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The Horse Will Fall Forever: Nijinsky’s Kinetographies of Becoming

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Abstract

The article introduces Catherine Malabou’s concept of plasticity and Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of becoming to research on the infamous, so-called *Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, the legendary dancer and choreographer of Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. In this document Nijinsky describes, among others, the walks he presumably took around St. Moritz in Switzerland in 1918-1919. The text was written when Nijinsky started developing symptoms of mental illness eventually diagnosed as schizophrenia. Yet in the article Nijinsky’s descriptions of walks are treated not as medical symptoms but as kinetographies of universal plasticity, in this case radically transforming the dancer’s identity or, better, disidentifying him *as* a site of becoming. It is the access that Nijinsky’s notebooks grant to a specific plane of kinetic experience which makes them of interest to the studies of human mobility, including dance. By deconstructing the peculiar character of plasticity the traces of which Nijinsky’s writing contains the article advances further the project of cultural kinesiology seen as vital component of performing arts theory and cultural analysis in general and situated on the crossing of philosophy and performance studies.

Keywords: Vaslav Nijinsky; Catherine Malabou; plasticity; becoming; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari; horse

On the cover of the 2012 English edition of contemporary philosopher Catherine Malabou's *Ontology of the Accident* there is a fragment of Sidney Nolan's painting *The Slip.* The fragment shows a horse upside down, falling from a cliff in a rather awkward, stiff position. In his notes to the painting Nolan wrote: 'It is a dreadful descent and the horse will fall forever.'[1] Presumably it is the decisiveness of the fall as well as its eternal character that explains the use of this fragment on the book's cover. Malabou's meditation on what she calls destructive plasticity deals exactly with this – the dreadfulness of irreversible descent – but also with its creative character.

Malabou writes: 'Destructive plasticity enables the appearance or formation of alterity where the other is absolutely lacking. Plasticity is the form of alterity when no transcendence, flight or escape is left. The only other that exists in this circumstance is being other to the self.' (p. 11) The passage from life to death that *The Slip* portrays is the ultimate form of destructive plasticity. Yet there are other forms of slippage that are even more important to Malabou – accident, deeply traumatic experience, disease that transforms life entirely. A person who undergoes one of these becomes 'A funny breed. A monster whose apparition cannot be explained as any genetic anomaly. A new being comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in a biography.' (p. 2) Destructive plasticity is virtually present in every human being as potential for becoming completely different – unexpectedly and irreversibly. The subject is no longer themselves losing – by accident or fate – the identity that defined their social status but also very personal sense of self. When at work, destructive plasticity rearranges the subject's most intimate being exposing it as a site of becoming rather than an object.

In this essay I introduce Malabou's concept of destructive plasticity, but also plasticity in general, to research on the infamous, so-called diary[2] (2006) of Vaslav Nijinsky, the legendary dancer and choreographer of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.[3] In this document Nijinsky describes, among much else, the walks he presumably took around St. Moritz in Switzerland in 1918-1919.[4] As is well known, the text was written when Nijinsky and Diaghilev parted for good and the dancer, secluded in the Alps with only his family, and unable to work as he once had, started developing symptoms of mental illness eventually diagnosed as schizophrenia (see Ostwald, 1999, Fernandez-Egea, 2019). Yet in what follows I am not interested in the anecdotal aspects of the diary or its medical importance. Instead, I propose a more theoretical approach and argue, along Malabou's vein, that Nijinsky's descriptions of walks can be understood as kinetographies of plasticity radically transforming the walker/writer's identity or, better, disidentifying him as a site of becoming, to adopt a key term from *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze, Guattari, 2006). It is the access that they grant to a specific plane of kinetic experience which makes them of interest to me and hopefully others who contemplate mobility. By deconstructing the peculiar character of plasticity – the traces of which Nijinsky's writing contains – I aim to advance further the project of cultural kinesiology as vital component of performing arts theory and cultural analysis in general that I introduced in *The Virus of Mobilization. Dance and the Shaping of Modernity, 1455-1795.* (Klimczyk, 2020)

