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Sensorial Memories of the Colonial Space in the Films of Marguerite Duras

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"I believe that people are made of the places they love or have lived in; I believe that location inhabits and propels us"¹.

This article argues that Marguerite Duras' films evoke memories of the colonised Orient through fragments of sonic, haptic and olfactive events, which happen, seemingly randomly, in the liminal spaces of Duras' filmic representation of place. In these interstitial gaps, the possibility of cultural hybridity is opened while the assumed or imposed hierarchy between the colonised and coloniser's space is deconstructed. Through an analysis of specific elements of Duras' films, such as water, colour and evocations of smell, this article will unearth fragments of these buried sensorial memories of intercultural

1 Agnès Varda in Jean Michaud and Raymond Bellour, "Agnès Varda de A à Z", *Cinéma 61*, n° 60, October 1961, p. 14.

contact in the colonial space. But first, I will position this analysis within a theoretical framework that highlights the complex sensual operations that take place between film and spectators, rather than focuses essentially on sequence analysis.

In the latest issue of *French Screen Studies*, two articles in English² were published about Marguerite Duras' cinema, showing the strength of scholarly research in Durassian studies in the Anglophone world. These articles focus on two films directed by Marguerite Duras, *India Song* (1975) and *L'Homme atlantique* (1981) and both closely analyse Duras' filmic innovations. Katie Fleming's article is a study of the politics of sound in *India Song*, while Elizabeth Groff examines Duras' questioning of the film medium in *L'Homme atlantique*. Both are significant contributions to the understanding of Duras' cinema, but neglect to discuss the relationship between viewer and text, notably the emotional attraction and fascination that Duras' films ignite in their audience. In the present study, I will move away from a logocentric vision of cinema to look at the ways Duras has used the film medium to explore her own sensorial memories of colonial place, and touch viewers' emotions.

Recent developments in film theory have shown that cinema can engage spectators in complex sensual operations which position spectators in liminal space, neither inside nor outside of the realm of the film but at the very limit of both worlds. These operations are achieved through cinaesthetic encounters, which, as suggested by Laine and Strauven "are based on experiencing, embodying, making sense of, and being affected by the film, in and through 'the flesh' rather than on notions of identification, visual pleasure, or

2 Elizabeth Groff, "Spectator, enter the paradox in Duras's virtual film *L'Homme Atlantique*" and Katie Fleming "India Song's politics of sound", *French Screen Studies*, vol. 21/1, 2021, p. 34-59, 60-80.

the satisfaction of narrative desire”³. Laine and Strauven link these encounters to the concept of synaesthesia which “provides an alternative way of approaching cinematic modes of representation as a shared existence that can be found neither ‘outside’ in the realm of cinema, nor ‘inside’ in the realm of spectator, but in the textures of sensual operations between the inside and the outside.

Leslie Barnes, in her book *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature*⁴, devotes a section of her study to Marguerite Duras. She begins her introduction with a reference to an interview between Xavière Gauthier and Marguerite Duras. In this interview, Duras speaks of her childhood in colonial Indochina, explaining how her memories of the place of her childhood will always remain with her, even if only in the form of subterranean allusions:

But the Mekong still remained somewhere. This Mekong next to which I slept, played, lived for ten years of my life, it stayed with me. Then when I say, “What is that murmuring? It’s the Ganges” it’s the Mekong speaking. Do you see?⁵

Through a close analysis, Barnes examines Duras’ relationship with, and position between, her lived colonial experience in Indochina and her writings. She argues that her literary innovations are closely connected to her early life in colonial Indochina. However, Barnes does not examine Duras’ most innovative work: her cinema. Indeed, research in French in Duras studies had previously produced significant articles and books on the notion of hybridity in Duras’ work which intersect with Barnes’ postcolonial approach, however it too has

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- 3 Tarja Laine and Wanda Strauven, “The Synaesthetic Turn”, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 7/3, 2009, p. 252.
 - 4 Leslie Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature*, Lincoln-London, University of Nebraska Press, 2014, p. 1.
 - 5 Marguerite Duras and Xavière Gauthier, *Woman to Woman*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1987, p. 99.

restricted its focus to her writing. *Imaginaires métisses: passages d'Extrême-Orient et d'Occident chez Henry Bauchau et Marguerite Duras*⁶; *Duras la métisse: métissage fantasmatique et linguistique dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Duras*⁷ and *Orient(s) de Marguerite Duras*⁸ all deal with hybridity and the presence of the Orient mainly in Duras' writing.

