

The Operative Heart

DAVID PALUMBO-LIU
Stanford University

THE HISTORY OF TISSUE AND ORGAN TRANSPLANTS IN WESTERN MEDICINE HAS always been involved with questions of singularity, sharing, and politics. As early as the sixteenth-century, Gaspari Tagliocozzi, a surgeon who was also Professor of Anatomy and Professor of Medicine at the University of Bologna, wrote of grafting skin to form a nose on those who were noseless (recall that in those days nasal amputation was a common form of punishment—we are speaking thus of the reconstitution of a citizen, of reconstruction as a political and ethical act). While proud of his accomplishment in fabricating a nose from an individual's own tissue, Tagliocozzi warns against grafting noses from one body to another. His warning is based precisely on the idea of individuality:

The singular character of the individual entirely dissuades us from attempting this work on another person. For such is the force and power of individuality, that if anyone should believe that he could accelerate and increase the beauty of the union, nay more, achieve even the least part of the operation, we consider him plainly superstitious and badly grounded in the physical sciences.¹

Inherent in the sense of individual bodies is the notion that there are specific individual properties that cannot be transposed. Indeed, as Nuland notes, the story of transplantation became “the story of our evolving comprehension that the cells of each of us harbored within them something that is theirs alone.” The question then becomes, “How can a potential recipient be made less xenophobic, less destructive of protoplasm from a donor? In other words, how can one person be made more tolerant of the transplanted tissues of another?”²

It is precisely with the discovery of cyclosporin that an entirely new horizon opens up: cyclosporin becomes the chemical of tolerance, one which enables doctors to manage the immune system and selectively accommodate the foreign, to “quell xenophobia.” Thus, in 1986, Winslade and Ross repose the question of individuality, but this time with a radical alternative in mind:

Are we spirits who happen to possess bodies and in fact need those bodies in order to manifest ourselves in this particular material world? If so, then it is not much concern whether we are inhabiting a pure or mixed-parts body. Are we, instead, minds-and-bodies, a kind of computer-like system in which the bodies are our hardware and the minds our software, our operating systems, as it were? If so, then the software, like any software, can run on any compatible body, although often not as well on the body-hardware for which the mind-software was originally intended . . . individual integrity lies presumably in the brain or in the more complex parts of the nervous system culminating in the brain (although even here a serious problem lurks as researchers investigate the transportability of brain tissue). The rest, outside and inside, is mere packaging of operating parts, to be used, and, when exhausted, to be replaced.³

Thanks to modern technologies of medicine, we have come the distance from unimpeachable individual specificity to wide-open interchangeability. And it should be clear by now that throughout these meditations on the distinct, unique, and nontransferable properties of individual bodies is a corollary ontological value pertaining to the notion of individual identity as something inherent, unchanging, and nontransferable.

The historical possibilities of entertaining such a profound re-evaluation of individuals and their bodies creates complex questions of technology and ethics, ontology and otherness. It is in this context of opportunity and crisis that we can read Jean-Luc Nancy's *L'Intrus*, which precisely situates itself historically:

Less than twenty years ago, one didn't graft, especially not with the use of cyclosporin, which protects against the rejection of the graft. Twenty years from now, it will certainly be a matter of another sort of graft, with other methods. A personal contingency thus crosses a contingency in the history of techniques. In an earlier age, 'I' would be dead; in the future, I would be a survivor by some other means. But always, 'I' finds itself tightly packed into a narrow slot of technical possibilities.⁴

A reading of Jean-Luc Nancy's *L'Intrus* presents the occasion to revisit, extend, and put into crisis a trajectory of thought that has long centered on notions of Being, alterity, community, and a fundamental rethinking of ontology; Nancy's heart transplant offers the possibility of realizing his ontological premises. Central to these concerns is the precise nature of human being, but also the ontological status of material subjects in general. Furthermore, Nancy has focused on the manner in which being has been framed in two different, but not mutually exclusive, ways, each of which has negative consequences for thinking through the issue of being.

First of all, there is the dominant tendency to read human being as immanent: some individual essence is always at the verge of appearing. The manifestation of essence (whenever and however it appears) is assumed to then be able to ratify an entire philosophical program of reading the human as such. Until then, we must be satisfied with evaluating human history and contemporaneity as indexed by that immanence. Second is the will to operationalize human being: human being, and its various actions in the world, is meant to accomplish something, to bring something into existence, to change the world and human being in it. There is the sense that such operationalization will, directly or indirectly, be related to the immanent unfolding of human being; we are human in the way that we act in the world,

transform it to our purposes, make it be “us.” Human discourses are set to codify and rationalize these transformations and their intentionality. The nature of human organization in communities is intimately related to both these frames; ideal communities are traditionally thought to manifest the perfect negotiation and reconciliation of individual and collective identities, of self and other. This is their immanence: as such supposed convergences and consolidations are thus operationalized, their collective “being” is quickly used to either reflect back on their perfect enactments, or to be a sign of something else to come.

