



Agatha and the Limitless Readings by Marguerite Duras. The literary text and its filmic (irre)presentation

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Abstract

The present article analyses the film *Agatha and the Limitless Readings* (1981) by Marguerite Duras as the final experience, together with *The Atlantic Man* (1981), of the so-called *Durasian literary-cinematic coalescence*, which began a decade earlier with *Woman of the Ganges* (1974). The fusion of both practices, born from the need to turn the literary text into voice refusing its mise-en-scene, generates a new filmic practice which is one of the highest materialisations of the time-image defined by Deleuze, characterised by the independence between the visual image and the sound image. In *Agatha...* the Durasian coalescence inserts a new semiotic and narratological strategy: the *presentation* of the literary text in the filmic image as part of its *irrepresentation* insofar as cinematic mise-en-scene. This new component of the visual image generates a literary scene opposed to the filmic scene that enables new metaphorical operations between image and sound, thus joining the network of irrational correspondences among the different elements of the sound image and the visual image that define this filmic experience as a poetics of invention, hypnosis and hallucination. In its final materialisation, the Durasian coalescence places itself at the epicentre of the problem of irrepresentability through the theme of incest. The *showing* of the irrepresentable, as a limit expression of the fusion between literature and cinema, is built through the relationships among their different elements, all of them defined by an absence that the author shapes.

Keywords

Marguerite Duras, French cinema, cinematic modernity, time-image, filmic representation, cinema and literature, intermediality.

1. Introduction. The Durasian literary-cinematic coalescence.

The cinematic experience of Marguerite Duras, started with the writing of *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) for Alain Resnais, later evolves to direction, making the cinematic adaptation of her own novels –*La*

musica (1967), *Détruire, dit-elle* (1969), *Jaune le soleil* (1972). Next, her filmic creation means a new artistic experience that we call *literary-cinematic coalescence* (Monterrubio, 2013; 2015: 500). This practice rejects the *mise-en-scène* of the literary text previously produced to generate a new fusion between both disciplines that arises from the need to turn the literary text into voice. The Durasian coalescence then reveals itself as one of the maximum expressions of the time-image of the modern cinema described by Gilles Deleuze (1986) and it is defined by five of the characteristics proposed by the French philosopher for this image. These characteristics, which are presented below, delimit the theoretical framework of our analysis, centred on the semiotic and narratological aspects of this filmic practice:

- *The heautonomy of the visual image and the sound image.*
The literary-cinematic coalescence arises from the differentiation, autonomy and even confrontation between the visual image and the sound image. While in the latter the literary text is enunciated, the former renounces its *mise-en-scène*: “What constitutes the audio-visual image is a disjunction, a dissociation of the visual and the sound, each heautonomous [...]” (Deleuze, 1986: 256). The perturbation created by this confrontation is the one wisely used by Duras to explore the issue of irrepresentability in the filmic field.
- *The voice of the sound image as a pure speech-act.*
This voice-over differs from the one defined by classical cinema, since it does not materialise an omniscient narrator of the visual image, but, on the contrary, due to its independence, it becomes ambiguous, uncertain, and makes possible the evolution of the narrative style of Duras. This voice-over, converted into a pure speech-act, enunciates the literary text: “[...] a pure but polyvocal speech-act is extracted which splits off from theatre, and tears itself from writing” (Deleuze, 1986: 257).
- *The free indirect relationship between the visual image and the sound image.*
The independence between image and sound does not respond to a simple and gratuitous arbitrariness, but both maintain what Deleuze calls a free indirect relationship. It is this relation that makes possible the appearance of a polyvocal time-image which destroys the univocity of the movement-image. A free indirect relationship in which the poeticity and the inventiveness of the Durassian coalescence will remain: “[...] an incommensurable or ‘irrational’ relation which connects them to each other, without forming a whole, without offering the least whole” (Deleuze, 1989: 256).
- *The interstice between the visual image and the sound image. The disappearance of the cinematic out-of-field.*
The interstice defined by Deleuze is materialised here through the fault opened as a consequence of the independence between the visual image and the sound image. This void enables and requires the artistic creation of the spectator, leaving much of the invention that it generates in his hands. Thus, with the creation of an independent visual image and an independent sound image, we do not only speak of a visual framing though also of a sound framing that, being autonomous, provoke the disappearance of the idea of the out-of-field as union of both elements to be replaced by the interstice as disjunction: “the interstice between the two framings replaces the out-of-field” (Deleuze, 1989: 278).
- *Time and space disorientation.*
The heautonomy between the visual image and the sound image and their irrational interstice provoke a time and space disorientation that works in this same sense of the free indirect relationship, which allows the story to be imagined anywhere, to belong to any place, or perhaps, to belong to a timeless no-place. This coalescent

substance conveys an invention of no-place and timelessness, as Youssef Ishaghpour pointed out in relation to *India song*: “[...] everything is projected into the no-place, the no-time and the in-between of the images” (1982: 243). It is within this literary-cinematic coalescence, therefore, in which we can invent about the stories that neither happen narratively nor audiovisually.

