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The Politics of Intrusion

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The intruder enters by force, arrives by surprise, or makes his way in by trickery. He enters where he has no right to be and where he has not been admitted. The stranger has something of the intruder about him; without it, he would lose his strangeness.

—Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Intrus*

WHAT MAKES A STRANGER INTERESTING IS HER STRANGENESS; WHAT MAKES the foreigner foreign is her foreign-ness; what makes the newborn new and promising is her newness. Once the stranger becomes familiar, once the foreigner is naturalized, once the newborn is socialized or educated into the ways of the world, the threat posed by strangeness/foreignness/newness is dissipated, and with that comes a loss. Without strangers in our midst, without the difference of foreigners, without the challenge of a new, potentially revolutionary, generation, how is the world to be renewed, as Arendt puts it? Without exposure to foreignness, how are we to renew the question of our own identity? How are we to be reminded that it is indeed a question? How are we to be made aware of our own foreignness?

Jean-Luc Nancy's essay, *L'Intrus*, is in part an account of his experience of having had a heart transplant and, some ten years later, falling ill with a cancer fostered by the drugs used to suppress his immune system after the transplant. In what follows, I use this piece as a lens through which to read Nancy's work as a contribution to and restructuring of contemporary debates over identity politics, just as he offers the experience as a lens through which to view the question of identity. To be more precise, he describes this experience of his body as the experience of having imposed on him, in an inescapable, incisive way, a practice of questioning identity. "The strangeness of my own identity, which was always very much alive [to me], never touched me so poignantly."¹ I will argue that what emerges from his account of this experience is an understanding of the body as symbolizing the social. On the face of it, this seems quite banal. Are we not already quite familiar with a long history of using the body as a metaphor for society, from Plato (the city as the soul writ large, the divisions of the soul being presented in terms of the division of the body into head, chest and belly), to Hobbes (the depiction of the sovereign's body as made up of his subject's bodies), to the mystical body of Christ, to the usage—common since the seventeenth century—of the term "body politic"? What is important here, however, is not the metaphor or the sign, or even the symbol, but symbolization as a *process*, and one that can only be understood in constellation with touch, recognition, interiority and exteriority, identity and identification, birth and being-with.

An experience such as Nancy's is, first of all, a particularly dramatic reminder of the divisibility of the individual. If my heart can be taken out of my body and a different heart put in its place, then I have come apart. If my heart, the principle of my existence (and I can say that without its being an abstract statement) can fail and yet I continue to live, then I have become a stranger to myself. If the heart that is beating in my chest, beating against the walls of my thoracic cavity—a heart I cannot but describe as my heart—can also be described as someone else's heart, then the question of who I am will resist easy answer.

At the same time, my skin, the surface of my body, presents an exterior to the world, and this fact calls for recognition. I will show that Nancy's

understanding of symbolization as a mode of recognition cannot be dissociated from the emphasis in his work on touch, and such a shift away from (though not to the exclusion of) the common modern preference for sight focuses attention on the very materiality of bodies. It may be possible to imagine a disembodied eye, or to take the God's eye view, but we cannot even conceive of touch without bodies. Rather, touch requires what is concrete.

Yet is there not something dangerous about such an emphasis on the body and touch? Does it not tend to coddle us in our prejudiced particularity and dispose us to building communities on the basis of immediacy and immanence, not to mention blood and soil? As I will show, this is impossible in Nancy's scheme: just as his experience of surgery demonstrated, our skin is anything but impenetrable—in addition to surgery one could think of wounds, bleeding, sweat, and even sex, birth, eating, breathing—and, in the same way, the limits of a polity are anything but firm. An experience of one's "own" body as intruded upon and strange to itself, an experience in which it becomes impossible to separate out the organic, the symbolic and the imaginary (as Nancy describes it) reminds us that, even as an ideal, the coherent, incarnated, organic polity is a lie.²

