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Title	Auditory perception and auditory imagination in the late plays of Marguerite Duras
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Publication date	2018
Original Citation	Noonan, M. (2018) 'Auditory perception and auditory imagination in the late plays of Marguerite Duras', in Noonan, M. and Pagès-Pindon, J. (eds.) Marguerite Duras: Un théâtre de voix / A theatre of voices, pp. 21-39. Leiden: Brill Rodopi. doi: 10.1163/9789004368743_003
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	https://brill.com/display/title/36190 - 10.1163/9789004368743_003
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Download date	2026-11-02 00:58:16
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/14351

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Auditory Perception and Auditory Imagination in the Late Plays of Marguerite Duras[1]

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Abstract

This chapter examines the scenic strategies Marguerite Duras developed in the plays *India Song*, *Savannah Bay* and *L'Éden Cinéma* in order to position the spectator in a place that enables her to inhabit her auditory imagination for the space of the play – to move, through the activity of listening to voices and non-verbal sounds, between 'inner' and 'outer' auditory realms. The 'outer' space that is represented on the Durassian stage as frustratingly inaccessible figures the 'inner' space to which Duras's text directs the spectator-auditor unremittingly. Drawing on Didier Anzieu's theory of the 'skin-ego', the primitive psyche constructed on the basis of 'psychic envelopes', the analysis presented here demonstrates that in her later plays, Duras generates a form of listening that breaks down the univocal defences of language and leads both actor and spectator to an intense apprehension of loss on the threshold of symbolic representation.

> Le théâtre commence, lointain, douloureux. – *Savannah Bay* [2]
> [Theatre begins, distant, painful]

Duras, in her later theatre, creates the conditions for an intensity of listening – positioning us as spectators, in fact, in a place that might be designated 'auditory space', where the conditions of the auditory prevail. In this auditory space, the spectator becomes permeable to the soundscape presented by the play in a way that enables her/him to inhabit her/his auditory imagination for the space of the play – to move, through the activity of listening to a voice, between 'inner' and 'outer' auditory realms. What are the theatrical strategies developed by Duras to enable her to create this theatre of the audio-vocal? What does the spectator-auditor stand to gain in such a theatre, which in fact undermines narrative and effective spectatorship? And what makes this form of theatre different from theatre for radio? In this chapter, I will discuss the dramatic techniques Duras developed in order to stage the incessant movement between body and word, in the space of the voice. I will show that her later plays foreground the materiality of the spoken voice and the relationship between present voices and absent voices, between the inner 'reading' voice, connected to the auditory imagination, and the outer voice, connected to the physical environment and to interlocutors. Lastly, I will argue that by insistently sounding and permeating the perimeters of a psychic topography that

[1] This chapter builds on some of the material that appeared in my book *Echo's Voice: The Theatres of Sarraute, Duras, Cixous and Renaude,* Oxford, Legenda Books, 2014.
[2] Marguerite Duras, *Savannah Bay*, Paris, Minuit, 1983, p. 31 (SB, 31).

fragments spatial knowledge, Duras leads both actors and spectators to an apprehension of loss at the threshold of symbolic representation.

By the time she came to write *India Song* (1973), Duras was already well on the way to her signature theatrical style. What she discovered with *L'Amante Anglaise*, first staged by Claude Régy in 1968, was that by separating the image from the text in the theatre, one could bring the participants – actor and spectator – to accept a state of drifting in the in-between of body and word, where facts are no longer clear, but where the acts of voicing and listening are more intense. Arnaud Rykner puts this rather well, when speaking of Régy's work in directing Duras's theatre:

> […] il ne vise pas la représentation plus ou moins mimétique d'un référent idéal […] mais l'expérience sensible de la matière déposée dans le texte, l'assomption de cette présence dont le texte est la trace et non l'imitation.[3] [It doesn't aim for a mimetic representation of an ideal referent […] but rather the felt experience of the matter laid down in the text, the assumption of that presence of which the text is the trace, and not the imitation.]

According to this conception of theatre, both actor and spectator should experience something of the physicality of the writing process – the process of transcribing the sounded material of the auditory imagination into signs. It is through listening, in an intense way, to the voicing of a particular kind of text, combined with a specific set of theatrical conditions, that this opportunity is conferred on the spectator.

In *India Song*, four off-stage voices try to remember, with varying degrees of difficulty and success, the story of Anne-Marie Stretter, of her love-affairs, of her eventual suicide. Stretter, a character who is prominent in at least two of Duras's novels (*Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and *Le Vice-Consul*) is the wife of the French Ambassdor to India. The play is set in the 1930s, in the French Embassy in Calcutta, though having said that, all of the geography referred to in the play – Calcutta itself, India more widely, and beyond, to Indo-China – is inaccurate. Duras uses place names in a musical way, to trigger emotions and engage the spectator's auditory imagination:

> Les noms des villes, des fleuves, des Etats, des mers de l'Inde ont, avant tout, ici, un sens musical. Toutes les références à la géographie physique, humaine, politique, d*'India Song,* sont fausses.[4]
> [The names of Indian towns, rivers, states and seas are all used here primarily in a musical sense. All references to physical, human or political geography are incorrect.][5]

[3] Arnaud Rykner, 'L'Inconnu de la chambre noire; Claude Régy et les dispositifs', in Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux (ed*.), Claude Régy , Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale*, vol.23, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2008, p.60. My translation.