In other words, in arguing for such a repositioning of Nijinsky's transformation, which he famously called 'my marriage to God' (2006, p. 7), I do not question but supplement the research already conducted on the case by psychiatrists (Abenheimer, 1946, Oswald, 1999) and literary scholars. (Orte, 2016, Svobodny, 2016) By looking closely at the kinetographies of

walking in Nijinsky's writing I am theorising a kinetic imaginary (Castoriadis 1987)[5] rather than further advancing the personal history of Vaslav Nijinsky as told in numerous hagio- (Nijinsky, 1972, Reiss, 1980), bio- (Buckle, 1972, Krasovskaya, 1979, Moore, 2013) and patographies (Ostwald, 1999) published so far. In my eyes, while plasticity is universal and reality a process of constant becoming, there are culturally shaped procedures (like psychiatry or literary studies) of making sense of this process. The procedures reterritorialize as more or less stable identities the becoming that has been unhinged by acts of deterritorialization (Nijinsky's walks), to once again refer to Deleuze and Guattari. It is between the devil of plasticity and the blue sea of cultural identities that becoming takes place and is written. So far Nijinsky's case has been mainly approached from the latter perspective. This article is an effort to advance the former and thereby enrich not only Nijinsky scholarship but historiography of the lived (and performing) body as well.[6]

The becoming in the diary is described as happening to a particular individual. Yet, what Nijinsky writes about – becoming other to the self – is a universal possibility, as Malibou reminds us: 'We must all of us recognize that we might, one day, become someone else, an absolute other, someone who will never be reconciled with themselves again […].' (Malabou, 2012, p. 2) I claim, advancing Malabou's argument, that by noticing and understanding both the universality and singularity of metamorphoses such as the ones captured in Nijinsky's notebooks we can more fully account for the processes of becoming encoded in them.

Becoming (plasticity, rapture,

transfiguration)

When in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari develop the concept of becoming-animal that was introduced in their study of Kafka (Deleuze, Guattari, 1986), becoming is described as follows: ‘Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles 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.’ (Deleuze, Guattari, 1987, p. 272) This movement-oriented “definition” of becoming points us toward a field of research that after Deleuze and Guattari could be called molecular kinesiology. The point is to move beyond the formal or organizational aspects of the movement of the bodies (molar movement and rest) and into their “pure mobility” (molecular movement and rest). What a molecular kinesiologist traces are speeds and slownesses on the plane of immanence, the affects that move the body or rather the body as affects in constant motion. In the process of establishing the body as relations of movement and rest the subject constantly dissolves itself, it never *is* but always *becomes*: ‘for Deleuze, one’s self must be conceived as a constantly changing assemblage of forces, an epiphenomenon arising from chance confluences of languages, organisms, societies, expectations, laws and so on.’ (Stagoll, 2010, p. 27) It is when the body is in crisis that its assemblage-like character becomes particularly visible.

Becoming’s condition of possibility is plasticity that, as written by Malabou, ‘can signify both the achievement of presence and its deflagration, its emergence and its explosion.’ (2010, p. 8) In a note she adds: ‘It refers both to the aptitude to *receive form* (for instance, clay is “plastic”) and the ability to *give form* (as in the plastic arts or plastic surgery), but it is also

characterized by the power to annihilate form.' (p. 87) Plasticity enables constant metamorphoses of forms and according to Malabou is a fundamental quality of being or, rather, 'being is nothing but its plasticity.' (p. 36) It is in deliberate acts of creation as well as in accidental destruction that plasticity manifests itself most clearly, though it is in fact, a "constant" in being. In general, plasticity is 'a structure of transformation and destruction of presence and the present.' (p. 9) Its destructive manifestation can provisionally be interpreted as a rupture that comes to the subject from an exterior to the self yet not outside of one's being. In this instance the subject accidentally receives a completely new form. Creative plasticity, which I propose to call transfiguration, is a self-induced metamorphosis. The distinction is analytical rather than actual. In actuality any change is both a rupture and a transfiguration. As Malabou notes – and this is crucial – 'there is no alterity outside the change that makes alterity possible […] alterity can only impose itself fundamentally through its *power of transformation* and as this same power. Transformation is the origin of alterity.' (2010, p. 40-41) If we are to understand becoming at its most immanent level, we have to see it as transformation introducing alterity – becoming oneself by becoming other to the self. This is what I will do for the writer/walker in Nijinsky's notebooks.

