

# The Other's Intrusion: Claire Denis' *L'intrus*

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Picture an elderly white man in a Polynesian beach cabin. The movie camera registers palm trees, clear blue water, and sandy beaches. These seem the conditions of luxurious retirement. In this film, however, exotic surroundings do not provide the protagonist with the comforts of a tourist resort. In fact, the man would likely consider himself less a tourist than a traveler. His wanderings are purposeful; the stakes are high. He may consider himself a soul searcher, attempting to migrate from the familiarity of his home toward a landscape in which a new identity can be imagined. He may want to invest in dreams of a new life. But there will be no payoff. Picture no romantic reward. He will be shown destitute, unable to author his own life. His dreams will be nightmares, his imagined migrations haunted by sleeplessness. In the real places of his travels, our protagonist will be confined to his bed. Is this a migratory setting? This essay will argue that the bed is indeed a real place of imaginative migration. I claim that the imagined identity of the protagonist is real and inescapable for him. Yet, the protagonist will not be the originating subject of his own imaginings.

*L'intrus* is a 2004 film by French director Claire Denis.<sup>1</sup> *L'intrus* is also a small book by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, published in 2000. The book was the inspiration for the film, and was credited as such in the end titles. In interviews and Q and A sessions after screenings, Denis has avoided going into much detail about how close (or not) the film is to the book. I focus on the film; yet, I will also read some of Nancy's passages closely. My reading of Nancy's text, however, serves the purpose of coming to grips with the aesthetics of the film. In any case, both film and book are about an older man who suffers from a heart condition serious enough to necessitate a heart transplant: *l'intrus* [*the intruder*]. The new heart warrants a second lease on life, yet causes problems of its own. The book is more elaborate concerning the

medication required to undermine the powers of the body's immune system, otherwise able to reject the new heart. In the film, the probability of corporeal rejection enters into the plot fairly late. Moreover, the film does not address the cancer that is caused by the incapacitation of the immune system.

Both film and book, however, explore the metaphorical qualities of the heart transplant that intrudes upon what once was one and whole. The intruder is personified and made into a foreigner, although the film is more explicit at times in making the intruder a migrant, who crosses borders. Occasionally, in the darkness of the mountain landscape, people with suitcases cross the protagonist's path. Gradually, though, it will be the protagonist himself for whom the heart transplant will imply a change of identity, making *him* the stranger in this film. Even though the book is often philosophically more abstract in comparison with the particularity of *this* specific actor in *these* specific settings, as required by the film medium, in one sense the book is more factual and personal than the film: the book is about the heart transplant that the author Jean-Luc Nancy endured nearly ten years before writing about it. The film, on the other hand, is a work of fiction, and Denis has never made it a secret that she is less interested in the philosophical implications of a heart transplant than in the narrative possibilities that Nancy's book has to offer.<sup>2</sup> But, then again, Nancy's text is not a philosophical treatise either; it is a personal, sometimes poetic account of suffering.

### **Real Dreams**

Even before the first titles, Denis' film begins with a warning by Yekaterina Golubeva's character: "your worst enemies are hidden inside, in the shadow, in your heart." This voice-over seems addressed to the film's protagonist, Louis Trebor (Michel Subor), a man in his sixties who undergoes a heart transplant. Denis does not ease any process of viewer identification with the main character; remarkably, Trebor is presented as a somewhat unsympathetic loner. Moreover, Louis' motivations are seldom articulated. The viewer is often at a loss in the attempt to construct a story out of the plot. Many questions remain unanswered, the significance of many scenes ambiguous. What is clear, is that Louis lives in a mountainous area of France, close to the Swiss border, and that he appears to be a man of nature, hiking and biking the hills, often accompanied by his two white huskies. Heart problems become apparent during a mountain lake swim. Recuperating on the lakeshore, Louis learns that he is being watched, a recurring theme throughout the film. Louis is estranged from his son Sidney (Grégoire Colin), who lives in a nearby town with his wife and two small children. Louis' lover, the town's pharmacist, pays him an occasional visit. Louis' neighbor, quite a distance away from his mountain house, is a dog breeder (Béatrice Dalle). For the depiction of Louis' home, the film is set in the French-Swiss Jura border region. Away from home, settings include Geneva, Pusan (Korea), and Polynesia.

