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**'TOUCHED BY A CARDBOARD SWORD': AESTHETIC
CREATION AND NON-PERSONAL SUBJECTIVITY IN
DANCER IN THE DARK & MOULIN ROUGE**

Patricia Pisters

Inspired by the films DANCER IN THE DARK (Von Trier, 2000) and MOULIN ROUGE (Luhrmann, 2001) Patricia Pisters addresses two questions. First of all, she investigates the strange ability to be touched by something that is obviously artificial, an aesthetic creation – in this case the musical. Secondly Patricia Pisters asks how these artificial aesthetic creations influence or even modify 'subjectivities.' In order to understand this, she argues that it is necessary to look at the implications of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of Deleuze and Guattari both in relation to aesthetic creation and in relation to a type of subjectivity that Deleuze and Guattari conceive of as 'non-personal.'

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I think it's a skill to be able to find such emotion in something so stylised. I would love to feel that much for someone who's been killed with a cardboard sword (Von Trier 2000: vi).

It appears to us that the only way of avoiding the absurdities of contemporary idealism is by conferring a machinic status to subjectivity [...], an economy of choice, a negentropic passion, at all levels of the cosmos – from the point zero of expansion of the universe to the blossoming of the most deterritorialized machinisms, such as poetry, music, and the science (Guattari 1979: 165-166).

INTRODUCTION

Not many recent films have had such an emotional impact on its spectators as Lars von Trier's trilogy *BREAKING THE WAVES* (1996), *THE IDIOTS* (1998) and *DANCER IN THE DARK* (2000). Although all three films are shot in a very realistic style with a lot of handheld camera work and natural settings and lighting, it is obvious that the spectator is drawn into the images by artificial means. *DANCER IN THE DARK* is most obvious in this respect, because this film, besides its realistic mise-en-scène and camera work, also draws upon musical conventions. The musical is a film genre that is known particularly for its unrealistic settings and situations in which people start singing and

dancing at any given moment or place. Usually the musical is considered to be a light genre. Von Trier, for example, compares the musical to operetta, a genre that does not demand much of its spectator (Von Trier 2000: v). *DANCER IN THE DARK*, however, is different. Although it draws upon musical aesthetics of song and dance, the film evokes such powerful emotions that it might confuse the spectator. At least the film forces the spectator to go beyond the conventional way of looking at a musical as something purely spectacular. With *DANCER IN THE DARK* Von Trier re-evaluates the film musical.

In a very different way, Baz Luhrman also puts the musical experience back into the film theater. With his film *MOULIN ROUGE* (2001) Luhrman remains closer to the traditional unrealistic conventions of the musical genre than Von Trier. One could even say that *MOULIN ROUGE* takes the artificiality of the musical to its extreme consequences: nothing is real in *MOULIN ROUGE*. The film contains many layers of performance and theatricality. Like *DANCER IN THE DARK*, however, there is also a sense of tragedy, and the spectator is emotionally engaged on various levels.¹

Inspired by these two recent film musicals, I address two issues in this essay. The first is the strange possibility of being deeply touched by something that is obviously an illusion: how can an artistic creation like film make us cry over 'someone being killed by a cardboard sword'? The second question is related to the first one: how do these films influence or even modify our subjectivity? In other words, how can a 'fake' artefact have any formative effect on us as a subject? In order to understand this, I argue that it is necessary to consider the implications of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of Deleuze and Guattari, both in relation to aesthetic creation and in relation to the question of subjectivity. According to Deleuze and Guattari, in aesthetic creation the boundaries between 'reality' and 'fiction' are no longer relevant, since the experience of the event is real. Consequently subjectivity can no longer be seen as something that is defined by the quality of interiority, something expressed in or projected on an aesthetic object. Rather, the subject should be seen in a non-personal way because it is formed in the materiality of the visual field. In this respect Deleuze's

¹ Both films (and the work of Von Trier and Luhrman in general) have met with heavy critique as well. In the Dutch film magazine *Skrien*, for instance, both *DANCER IN THE DARK* and *MOULIN ROUGE* were discussed favourably as well as negatively (Cf. *Skrien*, November 2000 and Oktober 2000, pp. 16-17 and pp. 40-41). I will return briefly to these critiques later in this essay.

film books suggest important new ways of analysing the musical and the implications of our conception of subjectivity.

