

## Analysis Of *Vers Nancy*

The film *Vers Nancy* is an interview between Jean-Luc Nancy and a student of his, Ana Samardzija, while they ride a train. They discuss foreigners, and the sense of intrusion that is part of being a foreigner. They also discuss assimilation versus integration, and how the stereotype that French people are arrogant affects foreigners. Other topics include being a society of homogenization, the Schengen Zone, and the importance of an identity being able to accept intrusions. Throughout the film, a black man, who is assumed to be a foreigner, is shown on the train with Nancy and his student. At the end of the film, the black man intrudes on their conversation, asking how much longer the ride is going to be, concluding the film.

The setting of the film is in the car of a train that is assumed to be traveling towards Nancy, France. The setting of the train ride plays on the topic of foreignness, since many foreigners embark on similar train rides when they are first entering a new place. Nancy and Ana are having a discussion on the topic of foreignness. Ana herself is a foreigner to France, who wanted to blend in when she first arrived, to the point where she would not be recognized as a foreigner. The other character in the film, Alex Descas, is a black male who is assumed to be a foreigner. He later intrudes on the other characters' conversation, asking if the ride is going to be much longer. His purpose is to play on the idea of foreignness. He was born in France, even though he appears to be a foreigner due to his African ancestry. Also, he is a foreigner to the conversation of the other two characters, and intrudes when he asks how much longer the ride is going to be. He also serves as a juxtaposition of Ana, for she is a foreigner despite not appearing to be one, and he is not a foreigner despite appearing to be one.

The most notable characteristic about foreigners is often their difference from everyone else, in both appearance and culture. Because of this, they are easily recognized as being foreign. However, this can sometimes be misleading, as with Ana and Alex. Since most foreigners cannot easily blend in, there is a sense of intrusion into the other culture. They are

quickly recognized as different from the host culture, and this disrupts the homogeneity of the culture. When this happens, the host culture perceives the foreigner as a threat to its stability, which results in the aggressive nature of viewing a foreigner as an intruder. The host culture will naturally fight to re-establish its homogenous nature. This can be achieved through two methods, assuming that the host accepts the foreigner. The host culture must either assimilate or integrate the foreigner. Both are similar in the sense that they aim to eliminate the strangeness of the foreigner, and by doing so restoring the society to a homogenous state. The difference is that assimilation achieves this goal by eliminating the difference of the foreigners, whereas integration achieves this goal by integrating this difference into the rest of society. When a foreigner is assimilated, they are forced to abandon their previous identity and adopt a new one. However, if a foreigner is integrated into society, it allows the foreigners to retain their personal identity. Nancy asserts that it is better to integrate foreigners into society rather than assimilate them, since an identity can only retain its strength if it is able to accept aspects of other identities. If an identity remains rigid and unchanging, then it will lose its significance.

The fact that the mode of discourse here is an interview facilitates the comfortable discussion of ideas, with the focus being specifically on the ideas of one of the people. As an interview, the discussion is centered on Nancy's ideas, and Ana is able to direct the conversation based on the questions that she asks. For example, when Nancy mentions the arrogant stereotype of French people, she responds by questioning his certainty of his statement. By doing so, she directs the conversation towards the stereotypical attitude of French people, and Nancy's opinion on it, prompting him to discuss it further. Ana is also able to control the conversation by introducing new topics when she feels it is appropriate. For example, after Nancy discusses France's strong identity for a while, Ana introduces the idea of the Schengen Zone to the conversation, signaling to Nancy that she wants to move on to the next topic, and thus controlling the flow of the discussion.

After hearing the discussion about Nancy's views on foreignness, it would be interesting to hear his opinion on the United States' treatment of foreigners; his views on the differences between the Canadian and Mexican border, the current racial tension in the South, and the US being referred to as America would be particularly interesting. To go about this, I would first ask him of his opinion on the United States' treatment of foreigners in general. I would then ask him more specifically about the difference between the two borders, and how the higher security on the Mexican border reveals that they are viewed as more intrusive than the Canadians, whose border is less secure. After, I would ask him about his opinion on the racial tension in the south, since there is still a strong sense of intrusion regarding African-Americans, despite the fact that African-Americans have been in the US for a long time. Finally, I would ask about his opinion on the fact that the US often is referred to as America, even though the Americas contain much more than the United States. Does he view this a sense of forced integration or assimilation? It would be interesting to hear Nancy's views on the United States' treatment of foreigners, especially since Nancy himself is a foreigner to the United States.

The discussion between Nancy and Ana has taught me that it is important to listen to others' ideas, and then to integrate those ideas, rather than view them as aggressive intrusions. If a set of ideas does not accept other ideas, then it a useless set of ideas, for they will remain stagnant, and not evolve or improve. It is through the discussion and integration of different ideas that intellectual progress is made, and therefore it is important to accept other ideas, rather than to remain rigid and oppress foreign ideas as if they were merely intrusive.

In future interactions, I will try to openly accept and integrate others' ideas with my own, particularly when it comes to writing. I have always been defensive of my writing, preferring to have only a teacher or professor review it, rather than having a peer review it. This is because I, like Nancy discusses, have viewed others' opinions of my writing as intrusions, and this aggressive view of them has caused me to resent them. This inhibits the

improvement of my writing, for if no new ideas are introduced into my writing, especially in the form of criticism, then there will be no improvement in my writing. If I accept others' criticisms, I will be able to integrate their ideas as a platform from which I can improve my writing. The film *Vers Nancy* focuses on the ideas of Jean-Luc Nancy regarding foreigners and foreignness, which can be applied to not only foreigners in a nation, but also to any foreign aspect of life, including the ideas of others, making his ideas significant in daily life.