[4] Marguerite Duras, *India Song*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, L'Imaginaire, p.9 (IS, 9).

[5] *India Song*, in *Marguerite Duras: Four Plays*, translated by Barbara Bray, London, Oberon Books, 1992, p.120. All further translations of *India Song* will be from this source.

The opening of the play establishes the ground rules: a priority will be given here to playing, in a musical sense, with different levels of sound and light. Duras's envisaged mise-en-scène, which is given in elaborate stage notes throughout the text, seeks to create a highly nuanced counterpointing of voiced word and silence, and of varying levels of audibility and visibility. The play is in four parts, and each new scene emerges very slowly out of silence and darkness – the spectator must learn, above all, to wait, in Duras's theatre. The first thing that becomes obvious, as the spectator listens to the piano blues tune, 'India Song' (Carlos d'Alessio composed the music of this tune for Duras's 1974 film version), and watches the stage setting emerge slowly out of darkness, is the presence of four voices. The status of these voices is highly unusual. *Voix* 1 and 2 are young women's voices, very sweet, but tinged with 'madness', the notes tell us:

> […] les voix de ces femmes sont atteintes de folie. Leur douceur est pernicieuse. La mémoire qu'elles ont de l'histoire d'amour est illogique, anarchique. (IS, 11)
> [The voices of these women are tainted with madness. Their sweetness is pernicious. The memory they have of the love story is illogical, anarchic. (Bray, 121)]

Duras plays with the levels of the voices much as Beckett did in a play such as *Comédie* (1972)[6], varying the levels of audibility to reflect the varying emotions of the voices, and in particular, their fear and desire. The stage notes tell us that the voices are 'rediscovering' the story of Anne-Marie Stretter at the same time as the spectator is – that is, their 'hold' on the memory of her story is tenuous, and what we receive throughout the play from the four voices is a plethora of disparate fragments of that story. And yet, these fragments are all we have – we are entirely dependent on the voices for any thread of narrative, and there is no easy coincidence between what we hear from them, and what we see before us on the stage. For the actors on-stage do not speak, that is, no sound emanates from their mouths throughout the performance. There are a small number of scenes in which characters appear to speak to each other in dialogue, particularly in the second, central scene of the 'reception' at the Embassy. However, Duras is very clear in her notes for the play that 'aucune conversation n'aura lieu sur scène, ne sera vue. Ce ne seront jamais les acteurs en scène qui parleront.' (IS, 56) [no conversation will take place on the stage, or be seen. (Bray, 138)] Writing of the earlier play, *L'Amante anglaise*, which became a model for all of her later stage work, Arnaud Rykner notes that, in creating plays that reduced the movement of actors on stage to a minimum, and that dislocated the visible body and the voiced text, Duras was creating the conditions for a kind of theatre that put the voiced words in the spotlight:

> La parole ainsi détachée de son support habituel permet un investissement totalement nouveau du temps et de l'espace scéniques, dont *L'Amante anglaise*, très tot, a donné le modèle. L'acteur n'est plus censé "habiter" l'espace théâtrale avec son corps. Il est pour ainsi dire réifié, ou plus

[6] Samuel Beckett, *Comédie et actes divers*, Paris, Minuit, 1972.

> précisement il est condamné à se laisser traverser par une parole qui fait résonner son propre *ego* sans que ce même *ego* prétende être à l'origine de la parole. [7]
> [This detachment of the spoken word from its usual support enables a totally new investment of scenic time and space – *L'Amante Anglaise* was the early model for this. The actor is no longer required to 'inhabit' theatrical space with his body. He is, as it were, reified, or more exactly, he is forced to allow himself to be traversed by speech, which causes his own *ego* to resonate, although this *ego* does not claim to be at the origin of the speech.][8]

In the case of *India Song*, the on-stage actors playing the roles of Anne-Marie Stretter, of her lover Michael Richardson, of the other male admirers in her entourage, and of the Vice-Consul of Lahore, are required, in certain dialogue scenes, to mime to their own recorded voices. In the non-dialogue scenes, the voices emanating from the reception, which is taking place in the room adjacent to the 'salon' visible on-stage, are heard intermittently, counterpointed with the four main 'voix', who are recounting the story. Therefore, there are 3 layers of voice in the play, in addition to many other sounds, which will be discussed in more detail later. In her notes for the play, Duras suggests that, for *India Song*, the stage should funtion as an echo chamber: 'L'image ou la scène, du point de vue sonore, jouera le rôle d'une chambre d'écho.' (IS, 57) [From the point of view of sound, the image, the stage, plays the part of an echo-chamber. (Bray, 139)] This suggests that both actor and spectator are called upon, to use Rykner's words, to 'se laisser traverser par une parole qui fait résonner son propre *ego* sans que ce même *ego* prétende être à l'origine de la parole.' In the opening notes for the play, Duras declares that it was the discovery of the possibility of voices that would be 'extérieures au récit' that propelled her to write this play, the story of which had already been explored in a number of her novels, as already stated:

