

Stardom: Beyond Desire?

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Introduction

When first approached to deliver this keynote lecture, I strangely understood the title of the conference to mean «the history of star **theory** reconsidered» and not just «History of Stardom Reconsidered». These two concepts are not necessarily the same thing at all, but nor are they mutually exclusive and hopefully the actual conference title will be able to incorporate the meaning I have ascribed to it in my mis-reading. However, this mis-reading could prove useful in that the approach to stardom I am going to endeavour to set out could take us into a different way of perceiving star bodies. I should add that this paper is intentionally polemical, not everyone is going to agree with the approach I have taken, but it is my hope that it will allow us to take questions of stardom further forward in our thinking, not however at the expense of the very valid aspects of star theory that already exist.

Let us consider the History of Stardom: Viewed in its simplest iteration it assumes an a-priori set of givens, objects (namely stars) to be investigated as cultural historical artefacts; concepts (namely stardom) that refer to a state of being or a condition (stardom like martyrdom); or which refer to a place or domain (stardom like kingdom); or again to a rank or office (stardom like earldom); or finally to a collection of persons (stardom like officialdom). These are all concepts that bespeak arrival (having made it), rather than states of becoming which are never finite and cannot therefore be seen as a-priori. And although stardom is necessarily viewed retrospectively — and so, in one sense, stars are not stars until they arrive — surely it is stars in their unfixity that fascinate us. Moreover surely it isn't just what they represent that needs to be understood (a way of fixing our stars, incidentally) but what they do and what affects they have or can cause.

Thus, today my focus is going to be on what a star text **does** rather than on what it means. I want to argue for an approach (Deleuzian in its conception, it is true) which, whilst it is not intended to exclude any other approach, will offer a new, complementary way of looking at stars (or so I hope): one which will take us away from discussions of pleasure and desire experienced in film-viewing through image and representation alone, away from the ideology of the gaze and questions of point of view, and which will argue for an approach to stardom based in a more materialist conception of film whereby we can talk about affects in terms of sensation rather than desire as it is currently understood. But in order to do this I need to set out some common ground which we all take to be true of star studies.

In broad terms, star studies have, by and large, fallen into two overlapping categories of approaches. The one has focused on the star body as sign, as cultural icon; the other on star reception. Central to this twofold approach has been the concept of the star image, namely questions of representation and, inherent in that, the notion of the gaze and, implicitly, desire — the appeal of the star body as a fantasy, an ideal ego for example. There is of course a great deal to be understood in examining a star body in this way. But there are also limitations. Given that star theory, as it currently stands, tends to prioritise representation and thereby questions of identity and subjectivity (in short, the image and meaning of the sexed and sexual star body) it is very difficult to see how we can escape a discussion of the experience of the cinematic moment in terms other than subjectivity and a gendered reading. But that is not the fault of star theory in and of itself — for stars are intricately affixed to gender performance

because the film industry (colluding with ideology and capitalism) wants it that way. And yet, as we know, star bodies are not fixed entities. And indeed star theory readily recognises this, even though, when it investigates this idea, it finds itself obliged to talk of stars and their unfixity in terms, for example, of «fluidity of gender». I know I did so when I began my study of the French film star Simone Signoret. It was difficult to see how to talk about this star body who was female yet not feminine in the strictly encoded and socialised meaning of the term. As we can see from the picture below there is nothing that secures her femininity (taken from her performance in Yves Allegret's 1950's film, *Manèges/Wanton*).



In my initial studies, I spoke of a blurring of sexualities where Signoret's performances were concerned as a source of pleasure in viewing for both male and female spectators. A not totally satisfactory reading however to my mind. Indeed, I found it a struggle to talk about a star body who was, in some ways, both sexes, yet female. My terms of reference seemed doomed to be stuck in binaries. And I was not alone. Critics speaking of Signoret's performance-style often referred to her as masculine, or compared her to a male star by way of explaining the effects of her performance. My way through this — so as not to feel I was measuring her against a fixed set of binaries — was to talk of her in terms of a pluralism of femininities (this allowed me to address her broad appeal as a star persona). I also spoke of her as a political body — one which challenged class and gender-based assumptions of power and which sought to assert her own economies of desire. I also discussed how she embodied history in certain filmic texts. And, too, I examined her body as the site of performance. Further, to show how beauty was not the only visual imperative of stardom, I invoked Bakhtin's concept of the mutable body — the one that passes from one form to another — particularly in relation to the way in which Signoret's body shifted in shape and aged prematurely, became ugly but which spectators nonetheless still went to see in their millions.¹ In the images below we can see how significant is the degradation of her looks — a degradation which occurred in the span of 25 years (she was 55 years old at the time of shooting this 1977 film by Moshe Mizrahi, *La Vie devant soi/Mme Rosa*). In all of these instances, however, I was measuring Signoret's star body against an a-priori concept of the norma-



