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HEART OF THE MATTER

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In “L’Intrus” Jean-Luc Nancy describes the alienating experience of his heart transplant. Most vividly his words make sensible how from “pain to pain, strangeness to strangeness” his proper “I” withdraws and becomes an intruder. The suffering of an opened, invaded, vulnerable body is infinite and the image of the tortured body of a crucified Christ almost automatically comes to mind.¹ And yet this religious connotation of sacrifice and martyrdom is precisely what Nancy puts into question. The expropriation of organs, the torments of the body bring us not closer to God but are rather an indication of the death of God:

*Corpus meum and interior intimo meo, the two together state very exactly, and in a complete configuration of the death of god, that the truth of the subject is its exteriority and excessivity: its infinite exposition. The intrus exposes me, excessively. It extrudes, it exports, it expropriates: I am the illness and the medical intervention, I am the cancerous cell and the grafted organ [...]*²

Nancy explains this further by adding that we are at the beginning of a mutation where man is going infinitely beyond man (again, implying the death of God) and becoming what he is and always has been, namely the most terrifying and troubling technician who refashions nature, and re-creates creation.³ Organ transplantation, which is an old phenomenon but only recently successful since the first non-rejected kidney transplant in 1954, is one more step in this essential and troubling characteristic of mankind.⁴ In both its legal and illegal practices in the world market of globalized capitalism today, organ transplantation is a form of bio-power and biopolitics in the Foucauldian sense: where life and its mechanisms are

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HEART OF THE MATTER **bodies without organs and** **biopolitics in organ** **transplant films**

“brought into the realm of explicit calculations and power–knowledge [is] an agent of transformations of human life.”⁵

However, the death of God that Nancy encountered in his intruding and extruding experience of cardiac transplantation also implies biophilosophical questions relating to the potentiality of the body and a new kind of ethics that this may imply. Nancy starts “L’Intrus” with a quote from Antonin Artaud: “There is nothing in fact more ignobly useless and superfluous than the organ called the heart, which is the vilest means that one could have invented for pumping life into me.”⁶ For Deleuze and Guattari, Artaud’s declaration of war on the organs, expressed on 28 November 1947 in the radio play “To Have Done with the

Judgement of God,” is the beginning of thinking the organism outside its habitual and automatic composition, the beginning of thinking beyond a religious framework. Artaud shows us “how to create a Body without Organs.”⁷ The Body without Organs as a concept has to be situated on a different level of experience than the biopolitical concerns related to organ transplantation. Rather than knowledge and power, it addresses an ethics of intensities, vibrations, gradients, joyful and sad affects, all marked by a “striving to persist.” But what is this striving to persist, what strives to persist in the experience of organ transplantation? What is the “strange *conatus* of infinite excrescence,” as Nancy calls his heart transplant?⁸ In what sense does this experience involve the death of God and undo the judgement of God? And how does this relate to the concept of sacrifice?

In this essay I will look at four recent films that have organ transplantations “at their heart”: *21 Grams* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2003), *L’Intrus* (Claire Denis, 2001), *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephen Frears, 2002) and *Heart of Jenin* (Leon Geller and Markus Vetter, 2008).⁹ Each film in its own way shows how Nancy’s concept of the intruder balances in a different dynamics between biopolitical and biophilosophical concerns. Each film participates in the biopolitical discourse that surrounds the question of the body that concerns us here. As such the camera registers the surface of reality, representations that could be considered as the visible skin of reality. The films, however, also offer more than representations. Hidden within the visible body of the image, on a more profound and invisible level, they also produce “Bodies without Organs” that change the concept of sacrifice from religious offering into political or ethical resistance and allow a-religious strivings to persist. Therefore, more than an instrument for capturing the world in representations, the camera thus also functions as a surgical instrument itself, putting reality on the operating table. Walter Benjamin’s famous observation about the film camera as scalpel serves here as an underlying principle to approach the power of the filmic images discussed:

[The surgeon] greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient’s body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs [...] The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web [...] Thus, for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of that reality which is free of all equipment.¹⁰

Laying bare what lies beneath the surface, these films are not just about organ transplantation, but by touching and moving organs they point to biopolitical and biophilosophical questions that are at the heart of the matter of contemporary reality.

hearts and kidneys

In all four films that form the “corpus” of my examinations, the heart is literally the most vital and problematic organ. In *21 Grams* and *L’Intrus* the main characters undergo a heart transplant. In *21 Grams* Paul (Sean Penn) is a terminally ill maths professor who receives the heart from a man killed (together with his two young daughters) in a hit-and-run car accident. Iñárritu’s film presents to us the crossing paths of Paul, his donor’s widow and now childless mother Cristina (Naomi Watts), and the hit-and-run driver Jack (Benicio del Toro).¹¹ Claire Denis’s film *L’Intrus* is directly inspired by Nancy’s essay on his heart transplant.¹² Although there is nothing of Nancy’s essay that finds direct cinematographic translation, practically every scene of the film is permeated with intrusion. Its enigmatic and dark principal character, Louis Trebor (Michel Subor), undergoes an illegal heart transplant and travels from the North (the snowy white mountains of the Jura on the French–Swiss border) to the South (one of the French Polynesian islands of Tahiti in the Pacific Ocean).