This coalescence between cinema and literature remains thereby delimited by a creative space where literary, theatrical and cinematic texts destroy their borders, both generic and chronological. This space of intermediality is understood as “a dynamic phenomenon –a movement, an encounter– that occurs between different cultural and media practices, but also at the crossroads of discourses” (Beaulieu, 2009: 219). In this intermedial practice, the materials of the different artistic fields are part of the same creative process, developing the intratextuality and the *entrécriture* analysed by Julie Beaulieu (2007). The literary-cinematic coalescence provides a rigorous semiotic and narratological definition to this *between-writing* among literature, theatre and cinema; between the actual and the virtual; between voice-over and no representation. In turn, we convert this coalescence into a methodology of analysis consisting in the study of its defining characteristics and the relationships established among the different elements of the sound image and the visual image. This systematic analysis, absent in previous studies of these filmic works by Duras, makes it possible to unravel the complex relations between literary and cinematic matter: “this third dimension arising from the in-between: between the text, enunciated by the voice-over, and its no filmic representation, absent, which confers to it [the film] all its creative potential [...]” (Beaulieu, 2007: 106). Moreover, and as we will demonstrate throughout the analysis, our methodology provides theoretical justification to determinant studies carried out by other authors, which, however, lack foundation in the field of film theory.

After all the above, the works that constitute the experience of the Durasian coalescence are the following:

1974	<i>La femme du Gange / Woman of the Ganges</i>	film → text
1975	<i>India song</i>	text → film
1976	<i>Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert</i>	text → film
1977	<i>Le camion / The Lorry</i>	film → text
1979	<i>Le navire Night</i>	text → film
1979	<i>Les mains négatives</i>	film → text
1979	<i>Césarée</i>	film → text
1979	<i>Aurélia Steiner – Vancouver</i>	text → film
1979	<i>Aurélia Steiner – Melbourne</i>	text → film
1981	<i>Agatha et les lectures illimitées / Agatha and the Limitless Readings</i>	text → film
1981	<i>L'homme atlantique / The Atlantic Man</i>	film → text

The elements of this literary-cinematic coalescence stand as the perfect tools to achieve the artistic destruction, both literary and cinematic, pursued by the author. Use the cinema to destroy the text and also destroy the writer by becoming a filmmaker: “[...] to make a film is to go on to an act of destroying the creator of the book, in short, the writer. It is to cancel him out [...] It's on this defeat of the written text that –for me– cinema is built. In this massacre lies its essential and decisive appeal” (Duras, 1990a: 99–100). That is to say, the annihilation of the literary substance through cinema and also the massacre of cinema itself, consummated by this literary-cinematic coalescence, as we will have opportunity to show.

2. *Agatha and the Limitless Readings*

Agatha and the Limitless Readings (1981) therefore means the final materialisation, together with *The Atlantic Man* (1981), of this limit-experience in the fusion between literature and cinema achieved by Duras. The film is shot in Trouville in the early days of March 1981, when its literary version, *Agatha*, is published in Éditions de Minuit. A double filming, in fact, given that the filmmaker's intention was to shoot also *La jeune fille et l'enfant*, a short story included in *L'Été 80* (1981). This filming is combined, in turn, with the recording of the documentary *Duras filme*, directed by Jean Mascolo (author's son) and Jérôme Beaujour, which intends to follow the double filming that Duras plans and to perform different interviews to its members. Unfortunately, the filmmaker must renounce *La jeune fille et l'enfant* because of lack of financial resources. A representative phenomenon of the multiplicity of the Durasian creative space and its intermedial rewriting is then produced. The interviews of the documentary become in turn a raw material for the writer, since she uses its transcription to work on the project *Le livre dit*, of which a twenty-page manuscript is preserved, published in 2014. This literary and cinematic space likewise includes the theatrical expression, as evidenced by the construction of the text, in which the dialogue of the two characters alternates with descriptions and stage directions. Even though the publication of *Agatha* has no generic indication, the manuscripts preserved include the annotation "Dialogues pour le théâtre" (Pagès-Pindon, 2012: 214).

Next, we carry out the textual analysis of the work from the already defined characteristics of the Durasian coalescence. Firstly, we study a unique singularity, consisting in the introduction of a new semiotic and narratological strategy: the presentation of the literary text in the visual image of the film. Secondly, we analyse the filmic irrepresentation defining this Durasian coalescence by examining the different elements of the visual image and the sound image in order to determine the relationships established among them. The exposure of these relations will allow us to show the poetic nature of the coalescent creation and to evidence how all its elements and its respective correspondences revolve around a conception of the absence through which Duras achieves the *showing* of the irrepresentable.

3. Appearance of the literary text

As we have already explained, *Agatha...* is the only work that uses the presentation of the literary text in the filmic image. This inscription of the literary-theatrical matter in the visual image has only two partial precedents:

- In *Le navire Night* (1979) the text enunciated by the voice-overs (Duras and Benoît Jacquot) appears written on blackboards on which the camera makes a panorama. In this case, the linguistic inscription is not the proper literary one but its transformation into filmic tool, another device created by cinema that the film shows along with other elements of lighting, props or make-up.

- In *Aurélia Steiner – Vacouver* (1979) the linguistic inscription of the name of the protagonist arises on the screen, although it also does not belong to the literary text but it is identified as part of the filmic creation-revelation. In the same way, a segment of the literary text is shown later, although not the printed text but a handwritten one, which is identified with Aurélia's calligraphy.

In *Agatha...*, however, the filmmaker shows the printed text for the first and only time. In order to determine the purpose of this new element, we analyse its presence in the film, which is limited to two moments of the visual image. Duras begins the film with the image of the first page of the literary-theatrical text, describing the situation in which the narration takes place. The vertical panorama through it is combined in the sound image with Brahms's waltz n° 15, a narrative motif of great importance in the story that evolves into a

fundamental element of the sound image of the film. The panorama allows the reading of the full text so that the spectator can produce a literary-theatrical scene that will then enter into confrontation with the filmic scene that the images will show:

- The literary “drawing room in an uninhabited house” becomes the hall of a cinematic hotel.
- The literary “sound of the sea”, heard and once observed through the window (Duras 1992: 32), turns into the image of the sea.
- The conversation between “a man and a woman” that the text creates changes into the silence and solitude of two characters that only meet in two shots at the end of the film and who in no case speak.