Also, by emphasizing touch, Nancy shifts the recognition relationship onto a more intimate footing; he extends the proper scene of recognition into the realm of privacy, domesticity and family life with the result that it becomes difficult to sustain the coherence of a private sphere, and certainly brings into question the necessity of a firm boundary between public and private. Drawing on Kelly Oliver's work in *Family Values*, I will argue that that boundary is made necessary for the politics of recognition by the characterization of femininity, and motherhood in particular (which, not incidentally, involves another experience of the body made strange to itself), as what resists and disrupts the social; maternal touch is regarded as what retards the formation of identity and threatens to smother all individuality.³ In this understanding, identity formation *must* involve a traumatic separation and an escape from the claustrophobic, domestic realm of the mother into the free spaciousness of the public realm. But if the mother-child relationship is instead construed as already co-operative, the process of recognition by which we gain our identities can be thought of as a process of

identification that begins in contact with the maternal body and then continues with the touch of other bodies. It is not a process that excludes rejection and withdrawal, but it does not insist upon a rejection by or of the mother as the institution of social, public life. It is, rather, a process of symbolization.

S Y M B O L I Z A T I O N

For the Greeks, the word *symbolon*, symbol, first meant a shard of pottery, one that could be broken in two when two friends, or a host and his guest, parted; each would take a piece, and when they met again the pieces could be set side by side, put together as a token of recognition.⁴

What is important to note about the symbol in the shift away from the word's common usage is that it is not the sign. "This symbolizes that" (as in "the body symbolizes the social," "the heart symbolizes life") cannot be translated as: "This stands for that," "the body stands for the social," "the heart stands for life." While the sign stands in the place of, and indeed necessarily displaces, what it signifies, the symbol is always a matter of relation; the *sym* of *symbolon* is equivalent to the Latin *cum* and the English *con*, meaning "with." The word itself, *symbolon*, means "to put with"; the friend puts her shard of pottery with her friend's shard and in doing so symbolizes their relationship. It does not stand in the place of their relationship because it is not something distinct from the relationship; it is their relationship, their being-together in the space between them. It occurs in the space between beings, and must be understood in terms of the connectedness and distance that that involves.

Nor can the symbol be reduced to the metaphor. When the polity is referred to as the body (as in Bacon: "It is the King's part [as the proper Physician of his Politicke-body] to purge it of all those diseases, by Medicines meete for the same"), it is a question of the word already understood in its relation to the human body now being set in relation to the polity. Its relation to the one is transferred to the other without there being any necessity to set body and polity in relation themselves. That is to say, one can talk about the body politic without at the same time broaching the question of

embodiment, and this is not only because (as Ricoeur might put it) this particular metaphor is dead. Bacon's sentence, at the moment of its appearance, may have been a linguistic creation, something that was both "event" and "meaning," but it has since become an everyday meaning and part of the language understood as code or system. Yet even as authentic and living, metaphor deflects any direct relation between, in this case, the body and the polity. That is to say, in the terms that Nancy uses in *Being Singular Plural*, metaphor does not capture what is crucial about meaning. The structure of metaphor does nothing to reveal that "[t]here is no meaning if meaning is not shared," or that "there is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation" (*Being*, 2-3). Only the symbol, properly understood, has the structure of sharing and circulation.

But the symbol is not even what is of interest here, especially not in the most common sense of the symbol as a consistent, enduring link. (This is what one finds, for instance, in dictionaries and encyclopaedias of symbols: "Heart" followed by a list of words: life, love, charity, etc.) Rather, what is significant is the process or the activity of symbolizing. The friends engage in symbolization when they break the pottery, and also when they later put their potsherds together. Symbolization is a matter of separation and distance in anticipation of reunion, but the reunion is never a restoration to completeness. When the shards are laid side by side, they remain fragments. As Nancy puts it:

The fragment carries the promise that its fractal line will not disappear into a gathered whole but, rather, will rediscover itself elsewhere, lip against lip of the other piece.⁵