In both *21 Grams* and *L'Intrus* the proper heart of the characters, by failing, appears as the first intruder. The second intruder is the grafted heart, a heart that, as Nancy notes, is identified by the host body as foreign, which necessitates the lowering of the immune system "so that his body will better tolerate the foreign element. Medical practice thus renders the grafter a stranger to himself: stranger, that is, to his immune system's identity – which is something like his physiological signature."¹³ Both *21 Grams* and *L'Intrus* ask ontological questions about what it means to be human, how we relate to others and deal with intrusions of the other, the stranger, to the point where we are strangers to ourselves. *21 Grams* shows the mysterious connections between individual fates. In *L'Intrus* every body is fundamentally disconnected.

Dirty Pretty Things and *Heart of Jenin* present more directly political stories of the heart. In *Dirty Pretty Things* Stephen Frears uncovers some of the invisible dimensions of contemporary London (or any globalized metropolis for that matter), featuring asylum seekers who work as cab drivers, night porters, cleaners, and prostitutes.¹⁴ A Nigerian doctor, Okwe (Chiwetel Ejiofor) works as a cab driver during the day and as a night porter in an expensive hotel after dark. One night while checking on a clogged toilet in one of the hotel rooms, he finds the cause of the blockage: a human heart. Then he discovers that the hotel manager Juan (Sergi López) runs an illegal operation trading kidneys of immigrants for forged passports. I will return to the significance of the kidney below. Here I want to remain with the heart that in this film is not transplanted but the starting point of an investigation into illegal practices, asking pertinent questions about the globalized traffic of biomaterial. *Heart of Jenin* is in a different way immediately political. This film is a documentary about Ahmed Khatib, a Palestinian boy shot by Israeli soldiers in 2005. His father, Ismael Khatib, decides to give his son's organs to six children in Israel. The documentary follows the father when two years later he visits some of the children who received his son's body

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parts. One of Ahmed's kidneys went to a Bedouin boy, another to an Orthodox Jewish girl. Although the father initially had doubts about donating Ahmed's heart, it now beats in the chest of a Druze girl.¹⁵

Of all the organs the heart seems to be most loaded with both vital and cultural significance. While many organs come in pairs (lungs, kidneys), the heart is a single organ and living donation of a heart is impossible. Someone has to die for another person to receive a heart, to live. The heart is a muscle that pumps blood into the vessels with rhythmic contractions. It is often considered as the soul of a person, containing someone's innermost thoughts and feelings. In the Bible (Genesis 6.5) God sees that the evil thoughts of mankind are seated in their hearts. But goodness is also situated in the heart. The sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary stand as exemplary for this broader connotation of the heart. Even though we do not see the heart, we can sense it easily, feel it working by putting a hand on our chest, or a finger on our pulse to sense it beating faster or slower in different circumstances. Metaphorically, also, we "know" the heart: it can jump with joy, recoil with empathy, freeze with fear, it can break.¹⁶

L'Intrus and *21 Grams* both refer to the heart in this sense of hosting good and evil souls. Denis's film opens with a preamble, an ominous image of an unnamed character in a dark grotto, played by Katerina Golubeva, who will return in the film as the haunting figure of an angel of doom. While she lights a cigarette we hear her voice whispering "Your worst enemies are hiding inside, in the darkness, in your heart." Throughout the film the main character Louis Trebor is portrayed as cold and "heartless," unable to connect to his son, to his lover, or to anyone else, living alone with his two huskies in a cabin in the woods. Even the huskies are left behind when he leaves the Jura to have his transplant operation. This man getting a new heart does not fill our own heart with sympathy. In *21 Grams* Paul follows Caterina, the widow of his donor. Rather than a stalker, he acts more like a protective angel with "a good heart." His confession to

Caterina that he is the recipient of her husband's heart first meets her immense anger, and then helps her in the unspeakable grief over her terrible loss. The title of the film refers to the idea that a person's soul, contained in the heart, has some kind of spiritual materiality that has actual physical weight. As Paul's voiceover reflects: "They say we all lose 21 grams at the exact moment of our death. Everyone. And how much fits into 21 grams?" The weight of a heart beat perhaps?