While uncovering the plasticity described in Nijinsky's text one comes across numerous acts of disidentification which the writer performs as the walker embodying – by means of movement in space available to us only on paper – multiple identities and hence exposing each one of them as arbitrary and all of them as dependent on performances of identity-forming differentiation. In the diary the writer/walker often takes on and twists identities that seem mutually exclusive: human and God, human and animal, peasant and aristocrat (and many others) etc. Each and every identity then is being

actively undone by enumeration and accumulation as well as juxtaposition with other identities: religious, national and species.

This juxtaposition of identities is a process which has both the plastic and the graphic component, to adapt Malabou's distinction. (2010, p. 3) It happens as movement of the body in space and as movement of writing. Both movements intertwine and condition each other while expressing the writer/walker's becoming – him being moved by the other and moving himself towards the other. The other who is ultimately [only] other to the self.

In this context it is Nijinsky's becoming-horse[7] that I plan to use as an example of machines of becoming at work in history. The reason for this choice is two-fold. On the one hand, it is in the analysis of becoming-animal that Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming is fully developed. On the other, it is in deconstructing Nijinsky-becoming-horse-when-walking that Malabou's plasticity can be captured at work. Nijinsky's take on becoming-animal enables one to balance Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on multiplicity of becoming by foregrounding its singular variant, the loneliness of a walker that Deleuze and Guattari sweep aside in their heavily politicized reading of becoming-animal as performing multiplicity (1987, p. 239-248), especially that Malabou only very briefly touches upon the issue when discussing, rather disapprovingly, Levinas's concept of transcendence. (2010, p. 39) In my interpretation Nijinsky's writing is an act of exploring the plane of immanence by means of solitary walking and precisely as the separation and loneliness of the writer/walker becomes an act of becoming-animal, becoming-other-to-the-self, becoming-oneself. On this plane personal history and universal plasticity become one another to produce a fall that lasts forever. Dreadful and empowering at the same time.

‘Schizophrenic’ walks

When in *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari develop their theory of schizophrenia as process rather than as a medical condition (see Van der Wielen, 2018), from the very beginning they refer to aimless walk as a model of this process. Their first example is Georg Büchner’s Lenz: ‘While taking a stroll outdoors […] he is in the mountains, amid falling snowflakes, with other gods or without any gods at all […] Everything is a machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines— all of them connected to those of his body.’ (1983, p. 9) More or less, the same could be written about Nijinsky who is also, even if briefly, discussed in *Anti-Oedpius* as an exemplary *schizo*. Both Lenz and Nijinsky charge themselves by walking in the mountains, treating this activity as a way of intensifying presence. In this sense, walking embodies the general characteristic of the schizophrenic process: ‘Every voyage is intensive, and occurs in relation to thresholds of intensity between which it evolves or that it crosses. One travels by intensity; displacements and spatial figures depend on intensive thresholds of nomadic deterritorialization (and thus on differential relations) that simultaneously define complementary, sedentary reterritorializations.’ (Deleuze, Guattari, 1987, p. 5) If we translated this quote into Malabou’s terms we could say that nomadic deterritorializations are ‘dangerous morphing’ while sedentary reterritorializations are ‘adventures of refiguration’. Together they constitute a machine for changing identities: ‘Between the adventure of a *refiguration* (the continuous route going from one figure to another) and that of a *dangerous morphing*, *their forms take an unforeseen direction*.’ (Malabou, 2011, p. 121)

Nijinsky’s deterritorializations are available to us as a series of kinetographies (reterritorializations) that allowed him to *feel*, to

communicate his experience on the plane of pure affects by means of writing. This is essential because it is affects that Nijinsky almost constantly writes with and about in the diary. It is instructive to do a close read of one of these kinetographies to capture the feeling (*chuvstvo)* that Nijinsky aims at becoming by writing/walking[8]:

