

(Re)Moving the Heart: Interiority and Intrusion in María Zambrano, Jean Luc Nancy
and Claire Denis

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This essay teases out often elusive but enlightening connections between three works: María Zambrano's *Persona y democracia* (1958), Jean Luc Nancy's *L'Intrus* (2000), and Claire Denis's *The Intruder* (2004), a film inspired by Nancy's text. Written by highly diverse authors—an exiled Spanish philosopher, a contemporary French theorist, and a French-born film director raised in colonial Africa—the three works represent the heart as a precarious border between inside and outside, proximity and distance, intimacy and intrusion. The complex status of the heart—as an organ and as a designation of the core of personal identity and the sacred, innermost interiority of the person—relates in these texts to the possibilities of movement, both physical and historical. A continuous movement of the heart that delineates the finite span of an individual life serves here as a marker of the temporality of human existence, created through the web of the subject's relations to itself and others. As I will argue, the temporality of existence, both individual and collective, is in these works altered by the possibility of intrusion, be it physical intrusion by way of heart transplant (Nancy), incursion into a bound space of a nation-state or an island (Denis), or a violent trespassing of the border between human and sacred realms, which in Zambrano's view characterizes sacrifice.

The Intruder, Claire Denis' film inspired by Nancy's text of the same title, is just one instance of the ongoing and well-documented dialogue that the director and

the philosopher maintained over the years.¹ In all likelihood, neither Nancy nor Denis has any knowledge of Zambrano's work. Their only tangible connection with her might seem quite tenuous, since it points to a particular geographical area with strong biographical resonances for Zambrano and Denis. The stretch of the Jura mountains close to the border between France and Switzerland is where Zambrano lived during the last stage of her exile (1964-1982) and wrote her best-known work, *Claros del bosque*, and where Denis, who spent parts of her childhood in the area, situates the first part of her filmic rendering of Nancy's text. This particular location, a place of exile from which Zambrano thought she would never return and the starting point of Denis' character's voyage in pursuit of a new heart, serves as a metonymic expression of a vulnerable interiority. Zambrano's philosophy and Denis' film focus on an interiority exposed to the outside—exile, separation, illness, death—and trace tortuous paths of two existences lived as a search for a new life, either via the extension of one's biological life (Denis) or through the life of thought (Zambrano).

This essay starts with an exploration of Jean Luc Nancy's autobiographical and philosophical account of the heart transplant as an intrusion: a physical and metaphysical opening of the subject to the other, both internal (one's own body and identity) and external (the other's heart). Subsequently, I link Nancy's notion of the intrusion found at the very heart of subjectivity, his own and the Western subject more broadly, to the idea of internal hollowness or the "void within," one of the fundamental insights Zambrano develops in *Persona y democracia*. Finally, a

¹ For different accounts of the relationship between Denis' films and Nancy's philosophy, see McMahon, Nancy (2014), Streiter, and Staat.

complex and by no means obvious relationship of Denis' film to Nancy's *L'Intrus* will serve as a springboard for an examination of the notions of crime and sacrifice which, while absent or muted in Nancy's text, figure prominently in Zambrano and Denis' accounts of the relationships between father and son, human and divine, and individual and power.

Nancy's L'Intrus

Jean-Luc Nancy's 2000 essay *L'Intrus* is an account of the personal as well as philosophical ramifications of the heart transplant that the author underwent at the age of 50. Focusing on the figure of the intruder and the act of intrusion, *L'Intrus* poses the question of the identity of the subject whose own heart was removed and replaced by another's and whose life has been permanently modified and altered by multiple prepositions: living *on* following the transplant, living *with* another heart and *under* the shadow of the new heart's uncertain compatibility with the body in which it is lodged. Nancy's text calls upon multiple discourses—medical, technological, political, philosophical, religious—not in order to fix, define, and therefore neutralize the untamable potential inscribed in the term “intruder,” but instead to show and expose multiple acts of intrusion intrinsic to the way in which Western culture positions the human subject in relation to nature, mortality, God, or other human beings.

In Nancy's text intrusion does not name an act perpetrated by someone who in the light of that act is considered an intruder in the same way in which the one who buys is a buyer and the one who travels is a traveler. The text questions both

the separation between the subject and the act and the precedence or primacy of the one over the other. The very nature of intrusion in Nancy's text consists in the impossibility of deciding who—or what—the intruder is and where or when the act of intrusion begins or ends. The possibility of intrusion, of intruding and being intruded upon, defines the subject—Nancy himself, but also the Western subject more broadly—not by fixing its borders but by *exposing* the subject to the always present possibility of destabilizing the imagined properties of unified subjectivity: the integrity of the body and the unity of the self or person, that zone of intimacy where one is alone with oneself.

The figure of the intruder embodies a paradox that for Nancy is constitutive both of the act of intrusion and the interiority intruded upon. That paradox can be formulated in the following way: only as long as the intruder remains foreign can it be recognized or thought of as in some sense belonging to the interiority it intrudes upon. Conversely, only as long as interiority remains prone to the intrusion can it be experienced or thought of as interiority. These paradoxes bring us straight to the heart, Nancy's own and the one replacing it. "My own heart (as you've gathered it is entirely a matter of the 'proper,' of being one, or one's 'own') . . . my own heart in fact was worn out. . . . Thus to live, it was necessary to receive another's, an other, heart" (2). The imminence of the heart's failure, which Nancy describes as defection—an accumulation of acts and signs of betrayal that culminate in the definite abandonment of its function—foregrounds the heart's function of keeping alive the body that belongs to someone who *is* that body and that heart. As the signs of betrayal mount and the heart abandons "the silence of the organs" synonymous

with the healthy life, both its status as an organ and its belonging to a particular body come under scrutiny: “Was it mine? Was it even an organ?” (3).² The evidence of malfunction intrudes upon the subject whose life depends on the possibility of heart transplant, another intrusion into the space created, violently opened up, by the heart’s defection and the necessity of its extrusion. The sick heart’s intrusion produces a void at the center of subjectivity, hollowing the body, opening it up to more intrusions that unleash a vicious cycle of increasingly aggressive medical treatments seeking to annul the immune defense mechanisms by which the body, now constantly at odds with itself, keeps rejecting the foreign element whose function is to prolong the life of the very person who has been depersonalized, diminished, and estranged—made a stranger to himself—through the struggle for survival.