... Elle recevra le César de la meilleure actrice, en 1978, pour ce rôle.



tive — what Deleuze terms the molar line: the line we use as a foundation or structure to our lives. Elements such as family, class, religion, gender, sexuality are all regimes of this molar line. In short, in measuring Signoret against this line, I was measuring how she does not fit. This is of course, one way to consider a star and, in so doing, I found a number of very useful theoretical approaches (some of which I have mentioned above) to enable an unravelling of the complexities of Signoret's star persona and performances.

But what if I had not measured her against fixed norms? What if I had thought more about what she was doing and what that 'doing' was doing to me and, furthermore, what I was doing in my watching? In short, what if I hadn't considered her in terms of image and representation? What might I then have been able to say about the processes of my interaction with her star body, or better still the processuality of a/our relationship in viewing?

To try and answer this, let me begin by questioning desire.

Questioning Desire:

Christine Gledhill's wonderful study of Hollywood and its star-making machinery, entitled *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, shows just how tightly knit are the concepts of desire and the star body. Yes, we do go to see our stars (and their bodies of course) to look at difference, at how unlike us they are in their glamour and beauty (and too in their off-screen lives). But we also go to look at them for their sameness. Indeed, in order for us to be hooked-in there has to be a point of overlap, a space of appeal that comes from shared common ground or knowledges. This is what Richard Dyer refers to as the star's ordinariness. But what intrigues me here now is Gledhill's term 'industry'. She is right in using that term 'industry' — for Hollywood produces. It is an industrial machine that makes desire take form — objectifies it — through the images and representations of ideal bodies which we as individuals can then pay to consume. Desire, or rather the **creation** of desire is, then, a vital function of capitalism — it appeals to the consumer as an individual: I am paying to watch someone I cannot be but can fantasize as being for a couple of hours.

However, as we also know, desire in western culture is very much a censored product in terms of our own subjectivity, since it is primarily located in the repressed and is based in lack. As Deleuze rightly argues, from Plato to Freud 'desire has been seen as other than life, or as something to be interpreted; we desire what we do not have, and our desires are mere "images", "fantasies" or "representations".' (Colebrook, 2002: 99) These are Deleuze's terms and as we can see they are terms that entirely echo Hollywood's practice. As we know, from Freud through to Lacan 'standard notions of desire, and (its) psychoanalytical explanation, tie desire essentially to lack, negation and the subject.' (Colebrook: 98) In short, I can only desire what I cannot have (the mother/father). Moreover, I can only obtain my identity, be a subject in my own right, through this essential lack of desire. My subjectivity therefore depends on my repressed desire. Psychoanalysis argues that, paradoxically however, we spend the rest of our lives in pursuit of that earlier sense of plenitude, even though attaining it means a loss of self, or death (Colebrook: 98).

Thus formulated, desire is essentially negative, conceived of as insatiable lack regulated by law (the law of the father). If, as psychoanalysis would have it, desire is located in the Oedipal then desire will eternally desire its own repression or illicit release. Desire in this context is eternally sexualised (and individualised), narrowed down as it is to the subject's sexuality. We could argue moreover that it is essentialised because in this interpretation it is primarily gendered as masculine (since it revolves primarily around desire of the mother) — and even if female desire is acknowledged it still comes under the purview of patriarchal law (the father prohibits the daughter incestual relations with him). This is a very narrow view of desire and its potential, and one that is linked to representation (initially in the form of the mother as object of desire). Moreover, any pleasure derived (because it is sexualised) would be one of discharge, of ending the sensation rather than holding it as an always already presence. And if it is correct that all daughters marry their fathers and all sons their mothers then that discharge enters into the metaphorical realm of the illicit. A very no-win situation. And one that Deleuze is extremely critical of.