> I went for a walk once, and it seemed to me that there was blood on the snow, and so I ran, following the trail. I had the impression that somebody had killed a man, but he was alive, and so I ran in another direction and saw a large trail of blood. I was afraid, but went in the direction of the abyss. […] When I was walking along the snow, I saw a ski trail that stopped in front of the trail of blood. I was afraid that people had buried a man in the snow because they had beaten him to death with sticks. I was afraid and ran back. […] I then felt that it was God who was checking to see whether I was afraid of him or not. I said aloud, 'No, I am not afraid of God, because he is life and not death.' Then God forced me to go in the direction of the abyss […] I went to the abyss and then fell down, but was caught in the branches of a tree, which I had not noticed. […] God wanted to test me. I understood Him and therefore wanted to disentangle myself, but he did not allow me to. I held on for a long time, but after a while I became afraid. God told me that I would fall if I let go of this branch. I let go of the branch, but did not fall. […] On the road I again saw the trail of blood, but I no longer believed it. God showed me this trail so I would feel him. I felt him and went back. He told me to lie down on the snow. I lay down. He ordered me to lie for a long time. I lay there till my hand felt cold. My hand began to freeze. I pulled back my hand, saying

> this was not God, because my hand ached. God was pleased and ordered me to go back, but after a few steps he ordered me to lie down again in the snow next to the tree. I caught hold of the tree and lay down, slowly falling back. God commanded me again to remain in the snow. I lay there for a long time. I did not feel the cold, and then God commanded me to get up. I got up. He said I could go back. I went back. He said, 'Stop!' I stopped. I came to the trail of blood. He commanded me to go back. I went back. He said, 'Stop.' I stopped. (2006, p. 13-14)

This dense text reads like a horror film scenario with the gaping abyss awaiting the protagonist, blood on the snow, suspicion of murder and commanding God. We need to notice the motif of beating one to death with sticks which will reoccur in the context of Nijinsky-becoming-horse. But beyond the anecdote there is something more crucial to these lines – a very detailed molecular kinetography that consists of speeds and slownesses, of abrupt starts and even more abrupt stops. Nijinsky starts walking and almost immediately is pacing fast, afraid of the looming destruction. His body is agitated, unsure of its direction and yet drawn to the promise of transformation. He is getting ready to reconfigure himself. It is at this very moment that Nijinsky calls upon God and with him, destructive plasticity. A rupture happens to him. His body becomes a site of an encounter with the other which happens as a series of speeds and slownesses. After Malabou we could recall Heidegger's words here: 'To undergo an experience with something - be it a thing, a person, or a god – means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us […].' (Heidegger, 1971, p. 56) The French philosopher comments on them as follows: 'This metamorphosis is at once a change of route, a new direction,

and a change of form. To undergo an experience is to receive another inflection and another form from the other as well as to give the other these changes in return.' (2010, p. 41)

Plasticity, as we remember, entails ability to both receive and give form, to be the object and subject of change. Nijinsky's body undergoes a gruesome trial at the hand of God, who tests Nijinsky's courage. This is destructive plasticity at work. At the same time this kinetic trial is a productive transfiguration. What Nijinsky performs is not blind obedience to an external force but a dialog. At one point he very precisely describes the dialectics of his metamorphosis: 'God told me that I would fall if I let go of this branch. I let go of the branch, but did not fall.' God can also be wrong or, rather, God needs Nijinsky just like Nijinsky needs God. Only when Nijinsky dares to act transformation becomes possible.

