

THE “IMPOWER” OF CINEMA: AN ANALYSIS OF *L’HOMME ATLANTIQUE*

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At the end of *The Time-Image*, Gilles Deleuze argues that the essence of cinema “has thought as its higher purpose, nothing but thought and its functioning” (Deleuze, 1989: 168). To defend this position, based on his thesis on montage, the philosopher proposes two distinct, inseparable movements: one going from the precept to the concept, the other from the concept to the feeling. While in the first “the cinematographic image must have a shock effect on thought”, in the second the thought generated by montage “takes us back to the images and gives us an affective shock again” (Deleuze, 1989: 158, 161). To these two movements Deleuze adds a third one, one in which “what cinema advances is not the power of thought but its ‘impower’”, wherein lies, according to Antonin Artaud, “the dark glory and profundity of cinema.” In this regard, the philosopher points out: “the problem for him [Artaud] is not of a simple inhibition that the cinema would bring to us from the outside, but of this central inhibition,

of this internal collapse and fossilization, of this ‘theft of thoughts’ of which thought is a constant agent and victim. Artaud would stop believing in the cinema when he considered that cinema was sidetracking and could produce only the abstract or the figurative or the dream. But he believes in the cinema as long as he considers that cinema is essentially suited to reveal this powerlessness to think at the heart of thought” (Deleuze, 1989: 166).

In both her literary and film works, Marguerite Duras establishes just such a relationship of “impower”. It begins with the impotence of a desire: a feeling of separation, abandonment or absence in the heart of the lover. This impotence can be found in Lol V. Stein’s state after Anne-Marie Stretter’s dance in *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* (*Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, 1964), which Duras echoes in an image in *India Song* (1975), when the vice-consul looks at Delphine Seyrig’s body from the threshold of the door. It can also be found in the irretrievable memory in *Hiroshima*

mon amour (Alain Resnais, 1959) and *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* (1981), or in the story of the unknown face of *Aurelia Steiner* (1979-1980). We may even find it in an unexperienced encounter that will be remembered as a separation, or in an unbearable escape of the other that leaves exhaustion in its wake. Moving between what remains after the disappearance and what has yet to appear, the feelings of Duras' heroes are not expressed through action, or through the situation of the character, but precisely through the unresolved, inexpressible elements of their situation. Duras defines absence as the best place to *think* about this "impower", because in the plenitude of what is already fulfilled there would be no need to go elsewhere, and therefore no need to speak, to produce words, or to create. In the documentary *Duras Filme* (Jérôme Beaujour, Jean Mascolo, 1981), the filmmaker explains that "saying things is an effect of lack; lack of life, lack of sight," and later she adds: "I think it is an absolute rule, and it is the fullness of the lack of being, either being in desire, in love or in summer, that allows us to say: love, desire, summer." Duras would follow the same path paved by modernity—interrogating the visible through forms that classical cinema had relegated to the margins and challenging the representation by finding new relationships in terms of *montage* and *mise en scène* (Vilaró, 2016)—to express the movement that is generated out of the essence of what is missing.

In one of her last films, *L'Homme atlantique* (Marguerite Duras, 1981), Duras sums up this movement as follows: "You remained in the state of the one who left. And I made a movie with your absence."¹ These words, spoken by the writer-filmmaker herself towards the middle of the film, summarize the journey of a film in which the absent image, the blackness of a film without images, operates as its main element. Considering this blackness as a figure—an image and driving force for writing, a meeting point between the filmmaker and her object of representation—this