Kidneys are differently connoted organs. Situated in the lower back they come in pairs, one kidney each side of the vertebral column. They serve many purposes, most crucially the filtering of blood, removing waste that is diverted to the bladder. The kidneys also regulate blood pressure, balance bodily homeostasis and produce certain hormones. In short, they are just as vital as the heart, but they are more hidden, operating more unnoticed, and because we have two kidneys, living donation is possible. Kidneys, sometimes referred to as reins, also feature quite prominently in the Bible where they are mentioned more than thirty times.¹⁷ In the Bible, animal kidneys are frequently referred to as sacrificial offerings made in seeking divine intervention to cure diseases.¹⁸ More metaphorically, human kidneys, just like the heart, are seen as the mirror of the soul. Several times, the kidneys are mentioned as "the organs examined by God to pass judgement on a person [...]": "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart (Psalms 26:2)"¹⁹ In newer translations of the Bible, however, kidneys and reins have gradually been replaced by "mind" or "soul." As Garabed Eknayan explains, this may have to do with the success rate of kidney transplants that makes the kidney more "soulless."²⁰

In *Dirty Pretty Things* the kidneys are quite literally sacrificed. Unlike in the Bible they are not animal organs but human ones, offered not to cure a physical disease but to cure a social-political "disease," trading it for a legal identity. In his review of *Dirty Pretty Things*, Ted Hovet refers to further symbolism of the central role of kidneys in the film: the kidney is invisible, just like the secret and invisible lives of the

immigrant service workers. As such they are nevertheless fully part of the "economic life of the city, providing manufacturing, transportation, and cleaning – especially, like the kidney, those functions that dispose of the waste that other's don't want to experience."²¹ At the end of the film Okwe, the illegal immigrant from Nigeria, a Turkish asylum seeker Senay (Audrey Tautou) and Juliette (Sophie Okonedo), a black prostitute without legal papers, work together to plot against the hotel manager and, instead of Senay's body parts, take *his* kidney to an organ traffic dealer in the parking lot of the hotel. At his surprise to see people he has never met before, Okwe answers the dealer: "We are the people you don't see. We drive your cabs. We clean your rooms. We suck your cocks." *Dirty Pretty Things* exposes the "underworld of British service culture."²² Kidneys in both their materiality and metaphoric sense are part of this exposition. And as such kidneys are part of the shadow apparatus of globalized capitalism, which makes it nonetheless a biopolitical issue where life is at the (dark) centre of political order and trade.

biopolitics and border transgressions

Dirty Pretty Things exposes this hidden aspect of biopolitics. The film shows how an invisible anonymous part of society can form a new collective, a multitude, presenting a resistance to the apparatus of power of global capitalism.²³ At the end of the film Okwe and Senay are able to leave the anonymous border location of the hotel, which could be seen as a metaphor for the British nation-state, regulating and "accommodating strangers into the home/nation."²⁴ With their forged passports they manage to get to that other anonymous border space, the airport. Senay leaves for her sister in New York; Okwe calls his daughter whom he had to leave behind in Nigeria after he was falsely accused of murdering his wife on the operating table. *Dirty Pretty Things* forms a counter-discourse and is part of a biopolitical

power–knowledge apparatus that could be defined in a broader sense than Foucault proposes. As Agamben argues, we can

call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connections with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and – why not – language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses – one in which thousands and thousands of years ago a primate inadvertently let himself be captured, probably without realizing the consequences that he was about to face.²⁵

The camera or film is another apparatus in this sense. *Dirty Pretty Things* is a fiction film that nevertheless addresses actual practices and that can provide empowering discursive resistance by showing, on the level of representation and storytelling, what is hidden in society's biopolitics of illegal organ traffic.

Heart of Jenin is a documentary and addresses biopolitical issues in an even more complicated network of power because it is at the heart of one of the most pertinent political conflict zones of the modern world: Jenin, the occupied territories of the West Bank. The film starts with an Israeli news item on the death of the twelve-year-old Palestinian Ahmed Khatib, innocently killed by Israeli soldiers who mistook him for a terrorist while he was playing with a toy gun. While Ahmed's body, covered in the Palestinian flag, is carried around as a martyr and the cries for vengeance are growing louder in the streets of Jenin, in the Israeli hospital where Ahmed died a male nurse had already set in motion a different response to the tragedy. At the bedside of his diseased son, he had asked Ahmed's father to donate his son's organs to sick children in other hospitals who might in this way get a chance to life. When after reflection the father

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takes a heartbreaking decision and agrees, the Israeli news reports again about this remarkable deed. Some of the families of the receiving children are interviewed, just before the operations on their children. Two years later the documentary makers follow the father and a relative in Israel when he visits some of the children who received one of his son's organs. In this way *Heart of Jenin* portrays the story of a father who instead of burying his son like a martyr and calling for vengeance, chose "gifts of life" instead. In a political situation as explosive as the Palestinian–Israeli conflict this profoundly humane decision is immediately political. As is the media coverage and the documentary itself that starts to operate in the discursive field. The film travelled and stirred quite some debates.

While it is widely acknowledged that the story in itself is very moving and the decision of the father to donate his son's organs is a remarkable choice, both this choice and especially the film's depiction of it are received with mixed feelings and disappointment from both Palestinian and Israeli sides.²⁶ Palestinians complain that the news report of the death of a Palestinian boy suggests that the Israelis would care about the loss of Palestinian innocent casualties. From the Israeli side, consciousness of the discursive effects of media representations have led to criticism of one-sided depiction of bad Israelis and victimized Palestinians because of the narrow focus on Ismael Khatib's decision and journey. On the PBS website of the film, Rabbi Haskel Lookstein counterbalances the story of Ahmed with that of an Israeli woman, killed in a terrorist bomb attack, who donated one of her vital organs to an Arab person. Steven Stotsky, in a review for CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America), argues that the decision of Ismael Khatib to donate his son's organs could not have taken place without the intercession of Israeli doctors and medical staff, whom he calls "the unseen heroes, who continue to administer critical care to individuals on both sides of the conflict despite the risks."²⁷ As a result, Stotsky argues, the film reinforces antagonism instead

of offering new insights into the conflict. Stotsky adds other background information to contextualize Ismael Khatib's noble gesture, reproaching the filmmakers especially in having portrayed the Orthodox family as grudging and prejudiced Israelis.