The heart transplant and the threat of the immune system’s rejection of the new organ open, both literally and metaphorically, a particular body to multiple intrusions from without (medical technology) as well as from within (immunological agents residing inside the body). Different threads of Nancy’s text circle around the space that opens there where his heart used to be. The space of the heart, which under healthy conditions is indistinguishable from the rest of the body, immersed in the silent functioning of organs, acquires a whole new status in a body that has become a battleground for opposing forces. The attempt to foreclose the possibility of the attack coming from either side—from the immune system or from the transplanted organ—only makes the counterforce more deadly, debilitating the

² The phrase “the silence of the organs” comes from Geroulanos and Meyers, 87.

body and opening it up for more interventions. As a consequence of that battle, the entire person, body and soul, becomes estranged. Nancy writes about being “deport[ed] into strangeness,” with the “chest open upon emptiness” (12). The experience of encountering the void where the heart used to be—an experience that exteriorizes the body, making it foreign to itself—is for Nancy a testimony to the open space or void that exists *at the heart* of the modern Western conception of the subject’s relation to nature, technology, and God. “Modern humanity . . . has made the wish for survival and immortality an element of a general program of ‘mastery and possession of nature’.” By altering the conditions of life and death, mortality and immortality, humanity is constantly in the process of exceeding the limits that enclose the person within the borders of the individual body and the interior realm of psyche or soul. This, for Nancy, is another way of proclaiming the death of God.

For Nancy, as for María Zambrano and a number of contemporary political theorists such as Etienne Balibar, there exists a conflict, or at least a gap, between two different meanings of the term humanity, as a totality of people or human beings inhabiting the world at a given time or as a set of properties that differentiate and define us as humans and qualify our existence as indeed human.³ In *L’Intrus* the simultaneously physical and symbolic or metaphysical opening created through the experience of the heart transplant provides an access for Nancy’s exploration of the crossing between generic human and particular, individual, dimensions of existence.

³ Without addressing human existence philosophically, Balibar contrasts systemic violence or “cruelty,” which makes life “worse than death,” and “civility,” which “aims at creating, recreating, and conserving the set of conditions within which politics as a collective participation in public affairs is possible or is not made absolutely impossible” (15). “Cruelty” and “civility” stand on either side of the limit that makes possible political existence, individual and collective.

Impossible to distinguish at the level of personal experience, these two different openings, the physical and the metaphysical—the opening of the chest and the altering of the boundaries of human life—bring to the foreground two sets of issues. On the one hand, there is the human tendency to modify, manipulate, and humanize the natural and social environment, which he calls *ecotechny* and identifies with the history of modernity. On the other, there is the growing human capacity for meddling with the conditions of life and death, which not only alters the human relationship to issues of life’s finality and finitude, but also poses the question of what life is worth preserving or, to echo the phrase that resonates painfully in our very recent collective memory, whose lives matter. By the end of his text, Nancy speaks of the self—his self—as *nothing but* a passage, gap, or opening created at the intersection between the technological modification of nature, human as well as non-human, and the person (“always identical to itself and yet that is never done altering itself [13]) who has been permanently estranged by the presence of another’s heart lodged in his hollowed chest.

Void Within

By emphasizing the existence of the spatial and temporal void that both defines the contours of human life—the contours of the “persona”—and opens that life up to history and society, Zambrano foreshadows Nancy’s description of the heart as a marker of the precarious borders of the human condition. Zambrano wrote *Persona y democracia*—published in 1958—as global geo-political borders were redrawn by the Cold War and while the effects of traumatic historical events

were still resonating deeply both in the author's life and in European history. The consequences of those events, primarily the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, were far-reaching and still unforeseeable. The political landscape emerging in the aftermath of the defeat of fascism, which was marked by the spread of democracy in Western Europe—with few exceptions including Francoist Spain—and the paradoxical situation of the world united and divided between two geopolitical blocks, announced, in Zambrano's view, the rise of a new historical reality that affected humanity as a whole. What she described as “una situación histórica tan complicada, y a la par tan simple . . . [e]s decir, tan sistemática,” a situation of the world marching ahead unified in its division, created an awareness that, more than ever, humanity as a whole was sharing the same planetary destiny (385).⁴ The interdependence between different parts of the globe was contributing to the spread of historical consciousness that “[a]hora . . . la historia la hacemos entre todos; la sufrimos todos también y todos hemos venido a ser sus protagonistas” (381).⁵ It is difficult not to note a double timbre in this sentence, an apparently simple affirmation combined with an unsettling, premonitory, even tragic tone that extends to the book as a whole. We are the protagonists suffering under the weight of history that we create. Being at the same time the authors *and* the protagonists of history, we are responsible for a creation that we do not control and that, possibly, controls or determines us.

⁴ an historical situation that is so complicated and yet so simple, that is to say, so systematic.

⁵ now, we jointly make history, we also suffer it and we have all become its protagonists.

Zambrano does not claim that what she calls the “systemic situation” of the world—i.e. the co-existence of opposing tendencies (unification and division) that operate simultaneously at different levels (particular and universal)—is a new historical phenomenon. She does claim, however, that the growing sense of human interdependence during the Cold War era created a specific kind of historical environment or atmosphere, which she calls “estado de alerta,” a state of heightened awareness that speaks to the fact that one both affects and feels affected by far-away events that one does not control. This “state of alert,” a mixture of activity and passivity, intensity and receptivity, uncertainty and readiness, is a complex response to an equally complex historical situation in which living in history means sharing our vital space with others, both close and distant. To exist humanly in history entails being open and exposed to a dynamic medium that distends and contracts in both space and time, one that brings us closer to others as it widens the distance and narrows the interval within which our actions and their effects take place.