Golubeva's character is one of two particularly elusive characters in the film, the other being 'la sauvageonne' ['the wilderness child'; also, 'natural stock plant or tree used as a base for grafting'], played by Lolita Chammah. Golubeva is 'the young Russian woman,' who functions as an intermediary between Louis and a group of illegal Eastern European organ suppliers. When Louis pays her off in a Genevan hotel room, he tells her that he wants a young male heart. Their dialogue is brief and to the point; nevertheless, it is the most extensive conversation the two will have, even though the young Russian woman is the only character, besides Louis, who is present in all settings of the film.

Other than in the Genevan hotel room, she is a haunting omnipresence for Louis, a harrowing angel of doom visiting him in his dreams and wanderings. She is often present as a silent observer of Louis' actions, as in the scene that lets the viewer know Louis' name. On the street, so-called 'nature man' Louis is spotted by who appear to be his son and his son's wife. The couple is in the company of their two small children, Louis' grandchildren. He pays casual attention to the baby and asks, apparently just to make conversation: "and this, this is a girl?" The baby's mother informs Louis that this baby actually is a boy and was, in fact, named after him: Louis. Louis' embarrassment is shown in point-of-view shots from the perspective of Golubeva's character in a side-street bar.

Through her, it is as though we are spying on him; and with her, we find out about the character traits Louis has to pay for later in the film. In these early scenes, then, before introducing us to the dubious affairs surrounding the transplant, Denis does not allow us to sympathize with Louis. She avoids presenting him as a convivial family man, and ensures that we observe his behavior more than empathize with his feelings. In Denis' own words: "Really, I think Trebor is not a pleasant guy and this is important, not to feel compassion for him" (Denis in Smith, unpaginated).

Louis Trebor is a character we recognize by observing his demeanor. And yet, we appear to have access to his innermost feelings. The film has been characterized as being told in a dreamlike fashion,<sup>3</sup> and Denis explains that she "wanted each image to convey a sense that it was generated by [Louis'] mind" (Smith, unpaginated). We, as viewers, do not live through what Louis experiences by identifying ourselves with him; rather, precisely by keeping our observer's point of view, we penetrate his thoughts and dreams.<sup>4</sup>

Two dream sequences stand out. The young Russian woman is present in both. What we could provisionally call the second dream sequence, roughly forty-six minutes into the film, is inserted between the payoff hotel in Geneva and another hotel room, likely situated in Pusan. Louis' wake-up bed is located in a different hotel, on a different continent, which means that the screen time of the dream sequences hides a time jump in the story. Moreover, when Louis wakes up, he has a different heart. What we do not actually see, therefore, is Louis actively traveling to Asia, and

preparing himself to receive his new heart. Nor do we see the surgeon actually performing the transplantation.

Remarkably, the last activity shown before Louis wakes up in Pusan, is what he does before going back to his hotel in Geneva: the purchase of an expensive timepiece from a white-gloved jeweler. The newly acquired watch, however, is not shown to measure accurately the time it requires to undergo the 'change of heart.' What time does it take to go to sleep in Geneva and wake up in Pusan? What time does it take to have a dream in-between? Concretely, a heart-change operation has a specific duration; a change of heart as indicative of a change of mind or, more to the point, a change of identity, cannot be measured in the same way.

The dream sequence: a body in a snow-covered landscape is dragged through snow and ice by two fierce horsemen, strapped with ropes to its ankles, dangerously close to being ripped apart by the galloping horses. One can recognize the foothills in the French-Swiss Jura border region, but no building, no marker in the landscape confirms this identification. Instead, the sound of galloping horses before we can see them, the editing, the indistinct landscape, the postponement of showing that the horses actually are dragging something, all conspire to cause a loss of orientation. Recognition, eventually, comes from a familiar face. One of the horsemen proves to be the young Russian woman, Golubeva. She dismounts and checks the dragged body, releasing the ankles. Only then we recognize the body: it is Louis. "I've already paid," he says in Russian, to which the Golubeva character responds: "you can never pay enough."