The surfaces where the pottery was broken are the external surfaces of the pieces, but are internal to the reassembled pot. Claiming its surfaces as exterior, the shard remains a fragment, a part of something lost; yet its incorporation into the reassembled pot, the transformation of those surfaces into internal surfaces, is not enough to stop its continuing to be a fragment. As Nancy writes: "symbolization' is not a subjective fusion, but exactly the establishment of a relation and the trace of its separation."⁶

matter of particularity, and when he speaks of touch, it is not a matter of mere contiguity or immediacy. Just as "the social institution" must be understood as any social institution whatever, "the body" must be understood not as my particular body, nor as a contentless, universal body, but as *whatever* body. It is the point that Agamben makes in *The Coming Community* regarding the coming being. But Nancy's point is a point about bodies: it is never a question of "whatever," in the sense of "whatever body, it does not matter which," but rather of "whatever body, such that it always matters."⁷

Yet what can touch mean if it is separated from contiguity or immediacy? Derrida, in *Le Toucher: Jean-Luc Nancy*, puts it like this:

Contact does not produce fusion or identification or even *immediate* contiguity. We must once more dissociate touch from what common sense and philosophical sense always attributes to it as wholly evident, as the first axiom of a phenomenology of touch, that is to say, from *immediacy*.⁸

For one committed to an understanding of politics as founded on recognition, the alternative to immediacy is most often a tightly-orchestrated Hegelian mediation;⁹ for Derrida, it is a Husserlian mediation of touch through sight;¹⁰ for Nancy it is a matter specifically of spacing, that is, a matter of understanding that all touch happens across a space. Even the most intimate instances of touch require space: the touch of lovers, of a parent and child, of a woman and the foetus in her womb, of a heart in a person's chest. Between the inside surface of my thoracic cavity and the outside surface of my heart, there is a space. That space can be extended as my heart is removed, and in this case my experience of my heart reveals itself to be not unlike the experience of my hand touching an object; in each case there is space between, and the touch happens across a space. Indeed, touch cannot happen except across a space and, just as communion makes community impossible, continuity makes touch impossible. In Derrida's words, this space-between may be "constitutively haunted by some hetero-affectation . . . through which the intruder . . . comes, like a ghost, to inhabit every interior space" (*Le Toucher*, 205).

The process of symbolization is, then, a process of recognition. The model of this recognition is not the master and slave but the pair of friends; it is not recognition that proceeds by sight so much as by touch; it does not rely on an assumption of conflict—whether in the form of *polemos* or *agon*—but on the far less determinative category of being-with. Above all, it is a process that does not take place between figures or positions or abstractions, but between bodies.

T O U C H

Touch is what happens between bodies; it is a matter of *res extensa* (that is, if it is a matter of *res* at all), of beings with surfaces. Things that touch can never be thought of as merely thinking things, or disembodied "I's/eyes, or modes of Spirit, or subject positions; they must be recognized as thoroughly embodied beings. Symbolization is never a process that moves away from concrete instances; rather it is the process by which a concrete being recognizes itself. Indeed, it is the process by which the social institution recognizes itself (*Birth*, 111). The social, the social institution, indeed any given social institution, recognizes itself in the being-together or being-with of bodies. Bodies, by being together, symbolize the social; between bodies and in the body, the social recognizes itself. Nancy's innovation is to acknowledge this as happening by touch.

Yet simply emphasizing the body can set us on the steep, slippery slope outlined above. Certainly, to be an object of recognition, I must have concrete existence; but if the sort of recognition I am granted depends on the details of my particular embodiment, then I am determined by my biology. If inclusion in a polity depends on the possession of certain physical characteristics or the sharing of a certain genetic patrimony, then the ground is laid for the exclusion, rejection, persecution, cleansing, eradication of those who do not share those characteristics or patrimony. Moreover, stressing biology as the criterion for inclusion, and at the same time privileging the experience of touch, would seem to invite conceiving the polity as an organic unity, a community in communion. What makes this slippage impossible for Nancy is the fact that when he refers to the body, it is not a

In addition, shifting emphasis to touch means, if not replacing, then certainly *displacing* the role of sight. What flows from this is best understood in terms of the spectator. I have stressed the role of space in Nancy's understanding of touch, but the proximity and intimacy of touch must have their play in contrast to the distance and remove necessary for the spectator. The spectator need not be the disinterested god or an alien being; it might be one of those who experience events in the way Kant describes the people observing the events of the French Revolution. The "uninvolved public" formed part of the revolution, he insisted, by virtue of its "wishful participation bordering on enthusiasm."¹¹ Yet, however enthusiastic that participation and however essential spectating is to the constitution of an event as event, spectating necessarily establishes distance and marks the spectators as removed in a way impossible for those touched by/in touch with those events. I can see and yet preserve myself from involvement; if I am touched, I am already involved.