AESTHETIC CREATION AS THE REALITY OF THE SENSIBLE

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari argue that creativity is necessary with regard to artistic sensibility, philosophical thought and scientific knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari 1994). In *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* Guattari emphasises the ethics behind all these creative acts (Guattari 1995). His ethics is an "ethics of experimentation" that mixes and relates heterogeneous fields in order to create something new, a new thought, a new perception, a new feeling. It is an ethics of the creative production of the new. Consequently, the writing of Deleuze and Guattari "moves freely between poetry, psychotherapy, economics, fashioning new modes of practice and different ways of thinking [...] the movement of animals is discussed alongside the rhythms of writers, [...] the behavioural patterns of sub-atomic particles have no more or less significance than a film plot." (Zagala 2002: 20) Creating something new has an ethical dimension. As Paul Bains argues in his article "Subjectless Subjectivities," all those who intervene and create

whether individual or collective (in education, health, culture, sport, art, the media, the fashion industry, etc.) have an ethical responsibility which cannot be dissolved by a neutrality based on a claim to mastery of the unconscious or scientific knowledge. That is to say, we have a politico-ethical responsibility for our creations or progeny whether virtual or actual. (Bains 2002: 106)

Because of the emphasis on creation and creativity, this ethics of experimentation that is at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy has a strong aesthetic dimension. It is this aesthetic dimension that I want to focus on. According to Deleuze and Guattari aesthetics need to reunite two aspects that have traditionally been separated. As Deleuze indicates in *The Logic of Sense*: "Aesthetics suffers from a wrenching duality. On the one hand, it designates the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; on the other hand, it designates the theory of art as the reflection of real experience." (Deleuze 1990:260)

Deleuze argues that these two aspects of the aesthetic need to be reunited in some way, "so that a science of the sensible can account

for the conditions of real experience" (Zagala 2002: 24). Essential to understanding the role of aesthetics is the fact that Deleuze does not make a distinction between art as a fantasy that presents us with possible but unreal experiences and art that reflects or represents reality. For Deleuze (and Guattari) aesthetic creation is not an experience of something else (unreal or second order), but the production of a real experience in itself. This conception of aesthetics is related to Deleuze's general rejection of the idea of representation which he develops in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1994). The full implications of this idea are developed elsewhere.² Here I would like to emphasise that, in *The Movement-Image* (Deleuze 1986) and *The Time-Image* (Deleuze 1989) Deleuze conceptualises the film image following this non-representational logic. According to Deleuze, film images are not to be seen as pure fantasy, nor should they be considered as re-presentations of the real world. Instead, Deleuze conceives the film image as a reality in itself with immanent power and quality. He demonstrates in which ways both 'real' and mediated images have their effects: affection-images have the power to affect, mental-images speak to the mind, action-images enhance our power to act.³

SUBJECTIVITY IN THE AESTHETICS OF THE VISUAL FIELD

The effects that images have upon their protagonists and their spectators indicate that there is also a relationship between aesthetics and subjectivity formation. In the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of Deleuze and Guattari, subjectivity is formed in the materiality of the image. The subject is not somehow 'already-made' and pre-existent. Is it not the case that the subject reflects upon the image and therefore knows it exists. The subject is not brought to exist by trying to be (intentionally or not) conscious of the image, nor by illusionary projections of the self (as an alienating identification or *méconnaissance*) onto the image. The kind of subjectivity that Deleuze and Guattari conceive of is not a subjectivity that is defined as the result of the Cartesian reflection (*cogito*), nor by the phenomenological intentionality (Hus-

² Cf. Olkowski (1999).

³ Deleuze uses Bergson's theory of images (of 'daily life') by transporting Bergson's categories like 'perception-image,' 'action-image' and 'affection-image' to film. For a detailed study to the different image-types of Deleuze: Cf. Pisters (2003).

serl), nor by an unconscious empty kernel (Lacan).⁴ Rather they conceive of the subject as a form of self-creation, an *autopoiesis* in the image, "the relationship of the 'I-unity' to the subjective sensation in the visual field." (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: ix-x) The brain only guides this self-creation in the visual field. Deleuze's remark about cinema that "the brain is the screen" should be seen in this light (Deleuze 2000: 365-373). As Paul Bains explains:

We have the strong impression that our sensual/visual field is *in front* of us and that we *look at it* from a supplementary dimension. This is an error. Sensations are brain achievements and there is no brain behind the brain or eye behind the eye to look at its products. Vision or any other sensorial experience is existence rather than 'representation of.' There is no re-presentation of one world but only the multiple worlds our brains achieve. (Bains 2002: 108)

In this conception of subjectivity we can no longer speak of a philosophical or psychological subject but rather of a 'subject-less' (in the sense of not 'ready-made') or non-personal subject that is formed by the brain itself: it is the brain that produces virtual worlds out of the visual field, or actualises a virtual world that is real but not (yet) actual.⁵ In these movements between the actual and the virtual our subjectivities are formed and extended by sensations in a non-personal way. As Guattari argues in the quotation above this article, this also involves some kind of 'machine-like' conception of subjectivity: subjectivity is fabricated in the materiality of the visual field, connecting and extending sensations, events and experiences on the surface of the brain. It is a kind of subjectivity that depends on the confrontation between a material image (for instance a film), and a particular brain (of the spectator). In this confrontation choices are made, depending both on the potentiality of the image and on the singularity of the brain waves. To feel oneself being affected, to take action, to resist, to weep, to become, is not a secondary reaction, it is an operation through which our subjectivity is formed.

