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IN DURAS' DARK ROOM

Comments on Le camion

In an early film by Marguerite Duras, *Nathalie Granger* (1972), Gérard Depardieu plays a self-undermining role. He acts as a travelling washing-machine salesman whose smooth talk brings about a surprising but far from desirable effect, and in one scene it appears as if the actor has been left in the dark as to whether he is auditioning for a role in the film, or is actually already acting in it.¹ The questions that Duras' game with the young actor must have stirred – is this a film? am I in or out of it? – are echoed in a peculiar manner in a later work that also features Depardieu, *Le camion* (1977). In the latter, his role is quite limited: he listens to what Duras tells him about a film that *would have been*, and he offers minimal commentary, read from the script, on what is not shown but only evoked by Duras' words. It calls to mind Plato's dialogues, in which Socrates develops a certain reasoning and his interlocutors' only function is to ask questions in order to keep the conversation going and to endorse the correctness of the train of thought until a certain, if often aporetic, conclusion is reached. There is also a second element that invites the establishment of a connection with Plato: the notable dialogue between Duras and Depardieu takes place in what would later, in the published script, be called the "dark room," which is reminiscent of Plato's famous allegory of the cave.²

Perhaps Duras has no intention of alluding to Plato.³ Still, not unlike his distrust of illusory images, she considers language a means to escape from the prefabricated images produced by the film industry. In the presentation texts, which are added to the book version of *Le camion*, she leaves no doubt about it: it is a wasted effort to preoccupy oneself with film. Or to get involved with the kind of film where something is thematized (love, socialist or capitalist hope, freedom, social or fiscal justice, and so on), or which presents a certain target group and thus believes it is addressing them: women, youth, and so on (73).⁴ Since none of that is still worth the effort, the only cinema that matters is the cinema that testifies to the realization that cinema is no longer worth the effort. "Let the cinema go to ruin, that is the only cinema" (74).

This position can be dismissed as an exaggeration, and seemingly contradicts Duras' appreciation of the work of Antonioni, Bresson, Chaplin, Dreyer, Godard, among others. But that does not relieve us from the task of examining the way in which Duras "murderously"⁵ deals with the medium of film, and, in particular, and of asking: what sort of imagination, according to her, lies enclosed within text?

1.

The first question that Depardieu poses while reading the scenario – "Is it a film?" – is answered by Duras with: "It would have been a film." This past conditional is followed by the affirmative: "Yes, it is a film." After this confirmation, the mood reverts to the conditional: "The truck would have disappeared. And then, later, it would have appeared again. People would have heard the sea, distant but very powerful. And then a woman would have waited on the side of the road. She would have given a sign." This alternation between the conditional and the present indicative gives rhythm to the conversation. If there is something to "see," then it is only because of the words. As the spoken words are part of a film, one may expect the images, if not to directly visualize the text, then at least to contribute to a coherent audiovisual experience. Yet, in that respect, watching *Le camion* is a frustrating endeavor, for the visual track consists of the conversation between Duras and Depardieu, interrupted now and again by images of a blue truck crossing a desolate landscape of industrial sites, housing blocks, agricultural land and commercial centers.⁶ The relatively slow-moving vehicle is the only visual element that can be connected to the text.⁷ Other elements of the text are not supported, let alone illustrated, by the images, and remain as such within the domain of the spectator's imagination. Here, Duras' alternation between the conditional and the present indicative playfully elicits the spectator's imaginative potential, moving from "what would have been" to "what is" without any visual evidence for the latter, descriptive utterances. The corroboration of the conditional hypothetical statements is solely brought about by words, and not by any audio-visually observable fact. This testifies to Duras' appreciation of "the limitless potential of text, its limitless proliferation of images," as opposed to (Hollywood) cinema, which "stops the text and kills its offspring: imagination (*l'imaginaire*)" (75). Whereas cinema arrests representation "once and for all" (75), *Le camion*, in Duras' opinion, is an undeniable success in not representing anything. It may stir the expectation of representation, but representation does not take place.⁸

2.