In an early passage from *Persona y democracia*, Zambrano writes: “El hombre podría definirse . . . como el ser que alberga dentro de sí un vacío. El vacío sólo aparece en la vida humana” (419).⁶ The notion of the void or emptiness-within that characterizes and, indeed, defines human existence is a crucial one not only in this book but in Zambrano’s thought as a whole. As happens in Nancy, the void is closely associated with the figure of a guest, stranger, or even a monster, while referring more generally to the human condition in terms of the creation of an inside that is continuously exposed to the outside, either by being open to it, or invaded by it.

⁶ The human being could be defined as that being that harbors an emptiness within her/himself. The emptiness/void only appears in human life.

Zambrano understands that internal hollowness as the foundation of properly human history. The void that “sólo aparece en la vida humana” is a result of the action by which human life cleared or created the space for itself out of the domain previously occupied by other, non-human, presences and forces: forces of nature, gods, myth, or the sacred. In fact, if there is a central idea in *Persona y democracia*, it might well be that in order for human life to be livable, and for history to exist as a place of encounter and exchange between individual and society, there has to remain that hollowness that opens individual life to others and keeps it open in space and time. But given the historical context of the time—the systematic unification of the world and the proclaimed triumph of democracy—and Zambrano’s own condition as an exile, it is no surprise that *Persona y democracia* dwells precisely on those *situaciones-límite* in personal and political life, when that internal opening and a passage to the outside is blocked. For Zambrano, those “dinteles,” or thresholds, arise at moments of crisis that bring to the fore the danger of alienation.

Though Zambrano was definitely not a Marxist, she was acutely aware of economic, political, and gender inequalities. She understood alienation not primarily in relation to labor, but in relation to a more general disruption or distortion of the relationship between the individual and society. This distortion appears at different historical junctures: divinization of the sovereign in absolutism, the State’s usurpation of the social in totalitarianism, and misrepresentation of the people in populism. Alienation, in more general philosophical terms, has to do with the closing

off or suturing of that constitutive void that makes one's own life livable and that makes society and history into our second home and our first nature.

For Zambrano, the humanization of history, a process that designates the creation of time and space within which human life unfolds, begins with the gradual emancipation from the intrusive presence of gods and forces of nature that in ancient times seemed to fill the universe without leaving any room for human development. The oppressive fullness of the world in which humans were guests could be dispelled only when, with the birth of philosophy and democracy in ancient Greece, the joint forces of Reason and polis cleared the ground for the creation of a properly human space, a site of rational laws rather than uncontrollable forces. Prior to that moment, human life was overshadowed by anguish: “[l]a angustia de sentirse huésped de un lugar donde todo está sujeto a la imprevisible voluntad de los dioses que, a su vez, eran movidos por las mismas pasiones que los hombres.”⁷ (415)

Thus, the notion of the humanization of the universe rests on the creation of an opening or void (*un vacío*) that traverses the outside and the inside; an outside emancipated from the intrusive non-human presence, and an inside shaped and sheltered by the laws of nature and of the polis. For Zambrano, the paradoxical status of the human being consists of carrying inside the hollowness, that opening in space and time that makes human existence possible. In other words, by doing away with the strange and unaccountable forces of nature, gods, or the sacred, human

⁷ The anguish of feeling like guests in a place where everything is subjected to the unpredictable will of the gods who, in turn, were moved by the same passions as humans.

existence creates a space where to be human in fact means becoming a stranger, an enigma or, at best, a pending project for oneself.

The existence of something called human condition is, for Zambrano, quite a risky proposition, one full of promises, dangers, even crimes, whether already committed or likely to happen. Fascism, for instance, was one of those already committed crimes that, in its calculated drive to destruction, risked being repeated. When, in one of the passages of *Persona y democracia*, Zambrano writes about Oedipus' tragic destiny, she does so not only in order to draw parallels between history and tragedy, but also to underscore the complex nature of his crime (perhaps of any crime). In one sense, Oedipus' tragedy comes from the intertwining of discernment and blindness, exemplified by his ability to solve the Sphinx's riddle concerning generic human nature while remaining oblivious to his own singular destiny. However, Zambrano's interest in the tragic and the unspeakable nature of Oedipus' crime has to do primarily with its temporality. One might go as far as to say that she reads Oedipus' story as a parable of the temporality of crime. While pointing to the belated nature of anagnorisis—the knowledge that comes when it is too late—Oedipus' crime also sheds light on what comes before his action, namely a murderous drive that precedes the act of parricide. “[S]i Edipo no hubiera llevado en sus entrañas la posibilidad del crimen, o si la hubiera arrojado de sí, al no matar a ningún hombre, no hubiera matado tampoco a su padre” (414).⁸ It is not my purpose here to discuss the value of this reading. Instead, I wish to elucidate the connection between Zambrano's treatment of Oedipus' crime and the remarks on the

⁸ If Oedipus had not carried within himself the possibility of a crime, or if he had cast it away from himself, he would not have killed anyone, not even his father.

temporality of crime found in her unpublished manuscripts on ethics.⁹ This will, in turn, provide the basis for addressing the way in which Claire Denis weaves the motif of murder, absent from Nancy's text, into the story told in her film.

In her essay "Para una ética," Zambrano describes crime as "una suerte de precipitación en el instante como en un abismo" (3).¹⁰ Her account of crime speaks of succumbing to groundlessness, giving in to the vertigo of an action that takes place in an instant, without connection to "before" or "after." One who commits a crime abandons the shores of temporality and community and falls into the grip of a solitary action, which is not only carried out against a specific other, but also seeks to annul the participatory nature of time as being held in common. "El crimen," continues Zambrano, "es no participar, en el doble sentido de no entrar en comunidad con el prójimo—se mata por no ver sufrir, por no entrar en el tormento de otro—por no acompañar al otro en su via crucis, y también por no participar en el sentido de no dar participación de lo que nos sucede, de nuestro secreto, oscuro tormento."¹¹ Crime turns the torment of an unspoken suffering into action. But

⁹ "Fragmentos para una ética (1954-1958)" is the title of a folder, archived in M-347 at the Fundación María Zambrano, which contains several brief essays on ethical issues (life and transcendence, morality, obedience). Zambrano's thoughts on crime, quoted here, are situated in the context of her reflection on the nature of evil and on what it means to commit an evil act. It is important to bear in mind that reflections on crime appear in Zambrano's work quite often in this period (late 1950s and early 60s), often in relation to sacrifice. The previously unpublished manuscript "De nuevo el sacrificio humano", which we publish in this issue, is an example of this point. Not just crime (individual, historical, mythical) but ethics in general is crucial for Zambrano's understanding of the abandonment of sacrificial history and absolutism in the name of democracy.