This dream sequence actually is the second one in the film. It entails an overstimulation of the senses: blinding light, disorienting sounds, and sensorial overload. It comprises an intense metaphorical portrayal of the experience of intrusion that is inherent in a surgical operation. Nancy describes it as *béance*: "It is not that they opened me wide [*béant*] in order to change my heart. It is rather that this gaping open [*béance*] cannot be closed ... I am closed open. There is in fact an opening through which passes a stream of unremitting strangeness" (Nancy 10).<sup>5</sup> Entering the twilight realm of the donor trade apparently results in corporeal payback. We do not see Louis being opened wide by surgical instruments; the scene in the film marks, but does not show the time involved in the surgical operation. Only after this sequence, Louis is scarred on his chest. Hence, corresponding to Nancy's quoted description of being closed open, the film does not show the operation itself; it shows Louis' *béance*, his personal vulnerability to the stranger's intrusion.

This sequence has in common with the first dream sequence that we are not entirely certain about Louis being asleep when having the dream. Could he be dreaming while being awake? Is, perhaps, the camera penetrating the realm of Louis' mindscapes and establishing for us what Louis is facing? In the first dream sequence (twenty-two minutes into the film), Louis is presented to us as markedly awake. At home in his mountain cabin, Louis gets out of the bed at night to take his medication.

Louis' dogs are uneasy. Louis' lover, left behind in bed, also wakes up. Something or someone has disturbed the peace: a young woman, *la sauvageonne*, the wild one, recognizable as the woman whom Louis observed through his binoculars during the afternoon. Is she an intruder now, trespassing into Louis' home?

A brief sequence of tightly edited shots, mostly low-key, blue-lit close-ups, lasting only eight seconds in total, cues us toward believing that we have just witnessed Louis violently stabbing and killing *la sauvageonne*. Among the close ups are a light-reflecting blade, only a few frames long, and a longer extreme close-up of a bewildered Louis staring frantically into the lens. Our suspicions are confirmed by a longer sequence after we have seen a few shots of the Golubeva character watching Louis from outside his home. Next we see Louis cleaning his bloody hands and knife. Only after this cleansing Louis returns to bed, to go to sleep beside his lover. As in a Kuleshov montage experiment, we wonder: is there an expression on the lover's face; is she stupefied?<sup>6</sup> Was this a dream, or did it really happen?

It has been suggested that Jean-Luc Nancy's new heart belonged to a young woman. Nancy ponders the possibility briefly (8, 12) and, in a footnote, refers to Sylvie Blocher's drawing "Jean-Luc with a Woman's Heart." In the film, Louis explicitly wishes to exclude the possibility of a woman's heart, but this is *after* the nightmarish murder scene. Hence, Louis' demand appears to be the denial of what may, in fact, be a real possibility: a young woman, *la sauvageonne*, may have died for Louis to live. Even before the actual surgery, presumably in Asia, the graft donor seems present in Louis' dreams. The forewarning in the second dream that Louis will never have paid enough may well refer to Louis' experience of taking the life of the young woman, his implication in the inescapability of her death. The young woman intruding into the familiarity of Louis' home, getting killed by him, would then be a necessary aspect of his acknowledgment that, without her heart, he would have died. The burial scene that follows, in which a priest announces a second death in fire and sulfuric vapors for the unfaithful, liars, and murderers, seems directed at Louis. He will receive what is coming to him, even though there was no alternative for what he has done.

Louis has failed to comply with the norms of moral correctness, which prescribe, as Nancy writes, "that one receives the stranger by effacing his strangeness at the threshold" (2). Nancy is interested here in the paradoxical effect of welcoming the stranger, for Louis *la sauvageonne*. If he were to have welcomed the stranger into the intimacy of his home, *la sauvageonne* would have ceased being a stranger. Once she crossed the threshold, she would have lost her strangeness and become a guest, not a stranger. Later in the film, though not necessarily later in the story, we see *la sauvageonne* breaking into Louis' home. Presenting her intrusion as burglary keeps her presence in his home strange, for now. Nevertheless, Louis must allow her heart to intrude into his body, so that the strangeness of her heart is changed into what is most familiar for him. And yet, his literal incorporation of her does not make

*la sauvageonne* disappear without a trace. Within Louis' limited hospitality, her effacement will not be complete. In the film, for Louis it is impossible, as described by Nancy, "to exclude all intrusion in the coming of the stranger, the foreign" (1).