We can imagine that the hitchhiking woman and the truck driver meet in the cabin of the vehicle: an enclosed space which, like a cinema, offers a view of the surrounding landscape. "They are locked up together in the same place: the truck's cabin. [...] They see the same landscape. At the same time. From the same space" (36 and 40). And yet, the man and the woman react very differently to what can be seen. For

him, everything coincides with its function, whereas for her the landscape consists of signs that inspire her to formulate associative and disparate thoughts. *Le camion* occupies a separate place within Duras' work because there is no love lost between the driver and the hitchhiking woman. The seclusion of the cabin and the mutual view of the road do not create an erotic tension between them. The characters have nothing in common save for a certain violence in their gazes (16). The man, in particular, appears to be who he is: rather young, a member of the Communist Party, defined by his profession and his task, which is to move goods from one place to another. And she is described as a "classless" woman (*déclassée*, 16 and 31) cloaked with the dignity of banality (65). "Their diversity would have been the subject of the film" (40) Duras states, but the viewer is not given the opportunity to see this diversity. The difference between the characters can only be derived from the opposition between, on one hand, the limited number of times that Duras refers to his role in the conversation – he is taciturn and not interested in a woman of a certain age (37) – and, on the other hand, the inconsistent set of thoughts, memory fragments, and categorical assertions with which the woman inundates the driver. She talks about Marx (*c'est fini*, 47 and 60) and about Mars (22); about her grandson and his name, Abraham (50ff); about the complicity between the proletariat and the employers (44); about God (*le vide*, 23), and so on. Still, their non-relationship is breached once, though not by the man and woman in the truck, but by the narrator, Duras, and her attentive listener and fellow reader, Depardieu. At a certain moment, they cheerfully read *together* the words that the woman would have said: "Let the world go to ruin, that's the only politics" (*Que le monde aille à sa perte, c'est la seule politique*, 25).

3.

The film intriguingly links two ideas: 1) we witness an end – the end of film, the end of the world – which must be welcomed, even actively brought about (*let* the world and *let* cinema go to ruin), and 2) in order to do so the use of the past conditional is instrumental.

The conditional can be found in many of Duras' works, including such early ones as *L'homme assis dans le couloir* (1962).⁹ An explanation of the use of this mood can be found in a radio interview during which the criticism is reiterated that, in another early text (*Le square*, 1955), the maid talks "in an unnatural, artificial way," to which Duras replies: "Yes, she doesn't talk in a natural way, because I let her talk the way she *would* be talking if she could do so. Realism doesn't interest me at all."¹⁰ The artificial, formal language of the maid is not to be taken as the supposedly adequate rendering of what and how ordinary people communicate, but rather as how she would be talking if she were listened to, if only "the lowest of the low"¹¹ had a voice. In that respect, the conditional mood is the one most faithful to imagination, for it not only expresses what one can imagine as a possibility, it goes further and renders explicit the virtuality of this imagination. The conditional mood does not suspend disbelief; on the contrary, it continuously tells the reader or listener not to take what is being expressed for real. In that sense, the material of *Le camion*

corresponds quite well to the conditional: at first sight, there is nothing that invites the spectator to believe what is being discussed. Save for the blue Saviem truck crossing the landscape, nothing is shown that supports or visualizes the dialogue's content. *Le camion* may be a film, but, like the conditional mood, it includes its own unreality.¹² As noted above, this should be taken as a logical conclusion drawn from the current state as Duras saw it: it is no longer worth the effort, and its end needs to be actively brought about – which is precisely what *Le camion* does.

Yet, there is another dimension to the unreality of *Le camion*, the film sealing of the end of film. This is highlighted by the fragment that Duras puts in front of the published script of *Le camion* (7), an excerpt on the conditional taken from *Le bon usage*, a handbook of French grammar by Belgian philologist Maurice Grevisse.

Traditionally, one considers the conditional to be a mood. One can reckon that in reality it is a tense (a hypothetical future) of the indicative mood.

The conditional expresses a possible or unreal event whose realization is considered as the consequence of a supposed given, of a condition (...)