¹⁰ a kind of plunging into the instant as if into an abyss.

¹¹ Crime means not participating, in a double sense of not entering into communal relationship with the other . . . , but also in the sense of not sharing [participar] what is happening to us, our secret, obscure torment.

rather than true action, Zambrano views crime as a form of the passivity entailed in succumbing to the pull of a passion.

References to crime as an unspoken, or barely spoken, drive to annihilate the other appear in Denis' film not only through images of a knife kept under the pillow or a gun buried for decades, but also in relation to secrets hidden in the protagonist's chest. Denis' and Zambrano's fascination with crime exists in tension with a radically different notion of temporality, one that concerns itself with opening. Associated with the image of dawn (aurora) in Zambrano's text, that other temporality is evoked in Denis' film by the scar on the protagonist's chest, a site where his life—a fictional parallel of Nancy's—intersects with the life/death of an other. This is how Zambrano speaks of dawn and the temporality of human life: "El alba es la hora más trágica que tiene el día, es el momento que la claridad aparece como herida que se abre en la oscuridad donde todo reposa. Es despertar y promesa que puede resultar incumplida"(399).¹² "But," she continues, "el hombre jamás está cumplido, su promesa excede en todo a su logro. . . [Es] como si el alba en lugar de avanzar se extendiese como tal alba. . .y su herida se abriese más profundamente para dejar paso a este ser no acabado de nacer todavía" (400)¹³.

Dawn is not just a beginning of the day but an opening in the curvature of the

¹² Dawn is the most tragic moment of the day; it is a moment when clarity appears as a wound opened in the darkness within which everything rests. It is an awakening and a promise that might remain unfulfilled.

¹³ the human being is never fulfilled, her/his promise always exceeds the achievements. . . . [It is] as if, rather than advancing, the dawn broadened and . . . opened itself into an even deeper wound, so as to give way to this, still not fully born, being.

horizon; an incision (wound) that ruptures the darkness of uniformity and announces the space/time of human life.

In the title essay for his book *Being Singular Plural*, Jean Luc Nancy explores the notions of singularity and multiplicity in a way that echoes Zambrano's ideas about the opening in space and time that both makes possible and is made possible by the movement of human existence. Nancy writes: "You are absolutely strange because the world begins *its turn with you*" (6). A bit further, he adds: "A 'day' is not simply a unit for counting; it is the turning of the world—each time singular" (9). The singularity—utter strangeness—arises from the multiplicity of moments in space and time that compose the turning of the world, which is not a single, uniform trajectory, but a multiplicity of turns which make us all, in turn, different. For Zambrano, to exist is to move through time and history, to participate with others in the turning of the world. It is to create a unique space in the shifting landscape of multiplicity, which is a testimony to the movement of the world through time and history: "El tiempo nos envuelve, nos pone en comunicación con todo medio y a la vez nos separa. Por medio del tiempo, y en él, nos comunicamos. Es propio del hombre viajar a través del tiempo. Cada hombre habita una zona del tiempo en la que convive propiamente con los demás. . . . Convivimos en el tiempo, dentro de él" (386)¹⁴.

In its concern with "traveling through time" as a property of personal and collective human life, Zambrano's philosophy brings us closer to Claire Denis' film,

¹⁴ Time envelops us, it puts us into communication with every medium and at the same time separates us. Through time, and in it, we communicate. It is proper to humans to travel through time. Every human inhabits a zone of time in which he or she lives together with others. . . . We live together in time, within it.

an adaption of Nancy's story. There, the story of a heart transplant—an individual's voyage between life and death, driven by the desire to survive—is situated in a global yet personal context of the world's turning, as the protagonist travels from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere, from France and Switzerland to Korea and Polynesia, in search of a new heart. In the interview that accompanies the DVD of *The Intruder*, Denis offers the following observation about her approach to Nancy's text: "I thought to myself that the film should express that the Earth is round." Zambrano's book and Denis' film trace the curvature of the movement or travel through time in which the singularity of the person, its relation to others, becomes haunted by the possibility of crime, whether individual (murder to extract someone's heart) or historical (fascism in Zambrano, the iniquities of globalization in Denis).

Intrusion and Spacing of the Hearts

Louis Trebor, the protagonist of Denis' film, abandons the lush scenery of the French Alps on a voyage that takes him first to South Korea, where he undergoes an illegal heart transplant, and then Polynesia, where, as a young sailor, he fathered a son. Trebor's feelings for this estranged son contrast with his indifference toward his other, French son Sydney, the latter himself a father of two infant boys who lives in a village close to the French-Swiss border. The purpose of Trebor's voyage around the globe is to procure a new heart and bestow his wealth on the beloved son who, like young Trebor, is a sailor. This search for a new heart leads to crime, not only the illegal organ trafficking, but also the unspeakable crime that awaits the

protagonist in his post-transplant future when, after several unsuccessful attempts to reconnect with the estranged son, he is summoned to a Polynesian morgue to identify Sydney's body, the scar from a heart-surgery still fresh in his son's chest.