In contradistinction to this kind of purposeful framing and tracking of human being (philosophically and pragmatically), Nancy proposes that we look at human being in the present as simultaneously singular and plural; the key issues are neither the emergence of being as “individual,” nor the emergence of “community” as the harmonizing of individual beings, but rather the notion that all being is best described as a co-extensive and contemporary “being with,” the focus being at once the singular entities and their common properties of being with each other. Certainly, one can regard Nancy’s meditation on his heart transplant as the near-perfect occasion in which to dramatize this philosophical premise.

My essay will trace how, in the course of *L’Intrus*, Nancy moves through a set of longstanding concerns about ontology and community, only to reach a point of crisis. The key to this crisis is found precisely in a historical understanding of the present. If his writings on community have each carefully referenced two historically cataclysmic visions of community in the twentieth century—fascism and communism—in *L’Intrus* another historical moment is presented, that of medical science and technology.

I argue that advances in medical technology have created another kind of human community, one framed in immanence and operationalization. Its operationalization is keyed into the project of making possible the immanent realization of immortality. Both could have devastating consequences for Nancy’s ontology, even as they extend his life. First, I will outline certain key terms: being, singularity, community, spacing/”dis-position,” “shock,” and the body(bodies). Then I will turn to the emergence of technologically-enabled and driven communities and bodies, and finally to the notion of

death and being: what happens when we consolidate our sense of being and community around the traditional project of forestalling death?

BEING AND SINGULARITY

Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularity plural existence. (*BSP*, 3)⁵

Throughout his writings, Nancy insists that any attempt to define singular being as ontologically isolatable from others is bound to fail; in his thinking, Being is always “being-with-one-another.” This “co-appearance” is the “fundamental ontological structure” (*BSP*, 61). The closest he will come to naming Being as distinct is to place it in co-extensive relation to his concepts of the “singular” and the “plural.”

Being singular plural: these three apposite words, which do not have any determined syntax . . . mark an absolute equivalence, both in an indistinct *and* distinct way . . . *Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as co-essence. . . . Because none of these three terms precedes or grounds the other, each designates the co-essence of the others. This co-essence puts essence itself in the hyphenation—“being” “singular-plural”—which is a mark of union and also a mark of division, a mark of sharing that effaces itself, leaving each term to its isolation *and* its being-with-the-others. (*BSP*, 28, 30, 37)

Just as he is loath to isolate Being as separable from (and valorized over) being-with-others, Nancy is set against aggrandizing “otherness”: “All forms of the capitalized ‘Other’ represent precisely the exalted and overexalted mode of propriety of what is proper, which persists and consists in the ‘some-where’ of a ‘nowhere’ and in the ‘sometime’ of a ‘no time’—that is, in the *punctum aeternum* outside the world” (*BSP*, 13). We end up with a schematization of Being as no less and no more than the Other; both are in turn removed from any singular “exalted status.”⁶

Crucially, Nancy’s proposal is different from the Hegelian dialectic in which there is a mutual dependency of being and other, ultimately to be

resolved in the florescence of the subject of absolute Being. Instead, Nancy argues for a shared ontology that refuses both an origin in singularity and an immanent resolution into singular Being: “A like-being resembles me in that I myself ‘resemble’ him: we ‘resemble’ together, if you will. That is to say, there is no original or origin of identity. What holds the place of an ‘origin’ is the sharing of singularities. This means that this ‘origin’—the origin of community or the originary community—is nothing other than the limit: the origin is the tracing of the borders upon which or along which singular beings are exposed” (*IC*, 33).

Nancy extends this notion far beyond the “human” to delineate a global notion of the shared property of a non-dialectical being-with-otherness:

Both the theory and the praxis of critique demonstrate that, from now on, critique absolutely needs to rest on some principle other than that of the ontology of the Other and the Same: it needs an ontology of being-with-one-another, and this ontology must support both the sphere of ‘nature’ and sphere of ‘history,’ as well as both the ‘human’ and the ‘non-human’; it must be an ontology for the world, for everyone—and if I can be so bold, it has to be an ontology for each and every one and for the world ‘as a totality,’ and nothing short of the whole world, since this is all there is (but, in this way, there is *all*). (*BSP*, 53-54)

In particular, and with specific import for my discussion of *L’Intrus* Nancy insists on maintaining our focus on the interstitial spaces of shared “being with”: “There is no Other. ‘Creation’ signifies precisely that there is no Other and that ‘there is’ is not an Other. Being is not the Other, but the origin is the punctual and discrete spacing *between us*, as *between us and the rest of the world*, as *between all beings*” (*BSP*, 19).⁷ Later in this essay I will return to this notion of the spacing of the in-between, and the possible infringement thereof created by the heart transplant; but first it is necessary to consider what this notion has to do with the idea of community, and by extension, ethics and politics.