And this where I turn to Deleuze to facilitate a consideration of a different way of formulating desire:

'Against psychoanalysis, Deleuze tried to de-sexualise and de-individualise desire' (Parr, 2005: 64) arguing that sexuality is but one flow amongst others which enters into the assemblage that is the human body (by assemblage Deleuze means: the human body as an assemblage of genetic material, ideas, powers of acting, relation to other bodies, etc). Against psychoanalysis, Deleuze argues that desire is not to be understood as the external relation between desiring subject and desired object (a relation Hollywood reproduces and capitalises upon incidentally). For Deleuze, desire is production, the production of reality not the creation of fantasies. We can begin to understand this if we consider that desire is connection, not the overcoming of loss, or lack, or separation; 'we

desire, not because we lack or need, but because life is a process of striving and self-enhancement.’ (Colebrook: xxii) Self-enhancement is meant here by Deleuze in its original sense of quality of self growth. Desire according to Deleuze is the productive process of life. A desiring-machine (which can be part of our selves or any organism), Deleuze tells us (and these are his terms) ‘is the outcome of any series of connections: the mouth that connects to the breast, the wasp that connects with an orchid, an eye that perceives a flock of birds, or a child’s body that connects with a train-set.’ (Colebrook: xxii) Thus, according to Deleuze, ‘all life is desire, a flow of positive difference and becoming, a full series of productive connections (...) a creative striving of life in general.’ (Colebrook: 99) In short: self-enhancement. Viewed in this light desire, is not common to human beings alone and this is part of the freeing process of Deleuze’s thinking. As Claire Colebrook states it so clearly:

Deleuze (...) frees desire from representation: desires are not images we have of what we lack; desires are positive events — including all the perceptions and sensible — [in the sense of sensing] encounters of all bodies. Once we free desire from representation, once we see desire as the act of a body itself and not the representation or wishful hallucination of an act, then we can also free desire from the human. Humans as speaking beings are no longer the only sites for desire. (99, my parenthesis)

This means that all life is a desiring flow (the act of a body itself); and this in turn frees us from the fixity of the Oedipal (repressed desire). Because what is originally desired is not the maternal object (ie a subject/object relation) but what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) describe as pre-personal desire, whereby what is wanted by the child is not another person but its own continued flow and production, its own self-enhancement (namely quality of growth). By pre-personal Deleuze means that process of becoming that occurs before we are constructed as a subject based in difference. This original pre-personal desire, says Deleuze, is impersonal intensive flow (desire is production from within)— what Deleuze and Guattari term ‘germinal influx of intensity’ (Colebrook: 103). If sexuality were allowed to continue untrammelled — that is, not be defined according to the concept of one person desiring another, but be allowed to remain true to its origin— then it too would enter the domain of the impersonal, because ultimately it is aligned with the way in which life produces and continues. Without the concept of the family and the repressed, procreation would be haphazard and true to impersonal sexuality. Masculinity and femininity become then, in this light, just ‘two of the responses or creations that life produces in order to continue.’ (Colebrook: 103)

This radical take on desire, and ultimately sexuality — as indeterminate, unfixed and impersonal — represents a tremendous challenge to the traditional psychoanalytical account of desire which is based in the family triangle and which, in turn, serves to maintain the capitalist ideal of social-production (and which as we know only too well has dominated much related discussion in film theory). As Charles Stivale puts it, ‘even though capitalism segregates reproduction from social life, it nonetheless delegates to the nuclear family the task of forming subjectivity in its own image.’ (2005: 56) The father acts as prohibitive authority: the family and especially the child, is forbidden desire of those objects closest to it (namely, mother/father). Similarly, in Marx’s reading of capitalist labour-relations, the workers (as cogs on a production wheel) produce commodities from which they too are alienated as subjects, and the boss acts (much like the patriarch) as the authoritative mediator. In other words the nuclear family functions on the micro-level much like capitalism and serves to perpetuate relations of power common to capitalist social production.