As the protagonist's decision to replace his worn-out heart with that of a young male sets into motion a series of secret, illegal actions aimed at procuring a compatible heart, the film as a whole shifts its attention to movement. This is not just a question of physical movement between different continents, places of transit (hotels, hospital rooms, ports), and types of dwelling (mountain cabin, beach hut), but also a movement between different places in time: the time of Earth's turning measured in days, seasons, and climates and the protagonist's own life-time, with his past stretching over different countries and languages and his future prolonged, stretched out thanks to the new heart. To underscore the secrecy and suspicion of wrongdoing that characterize the protagonist's life graspable only in fragments and traces, Denis' film makes repeated narrative and visual references to traces—traces of identity in the form of burned letters and multiple passports, traces of blood, footprints in the snow. She even rescues footage from an unfinished film called *Reflux*, which shows a young Michel Subor, the actor playing Louis Trebor, shot in Polynesia in 1962. Quite literally digging out of the shadows the traces of the career of the French actor of Russian origin whom she brought back to the public eye in her 1999 film *Beau Travail*, Denis pieces together the story of the protagonist, an elderly French man, in all probability of Russian origin, who also hides in the shadows of the past that haunts him in his dreams and that flickers on the screen in the black and white shots from *Reflux*. Not in vain did Denis, speaking of the importance of

casting Michel Subor as the film's protagonist, point out: "He is not a character in *The Intruder*. He is the intruder."¹⁵

In an interview, Claire Denis referred to her strong physical response to the reading of Nancy's text. That response, she claims, was due to the fact that she had never before felt her heart in quite the same way. Becoming aware of her heart went hand in hand with the physical or quasi physical sensation of feeling "for the first time that the heart was set in the cage of the ribs." Not only did the heart announce its presence, but that presence had a spatial dimension, the sense of it being set in a specific place, surrounded and enclosed by the cavity of the chest. We can say that the reading of *L'Intrus* had for Denis an effect analogous to the one Nancy experienced in the aftermath of his heart failure. First, there are signs of the illness that serve as an announcement, unsettling the mute presence of the organ in the natural setting of the body. At the same time that it announces its presence, breaking its silence, the heart is also withdrawing, threatening to abdicate its function. (Denis argues that while shooting certain sections of the film she also experienced the proximity of death.) Second, becoming aware of the heart not only leads to discovering the chest as a place where it is found. By announcing itself, the heart also actively hollows, opens the chest, from within as well as from without; it creates the idea of the opening of the cave in which it is set and evokes the container of the rib cage that holds it in.

¹⁵ "Il n'est pas le personnage de *L'Intrus*, il est l'intrus." Qtd in Jacques Mandelbaum, "Michel Subor, 'Petit Soldat' pour Godard, n'a jamais pu se résoudre au mercenariat," *Le Monde*, Mar. 5, 2005. Web.

A crucial element in Denis' cinematographic rendering of Nancy's text lies in her narrative and intensely visual reinterpretation of the dual sensation—presence-absence, announcement-withdrawal—of the heart that surfaced in her reading of the text. In the same interview, Denis points out that choosing a heartless man as the film's main character was her way of accounting for the experience of becoming aware of the lack of sensation of having a heart. Instead of a heart announcing its withdrawal from a man (Nancy) or a woman (Denis), in the film we have a heartless man who goes in search of, or on a hunt for, his heart or hearts. In the course of this search—for a young, new heart to replace his worn out one, and for the beloved Polynesian son on whom he wishes to bestow the wealth and feelings denied to the unloved, European one—the protagonist undergoes many changes, internal and external. He gets a new heart, changes places, continents, and homes, only to initiate a return to where he started, with his heart again becoming ill, irreparably torn and divided, lacking wholeness.

Denis' response to the sensation that Nancy's text awoke in her consists in exposing both the viewer and the protagonist to the sense of dislocation generated by the latter's gliding movement through space and time: his venturing forward to Korea and Polynesia that is also a return to the past, and his sail back to Europe that seems more like a post-mortem journey of no return. Conceptually and visually, the film locates itself in the place of the void, the chest/heart of a heartless man who circles the earth (North-South, East-West) in the attempt to reconstruct and repair his heart and his life and who leaves behind bloody traces of crime and murder.

Aside from a premeditated crime, which is a result of a secret operation aimed at procuring a new heart for the ailing man, there is another crime carried out under a double veil of secrecy. That other crime, which can be seen as an inversion of the act of purchasing a heart that belongs to an unknown young man, takes place unbeknownst to the protagonist, although it is still carried out in Louis Trebor's name by the same Eastern European mafia engaged in the illegal organ trade. The secrecy that shrouds the crime—or, vice versa, the crime that preserves the secret—is dispelled close to the end of the film when the body of Trebor's French son appears in a Polynesian morgue as it is being literally and figuratively unveiled through a slow and painful lifting of the white cloth covering the body: feet first, then the torso with a barely sutured wound, and, finally, the face.

The cold-blooded act of purchasing a young heart returns to haunt Trebor, an autophagous father whose new life is driven by a heart that likely belongs to his own son, the unloved one. An unsent, half-burnt letter to the beloved Polynesian son, which Trebor's French son discovers in his father's home, speaks of a broken heart that is split, not only between two sons but also between the force of time that weighs over it and the yearning that propels its movement and guides its search: "Every lost day that we spent apart weighs on my heart as an entire year. You'll see, I'll make it up to you. . . . Don't push me away. I am on my way." The letter that never reaches its destination, unless its destination was to reach the son who was not destined to receive it, speaks of the father's sorrow. His desire for re-encounter with his far-away son drives Trebor forward—which also means back—in time and space. That winding movement through time and space follows the trajectory of the

(father's) heart that yearns to be given, but only after another heart has been taken away by a murderous knife, and yet another consumed by the fire of unrequited fatherly love. The meandering and never fully explained movement of Denis' protagonist between his two sons and the two hemispheres constructs a web of relationships that strings one male heart to another in a chain of love and rejection, a murderous urge to prolong one's life at the expense of someone else's and a desire to live on through—or, quite literally, *in*--the other.