⁴ Cf. Badiou (1994: 61).

⁵ At other places Deleuze and Guattari call this kind of subjectivity 'transcendental empiricism,' or the formation of the subject (a transcendental notion) in and by the given (empiricism, pure immanence). Cf. Buchanan (1997: 483-497).

So far I have discussed the implications of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm of Deleuze and Guattari in a rather abstract way. Let me try to develop this further by taking a closer look at *DANCER IN THE DARK* and *MOULIN ROUGE*. In what ways could these musicals be formative of non-personal or subjectless subjectivities in the visual field and sense perception?

THE MUSICAL: FROM MOTOR ACTION TO OPTICAL AND SOUND SITUATION

In *The Time-Image* Deleuze discusses the musical genre at length (Deleuze 1989: 60-67). He argues that the musical epitomizes de-personalised movement as a way of creating a 'non personal' subjectivity. In the musical, Deleuze argues, the artists have a certain individuality as the creative sources, but their dancing and singing move into a non-personal element, as if the movements take possession of them. The artists are therefore also the receivers of the movements and music. Their subjectivities are formed by the aesthetic creations they express. Deleuze puts it as follows:

Of course, even in *BERKELEY*, and all the more in musical comedy in general, the dancer or couple retain an individuality as creative source of movement. But what counts is the way in which the dancer's individual genius, his subjectivity, moves from a personal motivity to a supra-personal element, to a movement of world that the dance will outline. This is the moment of truth where the dancer is still going, but already a sleepwalker, who will be taken over by the movement which seems to summon him: this can be seen in Fred Astaire in the walk which imperceptibly becomes dance as well as with Kelly in the dance which seems to have its origin in the unevenness of the pavement. (Deleuze 1989: 61)

With this analysis of the musical we can begin to understand what Deleuze and Guattari mean by the formation of the non-personal (supra-personal) subjectivity in the materiality of the visual field.

One characteristic of the musical, Deleuze argues, is that there is always a moment where the normal sensory-motor action (the movement-image) stops, and where the image transforms into what Deleuze calls a purely optical and 'sound' situation (characteristic for the time-image). This change takes place progressively and the actions of the

characters change accordingly. The normal motor step becomes, sometimes imperceptibly, a dance step that goes beyond the personal action and that touches upon something bigger. I will return to this 'something bigger.' This almost imperceptible moment between motor and dance step, between spoken words and a musical song, is what Deleuze calls a 'degree zero,' a hesitation before entering another level. In the optical and sound situations of the musical, the colours, sounds and forms become intense and the dance and singing voices become part of the moving elements that have a dreamlike power and give access to another dimension of experience, which Deleuze calls 'movement of world.' Here Deleuze refers to the fact that the dancers seem to be taken up into something larger than themselves, the artistic creation that is non-personal and nevertheless also helps to create their subjectivity (in a parallel way, the spectator can be taken up into and formed by the movement of world that the dancer expresses).

Deleuze distinguishes two ways in which in the musical the 'reality' of the motor action opens up to the optical and auditory world of the song and dance:

On the one hand we think that musical comedy gives us in the first place ordinary sensory-motor images, where the characters find themselves in situations to which they will respond through their actions, but that more or less progressively their personal actions and movements are transformed by dance into movement of world which goes beyond the motor situation, only to return to it, etc. Or we suppose, on the other hand, that the point of departure only gave the appearance of being a sensory-motor situation: at a deeper level it was a pure optical and sound situation which had already lost its motor extension; it was a pure description which had already replaced its object, a film set pure and simple. [...] In the first case [...] we move from the narrative to the spectacular, we are admitted to the implied dream; in the other we go from the spectacular to the spectacle, just as from the film set to the dance, in the whole of an implied dream which even envelops walking. (Deleuze 1989: 62)

It seems to me that *DANCER IN THE DARK* and *MOULIN ROUGE* present precisely these two classical types of the musical in their extreme consequences. In *DANCER IN THE DARK* we move from the realistic motor-sensory action of the narrative to the spectacular in which the image becomes colourful and obtains a dreamlike power that goes beyond the actual motor-situation of the narrative of the film. In *MOULIN*

ROUGE we are always already implied in the spectacular. The whole film is shot in a studio, and the images of Paris were created digitally: they are pure 'descriptions' ('fake') to begin with. Nevertheless, within the film there are moments where we move from this spectacular world to the even more spectacular: the characters of the film rehearse for a spectacle, which is called 'Spectacular Spectacular.' Now, in order to see which implications these two aesthetic strategies have for the aesthetic creation of subjects, let us take a closer look at both films.