Capitalism cannot make way for the unruliness of desire as flow — for, if it did so, we would insist on different relations with objects of social production, based on openness and unhierarchical, non-individualised, shared modes of social production. Thus, in a similar vein, it is vital for capitalism’s sake that its own mode of reproduction prevails. Because, in this way, it restricts desire, as a concept, to sexuality which allows for its easy containment within the nuclear family. And it also allows for its subsequent repression through the psychoanalytic concept of incest. And so it is that we end up desiring our own repression.

To sum up this part of my argument: as Deleuze makes clear in his analysis, capitalism, western ideology, produce an image of desire that is familial. All desire is explained from the family triangle model (Colebrook: 103); a model of prohibition. But this of course produces us as repressed and desiring subjects. And desire, in turn, becomes repressed and organised in human terms. As such it ‘is objectified, socialised and humanised’ (Colebrook: 104). Objectified because we must not desire the mother object, socialised and humanised because only in renouncing the natural object of desire (the mother) can we become human and part of the social order of things. In short, desire based in this model is (to use Deleuze’s term) molar: that is, fixed, commodified (naturalised even).

We are well aware that cinematic grand narratives similarly offer us this model of desire (as an external subject/object relation). We are also aware that cinema has tended to commodify desire (how, after all, would it be able

to sell something that is unfixed, unruly or undetermined!!). Thus I am not going to develop these well-rehearsed arguments of grand narratives or commodification of desire here. What I do want to do is to turn to the concept of the star and questions of desire within a Deleuzian model of sensation to propose another way in which we might talk about the star body and its perception. What I have optimistically termed in my title: Beyond Desire.

Stardom — Beyond Desire

Deleuze argues that desire is not a fantasy of what we lack, it is first and foremost a psychic and corporeal production of what we want — namely self-enhancement (Parr: 65). Desire is production, a flow. If we accept this premise, then what happens within the context of cinematic production?

Cinema is not only a representation of something with meaning (telling a story), it functions also as a machine which produces movement through its own machinic assemblage (as cinematic apparatus) along with the machinic assemblage of other bodies on screen (be they star bodies, mise-en-scène, sound, lighting etc). Thus cinema is not only representation but, because it produces movement, is also 'an aesthetic assemblage that connects and works through affect and sensation.' (Kennedy, 2000:114) The film image viewed in this light becomes material force rather than figuration (representation). The image vibrates, flickers (an interesting return to an earlier term we used to use for film, 'the flicks' — as if we knew it was matter) as the eye engages with the movement. In watching, the spectator's body receives and gives back movement, and in so doing influences the external images on-screen. Dana Polan helps us to understand this idea when he says: 'what we see on the cinematic screen is the body, not insofar as it is represented as "object", but insofar as it is lived as experiencing sensation.' (quoted in Kennedy: 111)

This has clear implications for how we interpret the image onscreen and surely helps us to get away from the notion of the gaze. If we experience the body onscreen as sensation (as vibration, resonance and movement) then that body exists surely as figural, as distinct from figuration. Figural meaning the image as material force — because the figural relates to the human figure (to matter), as distinct from figuration which relates to the image as representational and narrative (as metaphor). And, as figural, the body is as matter, and as matter the body thereby has singularities in the same way that matter itself has singularities (what we can also call molecular-ity). This is an important point because it allows us to experience the star body as a material encounter with all the forces and intensities implicit in that notion of matter. For matter exists in modulation, is always processual, that is, in movement, in change, a molecular process. To view the body in this way is to understand it at what Deleuze terms the molecular level which veers away from the strict segmentary or binary nature of the molar level and which allows us to perceive bodies as part of a molecular process within a machinic assemblage of technological, material, social and other forces, and not just as biologically or culturally determined.