> Cette découverte a permis de faire basculer le récit dans l'oubli pour le laisser à la disposition d'autres mémoires que celle de l'auteur: mémoires qui se souviendront pareillement de n'importe quelle autre histoire d'amour. Mémoires déformantes, créatives. (IS, 10)
> [This discovery made it possible to let the narrative be forgotten and put at the disposal of memories other than that of the author: memories which might remember, in the same way, any other love story. Memories that distort. That create. (120)]

The story, dredged from the past, is told by voices that resonate in the bodies of those listening. It is a story of passion, of loss, of melancholy and – perhaps – of enthralment to the death drive, to the unsayable. The fragments of story ('mélopée faite de débris de mémoire, et au cours de laquelle, parfois, une phrase émergera, intacte, de l'oubli' [IS, 40]) [a slow recitative made up of scraps of memory. Out of it, every so often, a phrase emerges, intact,

[7] Arnaud Rykner, 'L'Inconnu de la chambre noire; Claude Régy et les dispositifs', op.cit., p.57.
[8] Rykner, op.cit. My translation.

from oblivion. (Bray, 132)] are recounted by voices directed to speak very slowly, sweetly, and in a somewhat incantatory fashion ('on devrait avoir le sentiment d'une lecture, mais rapportée' [IS,58]) [one ought to get the impression of a reading, but one which is reported (Bray, 139)]. In fact, Duras annotates the voice-work throughout the script as if it were a musical score, paying attention to tone and colour, as well as to pitch and volume. The work on the voices, by the writer, and inevitably then, by the players, is rigorous, exact. The overall effect is that of musicality. Word is counterpointed with silence throughout in a strongly rhythmical fashion, according to a two-way beat – systaltic rhythm of the heart, or the ebb and flow of a tide. The listener is drawn into a state of 'fascination', just as the other characters are in relation to the enigmatic Anne-Marie Stretter ('Les voix 3 et 4 sont des voix d'hommes. Rien ne les lie que la fascination qu'exerce sur elles l'histoire des amants du Gange, surtout celle […] d'Anne- Marie Stretter' [IS, 105]). [Voices 3 and 4 are men's voices. The only thing that connects themis the fascination exerted on them by the story of the lovers of the Ganges, especially […] by that of Anee-Marie Stretter. (Bray,121)] There is the suggestion that over-engagement with this story could be dangerous:

> La voix 3 est, en effet, exposée au danger – non pas de la folie comme la voix 1 – mais de la souffrance. (IS,106)
> [Voice 3 is exposed to the danger, not of madness, like Voice 1, but of suffering. (Bray, 121)]

One of the men's voices, Voix 4, can tolerate the story, the other, Voix 3, cannot. This difference, between the tolerable and the intolerable, 'devrait se retrouver dans la sensibilité des Voix 3 et 4' (IS, 11) [should be reflected in the sensibilities of the two voices], in the same way as the women's voices are 'atteintes de folie' (IS, 11) [tinged with madness (121)], one of them, Voix 1, is consumed with the story of Anne-Marie Stretter. The voices must make these states of emotion heard *in the voice.*

In order to think a little further about the status of these voices in Duras's vision for her play, and her strategic and structural use of voices, it is helpful to consider the work of Michel Chion on the notion of the acousmatic voice in cinema. Because Duras is using sound recording – the creation of a *bande sonore*, which includes the voices – in the creation of the play, the comparison with cinema is not inappropriate. Chion notes that in cinema, the location of an acousmatic voice – a voice whose source cannot be seen by the spectator – is ambiguous: the voice is both *in* the image, in that it is heard to emanate from the image in the same way as the on-screen voices do, but it is also outside the image, 'off screen':

> Comme si la voix rôdait à la surface, à la fois dehors et dedans, en peine d'un lieu où se fixer. Surtout quand on n'a pas encore montré quel corps habite normalement cette voix. Ni dedans ni dehors, c'est le destin, au cinéma, de l'acousmêtre.[9]
> [It's as if the voice were wandering along the surface, *at once inside and outside*, seeking a place to settle. Especially when a film hasn't yet shown what

[9] Michel Chion, *La Voix au cinéma*, Paris, Éditions de l'étoile, 1982, p.28.

