

The Malady of Death

by Marguerite Duras

duration: 51 minute
in three acts

(no intermission)

“The Malady of Death”

Concept and directed by Tea Tupajić

With collaboration of Florent Delval

Performed by Tea Tupajić

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Description of the performance

The complete text of "The Malady of Death" by Marguerite Duras awaits the audience members by their chair when entering the performance space.

After the lights are turned on, the performer comes on stage, sits on the chair and starts to read in herself the very same text.

The audience members also start to read the text.

The first act lasts 14 minutes.

Then there is a passage of dark.

In the second act the performer and the audience continue to read the text in themselves.

The second act lasts 24 minutes and is separated from the third act by a passage of dark.

The third act lasts 11 minutes and during it the performer looks at the audience and afterwards reads the original proposition of staging of the text.

After the third blackout the performance is over and the performer leaves the stage.



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"The malady of death", in the French original title "La maladie de la mort", text written in the 1982 by Marguerite Duras is a theatre play not de facto (since it is written in the prosaic form of the novella), but de iure as the author aims it clearly and exclusively to be staged in the theatre. Content wise it tells the story of nights spent together by a man and a prostitute.

Qualities for which this text has been chosen, inscribed in the very roots of its expressive trumps, are at the same time the ones that make its mise en scene difficult in the traditional sense.

Duras uses the verb, the basis of all actions, almost always in the conditional grammatical form, therefore suspending actualization of whatsoever event. The action itself is merely imagined in its vibrating potentiality. Thus making the event nearly impossible and absent, all moving powers of the text shift to the floating, almost unrealistic relationship between the man and the prostitute.

The strategy Duras uses towards the spectator is very direct. She involves him from the very beginning by putting him on the imaginative stage as one of the characters. It is exactly here where the performative potential of the play lies. For, when the reading is staged the reader finds himself not only on the virtual, potential stage, but directly as part of the play. The text becomes physically close to him: the reader becomes almost the speaker, he finds himself on the edge of speaking, as if he performs in the very here and now of the performance.

However, in the play the dialogue exists in the ambiguous, wide field of possibilities that might or might not be happening in the other character; never being certain, stabilized or defined. The proposed sculptured relationship is forced to remain based merely in the assumption of the potential thought or line of the other part. In this sense the dialogue serves rather as a descriptive, reflective, one way thought than as a communication tool.

The reader, who originally is the spectator, finds himself becoming the actor of two characters who find themselves in a situation that at the same time takes place and could take place. This sounds complex and it would be so were it not that that Duras' text has this wonderful lightness and concreteness and the staged situation its clear simplicity.

When the spectator, or should I say the participant distances himself from the role he momentarily plays in the performance and when he analyzes the specificity of this concrete format (consisting of all means of theatre here used in their naked, bare version) he realizes that the simple love story in the play could be read as the metaphor of the concrete theatre situation he participates in. As all we can say about love, we can say about theatre and therefore by staging the play about love, we are staging the play about theatre. (In the theatre.)

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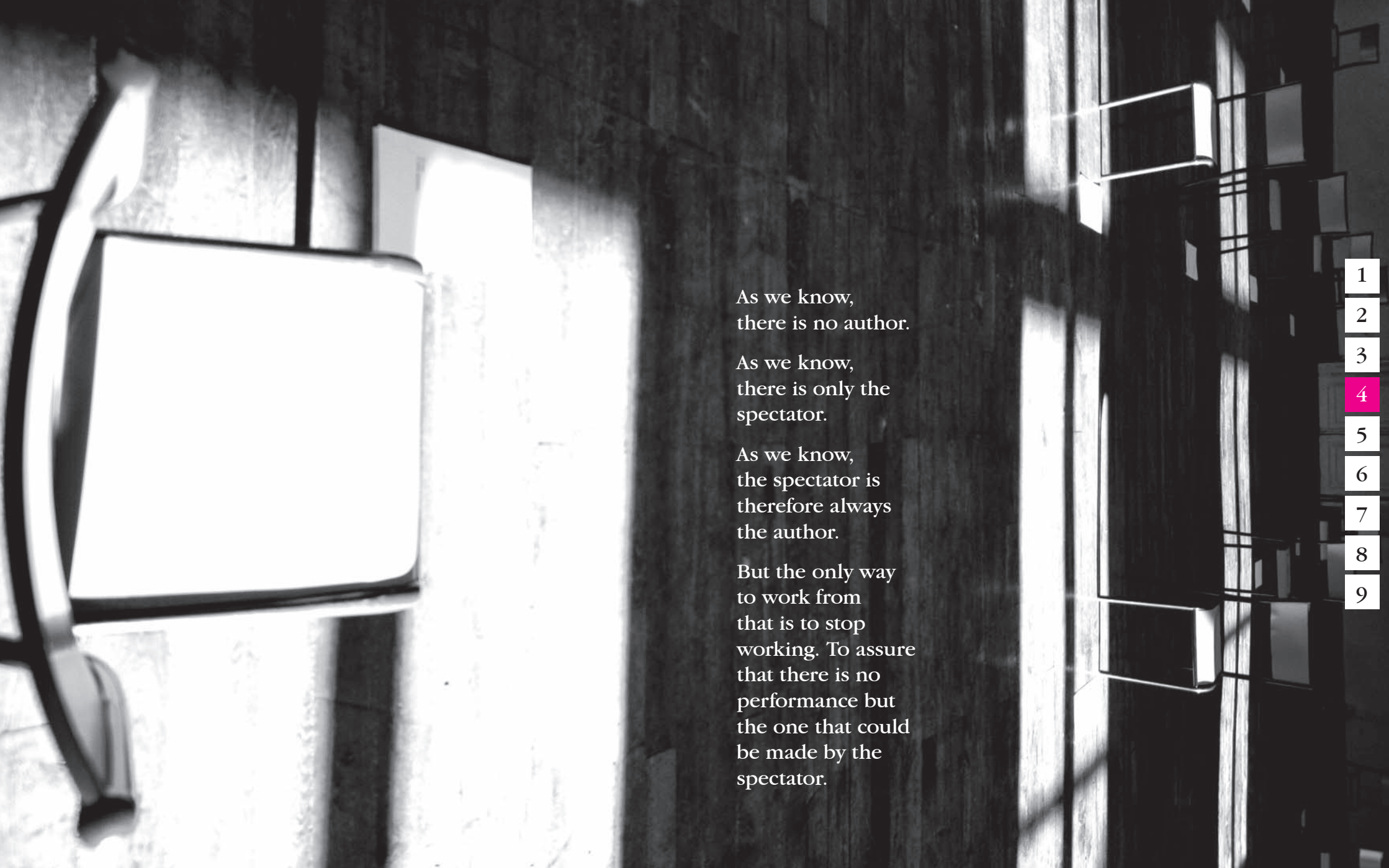
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As we know,
there is no author.