It is far from accidental that the Polynesian islands would be the penultimate stage in the film's movement through different spaces and sites that connect and separate this archipelago of male hearts.¹⁶ Hearts that are sick and dislodged; hearts that change chests and beat for the other because they are moved by love, driven by the desire for sacrifice, or selected as victims of crimes, whether crimes of love or infringements of law. (The latter is the case with the immigrants smuggled across the border and furtively observed, even preyed upon, by Trebor, a man who hides in the shadows of his untraceable past, his untraceable heart[s]). It is the violence of spacing, of opening and intrusion into the space created by the hazardous movement *of* and *between* hearts, that drives Denis' camera on its non-linear voyage through spaces and times interwoven in the film's narrative. The force of spacing pulls apart and connects different temporalities and sites, related not only at the

¹⁶ I say "penultimate" because the last time we see the ailing Trebor he is on a ship with his two sons—the dead one and a young man who takes it upon himself to play the role of a son—presumably traveling to Europe, which he may or may not reach. The film, however, does reach the Northern Hemisphere, ending with a sequence of the dog-breeder's (Beatrice Dalle character) frenzied sled-ride through a pristine snow. Jean Luc Nancy aptly described this last scene as an enigmatic sequence in which the movie's secret "is carried off, along with the whole film, by the most secret one of all, the woman who trusts in nothing but the furious running of her dogs" (2014, 159).

narrative level but also by film's continuous references to physical movement in its own momentum, directionality, and rhythm.¹⁷

In an essay that reflects on the primacy of editing and shot composition over narrative in Denis' cinematography, Saad Chakali views *The Intruder's* Polynesian setting as a literal manifestation of "the power of [Denis'] oceanic montage of takes in an archipelago." In his reading of the film's final scene—that of the dog-sled driven by a dog breeder (Beatrice Dalle) as it cuts through the pristine snow—Jean Luc Nancy suggests that, at its end, the film "speeds ahead toward other strangeness, toward other possible intrusions; it speeds ahead, . . . the undecidability of pathways and passages resounding in the driver's manic laughter, which also betrays the jubilation of a director who has thrown her film *a grandes guides* toward the depths of her own strangeness" (158). Building on Chakali's analysis of oceanic islands as setting and trope and Nancy's reading of the final scene that, rather than closing it, opens the film up to its own strangeness, I would like to reflect on another form of movement that gains prominence in Denis' account of Trebor's post-transplant life. That other movement has to do with gravity and weighing down, the forces that act on Trebor as he is moving along the curvature of the Earth and beginning to experience the pull of illness, climate, and the crime committed in his name.

¹⁷ In his conversation with Claire Denis at European Graduate School, Jean Luc Nancy has spoken about the crucial role that spacing—opening and going through the space—plays in Denis' interpretation and expansion of his text ("Claire Denis and Jean-Luc Nancy. L'Intrus. *The Intruder* 2007," *You Tube*, online video clip, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoTGowlhABk&list=PLAF14597649B3C9D7>>, accessed Feb. 18, 2015).

First in Korea and then in Polynesia, the film's emphasis turns to visual and narrative elements that hang over the protagonist, weighing on him symbolically or physically like the mattress he carries on his head in one scene. The first shot following his operation is an image of cranes seen from a hotel window in South Korea through a double curtain of transparent white cloth and falling snow. From the moment we see Trebor prostrate on a bed, barely containing cries of pain while a blind Korean masseuse is touching his freshly scarred chest—a scar, like the crane, evokes a cross—to his endless wait for his son in a hut on a solitary island, the protagonist is enveloped, encircled, and oppressed by things weighing over him: the suffocating climate, the dead time of the wait, symptoms of the transplanted organ's rejection, and, finally, the discovery of his French son's corpse. The connection established in the film between climate, the bed as a refuge in a precariously built hut, and the downward pull of illness evokes the etymological proximity of a family of words deriving from the Greek noun *clino* (incline, slope, decline). Not only *clima* (climate), but also *clini* (bed), *clisi* (inclination, slope) and *clinici* (clinic) share the same root.¹⁸ This family of words associated with movement up and down a slope or with a reclined position on the surface of a bed contains a linguistic trace of the film's treatment of Trebor's movement. His passage between patches of land (continents and islands) becomes embodied in his sons, the plural "sons" pointing to the uncertainty of the actual number. Is it one (the beloved one), two or—given that toward the end of the film a young Polynesian man charitably agrees to act as stand-

¹⁸ "Etymology of Climate," *English Words of (Unexpected) Greek Origin*, Jan. 31, 2009, <<https://ewonago.wordpress.com/2009/01/31/etymology-of-climate/>>, accessed February 18, 2015.

in for the missing son—three? In any case, there is not a single son whom Trebor can indeed call his, just as there is no land, no bed in which the film affords the protagonist a rest. As Wim Staat points out, Denis “makes Louis suffer the burden of not dying” (204). Not even a final rest is possible for Trebor, be it death or an arrival that would not carry with it a remembrance or a foreshadowing of another departure, another intrusion.

Toward the end of the movie, Trebor leaves Polynesia on a ship with the coffin bearing the body of his French son. We see the coffin hoisted up by a forklift truck and then lowered into the cargo. The ship is a metallic tomb for the son and a bed for the father who is last seen lying on deck, attended to by Toni, a young surfer who agrees to care for the sick man out of the goodness of his heart. The architecture of the ship-bed-tomb carries the three men, each of whom is occupying the place of another in an abysmal series of substitutions: the father transporting the corpse of the son whose heart is buried in his own chest; the surrogate son who is the only person willingly occupying the role of a substitute; and the dead French son who is a multiple substitute. Not only is he a shadow-son, the one who keeps vacant the place in the father’s heart that belongs to the beloved son, but he also donates his heart to replace the father’s, taking to an extreme and reversing the Christian sacrifice whereby God the Father gives up his son to cleanse the sins of humanity.

Zambrano and Denis: Returns of Sacrifice

The notion of sacrifice figures prominently in *Persona y democracia*, particularly in the section “Humanización de la sociedad,” where Zambrano relates the process of humanization of society to the abolishing of sacrifice and the free development of the person. What she calls the “sacrifice of the person” is, for Zambrano, a paradoxical notion that points not only to the return of sacrifice in contemporary society but also to its distortion or “inversion.” Zambrano’s approach in this section represents a mixture of reflection on past—so called “archaic”—forms of society (up to the Greek polis) and an anticipatory, perhaps even prophetic, idea of the fully human, that is, *democratic* society as something that belongs in the future and that will (or may) come to be. Zambrano’s argumentation slides between different times (past, present, and future), between hope and melancholy. The temporality of her thought here parallels the way in which Denis’ film treats different dimensions of time and the protagonist’s sliding movement through space. The film’s movement between different times, spaces, and states (such as from dream to waking) underscores and preserves the mystery. Who is Louis Trebor? Whose heart has been extracted to fill his chest? Was this extraction a result of the son sacrificing himself for the father or was it a cold-blooded murder?