DANCER IN THE DARK: FROM NARRATIVE TO SPECTACULAR

Like *BREAKING THE WAVES*, *DANCER IN THE DARK* has a melodramatic plot. The film tells the sad story of Selma, a factory worker (played by Björk) who suffers from a hereditary eye disease and slowly turns blind. Her son is faced with a fate similar to hers, and Selma does everything to prevent this from happening. She saves all her money to give him an expensive operation. In the end Selma will even die for her son, the ultimate melodramatic female sacrifice. The narrative scenes are frequently cut with musical scenes in which the realism of the story is temporarily replaced by the consolation of music and dance. One of the most frequent critiques that the films in Von Trier's trilogy have with met concerns the female sacrifice in the narrative of the film. Indeed, if we consider the film either as a fantasy/wish or as a representation of female behavior which women were invited to identify with, and to take as an example for their own essential (feminine) subjectivity, this critique is completely justified. However, it is my argument that in Von Trier's films, the main characters are not examples or role models for 'ready-made' subjectivities. They aesthetically express something non-personal, or supra-personal, a worldliness that 'possesses' them and that touches us. This form of subjectivity is not so much related to an essential subject willing to suffer but to the aesthetically motivated choice to make machine-like connections to supra-personal forces. It has the power to capture both the character and the spectator, if the latter dares to be captured by these supra-personal forces of worldliness as well.

Before considering the contrast between the spectacular scenes and the narrative, let me first discuss the aesthetic quality of the musical scenes themselves. The first musical scene takes place when

we are 45 minutes into the film, at the point where you do not expect it to occur anymore. It occurs when Selma takes on a night shift at the factory and is very tired. In fact, all musical scenes start when Selma is either very tired or very upset and paralysed by the situation she finds herself in, for instance when she has killed her neighbour Bill who stole all her savings, or when she finds herself powerless in a courtroom or prison cell. This is significant, for, as Deleuze has argued in *The Time-Image*, especially when one is exhausted or 'paralysed' the sensory-motor action gives way to pure optical and sound situations – where one enters into a visionary other worldliness. Each musical scene starts with a kind of degree zero where environment sounds start to deviate from their normal functioning, where they start to group together in harmonic rhythms and where the colours seem to become more intense as if a very fine layer of Technicolor gradually sprinkled the images. The handheld camerawork in shots of relatively long duration and little cutting are taken over by a rapid cutting between many camera positions (in fact Von Trier used 100 camera's for the musical scenes). The reference to this MTV style of filming is emphasised by the fact that Selma is played by performing pop artist Björk. This reinforces the effect of some kind of supra-personalization that occurs in the event of aesthetic creation, putting Selma/Björk into 'a movement of world,' a movement that goes beyond the normal sensory-motor situation and carries these scenes into a different dimension.

At first sight, the musical scenes seem pretty much similar to traditional musical scenes. As argued above, each scene starts with a moment of degree zero in which the rhythm and nature of the images starts to change and then transport us into another world. However, the musical scenes in *DANCER IN THE DARK* do not have the usual effect of utopia and entertainment. Where in traditional musicals the song and dance routines make you cheerful and happy,⁶ in *DANCER IN THE DARK* these scenes provoke precisely the strongest heartbreaking emotions, even more so than the dramatic scenes of the narrative. This has to do with the fact that the contrast between the melodramatic and the musical scenes is very strong. The melodramatic parts of the film are shot in a realistic style. This realism is not the glossy Hollywood realism of continuity editing that is usual for classical melodramas.

⁶ According to Richard Dyer, most musicals are "ecstatic and happy, entertaining and utopian." Cf. Dyer (1985: 220-232).

Rather it is a raw European form of realism: shaky handheld (digital) camera work, natural light, panning instead of editing and long shots.⁷ The scene in which Selma and Bill confess their secret to each other is an example of a scene in which this form of realism is very clear.⁸ Although this scene is edited, very often – instead of cutting between Selma and Bill (which is the usual realistic Hollywood style of continuity editing) – the camera moves between the two characters without cutting, emphasising in this way the small space in which they are both ‘locked.’ Because of the natural light used in these scenes, the colors are rather cold. By using this harsh realistic style for a melodramatic narrative that is usually presented in a more artificial Hollywood format, Von Trier deterritorializes the genre. The melodrama gets a very rough realistic edge to it, which makes the intersection with the musical scenes all the more risky. The contrast between the ‘cold’ dramatic scenes and the ‘warm’ musical scenes, mediated by degree zero moments, structures the film as a whole. It becomes a dialectic structure of oppositions.