[It is also used] to indicate a simple imagination that somehow transports events into the field of fiction (in particular a pre-ludic conditional used by children in their proposals for role-playing games).¹³

Relying on Cécile Hanania's detailed analysis of Duras' selection of these quotes from Grevisse's book, one can point out the influence of French philologist Gustave Guillaume on this way of defining the conditional. Guillaume argues that what is generally called the conditional mood is not a mood, but a future tense. According to Guillaume, the conditional and "proper" future tenses (of the indicative) can be distinguished according to "certainty": the conditional is uncertain, whereas the usual future tense is certain. Or, stated otherwise, the future can be split into a categorical or unconditional future ('will'), and a hypothetical or conditional future ('would').¹⁴ This proximity between the conditional and unconditional future – also echoed in the occasionally barely audible difference in French between verbs in the conditional and in the future, like *j'irai* (I will go) and *j'irais* (I would go) – may explain why Duras was unable to name her use of the conditional consistently.¹⁵ More often than not she refers to it as the 'future anterior' (89).¹⁶ One can only speculate about other reasons, if any, for this conflation, but in my opinion the main one resides in Duras' 'ludic' use of the conditional. Regarding Duras' (pre)ludic use of the conditional, Hanania argues there is in fact nothing (pre)ludic about it. Duras' choice for the *past* conditional may have "narrative potential," insofar as it presents something that may have been the case, but the story is also over and done with.¹⁷ Let us take a closer look at this.

As noted above, from the entry in Grevisse's French grammar, Duras also cites the passage which states that the *conditionalis* may be used to indicate the fictional aspect of certain assertions, which is what children do when playing: they put themselves in the shoes of characters in order to figure out what would happen if

they were those characters. More precisely, the moment a child imagines herself to be a pirate, or that a storm is about to break out, she *is* a pirate and a storm *breaks* out. This magical, immediate materializing of a mere product of the imagination is repeated by *Le camion*, alternating between the conditional and the present indicative, and moving from 'would' to 'is'. In children's games, the conditional does not differ from the present, as it creates and merges with it. But this pleasant continuity, the uninterrupted shift from imagining the game ('would') to the game itself ('is') – quite often within the game itself – seems to most adults no longer accessible. In that respect, one can read *Le camion* as an attempt to restore this infantile pleasure in the force and power of imagination by creating a world within which an hypothetical, conditional future coincides with the present. That, in turn, allows one to speculate that, for Duras, the adult writer, the task of creating a miraculous indistinction between hypothesis and reality requires the additional time of the future anterior. In that respect, one of the most blatant examples of confusing the past conditional with the future anterior – “Sometimes I unveil destiny through the future anterior of events. ‘She *would* have been beautiful,’ ‘She *would* have swum far”¹⁸ – attests to a desire to connect the hypothetical with reality and positions Duras as the one who transforms what would have been the case into what, at one moment or another, will be the case. However, if Duras' reference to the future anterior is incorrect, and yet indicates the desire to obtain the conditional's (pre)ludic pleasure, why then opt for the *past* conditional? Whatever “present” the conditional may be able to create, does not its past tense suggest that the “game” is over?

4.

In Lacanian theory, the future anterior is used as one of the ways to describe the subject and, in particular, its relation to time. In a seminal paper from 1953, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan highlights the temporality of the subject as follows: “I identify myself in language, but only losing myself in it as an object. What is realized in my history is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming.”¹⁹ The crucial word in this passage is “realized,” for beyond the objectified, alienating illusion of the imaginary ego, what can be considered as real? The original French version provides a subtler answer, for the “real” that one may expect as the pendant to “the loss of oneself as an object” is not something that is “realized,” but rather something that actively “realizes itself” (*se réalise*). But the question remains the same: what is it that realizes itself in one's history? According to Lacan, it is not the past definite, which can be objectively situated as “past” on a chronological timeline; nor is it the perfect of what is past yet part of me. Rather, what realizes itself is what belongs to the future. Despite the common psychoanalytical focus on the past – fueled by the Freudian idea of a determination by an (infantile) past – the Lacanian subject (of the unconscious) is not some hidden affective core or a set of repressed thoughts and fantasies. Rather, the Lacanian