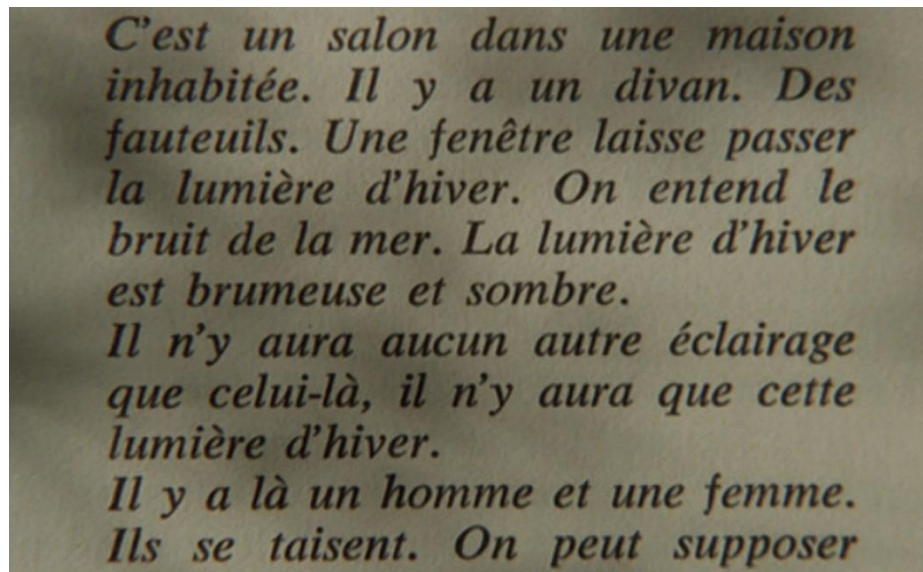


Fig. 1 – First appearance of the literary text in the film

Therefore, the conversation of the literary work will not take place in the visual image, and it will only happen in the sound image, through the voice-overs of Duras and Andréa. Nevertheless, the filmmaker generates, through the presentation of the literary text, a new free indirect relationship, since it gives a literary-theatrical context to the pure speech-act of the voice-overs that conflicts with the visual image. In this way, the cinematic work reinforces the literary one to immediately establish the independence between the sound image –which will correspond with the reduced literary and theatrical text– and the visual image –which far from generating the mise-en-scene of the space described in the text, it will offer a different narration. This disjunction provokes, first of all, the space and time disorientation of the spectator, essential to develop the emotional and irrational experience that Duras proposes, as we will analyse later. Hence, the images will show the interior space of a hotel –Roches Noires– on the edge of the sea and the exterior space of the beach and the city of Trouville. While the voice-overs of Duras and Andréa enunciate the literary text of the conversation between Agatha and her brother, the visual image travels through the mentioned spaces and shows the two characters, interpreted by Bulle Ogier and Yann Andréa, always alone and silent until the final encounter occurs.

The second and last appearance of the literary text happens in minute 38, causing the division of the film into two parts. On this occasion, five more takes of the text alternate with a shot of the beach while in the sound image we only listen to the musical motif, just as in the appearance of the first text. The enunciation of the voice-overs has been stopped in page 24 of the literary work. However, the textual shots belong to a later page, in the first case, and to previous pages in the remaining four. These five shots are ordered alternately

with the same take of the beach, creating a visual rhythm that shows, once again, that fault-interstice between the literary-theatrical conversation inside the house and the marine exterior of the filmic work. The first text of this series of five is again a description, belonging in this case to the ending of the film (italics are ours):

He lies down on the divan in a suggestive and proper position, but which could suggest the presence of her body next to his. Then she turns away from him. Moreover they have almost always turned their backs to each other when they speak to each other, *as if they were unable to look at each other without running the risk of becoming lovers*. They have each remained in the very infancy of their love. (Duras, 1992: 45-46)

The descriptions of the literary work have been focused all along the text around the movements and the glances of both characters, always standing and moving around the room space while they converse. This is the only one, however, in which one of them sits, in this case he lies down, evoking a symbol image of incest around which the conversation gravitates. This literary-theatrical image creates three correspondences with the filmic narration:

- It refers to the first image of Bulle Ogier, who was likewise lying on a sofa. That is to say, the image of the literary text generates, thanks to the *décalage* facing the filmic image, a sort of *textual-visual rhyme* defining the free indirect relationship of the Durasian coalescence.

- It anticipates the enunciation of the voice-overs, which have not yet remembered that nap in the month of July that would evoke the image of the lying brother, thus creating a *textual-sound metaphorical prolepsis* between what the spectator can read now and what the voice-overs will enunciate later.

- It presents the identification between the gaze and the incest that runs through the whole conversation of the sound image. This look is absent of the visual image at this moment, considering that both characters have not even met yet. A *textual-visual metaphorical prolepsis* between this text and the encounter of the characters of the visual image occurs, since they will also avoid looking at each other, as the gaze becomes a symbol of the irrepresentable incest. As Sylvie Loignon points out: "The insistence of the text on Agatha's and her brother's eyes, which are at the heart of the virtual transgression of the incest, underlines the importance of the eyes in the passionate relationship" (2001: 288). Duras's/Agatha's voice-over has already narrated the walk along the river in the sound image; there, the different look between the siblings arises: "[...] I came back and saw that you were still there and that you were still watching me, and I saw that you were thinking the same thing at seeing me as I was at seeing you in that way [...]" (Duras, 1992: 19).