For Barnes the postcolonial notion of *métissage* "allowed for the emergence of a literary fabric composed of a seemingly incommensurable linguistics thread, namely French and Vietnamese"⁹. She writes that, as Duras was "raised in the interstice between colonial society and the native populations [...] her novels bear the mark of this cultural and linguistic contact zone"¹⁰. These studies have analysed Duras' novels from a postcolonial perspective but have tended to leave cinema untouched.

Christine Anne Holmlund¹¹ is one of the very few to have looked at the question of colonialism and postcolonialism in Duras' films. She does so within the framework of Homi Bhabha's theories, using Duras' films to provide a critical analysis and highlight the shortcomings of the colonial theories of Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, especially the exclusion of women in their theories. However, Holmlund does not

6 Olivier Ammour-Mayeur, *Imaginaires métisses: passages d'Extrême-Orient et d'Occident chez Henry Bauchau et Marguerite Duras*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004.

7 Catherine Bouthors-Paillart, *Duras la métisse: métissage fantasmatique et linguistique dans l'œuvre de Marguerite Duras*, Genève, Droz, 2002.

8 Florence de Chalonge, Yann Mével and Akiko Ueda eds., *Orient(s) de Marguerite Duras*, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, "Faux titre", 2014.

9 Leslie Barnes, *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature*, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

10 *Loc. cit.*

11 Christine Anne Holmlund, "Displacing Limits of Difference: Gender, Race, and Colonialism in Edward Said and Homi Bhabha's Theoretical Models and Marguerite Duras's Experimental Films", in *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged*, Hamid Naficy and Gabriel Teshome eds, Milton, Routledge, 2016, p. 1-22.

provide a study of hybridity or *métissage* in Duras' films. The present article intends to fill this gap through a reflexion and an analysis of Duras' filmic production.

Duras has described her films as political while adding paradoxically, the caveat "but they don't speak about politics"¹². I will argue that, if Duras' films are political without talking about politics, it is precisely because it is through the insertion of fragmented memories of sounds and haptic images that postcolonial politics come into play. These sensorial fragments do not articulate a political position or message for spectators but allow them to experience the liminality of colonial space, the zones of contact, and the gaps between colonial agents and the Other. I will suggest that these insertions play a defining role in the innovation strategies at work in the films. While linguistic *métissage* is still taking place through dialogues and colonial relationships, Duras' films also attempt to insert fragments of the sensorial lived experiences of these cultural contacts through several film techniques which emphasise tactility, sound and olfactory elements.

In her book, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Laura U. Marks uses the notion of "intercultural cinema" to describe what other scholars have named hybridity and *métissage*. She explains that interculturality is

characterized by experimental styles that attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge or living as a minority in the still majority white, Euro-American West [...] Intercultural films and videos offer a variety of ways of knowing and representing the world. To do this they must suspend the representational conventions that held in narrative cinema for decades, especially the ideological presumptions that cinema can represent reality¹³.

12 Jacques Grant, "Entretien avec Marguerite Duras", *Cinéma 75*, n° 200, juillet-août 1975, p. 111. My translation.

13 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2000, p. 1.

She argues that intercultural cinema evokes memories of culture and place through an appeal to non-representative and embodied knowledges, and experiences of the senses, such as touch, smell and taste. Marks' definition indicates that intercultural cinema is not the property of any single culture but rather accounts for the confrontation between more than one culture in the hierarchical context of colonialism. While Duras' cinema may not fit perfectly within the definition of intercultural cinema, it does bear similarities to it. In interviews, Duras has often mentioned the encounter with the Other during her childhood, and indeed framed it as the explanation for her coming to writing and filmmaking:

We had close to hand [...] colonialism in its most caricatural, abject form. And, because of my mother's profession, we had the good fortune to be relegated to the ranks of the natives. That is why I have written [...]: I was not part of the milieu of important functionaries, I looked at them. That is why, subsequently, I have been able to write, to raise the question of all that that covered up¹⁴.

Duras was also aware of the process of *métissage* at work in her perception of the French landscape:

You won't find anything in Vietnam. Get Yann to take you to the banks of the Seine, thirty kilometres outside of Paris, where the river loops, where the leaves make a bed on the banks and where the earth has grown spongy. It isn't *like* the Mekong. It is the Mekong¹⁵.

