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The Dis/rupture of Film as Skin

Jean-Luc Nancy, Claire Denis, and *Trouble Every Day*

It's on the inside of me
So don't try to understand
I get on the inside of you.
(Tindersticks, *Trouble Every Day*)

1 Prologue: the skin of film (Abbas Kiarostami/Jean-Luc Nancy)

Film and skin, film as skin. In two of Jean-Luc Nancy's film-theoretical texts – his little book about the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, *The Evidence of Film* (Nancy 2001), and “Icon of Fury” (Nancy 2008a), an essay about Claire Denis's film *Trouble Every Day* (2001) – the French philosopher recalls this double meaning and etymology of *pellicule*, film. In French (and English) it can mean skin, a sensitive membrane that:

is thinness and nothing else. This thinness defines a support that is unlike the support of painting and drawing: film is not a matter that easily takes on another material (paste, pencil, varnish), but rather a material that is sensitive to the singular material that light is, and this sensitivity is made up of thin, diaphanous substances (Nancy 2001: 46).

Abbas Kiarostami's film *Zendegi va digar hich* (Iran 1992, English title, in a literal translation: *Life, and Nothing More...*; French title: *Et la vie continue*) contains a scene that becomes, at least for Nancy, a *mise en abyme* for this precarious but persevering materiality of film. It is a scene in which the film's protagonist, a director, regards a painting that has been ruptured, torn by a crack in the wall caused by the big earthquake in Northern Iran in 1990 (see Fig. 1).

Kiarostami's film, which depicts how life goes on, takes place three days after the catastrophe. Nancy identifies the traditional rural portrait that has been torn in a physically impossible way as an emblematic image, an “image of an image” (Nancy 2001: 62). It is emblematic of the film's form and subject, of its configuration of continuation and rupture – the rupture that pervades the various layers of images into the country's reality; the continuation of film that asserts itself against the destruction:



Fig. 1: An “image of an image,” of continuation and rupture: Abbas Kiarostami, *Zendegi va digar hich*

From one world to the next, the images work in continuity and discontinuity, just as the films [by Kiarostami] work with movements and interruptions [...]. In *Life and Nothing More* the torn picture is not just split by a crack: it is, in itself, both a crack or a fissure and a continuous tie between the past [...] and the present [...]. (Nancy 2001: 40)

For Nancy, the fissure of the image is not only an allegory of the filmic “*paradox of what continues*” (Nancy 2001: 58; emphasis in the original text); the doubling of fissure and continuation, the continuation that prevails against the catastrophe, express the “perseverance of being” (Nancy 2001: 60) in Kiarostami’s recasting of neorealist cinema, a continuation beyond the mere continuity of images.

The director’s gaze confronting the image, and the subsequent mobilization of the gaze that detaches itself from the protagonist follow, according to Nancy, “the axiomatics of a way of looking” (Nancy 2001: 12), one that “is respectful of the real that it beholds, that is to say it is attentive and openly attending to the very power of the real and its absolute exteriority” (Nancy 2001: 38).¹ And just like Kiarostami’s cinema, for Nancy, embodies and operationalizes an ethics of looking where “looking just amounts to thinking the real, to test oneself with regard to a meaning one is not mastering” (Nancy 2001: 38), Nancy’s philosophical project often returns to figures of a sense one is not mastering, a truth without depths:

¹ This mobilization of the gaze manifests itself paradigmatically in the sequence containing the image (of the image): with the gaze of the director within the film, preceded by the image and the subsequent camera operation that “leaves” its diegetic source, the director, and the image of the peasant, directing itself towards and through a door next to the picture, eventually showing the landscape deframed.