In Nancy, the notion of being-with is intimately occasioned in a spatial and temporal metaphor which, once again, “scales back” both the isolatability of “individual being” and the telos of immanence:

“With” is the sharing of time-space; it is the at-the-same-time-in-the-same-place as itself, it itself, shattered. It is the instant scaling-back of the principle of identity: Being is at the same time in the same place only on the condition of the spacing of an indefinite plurality of singularities. . . . We are each time an other, each time with others. (*BSP*, 35)

Given then both this simultaneity and this co-appearance, the idea of a slowly evolving social subject with an attendant, developing social community is erased, as are traditional notions of community as the collection of pre-existing individuals. Stated flatly, “Community means that there is no singular being without another singular being” (*IC*, 28). The point of ontological articulation is thus “co-appearance” as it occurs in the in-between, shared spaces of being-with.⁸ And it is precisely the dis-position of this shared space that characterizes the political and ontological activity of community. This connection is encapsulated in this sentence: “Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other meaning except the dis-position of this ‘between’” (*BSP*, 27), and is made universal here: “Being is not the Other, but the origin is the punctual and discrete spacing *between us*, as *between us and the rest of the world*, as *between all things*” (*BSP*, 19).⁹

Consistent with his insistence that Being not be reduced to the mere immanence of something other to come is Nancy’s argument that “community” be freed from immanence. Such thinking leads one always to think of community as less-than itself. Importantly, one effect of this devaluing of being-together is the operationalizing of community. Under the imperative to become something better, to reach some other, more satisfying state, communities are asked to manifest progress toward those goals, to be effective instances of human social development.

The political, if this word may serve to designate not the organization of society but the disposition of community as such, the destination of its sharing, must not be the assumption or the work of love or of death. It need neither find, nor regain, nor effect a communion taken to be lost or still to come. If the political is not dissolved in the sociotechnical element of forces and needs (in which, in effect, it seems to be dissolving under our eyes), it must inscribe the sharing of community. . . . ‘Political’ would mean

a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing. (*IC*, 40)

Community, then, is tied absolutely to the idea of inoperation, a refusal to be drawn into a “higher” purpose (of love, of death, or finding, or regaining, or efficacy). It is only then that we can apprehend its location and experience it in this dis-positional space, a lateral and co-extensive motion that refers to nothing. Crucially, in Nancy’s work we also find a very similar discourse on the body, and this forms a crucial perspective on what will occur in *L’Intrus*.

B O D I E S

Just as he rejects the operationalizing of community, its being pressed into service always to symbolize (and act toward) something other and beyond, so too does Nancy critique the constant, seemingly inevitable symbolization of the body. Against this current in western philosophical thought, he asks instead for “a *corpus*, a *catalog*, the recitation of an empirical logos that, without transcendental reason, would be a gleaned list, random in order or in its degree of completion, a corpus of the body’s *entries*: dictionary entries, entries into language, body registers, registers of bodies. . . . All this would be possible only if we had access to bodies, only if they were not impenetrable, as physics defines them. Bodies impenetrable to language” (*BtP*, 189). Just as he wishes us to regard community as simply and always a distinct disposition of space in-between, and Being as the co-appearance (always) of the singular and the plural in and as this space, so too does he seek to prevent the body from constantly being drawn into speaking of something else, or signifying beyond itself. Instead he would place it into a simple catalog, an inventory of itself and its others, such that it is given over to writing itself. Then what we will find are “no longer bodies that make sense, but sense that engenders and shares bodies. No longer the semiological, symptomatological, mythological, or phenomenological pillage of bodies, but thought and writing given, given over to bodies. The writing of a *corpus* as a separation

and sharing of bodies, sharing their being-body, shaped out by it, and thus divided from itself and from its sense, exscribed all along its own inscription" (*BtP*, 197).

Nevertheless, and crucially for my reading of *L'Intrus*, both Nancy's desire for us to see community as "inoperative" and his hope that we can regard the body as something other than a symbolic space are jeopardized precisely by the historical occasion of the transplant. For in this instance, Nancy is confronted by (and his body drawn within for its very survival) a technological community with a precise intent—the deferral of death. And in this community, immanence re-appears as immortality. If the negative image of the body for Nancy may be seen in this fragment wherein "the body remains the organon, the instrument or the incarnation, the mechanism or the work of a *sense* that never stops rushing into it, presenting itself to itself, making itself known as such and wanting to tell itself there" (*BtP*, 192), then in the medical/scientific/technological community in which he finds himself inscribed we find the invasion of a specific sense, a saturation of particular meaning, operationalized and put into service to make the body survive. But survival is possible only within its unique regimes, values, and assumptions.