This has implications for understanding the political, for the pursuit of knowledge, and indeed for sociality in general. For instance (and this anticipates the discussion of the public/private distinction to come), the research scientist relies on sight, not touch; to have seen is to know. Oliver has argued that this very reliance on sight has historically determined patterns of research into pregnancy and gestation, and has in turn overdetermined our understanding of womb and placenta, finally identifying the relation of fetus and the maternal body as a relation of hostility. This case is more than one example among many. It is the instance that shows how the medical gaze has determined the character of our first relationship and thereby influenced how we characterize all relations that follow. What is established as knowledge becomes a limit to our thinking, and only by displacing that knowledge and the privileging of sight upon which it relies can we free thought to get in touch with another (felt) experience of relation.

One who stands apart may describe herself as preserving her objectivity or safety or health or well-being or independence, all of which come down to the preservation of identity. If I can keep my distance, I can preserve my self-understanding as an autonomous individual; but this becomes increasingly difficult the more I come in touch with the world, whether through the

touch of a lover, or of a mugger, or of the mass of people on a crowded street. In each case, touch has the capacity to challenge and compromise my identity as it impinges on me, encroaches upon me, intrudes upon me, presses against my boundaries.¹²

Touch, then, is not a matter of immediacy, but it is intimate. It is not experienced without there being a space between, but it is nonetheless experienced as continuity. The verb Nancy uses for this is *partager*, meaning "to share" but also "to separate." Derrida—speaking for Nancy—puts it well: it is a matter of "sharing without fusion. Community without communion, language without communication. Being-without confusion" (*Le Toucher*, 221).

Part of what is shared is an origin, the origin, and in *Being Singular Plural*, touch gains an ontological significance, emerging as it does from a discussion of the concept of reaching the origin. (In French, *toucher à* is to reach, while *toucher* is to touch.)

To reach [*toucher à*] the origin is not to miss it; it is to be properly exposed to it. Since it is not something other . . . , the origin cannot be missed nor can it be appropriated (penetrated, absorbed). It does not obey this logic. It is the plural singularity of the being of [any] being. We reach it [*vous y touchez*] to the extent that we reach [or touch] each other, and where we reach [or touch] other beings. We touch each other insofar as we exist. Touching each other is what makes us 'us,' and there is no other secret to be discovered or hidden behind this touch itself, behind the "with" of co-existence. (*Being Singular Plural*, 32)

This builds on and overcomes a thought Heidegger presents in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.¹³ The stone touches the earth; the lizard touches the stone; my hand rests on the head of another human being. Heidegger seeks to direct attention to the experience of touching as a mode of access to the world. However, he insists that touching counts as access only when the toucher, and perhaps also the touched, is one of us, a human being. Nancy balks at this, and in "Touching," an essay in *The Sense of the World*, Nancy takes Heidegger firmly to task for such an excessively narrow

understanding of world, and for privileging a paternalistic, perhaps feudal, at least hierarchical form of touch.¹⁴

Yet, however subtle we make our understanding of touch—if we understand it as sharing *and* separation, if we allow it to displace sight in the field of the senses, if it involves a mediation, if we allow it to direct our attention to what is concrete and embodied—does emphasizing touch not return us to the matter of skin touching skin, or, if the set of beings regarded as relevant is appropriately increased, of surface touching surface? That is to say, does it not return us to an understanding of the world and specifically the others who populate it in terms of accessible exteriors hiding inscrutable interiors, which is to say, to the most troublesome aspects of modern subjectivity? In Nancy's work it does not, and for two reasons. First, rather than beginning with the subject and going on to build up an intersubjectivity by establishing relations between subjects, he first studies relation. It is these relations, the trajectories (touches, glances, movements) across a space that go to constitute the "I" at all. It is never a question of my constituting myself (from the inside, as it were) and then seeking recognition from elsewhere, from outside, because both interiority and exteriority are always in play as the interior exteriority of the community.¹⁵ In the same way, our skin, the surfaces of our bodies, are the interior exteriority of our communities on the model of symbolization; we are fragments laid edge to edge, lip to lip, and those edges will never disappear in an undifferentiated unity.

