

THEATER REVIEW

Who Are We? Where Are We? What Are We Doing? You Decide

By JONATHAN KALB

Marguerite Duras is one of those rare writers (Sarah Kane and Gertrude Stein are others) whose blithe indifference to genre makes them ideal for use in multimedia performance, where effects become pregnant with meaning and language leans toward background music. "Destroy, She Said" (1969) belongs to a radical phase of Duras's career (after the 1968 student protests in France), when she began labeling her fascinatingly fractured texts more or less arbitrarily as novels, stories, plays or film scripts. It was perceptive of the adaptor and director Ivan Talijancic and his Wax-Factory collaborators to recognize this coldly erotic, deeply ambiguous story as a potent foil for their technical wizardry.

The set for "... She Said," a 45-minute visual gem presented in English at the Brooklyn Lyceum as part of the Act French festival, is a wide, white-walled tube that recalls the tunnels in the old TWA terminal at Kennedy Airport. Raised about three feet off the floor, it seems to float in the dark as numbers, words and multilayered video clips are seen on its rear wall and three actors — a man and a woman in white (Dion Doulis and Katarina Stegnar) and a woman in black (Erika Latta) — move about in tightly choreographed patterns, starkly silhouetted by lights embedded in the walls and floor.

The actors play unnamed characters whose identities are fluid and who behave sensually in a detached, formalistic way. Sometimes they wrestle together and rise from the floor lit by a pulsing strobe, their

"... She Said" continues through Sunday at the Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Avenue, Park Slope, (212) 780-3372.



Tasja Keetman/Act French

Where language leans toward background music: Erika Latta in "... She Said," a theater work adapted from a 1969 "novel" by Marguerite Duras.

... She Said

Brooklyn Lyceum

movements acquiring an eerie, punctuated harmony that evokes plants growing in time-lapse photography.

Unfortunately, the text overlaid on these gorgeous, animated images is even more fractured than Duras's and extremely frustrating. The book tells an elegantly indeterminate story about calcified love and preda-

tory destruction among four people staying in a hotel for convalescents.

"... She Said," by contrast, relies on the rather tired and limited idea that obscuring specific location and time is in itself interesting. The closest the show comes to situated action is when unlocatable, miked voices say, "Where are we?" "In a hotel." "Could it be some other place?" "It is up to the spectator to choose." Most of the lines are apparently selected at random from either Duras's book

or from her famously petulant interviews.

Occasionally, Ms. Latta steps out of the white tube and speaks directly with the audience as "the author" at a long table at floor level beside the production's four technicians. Her yearning for a closer and more meaningful connection with "her" creations ties the action together to an extent, though her posing in black gloves holding a drink and smoking is pretentious.

For all its homage to Duras, "...

She Said" is a very different sort of "hybrid" artwork from the ones she conceived. It's much more slick, constructive and purposeful, with its confident technical display, than the deliberately broken and disruptive "Destroy, She Said" (which Duras once fondly called "imbecilic"). At one point, Mr. Talijancic inserts a line I couldn't find in Duras's text: "Perhaps someone from the outside could manage to find out what's going on inside." Don't count on it.