Granted, when the Orthodox father Yakov Levinson is interviewed in the first instance, while his daughter is unexpectedly on the operating table, he expresses the wish for the kidney of his little daughter preferably to be a Jewish organ. And one can question here the filmmakers for capturing people at a very anxious and vulnerable moment of their life. When two years later the family receives Khatib and his relative the situation certainly is very painful, partly because of this initial interview. Moreover, the political situation weighs heavy on the shoulders of both the hosts and the visitors. And yet the film does not give the one-sided image of the Jewish family as is argued in Stotsky's review and in other online commentaries. In fact, the Orthodox family is genuinely grateful: "We owe you so much," Yakov Levinson says while the little girl with Ahmed's kidney gives Ismael a present. Moreover, the fact that the family agreed to be filmed in these circumstances (not all recipients of Ahmed's organs gave their permission) is quite courageous because it exposes them. It makes them liable to the accusation of betrayal and it shows a willingness to enter into some kind of dialogue, even if, as Orthodox Jews, they have a strict lifestyle and the father does not know how to express himself very well. The film acknowledges this perspective. When Ismael and his relative drive back home, the uncle comments about Yakov Levinson: "This man really regrets what he said earlier. Did you see the little girl? I think she has a secret energy behind her. Her name is Menuha, which means tranquillity, comfort." In these words there is a ray of hope that in the vastness of the political blockages and deadlocks something can still connect, quite literally, a shared source of life. But the political situation is so incredibly complex and so deeply painful that any representation becomes part of a much larger discursive network. *Heart of Jenin*

literally goes to the heart of these matters, presenting a biopolitical story that is profoundly related to all kinds of power relations that need contextualization and vigilance, but that operate also at the level of the heart and soul. And hence, just like *Dirty Pretty Things'* exposure of the invisible side of contemporary London, it starts cutting through the skin of discursive representations.

intense cruelty of bodies without organs

At this point we have to start asking how organ transplantation, this trans-individual exchanging of vital body parts, with all its political connotations entangled in discursive apparatuses and biopolitical networks of power, relates to biophilosophical questions. Eric Alliez has argued that "biophilosophy realizes itself as biopolitics."²⁸ Can we now also ask how biopolitics might imply biophilosophy? Does the discursive representation of organ transplantation relate to the concept of the "Body without Organs"? Does the literal and corporeal "opening of being" that Nancy describes as so powerful in "L'Intrus" relate to the pre-individual and trans-individual ethics of immanent vitalism that is implied in the biophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and that is most vividly expressed in Artaud's *Body without Organs*? Before turning back to the films, let's have a closer look at the concept itself.

First, it is useful to clarify that transplant organs should not be confused with the concept of "organs without bodies" that Slavoj Žižek proposes in his (reverse and perverse because related to sexual difference and desire) reading of the *Body without Organs*. Žižek gives the examples of Edward Norton's hand that starts fighting itself in *Fight Club*, or the recorded voice that sings without being embodied in *Mulholland Drive*. These "organs without bodies" are, according to Žižek, Lacanian partial objects:

The hand acting on its own is the drive ignoring the dialectic of the subject's desire: drive is fundamentally the insistence of an undead

“organ without a body,” standing, like Lacan’s *lamella*, for that which the subject had to lose in order to subjectivize itself in the symbolic space of the sexual difference.²⁹

It is quite clear, however, that a grafted organ and the experience of organ transplantation has nothing to do with partial objects that are lost in order to be subjectivized or with the symbolic space of sexual difference and desire negatively defined as “lack” (of the symbolic organ, of castration). Quite the contrary, as Nancy suggests, the gift of life in organ donation

institutes among us, without any limit other than the incompatibility of blood type (and, in particular, without the limits of sex or ethnicity: my heart may be the heart of a black woman), the possibility of a network wherein life/death is shared out, where life connects with death, here the incommunicable communicates.³⁰

What is communicating in the material exchange of body parts (donating and receiving an organ) communicates on a pre-individual, transversal level, beneath the habitual organization of the body and representation. Beyond the laws of transcendental subjectivity that, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, “always has a priest behind it”: the hierarchical organization of power and knowledge against normative white, male faciality (which has the “face of Christ” as its reference).³¹ In organ transplantation the “Christian” (or other national or religious normative) organization of subjectivity is literally undermined. Even an Orthodox Jewish family is happy with a Palestinian heart. And so a biopolitical practice of “organs without bodies” operates on an intensive pre-individual level. It obtains the deterritorializing powers of the Body without Organs that is not organized following the laws of the judgement of God.