In the instance of the heart transplant, we find that the "rushing in" is not just that of the other's organ, which is substituted for one's own, but the entire sense-making operation of which this substitution is the end and the beginning. This instance may be read as diametrically opposed to Nancy's description of the shared space between singularities, a sharing that constitutes precisely the singular as singular/plural. Nancy argues that this "between" "does not lead from one to another; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge . . . it is that which is at the heart of a connection, the *interlacing* of strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very center of the knot" (*BSP*, 5). Instead, in *L'Intrus* we find the intense and inescapable pressure to discern whether or not this particular interlacing/interpenetration does not fuse Nancy into the other, and vice-versa. Does this instance of fusion not provide a counterexample to that of sexual intercourse, which Nancy often cites as the positive example of such unfused interlacing?

Frustratingly, and provocatively, one could indeed argue in either direction. On the one hand, one could say that the instance of the transplant negates the positive assertions we find throughout Nancy's writing on being and otherness, that it points us to a new historical moment wherein bodies are inscribed and fused (for the sake of their very survival) within a community of science, technology, and the particular values that operationalize the heart in their service. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that this opening up to receive the other, and the subsequent re-relation of singularities, the radical upsetting of a sense of separateness, exemplify instead the perfect realization of Nancy's ontology: that the technologically-affected "fusion" actually only reverses the self-other relationship and accentuates their mutual identity within the interstitial space of indeterminate ownership of the heart. Herein, the stranger and Nancy share a liminal space or dis-position of organs and identity.

In *L'Intrus* we follow the gradual disintegration of the "individual" along the lines of Nancy's previous writing on ontology. Slowly, but surely, the encasement of the individual gives way to a radical invasion of otherness that ultimately leads to a questioning of the claims that self and identity are distinct and independent. And yet, what would seem to be a positive instance for Nancy is cast within a historical moment that threatens, if not to re-insert his ontological assertions back into the traditional western model which stakes the highest claims for the individual "self," at least to dilute and compromise Nancy's claims.

To understand how this might happen, we must first provide a more detailed analysis of the specific relation of bodies and being. If, in *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy remarks upon "the difference between things in general, the difference between my body and many bodies" (*BSP*, 29), then this difference is found again to be significant precisely as a primary element of the sharing, the sense of being as being-with, that undergirds Nancy's ontology: "A body is the sharing of and the departure from self, the departure toward self, the nearby-to-self without which the 'self' would not even be 'on its own'" (*BSP*, 84). This doubling—in effect, this simultaneous sharing and departure—is of a nature with the simultaneity of singular/plural and, importantly, of unity/disunity.

The “with” is or constitutes the mark of unity/disunity, which in itself does not designate unity or disunity as that fixed substance which would undergird it; the ‘with’ is not the sign of a reality, or even of an ‘intersubjective dimension.’ . . . As such, it also constitutes the traction and tension, repulsion/attraction, of the ‘between’-us. The ‘with’ stays between us, and we stay between us, but only [as] the interval between us. . . . Therefore, it is not the case that the ‘with’ is an addition to some prior Being; instead, the ‘with’ is at the heart of Being. (*BSP*, 62, 30)

Nevertheless, the particular dynamic here described may be manifested in different ways; there is no foregone conclusion as to the manners in which this disposition of being-with can occur.

For example, in *Being Singular Plural* we find two quite different descriptions of the exposition of Being—one rather neutral, the other violent. Compare these two passages:

It is not the eruption of an Other, which would clear away or sublimate the world, which would transcribe it into something else; instead, it is the exposition of the world-of-bodies as such, that is, as originally singular plural” (*BSP*, 84).

The essence of Being is the shock of the instant. Each time. ‘Being’ is always an instant of Being (a lash, a blow, beating, shock, knock, an encounter, an access). As a result, it is also always an instance ‘with’: singulars singularly together, where the togetherness is neither the sum, nor the incorporation, nor the “society,” nor the “community” (*BSP*, 33).

It is in this dual description of the exposition of being that we find a specific point of entry into *L’Intrus*, for Nancy’s essay begins by describing a scene that has deeper affinities with the latter, violent citation. We find an assertion that, rather than the proper instantiation of Being, this intrusion is an act of transgression against the Self: “The intruder gets in by force, by surprise, or by trickery; in any case, neither with the right to be there nor with having been admitted” (*I*, 10). Nevertheless, note the gradual transformation which occurs in the following sentence, as it moves the

distance between what has just been asserted (the isolated “self” being intruded upon by an illegal intruder, one without the *right* to be there) to a statement that safeguards its otherness despite its unlawfulness. In this short span, we have the articulation of, precisely, being/singular/plural, wherein both the singular and the plural retain their co-extensive identities: “It never ceases to be an intrusion: that is to say, it is always without the right to be there; it never becomes familiar, one never becomes accustomed to it. On the contrary, it is always a disturbance, a discordance in the midst of intimacy. This is what must be thought, and therefore practiced. If not, the strangeness of the stranger is reabsorbed before he has passed the threshold” (*I*, 11-12).