### **Hospitality and Hostility**

In other words, Louis does not naturalize the intrusion that grants him life. Instead, he responds to the intruder's foreignness without taking her foreignness away. In his nightmarish recollections of her, there is no warm welcome: his response means violence. These haunting dreams form Louis' understanding of what Jacques Derrida, in "Hostipitality," calls the "law of hospitality which violently imposes a contradiction on the very concept of hospitality in fixing a limit to it" (4). Hostility is incorporated into hospitality. Louis confronts the inevitability of allowing the intrusion of the other to continue to be intrusive, which implies letting her disturbing entrance remain a persistent "perturbation of [his] intimacy" (Nancy 2). Her death is felt as his infinite responsibility, for which he can never pay enough. This is how the physical pain of *béance* is complicated by guilt. It is how Louis' *béance* is deepened.

In the words of Emmanuel Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, "Death, source of all myths, is present only in the Other, and only in [her] does it summon me urgently to my final essence, to my responsibility" (179). Levinas argues that the vulnerability of the other, presented to us by the destituteness and nudity of the other's face, ethically cannot be affected by murder, because "murder still aims at a sensible datum" (198). The other, Levinas continues,

*opposes to me not a greater force, an energy assessable ..., not some superlative of power, but precisely the infinity of his transcendence. This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial expression, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder.'* (Totality and Infinity 199)

The confrontation with his own mortality that is evoked by Louis' imminent heart failure, is rendered secondary to his responsibility for the death of *la sauvageonne*.

In the film, the face of *la sauvageonne* cannot be effaced. Louis' nightmares are primordial. He dreams the answer to the key question with which Theodore de Boer summarizes Levinas' controversial position within the tradition of phenomenology: "Is man primarily present to himself ... or is he face to face with the other from the very beginning ... and only in the second place (by abstraction) a self-consciousness?" (92). Louis is summoned before he is able to confirm his self-sameness. By being the host to the intruder in this way, that is, by being unable, willingly or not, to prevent the other from intruding, "nothing other than ipseity itself" is at stake, Derrida writes (15). Indeed, the identity of the self [*ipse*] is second to the haunting face of the other.

De Boer explains that this is Levinas' way to convince us of the reality of the external world. First, Levinas reminds us, as De Boer writes, that "since Descartes,

philosophy has been haunted by the idea that the world is a dream and that one's fellow men are a mirage" (99). Levinas takes the recurrence of the dream seriously, not to exorcize its haunting, but to acknowledge from the resisting recurrence of skepticism that, given time, the thinking subject cannot sustain his *ipse* in and through his hold over the existence of the exterior world. Instead, "the only resistance firm enough to convince us of real exteriority is the face of the other" (De Boer 99). To this exteriority, self-consciousness is secondary. This exteriority cannot be killed.

In *L'intrus*, Louis does not die either, although he does become a stranger himself. In the book, this becoming-strange of the self to itself is related to the immunodepressive medication that is required to estrange Nancy's own body from himself, incapacitating his immune system which would otherwise reject the graft. The book appears to become more corporeally intimate as a result of the intrusion into the recipient's body. Significantly, it abstracts from the young woman intruder who may have been the donor. In the concluding paragraph, Nancy writes: "The *intrus* is no other than me, my self; none other than man himself" (13). Is this an expression of solitude? Is it the reaffirmation of the self-same and the exclusion of the intrusiveness of the other? Would there be a similar abstraction in the film?

Louis the stranger is literally made into a foreigner: after Pusan, Louis travels to Tahiti. By presenting Louis as a traveling foreigner, the film does not abstract from the theme of (de)familiarization. For Nancy, his intrusive heart failure brought him back to what is most familiar to him: "A strangeness reveals itself 'at the heart' of what is most familiar ... But now [the heart] falters, and this very strangeness refers me back to myself: 'I' am, because I am ill" (4).<sup>7</sup> In contrast, for Louis in the film, not his heart but the faltering familiarity with his son brings him back to himself. In the film, moreover, the question of the donor and the inescapability of her death persist precisely as intrusions into intimate familiarity. After undergoing the transplant, Louis feels urged to reacquaint himself with what seems to be another son, the one he never met. Traveling back to an island near Tahiti, Louis revives his old friendship with a local man, called Henri. But Louis is no longer traveling toward the newness of his heart; he is now ostensibly looking for his son. Has he become the sole intruder into the Polynesian island, or would he still allow the intrusion of the other into him? In other words, is Louis still gaping open, or has he fled from *béance*?