> body this voice normally inhabits. Neither inside nor outside, such is the acousmêtre's fate in the cinema.][10]

The four main voices in *India Song* are not the voices of the characters we see on the stage. They are recorded voices emanating from amplifiers around the auditorium – certainly, in the Het Zuidelijk Toneel production I saw at the Edinburgh Festival in 1999, directed by Ivo Van Hove, the voices came from speakers all around the auditorium (but not from the stage), so that one had the impression of being in the same place as them – though this place is unknown, unknowable. This implication in the space of unknowability is very much the effect Duras wanted to achieve. For example, the central, and longest, scene of the play – the reception at the Embassy, attended by high-ranking members of ex-patriate community, all gossiping about the amorous scandals attaching to the ambassador's wife – is not visible to the spectator. What we do see – the adjoining salon through which various characters flit – 'devra apparaître comme ACCIDENTEL', says Duras, 'Volé à un tout de nature inaccessible: la réception.' (IS, 58) [the set should seem accidental – stolen from a "whole" that is by its nature inaccessible , i.e. the reception. (Bray, 19)] The sounds of the reception penetrate the auditorium, though, adding another layer of voices and music to the soundscape. Duras is clear in her stage notes for the reception scene that 'le bruit de la réception devrait venir du côté droite et de la scène et de la salle, comme si la réception avait lieu aussi derrière les murs de la salle' (IS,57) [the noise of the reception should come from the right side of both the stage and the auditorium, as if the reception was taking place behind the walls of the auditorium. (Bray, 139)]

Duras's innovation then, in this play, was to simultaneously block the spectator's view of the place of action, and to loose a number of errant voices into the space of the auditorium, while placing the mainly silent bodies of the central protagonists in an annexe or ante-chamber of the action. This means that the four voices, but also the on-stage characters and the spectators are all in an *in-between* place 'ni dedans ni dehors'. The sense of an in-between is also generated through the gap between what the four voices say, and what is seen on the stage: these two elements are not always synchronised, and in any case, what happens on-stage is in no way a representation of the text spoken by the voices. The on-stage bodies are frequently very still – Stretter stands, 'statufiée dans ses larmes' (IS, 17) [a statue in her tears (130)], in an early scene, and later, she and two of her male admirers, on-stage, are described as being 'atteintes d'une immobilité mortelle' (IS, 35) [struck by a deathly stillness (123)]. Most movement is witnessed in the dance sequences in the 'reception scene', which is also the only scene of on-stage 'dialogue' between the characters (though, as already noted, the voices in these dialogues do not emanate directly from the bodies of the on-stage actors, but are, rather, their recorded voices, to which they mime). In the last part of the play, when the pace has slowed to the nightmarish 'lenteur' of the overhead fan, and silence is occupying ever-greater stretches of stage-time, Stretter and her male entourage are 'dans la même pose mortelle' (IS, 118)[in the same deathly attitude (169)].

[10] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, translated by Claudia Gorbman, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999, p.23.

Duras disturbs the visual dimension of theatre, frustrating the spectator's desire to see, creating characters who are the fascinated viewers of multiple fictional versions of their own past lives. In this theatre, the character's experience is paralleled by the spectator's experience, which is in turn mirrored by the actor's experience on the stage. In the case of *Agatha*, the spectator's frustrated desire to see is paralleled by the actor's experience of blindness – of having to impact upon the other actor with eyes closed for significant streches of stage time. Her theatre is radically other for the actor as much as for the spectator – again and again, she forces the actor inward, to the space between word and body, audio-vocal space, this wound that is opened up by her plays but never healed. Her plays force actors into various states of blindness and muteness, requiring of them states of intense listening - to their own recorded voices, to the recorded voices or voices 'off' of other actors. Even when voiced communication is live on the stage, this theatre requires a particular attentiveness to the functioning of voice and listening, given that the eyes may not be used as in conventional communication. Thus, Duras forces the actor to depend far more on the auditory faculty than she/he would normally do: the Durassian actor must learn again to *receive* as a primary activity, to assimilate material experience in what might be considered to be a state of passivity. The meaning of passivity is called into question, however, by Duras's work for the stage. I would suggest that she creates the conditions for a *drifting* of the actor's – and the spectator's – attention between specular image and soundscape, between the scene of representation and the wider, 'sonorous' space that remains inchoate, elusive. This drifting, which I would liken to 'psychoanalytical' listening, mirrors and stimulates a movement between conscious and unconscious levels of awareness.

This is theatre, therefore, that strives to create the conditions of auditory memory and imagination. The echo-chamber of the stage figures the internal echo-chamber of the body-mind, while the performance enacts movement across the boundary separating sound and language, body and text. The listener in this theatre will hear and feel something of the distress of a perpetual return to a part of the self that is unknowable, to a primary loss that remains unsayable in narrative discourse.

> MADELEINE. La salle est noire. (Temps). On lui raconte qui est mort. (Temps). […] On lui dit comme la mer était bleue. […]
> JEUNE FEMME. Comme la douleur est longue. (Temps). Comme elle change. (Temps). Comme elle devient. (Temps). Le second voyage. (Temps). L'autre rive. (Temps). Le deuxième amour.[11]
> [MADELEINE. The theatre's dark. (Pause). You tell it who died. (Pause). […] You tell it how the sea was blue. (Pause). […]
> YOUNG WOMAN. How long the pain. (Pause). How it changes. (Pause). What it becomes. (Pause). The second journey. (Pause). The other shore. (Pause). The second love.][12]

[11] Marguerite Duras, *Savannah Bay*, Paris, Minuit, 1893, p.127.
[12] *Savannah Bay*, in *Marguerite Duras: Four Plays*, translated by Barbara Bray, London, Oberon Books, 1992, p.115.