This dialectic of oppositions, for instance between ‘cold’ and ‘warm,’ is important in understanding the strong emotional effects of the film. We can understand these when we consider Von Trier as a quaint heir of Eisenstein’s theory of attractions. The aim of Eisenstein’s dialectic of oppositions was to create pathos. Pathos can only be reached when there is a contrast or change in both form and content. As Deleuze says of Eisenstein’s pathetic jumps: “from sadness to anger, from doubt to certainty, from resignation to revolt. [...] The pathetic implies a change not merely in the content of the image, but also in the form. The image must, effectively, change its power, pass to a higher power.” (Deleuze 1986: 35)⁹ In a similar way, we can see that in *DANCER IN THE DARK* the dark content of the narrative changes into the consoling content of the songs (“There will always be

⁷ This European realism started after the Second World War with Italian neo-realism. Lars von Trier is part of a group of Danish filmmakers who in 1995 called for a revival of realism and naturalism in filmmaking in a manifest called ‘Dogma 95.’

⁸ Bill tells Selma he does not have the money his wife thinks he has (and spends accordingly); Selma tells Bill she is turning blind and that she saves all her money for her son’s operation.

⁹ Deleuze mentions the changing dimension and function of the close-up in Eisenstein; I refer here to the change of style – montage – and ‘temperature’ – warm colours – of the image.

someone to catch me,” Selma sings when she is about to be sentenced to death in court). At the same time the formal qualities of the images change. Harshness and imprisonment in long shots turn into a bath of soft colours and liberation through many camera angles and cuttings. As in Eisenstein, the effect of this opposition in form and content is clearly *pathos*. The opposition between the narrative and the spectacle is heartbreaking because the spectacle is an opening to a ‘movement of world’ (to which I will return in a later section). In the musical moments we are captured by the event of artistic creation, parallel to the way in which the artist is summoned by the music and dance movements.

When Selma/Björk starts to sing and dance in *DANCER IN THE DARK* she is captured by something larger than herself, by an element of worldliness – which is the reason why we can be touched as well. After having seen the film, perhaps we have changed a little. Perhaps we can see and hear the world differently. The rain, the footsteps, the passing train and the soft voices of other people in the theater perhaps start to group together in harmonic sounds, they become-music. And, as with Selma, this non-personal experience then becomes part of our ‘subjectivity.’

MOULIN ROUGE: “SPECTACULAR, SPECTACULAR”

The story of *MOULIN ROUGE* is relatively simple. In 1900 a bohemian artist, Christian (Ewan McGregor) moves to Paris to learn about “truth, beauty, freedom and love.” He falls in love with the most beautiful courtesan of the Moulin Rouge, Satine (Nicole Kidman). Satine is also courted by a rich Duke (Richard Roxburgh) who has money and esteem to offer. Against all odds Satine returns Christian’s love but dies of consumption. Like *DANCER IN THE DARK*, *MOULIN ROUGE* is a renewal of the musical and has a strong effect of pathos that is created by contrasting elements. On the level of content, highly cheerful and comic scenes are contrasted with tragic scenes. For instance, when Satine does not appear for an important date with the Duke, the owner of the Moulin Rouge, Harry Zidler, eases the Duke’s anger and hurt feelings by singing to him about Satine feelings for him: “Like a Virgin” – in a humorous way Zidler reinterprets Madonna’s famous song. But in the next scene Zidler (and we as spectators) learns that Satine didn’t come to her date because she is ill and is going to die. Campy happiness is contrasted with classic tragedy.

On the level of form the opposition is less clear and works in a different way than in *DANCER IN THE DARK*. The aesthetic style of *MOULIN ROUGE* has been characterised negatively as a cheap advertisement style. Gregory Flaxman, for instance, argues that the film leaves no room for intelligence, everything is utterly canned and controlled and the image is 'flat,' using "longer lenses and playing with lighting in such a way as to hollow any depth of the screen."¹⁰ One could say that the images in *MOULIN ROUGE* are indeed flat, stylistically speaking, in the musical scenes. However, this apparent superficiality of the images (seen as flat representations of reality) can perhaps be seen differently when we analyse the film in a Deleuzian way. Flatness or superficiality is the aesthetic characteristic of Deleuze's second type of musicals. Let me quote Deleuze once more on this type of musical where we go from the spectacular to the spectacle:

[T]he sensory-motor situation allows 'flat views' to show through, postcards or snapshots of landscapes, towns and silhouettes. It gives way to those purely optical and sound situations where colour takes on a fundamental value, and the action, itself flattened, is no longer distinguishable from a moving element of the coloured film set. So dance arises directly as the dreamlike power which gives depth and life to these flat views, which makes use of a whole space in the film set and beyond, which gives a world to the image, surrounds it with an atmosphere of world. [...] It will be the movement of the world, which corresponds, in the dream, to the optical and sound image. (Deleuze 1986: 62-63)

In *MOULIN ROUGE* we are indeed in a flat space of the sensory-motor situation (which is already a dreamlike situation). Song and dance open up the image to the optical and sound situation that is surrounded by an atmosphere of the world (and which, hence, moves beyond the subjective and personal).