Second, our bodies are not themselves examples of undifferentiated unity, as *L'Intrus* so eloquently shows. My body is itself replete with parts, organs—each one discrete and each one connected (by arteries, veins, tubes, ligaments) to the others to make up a system and, in turn, an organism. Here too is an interior exteriority. We can think of ourselves as unified and coherent only because, for the most part, we do not even experience it as exteriority; that is, we do not experience our organs. Before he was told he needed a transplant, Nancy was not even aware of the beating of his heart. "It was as absent to me as the tread of my feet as I walked" (*L'Intrus*, 2). Then a moment came when this heart became a stranger to him. "It intruded by defection . . . My heart became my stranger precisely because it was within me. Strangeness did not have to come from outside; it first appeared from

inside." This is not to say that we become strangers to ourselves only when we are sick, when one of the parts that sustains us fails. Until the point at which it began to falter, Nancy's heart was strange and "because it was not even perceptible, not even present." It remained secret. Now that it falters, it appears—and, he writes, "the strangeness of it sets me in relation to myself."¹⁶

This is an echo of the insight expressed years earlier in *Corpus* that bodies are open spaces, places of existence:

Bodies are not "full;" they are not filled space (space is always filled); they are open space, which is to say they are, in a sense, space that is properly *spacious* rather than spatial, and this we can still call *place*. . . . [T]he body-place . . . is a skin folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, eviscerated [*exogastrulée*], orificed, evasive, invaded, stretched, relaxed, excited, shattered, bound [*liée*], unbound [*déliée*]. . . . [T]he body *gives place* to existence.¹⁷

B I R T H

What does the turn to touch mean for the question of identity? In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy writes that:

Nothing exists that is "pure," that does not come into contact with the other, not because it has to border on something, as if this were a simple accidental condition, but because touch alone exposes the limits at which identities or ipseities can *distinguish themselves* [*se démêler*] from one another, with one another, between one another, from among one another. (*Being*, 159)

As was the case with symbol and symbolization, what is important here is the process: to dwell on the substantive, "identity," would be to predispose us to a thinking of identity as something static or even substantial, whereas to look to identification recognizes the work of time and the fact that any identity is a moment in a process of identification. At the same time, I want to forge a different sort of connection with symbolization. Identification is a

mode of symbolization in that it is a process of establishing relation and specifically involves the relation between bodies that is established by touch. My purpose is to press upon the assumption—upon which identity politics relies—that identity is constituted by patterns of recognition operating in a public sphere, and that the process of gaining an identity cannot get properly under way until one has emerged or been expelled from the private space of family life. If identification is to be thought of, rather, as a sort of symbolization, then the touching, holding, caressing, abuse, beating we experience as children, in families, is a vital part of the process, and it must be thought through as at once psychological, social, political, and (always) corporeal. As such, it must begin not with our emerging from our parents' house, but with our bodies' emerging from our mothers' wombs—that is to say, with birth understood as a very material event.

Examining recognition as it happens in the private sphere is nothing new, and Honneth, for example, has shown that the love relationships within the family are regarded by Hegel himself as having the status of preliminary relations of mutual recognition. In particular, Honneth directs attention to the Hegelian understanding of the mother-child relationship, drawing telling connections between it and the work of contemporary psychologists and psychoanalysts. Yet for Hegel and for Honneth, this form of recognition remains preliminary, and just as Hegel speaks of the birth of a child in terms of a "qualitative change" and a "break in the process" of development already under way in the womb, so he insists on a break between the experience of family life and the attaining of personhood in the public sphere. "[Man.] so far as he is not a citizen but belongs to the Family, is only an unreal impotent shadow."¹⁸ In addition, for Hegel and for Honneth, there is no point at which the process is not a *struggle* for recognition; all relations, from those of mother and infant through all later political relations, are construed as necessarily adversarial. This is at the very least an overdetermination. Finally, though Honneth's reading of Hegel leads him to consider a portion of the recent research on early childhood development, there is no attention to the experience of birth, and certainly not as a corporeal event.