On the molecular level, in the feeling body a total synchrony of God and man is performed: in the last part of the performance Nijinsky stops and goes, in frantic explosion of speeds and slownesses, as if he was a Deleuzian machine: 'Not man as the king of creation, but rather as the being who is in intimate contact with the profound life of all forms or all types of beings, who is responsible for even the stars and animal life, and who ceaselessly plugs an organ-machine into an energy-machine, a tree into his body […]' (Deleuze, Guattari, 1983, p. 4) The rhythm of the machine is a perfect staccato with an underlying beat which firmly grounds Nijinsky in the snow on which he walks and in which he lies for a long time. The tree in this context becomes a *pars pro toto* for the body without organs, the profound life.[9]

And yet this is not where the transformation ends. A couple paragraphs further in the text Nijinsky continues his kinetography: 'I ran home, glad that

these trials were over, but God commanded me to direct my attention to a man who was coming towards me.' (p. 16) Nijinsky runs and hides from the man, who is building a mound in memory of his late wife and eventually puts a wooden cross on top of it, but something (God?) draws him to this man. The cross makes Nijinsky think about his wife. He is afraid that she might die as well and hence concludes his narrative with the following words, summarizing his transition from death-fearing man into death-embracing machine: 'I am afraid of death and therefore I do not want it. I turned back and took out the tree, but thinking that the man would discover my impudence, I stuck the tree back in again, but I crossed out the cross, thinking that the man did not understand death. Death is life. Man dies for God. God is movement, and therefore death is necessary.' (p. 16) The cross needs to be crossed out, undone as the tree. Transcendence is but a mere illusion. What really *is* is the constant movement between life and death. The eternal return of the same as the other.

The border between subject and object has been blurred. By conflating himself with God Nijinsky becomes the latter, becomes movement, immanent change of things, metamorphosis. While on walks he feels the unity of all things, and therefore necessity of death undistinguishable from life. This brings a very concrete, bodily, kinetic sensation – God as movement. A vibration which Frédéric Gros in *A Philosophy of Walking* kinetographs as follows: 'The body becomes steeped in the earth it treads. And thus, gradually, it stops being in the landscape: it *becomes* the landscape. That doesn't have to mean dissolution, as if the walker were fading away to become a mere inflection, a footnote. It's more a flashing moment: sudden flame, time catching fire. And here, the feeling of eternity is all at once that vibration between presences. Eternity, here, in a spark.' (2014, p. 65)

In Malabou we find an adequate description of such transforming feeling of eternity: ‘Changing […] amounts to finding a mode of torsion, reversion, metamorphosis, or migration that matches the impossibility of fleeing and the injunction to look at what looks at us. It is a kind of flight *in situ* […] To modify oneself is to change without fleeing, running, or waiting.’ (2010, p. 42) God is what looks at us but as seen by us. The walk is an act of looking at God looking at Nijinsky. At its most focused and most stationary it becomes most frantic and explosive, producing not identity but constant becoming – defamiliarization of all things, fluidity bordering on catatonia, deterritorialization: ‘As for the schizo, continually wandering about, migrating here, there, and everywhere as best he can, he plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorialization […] It may well be that these peregrinations are the schizo's own particular way of rediscovering the earth.’ (Deleuze, Guattari, 1983, p. 35)

Earth is exactly what Nijinsky rediscovers while lying in the snow or when kinetographing his rhythmical feeling in another passage in the diary: ‘I do not know how to plow, but I know that the earth glows. Without its warmth there would be no bread. People think that they must burn the bones of dead people in order to fertilize the soil. I will say that this is bad because the earth is made fertile by warmth and not by ash.’ (2006, p. 171) The warmth of the earth seems to be the opposite of the cold snow in which Nijinsky lays for a long time and yet when one is married to God one feels things differently. Near the end of his diary Nijinsky writes: ‘[…] I have studied the earth because I feel it and do not think. I know that the earth is a living thing.’ (p. 223) Walking seems to be among his preferred ways of studying the earth. During the walks his body performs most basic acts: falling down, standing up, running and standing still. All of them are essential as means to establish connection with God, with the movement of nature, nature as

movement, *feeling* one with it.