One could argue that in a perverse way, by going from the spectacular to the even more artificial and superficial spectacle, the images in *MOULIN ROUGE* are 'deepened' by becoming a pure aesthetically moving element of the coloured film set. Although here the stylistic

¹⁰ Gregory Flaxman on the Film-Philosophy discussion list: <http://www.film-philosophy.com>, Thu, 21 Feb 2002.

contrast is not between 'realism' and 'fantastic dimension' as in *DANCER IN THE DARK*,¹¹ but between 'flat' and even 'flatter' the effect is no less pathetic. At the beginning of the film, for instance, Christian enters Satine's room to treat her to a poetry reading. Satine thinks Christian is the Duke and thinks he wants something quite different than reading a poem. Then in the middle of the theatrical and over-the-top acting, Christian starts to sing "You can tell everybody that this is your song." The moments he starts to sing, the lights over Paris switch on. And while he sings "how wonderful life is now you're in the world" he takes Satine in a dance movement over the rooftops into the sky where they dance on clouds. Here we go from the actual flat sensory-motor situation to the even flatter virtual dream moment. And in the movement of the dance and the song, another world is opened: the world of "truth, beauty, freedom and love," the bohemian ideals which are sharply contrasted in the film with the world of the Duke, the world of money, security, esteem and power.

In *MOULIN ROUGE* the pathetic oppositions are less clearly distinguishable than in *DANCER IN THE DARK*. In the latter film the melodrama and the musical scenes are very different in both form and content which creates the effect of pathos. In *MOULIN ROUGE* the difference between comedy and tragedy and between flat images and their opening up in song and dance is not so clearly opposed. Both the sensory-motor situations and the optical sound situations contain tragedy as well as comedy. Moreover, the song and dance routines open up to both the world of the bohemians and the world of the Duke. The clearest example of these two 'worlds' can be found in "Le Tango de Roxanne," one of the most beautiful scenes of the film. In the *mise-en-scène* of this scene the opposition between the world of the Duke and Christian's world is evident. While upstairs in the Moulin Rouge Satine has a dinner with the Duke in order to convince him that the spectacle that he is financing and that the bohemians are creating should have a different ending, downstairs the dancers of the Moulin Rouge, the bohemians and Christian are waiting.¹² One of the dancers,

¹¹ The opposition is only stylistic/aesthetic, both dimensions/levels are 'real' (actually or virtually).

¹² The show within the 'show,' "Spectacular, Spectacular" tells the story of Satine and Christian in *mise-en-abyme*. With a reference to Indian Bollywood musicals, "Spectacular, Spectacular" is set in India where a courtesan falls in love with a poor *citar* player. In the end she refuses the money and

the Argentinean, opens up “a dimension of worldliness.” His motor steps change into a tango, his voice gradually changes from talking to singing: “We have a dance – in a brothel in Buenos Aires, a prostitute [...] A man falls in love with her. First there is desire, then passion, then suspicion, jealousy, anger, betrayal [...] Jealousy will drive you mad [...] Roxanne, you don’t have to stay in the red light [...]” With this last sentence the song has started and we recognise the popular 1980s song by The Police. As in the play “Spectacular, Spectacular” here again the story of Satine and Christian is doubled. While the dancers dance through all the passionate emotions downstairs, Satine accepts a huge diamond necklace of the Duke as a symbol of the deal they close (he will make her a star, the play can have the ending the creators wish). The jealousy that is described and danced by the dancers first takes hold of Christian who thinks of Satine upstairs, but when the Duke discovers Satine looking at Christian who walks in the street, he is jealous in turn. Here the lighting and colours help to emphasize the opposition between Christian’s world and that of the Duke. Christian walks in a set that is bathing in red light, while Satine is standing upstairs with the Duke. Her face is lit in a cold blue light and becomes ‘cold blue.’ The actors are now literally becoming part of the moving elements of the film set. The colours are highly absorbent, acquiring a depth that opens other worlds. And at the climax of the dance scene downstairs, the most pathetic moment of the film takes place upstairs: Satine has to choose between one world or another. But the aesthetics of the colours have already chosen for her. Consequently, the Duke gets furious at her rejection and rips off the necklace he has just offered her.