Something true right at the skin, skin as truth: neither the beyond-the-skin sought by desire, nor the underside that science aims for, nor the spiritual secret of flesh revealed. For us, the nude is neither erotic nor anatomical nor authentic. It remains on the edge of or beyond these three postulations. The truth right at the skin is only true in being exposed, in being offered without reserve but also without revelation. (Nancy and Ferrari 2014: 2)

This trope resonates in Nancy's philosophical project of the "exscription" of the body (Nancy 2008b), as well as in his deconstruction of Christianity, and it manifests itself in his work on dance,² on the iconography of nakedness and of *noli me tangere*. It also marks a point of convergence with the cinematographic aesthetics of French director Claire Denis, whose films Nancy frequently comments upon.³ The question of a meaning beyond, or of a truth right at the skin or the surface also structures Claire Denis's films.⁴ But an emblematic rupture that is framed by a larger continuation and contained by an ethics of looking, as in Kiarostami's *Life And Nothing More*, is impossible to be found in Denis's body of work. *And life goes on? Trouble every day*. Denis's films open up to a real of a different order, they open up "icons of fury," the fissures of and in the sensitive membrane of film. It is this opening-up, the ruptures and their operations, that will be the subject of the following remarks.

My essay will track these operations in and with Claire Denis's para- or meta-horror film *Trouble Every Day*, and will connect them first to a (film-)theoretical discussion of the structures of continuity and of what film and psychoanalytic theory call *suture*. In a second step, the essay will reevaluate the film's ruptures of suture, skin, and image as disruptions that not only install a discourse of non-normalization beyond a filmic archeology and analysis of the societies of control,⁵ but eventually even affect the discursive formation Giorgio

² See Monnier, Nancy and Denis 2005.

³ Apart from several essays by Nancy dealing with Denis's films, their correspondence and collaboration includes one feature film, *L'intrus*, which takes up motives from Nancy's autobiographical essay with the same name, two appearances by Nancy in the essayistic films *Vers Nancy* and *Vers Mathilde*, as well as several radio and stage conversations. It also has provoked a veritable Nancy-Denis scholarship, see for example the essays in Morrey 2012.

⁴ The body and skin of film have been a prominent motif and motor of film theory over the last 20 years, especially in contemporary phenomenological theory. See especially Marks 2000. The limitations and fallacies of a phenomenological conceptualization of touch have often been the subject of Jean-Luc Nancy's work (See Nancy 2008b).

⁵ As opposed to control society horror approaches that, from David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) to Ben Wheatley's *High-Rise* (2015), link the topic of (sexual) deviance and destructive desire to a class struggle both contained and configured by the audiovisual as well as architectural control-spaces. For the configuration of Deleuze's concept of the "societies of control" and contemporary horror cinema see Robnik 2015.

Agamben describes as the “anthropological machine.” To try to get another glimpse beyond the paradigm of the bond of skin, (photochemical) film, and anthropogenesis the essay will conclude by briefly tracing it to and through a recent filmic reconceptualization of this relation: Jonathan Glazer’s (in the context of this essay aptly titled) *Under the Skin*.

2 Skin, rupture, suture

A long, in the dark of night (especially given digital film compression and image capture; in the movie theatre, with a 35 mm print, we would see more) almost indistinguishable kiss of an anonymous couple marks the beginning of Claire Denis’s 2001 film *Trouble Every Day* (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: The kiss preceding all ruptures and differentiations: Claire Denis, *Trouble Every Day*

This prologue or inverse motto receives its logos from the title song, composed by the Tindersticks and Stuart Staples, like many of Denis’s film scores: “It’s on the inside of me / So don’t try to understand / I get on the inside of you.”

A double motto: a kiss on the surface that is isolated from the film that follows, and which does not infect its tale of infection and infestation; a song and theme that at the same time evoke and neglect the desire to understand and to go inside. This kiss will not imprint itself onto the film that follows, the passionate kiss that does not seem to be in danger of turning into something violent, an act of carnivorous consumption, biting, devouring. It precedes the trouble of differentiating, of distinguishing between sexual desire and bloodlust, for example.

After the credits, establishing textures, images of fluidity and Paris, we hear the last beats of the title song and we see a woman, Béatrice Dalle, at the side of the street, waiting, presenting herself alongside a van (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: The predatorily Coré

This woman, who will not speak, who will only utter sounds that indicate lust or pain, will later be called Coré. It is an archetypal name, which not only refers to the myth and mystery of the “divine maiden” Persephone or Kore – the “Urkind” of C.G. Jung’s and Karoj Kerényi’s works, which Giorgio Agamben also discusses in an essay (Agamben and Ferrando 2014); it also alludes to the core of her sickness, which the films’ scientists are looking for and do not find, since, as with Vampires, there is no cure.