If voice is indeed the *medium* that negotiates a passage between body and language[13], then Duras's focusing on the audio-vocal dimension of theatre would suggest a desire to inhabit the threshold where the self is on the point of division and solidification into image, but still capable of inhabiting the space of plurality and permeability that is the space of sound. It is in the slow *voicing* of fragments of narrative, in the drifting of text and gaze between the narrow space of representation and the wider space of non-representation that an approach, and a waiting, at a threshold - like a second journey, a second love, an apprehension of the old, lost love, the old pain - are enacted. Through an *unbinding* of voice and image, narrative text and representation, Duras creates a space - interval, gap - into and out of which actors and spectators drift, through an audio-vocal membrane. Her late plays lead the spectator to an intense apprehension of loss at the threshold of symbolic representation.

It certainly seems that Duras was engaged in active exploration of the disruptive powers of sound in her work in the theatre, and consequently in developing a community of actors/auditors who would learn to relinquish the control based in specularity and give themselves over to the threat to the ego posed by the disintegrative properties of sound. It is sound's ability to traverse spatial and temporal boundaries, and its liquid qualities that are harnessed by Duras in her theatre. By giving such authority to the aural text, Duras chooses to disrupt what Barthes refers to as 'le réseau fixe des rôles de parole'[14][the fixed network of the roles of speech], that is, the binary power-relations on which discourse is based: speaker-listener, master-disciple, God-believer. For aurality signifies circularity, perpetual mobility and switching of positions. *L'écoute parle* [listening talks], according to Barthes, and it is perhaps an auditory conversation among articulate ears that Duras desired to establish in her theatre.

Hearing sound is 'a way of touching and being touched by one's space',[15] for the experience of sound installs us in particular spaces, and, as psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu has shown, it is through her very early experience of sound *in utero* that the infant begins to establish a sense of distances, volumes and limits.[16] Anzieu's work demonstrates the power of auditory experience to bring about a sense of intimate physical belonging, and its converse, physical alienation and threat to the self's boundaries. The playing area on Duras's stage very often presents the physical body of a woman, reduced to 'appearance', bearing some or all of the gender markings of the feminine mystique - madness, excessive passion, maternity, death-drive – and traversed by fragments of a narrative that resists coherence or closure. This is certainly the case in the plays *India Song*, *Savannah Bay* and *L'Éden cinéma*. In

[13] This is the theory developed by psychoanalyst Guy Rosolato in his essay 'La Voix, entre corps et langage', in *Revue française de psychanalyse* 37:1, 1974, pp.75-94.
[14] Roland Barthes, 'Écoute' in *L'Obvie et l'obtus* : Essais critiques III, Paris, Seuil, 1982, pp.228-229 (229).
[15] Steven Connor, from 'Transports', a radio essay transmitted on BBC Radio 3, 27 February 1997.
[16] See Didier Anzieu, *Le Moi-Peau*, rev. edn., Paris, Dunod, 1995.

these plays, the uninhabitable terrain of the stage, which is echoed in the blanks, pauses and silences in the text, suggests the lost source of the woman's voice, lost source of her writing. By fragmenting the spatial, textual and bodily dimensions of her stage (disjunction of voice and body/image), Duras establishes the conditions of permeability between bodies and texts.

According to Claude Régy, who directed many of Duras's works for the stage, Duras was seeking to capture what she called 'la voix de l'écriture', to hear what the text sounds like as it emerges from the unconscious, before it is set down on paper:

> Ce qu'elle essaie de faire, c'est de restituer sa propre lecture, cette façon d'entendre l'écrit avant qu'il soit jeté sur le papier quand il arrive directement de l'inconscient et que de cette masse d'inconscient se dégage un petit groupe de mots qui est à la fois musical, rythmique, sonore.[17]
> [What she tries to do is to reinstate her own reading, that way of hearing the writing before it goes down on paper, when it comes directly from the unconscious, and when a small group of words that is simultaneously musical, rhythmical and sonorous emerges from that unconscious mass.]

What appears to have been important to her as a writer for the stage was the process of capturing the aural quality of words as they emerged from the unconscious, releasing the musical, rhythmical association that particular words had for her:

> Je ne m'occupe jamais du sens, de la signification. S'il y a un sens, il se dégage après. [...] le mot compte plus que la syntaxe. C'est avant tout des mots, sans articles d'ailleurs, qui viennent et qui s'imposent. Le temps grammatical suit, d'assez loin.[18]
> [I never bother about the meaning, the signification. If there is a meaning, it emerges later. […] the word counts more than the syntax. It's words, without articles, moreover, which come and impose themselves. Grammatical time comes along quite a bit later.]