Desire, passion, suspicion, jealousy, anger and betrayal are the big emotional events between which Christian and the Duke move. In the scenes described above, but also in the scenes where “Spectacular, Spectacular” is rehearsed or performed, the difference between the ‘real’ sensory-motor story of Satine and Christian becomes increasingly mixed with the optical sound situations of the songs and dances. The characters enter into a ‘delirium’ of colors and sounds that create pathos, and that have a non-personal effect on the formation of subjectivity. Likewise the spectator, in encountering this particularly powerful field of vision, can choose to be ‘formed’ by these non-personal

wealth a rich maharaja is offering her. The Duke doesn’t like this ending and demands the courtesan to choose for the maharaja.

events, allowing him- or herself to be captured by the colors, sounds and passions as well.

TERRITORIALIZATION AND DETERRITORIALIZATION: EXTENDING THE SUBJECT IN BECOMING-MUSIC

So far I discussed the aesthetic aspects of *DANCER IN THE DARK* and *MOULIN ROUGE*. I have indicated in which ways both *DANCER IN THE DARK* and *MOULIN ROUGE*, as musicals, trace ‘movements of worlds’; how they go beyond the personal and influence our subjectivities on an aesthetic level. Now I want to take these observations one step further by asking how we can translate what we hear, see and feel into concepts that help to understand our aesthetic perceptions: what happens when we are touched by an artificial artistic creation? How can we understand this ‘movement of worldliness’ that the aesthetic event is giving? Here it is necessary to consider the character of art and philosophy as defined by Deleuze and Guattari. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari argue that philosophy needs a nonphilosophy that comprehends it, just like art needs nonart (and science needs non-science) (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 218). What matters is that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, art thinks just as much as philosophy does. Art (cinema and music in my examples) thinks in percepts and affects, while philosophy thinks in concepts.

The key concept in understanding the affects of the musical is ‘becoming-music.’ Becoming-music is one of the many forms of becoming that Deleuze and Guattari have developed in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 231-309). The concept of becoming is derived from Henri Bergson’s philosophy, and is opposed to the philosophical concept of being. Becoming is always in movement, takes place in time (duration) and happens on a molecular level. It never means a literal turning into something else, it means entering into a zone of proximity, a zone of continuing transfer. In singing one can for instance become child, bird, insect or sea.

Music has tremendous power: “flags can do nothing without trumpets,” Deleuze and Guattari argue (Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 348). The power of music is territorial and deterritorial: a child that sings softly in the dark creates a safe territory for itself. We create sound walls to mould our environments. Music also has deterritorializing power. It deterritorializes, for instance, the voice, which becomes less and less the instrument of language. Music can also open

up territories, like the voices of the characters in *DANCER IN THE DARK* and *MOULIN ROUGE* that open up Selma's prison walls or make Satine and Christian fly and give them an overwhelming feeling of freedom. Becoming-music is precisely the opening up to the molecular world of sounds. In becoming-music the subjectless and non-personal formation of the subject takes place. Selma in *DANCER IN THE DARK* becomes-music when during her night shift groups of sounds pack together on the degree zero of aesthetic change from motor-situation into optical and sound situation. She creates a refrain, she hears music, she becomes-music. And she opens up another dimension in the world, a virtual but nevertheless real dimension, a new territory that is safer and vaster than the small town she lives in, even though it features the same people. This is the tremendously powerful and liberating force of aesthetic creation (which has an ethical dimension because of its liberating force).

Another example from *DANCER IN THE DARK* demonstrates the power of becoming-music. In one of the most beautiful musical scenes Selma's boyfriend Jeff has just discovered that she is almost blind. They stand on a rail track and Selma did not see a train coming. She throws her glasses in the water and while the colors become warmer, she hesitantly starts to sing "I've seen it all – I've seen water, it's water that's all." Jeff answers – entering slowly into a refrain as well: "Have you seen the Chinese wall, the Niagara Falls" and "the house you will share, your grandson's hand as he plays with your hair?" Some of the lyrics are sustained by images in *SOUND OF MUSIC*-like scenes that Selma and Jeff witness from a train while singing. As indicated above, the opposition between the narrative and the musical scenes is very strong and the becoming-music deterritorializes the imprisonment of Selma's situation while at the same time creating new territories (worlds) where all is safe. But the becoming-music of the world has an almost all-embracing cosmic effect, deterritorializing also the words and images in themselves, carrying them to a supra-personal level. Because Selma's personal and individual situation is surpassed by this becoming-music, these images have the capacity to affect us as spectators, modifying our subjectivities with supra-personal elements of the world.¹³ Aesthetic creations (film images), however fake they may be, need to touch upon this supra-personal

¹³ Again it should be emphasised here that this is an empirical (immanent) transcendental event.

element (of worldliness, of the forces of history, human emotions and other forces) in order to touch anybody. Or else, they will be no more than indulgent introspections.