German director Christian Petzold described the opening scene as follows (in a short weblog entry and memory protocol after seeing the first half hour of *Trouble Every Day* at a film festival, see Fig. 4–11):



Fig. 4–11: Crisscrossings: From inter-subjective relations towards a structural desire of the film-form.

Béatrice Dalle stands next to a transformer station at the side of a road. A truck passes by. She briefly looks up. The driver has noticed her. And her gaze. He stops his truck. This stopping of the vehicle is shown in a complicated camera operation. The shots before were static. Simple. But now the camera is moving. Tracking the stopping truck for a moment. A



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.

crane movement is crisscrossing the rear. The movement comes to a halt when the driver opens his door. Somewhat peculiar and strange is this whole operation, this shot. It does not seem to be caused by anything, to narrate anything. A decoupage and montage



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.

with two, three shots would have told the stopping of the truck and the woman that caused it in a much simpler and clearer way. The sequence shot however stands out.



Fig. 11.

Later we see a man on a motorcycle. The irritation that seems to affect the cyclist while passing the truck, this irritation is immediately understandable for us, because it originated in the complicated camera operation, the sequence shot. (Petzold 2005: 143; my translation)

In a precise manner Petzold maps out an operation that is, albeit seemingly uneconomical and isolated, nevertheless almost paradigmatic for Claire Denis's films. An economical and simple shot pattern is crisscrossed by a complex camera operation. The almost infectious irritation that Petzold notices is not only caused or prepared by the way the stopping truck is shot, but by the way the meeting of the driver and Dalle is arranged. It could also be described as being the result of a small structural puzzle that is part of the same sequence: the film seems to wait for the direct address, the gaze of the driver, right there in the middle of the road. This gaze is then matched by the counter shot of Béatrice Dalle, with her eye-line in a seemingly regular shot-counter-shot pattern, but it is only for an instant, because then Dalle seems to enter her own point of view, only to be established and positioned as the waiting, craving, fixating, desiring female presence once again. The subsequent backing-up of the red truck that takes over image and soundtrack alike not only prefigures the monstrosity of this desire; it also points towards a paradigmatic shift within and of the film: from inter-subjective relations towards a structural desire of the film-form.

The sequence and its puzzling camera operation evoke a gaze and object that we could describe, almost with an oxymoron, as a trans-subjective point of view, as the "uncanny detachment of an object-gaze without a diegetic source" (Lie 2012: 131; my translation). But what are the implications of this gaze, this operation in and for *Trouble Every Day*? For now we could say that the subsequent backing-up of the red truck that then fills image and audio track alike prefigures the monstrosity of the desire that is directed towards its surface and then the inside. It also marks a shifting between intradiegetic inter-

personal relations to something that would need to be described as a structural filmic desire evoked by an automatic, detached object-gaze or gaze-object.

Claire Denis's cinema is composed of erotic and political body-image-textures that go beyond aesthetical dualities of abstraction and concretion, or discursive polarities like politics and the sensual. In gliding and slipping motions between organic and inorganic surfaces and textures, between automatic and human gazes, it produces narrative and formal dissociations; it follows a double poetics of touch and dis/rupture.

Already with her first long feature film *Chocolat*, from 1988, it has been her concern to show French colonial history and its geopolitical effects as an affair of gazes and touches. Especially since her arguably most famous feature film to date, her French legion Billy Budd-variation *Beau travail* from 1999, many of her films add up to a project that tracks bodies in filmic and political spaces or zones in a tension of singular desire and political collectivization. *Beau travail*, *Trouble Every Day*, *Vendredi soir* (2002), *L'Intrus* (2004) and *White Material* (2009) could all be considered as filmic reflections of what Michel Foucault called the complex "investment of the body" (Foucault 1995: 25), and at the same time they de-vest, or "exscribe" the body. In particular, *Trouble Every Day*, *Vendredi soir* (2002), and *L'Intrus* (2004) could all be described as forming a trilogy of embodied spatiality. The three films follow, to radically condense and paraphrase them, a topological movement starting with the gory opening of the body surface in *Trouble Every Day*, continuing with the magical creation of an intimate space in a car during a traffic jam in Paris, in *Vendredi Soir* (that is foreshadowed in *Trouble Every Day*'s prologue), and, eventually, culminating in movements that crisscross and dissolve the borders of the body and its surface and global geopolitical borders in *L'Intrus*, which, taking up Jean-Luc Nancy's essay of the same name, short-circuits movements of illegal migration, globalization, and an illegal heart transplant.