Peter Alois Orte has thoroughly analyzed how Nijinsky conceptualizes feeling (*chuvstvo*) in his writing. The word for him,

> Represents a force of sensation that extends beyond our conscious understanding or our ability to remain whomever we might imagine ourselves to be […] our inability to be or remain ourselves, our inability to be indifferent, or stable as in the fiction of a pure or ideal mind: to the degree I feel, to that degree I change, I am already beyond or outside myself, in the body, in the world […] the word expresses an excessive immanence of life that cannot be reified, reduced to words or thought […]. (2016, p. 91)

Feeling is a transformative force, a Deleuzian pure affect. An aimless stroll is an act of pure feeling and hence of becoming. It is while walking that Nijinsky becomes, at least for a time being, at peace with himself by reaching towards the other: 'I have experienced the fear of death on a precipice. No one wanted to kill me. I was walking along and fell over a precipice, and a tree held me up.' (2006, p. 93) In Nijinsky's diary writing configures walking as feeling – the rhythm of the profound life which is ever-changing, chaotic and yet perfectly organized, destructive and productive at the same time. In feeling-writing plastic and graphic meet to become a synthesis.

The synthesis for Malabou is impossible yet enforces itself as a necessity. As she writes, 'the sharing of the plastic and the graphic run parallel to the sharing of presence - flesh, face, body - and that which breaches presence - traces and marks on the flesh, face, or body. The confrontation of plasticity

and the trace thus made me aware of *the impossible possibility of writing presence*.' (2010, p. 11) Nijinsky himself expresses the same longing for writing presence: ' I know that if I show my handwriting to someone who can read the future, he will say that this man is extraordinary, for his handwriting jumps. I know that jumpy handwriting is a sign of goodness […]' (p. 42) Once we recall that it was his famous ability to jump and suspend his body in the air that made him a God of dance (see Brandstetter, Nesme, 1998, Järvinnen, 2015, p. 109-112) it becomes clear why Nijinsky in one of the letters jumpily writes: 'I am a God. I am Dance. I am love. I am God.' (2006, p. 249) This is as laconic a description of the impossible synthesis as any.

It is this (re)active production of continual corpolinguistic metamorphosis captured in the diary that can be called Nijinsky's becoming. The body becomes flesh as if prefiguring Merleau-Ponty's final meditation on being (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). It becomes a process rather than a fixed entity, transfigures itself by splitting into man and God and conflating the two: 'I have flesh. I am flesh. I am not descended from flesh. Flesh is created by God. I am God. I am God. I am God…' (Nijinsky, 2006, p. 24) Becoming God is none other than remaining faithful to the plasticity, understanding that 'the essence of a thing […] is its alterity. The essence of a thing is that through which it is originally foreign to itself. It should be possible to understand that alterity is first of all the strangeness within, the most intimate unexplored mystery of essential self-identity.' (Malabou, 2010, p. 42) It is this strangeness within, this other to the self that Nijinsky walks into and that is made graphic in the diary as God.

Becoming-horse

It remains to uncover in more detail how Nijinsky kinetographs flesh, what bodies he becomes while probing his plasticity. To do this it is useful to consider another walk that was described in the notebooks – a walk of becoming-animal.

One day he escapes the house after arguing with Romola over eating meat. It is worth noting that when explaining his reasons to be vegetarian he writes: 'I am not a meat-eater. *I am a man, and not an animal.* I am an animal only when God wants me to understand that I should not eat meat.' (2006, p. 134, emphasis mine) The walk he undertakes after the fight with his wife is a long and complex one. First he goes to town and looks for a room where he could hide himself. He finds it eventually in a woman's house. He feels at peace in the room but decides to continue his walk. He plays with children in the street and meets another woman who gives the children cakes. Nijinsky discovers that the woman lost her child, 'feels' her and tells her that 'God takes what he gives and that she should not grieve.' (p. 138) He then goes into the forest and begins an ascent: 'I went quickly up the hill, and suddenly I stopped. I did not know what to do. […] I waited for God's command. I waited and waited. […] I felt a push and went on. I was going up higher and higher. I walked on and on. Suddenly I stopped and realized that it was not possible to go any farther. […] I realized that death had come. I was not afraid […].' (p. 138)

It is there, on the hill, when it is not possible to go farther, that the ground for transfiguration is cleared – death is embraced with sadness and helplessness (of Nijinsky, of the women, of the world) but still without God's assistance, only by following the mysterious push from the immanent

outside. In the moment of stillness the dice are cast and fate decided, accidentally in Malabou's sense of the term. But not just destructive plasticity is at work here.

