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Immanent Imitations, Animal Affects: From Hijikata Tatsumi to Marcus Coates

As a whole, this third chapter is primarily concerned with the theatre of immanence as a site of bodily experimentation, an event of metamorphosis for performer and audience alike, particularly in the encounter with nonhuman animals. These concerns will be explored primarily through an examination of the performance practice of butoh co-founder Hijikata Tatsumi and the work of the contemporary artist Marcus Coates, alongside Deleuze and Guattari’s well known concept of ‘becoming-animal’. As Alain Beaulieu has summarized,

Animals are omnipresent in Deleuze’s work, and throughout Deleuze and Guattari’s common body of work: the tick’s world, the assemblage (agencement) of the wasp and orchid, the spider’s prehension of the fly, the cat who knows better than the human how to die, the multiplicity of the wolf, the affects of Little Hans’ horse, spiny lobsters’ nomadism and bird-artists. (Beaulieu 2011: 69)

Within all of these discussions, Deleuze and Guattari insist that humans differ from nonhumans in degree rather than kind; indeed, it is this proximity that allows for the real exchange that they call becoming-animal. In placing this concept alongside specific performance practices, I do not mean to suggest that we should point to Hijikata or Coates’s work as mere examples of becoming-animal (a particular risk in the case of Coates, given we know that he is familiar with this specific Deleuzo-Guattarian concept). After all, how can we say that Coates’s video work *A Guide to the British Non Passerines* (2001) exemplifies becoming-animal when it involves him imitating the calls of 86 different bird species, whereas Deleuze and Guattari explicitly say that ‘becoming is never imitating’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 305)? How can Hijikata’s *Kinjiki* be an example of becoming-animal when it is thought to have involved suffocating a chicken to death – an act that arguably reinforces rather than dismantles a transcendent, hierarchical relation between human and animal?
Likewise, I do not intend to imply that the notion of becoming (-animal, or indeed -minor and -woman) is a universal concept that can be straightforwardly applied to vastly differing performing bodies. For instance, while I will only be able to touch on the concept of becoming-woman very briefly here, the chapter still broadly considers the question of how we might speak of and enter into becoming in a manner that registers species, but also cultural and sexual difference. Can we reconcile Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence on the universal nature of becoming and their refusal of any transcendent opposition of species, cultures or sexes, with the specificity of distinct corporeal experiences? What is the relationship between becoming-animal as a concept that speaks of human and nonhuman animal bodies in general, and becomings-animal as they manifest themselves in the singularity of particular encounters: not just human-animal but Hijikata-the-human and this particular neighborhood dog in Akita, ‘a northern province on the island of Honshu’ where Hijikata spent his childhood (Holledge and Tompkins 2000: 144)? In this sense, the conjunction of Deleuze and specific performance practices provides an important reminder of the extent to which what appears as becoming (rather than as reproduction or imitation) is always contextually determined.

The necessary responses to these questions are complex, and will be attempted at various points throughout the chapter. For now, I will simply note that neither practice serves to illustrate becoming, specifically becoming-animal, because each constitutes its own different mode of thinking the nature of the relationship between human and nonhuman animals. These thinkings, I propose, have both a proximity and a singularity in relation to one another, such that their juxtaposition is mutually illuminating; we learn as much about Deleuze and becoming-animal from looking at Hijikata and Coates as the other way round. Secondly, I would suggest that much hinges on the way in which species (but also cultural and sexual) differences are conceived, on what basis human and nonhuman animals (or indeed, Japan and ‘the West’, men and women) are said to differ. Or again, we need to explore if, how and why Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology of the becoming of bodies does not constitute a universalization of a specifically white, Western male experience in a manner that homogenizes the difference of other corporealities.

However, before we embark on this investigation, I want to extend my introduction to this chapter’s key practitioners, starting with Hijikata Tatsumi. From early examples such as the 1960 film Heso to genbaku (Navel and A-Bomb) to his final solo, Leprosy within the piece Summer Storm (1973), what Hijikata called ‘the body that becomes’ remained at the centre of his work (Fraleigh 2010: 55). Butoh expert Sondra Fraleigh argues that metamorphosis ‘is the metaphysical method of butoh, its alchemical aspect, and its shamanist basis’ (Fraleigh 2010: 13). Hijikata specifically uses dance not to represent the movement of other bodies, but to locate new and