Whether in her interviews, her writing or her films, Duras' colonial and postcolonial experiences always pervade as a theme, a subterranean presence, through her innovative strategies of representation. For Marks, they are

14 Marguerite Duras, *Œuvres cinématographiques: édition vidéographique critique*, Paris, Ministère des relations extérieures, Bureau d'animation culturelle, 1984, p. 21-22, quoted by Christine Anne Holmlund, "Displacing Limits of Difference", art. cit., p. 9.

15 Laure Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life*, translated by Anne-Marie Glasheen, London, Phoenix, 2001, p. 9.

signs of interculturality. Indeed, both French-speaking and English-speaking scholars, while using terms with varying connotations¹⁶, recognise in Duras' work the presence of her Vietnamese childhood experience¹⁷.

Duras spent her youth in a culturally liminal space, marginalised from colonial society because of her familial situation but separated from the Vietnamese people racially and culturally. The sense of being between two cultures, of inhabiting the interstices of native and colonial spaces in a context of hierarchical power relations, is something that has never left Duras. As she became a writer and a filmmaker living in France, her sense of self as a liminal subject persisted and pervaded her writing and filmmaking. In her films, Duras "speaks" from a complex perspective: that of the white coloniser, marginalised and brought up in close contact with native Others. However, her work was essentially produced in a postcolonial setting. How is this reflected in her films?

The colonial experience is embodied through sensorial elements, rather than a coherent political discourse.

16 For a discussion about Postcolonial and Francophone Studies, see *Francophone Postcolonial Studies, a critical introduction*, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy eds, Oxon, New York, Routledge, 2014.

17 In my book *The Cinema of Marguerite Duras: Multisensoriality and Female Subjectivity* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2019), I devote an entire chapter to Duras' performance of authorship in her films. I show that Duras constantly inserts her bodily presence and her personal world into her films. In *Nathalie Granger* (1972), she filmed her own house in Neauphle-le-Château; in *India Song* (1975) and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976), she included her own voice as a voice-over; in *Le Camion* (1977), she takes the role of the character of the old woman; in *Césariée* (1979), *Le Navire Night* (1978), both *Aurélia Steiner* films (1979), *Les Mains négatives* (1979), *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* (1981), and *L'Homme atlantique* (1981) she provides the voice-over. She also filmed her Trouville apartment at length in *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* and gave her partner, Yann Andréa, the main acting role in three of her films. Thus, even though her films are not autobiographical in the traditional sense of the term, these choices clearly show that Duras' films cannot be detached from her identity as writer and filmmaker.

Elements such as sounds, colours and smells evoking her colonial experience resurface in unexpected ways in all the films and are experienced by film viewers as lived experience because of the specific characteristics of cinema which I will briefly explain¹⁸.

In her book *The Tactile Eye: Touch and The Cinematic Experience*¹⁹, Jennifer Barker explores the visceral connection between films and spectators. She argues that the experience of cinema is a sensuous exchange between film and viewer that goes beyond the visual and aural, beneath the skin of viewers, and reverberates in their body.

Marks, in *The Skin of the Film*²⁰ and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*²¹ explains the ways in which intercultural cinema engages the viewer bodily to convey cultural experience and memory. Both theorists argue for the necessity to include viewers in film analysis, rather than simply analyse film as text. Considering the importance that Duras accorded to her childhood memories as well as the spatial and sensorial atmosphere of her films, Barker and Marks' film theories are very useful to understanding, on the one hand, the hybridity of Duras' cinema and, on the other, the fascination felt by Duras' spectators for her films, through which they can live the sensorial experience of liminality.

Duras' films, and in particular the films of the Indian cycle, rely heavily on the power of their sonic elements: the human voice - which speaks sings, laughs and shouts - music, silence, and sound effects. The audio-visual relations in these films have been read by several scholars as political. Fleming, in

18 See my 2019 book for additional information on theories on multisensoriality, *ibid.*, p. 1-17.

19 Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009.

20 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, *op. cit.*

21 Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

her article on *India Song*, provides a new perspective on what she calls *India Song's* politics of sound. She shows that

the Beggar Woman asserts her presence on the soundtrack and transforms the offscreen into a political space 'alongside' the onscreen image. She thus exists up close, not only to the French colonial subjects but also to the spectator in a form of intimacy which transcends the spatial exclusions of the image²².