Trouble Every Day is just as invested in mixing and blending these different connotations of filmed and filmic transplantations and invasions of the body. It relates the rupturing and violating of the skin of human bodies to the skin and stitches of filmic materiality and grammar, to the skin of film itself, to film as skin and to what is called "suture" in film theory. *Trouble Every Day* is a horror film paraphrase that reassembles motives from the vampire and cannibalism genres and takes up generic approximations of the logics of desire with the discourse of infection. But it is not the kiss of the vampire, but rather the "kiss as vampire" that is at the core of its gore (Nancy 2008a; my emphasis).

This configuration leads the film's four protagonists through Paris, the newlywed American couple Shane and June Brown, and scientist Léo Sémeneau and his wife Coré. They – and the film itself – are driven by searches, marked by

search images: searching for a cure against the desire for sex that turns into carnage (Shane and Léo), for objects and victims of their desire (Coré and Shane), for reasons for the husband's mysterious behavior (June), for the wife before she kills again (Léo). The searches do not form a narrative in any conventional sense, but lose themselves in textures, patterns, intensities.

The crane operation, the irritation and re-stabilization of a human point of view at the beginning of the film structure and infect the entire film. However, they do not set off a shift towards the totality of an automated gaze (as in some of Stanley Kubrick's films), or the total extimization of a subjective gaze (as in the somewhat related films by Philippe Grandrieux). The move and method of Denis's cinema follow a logic of indifference where it does not seem to make a structural difference whether organic and inorganic textures, acts of love and acts of violence, caressed or ruptured skin are filmed. The precariousness and double meaning of "film" resonate in this logic of indifference.

Agnès Godard's camera gives this and most of Denis's films their singular visual signature; its tactile gaze hovers over the film's bodies and textures, turns them into surfaces without clear borders and subject markers. Among their collaborations *Trouble Every Day* may be the film that plays on the double meaning of *pellicule* the most, pushing also phenomenological paradigms of the skin of film and the tactility and synaestheticism of film experience towards a territory of the uncanny, the untouchable, beyond the paradigm of touch.⁶

The skin that is desired and torn open by Coré and Shane, the film's two protagonists that are sick and infected in a way that is never really specified or receives a name, the skin that is ripped within and, to a certain (metaphorical) extent, by the film itself, is always photographed in a tender, fluid, but nevertheless precarious mode. In the scene of Shane's and June's arrival in their hotel in Paris the operation and irritation of the beginning is recast and radicalized. The sequence, again, takes up the trope of a subjective gaze becoming trans-subjective, detached from the human subject of the gaze, and creating an uncanny gaze-object/object-gaze that contaminates film and characters alike (see Fig. 12–14).

The shot-reverse shot with Shane's/Vincent Gallo's creepy stare and the neck of a chamber maid that will eventually be killed, bitten to death by Gallo's Shane, this operation, filmed and followed by a Steadicam, establishes a pattern and perspective that shortly afterwards is repeated without the subject of the appetent gaze (see Fig. 14). It generates what Slavoj Žižek, in his book on Krzysztof

⁶ That film theoretical paradigms of touch are called into question by Denis's cinema has also been pointed out, with regards to *L'Intrus*, by Laura McMahon (McMahon 2008).



Fig. 12–14: The detachment of the gaze.



Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.

Kieślowski and film theory, calls “the spectre of a free-floating Gaze without a determinate subject to whom it belongs”:

The ultimate threat [to the elementary matrix of classical Hollywood narrative cinema] is not that of an objective shot which will not be “subjectivised,” allocated to some protagonist within the space of diegetic fiction, but that of a *point-of-view shot* which will not be clearly allocated as the point of view of some protagonist, and which will thus evoke the spectre of a free-floating Gaze without a determinate subject to whom it belongs. (Žižek 2001: 33)

Such a gaze is an irritation or exhibition of what film theory since the 1970s, following Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller, calls “suture,” the mechanism and grammar of stitching together the film via montage, and stitching-in the absent cause of the filmic image via a substitute or representation of the structurally absent force of signification (the camera, the enunciator, etc.). It is especially (if not exclusively) the convention of shot-reverse shot that interpellates the spectator, folds or sutures the off-screen into the onscreen, or what Jean-Pierre Oudart called “L’Absent,” the Absent One, the absent source of the gaze into the diegesis by (re-)attributing the (automatic) gaze to a human source (Oudart 1977).