Fig. 2 – Shot of the beach that alternates with the literary text

The four remaining shots, all of them from previous texts, present descriptions about the movements of the characters and different lines of dialogue, which therefore have already been enunciated by the voice-overs of the sound image. A *sound-textual anaphora* that redounds once again on the rhetorical and poetic structure of the film is then produced. These relevant dialogues in the conversation of the voice-overs have, in all cases, been accompanied by the visual image of the sea, in the same way as these texts, which also provides an indirect visual component to these anaphoras. In the second case, this sound-textual anaphora is generated around a scream never uttered:

SHE. – I'm screaming with you [...]

HE. – You're leaving so as to continue loving me? (Duras, 1992: 13)

Michelle Royer identifies this scream with the writing and its expulsion through the voice-over: "Between the voice-over and the writing, an expulsion out of the body happens, which, analogous to that of birth and separation, is announced by the scream" (1993: 109). The last insert shot is again a vertical panorama of the literary page, just like the first one with which the film began. In this dialogue the identification between the incestuous love and the look is repeated: the love of Agatha towards the brother and the capacity of him to see her. This gaze will never take place between the characters of the visual image (*italics are ours*):

HE (*softly*). – Say it to me as if to him.

SHE (*softly*). – *I love you.* (*pause*)

HE. – Again.

SHE. – I love you as I was unaware how much I could. [...]

HE. – *You are Agatha.*

SHE. – Yes. [...]

HE. – *Agatha, I'm seeing you.* (Duras, 1992: 14)

After having analysing these inserts of the literary text, we can now determine their purpose. That of generating a literary scene, confronted with the filmic scene, which thus materialises a new irrational interstice within the visual image. This confrontation strengthens the Durasian coalescence and collaborates in its destructive work of the story.

While the poeticity and the capacity of inventiveness arose, in the previous works of this coalescence, from the interstice between visual image and sound image and its free indirect relationship, with *Agatha...* Duras also creates a new disjunction within the visual image, confronting the literary text and the filmic one. The free indirect relationship produced through this new interstice allows the emergence of new correspondences and resonances between both scenes. The image of the literary text is always and solely accompanied by the musical motif, reiterating the disjunction between the literary text (visual image) and the enunciation of the voice-overs (sound image). Therefore, the presentation of the literary text becomes an element of the irrepresentation of the narrative inherent to the Durasian coalescence. The author herself enunciates the paradox of what we consider an achievement of the coalescence in this work: “I think *Agatha* is more readable in cinema than in the book, it is the first time something like this happens. If I had to choose between *Agatha*, the book, and *Agatha*, the film, I would choose the film” (Duras, 1993: 11).

4. Filmic irrepresentation

Having concluded the analysis of the presentation of the literary text as an element of the filmic irrepresentation of the narration, we next study the latter, typical of the Durasian coalescence in its whole. As Duras says: “[...] what there is in my films is that there is no longer representation [...] classical representation” (2014: 155). Having verified how the filmic text responds to the definition of the coalescent matter, it is now necessary to analyse how the visual image and the sound image are constructed, in order to determine the free indirect relationships generated among their different elements starting from the idea of irrational interstice, from which the poetic nature of the work emerges. Using Deleuze's conception of the actual and the virtual –which Beaulieu applies to the analysis of *Le Camion*–, in which both aspects “coexist, and enter into a tight circuit which we are continually retracting from one to the other” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007: 150), we can assert that the virtual emerges from the actual of the narrations of the visual image and the sound image of *Agatha...* and from their free indirect relationship: “a signification: an image owned by each spectator, a mental image [...] whose representational and significant possibilities are endless [...]” (Beaulieu, 2015: 120). In Alain Boillat's analysis, this practice would be placed between the “intersection” and the “referential disjunction” of the visual image and the sound image, generating two interconnected diegesis, which in turn provoke a “megadiegesis that emerges in the imagination of the spectator” (2007: 366).

4.1. The visual image

The visual image is constructed through three elements: literary text, filmic image and black image. Having already analysed the presentation of the literary text, which, as far as structure is concerned, divides the work into its two parts, we must now tackle the structuring of the diverse elements of the filmic image and their relation with its absence, that is, with the black image.

4.1.1. The black image

The black image only appears in the first part of the film, until the literary text emerges again. Its function is neither the transition between sequences or scenes, nor the indication of a temporary course, as the classic film language would establish. On the contrary, the black image is inserted between shots that show the same space, either inside or outside, thereby acquiring its own identity, making its presence rise in value within the visual image by not responding to a punctuation function of the text. If we analyse the structures in which it participates, we discover a visual metre that identifies with poetic metre. In the following diagram we can distinguish the four types of what we could call *visual verses*,

marked in different colours, and we can also differentiate the five stanzas that they construct. This analysis allows us to evidence the visual rhythm generated by the black image:

Shot.	Visual image		Sound image
1.	2. text – black – interior	A – B – C	music – VOICE SHE: You had always spoken [...]
2.	9. interior – black	C – B	VOICE SHE: [...] as much as I want to see you [...]
3.	11. interior – black	C – B	VOICE HE: [...] will be carried off far from me [...]
4.	13. interior – black	C – B	VOICE HE: It shall be neither [...]
5.	15. interior – black	C – B	VOICES: – This suffering. – Yes.
6.	27. beach – black	D – B	sea sound + VOICE SHE: No.
7.	44. beach – black	D – B	VOICE HE: [...] and we screamed [...]
8.	49. beach – black	D – B	music + VOICE HE: [...] Tell me more.
9.	52. she – black	C' – B	SILENCE
10.	54. beach – black	D – B	VOICE SHE: [...] when I was a little girl.
11.	56. she – black	C' – B	VOICE SHE: [...] solitude [...]
12.	58. she – black	C' – B	SILENCE
13.	60. beach – black	D – B	SILENCE
14.	62. she – black	C' – B	VOICE HE: There where it passed out of sight.
15.	64. beach – black – text	D – B – A	VOICE HE: [...] it was all over.