For Laura McMahon²³, the film, through the figure of the beggar woman, is an implicit critique of French colonialism in Indochina. While I agree with McMahon and Fleming's interpretation, I am suggesting here that it is not only through the voice of the beggar woman but also, and more importantly, through the powerful use of sound in the entire film that Duras critiques colonialism. Importantly, through the desynchronisation of sound from the visual track, Duras can provide a lived experience of being in-between: between coloniser and colonised, both seemingly belonging and not belonging to either. It is in the interstice between image and sound that Duras manages to reproduce the kind of liminality which she lived in colonial Vietnam. Some readers perceive Duras solely as a coloniser²⁴, although Duras identifies at times in her interviews with the indigenous class because of her social status in Vietnam. This may justify why her filmic work constantly explores the in-between space where one does not belong to either but shares some characteristics with both.

The best-known film innovation that Duras brought to cinema, the disjunction or de-synchronisation of sound and image, has an equalising effect on the two tracks. It is a device

22 Katie Fleming, "India Song's politics of sound", *op. cit.*, p. 66.

23 Laura McMahon, *Cinema and Contact: The Withdrawal of Touch in Nancy, Bresson, Duras and Denis*, London, Legenda, 2012, p. 87.

24 See for instance Julia Waters' article ("Marguerite Duras and the Colonialist Discourse: An Intertextual Reading of *L'Empire français* and *Un barage contre le Pacifique*", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 39/3, July 2003, p. 254-266).

that allowed Duras to destabilise the conventional hierarchy between sound and image, which she saw as reproducing the power structures of society, including colonial societies. Through it, she invites spectators to question representations of the colonial relations with the colonised Other as invisible but audible whereas the coloniser is always visible and audible, at least in *India Song*. In *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, a ruined Embassy is all that is left of the past splendours of colonisation, rendering the coloniser visually absent but with a sonic presence.

While Duras' comments on colonial relations are immediately decipherable in the Indian cycle because they are central to the theme of the films, sound has an uncanny quality and a liminality in all of Duras' films where there is disjunction between sound and image. Spectators, as a result, have to adopt an in-between position: at the threshold of sound and image, between inside and outside, between sound off and sound on, and between the visual and the sonic narrative. In *India Song*, shots of the inside of the Embassy with white characters moving slowly around the luxurious space, and from their viewpoints are disrupted by the loud uncanny voice of the beggar. The binary distinction between inside and outside and with it the coloniser and indigenous space is also disrupted. This creates an in-between visual and auditory space which problematises for the spectator any sense of being inside or outside.

By deconstructing cinematic strategies of representation, such as the separation between inside and outside, Duras opens her films to fragments of her sensorial world, detached from narrative linearity. As suggested by Fleming,

The dialogue establishes the Beggar Woman and her vocalisation as dislocated and unlocatable, her words imbued both with a pathologising specificity and the impossibility of translation. As such, the words are

staged as *phôné* rather than *logos*: they are not framed by the film as a tool for political enunciation.

While the words of the beggar are indeed not staged as *logos* but as *phôné*, the images of the embassy do not form part of a logical narrative but are there, like meaningless sounds (*phôné*), to embody and provoke sensorial experiences. Mirrors, the piano, sofas are all images unlinked to the logic of the narrative and function as signifiers without signified, *phôné* without *logos*.

I will now give several examples of what I have identified as the emergence of sensorial memories inserted in the films through the use of haptic shots which trigger tactile and olfactive experiences. For Duras, sensorial experiences of childhood remain imprinted in memories. Thus, as shown in Laure Adler's biography of Duras, these sensorial experiences reappear at the point of contact with elements that bear similarities to childhood memories, notably the element of water.

Images of water are central to Duras' films, functioning as 'une image passe-partout' (a master image) as she explains in *Green Eyes*²⁵. Water can signify the Seine (*Navire Night*) the Atlantic Ocean (*Agatha*), the Ganges or the Mekong in the Indian Cycle.

The tracking shots of the water element with its shimmering surfaces, glistening colours and reflections of light, gives rise to images of exquisite beauty in *Nuit noire*, *Calcutta* (directed par Marin Karmitz, 1964), *La Femme du Gange*, *Agatha et les lectures illimitées*, *L'Homme atlantique* and *Aurélia Steiner (Melbourne)*. Spectators share and feel the aesthetic experience of the water element under different lights, at different times of the day regardless of the narrative.