Trouble Every Day’s hotel hallway trackings suture and de-suture at the same time, they let us feel and see the suture in an operation that inserts the “Absent One” into the diegesis with a trans-subjective uncanny proxy gaze. The paradigm of continuity editing is not destroyed by an operation like this; it rather becomes a source of disruption, trouble, contamination, and transference itself. The chambermaid and her passages through the hotel’s hallways and ground floor become the object of these free-floating gazes. From now on she is frequently shown and shot in perspectives that distinctly mimic point of view shots, that reframe, push and creep in on her, when she is undressing and washing herself in the hotel’s employee rooms for example (see Fig. 15–18).



Fig. 15–18: The haunting “place of impossible subjectivity.”



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

What she seems affected or haunted by is an impossible subjectivity or trans-subjective filmic presence; one that is, of course, also the presence of the film itself: “So we are not dealing here with the simple reversal of a subjec-

tive into an objective shot, but in constructing a place of impossible subjectivity, a subjectivity which taints the very objectivity with a flavour of unspeakable, monstrous evil.” (Žižek 2001: 36) Žižek’s Big Other, the impossible subjectivity, is a constant presence that haunts *Trouble Every Day*’s spaces, just like the possibility of becoming a bite haunts its kisses. But it is essential for its poetics of indifference that, in a seemingly seamless manner (often even in one fluid shot and accentuated or triggered by the Tindersticks’ score), the film introduces micrological differences, switches between potential crime scenes and scenes of (everyday) life and labor and their materialities.

The title’s everyday trouble is thus recast or spelled out cinematographically as a consistent disruption within the configuration of gaze and its relation to the world. Since it cannot be contained by the metrics of montage, the rules of continuity and stable subject-object relations on screen, this trouble produces a structural horror of precarity in the entire film where monstrous desire, screen sensuality, and social observation turn out to be indistinguishable, mutable, part of the same realm of ruptured representation and their operations.

3 Disruptions of the “anthropological machine”

Trouble Every Day is not, however, altogether swept away by the frenzy of blood-lust and the filmic eroticism of tactility and textures. But where even grammar and structure prove to produce a precarious filmic body it might be safe to assume that the narrative structure and content cannot contain and account for the structural horror. The protagonists search for the roots of and a cure for the blood lust, the urge to understand and the desire to go inside will remain unfulfilled, unsuccessful, mere motivations of movements. Nevertheless, they receive fragments of a context: Allusions to laboratory scenes and a failed experiment with plants in the colonies of French Guyana haunt the film as screen memories of a different materiality; dissected brains and botanical experiments open up a larger framework of horror motifs that include mad scientists, experiments gone awry, and the outbreak of an infection that might eventually lead to an apocalypse of flesh-craving creatures.

All this does not amount to any sufficient intradiegetic explanation of the blood feasts. But not only do the references implant a material and genre historicity into the flow of surface images, they contribute to the installation of a discourse, a hybrid universal knowledge of biological life: *Universal Pharmakon* is the name of the company Shane Brown used to work for and for which he apparently stole Léo Sémenau’s research; and universal is also the field of Sémenau’s bioprospections and his pharmaceutical, neurobiological, and botanical

research that was aimed at researching and curing “nervous diseases, pain, mental diseases, and problems of libido...”

This speculative universality of life aside, *Trouble Every Day* is, on a diegetic level, not interested in any social pathology and pathogenesis, or any dangers that would affect a population; and it remains unclear if Shane, who can still medicate and masturbate, sublimate and sedate himself, and Coré are the only of their type, or indeed one of a kind. Although alluding to its universality these discursive traces obviously fail to lead to any positive concept of life, to its inside, its core, they rather remain a speculative, consistently implausible framework for the desire that turns into bloodlust. In that regard they are connected to the entire seeking system of the film, its aesthetics of indifference, its style of fluid search images, its characters who even in their gory excesses seem to search for something within the body and the blood.