Further into the essay, we find a concise summing-up of this simultaneous, complex co-appearance of being and other: “There is an intruder within me and I become a stranger to myself. . . . But making me a stranger to myself does not bring me closer to the intruder” (*I*, 3). It is crucial in this instance to understand that what Nancy means by “myself” is not to be confused with Being. Rather, what he has become estranged from is the notion of the individual Self, and what he is now profoundly confronted with is Being as being-with.

The resistance to the absorption in the Self is exactly emblematic of Nancy’s refusal of the Hegelian dialectic; the sentence brilliantly insists on preserving the integrity of the other against such incorporation. And yet, rather than remain simply at the level of a kind of ontological pluralism, Nancy focuses our attention *both* on the way he is alienated from the traditional privileges of individual being *and* refused the transcendental movement of fusion with the Other. Absorption into the Self is denied, but so too is any transcendence into some other, higher Being. Both the avenues of self-enhancement through incorporating the Other and self-transcendence by expropriating the self into some greater Being are cut off. He now exists precisely in that dispositional space in-between, a space occupied co-extensively by the intruder. There is thus a double imperative against resistance to otherness and against absorption into otherness. Between the two lies exactly the possibility of sharing, of being-with:

[B]odies run the risk of resisting one another in an impenetrable fashion, but they also run the risk of meeting and dissolving into one another. This double risk comes down to the same thing: abolishing the limit, the touch, the absolute, becoming substance, becoming God, becoming the Subject of speculative subjectivity. This is no longer the absolute, but saturated totality. But as long as there is *something*, there is also something else, other bodies whose limits expose them to each other's touch, between repulsion and dissolution. (*BTIP*, 206)

This double argument has a particular manifestation in the way Nancy describes the workings of the immune system in *L'Intrus*. Here he experiences a "constant exteriorization" as it explodes his prior sense of self: "It comes down to this: identity counts as immunity, the one identifies itself with the other. Strangeness and being a stranger become common and quotidian. This translates itself by my constant exteriorization" (*I*, 33). Again, the self is refused both the sanctuary of individual essence and communion with the other, a communion which always threatens to absorb either one into the other.

We might thus accept the argument that, in the course of *L'Intrus*, Nancy delineates an instance of his ontological philosophy becoming particularly and graphically manifest, and as such, welcome it. However, as one moves through the essay, one also finds negative moments as well. Most disturbing is the way that the body's induction into the medical procedure automatically inscribes it in a particularly operative community. Not only is his survival "inscribed in a complex process woven together with strangers and strangeness" (*I*, 21), but this strangeness is of a particular, instrumental nature. Nancy describes the intimate and concrete practices which invade his body, "the intrusion . . . of this space: tubes, pliers, sutures, and catheters" (*I*, 26). We find that:

There is an opening there through which passes an incessant flux of strangeness: immune depressant drugs, other drugs charged with combatting certain so-called secondary effects, effects which they do not know how to fight

(such as the degradation of the kidneys), repeated check-ups, all of existence set in a new register, swept completely through. It is life scanned and reported in multiple registers, each one of which inscribes other possibilities of death. . . . It is thus I myself who becomes my intruder, in all of these accumulated and opposing ways. I feel it well: it is far stronger than a sensation. The strangeness of my own identity, which was always so much alive and vivid, never before touched me so acutely. "I" has clearly become the formal index of an unverifiable and impalpable chain. (*I*, 35-36)

All this bespeaks the fact that the "strangeness" here consists not only of the other's heart, but of the entire apparatus that makes the operation possible, that is, in the final analysis, the intrusion itself.

If one recalls Nancy's critique of western philosophy's constant transformation of the body into a sign of something else, we cannot but be shocked at the present transformation of Nancy's body into this "new register." In the regime of the transplant, the body has first become the object of a thoroughgoing re-definition, and secondly, in that process, is persistently and necessarily read as a symbol of the efficacy of those operations and its legitimizing token. The analytical struggle in *L'Intrus* is to tease out the properly philosophical, ontological dimension from the pragmatic, technical, and medical/scientific dimension: where does one stop, and the other begin? Again, does this operation enable Nancy's ontological claims to be manifested, or does it negate them?