article offers an analysis of *L'Homme atlantique* as the work in which both the expression of the "fullness of the lack of being" through which Duras understood her writing, and the searching movement towards a specific filmic approach in the intersection between text and image, find their final culmination. This is what José Moure refers to in one of the best texts devoted to *L'Homme atlantique*: the filmmaker makes "'the film on the reading voice of the text' that she had dreamed of, and in doing so resolves [...] the conflict between voice and figure, word and image, text and representation, paper and film... that underpins her whole experience as a filmmaker" (Moure, 1997: 234). This statement poses a paradox that needs to be addressed: Duras "resolves" the *enigma of writing* through cinema, but does so by invoking its death through the voice of the text. My hypothesis is that blackness in *L'Homme atlantique* expresses the force of the desire and of the absent object that inhabits both Duras' literature and her cinema; however, the suggested solution should not be understood in terms of representation—which would lead us to declare the death of cinema—but in terms of figuration, considering cinema itself as a place to create a bond, a relationship, to explore the displacements of its own writing and its own operations: between narrative, representative and expressive elements; between syntactic and symbolic elements; between the filmmaker and her object; between the object, the subject and the spectator; or even between the filmmaker's praxis, theory and film criticism.

THE FIGURE OF ATLANTIC BLACKNESS: OBLIVION AND OBSERVATION

Marguerite Duras made *L'Homme atlantique* in a period of depression, while engaged in a relationship with her last domestic partner, Yann Andréa. He often left her for several days, and "it would be one of those departures (one that seemed final), in June 1981, that would unleash the heartrending

darkness of *L'Homme atlantique*" (Ferreira Neves, 2013: 87). Of the 42 minutes footage, 30 show a black screen, with sporadic appearances of some shots from the film *Agatha et les lectures illimitées*, made a few weeks before, while on the soundtrack we hear only the voice of Duras and the sound of waves on the sea at the end. While in the first part of the film we see intermittent images from *Agatha* on the black screen, in the second part blackness becomes the only image, "as if the camera shutter had closed for good (or the heart of the image had stopped beating)" (Moure, 1997: 224). From the beginning, this blackness appears as an element of transgression and violence against the image; as Laure Bergala points out, "the black image of *L'Homme atlantique* is a violent image that replaces the rest, preventing other images from appearing or covering them up" (Bergala, 2014: 140). The blackness is thus not an image but a figure, an expression rather than a representation, creating a space of relation between Duras' voice and its object. In particular, blackness emerges as the figural expression defined by François Lyotard: its mission is not to construct, but to deconstruct, and in so doing it does not attempt to tell the truth, but "to do a work of truth" (Lyotard, 1971: 386). The blackness introduces a mobility, violates the order and operates as the negative work of writing that connects the dispersed elements of the text; above all, it confirms that the figure does not arise from meaning, because it is the force field of a desire that does not interpret the work, but passes through it. As Jacques Aumont suggests, referring to Lyotard, "using the same gesture, language constitutes its object by losing it in order to signify it", and the "Lyotardian radicalization of the notion of figure" places figuration in a place where "there is nothing but a process, an incessant and interminable dynamic" (Aumont, 1996: 168).

L'Homme atlantique begins with this transgression of writing and, to that end, invokes oblivion. "You will not look to the camera. Unless you are

asked to do so. You will forget. You will forget. The fact you are, you will forget. I think it can be achieved. You will also forget that the camera is. But above all you will forget that you are. You. Yes, I think it can be achieved, for example, by taking other approaches, including that of death, of your death lost in a sovereign and nameless death." Up to this point we have not yet seen any image, and then he appears, Yann Andréa; the actor who is asked by Duras to forget the camera, to forget the film, and, above all, to forget himself. The actor assimilates the gesture that Duras seeks in her writing. And Duras refers to oblivion by invoking death. However, it would not be just any death, but a "sovereign and nameless death", in which there is not only the loss or the oblivion of oneself, but a universal loss and oblivion in which the subject becomes passive, anonymous, timeless, neutral.