### **Beside Travels**

Reminiscing about his seamanship, going to back to the colonial infrastructure of ports and tenders, Louis will spend most of his time in Polynesia in bed. By now, the bed has become a clearly recognizable motif in the film. One of *L'intrus*' most memorable, though odd, shots is of Henri and Louis wading through Polynesian shoals carrying a large-sized mattress across the bay toward Louis' dilapidated beachside cabin.



Carrying Louis' mattress. Screenshot from *L'Intrus*, dir. Claire Denis. Ognon Pictures, 2005.

There is a strangeness and absurdity about this mattress that lingers. It recalls the many beds that have already been featured in the film. Two of these beds have served as the initial stages of the dream sequences in the first half of the film, and they have raised questions about the nature of the dreams. Was Louis really sleeping, or were these sequences indicative of his waking mental state? Would it matter if there were no difference between sleeping and waking? Here, on his Polynesian island, in his cabin from the sixties, lying in his bed, Louis reminisces about the times he was on the island in the past. For Louis' flashbacks, Denis remarkably uses old footage of the adventure film *Le Reflux* (1962, dir. Paul Gégauff), starring the same, though young and hardly recognizable, Michel Subor aboard a small coaster tending the shores of the Polynesian islands. But the images are inconclusive. They do not document Louis' settlement on the island; there is no proof that Louis' son is real.

In another dream-like sequence, Denis presents us with point-of-view shots from Louis, once again lying on his Polynesian cabin bed. These shots show the early morning hours of those who cannot fall asleep, the projections of an insomniac. The killed donor and the abandoned son both belong to the strange realm of sleepless intrusion.<sup>8</sup> In this realm, Louis is forced by the unremitting strangeness of his heart to admit that he needs both the death of his donor and now also the recognition of his son in order to survive. In this adventure, Louis has changed into a stranger, even to himself.

There is no subject left who can rightfully claim an identity for himself, because, as Nancy explains: "One emerges from this adventure lost. One no longer knows or recognizes oneself" (11). The 'I' is emptied out because, Nancy continues, "very

quickly, one is no more than a slackening, floating strangeness” (11). The intrusion has had a self-estranging effect: “the most absolutely proper ‘I’ withdraws to an infinite distance ... slipping into the morphinic unconsciousness of suffering and fear” (12). On his many beds in this film, Louis lacks the agency to be a protagonist. What haunts him is a dreamt killing; the affirmation he strives for, he cannot accomplish alone. In fact, he has to face a loss of identity that is inherent in his adventure, alone and away from home. Nancy despairs: “the multiple stranger who intrudes upon my life ... is none other than death” (7). According to Nancy, identity for the one who has to endure intrusion is related to death, which is what happens to Louis as he is faced with the infinite responsibility for the death of *la sauvageonne*.

The floating strangeness of insomnia that confines Louis to his bed may be compared with Nancy’s sedation by morphine. Perhaps paradoxically, Levinas would characterize Louis’ insomnia as ‘vigilance.’ However, Nancy and Levinas do not really describe opposed states of being. For, Levinas makes clear that vigilance does not belong to an active protagonist. The vigilance of insomnia is anonymous, since Levinas would agree with Nancy that the proper ‘I’ has withdrawn. In *Existence and Existents (De l’existence à l’existant, 1947)*, Levinas writes: “the vigilance of insomnia which keeps our eyes open has no subject. It is the very return of presence into the void left by absence” (65). This presence, we have learned from Nancy and Denis, is *l’intrus*. The grafted heart violently intrudes as “an irremissible existence” (Levinas, *Existence* 63), as “unremitting strangeness” (Nancy 10). However, other than for Nancy, death in the film does not belong to the protagonist. We have to acknowledge that Louis’ own mortality has been made secondary to his responsibility for the death of *la sauvageonne*, the one who haunts Louis from a real exteriority. Levinas, as we have read, refers to the transcendence of this exteriority as the infinity stronger than murder. The face of *la sauvageonne* is this exteriority. Louis’ insomnia confirms that the haunting dreams do not belong to the realm of the unreal. Louis is in a state of vigilance. He is awake when she haunts him.