We as spectator meet, then, the star body as material force, as vibration, resonance and movement. These are two distinct bodies in a relation of sensation: the spectatorial body and the star body on screen. We can now see how the spectatorial body and the body onscreen link up in what Deleuze terms an 'a-paralletic evolution' — namely, the becoming that exists between two contrasting matters or 'two beings that have nothing whatsoever to do with one another.' (Deleuze quoted in Kennedy: 36) In our context these two contrasting matters would be the en-screened body (be it the star body, or any other assemblage on screen) and our own spectatorial body — the former star body is figural (relating to matter) the latter the spectatorial body is real (as matter). Deleuze uses the example of the wasp and the orchid to explain this term a-paralletic evolution. Here is a picture of the wasp-orchid to help us understand this argument:



As Deleuze explains, the wasp and the orchid are two distinct beings or species that form a symbiotic alliance through sensation. The orchid seems to form a wasp image, what Deleuze describes as an orchid-becoming of the wasp — a mimetism (see image above) which attracts the wasp. When the wasp alights on the orchid there is a linking up which changes the two distinct bodies. They do not become one, but they do form a single bloc of becoming until the moment has passed: the wasp becomes part of the orchid's reproductive organs at the same time as the orchid becomes the sexual organ of the wasp. In that moment of intensive flow, that is, in that moment of connection, of becoming, the orchid is perceiving the wasp as if it were perceiving its world. It has a (virtual) perception of the very essence of the sensation (of becoming wasp). So too for the wasp in relation to the orchid (Deleuze, 1983: 19). This is clearly far more intriguing than saying that their states alter. What Deleuze is saying is that (as with the wasp and the orchid) we are always becoming. It is also clear that, in terms of the wasp and the orchid, their relation is one of sensation rather than what we currently term desire.

In terms of sensation, then, the encounter sets in motion three stages. First, vibration — sensation felt at a nervous level (the orchid has the sensation of the wasp/and the wasp the orchid). Second, resonance — the embrace, the clinch, the two sensations resonate together (an orchid-becoming of the wasp, a wasp-becoming of the orchid). Finally, forced movement, when the two sensations draw apart (the orchid and the wasp separate).

This concept of a-paralletic evolution allows Deleuze to explore the real flows of desire, rather than the repressed (metaphorical) one. Deleuze is interested in an encounter which brings together, in resonance, two separate species (wasp and orchid) because it shows that reproduction can be extrinsic as much as intrinsic (that is, not necessarily be species determined). This allows us to see the disjunct nature of communication. In short, this symbiosis serves to show how sexuality can swerve away from the relation between law and desire, and land resolutely in the positive terrain of what Deleuze terms 'vital functioning' (by which he means life forces and flows).

If we now reconsider this concept of a-paralletic evolution in terms of the spectatorial body² we can already determine that a connection of two intensive flows occurs between, say, the star-body and that of the spectator. In this terrain of vital functioning, my body senses the star body through its movement, its figural materiality. The intensive flows between us means that I have a virtual perception of the very essence of that sensation. I do not become the body of the star itself (self-evidently), nor does this mean I identify with it (as an ideal ego). Rather, I have my own sensation of the vibration and movement of that body. That is our resonance, our clinch (even if it is an unpleasant or, indeed, a bland one). Furthermore that is not our only clinch. Clearly there will be more than just these intensive flows — there will be connections with other cinematic machinic assemblages (such as mise-en-scène, sound, lighting, and so on). In these contexts, then, the spectatorial body is not a united self, nor even seeking to be such. Rather the spectatorial body is a disjunct self — engaged in a simultaneous set of nomadic perceptions, which includes a perception of the star body, lighting, décor, sound, all the aspects of mise-en-scène and so forth.³

If we can agree that sensation is another way to engage with the machinic assemblage of cinema, let us consider further how this would work in relation to the star body and performance. As the star body moves, so it is first perceived as sensation — sensation of movement. The liquidity of that movement vibrates and resonates with the spectator body which in turn becomes part of that molecular process (remember the wasp and the orchid). The star body comes to us as matter in modulation, as a series of intensities, rhythms, and flows. This allows us to unpick (amongst other things) or explain (in a material non-gendered way) what occurs when we speak of the intensity of an actor's performance or the force of it. As matter on screen the star body has singularities (things move and shift all the time, sometimes almost imperceptibly, yet we sense it). The star body provides us with an experience of the affective (which, to take the two meanings of the word, we either briefly inhabit => we become the sensation; or are moved by it emotionally => we sense the sensation). And our body receives and gives back movement to these perceptions and sensations. Each time we view the star body neither our presence nor the star body's is the same. Thus, the star body is always changing, becoming and is experienced, in our reciprocal relationship to it, at a molecular level. Similarly, because our experience is molecular, rather than molar, sensation will always be different — nothing is fixed. According to Bergson, perception is a function of molecular movement and is always changing (Kennedy: 118). Always becoming.