After invoking oblivion and death, Duras asks us to look. "You will look at what you see." Again, the voice of the filmmaker reveals where images go; the story will progress in terms of observation and, more precisely, of a gaze after its own extinction: "But you will look at it fully. You will try to look to the extinction of the gaze, to your own blindness, and even through your blindness you must still try to look. To the end." Yann Andréa appears as the subject who should "look fully", "to the extinction of the gaze." Andréa turns his eyes to the window where he should begin to see something new, and the blackness reappears in synchrony with Duras' voice referring to what is not there (the sea, the walls facing the sea, the dog, the bird) and to what belongs not to the vision, but to the feeling ("this word before you", "the successive disappearances"). "Listen", Duras continues, "I also believe that if you did not look at what is in front of you, this would appear on the screen. And then the screen would be emptied." If oblivion invoked death to locate the character in a universal, timeless place, now the voice forces the actor to look at everything around, in order



to show it, to make it visible. And to see it as if he had never seen it before, as if what is there was new. The trajectory of the film is in the hands of a gaze that is both the last and the first, with no action, with no time, but in which the subject must surrender to the most absolute passivity as if it were the most active gaze in order to vanish from the image: "You have left the camera frame", "You are absent", "Your life has gone away", "You are no longer anywhere", "You are no longer the favourite", we will hear. With this displacement, with this disappearance, the actor becomes a spectator, or Duras reminds us that, as spectators, we witness the same movement of oblivion and observation, a hypnosis of which we are not only victims but also agents. This is the first movement of the film: to give the responsibility of writing to the experience of watching.

THE SUSPENSION OF THE SPECTATOR, THE UNIVERSAL PLACE

In a 1963 interview with *Cahiers du cinéma*, Roland Barthes emphasized the importance of going to the cinema alone, because the projective nature of the theatre calls for an availability incompatible with social culture and with the commentary that both the film lover and the general spectator end up engaging in (Delahaye, Rivette, 2005: 39-51). In *Les Yeux verts*, Duras reminds us of the importance of the solitude of the spectator in the theatre before being "kidnapped by the film", and it is this very solitude that leads her assert the need for a reflection on what separates the creator of the work from its spectator (Duras, 1996: 18-23, 35). In the same book, the writer-filmmaker considers that while, on the one hand, "the film does not develop (*déroule*), it acts (*il agit*)", and that it "remains in its orbit, [...] chained to its own writing," on the other hand, it takes on the spectator, "moulds him,

L'Homme atlantique (Marguerite Duras, 1981)

makes of him whatever the film wants” (Duras, 1996: 89, 19).

Duras’ observations can be linked to Jean Louis Schefer’s description of the ontology of cinema, in which the spectator is the victim of an experiment that he contrasts with the world outside the theatre. In broad terms, Schefer explains, faced with the screen the spectator does not experience the Platonic cave, but the suppression of the world that dwells in him, an inevitable crime that annihilates all decision; the spectator does not decide on the movement of the images, does not modify the action, and, unlike the observer of the canvas, whose gaze traces a reading onto it, the spectator becomes at once victim and executioner, because he allows himself to be carried, immobile in his seat, while replacing the world he inhabits outside the film. We read in the first pages of *L’Homme ordinaire du cinéma*: “A machine rolls, representing actions simultaneous to the immobility of our bodies, producing monsters; all this may seem delightful rather than terrible. Or at least, even while it is terrible, it is undeniably pleasurable. But it is perhaps the unknown, uncertain or ever-changing bond of this pleasure, this nocturnal kinship of cinema that interrogates both the memory and the signification; in the memory of the film, the signification remains attached to the experience of an experimental night in which something stirs, comes to life, and speaks to us. This is why, for the spectator, cinema is primarily something completely different from what most film criticism suggests” (Schefer, 1997b: 6-7).

As an “experimental night” (a “perpetual night”, Schefer would later write), the black screen in *L’Homme atlantique* would not only define a work of the negative on the represented, or the figural condition of writing; blackness, insofar as it is intrinsic to the gaze towards what once appeared and is no longer there, towards the fragility of the image in time, is revealed as the passive place both of the spectator’s openness to the screen and of the film, which dwells—actively—in