“The Body without Organs hurts,” Alliez asserts.³² The references to Artaud indicate that for Deleuze and Guattari a particular way in which it hurts is in the confrontation with madness. Artaud, who was diagnosed as schizophrenic, in his theatre performances resists the

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organic use of language and bodily code by uttering “only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound.”³³ Deleuze and Guattari argue that the schizo has his own system of coordinates at his disposal, which does not coincide with the social code. “It might be said that the schizophrenic passes from one code to the other, that he deliberately scrambles all the codes.”³⁴ Organs are regenerated, re-inscribed in a “litany of disjunctions” on the own body.³⁵ This disorganization of the body can be realized in less pathological forms in artistic experimentation. But it can be argued as well that it has a techno-physiological form in the donation and reception of organ transplantation. The way Nancy describes his grafted body undergoing an additional excruciating treatment for cancer that invaded his body as a side-effect of the lowering of his immune system is in a sense a “schizoid” experience, an experience that changes the habitual organization of his body completely:

My heart is twenty years younger than I am, and the rest of my body (at least) a dozen years older. So having at the same time become younger and older, I no longer have an age proper, just as, properly speaking, I am no longer my own age. Just as I no longer have an occupation, although I am not retired, so too I am nothing of what I am supposed to be (husband, father, grandfather, friend) unless I remain subsumed within the very general condition of the *intrust*, of diverse *intrus* that at any moment can appear in my place in my relations with, or in the representations of, others.³⁶

This is, quite literally, a body with scrambled codes, a Body without Organs. It is a body full of intensities that underneath the organized body starts to make new and different connections, experience new (sometimes excruciating) affects. “We don’t know what a body can do,” is Spinoza’s famous question that Deleuze has emphasized as the most central one that is the basis of the Body without Organs. In the transcription of his courses on Spinoza, Deleuze explains further: “Knowing what you are capable of. This

is not at all a moral question, but above all a physical question, as a question to the body and to the soul [...] The only question is the power of being affected.”³⁷ Artaud, in his schizoid experiments of the Body without Organs, created a “theatre of cruelty.” In her article on Deleuze and Artaud, Laura Cull mentions that Artaud’s system of cruelty was directed at allowing cruelty as affective power to penetrate everything, especially the relationship to his audience: “Making yourself a theatre of cruelty, then, is not about ‘wielding a butcher’s knife on stage at every possible opportunity’ in order to represent cruelty, Artaud explained; rather it means creating a ‘real transformation’ in your audience by acting ‘deeply and directly’ on their sensibilities.”³⁸

We have seen that *Dirty Pretty Things* and *Heart of Jenin* are films with huge biopolitical signification, but they remain mostly at the level of narrative representation. The Body without Organs in these films can be sensed only indirectly, underneath the acting, the storylines, the visibility of the representation. They are empowering discursive tools (or perhaps even weapons) but they do not cut directly into the “organs” of the audience. *21 Grams* and *L’Intrus* are films that respect less the rules of classic narration and representation. And therefore these films perhaps cut deeper, in that they deal more saliently with the biophilosophical implications of organ transplantation. Aesthetically they perform cruelty (as a disorganizing force) on the audience. *21 Grams* has been criticized for its scrambled and fragmented narration.³⁹ At the beginning of the film we see flash-forwards of the main characters that chronologically only come to know each other later:

We see Cristina asleep on a bed while Paul sits beside her, smoking, gazing down; we see Paul slumped in a wrecked chair outside a desolate motel, in gray light; we see an abandoned swimming pool, choked with debris, under a brooding sky full of floating snow. These introductory epiphanies yield to choppy glimpse of the plot’s frantic climax (Jack driving a car at high speed, rushing an injured, bleeding Paul and a screaming Cristina to the hospital).⁴⁰

This is a disorienting prelude indeed, but it is also a very expressive way of putting the power of affect before any narrative development or organization. Before we can make sense of the story, before we can identify with the characters, the sensations and affects have already grasped us, at a deep and cutting pre-individualized level. This primacy of the affect and the fact that we start from a point in the future, that the narrative or narration speaks from a perspective of the future, are what I call elsewhere the schizo-aspects of contemporary cinema in the digital age.⁴¹ The frantic camera work and the editing style are the scalpels of the surgeon filmmaker. With its jumping, slicing, looping structure *21 Grams* is a Film without Organs. Moreover, this sense of unavoidable fate that the film’s encircling structure brings about makes *21 Grams*, as Robert Hahn argues, in spite of its melodramatic materials, reminiscent of Greek tragedies.⁴² But, as Hahn rightly notices, it is not the individual fate of the characters that interests Iñárritu but rather the impersonal or pre-individual experience of time as such. It is in time that we become, in time that our fate gets entangled with that of others, the strangers that intrude on our life and become entangled with ours. Relative to the normal organization of the body and human psychology *21 Grams*

undercuts the premise that we are most ourselves when we are confident in self-definition and successful in self-presentation; we are equally real, it suggests, when we are out of control, confused, obsessed, deluded, ill, pathetic: we are all of those people – the people we were then, and the people we will be.⁴³

All characters in *21 Grams* have become strangers to themselves. Paul’s heart transplant is not just his own struggle with that question of a becoming and transforming self. Within the intense structure of this film, the heart transplant puts us in touch with those fundamental intruding questions at the core of our identities.