The weight of the pragmatic is indisputable; Nancy unrelentingly notes the pervasive presence and profound reach of the discursive community which mandates and governs the practices which keep him alive, which enable and facilitate these processes for Nancy's "own" sake:

To taking drugs more than once a day and going back to the hospital for check-ups there are added the dental consequences of radiotherapy, the loss of saliva, the food restrictions, the restrictions on contact for fear of contagion, the weakening of muscles and kidneys, the reduction of memory and of the strength to work, the reading of analyses, the insidious recurrence of mucositis, candida, polyneuritis and this general feeling of no longer being

dissociable from a network of measures, of observations, of chemical, institutional, and symbolic connections which never allow themselves to be ignored like the connections intertwined in ordinary life are. On the contrary, these connections expressly hold life unremittingly aware of their presence and supervision. (*I*, 40)

Such awareness extends to incorporating Nancy himself, transforming him into the very material intrusions that now are necessary elements of his body: “The intruder exposes me excessively. It extrudes me, exports me, expropriates me. I am the malady and the medicine; I am the cancerous cell and the transplanted organ; I am the immune depressant agents and their palliatives. . . .” (*I*, 42).

In such dramatic and graphic passages, do we not find an instance where one has operationalized the heart, the body, and thereby rendered them outside themselves altogether? Is it not the case that “when one puts the body on the program, on whatever program, one has already set it aside” (*BtP*, 190)? Again, the critical question for my essay is whether or not this pragmatic program is consistent with Nancy’s ontological program, or quite different from it. Do science and technology radically alter (or even pervert) the ontological situation, or dramatically enhance it?

Nancy addresses the relation of technology to being in *Being Singular Plural*: “. . . we regard [‘technological’ nature] as an autonomous instrument. We do so without ever asking ourselves if it might not be ‘our’ comprehension of ‘our-selves’ that comes up with these techniques and invents itself in them, and without wondering if technology is in fact essentially in complete agreement with the ‘with’” (*BSP*, 70). In a note, he continues this idea that *techné* is consistent with ontology: “Even ‘in nature’ species proliferate and live alongside one another. *Techné* would always have to do with what neither proceeds from nor to itself, with disparity, contingency, and, thus, with an unachieved and unachievable essence of the ‘with’” (*BSP*, 202 n. 61). But is this not an altogether different version of technology than the one we find in *L’Intrus*? While the positive version of *techné* finds it, along with everything else, alongside everybody and everything else, in *L’Intrus* is not *techné* intrusive and violent, transformative? Doesn’t his heart transplant present a

radically different, historically specific, instance? The specific, historical case of technology is one which he mentions emphatically in *The Inoperative Community*:

But for us, by now beyond even the ‘totalitarianism’ that was to be the monstrous realization of this promise, there remains only the play of imperialisms against the background of still another empire, another techno-economic imperative, and the social forms that such an imperative creates. It is no longer even a question of community. But this is also because the techno-economic organization or ‘making operational’ of our world has taken over, even inherited, the plans for a communitarian organization. It is still essentially a matter of work, of operation, of operativity. (IC, 23)¹⁰

As we saw above, the operationalizing of the body in the transplant procedure requires that, to take in the foreign body, Nancy’s immune system must be turned against itself; it is disallowed to recognize the stranger as a stranger. This circumstance puts tremendous pressure upon the notion of heterogeneity that Nancy insists upon: “From one singular to another, there is contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other” (*BSP*, 5). We are led to ask if the other’s heart is contiguous, or made continuous? This could be one critical measure of the trajectory, positive or negative, of Nancy’s *L’Intrus*.

At one moment, Nancy seems to offer us two possibilities: “The very meaning of the word ‘together,’ just like the meaning of the word ‘with,’ seems to oscillate indefinitely between two meanings, without ever coming to a point of equilibrium: it is either the ‘together’ of juxtaposition *partes extra partes*, isolated and unrelated parts, or the ‘together’ of gathering *totum intra totum*, a unified totality where the relation surpasses itself in being pure” (*BSP*, 6o). While it is relatively easy to dismiss the latter choice, as it would seem to be contaminated with the notion of immanence and transcendence, the former choice needs to be addressed seriously. For while in this case each part would retain its otherness, its singularity, the focal

point would be on their *juxta-position*, not their dis-position. That is to say, the emphasis would be placed on their being next to each other, rather than on their shared ontological nature of being together. The slippage between the two alternatives Nancy mentions precisely informs the difficulty of thinking through this ontology. And it would be entirely possible to leave it at that, were it not for the instance of the heart transplant, which makes literal and real what was philosophically abstract.

At this juncture, we must evaluate the status of the entire network of material procedures that make this new contiguity/continuity possible in the first place: Are they not an essential part of the intrusion of the foreign? Does this recognition not force us to re-evaluate their positive function in manifesting in real terms what was philosophically conjectured? This re-evaluation leads us once again to question whether techné is intrusive or alongside, whether it is a perversion of the human or its co-extensive, inventive property.