the viewer after the screening. It is a passivity of the present (hypnosis, oblivion) and an active memory (observation). If, according to Duras, the film is “a passage through a non-thinking state, in which thought would waver and fade,” the spectator, then, “does not decipher, but submits and the openness that occurs in him gives rise to something new in his bond with the film, something that has to do with desire” (Duras, 1996: 93). What the filmmaker identifies as the place of desire is the relationship that Schefer describes between the spectator and the film preceding figuration, when the image is not yet a form, but a mass, and our knowledge is not of the figured subject but the matter of time (Schefer, 1997b: 170, 185). Schefer regards this experience as a meaning far removed from the production of meaning: “signification is not something that the image expresses or conveys; it is more precisely an articulation that gets lost in it”; or, in other words, “the image does not contain meaning, and does not retain it. It organizes it illusorily, according to devices and rules that are in fact unreadable” (Schefer, 1997a: 31, 32). In this way, the art critic writes, “this single desire is perhaps resolved: to be in the image, to be the meaning and its privileged transition, yet without being able to understand it; that is, becoming incapable of *reassembling* it” (Schefer 1997b: 127). *L’Homme atlantique* explores the place of this privileged transition of the spectator: it assumes the loss of the images in their movement in the present and after their projection; in other words, it creates a resistance of the retina and the memory. “I am what ensures the transition of the images, I am therefore something other than their spectator; I am made weaker by them” (Schefer 1997b: 100). The movement becomes the action that gives meaning to the existence of the memory, and of love: it becomes a “springboard” into the interminable, in the words of Philippon (Various, 1997: 65-68), that place where all gazes—the actor’s, the spectator’s, the represented object’s and even Duras’—will end up *falling*.

This weakness of the gaze, which is inherent to cinema, is evoked by Duras' voice in the film when she alludes to the impotence of cinema to represent reality: "Cinema believes it can record what you are doing in this moment. But you, from wherever you are, here or there, in keeping with the sand, or the wind, or the sea, or the wall, or the bird, or the dog, you will realize that the cinema cannot." How can images be used to express something that for film is indescribable? Why even make a film then? Later, in the middle part of *L'Homme atlantique*, when we see the last shots of Yann Andréa sitting in the armchair in the hall, Duras tells the beginning of her story: "Last night, after his final departure, I went to that room on the ground floor that looks out onto the park." Duras tells of the separation, describing the space and what she did after her lover left. "And then I began to write," continues Duras. The story and its writing would constitute the beginning of *L'Homme atlantique*, but what led her to make a film instead of a book is explained shortly after, when the director confesses that her memories "were not uncertain", but that "there were some beaches around the eyes, where to embrace or to stretch out on the warm sand, and that gaze focused on death." And she adds: "That was when I wondered, why not? Why not make a film? Writing would be too much from now on. Why not a film?" Again, Duras refers to memory as a place to explore in and through the gaze, through what lies around it (referring to a universal state where all things dwell) and where it is directed (to its own extinction). "Writing would be too much" not so much because the story is no longer possible, but because memories neither appear nor disappear, but persist, or more accurately, remain: *they are there*. In *L'Homme atlantique*, memories are there despite the impossibility of reaching them, and they remain as a loss. This is what cinema allows that literature does not: to remain in the loss and, in doing so, to show the blackness as a figure between text and image, as we can read in

Les yeux verts: "You said: 'When we read, we find each other, and when we go to the movies, we lose each other.' And when we go to watch your films, we do not lose each other. It is in the blackness that we find each other" (Duras, 1996: 93).

BETWEEN THE UNIVERSAL AND THE INTIMATE: THE DISPLACEMENT OF WRITING

However, if the meaning of the film depends on a loss, and if this loss, leaving aside the figurative question, is constructed as a *meeting space*, then where does the film speak from? Beyond the suspension, the disconnection from the world and the immersion in the journey of the image, the weakening of the spectator together with the loss of the images becomes the communion to which *L'Homme atlantique* aspires, the fusion of man and sea in a single, eternal, passive, anonymous and universal gaze: "You and the sea are one to me, my single object in this adventure." The hypnosis of the film culminates when the action starts to be told in present instead of future tense; we shift from "You will advance, you will walk" to "You are alongside the sea", and from the oblivion of the self to an oblivion of the world. Only the film exists, despite its "impower" in relation to the world. And when this happens, Duras introduces the "I" into the story, the "I" as subject that brings together the man and the sea, the actor and the film: "I also look at it. You should look at it as I do, as I look at it, with all my strength, in its place." The appearance of the "I" produces a new displacement in the gaze, which no longer comes from the actor but instead constructs the universal place; the "I" distorts the universality of "sovereign and nameless death", of passivity and anonymity. *L'Homme atlantique* is confronted with this paradox: to construct the most intimate world as the most distant world from any subject, from any possible connection with the world.