Duras herself once stated that she preferred theatre that was read, not acted, as 'le jeu enlève au texte, il ne lui apporte rien... il enlève de la présence au texte, de la profondeur, des muscles, du sang.'[19] [the acting takes away from the text, it doesn't contribute anything to it… it removes presence from the text, it takes away depth, muscles, blood.] She seems to have desired a theatre where the actor would do nothing other than 'faire porter le texte hors du livre par la voix seule, sans les

[17] Claude Régy, quoted in Liliane Papin, *L'Autre Scène: le théâtre de Marguerite Duras*, Saratoga, Calif., Anma Libri, 1988, p.28. My translation.
[18] Régy, in Liliane Papin, op.cit., p.14. My translation.
[19] Marguerite Duras, *La Vie Matérielle*, Paris, Galimard, 1987, Folio, p.17 (VM, 17). My translation.

gesticulations pour faire croire au corps souffrant à cause des paroles dites alors que le drame tout entier est dans les paroles et que le corps ne bronche pas.' (VM, 17) [make the text come out of the book through the voice alone, without gestures aimed at making one believe in the body suffering because of the words said, whereas all the drama is in the words – the body doesn't move.] The suffering body is in the voiced words, or more precisely, in the writing as it moves from body of writer to body of actor to body of 'auditor' through the medium of the voice.

Writing, for Duras, was essentially a process based on listening, and theatre afforded her the opportunity to stage what she called *la voix de l'écriture*[20][the voice of writing] to involve actors and spectators in the process of hearing in the in-between of word and syntax. What this means, in essence, is that she was using the occasion of the live moment of theatre to re-enact the process of writing, the process whereby heard sounds, phonemes, words and phrases are salvaged from the unconscious and transmuted into writing. She devised a series of scenic strategies in order to ensure that the spectator - and the actor - would receive her staged texts in the same way as she received them as a writer. If she was attempting to apprehend what lies beyond or before the text in her writing, then perhaps we could say that, on the stage, she was endeavouring to use theatre's aural and oral dimensions to engage her listeners in the experience of retrieving the aural origins of the text. Thus, the experience of 'watching' one of Duras's later plays is one of involvement in the processes of listening, remembering and composing on the basis of a medley of heard fragments that does not facilitate coherence. What this form of theatre calls for is a relinquishing of the security that the eye affords, and an exposure of the self to the vulnerabilities of the ear, a willingness to undergo and receive. In the state of heightened awareness of sonorous intensities that Duras's theatre seeks to cultivate in its community of listeners, the participants are indeed installed in a sense of space, but it is not necessarily a space that is visible on the stage. I suggested earlier in this chapter that Duras's staged texts cause the spectator's attention to drift between the space of representation and the large empty space of non-representation that is a feature of the later plays. In *Savannah Bay*, for example, the greater part of the set is occupied by a set made for a play that has not yet been written, that will never be written because its material is unwritable:

> Derrière cet espace de la représentation, séparé de lui, se trouve le décor que Roberto Plate a fait pour Savannah Bay. […] Ainsi le décor de Savannah Bay est-il séparé de Savannah Bay, inhabitable par les femmes de Savannah Bay, laissé à lui-même. (SB, 95)
> [Behind the foreground area and separate from it is a large set designed to suggest a vast empty landscape. […]
> Thus the setting of Savannah Bay is separate from the representation of Savannah Bay – uninhabitable by the women who are its protagonists; apart. (Bray, 98)]

[20] Régy, in Liliane Papin, op.cit., p.28.

What is shown is incidental to a whole that is inaccessible; what is available has a contingent and indeterminate relationship with what is not seen. The empty space of 'non-representation' is also the source of the many non-verbal sounds –primarily, but by no means exclusively, music – that erupt into the playing area in the course of performance in a number of these plays.

In her later theatre then, Duras draws the spectator into the place of 'inner speech', space of auditory imagination, where the voice makes us see visions. I have already suggested that Duras, in her writing, was seeking to capture something of the quality of 'inner speech', imbued with the sense of an original space of sound and hearing. Her use of the theatrical space, as opposed to her work in fiction and in film, suggests that the stage offered her a privileged setting, for there she could stage the movement between inner landscapes and 'outer' images/representations, between inner speech - 'the voice of writing' - and narrative text. In the theatre, she moves the spectator into and out of the space of auditory imagination, where voiced words ebb and flow in a soundscape composed of non-verbal sounds (particularly the sounds of the distressed/forbidden body), and music. In this space, it is through the soundscape that the spectator sees: what is told by the voices is only ever partially represented on the stage, and usually not at all. In plays such as *India Song*, *L'Éden Cinéma* and *Savannah Bay*, we watch characters on Duras's stage as they struggle to see and hear, to remember, to piece together fragmented narratives. We watch them as they spectate at the theatre of their own pasts, blind witnesses to the telling of their lives. *Agatha* (1981) is Duras's most daring example of theatre that seeks unremittingly to direct the spectator to a dark, inner space where words are the only signposts.