Such an approach can help us to understand the complexities of what we experience when connecting with a star body and help us to perceive its performance in all its layers of intensities. An approach that is helped by the fact that this way of experiencing the star body takes us away from the concept of gendered identity (or entity). Here the star body is denaturalised (in that molar sense of fixed gender) and 'instead reconceived as a series of flows, particles, in assemblage with other bodies.' (Kennedy: 94) And moreover it allows us to acknowledge that the spectator is as much engaged in a 'pragmatics of becoming' as is the star body.

It is at this point that it would be useful to illustrate these ideas through a filmic example. Taking Signoret as my main model and her performance in Jacques Becker's *Casque d'or* (1952), I have chosen the dance sequence that takes place at the beginning of the film between Signoret and the lead male star Serge Reggiani. Here is the synopsis of the sequence. The film is set in the *Belle Epoque* era. Marie (played by Signoret) arrives by rowing-boat at a *guinguette* outside Paris with her women friends (mostly prostitutes) and their pimps or gangster lovers. Marie's own pimp, Roland, is a fairly nasty piece of work who tries, unsuccessfully, to push her around. At the *guinguette* the dance music strikes up and a friend of one of the gangsters comes to join them at their table. His name is Manda (played by Serge Reggiani). An immediate exchange of glances between Manda and Marie make it clear they have taken a fancy to each other. Marie invites him to dance with her (thereby breaking a first code and asserting her female agency). He demurs and then agrees. As they dance together he constantly averts his eyes and attempts to resist her charms. Meantime, Marie's pimp grows increasingly agitated at the table. The dance draws to an end. Manda finally looks into Marie's eyes, they smile and swirl around as the dance music concludes.

The Dance:

Let us first of all break this encounter down into its series of events. At first it is clear that there is eye contact between the two protagonists: Marie, played by Simone Signoret and Manda, played by Serge Reggiani. We know from looking at him that he is looking at her and that that look is confirmed via camera work, we see her looking back. Vibration, followed by resonance (in the form of the visual embrace) occurs, both sensing each other. We too sense this intensity. This continues as she invites him to dance. At the point where their two bodies come together, however, things change. Her body has liquid movement, his does not (it remains rigid, stiff like a pole). So that earlier synthesis/symbiosis of sensation, the clinch through eye contact, has been replaced by a new state of events. There is a new and different intensity between them — and too, of course, for us as we notice this unclinking, this forced movement on his part of drawing apart. Not only are their bodies differently located but so too are ours in that we shift to a sensation of his unease as mis-matched with her vibrating sensuality. As they dance, he persists in looking away from her eyes, remaining stiff as she encircles around him in fluid movement. Only upon the third return of the camera to the dancing couple is there a new shift. This time their eyes meet, he breaks into a smile, they swirl around, both bodies resonating in the physical embrace. The clinch reappears at a physical level this time. After which they draw apart.

In this encounter with its many shifts, Signoret and Reggiani display a multiplicity of sexualities with which we also vibrate and resonate. Remember the wasp and the orchid: in the actual encounter the wasp transforms the testicular nature of the orchid into a reproductive organ as pollinated, germinal flux — the two are neither male nor female, both become part of each other and evolve into something different from what they were apart. But to return to our characters. Both the Marie and Manda have a map/an idea of each other as desiring machines. She already has a sensation of him and is already in a processuality of becoming a single bloc with him. He for his part is a desiring-machine, yes, but with two (conflictual) sets of movement (to embrace/clinch, but also to depart) — hence his unease. What then will be the vibrations that will help him choose his direction and for the clinch to occur? A first answer lies with Marie's body and the intensity and energies of her vibrations which we as spectators get to determine from, amongst other vibrations, her ironic smile at his unease, her fluid movement that does not change in relation to his stiffness, plus her smiles at her own evident pleasure in dancing with him. However, her mapping, her idea of him has to negotiate the vibrations emanating from him, as sensed by her. Marie's idea of him, then, takes her in several different directions, causing her to shift her own processes of becoming — the most significant one of which is becoming-intense (in the Deleuzian sense of interior flow of life — intense germinal flow (produced from within) which as we recall is the opposite of repression). For his part, Manda has to decide to relinquish desire as repression (as exemplified through the several cuts to Marie's patriarchal pimp exuding possessive fury and jealousy) and become other than man caught in the fixity of Oedipal relations of negative desire. As Deleuze might put it, the Manda character has to go through the process of becoming other than man, becoming-woman to become open to the intensity of life. This openness to unfixity is confirmed by the ending swirl of their dance together (caught in a long shot to begin with as if to emphasize this event).