The mystery at the center of Denis’ film, in my view, plays a role analogous to the one that the notion of the sacred—to which the qualities of mystery and darkness also belong—has for Zambrano’s analysis of the humanization of society. In other words, both the philosopher and the filmmaker are concerned with openness and unveiling: clearing the space in which the human being can exist (Zambrano) and mapping the protagonist’s internal world onto the exterior, where

he is confronted by the palpable forces of time, illness, and climate (Denis). In both cases, however, openness depends on preserving the sense of something that remains unrevealed, an unexplained mystery, that is, one might argue, related to the sacred and to sacrifice.

Zambrano's account of the sacrificial component of history is influenced by the Christian strand in her thought, which is embedded in her conception of the different stages in the process of the "humanization of society." Initially, the human position in the universe depended on the relationship with the mysterious and unaccountable forces of the sacred. Through the transformation of the sacred into the divine—the next stage in the process of humanization—human beings acquire some degree of independence with respect to the gods, who preserve the power to meddle in human affairs but are unable to reach into the depths of human suffering. The gods, as Zambrano puts it, remain "dancing over the abyss" that human suffering opens under their feet.

The foundation of the Greek polis and, later, the advent of Christianity advance the process of humanization into the political realm and the human relationship with the divine. The Greek polis inaugurates a true novelty with respect to societies where humans lived in constant exposure to gods and forces of the sacred from which only the bonds of community, ritual and faith sheltered them. The humanization of society associated with the foundation of the polis—space where free men deliberate on their affairs, keeping gods at bay—had its religious counterpoint in the process of God becoming human, which Nietzsche, with more than a hint of irony, called "the stroke of genius" on the part of Christianity (qtd. in

Keenan, 12). For Zambrano, who in this respect follows an established line of thought about Christianity, the apparition of a “true God” who, rather than asking for human sacrifice, himself descends, should have brought an end to the need for sacrifice that plagues human history (465). This conception of Christianity as a religion that brings sacrifice to an end has been critically addressed in many recent debates on sacrifice (including Jean Luc Nancy’s seminal essay “The Unsacrificeable”), and it undoubtedly speaks to the Christian slant in Zambrano’s thought.

In fact, Zambrano’s views on the sacrifices of Socrates and Christ could be seen as examples of the ambiguous, as well as self-avowedly *Western*, attitude towards sacrifice, whose logic Nancy’s essay exposes and critiques. What, in Nancy’s view, unifies a variety of Western approaches to sacrifice—from Saint Paul, and Saint Augustin, to Pascal, Hegel and Bataille—is, first of all, an affirmation of difference that divides Western sacrifice, exemplified by the deaths of Socrates or Christ, from the “old,” pre- or non-Western forms. (Undoubtedly, the Polynesian setting of Denis’s film foregrounds the issue of the relationship between Western and non-Western cultural models.) The idea behind that presumed difference is that, while “old,” ritualized forms of sacrifice depend on a fixed economy of exchange between a divinity who asks for sacrifice and humans that give it, the Western sacrifice is an instance of a subject willfully sacrificing her/himself. To the extent that it is fully willed and chosen, the sacrifice of the subject surpasses or annuls—in Hegelian terms, sublates— sacrifice through the very act of engaging in it. For Nancy, Western ideas about spiritualization and overcoming of sacrifice can

barely hide an underlying fascination with horror and (self)annihilation whose full expression is the Holocaust.

In her account of the death of Socrates, Zambrano engages with the same rhetoric of the overcoming of sacrifice that Nancy criticizes. Zambrano argues that the death of Socrates represents a new kind of sacrifice, which an individual — Socrates—famously commits when he decides that death is preferable to being ostracized, that it is better to die than live without the benefits of citizenship and the practice of philosophy. Here her text establishes a telling parallelism between the new, more personal and deliberate form of sacrifice exemplified by the death of Socrates and the biblical rejection of old ritualized offerings. She writes: "If in a passage of the Bible Jehova says: 'I want mercy and not sacrifices', the polis could have said to its citizens: 'my existence depends on your being human' ["ser hombres"]" (458). Jehova's rejection of archaic and presumably inauthentic religious practices and the polis' invitation to its members to practice and cultivate their human qualities in the openness of the political sphere both appeal to the authenticity that comes from the inner realm of the subject.

In contrast to the ancient conception of sacrifice based on the dictum "do ut des"—God gives because humans give offerings to God—the sacrifice of Socrates affirms a bond between the individual and the polis, which is essential for a self-definition of the subject. Unlike the space humans receive from the gods in exchange for relinquishing something valuable, the space of the polis is constituted through being shared with others, with fellow citizens. To the extent to which Socrates cannot relinquish his belonging to the polis without giving up what makes

life livable, his sacrifice is an affirmation of what cannot be sacrificed: existing in common as members of the polis. In that sense, Socrates' decision to give his life to and for the polis preserves what exists in excess of sacrifice: the link between polis and person, which cannot be taken away. It is precisely this notion of the sacrifice of the subject as an act by which the subject re-appropriates itself in the very act of death, that Nancy finds problematic.