In general Nijinsky's walking is persistent, heavy, even obsessive. There is something in the way he walks that resembles the stomping in *Le sacre du printemps* or angular treading of the leading character in *L'après midi d'un faune* (see Ruprecht, 2008). Walking is oriented downwards, leaving deep traces as if Nijinsky was sketching a drawing for God to see. His pace is shifting but mostly he is speeding, his whole body agitated. He might freeze momentarily and then start again but what is gone compared to his dancing in Ballets Russes early works choreographed by Michel Fokine is fluidity. This is no longer Nijinsky the shape-shifter. The strength is apparently still there but it does not translate into the impression of effortlessness that so many of his viewers had while watching him dance.[10]

After realizing that death has come Nijinsky keeps walking along the river despite being very tired. He hears children forced to sing and feels sorry for them. He does not stop because the sensation of death is pushing him forward: 'I walked on and on. I came out on a road that led home in one direction and to my room in the other […] I felt that I had to go to that room, because I had to change my whole life. I decided to go there but a mysterious force compelled me to realize that I had to turn back.' (p. 139) The transfiguration is apparently not possible in the closed space of the room so Nijinsky goes uphill again. The mysterious force of destructive plasticity is driving him. Again he walks onward. The push becomes overwhelming, the need to change his whole life deeply burning. This is when Nijinsky notices an animal and transfiguration finally takes place: 'I saw a horse running uphill, and I ran. I did that not thinking but feeling. I

panted as I ran. I could not run, and I walked. I realized that people urged horses and men on till they stopped and fell like stones. The horse and I decided that they could whip us as much as they wanted, but we would still do what we liked, because we wanted to live. The horse walked and so did I.' (p. 140)

Nijinsky becomes a horse by running and walking with him. It is these forms of movement that enable the dancer to feel truly alive. The forms are universal in the sense of being universally accessible means of change. And yet in this case it is walking, not running that is associated with liberation. Running is caused by rapture. It is too exhausting to facilitate transfiguration. This seems to be Nijinsky's discovery – the decision to walk is a manifestation of sovereignty on the grounds of which different species can meet: 'The horse and I decided that they could whip us as much as they wanted, but we would still do what we liked, because we wanted to live.' This will to live is what we could call intensity of the flesh. Violence does not reach it because violence happens on the molar level. On the molecular plane one does what one likes. Nijinsky and the horse thus decide to walk.

Interestingly it is in the context of becoming-horse that Nijinsky reappears in Deleuze and Guattari after being referred to a couple of times in *Anti-Oedipus*. His reappearance happens in reference to the topos of a dying horse, that can be found also in Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Freud (1987, p. 257). It is Freud's figuration of the suffering horse, in the case of Little Hans,[11] that Deleuze and Guattari discuss in detail, offering an alternative interpretation of the horse figure. This case of a child becoming-horse is obviously very different from Nijinsky's but still certain general similarities can be traced which help us understand the workings of his transfiguration via Deleuze and Guattari's take on Little Hans's horse.

Contrary to what Freud claimed, ‘Little Hans's horse is not representative but affective,’ write Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 257) Hence in any case of becoming-animal it is crucial to acknowledge that it does not equal imitating animal behavior: ‘the human being does not “really” become an animal any more than the animal “really” becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. […] What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.’ (p. 238) As we saw, Nijinsky stressed that he was a man, not an animal[12], so it is no wonder that when identifying with the whipped horse Nijinsky does not turn into a horse but becomes with it by feeling with it. He walks with it, not like it. They walk together. It is the walking in which they meet and that becomes a block of becoming.