subject essentially lacks any essence. It is, simply put, the indication of something that remains open: in what concerns the past, it is the gap in any causal determination; and in what regards the future, it is the anticipation of any possible identity. In that respect the subject is, as Lacan once put it, “a reply from the real”; in other words, it is a symptomatic, or fantasmatic, and hence incoherent, construction required to situate and interpret the opaque dimension of the desire of the Other, that is to say, the fact that the material at one’s disposal for building an identity is marked by a structural lack. That is why Lacan, from early on, introduced a logical time that supplements the inevitably objectifying chronology of one’s biography. The “logic” in logical time refers to the symbolic and, at their most fundamental, unconscious level, to logical formulae that endow a human being with a place, and hence an identity, within a pre-existing symbolic universe. In that respect, the subject – the underlying support, or *hypokeimenon*, as Lacan often puts, relying on an Aristotelian terminology – of one’s identity is logic. The “time” involved in this logic, however, concerns the latter’s inconclusiveness (or, as Lacan will put it at a later stage of his work, its “impasses”), which requires an unconscious decision about how one situates oneself within the symbolic. This “moment of concluding” is the paradoxical moment where the (logical) Other fails to “support,” that is to say, to function, as the subject of one’s identity. And that is what propels the human being involved to “jump” beyond this gap. This leap is anticipatory, for although nothing allows one to conclude, one must do so in order to get inscribed in the symbolic order. The subject, properly speaking, is therefore nothing but the movement from one symbolic element to another, a lack-of-being in search of the one element that would found one’s identity, an ultimate signifier that is, however, structurally absent from the symbolic order – hence the Lacanian notation of the subject as an erased signifier, $\$$.²⁰ This allows us to understand what is meant by the “*ce qui se réalise*” cited above: what realizes itself in one’s history is what never becomes real, but can only be supposed as the subject that supports one’s identity. The latter consists of imaginary constructs (the ego, jealous rivalry, fantasmatic scenarios, etc.) and symbolic formations (symptoms, ideals, etc.) and presents itself as such. And yet, their subject has no being, no ontological ground, which is why it can only manifest itself, via these imaginary and symbolic “detours,” as a desire for being. This “being” is what *will have been*, which means that it is projected into the future, not as a goal one could possibly obtain, but rather as something that will be missed, as one is, temporally speaking, both before and after it.

To relate “becoming,” “openness,” and the subject’s non-coincidence with itself (and hence its lack of identity) with the future may appear to be an obvious and unproblematic gesture. After all, is not the future that period of time which is characterized by the same openness – by “possibility” instead of necessity, by the potential “change” that interrupts a vicious repetition of the same, and by “uncertainty”? That, however, misses the intricate relation between future and past that is expressed in the time of the *future anterior*. The ethics of psychoanalysis is not so much rooted in a belief that things can be different – for the future has not yet

been written, as long as, with some therapeutic help, one has the courage to be the author of one's future "story," etc – but rather consists in confronting the openness that characterizes one's temporality as a subject. This includes, indeed, the future, but also the past. In order to briefly explain this, it is worth paying attention to a text by Guillaume that Lacan quotes from repeatedly – without, as so often the case with other sources that Lacan draws inspirations from, referencing it explicitly – entitled "Periods and Temporal Levels Within the System of French Conjugation."²¹ In that text, Guillaume raises a simple question: why is it that French has two past tenses (and, as noted earlier, two future tenses, the categorical ("will be"), and the hypothetical ("would be"))? Why can one say: "he sang," and also "he has sung"? In order to clarify the issue, he introduces a distinction between *incidence* and *décadence*. On a classical timeline divided into two halves, sentences situate things either in the past, the future, or the present. With regards to the past, both the imperfect ("sang") and the perfect ("has sung") belong to this period. And yet, while the latter has mere incidence – it falls upon time, from the Latin *in cadere*, "to fall upon" – the former has both incidence *and* decadence. The imperfect, according to Guillaume, not only falls upon the timeline (*incidence*), but traverses it (*décadence*). The "decadence" of the imperfect resides in its inclusion of a subjective time, added to the chronological one of "incidents," which is needed to imagine its temporal stretching-out. Simply put, in order to be able to formulate a sentence such as "he sang," one needs not only chronological distinctions (cf. the "periods" in the title of the text), but also, within the chronological period of the past, an "image" of a time that transgresses any precise moment. The imperfect – and its pendant in the future, the conditional – situates itself on a chronological line that is divided into periods, but that also touches upon another temporal level, in which things not only "have happened" but "were happening." Guillaume illustrates this with the example of *Un instant après, la bombe éclatait*.²² If one were to opt here for the simple past and thus use *éclata*, the sentence would leave no space for interpretation: the bomb has exploded. Which, in Guillaume's terminology, means that the simple past, like the perfect past, describes an incident, with a *décadence* reduced to zero.²³ However, the meaning of the imperfect, *éclatait*, depends on the context in which the sentence occurs, for it can, depending on the context, either mean that the bomb has exploded or that it was about to explode, but something happened that prevented this. This "decadent" time that transgresses the chronological time of "incidents" – indicating their "becoming," as Deleuzians would put it – is made visible by the imperfect, and this is what the difference between the two past tenses amounts to.