The relationship between the screen and the voice clarifies this dialectic as forms of expression of disappearance and intimacy, respectively. This is what Hatiziforou refers to when he argues that the creation of *L'Homme atlantique's* "oral text" takes place as an "approximation to the text that entails moving away from the film" (Hatziforou, 1988: 102). Both the voice and the screen are powers that create a dualism, an asynchronous struggle without either of them achieving completeness without the other; according to Deleuze, in Duras' cinema, as in Straub-Huillet's, the visual image and sound image share a "common limit which connects them to each other" (Deleuze, 1989: 279). In this limit Duras locates this intimate, universal space: a space of desire and of writing, the blackness where, as we saw above, "we find each other" in literature, and which cinema expresses as a loss. On this limit, a "supplementary screen" is raised between the narrative and the spectator (Bonitzer 1975: 49-51). This is where Duras becomes a spectator of herself, of her own loss, her voice then expressing the film's need to keep seeing, so that the image that existed endures on the screen ("You already have a past, a shot behind you"), while it can also be denied ("You will realize that cinema cannot"). The construction of the presence-absence of memories requires more than photographing both sides ("with his departure his absence has taken place, it has been photographed as his presence used to be"); a journey needs to be created, a displacement that follows the logic of the dispossession of the one who wants to look at the loss; in short, that follows the displacement of the loss itself. Consequently, after invoking the impotence of the cinema, in the image we see Yann Andréa walking through the hall and hear the voice of Duras saying: "everything will happen as a result of his moving." Duras will continue asking the hero to move, giving him orders, subjecting him, as we saw, to the hypnosis of the spectator, putting his eye in a state of repose. However, given that this displacement of the loss

is the most intimate gesture, how can we move in it? How can we generate a written text out of it? It would be a question of creating a movement without matter, out of the movement left by the other after his disappearance. In this way, the voice

DURAS' OBSERVATIONS CAN BE LINKED TO JEAN LOUIS SCHEFER'S DESCRIPTION OF THE ONTOLOGY OF CINEMA, IN WHICH THE SPECTATOR IS THE VICTIM OF AN EXPERIMENT THAT HE CONTRASTS WITH THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE THEATRE

announces: "Nothing of you is there except this floating, travelling absence, which fills the screen."

The tracking shots in *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976) allude to this displacement. Using the same soundtrack as *India Song* (1975),² where Duras had explored the empty space in the split between image and voice, *Son nom de Venise* confronts the spectator with an even more radical movement of writing without a referent, liberated from the story, from the scene, from the representation of the text. The camera assimilates this liberation and moves on erratically without stopping, even though there is something to look at, a space to penetrate, an exit to begin again and recall *India Song*. As Moure points out, the deconstruction work proposed by Duras in *India Song* does not operate as the potentialising of the unrepresentable, but as the erosion of potentiality, the exhaustion of visual material, the receptacle of a collapse of the imagination after the disjunction between sound and image has been achieved (Moure: 1997: 216). In *Son nom de Venise*, the camera neither advances nor pulls back; we are witnesses only to a to-ing and fro-ing, a blind and deaf movement: "Duras seems to have penetrated this nothingness, this erasure, this oblivion; she departs but does not need to leave. It is another