If, in addition, we analyse the expression of the sound image during these absences of the visual image, we verify that different combinations are created regarding the voice-overs: they initiate their enunciation during the black image; they continue it; they respond to each other; or they make a pause. In all cases, both the words and the pauses that are produced in this absence of image acquire a new value. They remain underlined by this interstice of the visual image that is then configured as a space of the narration conflict, of the difficulty to enunciate the incest. The black image becomes a metaphor of the irrational, subconscious conflict that causes “a guilty love affair”, “this criminal affair” (Duras, 1992: 25) in the characters. This first and almost unique qualification of the love between siblings occurs at the beginning of the second part, thus overcoming the conflict of its formulation and, therefore, making the black image that symbolised it disappear. This interpretation belongs to the virtual image already described, to the megadiegesis constructed by each spectator: “Black shots, like the blank parts of the text, request the participation of the reader-spectator that must necessarily fill them, since these are abnormally empty spaces” (Beaulieu, 2009: 232).

4.1.2. The filmic image

On the other hand, the filmic image is constructed by means of two alternations: interior of the hotel/exterior of the beach and the city; absence/presence of the characters inside the hotel. These two alternations build their correspondences with the sound image, especially with the voice-overs. Regarding the first one, there is a clear significance of both spaces. The exterior of the beach and the city generate, first of all, the absence of the summer, of the time evoked by the voice-overs –“It’s Agatha’s summer” (Duras, 1992: 15)– that stresses its distance from the recollections of the siblings. As the author explains:

[...] the films of the summer are shot in winter. I can even go further, I say that cinema is made in winter. That is, during the absence, even the absence of the subject, even the escape of the subject's conditions. That is, of the heat, the pleasure of living, a kind of emptiness of the human being, of his game. Only in winter we can testify the happiness of living. It is in winter – when it is impossible, practically impossible, precisely, to access that pleasure of living– when we can testify it. (Duras, 2014: 40)

Before the appearance of the characters of the visual image, this exterior space is revealed as the space of the past, of the invention around the infancy memories evoked by the characters of the sound image, which symbolises the loss of childhood. In opposition to the latter, the interior of Roches Noires is constituted as a space of the present, that of the siblings' farewell facing a separation that “[...] becomes a way to preserve the forbidden love” (Loignon, 2003: 55).



Fig. 3 – Interior image of the Roches Noires hall

The presence of the characters of the visual image determines a second significance of the interior space. Their six appearances, two in the first part and four in the second, are always associated with the past of childhood. Thus, the enunciation of its recollection by the voice-overs seems to invoke the presence of the characters of the filmic image, as if the latter could only exist through the infantile remembrance of the former. The first appearance of the characters occurs when Duras's/Agatha's voice enunciates the first childhood memory of the siblings. While the female character is lying on an armchair, the male one appears with his back turned, outside the hotel, to enter next.



Fig. 4 – Fig. 5 – First appearance of the characters

Her second appearance takes place again with the memory narration of the day in the hotel next to the river. Duras's/Agatha's voice enunciates her recollection of that day while the visual image shows the wandering of the female character in the hotel, with the visual metre that we have already observed when analysing the black image. It is then when the filmic device is revealed. The camera is shown through a mirror and immediately after the character looks at it, breaking the cinematic fourth wall, destroying the fiction to show the extradiegetic space of the filmic construction, the space of the Durasian writing: "This is *la chambre noire*. The room of *Aurélia Steiner*, that of *L'Été 80* and *Agatha*... For me, it is the place of writing" (Duras, 2014: 185). Just as it happens with representation, fiction is not possible either. Duras asserts about this breakdown of the fiction space: "I show the camera. I show how a film is made. You can see that it is an attempt to execute the cinema, that I do it perhaps involuntarily. Often, in the middle of a film, I stop believing in it, I can not resist what I call the crime" (1993: 189). Through this repeated look at the camera, destructive of fiction, the encounter between the female character of the visual image and that of the sound image occurs. In that moment, the latter narrates the memory of that walk along the river. For a few moments, the identity fusion between the four entities takes place: actress/visual character and filmmaker/sound character.



Fig. 6 – The female character looks at the camera

In this manner, the revelation and death of the cinematic fiction gives way to the literary text, concluding the first part of the film. In the second, her presence continues in a third appearance with which to complete the recollection and to attain the revelation of the incest. Its formulation, as indicated above, ends the presence of the black image as a symbol of the impossibility of its enunciation, the intimate conflict of the characters. The remembrance of the "nap in the month of July" (Duras, 1992: 35) corresponds to her new appearance (the fourth) walking along the hall. Duras's/Agatha's voice-over then invokes the presence of both characters in the same shot for the first time, placing them in the same time coordinate that had been an unknown fact until this moment. During this joint presence of the characters of the visual image, who in no case look at each other, the voice-overs remember the supposed incest:



Fig. 7 – First image of the encounter

HE. – The eyes are not visible. The body is closed up entirely beneath the eyelids. (*pause*)
 You are my sister. The body is immobile. The heart can be seen beneath the skin.
 SHE. – You touch the body. (*pause*) You lie down next to it. (*pause*) We remain silent.
 HE. – The breasts, I think, are within reach of my hands, of the kisses of my mouth.
 (Duras, 1992: 40)

The encounter ends with a second and last image in which both characters are placed next to each other, without looking at each other, in almost total darkness. He with his eyes closed, hers opened, while Andréa's/brother's voice-over concludes: "Yes, no other love" (Duras, 1992: 41). Then, the visual image advanced in the second insert of the literary text, previously analysed and defined as *textual-visual metaphorical prolepsis*, is shown and it implies the absence of the gaze between the characters. This is also a metaphorical image of the innocence of the fiction symbolised by his closed eyes, facing the creative and destructive identity, extradiegetic, of her opened eyes. This sublime image conveys the differentiation of the characters that the author wishes to establish: "Sometimes I think it was Agatha who invented everything, the brother's love, the brother, everything, the world. I think it was Agatha who discovered the incest; he was not able to discover it. Therein lies the incommensurable strength of that child, Agatha. She discovered that they loved each other" (Duras, 1993: 11).



Fig. 8 – Second image of the encounter

The fifth appearance presents them separated again. He, once again in the terrace, is looking out, while she walks along the hall. The voice-overs then evoke the memories next to the piano before Agatha's withdrawal of music, who gives it to his brother. Finally, their last appearance takes up the first one, placing them in the same spots, while the voice-overs evoke their stay in Gabon. In this way, a circular structure emerges that opens a new interpretation of the visual image narration, which could have not taken place either, to be pictured by the characters, who remain in the same position while they imagine what the spectator has heard and perhaps what he has also seen. They could be the characters of the visual image who envision the characters of the sound image, thereby closing a circular structure about the meaning and interweaving of both images, in which the sound image seems to invoke the visual image at the same time that the visual image could invent the sound image. In addition, on this occasion, there is a sort of disoriented shot-countershot in which the male character looks at the interior for the first time, and that could contain an exchange of gazes that would remain out of frame. This possible look, still absent, now symbolises an incest consummation that is identified with death:



Fig. 9 – Fig. 10 – Last appearance of the characters

HE. – Yes. We didn't agree... You were saying: "Agatha is the one who would have dared to confront death."

SHE. – You, you were saying that she, Agatha, couldn't die, that she, she faced death without danger of dying.

HE. – I also said that he was mortal.

SHE (*as an echo*). – Him, yes. (Duras, 1992: 50)

4.2. The sound image

While the visual image is constructed from the oppositions among its different elements, as we have analysed, the sound image is generated as a kind of modulation among its own: voice-over, music and the sound of the sea. These three elements are articulated producing different sound plans, all of them alien to a visual image that remains silent.

4.2.1. The voice-over

The silence of the characters of the visual image provokes a new split between actor and character that prevents from establishing the identification with the voices of the sound image: “I have been asked why I chose Bulle Ogier to do *Agatha* to say nothing, to keep silence. I think I did it to separate her from her voice, for you to see her, so that her voice were my voice, uttered by me” (Duras, 1993: 10–11). Faced with this silence, Duras’s and Andréa’s voice-overs, pure speech-acts, become the crucial procedure of the Durasian coalescence. These enunciations, defined by Michel Chion as a *textual speech* (1994) and analysed by Alain Boillat as a *literalization* of the voice-over (2007), are used by Duras to create a diegesis of the sound image that distances from its usual narrative functionality on the visual image. A practice whose achievements are brilliantly described by Ishaghpour:

Through the voice, the integral voice-over, Duras rends the magic of cinema as a universe of identification, of imaginary fascination. She introduces the seclusion of the listening. In classical cinema, there is integration of fiction, of figures, in space. Duras separates the two elements, the world is there, in front of the camera, and the fiction remains in the voice-over, but it is thanks to this exile of the speech that the world appears on the screen, as an inaugural appearance, not as a fantasy. (1986: 280)

The literary-theatrical text, turned into voice, “points to the corporeity of writing to an erotic stripping of meaning” (Royer, 2009: 160) and it is characterised by the Durasian orality and its musicality, associated to the parataxic writing typical of the author: “[...] the parataxis lies in the antipodes of ellipsis or summary [...] far from reducing duration, parataxis tries, we would say, to restore it just as it is. Literary equivalent, therefore, of the sequence shot of cinema [...] in which the filmic time is equal to the diegetic time” (Noguez, 2001: 23). In this case, the diegetic time of the conversation between the siblings of the sound image corresponds to the one of the wandering characters of the visual image thanks to fixed and panoramic shots, which also connect the interior of the hotel to the exterior of the beach, insisting on the idea of real duration equally transmitted by the dusk that occurs in the visual image. This experience of the temporality lived by the spectator contributes to the invention and its displacement towards a hypnotic and hallucinatory state that we analyse later: “Real duration through which everything lasts *inside us*, like us, it is us who remember, who sustain the weight of fantasy and make it be” (Noguez, 2001: 82).

As we have already advanced in the analysis of the filmic image, the content of the enunciation of the voice-overs is divided between the present of the separation and the past of childhood and adolescence memories around incest. The voice-overs of Duras/Agatha and Andréa/brother generate a clear correspondence regarding the interior and the exterior space of the filmic image and their respective symbolologies. Thus, we associate Andréa’s voice-over to the exterior while Duras’s one corresponds to the interior. The male voice belongs to the *fictional space* of the recollection linked to the exterior, while the female one belongs to the *space of the writing* associated with the interior, that of the creation-destruction of the coalescent work. As we have already observed, the presence of the characters of the visual image materialises when the voice-overs address the memories related to incest, recollections initiated mainly by Duras’s/Agatha’s voice.