We should observe also that Levinas’ phenomenology of insomnia is intended as an alternative to Heidegger’s analysis of being toward death (*Sein zum Tode*).<sup>9</sup> In Levinas’ interpretation of Heidegger’s authentic being toward death, authenticity away from everydayness is a lonely experience, because it is the result of a confrontation with one’s own death, a death no other can die. An ecstatic anxiety, not an everyday fear, is what belongs to authentic being toward death. Louis’ insomnia, however, following Levinas, points in a different direction: “While anxiety, in Heidegger, brings about ‘being toward death,’ grasped and somehow understood, the horror of the night ‘with no exits’ which ‘does not answer’ is an irremissible existence” (Levinas, *Existence* 63). The irremissible existence of the intruder in Louis’ does not let him understand what death would mean for himself, but it does keep him awake; he is “the object rather than the subject of an anonymous thought” (Levinas, *Existence* 66). Rather than the anxiety of authentic being toward death, Levinas

writes, “there is horror of immortality, perpetuity of the drama existence, necessity of forever taking on its burden” (*Existence* 63).

Denis makes Louis suffer the burden of not dying while being responsible for the death of the other. She lets him live, but without relief. Louis’ attempt to flee from what keeps him gaping open, toward recognition from his estranged son, cannot but fail. Despite the welcoming gesture of the Polynesians, who are even willing to stage a performance in which one of them takes on the role of the missing son, Louis is unable to accept the gift. He has to accept that the estranged son can be no one else than Sidney (Grégoire Colin), whom we have already met in the early scenes of the film. Yet, the son does not reconfirm the self-sameness of Louis. For, Louis’ son is, in fact, dead. Identifying his son’s body in a Polynesian morgue, identifying also an enormous, fresh scar, still gaping open, on his son’s chest, is as close to a recognition that Louis can come. Louis and his son are strangers to each other.

Now we understand why Denis has presented us with an unsympathetic protagonist. Unlike the protagonist of Nancy’s book, Louis the stranger does not run the risk of being identified as a defamiliarized representative of our own self-doubts. Louis does not become a stranger to himself, and nor do we, by way of character identification, become strangers to ourselves. Louis always remains a third person, not only for us, but also in the company of those close to him. The other for Louis is near, he can recognize the other’s face, but he will never believe that she (*la sauvageonne*) or he (his son) are his alter egos. To be sure, Louis’ unsympathetic strangeness is reinforced by the intrusion of the heart transplant, which forces him to travel. However, for Louis there is no homecoming, no recuperation of a reified self-consciousness after having risked his identity abroad.

Nancy comes to understand that there is no self to be gained from the ordeal of coming face to face with oneself. There is no self-assurance in the ordeal. Nonetheless, there seems to exist an attainable self at the horizon of the continuous defamiliarizing of the self by the self: “The *intrus* is no other than me, my self .... No other than the one, the same, always identical to itself and yet that is never done with altering itself” (13). The unremitting strangeness that Louis embodies, however, even when incorporating the intrusion, never arrives at such a first person self-confirmation and, from there, never becomes a ‘we.’ Our character identification never becomes a self-identification: we identify Louis, but we don’t identify *with* him. He remains irremissibly strange.

Having returned North while accompanying the coffin, Louis on a improvised bed will be kept awake by the unremitting strangeness of the relation to his son.<sup>10</sup> So, the disturbance of Louis’ everyday life by the intruder comes from an outside realm that keeps transcending Louis’ existence. Yet, the transcendental in *L'intrus* is not the one of a privileged knowledge of a higher moral order that is warranted by reason (deontology). Nor does the intruder suggest an attainable self in the long run of

self-questioning experience (teleology). As in the French title of Levinas' *De l'existence à l'existant*, which expresses a movement *contra* Heidegger away from abstraction (*Sein*) and toward concreteness (*Seiendes*), Louis' existence is always moved by concrete corporeal existents. That notwithstanding, he does not move toward a horizon that is shared by his alter egos. Hence, it is not the horizon of the future that transcends the here and now of Louis' existence.