25 Marguerite Duras, *Green Eyes*, translated by Carol Barko, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 70.

Close images of water flowing in *Aurélia Steiner* (*Melbourne*) emphasise framing, light, colours, movements and a sense of liquidity, with no direct relation with the stories told by the voices. The emergence of these images of water in the films also provokes in spectators an aesthetic experience which invokes their own sensorial memories associated with the water element. The camera movements through the tracking shots trigger in them the feeling of motion. In *Aurélia Steiner* (*Melbourne*) the camera, placed on a barge, films in a succession of tracking shots, the Seine, sometimes in close up. Images of the sea, in *Agatha* and *L'Homme atlantique*, are framed with wide shots which emphasise the vastness of the ocean, its colours and light. By solely framing the water, they provide for spectators the physical experience of watching the seascape independent of geographical location. Images of the ocean and of the river in Duras'films recount the filmmaker's own early experience and sensation of the water element as she often recalls in her interviews, but they also offer viewers the possibility of their own reminiscence which cinema can powerfully trigger through camera movement, framing and light.

In *The Lover* (1984) Duras reveals the importance of the colour blue carried along by images of the blue water, the Mekong, the sea, and the sky of her childhood. She writes:

I can't really remember the days. The light of the sun blurred and annihilated all colour. But the nights, I remember them. The blue was more distant than the sky, beyond all depths, covering the bounds of the world. The sky, for me, was the stretch of brilliance crossing the blue that cold coalescence beyond all colours. [...] The air was blue, you could hold it in your hand. Blue. The sky was a continual throbbing of the brilliance of the light²⁶.

26 Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, translated by Barbara Bray, London, Harper Perennial, 2006, ebook, loc. 860.

The colour blue is presented as an essential component of her childhood memories in Indochina, including early aesthetic experience²⁷. It is dominant in the seascapes of many films, including, among others, *Agatha et les lectures illimitées*. Although this film is not directly linked to childhood memories, liquid blue pervades the entire film, including the final still shot framing a painting from an unknown artist.

In film after film, Duras attempts to capture the sensorial experience of a spectacle of her colonial childhood as described in *The Lover*, repeating the same shots with slight variations and refinement as if always dissatisfied with the results. What the colours and light reconstruct are a poetics of sensations of the colonial place that elicit and affect the viewers' senses.

The film of *Le Navire Night* has not been often studied by scholars although Dominique Noguez has said that "One finds in this blind film, in this love story without images, some of the most beautiful images of the entirety of contemporary cinema"²⁸. It begins with a travelling shot of the blue sky and contains a series of haptic shots including an intriguing and repetitive close-up of a shimmering red Vietnamese dress, which has no link with the story told through voice-over, of two lovers who never meet and whose desire is sustained by constantly postponing its satisfaction.

The visual track presents us with shots of Paris: a park, 'le Bois de Boulogne', the Seine and the Père Lachaise cemetery.

27 For an analysis of colours in Duras' writing see: Carol J. Murphy, "La couleur des mots: sensations colorantes dans les textes de Marguerite Duras", in *Marguerite Duras à la croisée des arts*, Michelle Royer and Lauren Upadhyay eds., Brussels-Bern, PIE-Peter Lang, 2019, p. 43-54.

28 "On trouve dans ce film d'aveugles, dans cette histoire d'amour sans images, quelques-unes des plus belles images de tout le cinéma contemporain" (Bernard Alazet, "Notice", in Marguerite Duras, *Le Navire Night*, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. III, Gilles Philippe ed., Paris, Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade", 2014, p. 1667, my translation).

Several sequences are filmed inside a house where actors Matthieu Carrière, Bulle Ogier and Dominique Sanda are shown. Again, it is impossible to directly link the actors to the characters evoked on the soundtrack.