As spectators, we can feel the different layers of intensities between the two bodies in a molecular way. What is on display here is the molecularity of sexuality which we experience as vibration (the eye contact for example) and then sensation (the movement of the dance). A molecularity of sexuality confirmed by the intensity of feeling which resonates from the camera work and the circular nature of the music accompanying their dance. The point is we have a sensation of both bodies, without at any point becoming them. We also get to sense them as matter

and, in that perceptual context, she no more than he is either female or male (in that fixed gendered sense). And we as spectator experience sensation in an ungended way.

Conclusion:

So it is that we, as spectator, when watching star bodies enter into sensation with them. Our own body engages in processes of becoming as we make our own map of this encounter. These are not single processes of becoming, but multiple, because the sensation (within the a-parallelic evolution) changes at all times — we respond to the different vibrations, resonances and intensities. Thus, when we view desire as sensation, how much more liberating our relationship to the star body becomes. It no longer has to be defined, fixed as either homo-erotic, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual. Even though these might be some of the intensive flows amongst other becomings. Most importantly, viewed in this light of sensation, our relationship is one that is based in reality (our senses) rather than fantasy (in the form of repressed desire/the what I cannot have). Through an approach based in perception and sensation we can better understand the star body as affect and understand how our own body, in viewing and listening, responds and produces its own sets of intensities. But there is also the fact, where we as spectator are concerned, that there are other processes of becoming (which connect into our own lived lives), triggered perhaps by these images or sounds, or where we are sitting watching, creating yet further sensations — another form of giving back movement to the external images of the film. Think in this context, for a moment, how, thanks to technology (web, dvd etc), there has been an increasing inter-activity with stars, creating a greater sense of immediacy of connection (we can download them onto our computers, enter their chat rooms etc). Sensation then is rhizomatic — a fibrous web, a set of variously informed speeds, intensities and energies — a molecular experience of the material. All machinic assemblages: the camera, the star bodies, the spectator bodies are producing desire in the way that Deleuze means it — as sensation as subjectless subjectivity: subjectless because it is not one and unified but disjunctive, rhizomic — ungended sensation, a-beyond-desire that frees up (as Deleuze so felicitously puts it) ‘a thousand tiny sexes’ which desire in its Oedipal formulation would have us subsume under one. (Deleuze quoted in Kennedy: 95) How much more gratifying a way to experience the star body and how much more revealing their performance becomes if viewed in this light.

Notes

¹ For all these approaches see Hayward, Susan (2004).

² I deliberately choose to use this term ‘spectatorial body’ by way of a term of reference for our function as spectator. In my view it is necessary to use this term rather than a concept such as THE spectator, or to attempt to speak for THE spectator. As Richard Dyer evoked in this conference to attempt to do so seems an untenable idea.

³ Let us take lighting by way of another illustration. Currently in reception theory we tend to look at lighting as an object relation that impacts only on the meaning of the image. For example we are used to describing the chiaroscuro lighting in film noir as a representation of the protagonist’s ambiguity. And in terms of subject/object relations (ie spectator identification) we might suggest that the spectator would read the effect of such lighting as pointing to the psychological complexity of the protagonist. Or to cite another example: This sort of lighting when used in a pursuit between a victim and a murderer might serve to produce a response of fear in the spectator. But in both instances we are talking about the effect (and not the affect) of the lighting on the spectator. And yet, as the lighting changes so too does the spectator’s sense of it. There is a material change for both. What can be said of this connection? What does that lighting do to the spectator and what does the spectator do in perceiving that light change? In what way does that body receive and give back affectively to that image? What happens at the level of sensation?

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