



BECOMING STRANGE

"We can be thrown into becoming by anything at all, by the most unexpected, most insignificant of things."¹

When Someone Strange is Calling You Home articulates moments of becoming: becoming other, becoming animal, becoming intense, in its contestation of domestic spaces. In Allison Tweedie's collage work, the perfection of the domestic is tested and set askew; in Alejandro Cesarco's *Here Comes the Sun* (2004), tangential notions of time are pushed; and in Toshie Takeuchi's video *Tampopo Head and the Name of the Dogs* (2011), the division between the domestication of animals and humans is thrown into a melancholic gap. Criticality is compressed against emotion in each case to show how we become by becoming strange.

Animals might be the final frontier for the conveyance of emotion in a contemporary moment where skepticism for cliché or the overly sentimental is high attenuated. The status of dogs has been elevated to that of family members in North American culture, and a recently circulated online infographic² suggests it is dogs, not cats, who dominate the Internet. "To become," writes Gilles Deleuze, "is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule — neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and non-preexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form."³ If the "zone of proximity" gets compressed through the rise in dog memes and GIFs online or we oppress dogs into outfits which only seems weird when compared to a monkey in a shearling coat in IKEA, then compressing this zone speaks to our desire to be close to that which we hope to become. This transformation around conceptions of form and distance, as Deleuze says, "starting from the forms one

has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the function one fulfills, becoming is to extract particibles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming and through which one becomes."⁴ We dominate dogs with our desire for perfect loyalty, excess closeness.

Deleuze advocates having "animal relationships with animals" and states that, "marking a territory is, in fact, "art in its pure state."⁵ Animals "intuitively have this capacity to express an impersonal life with its network of affects."⁶ In the dog walking scene in Takeuchi's video where the male subjects walk the female characters in the park, there is a suggestion: "That is the essential point for us: you become-animal only if, by whatever means or elements, you emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule."⁷ This molecular reading suggests the action is where shifts in conception occur. Not representational, but still a physical manifestation of how an act can refuse to be named. By naming his dogs after women he knows, Hilko dominates with his version of events, but by rewriting the fictional portraits of the women, Takeuchi refuses that domination.

If they sit on the sofa, if they sleep with you or if they have a dog bed. If you walk them in the park with a ball chucker or if you carry them in a purse designed for such a purpose. If you talk to them like a baby, or like a three year old, or like another adult. If you let them eat off your plate, if you give them a raw food diet, if you buy the cheapest dog food you can find. If you live where they take dogs, if you pay the pet deposit or if you pretend you don't have a dog and send your dog to a friend's when the landlord comes over. If you let them sit in the front seat of the car, their

Jacqueline Turner on *When Someone Strange is Calling You Home*

faces out the window. If you let them sit on your lap while you're driving, if you put them in the back of your SUV. If you've said I wish I was a dog so I didn't have to go to work or do the laundry or whatever is annoying you at that moment. If you pat your dog on the head gently, or if you pet it intensely working out the muscle kinks from ball chasing escapades. If you bathe and brush your dog regularly even through your dog hates that. If you brush your dog constantly because they love that. If your dog is described as a ball of fluff. If you find dog hair inexplicably in your underwear drawer. If you call your dog with a whistle or by its name. If your dog comes when you call or runs the other direction. If your dog is trained, can heal or if you never bothered with that shit. If other people with dogs say hello to you in the dog park trails or if you're walking alone and then no one says hello. If people say beautiful dog, happy dog, or what a tough guy about your dog. If your friends' dogs always come up to you and put their head in your lap. If your friends' dogs avoid you. If they pee when you look at them. If your dog acts embarrassed or ashamed. If your dog looks like they are almost laughing. If your dog can sense when you're upset. If your dog barks early in the morning. If your dog barks early in the morning and the neighbours complain. If you have put up posters when your dog was lost and fielded calls until you found them. If you never found them. If you got another dog. If you have your dogs cremated after they die, if you keep them in an urn or scatter the ashes in the park where they loved to run.

The "if" is the only space in which we can actually exist in relation to notions of domestic perfection, in relation to the ways we have elevated the status of dogs to family members, or even adjusted our own affective responses to fit within the realm of contemporary conceptions of happiness.

How do we want to be? How strange can we become?

Toshie Takeuchi, *Tampopo and the Name of the Dogs*, 2011. Photo: Blaine Campbell

NOTES

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005), 292, quoted in Alain Beaulieu, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," *New Literary History*, 38, no. 4 (2007), 76.

² Alicia Eler, "The Big Secret About Cats on the Internet," readwrite, http://readwrite.com/2011/11/23/the_big_secret_about_cats_on_the_internet (accessed 16 April 2013).

³ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 1, quoted in Alain Beaulieu, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," *New Literary History*, 38, no. 4 (2007), 75.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005), 272, quoted in Alain Beaulieu, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," *New Literary History*, 38, no. 4 (2007), 75.

⁵ Alain Beaulieu, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," *New Literary History*, 38, no. 4 (2007), 70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005), 274-275, quoted in Alain Beaulieu, "The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought," *New Literary History*, 38, no. 4 (2007), 78.

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