As already suggested, Duras required a minimum of intervention on the part of the actors on her stage – movement was to be kept to a minimum and stylised, and where the actors did get an opportunity to voice the text directly on the stage (and it has to be said that this is rare enough in Duras's theatre), the text was to be 'recited', as if it were being read[21]: numerous stage directions throughout the texts attest to Duras's desires in respect of the neutrality of the tone of voice she required from actors. This approach establishes a distance between actor and text, displacing the actor and placing the text centre-stage: the actor is no more than an antenna for transmitting sound signals, or a sensitive mechanism for responding to recorded sound, often the sound of her own voice. However, I say 'no more than' when, in fact, what is required of the actor in this theatre is very demanding indeed. For the actor must learn to listen with a new intensity, to track her body's responses to every inflection, to hear how each sound reverberates within her. She must endeavour to be in the soundscape, and in her own internal auditory world as much as, if not more than, in the scenic landscape of the stage. In place of representational realism and narrative coherence, Duras places the power of the voiced word to resonate in the actor's and the spectator's auditory imagination. As already noted, she makes her

[21] See Liliane Papin, *L'Autre Scène*, op.cit., pp.138-153, for Claude Régy's account of his direction of Duras's plays.

project very clear in the stage directions for *India Song*, where she indicates that the stage should function as 'chambre d'écho' (IS, 57), an echo chamber across which the sound-track of recorded voices reverberates, and that 'Les voix, passant par cet espace, devraient arriver au spectateur avec la même portée que sa voix de "lecture intérieur."' (IS, 57) [Passing through that space, the voices should sound, to the spectator, like his own "internal reading" voice. (Bray, 139)] Claude Régy reinforces the notion that what Duras wanted to recreate in the auditorium was the experience of 'inner' reading, that essentially, theatre happens less on the stage than in the minds and auditory imaginations of those present. The experience is ultimately one which parallels the writer's experience of hearing words, the source of which remains unclear, and creating - text, theatre - on the basis of auditory contact with words:

> Le pas important que nous a fait faire *L'Amante Anglaise*, c'était de s'apercevoir que le texte écrit, s'il est désensablé d'une interprétation sentimentalisé par un excès de jeu provenant de l'acteur, reprend son rôle d'écrit et fait complètement fonctionner la mémoire et l'imaginaire des spectateurs qui retrouvent leur liberté de lecteurs.[22]
> [The important discovery we made with *L'Amante Anglaise* was the realisation that if the written text is freed from an interpretation is sentimentalised by excessive acting on the part of the actor, then it can take on its role as writing, making the memory and the imagination of the spectators function completely, and they in turn rediscover the freedom they have as readers.]

In his work on the notion of 'psychic envelopes'[23], psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu suggested that the sound envelope, 'l'enveloppe sonore', the sense of containment or holding provided by the neo-natal infant's sound environment (including the mother's voice) provides the infant with a first spatio-auditory image of its own body, a sense of space-volume allowing bilateral exchange between inside and out, and a sense of fused reality with the mother's body. Building on this work, psychoanalyst Édith Lecourt describes the sound envelope as having two parts or 'faces': a verbal face and a musical face :

> La face verbale, plus linéaire (dans le temps), univocale, fil apparent de la trame, est tournée vers l'extérieur. La face musicale, en épaisseur, tissée de voix (dans l'espace comme dans le temps), plurivocale, est plus tournée vers l'intérieur.[24]
> [The verbal face, more linear (in time), univocal and a visible thread in the texture, is turned toward the outside. The musical face, in thickness, woven

[22] Claude Régy, quoted in Liliane Papin, op.cit., p.28.
[23] Didier Anzieu, *Les Enveloppes psychiques*, 2nd edn, Paris, Dunod, 2000.
[24] Édith Lecourt, 'L'Enveloppe Musicale', in *Les Enveloppes psychiques*, op.cit., p.236.

of voices (in space as in time), and plurivocal, is turned more toward the inside.][25]