In *MOULIN ROUGE* the entire setting is already a territory, the Moulin Rouge, where music and dance are meant to deterritorialize its guests by freeing them temporarily from their daily constraints. Yet, the song and dance routines still manage to territorialize and deterritorialize even further. In the first place it is evident that *MOULIN ROUGE* re-uses familiar pop songs, like "Lady Marmelade," "Like a Virgin," "Roxanne" and "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend"/ "Material Girl." One could say that, by doing so, the film at this level also uses 'flat' songs, by which I mean popular songs that at first impression are just as 'superficial' as the flat images. Moreover, the songs are sung by the unprofessional voices of the actors Ewan McGregor and Nicole Kidman, perhaps making them 'flatter than flat' because they don't seem to follow professional artistic standards. However, it has quite a surprising effect of 'authenticating' and deepening the flat images, again because of the contrast between the smooth images and 'rough' voices. One could say that in this respect *MOULIN ROUGE* is opposed to *DANCER IN THE DARK* where a pop star, Björk, becomes an actress. While Björk's trained and well-known voice gives the raw images of *DANCER IN THE DARK* color and deterritorializing power, the untrained and unknown voices of Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor give something 'raw' to the artificiality of the images of *MOULIN ROUGE*. Amidst a world that is designed to deterritorialize, they create a territory for their love. This is exemplified in the only original song of the film "Come what May" – their song, in which they promise each other eternal love.¹⁴ Like *DANCER IN THE DARK* the becoming-music of the image makes that the characters move beyond the sensory-motor situation and speak to supra-personal feelings that can be recognised and appreciated as movements beyond the given.

¹⁴ At other moments, the songs do have deterritorializing power, for instance, in the scene where Satine sings "One Day I'll Fly Away." Not only do the words of the song express a liberating force, she also stands on the rooftop of the Elephant-shaped building of the Moulin Rouge and is literally almost flying.

*THE GREY AND THE RED CURTAIN:
'F' FOR 'FEELING FOR FAKE'*

DANCER IN THE DARK and MOULIN ROUGE present us with highly artificial worlds. Both films refer self-consciously to the theatrical quality of the musical scenes (like the characters in MOULIN ROUGE, Selma is rehearsing for a local performance of a musical). Both films emphasize the artificiality of the spectacle that is to come. DANCER IN THE DARK starts with an overture, a musical composition without voices of almost four minutes over a completely dark screen. Of course this refers to Selma's blindness and the importance of music to her. But one could also say that here we have a degree zero of the image and sound in general: from here a territory (the film) will be created and opened up (deterritorialized) on different levels. On an aesthetic level both melodrama and the musical will be creatively deterritorialized, with the effect of pathos. On a conceptual level, the overture could be seen as an ultimate becoming-music, with the effect of molecular dissolution into the world. At the close of the film, when Selma is executed, a grey curtain closes the harsh 'spectacle' of her death. It also closes the narrative and the spectacle. But that is not the end. When we leave the theater, after the grey curtain has closed, Selma/Björk's voice sounds again over a dark image. Both sound and dark image extend to us, spectators, who may have changed a little, touched as we were by the 'fake' aesthetic event. In MOULIN ROUGE a theatrical red curtain opens and closes the spectacle. Here too, we know we are entering a world of artificial creation, but we can believe in the reality of the emotions that can extend our subjectivities.

According to Deleuze, we do not look for the lost internal and essential center of our subjective selves. Our subjectivities are created in a non-personal or subjectless way. We are not masters of ourselves. We receive particles of 'worldliness,' even of cosmos, that become part of us and change us. In the interview about DANCER IN THE DARK quoted at the beginning of this essay, Lars von Trier seems to express a similar view about artistic creation as a non-receptive, non-personal act:

If you really work with a character, with an actor, it's as if you were making a documentary. You don't design something: you investigate something that is already there. Because it isn't my person [...], perhaps the work becomes more accessible. (Von Trier 2000: x)

In the folds of our brain virtual and actual images are both as real and have effects on our sense of self. This explains why we can be touched by artificial means just as well as by 'real' images. We are touched by the reality of the sensible. These images, these aesthetic creations extend our subjectivities in non-personal ways. The power of musicals like DANCER IN THE DARK and MOULIN ROUGE lies in their capacity to let characters receive forces of 'worldliness' through their song and dance – forces that affect us, spectators, in our turn.