The issue might be partially resolved by demarcating two realms—the instrumental, and the ontological. In one instance, the “other” of the other’s heart is merely an instrumental object; in the other case, it is one which/who illustrates an ontological instance. In the following passage, Nancy describes another moment of the marshalling of the other into significance and incorporation into the subject which has deep affinities to the first proposition (that is, that the heart is an instrumental object incorporated into the subject’s body, and its alterity is erased in the process, absorbed into and by a relentlessly appropriative subject):

This other is no longer an other, but an object of a subject’s representation (or, in a more complicated way, the representative object of another subject for the subject’s representation). Communication and alterity that is its condition can, in principle, have only an instrumental and not an ontological role and status in a thinking that views the subject as the negative of its specular identity of the object, that is, as an exteriority without alterity. The subject cannot be outside itself: this is even what ultimately defines it—that its outside and all its ‘alienations’ or ‘extraneousness’ should in the end be suppressed by and *sublated* in it. (*IC*, 24)

The alternative to this reading of the transplant as instrumentalizing the other, of attempting to render it continuous, is a reading that maintains its contiguous status alongside, *with*, the receiving body. Indeed, this reading would pertain in even perhaps the most radical moment of *L'Intrus*, when Nancy notes that at the moment that the other's heart becomes "his," he himself has become "other" to himself (by dint of the fact that his immune system, that monitor of and protector against otherness, has been recoded to accept the not-self).

The question we have been asking all along—is this operation a dramatization of Nancy's ontology or its worst nightmare—can be situated and read across multiple sites. Each, however, touches upon the question of whether the operation allows us to see, graphically and profoundly, Nancy's ontology, or whether its very conditions of possibility do not irredeemably place it in the circuits of a technological operationalization that hijack the human body into a project of immanence. And this immanence would be nothing else than the immanence of immortality. It is now that we must finally turn to the role of death.

D E A T H

"Thus, the multiple stranger who intrudes on my life . . . is nothing other than death, or rather life/death: a suspension of the continuum of being, a scansion where there is not a lot for 'me' to do" (*I*, 25). Thus Nancy names the intruder, completely and absolutely, its multiplicity now gathered under a single signifier. Crucially, this naming gives a new name as well to the paradoxical question that we have laid out in this essay: Is this operation to be seen as a positive, or negative event? If we see it as the latter, it is solely because of the operationalizing of the heart, which comes upon its insertion into a technoscientific (not to say economic) community of immanence. Parallel to this network is a network where "life/death is shared, where life connects with death, where the incommunicable communicates" (*I*, 30). Yet in the course of his essay (and drawing on his other writings on death), Nancy gives us more grounds on which to answer for the positive—that is, to construe this instance as providing the most intense experienc-

ing of being. His use of language makes this perfectly clear: “To isolate death from life—to not let the one entwine itself intimately with the other, each one intruding into the heart of the other—that is what one must never do” (*I*, 23).

We can thus look afresh at passages such as these from *Being Singular Plural*, and see in *L'Intrus* a particular concretization of Nancy's notion of death and others. The sharing of the heart, the creation of a particular instance of being-singular-plural, is intimately acted out on the topos of death/life.

The other dies insofar as the other is with me and that we are born and die to one another, exposing ourselves to one another and, each time, exposing the inexposable singularity of the origin. (*BSP*, 89)

[Death] is there between us at the distance that separates us, but this distance is also what prevents us from being separated, because it contains the condition for all understanding. (*BSP*, 90)

Just as all being is being with, a proposition that creates a new understanding of self/other dynamics, all being is co-extensive with multiple singularities. Nancy's discussions of death and the other can thus be extrapolated out to his notion of community. Consistent with Nancy's notion of being as always being-with, death “is dissociable from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself—and reciprocally” (*IC*, 14). He elaborates the connection between community and death:

Community is revealed in the death of others; hence it is always revealed to others. Community is what takes place always through others and for others. It is not the space of the *egos*—subjects and substances that are at bottom immortal—but of the *'Ts*, that are not *egos*. It is not a communion that fuses the *egos* into an *Ego* of a higher *We*. It is the community of *others* A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth (which amounts to saying that there is no community of immortal beings: one can imagine either a society or a communion of immortal beings, but not a community). (*IC*, 15)

This “mortal truth” thus blocks the path toward immanence, the lure to see one’s truth beyond the mutual co-appearance of others (“community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence” [IC, 35]). The death of others is always a death revealed to others; death “happens” to one, and at once constitutes yet another sign of the shared space of being.