In contrast, birth and bodies are central to Nancy's thought. Birth is a moment of creation, but in a sense distinct from creation understood as that

moment when a spirit is breathed into inert matter. That is to say, it is not a matter of incarnation, the introduction of a spirit or a soul into its fleshy prison. In fact, Nancy writes:

"[T]he body has the same structure as spirit, but it has that structure without presupposing itself as the reason for the structure. Consequently, it is not self-concentration, but rather the ex-centration of existence. Existence does not presuppose itself and does not presuppose anything: it is posited, imposed, weighed, laid down, exposed." (*Birth*, 200)

Birth is the moment in which a body is posited; it is the separation and sharing of bodies (*Birth*, 197). We are accustomed to thinking of the experience of birth as a matter of confrontation between the maternal body and the foetus/baby. We each had to fight our way along the birth canal and into the world or, alternatively, we were expelled from the dark, warm comfort of our mother's womb into the glare and air of the world. In either case, the relationship is already marked by struggle and sets the stage for a long and hard-fought fight against that maternal body, against our parents, against those in our social milieu, against our political rivals. Yet Oliver's genealogy of such descriptions of the foetus/maternal body relation show that there are quite specific reasons why such descriptions have been preferred, reasons to do with the correlation of sight and knowledge (as I mentioned above) and the structure of the medical gaze, and also with patriarchy's need to regulate women's bodies. But the experience of birth need not be described in such terms, and Nancy's ontology opens up the space for other descriptions such as the one Oliver offers of pregnancy, birth, and infancy as a joint endeavour relying on co-operation between mother and child.

According to Nancy, the sharing and separation of bodies operates along several axes. It is the separation of the child from its mother, but it is in that moment of separation that their sharing becomes possible. Birth is a spacing, the establishing of a distance *across which* touch can happen, and the first demand of a body is always that it be touched. He writes (in *The Birth to Presence*) that at birth, a body is delivered, delivered over to "contact with so many common extremities of other foreign bodies, bodies that are so

This process of exposition is Nancy's version of the process of identification, and a refreshing alternative to the prevailing thought of identification. After all, what continues to dominate the debate over identity is the Freudian account founded on the ideas of castration anxiety and penis envy, and on a fear of birth. At first, both male and female infants identify with the mother. At a certain point, the little boy is horrified by the penis-less maternal body because the sight of it inspires the fear that he may suffer her fate and be castrated too. Yet there is something both *heimlich* and *unheimlich* in this experience, because the mother's genitals are also a reminder of his "home" in his mother's womb: he longs to be at home with her, but fears the castration that that would entail. To guard against that he must establish himself as "not-that," that is, he must identify himself over against his mother and with the father. Meanwhile, the female child is not spared this struggle and separation. She too is horrified to see that her mother, like her, lacks a penis, and the separation from the mother comes in blaming her for this state of affairs; only later does she come to identify with her in the hope of securing the love of the father. In terms of exposition, the Freudian version of events suggests that we were not yet exposed at birth, as though birth were not yet a separation from the maternal body, and as though the struggle against it could only be resolved by locating some other with whom to identify over against it (for the boy) or for whom to eventually identify with it (for the girl).

In significant respects, much post-Freudian feminist theory remains within this model. For Kristeva, identity is achieved by abjection, that is to say, by the exclusion of otherness; Butler takes up that thought with the description of the abject as what is expelled from the body, discharged as excrement.¹⁹ What Nancy's concept of exposition makes possible, in contrast, is a conception of the mother-child relationship—the field in which the process of identification is played out—as always already involving both distance *and* intimacy, exclusion *and* inclusion. This removes the necessity for a decisive moment of horrified rejection or withdrawal and blame. Instead, it becomes possible to understand the relation of mother and child on Oliver's cooperative model, where it is a relationship now construed as spacious and social, rather than enclosed and exclusionary.²⁰

close, so intimate with this body in their own freedom" (*Birth*, 200). Elsewhere, in *Corpus*, he puts it in terms of birth as coming into the world, where the world is understood not so much as the world of others, nor even my world, but as the world of bodies (*Corpus*, 30). At birth, we acquire an exterior that puts us in relation not only with the body from which we came but with all the bodies that populate this world of bodies. That is to say, separation and exteriority in no way serve to mark our independence or atomistic subjectivity, or the possibility of an absolute freedom or of self-positioning. Instead, birth is the moment of *expeausition*.