According to Lecourt, what binds these two parts of the sound envelope together is the intensity of mastery that sonorous experience requires. The two 'faces' of sound experience require two very different modes of contact: 'l'une sonne, chante, vibre et résonne' (one sounds, signs, vibrates and resonates [the musical face]), while the other is articulatory and more abstract ('articulatoire et plus abstraite', *Les Enveloppes psychiques*, 237) Furthermore, the two dimensions of sonorous experience are expressions of two different modes of contact between self and surrounding sound group or environment: 'l'une est "nous", l'autre est "je", rappelant les bases groupales de leurs structurations, l'une plus tournée vers le groupe interne, sa cohésion, l'autre vers le groupe externe, et la différentiation.' (*Les Enveloppes psychiques*, 237) [one is 'you', the other is 'I', recalling the group bases of their structurings, one more turned towards the internal group and its cohesion, the other towards the external group and differentiation. (*Psychic Envelopes*, 225)] What Lecourt calls 'la cavité sonore' is the space where all this early sound experience of the world is felt: 'cavité bucco-rhino-auriculaire (désignant par buccale l'ouverture introduisant au pharynx et au larynx).' (*Les Enveloppes psychiques*, 226) ['bucco-rhino-auricular cavity' (designating by buccal the opening that leads to pharynx and larynx). (215)] This notion of 'sonorous cavity' designates the intimate motor-sensor network that links the organs of speech and hearing in the human body, incorporating the oral, nasal and auricular spaces. Lecourt chooses not to distinguish between these three openings, in order to place the accent squarely on 'cette notion de cavité: trou, orifice où transitent des sensations, des perceptions, des actions, des substances, des objets, et... des sons.' (*Les Enveloppes psychiques*, 226) [the notion of cavity – a hole or orifice through which sensations, perceptions, actions, substances, objects and … sounds pass. (*Psychic Envelopes,* 215)] This sonorous cavity is the site of a rich sensory experience and is fundamental in the early establishment of the boundaries of the self. In mythology, according to Lecourt, the sonorous cavity is represented by the cavern, 'a resonant place with multiple echoes, domain of the god Pan.' (*Psychic Envelopes,* 217) The cave resounds and echoes, two qualities that locate it at the boundaries of interiority and exteriority.

Duras uses the spatial dimension of theatre to support and complement the vocal-auditory experience that she privileges in the plays. Her stage is indeed a cavern, a resonant space, the vastness and emptiness of which are emphasised, and where there is also a strong focus on boundaries between inside and outside. Her dual or split stage space could also be seen to represent the 'two faces' of the sound envelope, the verbal and the musical, one directing the auditor outward, the other directing her inward; one representing the pull to the world, the other the pull to a

[25] Édith Lecourt, 'The Musical Envelope', in *Psychic Envelopes*, ed. Didier Anzieu, London, Karnac Books, 1990, pp. 211-235 (225).

return to stasis, to fusion with the surrounding environment; one characterised by verbal utterance, the other by music, vibration, resonance; one which is linear, temporal and univocal, the other circular, spatial and plurivocal. The script that Duras stages is less concerned with constructing a narrative than with sounding the auditory foundations of the written text. The 'outer' space that is represented on the Durassian stage as frustratingly inaccessible figures the 'inner' space to which Duras's text directs the spectator-auditor unremittingly.

In this theatre, Duras asks the spectator to wait, and listen. By highlighting what Luce Irigaray referred to as the 'murder and burial of the mother'[26] in Western patriarchy, and the resultant de-subjectified (female) position upon which culture in general, and the narrative enterprise in particular, are founded, Duras goes some way toward realising Irigaray's feminist project of 'playing with mimesis', working the representative machinery in order to expose its machinations – principally, the silencing and burial of the feminine.[27] However, through her skilful use of verbal and non-verbal sound, Duras also generates in her theatre what Barthes referred to as *écoute panique*[28] [panic listening], a form of listening that breaks down the univocal defences of language and causes the self to become centred in the pre-rational polysemy of its auditory being:

> Mais la grotte c'est aussi l'antériorité, rappel des origines, celles ici d'un dieu abandonné dès la naissance par sa mère, dans un lieu aride et isolé, tout comme Apollon. Pan, dans sa caverne, crée l'illusion sonore, celle qui produit la panique d'un groupe, la panolepsie du sujet. Et dans les deux cas, la perception sonore de la langue et de la musique se trouve désarticulée, laissant place à une immense confusion, avec perte d'identité, et à l'envahissement par le bruit persécutif.[29]
> [But the cave is also anteriority, reminder of origins, in this case those of a god abandoned by his mother at birth in an arid and isolated place, just like Apollo. Pan, in his cavern, creates the sonorous illusion that produces panic in a group and a panic attack in the individual. And in both cases, sonorous perception of language and music is disjointed, giving way to an immense confusion, with loss of identity and invasion by persecutory noise. (*Psychic Envelopes*, 217)]

By using the stage as a resonating chamber or cavern and by insistently sounding and permeating the perimeters of a psychic topography that fragments spatial knowledge, Duras leads both actor and spectator to an intense auditory apprehension of loss at the threshold of symbolic representation. If, as Walter Benjamin asserted,

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[26] See Luce Irigaray, 'Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère' in *Sexes et Parentés*, Paris, Minuit, 1987, pp.21-33.
[27] Luce Irigaray, Pouvoir du discours, subordination du féminin', in *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris, Minuit, 1977, pp. 65-82 (74).
[28] Roland Barthes, 'Écoute', op.cit., p.229.
[29] Edith Lecourt, 'L'Enveloppe Musicale' in *Les Enveloppes psychiques*, op.cit., p.229.

melancholy spatializes[30], then Duras's inundation of space with sound creates a melancholy, splintered self, transfused with the urgency of sonorous panic. Thus, her later theatre brings us into a place of auditory memory and imagination, where the self is liquid and running, living the drives, energies and pulsations of auditory contact with time and space – a borderland, on the threshold of the written word. It is the voice that gives access to the Durassian borderland.

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[30] See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, London, NLB, 1977, pp.92-97.