4.2.2. The musical motif

The musical motif, Brahms's waltz n° 15 interpreted on the piano by both siblings in their infancy, will likewise remain bound to the recollection of the latter. This musical motif appears with the shot change or it arises, and vanishes, within it. Ten appearances of the same melody correspond to three elements of the visual image:

- The literary text. The musical motif serves in this case as an element of separation in the definition of a literary scene faced to a filmic scene. At the same time, the music isolates the image of the literary text from the rest of the elements of the sound image, which also prevents the identification with the latter.

- The exterior image of the beach. Its appearance along with the musical motif indicates the beginning of a memory.

- The interior image with the presence of the characters. The previous combination, provoking the childhood remembrances, moves in the second part of the work to the interior space, always with the presence of the characters, in the recollection of the incestuous experience.

However, when Duras's/Agatha's voice relates the visit to the abandoned hotel, where both siblings play the waltz on the black piano, the melody evoked by her never appears. Agatha's act of giving, in which music also becomes a symbol of the passionate love, is told in the absence of the musical motif:

I was seeing myself in a mirror listening to my brother playing for me alone in all the world, and I bestowed on him all music forever and I saw myself enthralled in the happiness of resembling him such that it was with our lives as it was with that river flowing together there [...] and then afterwards I became aware of a burning sensation in my *body*. (*pause*) I lost the awareness of living for several seconds. (Duras, 1992: 21)

Once again, we confirm how the filmmaker avoids the redundancy between visual image and sound image, eliminating any possibility of a direct relationship between the two in order, nevertheless, to create a new correspondence between the musical motif – previously listened on several occasions– and the past happiness. That is, the “pleasure of living” that was absent in the winter beach mentioned by Duras. This bond is reiterated in the end of the work, again, in the absence of the music: “When she gave over all music to him forever and when she was enraptured in happiness as the river flowed” (Duras, 1992: 47).

4.2.3. The sound of the sea

Finally, the sound of the sea is the element that serves as a link between the visual image and the sound image, since it is the only one that could be diegetic, that is, that could come from the visual image of the sea. However, this identification also fades when hearing its sound for the first time along with the title credits and secondly inside the hotel, with the first appearance of the female character. Its sound is then associated with the voice-overs, more specifically with the strength of the memories evoked by them. We hear it both inside and outside the house. It emerges and fades within the same shot of the visual image, becoming a magnificent metaphor of the power of recollection to flood the present. Its modulation helps to produce a certain state of hypnosis in the spectator, it prepares him to the same type of hallucinatory experience that narrates Andréa's/brother's voice around the memory of that summer nap, in which the sea sound appears as well:

SHE. — You can hear the sound of the sea, calm and slow [...]

HE. — I come back into the hallucinatory room. (*pause*) I think she's asleep [...]

SHE. — The sound of the sea enters the room, dark and slow [...] Her body's indecency has all the magnificence of God. It's as though the sound of the sea covers it with the sweetness of a deep wave. (Duras, 1992: 36-37)

This fragment of the conversation takes place along with images of the exterior of the beach, to go inside in the last sentence, where we see her in front of the mirror. Then the encounter of both characters in the same space is accompanied by the sound power of the sea, which brings with it the overwhelming recollection of the incestuous episode already mentioned.

5. The poetics of the Durasian coalescence

The metaphorical and metamorphic operations of the Durasian coalescence reject every univocal relationship between its elements, what we could call pleonastic relationships between image and sound: literary text and voice-overs; black image and silence; image of the beach and sound of the sea; interior image and music. On the very contrary, the analysis of the different elements of the sound image and the visual image allows us to verify the network of interrelationships that they generate and which defines this coalescence between literature and cinema as a poetic practice, corroborating the lucid description proposed by Dominique Noguez:

[...] a cinema of correspondences; Baudelairean perhaps, but certainly surreal, in the deep sense that Breton sought. It is the game (but with gravity, with pathos) of "the one in the other" – the idea, Breton says, that "any *object* [but also every *action* and every *character*] is contained in any other. (2001: 87-88)

We intend to synthesise these free indirect relationships, Baudelairean correspondences and surrealistic practice of great complexity, that we have analysed in *Agatha...*, in the following diagram, proposing a global vision of these relationships that equally corroborates Deleuze's statement:

Speech reaches its own limit which separates it from the visual; but the visual reaches its own limit which separates it from sound. So each one reaching its own limit which separates it from the other thus discovers the common limit which connects them to each other in the incommensurable relation of an irrational cut, the right side and its obverse, the outside and the inside. (1989: 279)

We present the elements of the visual image in red and those of the sound image in blue and we also mark the different metaphorical and rhetorical operations analysed in bold.