world that opens up before her: modernity seeks the destruction of form, Duras gives form to absence,” writes Ishaghpour (Various, 1997: 84). In this sense, Jean-Pierre Oudart noted the difference between the tracking shots in *Son nom de Venise* and those in *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et brouillard*, Alain Resnais, 1954). “Resnais’ tracking shot is torturous, holding in desire. It pushes the gaze, puts the referent on the screen to turn it into a phantom. It censures the appetites of the eye, censures the thoughts of the filmed object (archaeological metaphysics, sanctification of history, transcendence of the referent).” In *Son nom de Venise*, on the other hand, the tracking shots evoke death in itself because the images are disengaged from what they were and from any possible connotation. Only the voices confront us now with a vague reminiscence of the images of *India Song*; they thus bring the word closer to an image from which it was separated, but against the new images “the voices don’t give shape to a new picture of history, or a novelized tapestry, or a genre scene. [Voices] are sprouts and touches of desire that echo each other, emerging from silence and disconnected from a historical-novelized background far removed from their triumphant connotations” (Oudart, 1976: 75-77). We recognise in the camera movement the extension of the movement of the non-work which, according to Duras, writing should strive for; and thus, Oudart continues, images appear like the eye resting in bed, in a movement of repose, to allow surprise to come to the gaze and not the other way around. We are still in the recumbent position of Anne-Marie Stretter, lying on the hot floor in *India Song*, in the suspension that incites the exaltation of Lol V. Stein, and the spectator, after the irrecoverable moment of images. This is why it is no accident that Bruno Nuytten, who worked as Duras’ camera operator, considered this filmmaker’s gaze to be similar to that of the pioneers of cinema (Duras, Noguez, 2001: 93-98), because it hearkens back to the original meaning of cinema:

to see how movement is generated, the passage of time, the life that surrounds things. Duras approaches writing as pure movement by creating a movement as absence, a movement that is not directed towards what is not there, a displacement without movement. Duras defines it as the place of passion: “I write and I shoot in the same place. When I go somewhere else, the same thing happens. [...] It’s what I call the place of passion. That place where you are deaf and blind. In a word, I try to be there as much as possible” (Duras, Porte, 2011: 94).

In *Son nom de Venise*, the abundant tracking shots over ruins express the movement of a desire that reaches beyond the creative movement, a movement without subject and without object, as a force before and beyond images: it resists both what is seen and the time of the action and what is left after the gaze. Following his theses on *The Writing of the Disaster* (what can be said when everything has already been said), Maurice Blanchot defined the destruction of Duras’ writing as “the consolation of a despair”. According to the French critic, *chez Duras*, destruction would operate as “an order that calms the threats of time” and, above all, as a gesture of love: “the person who could destroy in a pure movement of loving would not wound, would not destroy, would only give, giving the empty immensity in which *destroy* becomes a word that is not privative, not positive, the neuter speech that conveys a neuter desire” (Blanchot, 1997: 113). This is the movement of writing into which *L’Homme atlantique* invites us from the beginning: a displacement of giving, of “empty immensity”, of neutrality. In *L’Homme atlantique* there are neither camera movements as in *Son nom de Venise*, nor rivers to follow, as in the films dedicated to Aurélia Steiner (1979-1980). The fluidity or ocean-river of the visual image embraced by the sonic power of the *Durasian* speech-desire (Deleuze, 1989: 259) here becomes an absence of the image. There are neither “sprouts” nor “touches” of image. On the one hand, the speech act as-

sumes all the displacement, all the fluidity that the image had previously generated; in the words of Ishaghpour, the rhythm of Duras' voice "is by no means fixed or repetitive, but born out of this same movement of the signifier that returns to an unnamed centre, at the very moment when it is bound for infinity" (Various, 1997: 85). And, on the other hand, it is no longer a movement of writing stripped of meaning that is proposed by *L'Homme atlantique*, but the death of the writer.