The shots of the gleaming red Vietnamese dress recur, appearing randomly on the screen like an obsessive, intrusive memory. The exact same sequence is repeated three times, intercepted throughout the film: an extreme close up of a red fabric, followed by a zoom out revealing little by little a Vietnamese dress pinned to a wall. Each sequence lasts only about one minute and is accompanied by a crackling sound which origin is impossible to identify. Its aesthetics and tactile qualities are transmitted to viewers through the technique of the haptic close-up and the unidentified source of the sound. Dominique Sanda is seen wearing a similar dress several times in the film. While there is no mention of Vietnam or any Asian location in the story told by the voices, the emergence of those shots seems to function as fragments of sensorial memories. Interestingly there is no mention of a dress in Duras' written text. In the film the many tracking shots from right to left, punctuated by still shots evoke the process of reminiscence which is inferred in the written text. This is exactly what I am arguing in this article: Duras' cinema can insert colonial memories in its postcolonial setting through the use of haptic shots.

Jennifer Barker explains that exploring cinema's tactility

opens up the cinema as *intimate* experience [...] as a close encounter, rather than as a distant experience and observation, which the cinema as a purely visual medium presumes. To say that we are touched by cinema indicates that it has significance for us, that it comes close to us, and that it literally occupies our sphere. We share things with it: texture, spatial orientation, rhythm and vitality²⁹.

29 Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

The repetitive shot of the Vietnamese dress is a way for Duras to inscribe and share her colonial memories while at the same time adopting a postcolonial perspective which questions the Orientalist gaze on the Other. The dress is not worn by an Asian character, it remains either disembodied or worn by a European woman. As in all of Duras' films, the colonised Other never appears on screen: in *India Song* and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta Désert*, the beggar woman remains invisible, just a disembodied voice. In *Le Navire Night*, the Vietnamese woman stays invisible and inaudible. The red dress, its shape, colour, luminosity and texture are the only signs of her ghostly presence. It opens up the film as "intimate experience" to use Barker's terms, a close encounter with sensorial memories of the French Vietnamese colonial past, which are thus simultaneously put to the question. It also confirms that Duras' films are political, "but [that] they don't speak about politics"³⁰.

I will now concentrate on the way films bring up sensorial fragments of memories linked to smell.

According to Marks, "sights may evoke smells (rising steam or smoke evokes smells of fire, incense, or cooking)"³¹, through inter-sensorial links or synaesthesia. She suggests that smell can be conveyed in film through synaesthetic links and through haptic appreciation of close-up images and images of touch. She pursues the argument that "the sensorium is malleable, that the sense modalities work in concert, and that all sense experience is informed by culture"³².

A long, slow shot of the wet sand in *Agatha et les lectures illimitées* or in *Nuit noire, Calcutta*, a close-up of Anne-Marie Stretter's hair, and the smoke from an incense stick burning in

30 Jacques Grant, "Entretien avec Marguerite Duras", *op. cit.*, p. 111 (my translation).

31 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

India Song all weave synesthetic links between vision, touch and olfaction. As explained by Marks:

We are constantly recreating the world in our bodies [...]. Cinema by virtue of its richer and muddier semiotic relationship to the world is all the more an agent of mimesis and synaesthesia than writing is. [...]. Cinema is a mimetic medium, capable of drawing us into sensory participation with its world [...]. Images are fetishes, which the reader can translate [...] into sensuous experience³³.

The experience of being in another's culture drives the desire to appeal to proximity and embodied knowledge, and the appeal to smell is one way that intercultural and diasporic identity can be established. In Duras' films, not only do the images conjure tactility, but they also link to the sense of olfaction and participate in the re-creation of a fragmented sensorial world. The smell of the sea, of the river and of wet sand is evoked in all the films we have already discussed, through the technique of close up, framing and camera movements. These shots are repeated again and again throughout the films, triggering in spectators their own olfactory and visual memories.

In *India Song*, the smell of hair is evoked through extreme close ups and smell of the Orient is conveyed by the image of burning incense on the piano. They have a similar function to the shots of the Vietnamese dress in *Le Navire Night*, it inscribes and shares colonial memories while taking a critical look at the objectivization of the Orient.

The sensorial memories of the colonial childhood of Duras find their way into her films through the liminal space created by the disjunction of the soundtrack and the disruption of the narrative, as well as the linguistic "métissage" of the dialogue, as shown by Fleming and Barnes. The visual, sonic and synaesthetic effects allow spectators, who are situated in a liminal space through the film apparatus, to experience the liminality

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

of colonial place. Through strategies of visual hapticity, an emphasis of the sonic landscape and the equalising effect of the disjunction of sound and image, Duras' films participate in the embodiment of interculturality and "métissage" and engage in colonial and postcolonial politics and poetics.

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