The "decadent" time included in the imperfect may be an apt tense to express the temporality of the subject, or, as Bruce Fink puts it: "Applied to the subject, the French imperfect tense leaves us uncertain as to whether the subject has emerged or not. His or her ever-so-fleeting existence remains in suspense or in abeyance."²⁴ This detour also makes clear why it is too easy to conclude that Duras' use of the *past* conditional misses the (pre)ludic aspects pertaining to the conditional, high-

lighted by Grevisse, and quoted as a motto in *Le camion*. Certainly, the sentences created with this past tense can only refer to what is chronologically past. Yet, with Guillaume's analysis of the imperfect in mind, one must also consider the fact that, within the past, there is also an unfinished, "decadent" temporal level. My suggestion here is that, while the imperfect combines incidence and decadence, the past conditional diverts our attention exclusively to the decadent aspect, to what *would have been*: to a hypothetical future imagined in the present, yet seen from an unfinished past.

5.

Taken together, the above can be understood as an indirect appeal to the childlike imagination, for a writing that not only removes us from reality, but also changes it. Or, as Duras proposes elsewhere: for "a sort of decalcifying of experience and imagination. For it is always *someone* who has imagination, who experiences it. One has to remove imagination from the personal sphere [*orbite*] and treat it from the outside."²⁵ May '68, or the praise of an indestructible imagination that detaches us from ourselves, does not seem far away – were it not for the fact that the hitchhiker, Duras, and Depardieu all see the world as falling apart.

Que le monde aille à sa perte, c'est la seule politique. At first glance, this is an abysmal sentence.²⁶ It raises questions, such as: what connection is suggested between politics and the end of the world? And what are we to think when the end of the world is not considered as something to avoid but, on the contrary, as something to affirm?

In order to situate this downfall, we can again refer to Gustave Guillaume. His influence is not limited to Grevisse's handbook on French grammar, or to Lacan's theory of the subject. Giorgio Agamben also makes use of Guillaume's reflections on language. The idea that the world can go to ruin usually refers to the specter of an apocalypse projected in future, a devastating catastrophe that announces the end of time. Paradoxically, the fact that this end evokes a variety of fantasized images can be explained by its unconceivability, by the fact one cannot imagine the end of the world. To put it in Kantian terms: given that the idea of "world" is necessary to be able to experience and know anything at all, one cannot imagine the end of it. And yet Duras invites us to do so: she invites us to go beyond the limit that reason has set for itself.

In addition, it must be noted that recently – more specifically, since Hiroshima – the conceivability (as well as the plausibility) of an actual end of the world has increased. It is likely for this reason that Hiroshima is referred to briefly in *Le camion*, and not only because of the film, *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), based on a script by Duras. The idea of the end of the world no longer arises from a religiously inspired fear of divine retribution, or from the hope for a new world. Rather, it lies within the capabilities of humankind itself. Of the many answers given to the question of

what differentiates humans and animals, the most recent is this: human beings can destroy themselves.²⁷ Since the second half of the 20th century, faith in progress has had to deal with a serious obstacle: not only is it difficult to consider a number of developments as progress, but the possible destruction of mankind means that the subject and agent of this supposed progress would be erased.

Upon closer analysis, this provides a peculiar temporal perspective. Humankind has lived through the Hiroshima and Nagasaki catastrophes, and catastrophes like those can be repeated any time. It is as if the catastrophe of the self-destruction of humankind has been realized as a possibility and, since then, we have been anxiously awaiting the fulfillment of this possibility. We retain the memory of the worst as of that which will possibly come to fulfillment.

The time between the end of progress and the “progress” of the end is analogous to what Agamben calls messianic time.²⁸ It is located between profane time – *chronos*, which was completed with the resurrection of Christ – and the end of time, or *Parousia*, which is when He will return.