Death is thus always at once “singular” and shared amongst the community: “sharing comes down to this: what community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself. Which does not mean my existence reinvested in or by community, as if community were another subject that would sublimate me, in a dialectical or communal mode” (IC, 26). Nancy draws all these elements together in the following passage:

The motif of the revelation, through death, of being-together or being-with, and of the crystallization of the community around the death of its members, *and that is to say around the ‘loss’ (the impossibility) of their immanence* and not around their fusional assumption in some collective hypostasis, leads to a space of thinking incommensurable with the problematics of sociality or intersubjectivity . . . within which philosophy, despite its resistance, has remained captive. (IC, 14)

Again, and to close out this section of my essay, we find a statement from *The Inoperative Community* that in its language graphically names the process of laceration and singular being and death:

What tears apart is the presentation of finitude in and by community—the presentation of the triple mourning I must go through: that of the death of the other, that of my birth, and that of my death. Community is the carrying out of this triple mourning. . . . What is lacerated in this way is not the singular being: on the contrary, this is where the singular being compares. Rather, it is the communal fabric, it is immanence that is lacerated. And yet this laceration does not happen *to* anything, for this fabric does not exist. There is no tissue, no flesh, no subject or substance of common being, and consequently there is no laceration of this being. But there *is* sharing out.

Properly speaking, there is no laceration of the singular being; there is no open cut in which the inside would get lost in the outside. . . . ‘Laceration’ consists only in exposure: the entire ‘inside’ of the singular being is exposed to the “outside.” (*IC*, 30)

Seen in these terms, the transplant operation changes exactly nothing (and this is a good thing). The immanence of some marvelous communion is taken away from the scene; there is no triumph or, indeed, defeat (since this laceration happens to nothing, either in the present or in the future). Voided of substance as we are used to regarding it, the singular being simply stands exposed to and with the other. The positions of self and other are interchangeable; any “essence” (whose heart is whose) becomes replaced by a global notion of common-placedness.

And yet this reading is to take only one dimension as the totality of *L’Intrus*. The simple fact is that sharing in this instance is enabled and mediated by a structured community intent on immanence, the immanence of its own perfection, the immanence of death-lessness (or at least, the ability to manipulate a constant deferral of death). Read in this regard, this operationalization of bodies (on all sides, from all directions) re-instantiates immanence and recodes bodies in its own logic. In this sense, the historical question which has been with us all along emerges with a vengeance: Are we now living at a time when the one thing that brings about recognition of community—death—is forestalled in the name of a specialized community operating under the basis of the eternal imperative to find immortality? And is this immortality to be found only by perverting the ontological precepts Nancy sets forth—that is, ironically, by making possible this laceration that is not a laceration?



N O T E S

I wish to thank Phyllis Gardner, Larry Zaroff, and Audrey Shafer for their suggestions.

1. Quoted in Sherwin B. Nuland, *Doctors: The Biography of Medicine* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 465.
2. Ibid.
3. W. J. Winslade and J. W. Ross, *Choosing Life or Death: A Guide for Patients, Families, and Professionals* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), quoted in *New Harvest: Transplanting Body Parts and Reaping the Benefits*, ed. C. Don Keyes (Clifton, N.J.: Humana Press, 1991), 9.
4. Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Intrus* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000), 14. My translation. All subsequent references to this text will be as *I*.
5. In this essay, I use the following abbreviations: *BSP* refers to *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), originally published as *Être singulier pluriel*, Éditions Galilée, 1996; *BtP* refers to *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); *IC* refers to *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). The essay cited was originally published as *La Communauté désœuvrée*, Christien Bourgois, ed., 1986.
6. Again, "It is not a question of an *aliud* or an *alius*, or an *alienus*, or an other in general as the essential stranger who is opposed to what is proper, but of an *alter*, that is, 'one of the two.' The 'other,' this 'lowercase other,' is 'one' insofar as they are many; it is *each one*, and it is *each time* one, one *among* them, one among all and one *among* is all. In the same way, and reciprocally, 'we' is always inevitably 'us all,' where no one of us can be 'all' and each one of us is, in turn (where all our turns are simultaneous as well as successive, in every sense), the other origin of the same world" (*BSP*, 11).
7. I hesitate to even use words like "interstitial," since in Nancy's lexicon, such terms rely on presumptions that he insists on putting into question and reformulating, often times quite radically. I hope this essay's focus and particular argument can avoid as much as possible inadvertently creating misimpressions regarding the application of these terms.
8. "Presence itself is dis-position, the spacing of singularities" (*BSP*, 14).
9. Consider also: "Our understanding (of the meaning of Being) is an understanding *that* we share understanding between us and, at the same time, *because* we share understanding between us: between us all, simultaneously—all the dead and the living, and all beings" (*BSP*, 99).
10. See also: "[E]conomic ties, technological operations, and political fusion (into a *body* or under a *leader*) represent to rather present, expose, and realize this essence necessarily in themselves. Essence is set to work in them; through them, it becomes its own work. This is what we have called 'totalitarianism,' but it might be better named 'immanentism,' as long as we do not restrict the term to designating certain types of societies or regimes but rather see in it the general horizon of our time, encompassing both democracies and their fragile juridical parapets" (*IC*, 3).