Following Jean-Luc Nancy, we might relate this mode of searching, even the general aesthetics of indifference and permanent oscillation to the two Latin words for blood: *sanguis* and *cruor*, the blood that circulates internally and the blood that sprays and splatters out, the principle of life and the principle of pain and cruelty. Looking for the core, the principle and universality of life, in *Trouble Every Day*, leads to more cruelty, more blood spray, to images of gore that do not lead to anything, do not represent, but rather point to an inherent monstrosity of monstration itself.⁷ The desire in and of *Trouble Every Day* is the mislead and ultimately failing desire to look for and show the inner principle of life (*sanguis*) in the splatter (of *cruor*) that affects the foundation of the filmic imagery:

The screen is torn into a wound streaming with blood. The image becomes an image of a torn image: no longer an image, or a figure, but an icon of access to the invisible. The invisible, that is *sanguis*, the blood nourishing the body, life itself, pulsating beneath the skin. (Nancy 2008a: 6)

This inside is the secret, the sealing of life in death by the fragility of the skin, the sealing of sense in blood. The fury wants this secret that is nothing other and that contains nothing other than the tearing apart of the integrity of life. (Nancy 2008a: 7)

This “tearing apart of the integrity of life” is a different formulation for what Giorgio Agamben frequently addresses as “the caesura between animal and human [that] first of all passes within man” (Agamben 2005: 16), within the knowledge and categorization of man:

⁷ See Nancy 2005, 17, 25.

The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human, therefore passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible. (Agamben 2005: 15)

Not only does *Trouble Every Day*, a film that oscillates between mapping the qualified lives of lovers and laborers and the *factum brutum* of biological life, address this caesura, this division thematically. It structures and divides its characters and affects the film's unstable border regime of cinematographic imagery, always marked by the impossibility of a clear distinction between man and monster, monstrous and tender images. It manifests itself as the rupturing of the skin by the kiss and bite of the protagonists as well as the camera and even affects the material body of the film itself, radicalized in a scene where Coré burns to death, but it seems to be the material of film itself that goes up in flames.

Rupture and tender touch pose as uncanny doubles, not only for the two 'sick' characters but also for the film and its camera work, and it is this doubling where Denis's film opens up its very own zone(s) of indeterminacy. Its bloodthirsty protagonists and, on a different level, the film's very own operations correspond with what Giorgio Agamben prominently described as forms of life, which escape or challenge the concepts of *bíos* and *zoë* and raise the concept of a bare, unmarked life – in *Homo Sacer* the “werewolf,” which exists in a zone of indeterminacy between human and animal, features as an example among many others (Agamben 1998: 105–108).

In Agamben's texts and other related cultural theories monsters and other hybrid beings are markers of the zone of the political: “Political hybrid beings haunt the body politic with disfigured mirror images of its abject social self” (Matala de Mazza and Vogl 2002: 212; my translation). With an ingenious phrase Agamben referred to the cultural institution of the “production of man through the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman” as the “anthropological machine.” This machine of anthropogenesis:

necessarily functions by means of an exclusion (which is also always already a capturing) and an inclusion (which is also always already an exclusion). Indeed, precisely because the human is already presupposed every time, the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside. (Agamben 2004: 37)

This double bind also haunts cinema in general as one of the key anthropological machines of the twentieth century, which continues to reproduce and produce and present and represent the production of distinctions as an inner caesura, “the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and

their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew” (Agamben 2004: 38).

Trouble Every Day: the peculiar and euphemistic phrase of the title is almost a formula for the abjection and the ordinariness of exception that the film stages in extremis. “Life – in its state of exception that has now become the norm – is the naked life that in every context separates the forms of life from their cohering into a form-of-life” (Agamben 1996: 152), this is how Agamben prominently (and enigmatically) described this everyday trouble. With the term ‘form-of-life’ (*forma-di-vita*), Agamben refers to:

a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something such as naked life. A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself. [...] It defines a life – human life – in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all potentiality (*potenza*). (Agamben 1996: 150; translation modified)