Jeffrey Librett has translated this play on words as *unhiding*, but that seems to emphasize what *expeausition* is not. Nancy writes:

The body is not an exposition of the "self" in the sense of a translation, an interpretation, a staging. *Exposition* means, rather, that the expression [self] is itself intimacy and separation. The from-itself is not translated, not incarnated, it is what it is: [it is] this vertiginous separation of self that is necessary in order to open the infinity of separation to self. The body is this departure from self to self. . . . The body is the being-exposed of being. (*Corpus*, 32)

Birth may be the separation and sharing between bodies, but it is also the separation and sharing of a body. The skin in *expeausition* (the hide in unhiding) must not take on the connotation of a simple exterior of an individual, that is to say, of an indivisible being.

Everywhere from body to body, from place to place . . . everywhere [there is] the capricious disassembling of what makes the assumption of a body. Everywhere a decomposition . . . which propagates an improbable material freedom which leaves room for no continuum of colors, of sounds or lines, which is instead the disseminated, endlessly renewed breaking apart of every initial assembling/building of cells by which a body comes to be born. (*Corpus*, 33)

That is to say, the body is never one.

If this is so, what becomes of the need for a distinction between public and private? So long as the mother is the all-encompassing being, seeking ever to hold and enfold us, then it is vitally important that there be a border beyond which we can hope to escape from her smothering presence. The power of the mother must be constrained and her domain limited, such that there be a distinct and qualitative shift in my mode of being as I struggle out of that domain (privacy and the family) and into the public world. Yet if that process is *not* a matter of struggle and is *not* premised upon the rejection or withdrawal of the mother, where does the need for the public/private distinction originate? Can the distinction be sustained? If so, it can continue only in a thoroughly compromised form, because once our being in the world is understood as exposition, as a being-with that involves both intimacy and space, then we are never quite at home even within our domestic space, and we are never simply strange, even in the most alien public arena. From the very beginning we are both strangers and at home in the world. As for identification, even as it secures us a place in the world it underscores our strangeness to it, and as we achieve identity we also become strangers to ourselves.

H E A R T

A crucial part of what's involved in a transplant operation is making sure that the recipient's immune system does not reject the foreign organ. Jean-Luc Nancy's heart might be the heart of a woman, or of someone from China or Africa, but that is of no importance. All that matters is that that body's immune system be compatible with his. Of course the compatibility is never complete, and his body rejected the new heart; the only possible response was to set about suppressing his own (though now there is always the question of which counts as his) immune system in order to preserve his life. "[The patient's] immunity is lowered so that he will tolerate the stranger. It makes him a stranger to himself, to this immunological identity which is, in a way, his physiological signature" (*L'Intrus*, 6). His identity must be suppressed in order to protect him from the intruder that saves his life, but that suppression in turn makes him vulnerable to attack by other enemies: by

infections he might catch from a child, at a swimming pool, in a crowd; by viruses already within him, "crouching all along in the shadow of immunity, always intruders since they have always been there"; or, thanks to another twist in the cycle of illness and treatment, by cancer.

