

Toward Nancy - Film Transcript

Teacher - It's odd you should say you wanted to be imperceptible when you arrived in France, because imperceptible means, literally, that you can't be seen. So you didn't want to be seen as a foreigner?

Student - Yes, I wanted to gain admittance, be here, not be seen as different, and not disturb the established order. Avoid adopting a stance in which I could be rejected or even deported. How did you think up the idea of intrusion that's contained within every foreigner?

Teacher - It first came to me because of what we were saying earlier about the double bind in relation to foreigners, because when I was asked to write something one day about foreignness, the fact of being a foreigner, my first reaction was to distance myself from convention, the welcoming of foreigners. We agree it's necessary to welcome foreigners; that's what we want. But there's something about the way we impose, normalize, standardize this welcome, the welcome of differences, respect of others, etcetera, which means we end up ignoring their foreignness. It's like pretending a black person isn't black. And so I decided that I wanted to specify what must remain foreign in a foreigner, and what makes him foreign.

Student - When you write that every foreigner is an intruder in a way, whom are you addressing, the host or the foreigner?

Teacher - First of all, I'm thinking of the one you call the host. Even though we need to consider the welcome offered by this host, if this welcome must lead to assimilation - that's one of the words used for foreigners and immigrants, along with the American concept of "the melting pot" - then I can't differentiate integration from assimilation. But I do know that this whole idea of accepting differences aims in fact to erase them, and to make them imperceptible as you say, meaning that no one can perceive the differences. But it comes up against differences that survive, because there are no strong centers of assimilation or integration now. In other words, it's a matter of taking thought beyond these models that are no longer adequate. I have the feeling that France is a country where it's easy to feel that you're an intruder, because France has a strong identity, with an arrogant attitude or mentality, as we are so often told.

Student - I'm not sure about that. You have that impression?

Teacher - The impression I'm arrogant? Seriously, yes because I often tell myself that when French people lecture the rest of the world about assimilation and integration, they're speaking with an identity that is incontestably strong. Perhaps it's not as strong now as a hundred years ago, but it has been built up by centuries of domination by a centralized and powerful state, a state that has led to the integration of all the French provinces, languages, and cultures, through wars.

Student - Don't you feel that the Schengen Zone, in other words, a Europe closed to the outside, tends to bring about - how can I put it - the illegal or intrusive passage towards the inside? It's hard to enter other than as an intruder.

Teacher - Of course. I believe this intrusion is caused by homogenization, and potent immunization. This is not only linked to the Schengen zone but to a whole civilization, that is a civilization of homogenization, and that has had a tendency to homogenize the world. Globalization has two aspects; it's either woeful homogenization, or blissful heterogeneity. They contradict each other. This intrusion is really... The Sangatte refugees are people who are excluded from the Schengen zone. Some are non-Schengen Europeans, while others come from far away. They're people who are seeking admittance to the homogenous zone, and who hope at the same time to retain what we call an identity, but an identity that should not necessarily appear as intrusive with heterogeneity in this homogeneity.

Student - That means something happens to homogeneity when the intruder arrives. What happens?

Teacher - Whenever there's intrusion, there's disorder, there's turmoil, and there's threat. An intruder is always threatening. The very word intruder reflects a form of threat. I've noticed that the word intrusion is often used by psychoanalysts, in relation to phenomena that arise in someone's conscious mind, in a violent, menacing, and hallucinatory manner.

Student - They call that 'intrusion.'

Teacher - The intrusion of the other into the self. But, at the same time, what occurs then in a pathological manner, is also the same as something that can be perceived as a strangeness within myself, not necessarily the presence of the other, but its existence. That's not at all pathological. It's what you can't identify, and if conceiving means identifying, then we cannot conceive it. That's the limit of identity, but identity can only be found by accepting some elements of this intrusion. Because an identity that is complete and well-founded, and incapable of accepting intrusion, is as stupid, closed, sealed...

Student - A stone like identity?

Teacher - Yes, like stone

Student - There must be elements of the other. But at the same time, isn't there a sort of rejection?

Teacher - Yes, there has to be acceptance of rejection. It's like people who hear voices. If someone hears voices, that can either be madness or genius. Without wishing to romanticize genius, something true has tried to express itself. In other words, there's always another voice speaking through our own voice when we truly say something.

Student - When you say, "Every foreigner must be an intruder," that sounds like a call to me. It seems to say, "Come foreigner, but when I least expect it, surprise me."

Teacher - That's true. But it's impossible. If I say, "surprise me," you can only do so by not responding to my request.

Student - For there to be a surprise, I mustn't expect to be surprised.

Teacher - Exactly, but if you're surprised unexpectedly, then you don't accept it either.

Student - You feel annoyed, unsettled.

Teacher - Precisely. You cannot avoid that problem.

Student - And so we're unsettled, but something occurs that allows us to change

Teacher - Yes, but the trouble is you may not want that. It's a little like everyday life. I'm always struck by the fact that all the important events, the things that have proved to be determinant in my life, occurred without me foreseeing them. I never foresaw anything, not even the job I do now. It's true; it's always from somewhere else.

Traveller - When do we get there?

Teacher - Sorry?

Traveller - When do we get there?

Teacher - When do we get there? In about ten minutes.

Traveller - So soon? Very quick and pleasant.

Teacher - A bit long though, wasn't it?



Director:
Claire Denis

Cast:
Alex Descas
Jean-Luc Nancy
Ana Samardzija