The idea of living in an interim time is not only characteristic of Pauline Christianity, but is also, according to Agamben, found in the linguistic reflections of Gustave Guillaume. According to the latter, it is difficult for us to imagine time. That is why we invariably latch onto spatial constructions, the most famous example of which is an infinite line that is divided into two parts, past and future, by a point: the present. A timeline such as that is a simple and perfect representation, but it is not suitable for illustrating how man, as a speaking being, experiences time. According to Guillaume, an operative time precedes the de-subjectivized timeline. We need this time in order to operate the transition from a possibility to its realization in chronological time. When we arrive at a statement while speaking, we need time to indicate how the statement relates to chronological time by means of the verb. Speaking is thus anticipating, and for this an operative time is needed, which can only subsequently be converted into chronological time. Agamben's reference to this notion by Guillaume enables him to posit that interim time – the time simultaneously after and before the end – is necessary in order to (according to Paul) be able to relate to the approaching end of time. In this regard, interim time is, as the title of Agamben's book puts it, *the time that remains*. “Whereas our representation of chronological time, as the time *in which* we are, separates us from ourselves and transforms us into impotent spectators of ourselves [...] messianic time, an operational time in which we take hold of and achieve our representations of time, is the time *that* we ourselves are, and for this very reason, is the only real time, the only time we have.”²⁹

Agamben relates this interim time to Paul's notable determination of the subject of this time: let those who have live as though they did not have, let those who mourn live as though they did not mourn (1 Cor. 7, 29-32), and so on. This subject indeed has qualities and possessions, but deals with them as if they were not there or, at least, as if they were of no importance. The subject that sparks Duras' interest is

also destitute: the hitchhiker, whose disjointed statements can only be retold in the conditional, which reveals the possible of anything that is actual and considers as actual what is merely possible.

In the first instance, we connected the catastrophic in *Le camion* to Hiroshima because of its reference to Resnais' film. This led us to a reading of "*Que le monde aille à sa perte*" as an interim time and, in grammatical terms, a conditional; a time that lies behind as well as ahead of us. Why, however, is this "the only politics" (*c'est la seule politique*)?

6.

When Duras herself explains the statement – with rather concise and complex reasoning – she refers to the loss of the world: not so much in the sense that the world is running toward its inevitable end, but that the world has lost its meaning and coherence. With this she proposes three things simultaneously: 1) political projects have either failed or are something to fear; 2) the West has seen an increase of guaranteed safety and material wealth, but has lost its interest in social inequality, famine, and a host of other appalling situations in other parts of the world; 3) we are alienated in and by the dominant influence of a certain economy, which provides us with commodities, to the detriment of *l'origine des choses*.³⁰ The loss of the world cannot be set right by an appeal or hope for a different world. It is, simply, its loss. With this, Duras sounds like a Nietzschean "madwoman" who, after the death of God, announces that every political project has failed. Yet, even if we recognize this, one cannot consider, or one may not wish to consider, the consequences. Duras does not seem to regret this loss of the world; rather, she is encouraged by it – "let it go to ruin" – because the only thing that will lead to a world experienced in community is the continuation of bringing this loss to light. One who thinks s/he can *have* the world has precisely lost the world in thinking so, because, when not shared with others, the world is an un-world. The world is tragically lost by the dominance of having: it is lost through possessions and the accumulation of them. We can remain indifferent to this, but we can also connect to (*rejoindre*) the loss of world which, according to Duras, makes the world communal. The writer thus develops a paradoxical reasoning: those who wish to have the world will lose it; those who, on the contrary, affirm this loss, will rediscover the world in community. And *that* is the only politics.

This second, less apocalyptic reading of the claim that one loses the world – or, more precisely, that one realizes that one has lost it – opens up the possibility for transformation, from particular individuals who believe they have something, into subjects without qualities or a class who, precisely in and through this loss (of world, of qualities, of particularity), create a community with a world to share.

7.