Denis’s *L’Intrus* is even more alienating in its aesthetics. As a European art film it is less expected to follow a Hollywood organization of

its material, and hence it is met with different evaluation criteria, even if it is still seen as an “evasive and difficult” film.⁴⁴ In Denis’s adaptation (or rather “adoption” as Nancy had called the film version of his text) the concept of the intruder is not only related to the physical dimension of the transplanted body. Rather, the idea of intrusion is sensible in every scene. Compared to *21 Grams*’ emphasis on time, Denis’s film is more concerned with space. Moving from the Northern hemisphere (the Jura) to the Southern hemisphere (Tahiti), with transits in Geneva (Switzerland) and Pusan (South Korea), the intrusion is first presented as a spatial phenomenon. The film starts at a border control with police dogs, sensing illegal traffic. Dogs, as guardians of the territory, as first to alert an intrusion, are in practically every scene of the first part of the film. And many scenes in the snowy mountain forests of the Jura are haunted by dark shadows of strangers who want to enter the country and whose glimpses we see regularly in the woods, the camera sometimes taking their place as a spying gaze from the shadows – for instance when “they” observe how Trebor’s own heart becomes an intruder, failing him whilst swimming.

The illegal immigrants who in *Dirty Pretty Things* get a face, a story and agency remain abstract but nevertheless real and present forces in *L’Intrus*. In this film they are haunting and haunted Bodies without Organs. Some scenes have oniric or even delirious qualities and we don’t know whether Louis Trebor actually kills one of those shadowy intruders who is later found under the ice; whether the bloody heart found in the snow is the heart of a girl who intruded Trebor’s cabin is really her heart, or whether it is a metaphoric image for his (illegally obtained) transplanted organ. Denis leaves these options open, while the political implications are nevertheless always sensible. In the Pacific, Trebor himself is the intruder. He clearly stands out among the islanders and is regarded with suspicion as a European foreigner. His attempts to find his Polynesian son, whom he left many years ago, fail, even if the islanders try to find a replacement son for him. Instead his body starts to

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reject his new heart, so the intrusion comes again from the inside, from the grafted heart. Trebor ends up at sea, with a pretended son whom he is too weak to reject, destiny unknown. The film returns to the Jura and ends (without Trebor) with the image of his neighbour (Beatrice Dalle) who is a dog keeper, who leads a pack of dogs through the snow. On the move, a new circle (of hunting?) starting.

The physical intrusion of his own body that Nancy describes in the experience of his heart transplant is not only translated in the film’s highly intrusive elliptic spatial structure but also in the completely de-psychologized painting of the characters that gives a sense of alienation. We will never get to know Trebor’s motives, his thoughts or feelings; he is certainly not a sympathetic character. As Martine Beugnet emphasizes in her reading of *L’Intrus*:

Drawn into the film’s circular flow (the journey takes us around the world and back), the characters operate less like psychological constructs than like chemical bodies reacting to a series of contrasted environments, or like cells traveling through the body of the film, set on their course by its internal kinesthesia.⁴⁵

The rhythm of a perpetual mobile (the beatings of a heart), this continuing movement is more important than narrative continuity, which is demanding and “cruel” for the audiences. Where *21 Grams*’ scrambling of filmic codes is confusing, Denis’s *L’Intrus* is enigmatically alienating. Beugnet refers to an interview with Denis where she characterizes her films as having a limp, one arm shorter, or a big nose, some kind of unfitting “excrescence” that wants to be felt, experienced. In another interview Denis explains that she likes philosophy because it is circular, like a meridian that encircles the world, and you can jump on another meridian and see things differently. “I need things to be open, nothing is definitive. I am just incapable of being ‘sliced’ (*tranchée*),” she explains.⁴⁶ With this form of “nomadic narration” *L’Intrus* is a Film without Organs, a Body without Organs, in the sense that

Beugnet concludes: “The film thus offers itself as a body of sensations through which, as spectators, we might sense and practice our ability to let our defences down – to be drawn into and infused by the unfamiliar.”⁴⁷ With the abstract but explicit connection between the stranger as territorial, physical and cinematographic intruder, *L’Intrus* presents perhaps the most balanced view between biopolitical and biophilosophical questions that organ transplantation and Bodies without Organs can bring about. But also the most unsettling ones. Unlike the other films, there is no hope as in *Heart of Jenin*, or agency and political visibility as in *Dirty Pretty Things*, or even catharsis and redemption as in *21 Grams*. Just a continuation on another “meridian” and the desire to continue in an open whole.