The conclusion to Moure's analysis of the film points in this second direction. According to the theorist, *L'Homme atlantique* culminates in the disappearance of the "I" from writing and from the *mise-en-scène* "by abolishing itself and fusing into the 'you': the 'you' of the absent actor, it is true, but also the 'you' of the spectator." And this spectator, continues Moure, "by occupying the absent place of the actor, has 'filled' the empty space of reception opened by the film and has kept the latter in a border state between living and dying; a spectator 'tied' until the final scene to 'prevent life from leaving' the film; a spectator sitting in front of the Atlantic blackness of the screen, in front of the mirror of his own absence, of his own death (in the 'camera that kills')" (Moure, 1997: 235).³ Little by little, *L'Homme atlantique* is directed towards this face-to-face with the loss of the other as an encounter with his own death. As a spectator of the same night of oblivion and observation, Duras remains in front of a faceless image, the image that remains when knowledge has ended: "My knowledge ends in this film. It ends because I know there is not a single image that could prolong it." And yet, despite the fact that the film has finished, it goes on existing, because "you already have a past, a shot behind you," or, as we hear later: "The film will remain that way. Finished. You are hidden and present at once. Present only through the film, beyond the film, and hidden from any knowledge about you, from any knowledge that could be obtained about you". Duras' voice suggests that the film exists to explain what the other

didn't know about himself but she did; however, after many minutes without images, Duras confesses that she does not know what to do with the exaltation produced by her feelings, and announces: "I only know this about it: that I must not do anything but suffer this exaltation because of someone I had before me, someone who didn't know that he lived, while I knew he was alive; someone who didn't know how to live, like I told you, while I did; but I didn't know what to do with that knowledge I had about that life that he lived, just as I did not know what to do with myself." The end of *L'Homme atlantique* alludes to the loss of self-knowledge; but in spite of not being able to see or to know, the film continues to exist because, in the displacement of loss, taking "sovereign and nameless" death as its vehicle, memories remain as the displacement of exaltation, as desire.

IN CONCLUSION

At the beginning of these pages I posited the need to see the blackness in *L'Homme atlantique* as a manifestation of the figural. However, in the same expression we would find a paradox: contrary to Lyotard's contention, the idea of "figure" in Duras' films does not move away from what is readable to propose a logic of visibility; on the contrary, it advocates the loss of visibility and takes the word—the oral reading of the text—as its main expression. However, Duras moves away from the visible because there is no other way to establish the relationship—a writing—between the I-You of desire. Following Lyotard, Duras would relate the figure to the *Id* (ça), "not with immediate figures of desire, but with their operations" (Lyotard, 1971: 23). As we have seen, blackness in *L'Homme atlantique* configures this space on the basis of oblivion and observation. The *Id* is located between the personal (I-you) and the impersonal (It), between the proximity of the first and the remoteness of the second: between the intimate and the universal. For Duras, cinema can render

desire visible not only because of the visibility of things, but also because the direct encounter with things entails a search for a different relationship, for a mediation distinct from that of painting or literature. This is why the filmmaker proposes a non-immediate operation, which cinema should carry out, on one hand, through the relationship with all the natures it can explore, and through all the elements that take part in it: subject, object, actor, spectator; and, on the other hand, because, in the words of Ishaghpour, Duras knows that “while the other arts can attempt to represent the unreal or the idea, cinema has no such means, it has the means of being sign without signified, indication, way” (Various, 1997: 89).

In these pages, I have tried to approach this displacement as the place where we can find the essence of *Durasian* cinema, that is, the *enigma of writing*. This displacement, which is born in the feeling of what cannot be solved, emerges in *L'Homme atlantique* in the loss of the visibility of the spectator in relation to the film, as we saw following the thought of Jean Louis Schefer. To find how to write of this loss, in *L'Homme atlantique* Duras converts what she once explored through the tracking shot into sonic power: “heautonomy of a sound image”, Deleuze would say; an “oral text”, according to Hatizforou. The “third screen” to which Bonitzer alludes expresses not only the separation between image and voice but, above all, the journey of this loss that is at the same time intimacy: the intimacy of a knowledge that does not know what to do and that in its own “impower” finds the expression of the memories it wants to deal with. Duras’ project, a movement inside the essence of what is lacking, of the fullness of the lack of being, culminates with what Lyotard identified in one of the main theses of *Discourse, Figure*, referring to the link—a radical link—between desire and the figure: “the culmination of desire (*Wunscherfüllung*) contains in itself the absence of the object” (Lyotard, 1971: 273). At the same time, it can be associated with the phenomenon defined by the

philosopher as “*acinéma*”: a movement that should not be understood in terms of “compensation” or “return” (terms inspired by a logic of consumption and economic benefit) but of a movement that does not preserve itself or propagate, or seek a relationship, but that “understands the pleasure of loss” (Lyotard, 1994: 57-69) to create a “discourse of intensity rather than power” (Lyotard, 1979: 273). This explains why it is an intensity that operates as “impower”: Duras stops having images of the other because otherwise her story would be the product of submission of the other by the self, a discourse of power and not desire, of representation and not writing. ■