In *Experience and Poverty* (Erfahrung und Armut, 1933), Walter Benjamin poses the following question: “Who still meets people who really know how to tell a story?”³¹ According to Benjamin, the lack of people who can tell a story has to do with the trauma of war. This trauma makes people speechless and deprives them of the sense of relating, or makes every story meaningless and futile. It is indifferent whether we connect Duras’ lost world, and the world still to lose, with Hiroshima or with the destructive power of the shopping center, for in both instances one can speak of a trauma that assails subjectivity. Duras’ response to this is fiction – not as the result of the creative labor of a brilliant individual, but as the text that can be read and deciphered in a truck driving across an ordinary ZAC (an urban development area). Embrace the loss of the world, assent to the absence of any political project, face the consequences of the constraining grip of capital on the most diverse areas of existence, dedicate oneself to the loss of one’s particular identity, point out the narrative potential of the past conditional, pit against cinema the indefinite virtuality of a fiction to be read... The despair that transpires from this is just as unmistakable as Duras’ commitment to infect her audience with a gay despair.

Notes

1. For the details of Depardieu’s first role as a film actor, see Laure Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life*, trans. A.-M. Glasheen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 288.
2. Marguerite Duras, *Le camion* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), 11. Further references are given parenthetically in the text; translations are mine.
3. Discussing *Le camion*, Dominique Noguez is reminded of Plato as well. Socrates is referred to in order to oppose the not-knowing of the hitchhiker to the militancy of the truck driver – “a militant is someone who has no doubt” as Duras puts it (42). See Marguerite Duras, *La couleur des mots. Entretien avec Dominique Noguez autour de huit films* (Paris: Benoît Jacob, 2001), 146.
4. This series also includes the Portuguese, the Malians and the Senegalese. In an interview with Annie Declerck, screened in 1981 on Belgian television, this series of target groups is completed with black, Algerian, poor, homosexual, and socially destitute people. When the interviewer expresses concerns about the politically incorrect implications of this statement, Duras’ riposte is: “When I allude to a clientele, I am racist. That is self-evident (*obligatoire*).”
5. See *Les yeux verts* (s.l.: Cahiers du cinéma, 1987), 93: “*Je suis dans un rapport de meurtre avec le cinéma.*”
6. The conversation with Michelle Porte, included in *Le camion*, reveals that the truck’s trajectory starts from Trappes to Plaisir, two municipalities of the Yvelines department (108). The shooting of the dialogue between Duras and Depardieu took place a few miles away, inside Duras’ countryside residence in Neauphle-le-Château.

7. Duras considers the truck a “somnambulistic” vehicle unknowingly transporting “the non-written writing” (*l'écrit non-écrit*) (106); see also *La couleur des mots*, (133). In another text, writing is considered “a matter of deciphering something already there, something you've already done in the sleep of your life.” Duras, *Practicalities*, trans. B. Bray (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 25. One could argue that the truck's cabin, where the driver and the woman meet, is that part of the non-written writing that can get deciphered in the dark room where Duras and Depardieu do their reading. For more on this dark room of writing, see Anne Cousseau, “La chambre noire de l'écriture,” *Marguerite Duras*, eds. B. Alazet and Chr. Blot-Labarrère (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 2005), 110-117 and Julie Beau-lieu, “La ‘chambre noire’ dans Le camion de Marguerite Duras,” *Écriture, écritures*, eds. M. El Maïzi and B. Stimpson, (Caen: Lettres Moodrnes Minard, 2007), 179-191.
8. *Marguerite Duras à Montréal*, eds. S. Lamy and A. Roy (Montréal: Les éditions Spirale, 1981), 32.
9. The very first sentences even of *La maladie de la mort* (1982) and *Les yeux bleus cheveux noirs* (1986) are in the conditional.
10. The interview is part of an episode of *Les Nuits de France Culture*, entitled “Tous les plaisirs du jour sont dans la matinée”, broadcast on 22 Feb. 2015; see: <https://www.france-culture.fr/emissions/la-nuit-revee-de/tous-les-plaisirs-du-jour-sont-dans-la-matinée-marguerite-duras> (minute 28).
11. Marguerite Duras, *The Square, in Four novels*, trans. S. Pitt-Rivers & I. Morduch (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 26.
12. As Duras puts it: “*Le conditionnel rend mieux que tout autre mood l'idée de l'artifice qui sous-tend la littérature comme le cinéma. Tout événement apparaît comme la conséquence potentielle, hypothétique, de quelque chose d'autre.*” And links this to children's games: “*En jouant, conscient jusqu'au bout de la fiction et en même temps de la légèreté du jeu, les enfants conjuguent constamment les verbes au conditionnel.*” *La passion suspendue. Entretiens avec Leopoldina Pallotta della Torre* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 73.
13. *Le camion*, 7. Duras quotes from the entry on conditional verbs in Maurice Grevisse, *Le bon usage. Grammaire française* (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1969), 680-683. Cécile Hanania has pointed out that this ninth edition is the one Duras must have been using. See her “Pour une grammaire de l'imaginaire: Marguerite Duras ‘lectrice’ de Grevisse,” in *Dalhousie French Studies*, vol. 80 (2007): 111-122.
14. Gustave Guillaume, *Temps et verbe* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1965 [1929]), 56, and *Langage et science du langage* (Paris: Librairie Nizet; Québec: Presses de l'Université de Laval, 1969), 253.
15. Moreover, in indirect speech situated in the past, the future anterior takes on a conditional form; e.g. “He said that she would have arrived before noon.”
16. Cf. Jean Pierre Ceton, *Entretiens avec Marguerite Duras* (Paris: François Bourin Editeur, 2012), 75ff and Hanania, *op. cit.*, for other examples.
17. Hanania, 117.
18. *Les yeux verts*, 234f: “*Quelquefois je dévoile le destin par le futur antérieur des événements. ‘Elle aurait été belle’, ‘Elle aurait nagé loin...’*”

19. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006) 247, see also 37 and 684; *The Seminar, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique* (1953-1954), ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988), 158; *Le séminaire, livre IV. La relation d'objet* (1956-1957), ed. J.-A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 235; *The Seminar, Book VI: Desire and Its Interpretation* (1958-1959), ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 158; *Le séminaire, livre IX: L'Identification* (1961-1962), unpublished, lesson of 9 May 1962; *Le séminaire, livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre* (1968-1969), ed. J.-A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 51.
20. Here, one cannot be but reminded of the well-known passage from *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, trans. R. Seaver (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 38, describing Lol's belief in the existence of such conclusive word, "[...] an absence-word, a hole-word, whose center would have been hollowed out into a hole, the kind of hole in which all other words would have been buried."
21. Gustave Guillaume, "Époques et niveaux temporels dans le système de la conjugaison française" (1955), in *Langage et science du langage*, 250-271.
22. Guillaume, 255. Cf. Lacan, *Écrits*, 568: "[The] duplicity we find in *Un moment plus tard, la bombe éclatait* [The bomb was to explode a moment later], where, without any context, we cannot know whether the event occurred or not." See also (713); *Le séminaire, livre XV: L'acte psychanalytique* (1967-1968), unpublished, lesson of 10 January 1968; *The Seminar, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959-1960), ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. D. Porter (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992), 220: "When one says 'a moment later and the bomb exploded (*éclatait*),' that may mean two contradictory things in French, namely, either the bomb did, in fact, explode or something happened which caused it not to explode."
23. In an almost Lacanian fashion Guillaume states that what differentiates *imparfait* (involving at least a minimum of *décadence*) from *passé simple* or *parfait* (involving zero *décadence*) is an infinitely nothing (*rien*) not to be confused with zero. Guillaume, 255.
24. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 63f.
25. *Marguerite Duras à Montréal*, 58.
26. The statement appears in *Le camion*, 25. The first part of it – "*Que le monde aille à sa perte*" – is repeated on (67) and, almost twenty years later, in *No More*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998), 36. *Duras commented on it in: La couleur des mots*, 148-152; in the interview with Annie Declerck; in the conversation with Michelle Porte, *Le camion*, (74); and in *Outside*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 139f.
27. Which makes Lacan sarcastically conclude that human beings are superior to other animals. Jacques Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, trans. B. Fink (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013): "What a sublime relief it would be nonetheless if we suddenly had to deal with a true blight, a blight that came from the hands of the biologists. That would be a true triumph. It would mean that humanity would truly have achieved something – its own destruction. It would be a true sign of the superiority of one being over all the others" (60).
28. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. P. Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

29. Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 68.

30. *La couleur des mots*, 149.

31. Walter Benjamin, *Experience and Poverty*, trans. R. Livingstone <https://www.atlasof-places.com/essays/experience-and-poverty/>.