Perhaps we could speak, in a structural analogy, of film-form, the form-of-film of *Trouble Every Day*: the caesura as the limes and inseparability of life and its form, which marks the *potenza* of the filmic, is its condition and effect at the same time. The opening of the suture, this structural disruption inscribes this caesura into the filmic body, “always dislocated and displaced anew.” Not only does this haunt *Trouble Every Day*’s characters, but determines its operations, its filmic grammar, its tropes, as a process of disruption and de-figuration. By being affected or contaminated through a hypnotic gaze that is detached from its subjective source, the structure of the entire film is drawn into a maelstrom of inner distinctions and a zone of indeterminacy. It is through this process, where ruptured skin ultimately evokes the disruption of the continuity of images in *Trouble Every Day*, that the anthropological machine that produces film/life starts to stutter and falter.

4 Epilogue: beyond (under) the skin of film⁸

Beyond the human form, beyond the anthropogenesis of film lies the void of images as merely conventional or provisional effects of data, lie black box and white cube as the spaces of contemporary image projections. Under the skin

⁸ Thanks to Tanja Prokic for suggesting the idea to address *Under the Skin* as a theoretical sequel to *Trouble Every Day* here.

lies another blank/black surface, not the spectacle of blood, not the principle of life or mystery of humanity.

Jonathan Glazer's experimental alien predator ethnography *Under the Skin* (2013) takes up the hyper-sensory exploration of surfaces and textures of Denis's cinema, along with its often quasi-anthropological drive, and radicalizes it, narratively and aesthetically. The film not only contains several points of reference to Denis's *Trouble Every Day* – a predatory woman (or alien in the body of a woman, played by Scarlett Johansson) in a coat and a van who eventually goes up in flames, a man on a motorcycle who looks and cleans up after her – ; its stalker and body horror also sets out to be a starting point to question or lead, ambiguously, beyond the caesura and the bond of film and human form once again, marked by a regime of image production and projection that confronts the dispositif of cinema with the spatial abstractions of installations.

Among the many issues and theoretical questions raised by Glazer's film (its quasi-anthropological method, its politics of color, its reflexive investigation of a Scarlett Johansson's star body, its doubling of alienness and absolute alterity with the exploration and evocation of femininity),⁹ the de- and recentralization of the human form in confrontation with itself as other leads to the core of the title's "under." Before this confrontation plays out (rather generically) as a literary self-reflexion of the female sex and, in a complicated move, therefore as "a non-human difference masquerading fatefully as a sexual difference" (Gorfinkel 2016) – it is, once again, installed and mobilized by a gaze that is itself mediated in multiple ways (especially in the guerilla style direct surveillance cinema-sequences, where Glazer turned the van into a multi-HD-camera stalking arrangement for male citizens of Glasgow, and Scarlett Johansson incognito into an alien actress). In its opening (or rather: origin) sequence the film's alien predator seems to be born directly out of a configuration of the beam of the cinematic projector, a constellation of stars, a black lens in a white iris, and the cinema-eye that belongs to Scarlett Johansson, the film's and alien's vessel. Becoming – female, human; film – means receiving a skin that reflects and absorbs the light, means receiving a body with a distinct form and borders, means being differentiated, experiencing difference. Johansson's alien commands over the formless, abstract spaces without coordinates and spatial markers: the white cube of her becoming and the black space of her manhunts, where the men she lures into her van, where their bodies are absorbed and ultimately drained by an amorphous black matter. The violent drama of the alien's failed becoming (female / human) is, in consequence, performed as a film effectively split in half,

⁹ See the essays in the dossier "Under the Skin / Scarlett Johansson" 2016.

and depicted as a collapse in processing the sensory overload of the world (i. e. Scotland), a failure to engage with the real of the own body. It is also the rupture between two spatial and cinematic modes (one more experimental and installative, the other more documentary and sensory) that renders the zones of indistinction encountered in Denis's cinema and *Trouble Every Day* into a fight zone, a confrontation of different regimes of representation. What both films show, however, is that to engage with the distinctions between man and monster, human and non-human, does not only mean to trace, following Agamben, the inner caesura within the human form, but to engage with its mediations and transferences, with the media of anthropogenesis and their form, with the ruptures and disruptions of film as skin – where the distinctions and forms are “always dislocated and displaced anew.”

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