NOTES

- 1 All quotes from *L'Homme atlantique* have been translated from the Spanish version of the text by Clara Janés in: Various Authors, 1997: 44-64.
- 2 In this way, Duras introduces a particular aesthetic economy that we find in *L'Homme atlantique* or in *Les mains négatives* (1978) and *Cesarée* (1978), using shots from *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* and *Le navire Night* (1979).
- 3 The quotations within the citation are fragments from the text of the film itself.

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THE "IMPOWER" OF CINEMA: AN ANALYSIS OF *L'HOMME ATLANTIQUE*

Abstract

"You remained in the state of the one who left. And I made a movie with your absence." These words, spoken by Marguerite Duras in *L'Homme atlantique* (1981), encapsulate the journey of a film in which she turns the absent image, the blackness of an imageless film, into the main figure. However, *L'Homme Atlantique* refers not only to the other's absence as told by the story, but to the death of cinema itself, through the creation of a film essentially constructed with words, conceived as an oral text. In this way, *L'Homme atlantique* culminates in a reflection on writing that Duras relates to desire and, more precisely, to a desire that manifests itself as lack, as the "fullness of the lack of being". Contrary to the studies that have approached the film from the perspective of the dialectic between literature and cinema to support the idea of a death of cinema caused by the word, this article focuses on the specificity of the film itself. To this end, I take up, on the one hand, the "figural" question posed by François Lyotard to consider the relations between desire, the figure and the move away from textual meaning, and, on the other hand, the question of the spectator addressed by the film, used by Jean Louis Schefer to define cinema as an inevitable crime of the outside world. This article considers both these approaches necessary to explore the figurative "impower" that Duras' films express and that *L'Homme atlantique* enacts as a sense of loss.

Key words

L'Homme atlantique; Marguerite Duras; black; desire; writing; "impower"; spectator, figural.

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EL «IMPODER» DEL CINE. UN ANÁLISIS SOBRE *L'HOMME ATLANTIQUE*

Resumen

«Usted permaneció en el estado de quien se ha ido. Y yo he hecho una película con su ausencia». Pronunciadas por Marguerite Duras en *L'Homme atlantique* (1981), estas palabras sintetizan el viaje de un film en el que la cineasta convierte la imagen ausente, el negro de una película sin imágenes, en su figura principal. Con ello, *L'Homme atlantique* se refiere no solo a la ausencia del otro que propone el relato, sino a la muerte del cine a partir de un film fundamentalmente construido desde la palabra, pensado como un texto oral. De esta manera, la película culmina con un pensamiento sobre la escritura que Duras vinculó al deseo y más precisamente a un deseo que se manifiesta como carencia, como la «plenitud de la falta de ser». Frente a los análisis que, para sostener la idea de una muerte del cine causada por la palabra, abordan el film a partir de la dialéctica entre la literatura y el cine, este artículo se centra en la especificidad fílmica de la película. Para ello, parte, por un lado, de la cuestión «figural» acuñada por François Lyotard para pensar el vínculo entre el deseo, la figura y el alejamiento de la significación textual, y, por otro lado, de la cuestión del espectador hacia la cual se dirige el film y con la que Jean Louis Schefer definió el cine como un crimen inevitable del mundo exterior. El artículo concibe ambas aproximaciones necesarias para abordar el «impoder» figurativo que el cine de Duras pone de manifiesto y que *L'Homme atlantique* trata desde un sentimiento de pérdida.

Palabras clave

L'Homme atlantique; Marguerite Duras; negro; deseo; escritura; «impoder»; espectador; figural.

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