As we know,
there is only the
spectator.

As we know,
the spectator is
therefore always
the author.

But the only way
to work from
that is to stop
working. To assure
that there is no
performance but
the one that could
be made by the
spectator.

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We know also that the theatre situation is basically very simple: there is the one doing something and the other one who is looking at that one who is doing.

However, what if both were to perform the same action, if they were to equally share time, space and therefore the circumstance of the action?

Moreover, if they were to be engaged in the activity of the reading of the same text, because of the power of the performance situation they both are in, they would enter the new, both fictional and concrete, dynamic relationship sculptured by the proposed text.



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"The malady of death" is a project based on the desire of creating a situation where the performance itself is constructed exclusively through the spectators activity of looking. Looking as an active, intellectual, autonomous and creative act.

The performance seemingly absent because happening somewhere else - In the wide spaces of the mental stage.

Fragile because so demanding,
Uneconomical,
Unclear,

The performance that risks not to happen,
In the grammatical form never leaving the conditional,
The performance happening in the solitude of the lights.

The performance in which the spectator, while waiting for the lights to go down, realizes that the light which is falling on him is the one enabling the performance to be seen.

And it can be seen by doing, not by looking.

The text, as autonomous, independent work of art, is here chosen to be the generating material of the performance. It, however, always exists through the individual, private operation of its reading. As the product of the reading always remains in the invisible, untouchable, imaginative sphere, it opposes to the characteristic of performance that exists through the chain of concrete, visible events. What is interesting is to see what happens when those two different phenomenons are put together. When reading moves to the

public, sharing context of the performance, it requires another type of engagement from the reader, which on a different way produces and performs various forms of knowledge and relationships. What the spectator can know about the performance is not what the performance wants to teach him, but that what he, through creative act, produces as knowledge.

Remaining conscious of the common here and now of the performance he is attending,

The spectator, himself, is creating the performance for himself.

And this performance created within the performance becomes the private island, that only he holds in possession.

The situation of the performance is also the one where the way of spending our time is organized for us by somebody else. We are spending our time by collectively, all at the same time, watching what is presented to us. When participating in the performance not through spectatorship, but performing the act/ivity of reading we are challenged not only to produce the knowledge and the performance for ourselves, but to organize the conditions of that production by mastering and organizing our time ourselves.

The field of freedom and labour opened here for the spectator demands from him above all to rethink the way and the act of looking and to examine the blurring positions of the spectator/ author/ performer that generate as the consequence of the changed way of looking.

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Marguerite Duras
La maladie de la mort

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The making of ... and the specificity of the format

I read the text of "The Malady of Death" measuring the time needed to be able to read it comfortably. It turned out to be 51 minute. I marked the time of what seemed to be the finished unit, after which I myself took a break. It came out after 14, then 24 and then 11 minutes.

The frame of 51 minute divided into three acts I considered the minimum condition for the performance to happen. Certain duration, certain performance time, certain shared time, structured so that is can be noticed, seen. Opposing to the common shared time; each spectator was to be given the chance of organising its own, individual, private time through organising the pace, the order, the productivity of the reading. Condition for private organisation to happen is to state from the beginning that nothing will happen from my part, that the performance is dependent exclusively on how one organises his 51 minute in the context of the performance.

After individualising the organisation of time, the need for private space in the shared space appeared. The chairs were to be separated 70-80 cm from each other, 4 chairs in a row, 5 rows total.

Acknowledgement

Photographic documentation of the performance is the work of Joan Alexander.

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