"In any case," he writes, "what it all comes to is this: identity counts as immunity, the one identifies itself with the other. To lower the one is to lower the other. Strangeness and being a stranger become common and everyday" (*L'Intrus*, 7). That is to say, the *experience* of strangeness and being a stranger become common. We are all in the midst of strangeness and we all are strangers, but we are rarely capable of experiencing that strangeness, assured as we all are of who we are. And it is not as though experiencing our self-strangeness in the way Nancy did with the erasure of his immuno-identity would bring us closer to the intruder; it is not as though erasing what differentiates me gives me access to a general, or transcendental identity. As Nancy writes of that moment:

It would seem, rather, that a general law of intrusion is revealed; there is no singularity, and as soon as there is one, it multiplies, it identifies itself in its renewed internal differences. (*L'Intrus*, 7)

The political significance of the insight becomes clear if it is set alongside Nancy's writing about Sarajevo in a piece called "Eulogy for the Melée":

By definition, the melange is not a simple substance to which place and nature could be assigned, to which one could lay claim as such, and which, as a result, one could plainly eulogize. Identity is by definition not an absolute distinction, removed from everything and, therefore, distinct from nothing; it is always the other of an other identity. 'He is different—like everyone' (Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*). (*Being Singular Plural*, 149)

As a stable, concrete entity, identity is impossible. It always threatens to break apart from within or to come apart in the context of a melange of identities. An identity is only ever a moment, and therefore it is the process of identification that must be the object of study. Within this process we can

promising moment in the development of a politics of intrusion. See also, however, *Subjectivity without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998) where Oliver uses the circulation of blood between foetus and maternal body as the model for her notion of vision as circulation.

13. Martin Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 196-97.
14. *Sense*, 59. More pointedly, Irigaray writes that for Heidegger, origin "is the whole that issues from a source, replacing and concealing the loss of an other (female) whole." See *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 44.

15. In *The Experience of Freedom*, this interior exteriority is called freedom. Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

16. *L'Intrus*, 3. The thought is counter-intuitive, but Nancy, by emphasizing the fact that our bodies include numerous organs, is making a claim similar in part to the one made by Artaud, and later by Deleuze and Guattari, with the thought of the Body Without Organs. Deleuze and Guattari think of the BwO as smooth and homogenized (*lisse*), incapable of containing or concealing something other than itself, above all not a soul or a subject. However, they also insist on the sheer immanence of the body, and Artaud writes: "The body is the body. Alone it stands. And in no need of organs" (Deleuze and Guattari, *One Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], 158). This is the point of departure for Nancy because of his realization that the body is necessarily in relation, and that it is internally divisible. Certainly the body is a limit of or to the social, but it is never simply immanent.

17. Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Métailié, 1992), 16.
18. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, s.451. Quoted by Oliver, 37.
19. Oliver, *Family Values*, 98.
20. Psychologists such as John Bowlby and Daniel Stern have directed their attention to just this question, and their findings support Oliver's theory. According to Bowlby, infant development is closely and directly related to the amount of social interaction the baby experiences: Stern, for his part, details the importance of touch and social contact. He also claims that the infant is never one with its mother, but rather their relationship is social from the very beginning (Oliver, 59).
21. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Retreating the Political* (London: Routledge, 1997), 133-34.

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broach the question of relation, which remains the question of the mother, which is to say, the "question of identification as the social constitution of identity (and as the constitution of social 'identity')." ⁷¹ The body, in these three ways, symbolizes the social. Bodies, shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, hand in hand, lip to lip, head to head, toe to toe, skin to skin, face to face, symbolize, constitute, and indeed *are* the social.



N O T E S

1. *L'Intrus*, 8. My translation.
2. This much was already clear to Plato, when he cannily described the ideal city as being founded on a noble lie.
3. Kelly Oliver, *Family Values* (London: Routledge, 1997).
4. *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 79.
5. *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 136.
6. *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 142.
7. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1. See also Nancy, "Someone," in *Sense*, 68-76.
8. *Le Toucher: Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), 137.
9. See Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995).
10. See *Le Toucher*, 183-208.
11. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 61.
12. In her more recent book, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), Oliver works to develop an understanding of vision as something more like touch and less like the function of the dematerialised eye of modernity (172), describing it as "a type of circulation between and through the tissues of bodies, elements and language" or "the result of the circulation of biosocial energy" (222). Her "look of love" is a tactile look that is "both spiritual and carnal" (215). Nevertheless, it is still a look, and her explicit aim as she moves beyond recognition is not to displace vision in favor of touch but to produce a new, positive notion of vision. For this reason, I concentrate, below, on her discussion of woman and foetus in *Family Values* as a