<u>LITERARY TEXT</u> <i>Literary-theatrical scene</i> in opposition to <i>filmic scene</i>			Visual metre
			Textual-visual rhyme
<u>MUSIC</u> Separation between the literary and filmic scenes Metaphor of <i>the pleasure of living</i> of the past childhood and adolescence			Textual-sound metaphorical prolepsis
			Textual-visual metaphorical prolepsis
			Sound-textual anaphora
<u>FILMIC TEXT</u>	BLACK IMAGE Metaphor of the intimate conflict Impossibility of the formulation of incest		
		Visual metre	
	AGATHA	Present – interior space	
	VOICE-OVERS	Artistic creation/destruction	
	Invocation of the characters of the visual image		Absence of the scream: Sound metaphor of the loss
	BROTHER	Past – exterior space	Fiction
	EXTERIOR - BEACH	Past of the childhood memories	Absence of the summer: Visual metaphor of the childhood
	FILMIC IMAGE	Diegetic space – fiction	
	SEA	Link between visual image and sound image	
	Metaphor of the power of memory		
			ABSENCE OF CHARACTERS Present of the separation
	INTERIOR - HOTEL	Extradiegetic space	
			PRESENCE OF CHARACTERS Inventiveness of the sound image Destruction of fiction Revelation of the incest
			Identity fusion
			Absence of the gaze: Visual metaphor of the prohibition of the incest

The visual image is generated from oppositions that are arranged in a sort of semiotic mise-en-abyme of its elements: literary scene and filmic scene; black image and filmic image; interior and interior space; presence and absence of the characters. This system is also constituted by structures that create a kind of visual metre. In turn, the sound image is constructed as a modulation of its three elements, producing a musicality, a sound rhythm, in correspondence with the visual metre, which provides the hypnotic and hallucinatory experience defining the Durasian work. These elements of the sound image and the visual image are related to the present of the separation-past of the memory axis that governs the film and whose function for Pascal Bonitzer is to “equivocate the narrative plot” (1981: 56), focusing on a phantasmatic dimension that we have described as hallucinatory. This network of free indirect relationships among the different elements of both images materialises the poetics of the Durasian coalescence. Barthélemy Amengual defines this poetics of irrationality when speaking of *Agatha...* and of the last work of this coalescence, *The Atlantic Man*, as follows:

[...] By what dialectic are the black screen and the sound forced to show, are the image and the silence forced to speak? With her last two films (the limit point of her research of the adventure), the author finds a solution on the side of literary communication, there where seeing and hearing (reading/imagining) become seeing without seeing and hearing without hearing [...]

in *Agatha*, in *The Atlantic Man*, the cinema suffers, as a language, a transmutation, an alchemy that generates a radically different language, practically unprecedented [...] *Agatha's* status is that of the poetic text (read, heard, reinvented). (1982: 102)

Faced with the analysis of Youalia Maritchik-Sioli, who defines the work as the proposal of “a plurality of possible readings” (2015: 150), we believe that *Agatha...* offers precisely the indiscernibility among all of them, as a result of its coalescent poetics. This poetic creation leads the spectator from imagination to hallucination, generating in him a sort of resonance, described by Luc Moullet regarding the spoken text of *Hiroshima, mon amour* and that we identify with the poetics of the Durasian coalescence, which “[...] disturbs the spectator, moves him, creates a certain resonance in him, a long-lasting resonance” (2014: 79). This poetics leaves the rationality of the narrative to propose an emotional experience: “She asks the spectators to renounce the desire to control the spectatorial experience and to prefer the intensity of the emotion rather than the rational process” (Royer, 2014: 49).

6. Conclusion. Irrepresentability and absence

This ending of the Durasian coalescence confronts, in the first place, the problem of the irrepresentability, quality that defines the subject of incest that the author approaches in the work. She thus explains her cinematic objective in a conversation with Yann Andréa (italics are ours):

M. D. –[...] nothing evidences incest, the nature of incest, nothing at all. Therefore, it isn't representable; therefore, it is not worth representing it [...]

Y. A. –Isn't there a contradiction between the fact that it isn't representable and the fact of wanting to generate images?

M. D. – Yes, but this contradiction is representable [...] *it's that impossibility which I show in the cinema. And it's also what my cinema does [...] I show what is not showable*, that's what interests me. (Duras, 2014: 42-43)

Duras's statement regarding writing: “Yes, writing is above all an impossibility” (1993: 214) is hence confirmed in her cinematic experience. This cinema of the impossibility of representation is constructed through the Durasian coalescence, by means of the correspondences among the different elements of the visual image and the sound image. These elements are defined from a primal notion of the Durasian work, as Ishaghpour points out: “Duras gives form to absence” (1986: 273). Absences already mentioned throughout our analysis: absence of the summer that defines the exterior image of the beach and symbolises the loss of childhood; absence of image –black image– symbolising the impossibility of formulation of incest; absence of the gaze between the characters of the visual image in which incest would materialise; absence of the characters' scream of the sound image facing the imminent loss and the existence of another love (Duras, 1992: 13, 31). In the filmmaker's words: “Writing isn't just telling stories. It's exactly the opposite. It's telling everything at once. It's the telling of a story, and the absence of the story. It's telling a story through its absence” (Duras, 1990b: 27). The narrative of incest, of irrepresentable nature, is produced by its absence. The *showing* of the irrepresentable is thereby constructed through the correspondences created among the different elements of the visual image and the sound image, all of them defined by the absence. In this way, we assume for *Agatha...* what Ishaghpour wrote about *The Lorry*, which links both concepts: “It will be precisely about that: about the rejection of the ‘sense’ to penetrate the empirical life. About a story as well as about its absence, about a fable to speak of the possibility of the impossible and about the image as absence, marked by this impossibility of the real to

become image” (1982: 268). It is this impossibility of representation that entails the artistic destruction: “Let the cinema go to its ruin. That’s the only cinema” (Duras, 1977: 74). In this destruction of literature and cinema through literary-cinematic coalescence, both writings fuse to generate a poetics of the irrational, provoking a spectatorial experience that evolves from imagination to hallucination. This poetics of the Durasian coalescence is capable of *not representing* but actually *showing* the irrepresentable, this criminal love.

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