sacrifice resurrected

All the above lead us to the final question: what happens with the concept of sacrifice when we consider organ transplantation in light of the Body without Organs? In many accounts of organ transplantation the Christian concept of charity is mentioned as an important motivation for organ donation.⁴⁸ And, as stated at the beginning of this essay, the suffering body of the organ-receiving body does remind us of the suffering body of Christ. In *Jesus of Montreal*, organ transplantation is explicitly linked to this religious sense of sacrifice. On the website of *Heart of Jenin* religious leaders of the big monotheist religions (a priest, a rabbi, an imam and a Baptist reverend) all comment that the gift of life is the greatest act of charity one can offer (even the pope has signed a donor certificate). And so *Heart of Jenin* participates in the religious discourses surrounding organ donation, even if this level is not addressed explicitly in the documentary itself. Organ transplantation is inscribed in biopolitical issues that are guided by religious institutions, albeit in a complex network of other apparatuses that go beyond institutional power, such as the individual decision to donate organs in particular (legal and illegal) circumstances.

At the same time Nancy has argued that the medical technology involved in transplantation practices signifies “the death of God” and implies an explicit transgression of this religious framework, in any event the institutional frameworks that are related to the type of normative or habitual organization of the body.⁴⁹ In the different films the concept of sacrifice is related in different ways to (the death of) God. In *Dirty Pretty Things* the main character Okwe, who is a doctor, mentions loud and clear that he has no religion, except to survive. Also in *21 Grams* and *L’Intrus* the characters are moving in a world without God. But the issue of religion is more complicated in the latter two films. First of all, as Laura McMahon has noted, for Nancy the dead of God “remains pregnant with the possibility if not necessity of a resurrection that restores both man and God to a common immanence.”⁵⁰ In *21 Grams* and *L’Intrus* multiple references to Christianity refer to this idea of resurrection. In *21 Grams* Jack, the ex-con, turns fanatically to religion to seek salvation and seems at first a Christ figure. However, it is finally Paul who becomes a resurrected Christ figure, a protective angel. He who receives the heart transplant sacrifices himself in the end (shooting himself in the chest) to help Jack and Cristina to somehow find redemption and repair themselves (Cristina turns out to be pregnant from Paul, Jack returns home to his family, leaving Christian dogmas behind).

In *L’Intrus* the (difficult) father–son lineage is inscribed with Christian connotations. Louis Trebor’s neglected French son (Grégoire Colin) is seen in his father’s deserted cabin, putting on a crown of leaves that was left behind by a young girl who first intruded the place. The crown certainly looks like Jesus’ crown of thorns, and both the girl and Trebor’s son later have their hearts ripped out. As suggested above, Trebor could have taken either of those hearts: an illegal one, or the (metaphoric) heart of his son whom he never loved. Moreover, the film features multiple resurrections, the main one being, of course, Trebor himself who gets a second chance through his heart transplant. When he travels to Tahiti, Denis also inserts a

young Michel Subor arriving forty years earlier on the same shore in another film, *Le Reflux* (Paul Géauff, 1965), which is a cinematographic resurrection.⁵¹ So while the sacrifice in Christian terms is deconstructed and questioned by “the death of God” that organ transplantation implies, there is a second life, a resurrection of God, precisely in the different forms of sacrifice and reception of “the other” as a stranger. Perhaps what organ transplantation makes quite literally tangible is the immanent life force that we share on a pre-individual level through which we can sense the immanence of God (and not God as a transcending judging principle). Perhaps, indeed as Philip Adamek suggests, “Christianity [itself] is like a heart transplant.”⁵² Sacrifice and redemption are still part of our secular medicalized and technologically mediated culture. But biophilosophy and the concept of the Body without Organs shows us that this resurrection after the death of God also implies “to have done with the Judgement of God,” entering a theatre of cruelty that asks us to perceive our relations to others in a new way. If Christianity is a heart transplant then God may well be a Body without Organs, responding, as Steven Shaviro has argued, both to the same necessity: “that of conceiving a non-totalizing and open ‘whole’ in which all potentiality may be expressed [...] without any sort of finality or closure.”⁵³ The image, according to Nancy in *The Ground of the Image*, is always “sacred,” distinct from reality but with its own force.⁵⁴ If Artaud has put man and God on the anatomy table to re-organize his body, the filmmaker can help with his scalpel to imagine this resurrected concept of sacrifice with new intensities and new power of transformation at the heart and soul of the matter beyond the institutional framework and dogmas of religious discourse.



notes

1 In Denys Arcand’s film *Jesus of Montreal* (1989) this was made explicit. Here, the actor who plays Jesus in a modern update of the passion play dies

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and his organs are taken from his body. Filmed from a high angle, Jesus’ body on the operating table seems to be on a cross.

2 Nancy, “L’Intrus” 12–13.

3 Ibid. 7. For the inclusion of technics and technology in Western philosophy, see also Bernard Stiegler’s three volumes of *Technics and Time*.

4 For the emergence and scope of organ transplantation and global trade in biomaterial, see Geesink and Steegers, *Nier te Koop, Baarmoeder te Huur* [*Kidney for Sale, Womb for Hire*].