For Zambrano, however, a production of excess that goes beyond the mere act of exchange is not just a feature of the human subject, but of all life, be it plant, animal, or human. That excess is, paradoxically, related to life's fragility, the need to breathe and eat, which ties everything living to its environment, its medium. Some of the most poetic passages of Zambrano's text speak of the fragility and excess that constitute life, both each individual life and life as a whole, the continuous process of living and dying in the course of which all that lives roots itself in the medium and spreads itself in time. Precisely at the point where she discusses the excess and fragility of life, its dependence on the medium which it consumes and alters, Zambrano's words register a certain ambiguity regarding sacrifice:

“Todo lo que vive,” she writes, “está bajo el sino—la fatalidad—de tener que apropiarse y destruir, para vivir, simplemente. Y de otra parte, la vida es exceso en que se sobrepasa lo destruido y consumido. (...) La vida sobrepasa ya desde su más humilde inicio el haber. Quiero decir que es siempre trascendencia (...) Y eso nos permite la consideración de que aquellos elementos destruidos por la vida no sean solamente aniquilados, sino en

cierto modo, redimidos, pues entran en un 'sistema superior'. Son consumidos al modo como los leños en la hoguera, o la cera en la candela, asociados en su propia destrucción a la llama" [insert quote from Spanish original—block quote] (460)¹⁹

How can one fail to notice that at the very same time she is paying tribute to the excess by which life surpasses its inevitable tendency toward destruction, Zambrano employs the language of sacrifice? The crackling wood, the melting wax is transformed and consumed by the flame that, in Zambrano's passage, does not go up in smoke, insofar as the image of "going up in smoke" ominously evokes, for us and for Zambrano, the word and the event of the "Holocaust." While keeping at bay the image of rising smoke, the reference to flame in her text does point to another upward movement, the elevation or integration of what has been consumed into a "higher system" of life to which everything that engages in the task of living contributes.

I would argue, however, that while employing the language of sacrifice, Zambrano thinks in terms of resistance and opposition to an understanding of history based on sacrifice. This becomes clear when, rather than treating participation in the "higher system" as a process by which singular entities

¹⁹ Everything that lives exists under the imperative—fatality—of having to appropriate and destroy simply in order to live. And, on the other hand, life is an excess that surpasses what has been destroyed and consumed. From its humble beginnings, life surpasses its assets. What I mean is that it is always transcendence. . . . And that allows us to argue that what has been destroyed by life was not simply annihilated, but in some sense redeemed, since it forms part of a "higher system." It has been consumed in a way logs are by fire or wax by a candle, contributing with their own destruction to the flame.

disappear into the general flow of life, which consumes them without remainder, Zambrano shifts her attention toward the way in which all living things create what she describes as the space of difference.²⁰ She writes: "Allí donde aparece la vida, aparece lo uno y lo otro" (461).²¹ This space of difference and deferral (akin to Derrida's "*différance*") is crucial for Zambrano's understanding of history and the notion of the person. Person introduces another layer of difference in the spatial and temporal unfolding of human life. Of all living things, claims Zambrano, humans are the only ones able to create what she calls "síncope," a break or interval in the space/time shared with others, in order to withdraw ("adentrarse") into the time-space where they are alone with themselves. It is worth noting here that the Spanish word "adentrarse" evokes both entering and withdrawal. Zambrano's "syncope" does not imply an abandonment of the time and space of history, but instead creates what we might describe as an exit into the interior, or an entrance that opens a new dimension within the openness where we live with others, in society.

The notion of syncope as something that only a person can create breaks the binary between inside and outside. The space of being alone with oneself is an inside found at the outside of the roles we play in society, as well as an outside necessary for the existence of the inside, the realm of solitude and intimacy into which we withdraw so as not to be thoroughly absorbed by the social.

This is where the notion of the sacrifice of the person comes in. For Zambrano, the "old" phenomenon of sacrifice returns in our times under a "new"

²⁰ Zambrano's resistance to subsuming the singularity of living entities into a general law of life is also evident in her reservations regarding the theory of evolution.

²¹ Where life appears, there appears one and the other. A form of unity that creates otherness.

guise, whereby in defense of the interests of the State or ideology, the value of the person is denied while being indirectly affirmed.²² In arguing that the sacrifice of the person is an "inverted sacrifice," Zambrano points to two things. First, that a unique and singular person must not be sacrificed, in the sense of subsumed into a totalizing community of the state, a pure race, or a homogenous nation. A person can, however, chose to sacrifice her or himself.²³ Second, attempts to sacrifice a person on the part of the State or in the cause of ideology represent a perverse and theatrical return of sacrificial practice that has lost its meaning in our times.

Describing a process reminiscent of Stalinist trials, Zambrano argues that in contemporary forms of sacrifice a person is made to wear the mask of culpability, admitting to a transgression attributed to someone who, in truth, does not exist. In making a concrete person into a perpetrator of a non-existing crime, the inverted sacrifice replaces anagnorisis with punishment. It is, says Zambrano, as if an actor playing Oedipus were forced to tear his eyes out on the stage for a crime he did not commit.

The question of "who dies," which haunts Denis's film, is also a crucial one in Zambrano's discussion of sacrifice, although in a different way. Those who die, either in the plot of *The Intruder* (Trebor's French son) or in one of its unsolved mysteries (an illegal immigrant, vagabond girl), always die for another (the son for

²² The quotation marks here serve as a reminder of a point Jill Robbins makes regarding sacrifice, which is that even in Biblical times (the Book of Leviticus) sacrifice referred to "old" practices whose meaning was partially lost and obscured.

²³ Regarding the chosen sacrifice, it is important to distinguish that notion from "el sacrificio buscado," which implies an active yearning or search for self-sacrifice that, for Zambrano, is inauthentic. A sacrifice can be chosen in the sense in which Socrates chose his, but it should not be actively sought.

the father, the young man for the sick man) or in another's place (the unloved son occupying the place of the abandoned beloved son). The sacrificial logic in Denis's film, its infinite economy of substitution depends on an open chain of intrusions. What strings together characters, events, times and places is nothing but series of intrusions, violent appropriations and dispossessions colonization–predatory capitalism, migration—which exist at the heart of Western history. In Zambrano, the question of "who dies" loses its meaning, as a real person is made to suffer and perish under the weight of a spurious one. The relationship between the victim, who gives life, and the executioner who takes it is the only remainder of the sacrificial practice, now emptied of all mystery and all meaning, whether human or divine. For the Spanish thinker, as for Denis, the sacrificial nature of Western history is the obscure ground of the story they can't stop telling.

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