For Louis, the intrusion of the other is a vertical transcendence. This is what breaches Louis' habitual ipseity, and this explains why the intrusion of the other can indeed be characterized, in Levinas' terms, both by proximity (the nudity of the face is immediate, and differs radically from the horizontal transcendence toward the attainable selves of the future) and by height (vertical infinity). In the wake of his son, Louis does travel back toward a future at home in the Northern hemisphere. Yet, Louis must acknowledge that he cannot be in control of it: "the future ... comes to me across an absolute interval whose other shore the Other—though he be my son—is alone capable of marking, and of connecting with the past" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 283).

## Notes

1. In a lecture on the occasion of the Denis retrospective of the Amsterdam Filmmuseum (October–November 2005), Patricia Pisters insightfully characterized Denis' oeuvre as a range of films involving a pendulum swinging between the alfa of vitalism and the omega of the death drive—the metaphor is actually inspired by the funerary words of the priest in *L'intrus*. According to Pisters, films like *Nénette et Boni* (1996), *Beau travail* (1999) and *Vendredi soir* (2002) belong to the 'alfa films'; *J'ai pas sommeil* (1994), *Trouble Every Day* (2001) and *L'intrus* (2004) are omega films. The pendulum swings, Pisters insists, not only between films but also within every film.
2. Denis has given many interviews. Characteristically, Denis claims: "My films are not highly intellectual, and *L'intrus* is like a boat lost in the ocean drifting" (Smith, unpaginated).
3. In his interview with Denis about *L'intrus*, Damon Smith asked: "What inspired you to tell this story in a dreamlike fashion?" Denis replied that the metaphysical aspect of the heart transplant theme urged her to present the film as being "more than any realistic story" (unpaginated).
4. Walter Benjamin famously compares the camera to a surgeon's knife, penetrating deeply into reality's web (223). In another metaphor, he sees film as capable of breaking through the confinement of our everyday "prison world." Benjamin emphasizes film's capacity to "burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second" (236).
5. Peggy Kamuf explores the etymology of *béant/béance*. She points out that *ouvert/ouverture* would be the more common French expression although, in that case, the etymological link would be lost with *bailler* which means to gape open, as in a piece of clothing, as well as in to yawn (mouth), gaping for lack of sleep (41). In the film there is a connection between sleeping, dreaming, and gaping open. I will elaborate on that below.
6. The cinematic Kuleshov experiment (1918) was named after filmmaker Lev Kuleshov (1899–1970), who edited an apparently emotionless face together with different shots (a plate of soup, a coffin) to demonstrate that viewers would attribute a different significance to the same facial expression according to different montage sequences.
7. R. Emmet Sweeney comments on Denis' version of *L'intrus* by calling attention to the transgression of everydayness inherent in heart failure: "A failure in the fabric of our everyday existence makes the banal visible to us" (unpaginated).
8. Denis has related insomnia to real or imagined killing before in *J'ai pas sommeil* (1994), also known as *I Can't Sleep*. Patricia Pisters explains that, not unlike Louis in *L'intrus*, "the characters [of *I Can't Sleep*] become insomniacs—and therefore their normal sensory-motor functions also become distorted; sleeping awake, the characters become seers, hearers, and wanderers and therefore open up to the notion of time" (Pisters 83). For Pisters, the insomniacs are wakeful but not active. In their wanderings, the elderly victims of the serial killer in *I Can't Sleep*, do see and hear, but they remain vulnerable even if awake. This opens them up—is it a gaping openness?—for intrusion. Pisters presents *I Can't Sleep* as a prime example of the transition from the action-image to the time-image as theorized by Gilles Deleuze, and emphasizes that the insomniacs no longer actively perform their subjective identity, but almost passively endure the experience of time.
9. Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*'s existential *Sein zum Tode* can be found in section 50 of *Being and Time* (in the Macquarrie/Robinson translation, 293–296).
10. R. Emmet Sweeney puts it as follows: "The death that haunts him never arrives, but is deflected onto the one he loves—another dream-image perhaps, but the weight of the body seems all too real, and the casket is concrete and banal" (unpaginated).

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