5 Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 143. Here, the word biopower appears for the first time. The first explicit mention of biopolitics is in Foucault’s “Il faut défendre la société.” See also Hardt and Negri, *Empire*. For an insightful account of various conceptions of biopolitics, see Dean.

6 Nancy, “L’Intrus” 1.

7 Deleuze and Guattari, “The Body without Organs” in *Anti-Oedipus* 9–16; and “How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?” in *A Thousand Plateaus* 149–66.

8 Nancy, “L’Intrus” 13.

9 Other organ transplantation films that go beyond the Frankenstein myth are, among others: *Coma* (Michael Crichton, 1978), *EMR* (James Erskine and Danny McCullough, 2004), *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* (Serdar Akar and Sadullah Sentürk, 2006), *Seven Pounds* (Gabriele Muccino, 2008), *My Sister’s Keeper* (Nick Cassavetes, 2009), and *Never Let Me Go* (Mark Romanek, 2010). There are quite a few Korean films that have organ trafficking in their action-plot. For instance, *Heartbeat* (Yoon Jae-keun, 2010), *The Man from Nowhere* (Lee Jeong-beom, 2010) and *The Traffickers* (Kim Hong-Sun, 2012). For an extended discussion of *Coma*, see Pisters, *Matrix of Visual Culture* 61–64. Another film that should be mentioned here is Anand Gandhi’s film *Ship of Theseus* (2012) which brings together three different stories of organ transplantation in a beautiful and intelligent way. For an analysis of this film, see Pisters, “Transplanting Life.”

10 Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations* 227.

11 For a review, see Hahn.

12 For a special issue on the Nancy–Denis encounter, see *Film-Philosophy* 21.1. See

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<<http://www.film-philosophy.com/2008v12n1/morrey.pdf>> for an introduction by the editor of this issue which features an article by Nancy on Denis's film *Trouble Every Day* and four other articles on the Denis–Nancy collaboration.

13 Nancy, "L'Intrus" 9.

14 See also Hovet.

15 See the PBS Wide Angle series website for background information and the full documentary: <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/heart-of-jenin/introduction/4991/>>.

16 For elaborate studies of the different significances of the heart, see Jager; Young.

17 Eknoyan.

18 Ibid. 3467.

19 Ibid. 3468.

20 Ibid. 3470.

21 Hovet 3.

22 Gibson 700.

23 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*. See also Bordeleau.

24 Gibson 694.

25 Agamben 14.

26 See, for instance, the hundreds of responses to the introduction of the film on the PBS website: <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/heart-of-jenin/introduction/4991/>>. Basically, every responder has new facts and additional perspectives to add. Or the blog post on Jewlicious: "Was Heart of Jenin Heartfelt or Heartless?" available at <<http://www.jewlicious.com/2009/07/was-heart-of-jenin-heartless-or-heartfelt/>>.

27 Stotsky. While Stotsky is very right that all this could never have happened without the excellent Israeli medical staff, one could continue the contextualization and ask why there are few Arab medical staff and facilities on the West Bank. But his point is well taken and valuable. A similar point is actually made at the end of Arcand's film *Jesus of Montreal*. Here the Catholic hospital is overcrowded and simply sends the severely wounded Jesus back on the streets. The Jewish hospital, on the other hand, acts adequately and while being too late to save him they do rescue his organs for transplantation.

28 Alliez 1.

29 Žižek 174.

30 Nancy, "L'Intrus" 8.

31 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 154. Here, Deleuze and Guattari talk about the curse on desire when desire is uprooted from its field of immanence and brought in connection to a (normative) transcendental principle. In the following plateau Deleuze and Guattari explicitly address European racism and degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face as the Christ face in painting where "the face of Christ [is used] to produce every kind of facial unit and every degree of deviance" (178).

32 Alliez 1.

33 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 9.

34 Ibid. 15.

35 Ibid. 12.

36 Nancy, "L'Intrus" 11.

37 Deleuze 9.

38 Cull 48.

39 See, for example, the reviews by Rene Rodriguez, Rob Gonsalves and others at <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/21_grams/>.

40 Hahn 56.

41 Pisters, *The Neuro-Image* 98–124.

42 Hahn 53.

43 Ibid. 56.

44 Morrey i.

45 Beugnet 43.

46 *Claire Denis – L'Intrus Entretien: Olivier Bombarda*, available <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPGmjCq-OFo>>.

47 Beugnet 46.

48 Weeda, "Nieren afstaan uit naastenliefde" [Donating Kidneys out of Charity] 8–9.

49 Nancy, "L'Intrus" 12–13, qtd at the beginning of this essay. In his book on Nancy, Derrida also emphasizes the link between the opening of the body by technology and the need to go beyond the Christian body in Nancy's work. See Derrida.

50 McMahon 70.

51 For an extended analysis of images of resurrection in Denis's films, see Morrey, "Open Wounds."

52 Adamek 196.

53 Shaviro 129–30.

54 Nancy, *Ground of the Image*. As he explains in the first essay of the book, "The Image – the Distinct," Nancy defines "sacred" here in a non-religious way as something that is distinct, separate.

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