The mechanism is the same as in the case of marriage with God: ‘To undergo an experience is to receive another inflection and another form from the other as well as to give the other these changes in return.’ (Malabou, 2010, p. 41) This time though, unlike with God, the power of transformation comes solely from within the self. The horse is not an agent, only a figure used by Nijinsky to transfigure himself.[13] The animal’s imagined pain is merely a means of universalizing the pain of Nijinsky who forms the interspecies identity as a grievance. It is through suffering (being whipped) that death is embraced and made productive.

It is in suffering caused by being overworked and mistreated that Nijinsky becomes-horse in the notebooks also on another occasion. In one of the most explicit passages we read:

> I danced for money. I almost died because I was overtired. I was

> like a horse that is forced with a whip to pull a heavy load. I have seen draymen whipping their horses to death because they did not realize that the horse had no strength. The drayman was driving his horse downhill and whipping it. The horse fell, and all its guts dropped out of its behind. I saw that horse and sobbed in my heart. I wanted to sob aloud, but I realized that people would take me for a crybaby, and therefore I wept inwardly. The horse was lying on its side and screaming with pain. Its scream was like a low moan. I wept. I felt. (p. 190)

By weeping for and with the horse Nijnsky feels himself. He transfigures his moving body into a body becoming-intensive, a body that disidentifies itself (the same can be said of Little Hans according to Deleuze and Guattari). In this sense he looks at the horse as himself and other at the same time. He identifies with him but also separates himself from the other by means of a rhizome. He becomes an assemblage that can be identified neither as Nijinsky's nor the horse's, but that of the becoming-horse of Nijinsky, to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari. (1987, p. 258)

Through becoming-the-other Nijinsky becomes non-singular. And by this de-identification he becomes himself as someone else. He is and is not an animal. He is and is not God. In the notebooks the writer defamiliarize and deform identities by arbitrarily selecting those he perceives as suitable to him, neglecting others, randomly throwing in the ones from different orders to a seemingly coherent catalog. What arises is a haphazard index of labels that simply cannot encompass his plastic being. It is in this sense that he writes of his becoming-God: ‘I understand everything. I can do everything. I am a peasant. I am a factory worker. I am a servant. I am a gentleman. I am an aristocrat. I am a tsar. I am an Emperor. I am God. I am God. I am God. I

am everything. I am life. I am an eternity. I will be always and everywhere. People can kill me, but I will live because I am everything.' (p. 184) He becomes plastic – a speeding machine kinetographing traces of its plasticity, its becoming.

A singular-universal becoming

Becoming then can be understood as molecular transformation. It takes place on the plane of immanence and not in the realm of purely physical commotion even if it marks the molar body as well, sending it into frenzy or stupor. In this context Nijinsky can be seen as a virtuoso of disjunction as it is through all-inclusive enumeration that he kinetographs his diverse identities as the flesh of God.

In *Anti-Oedpius* we read: 'The schizo knows how to leave: he has made departure into something as simple as being born or dying. But at the same time his journey is strangely stationary, in place. He does not speak of another world, he is not from another world: even when he is displacing himself in space, his is a journey in intensity […]' (p. 131) Nijinsky's walks as kinetographed in the diary help us understand intensity in Deleuze and Guattari and plasticity in Malabou. These walks performed a departure from the stage, from movement as production of extensive objects to behold to the realm of speed understood as embodying plasticity: being constantly in transition, becoming a shapeless, ever-changing vortex.

Heidegger criticizes what Deleuze and Guattari call movement as '*the reduction of the metabolic to the phoronomic*.' (Malabou, 2011, p. 41) It is in the metabolic then that intensity and plasticity find their counterpart. The triad constitutes a conceptual force field in which Nijinsky's walks can be

conceptualized. Who was once merely a moving body becomes a speed process leaving plastic and graphic traces. Who was once a body forever suspended in air, specter of a rose, becomes earthy flesh, a walking horse. Who was once a God of dance becomes a dance of God understood as immanent changeability. Intensity does not translate into a specific kind of movement. It is not a style, it is not even a way of moving. It is a mode of being (a metabolic) that always seeks to become not itself. Perhaps Nijinsky captured it best when he wrote: 'I do not want to dance the way I used to, because all those dances are death. Death is not only when the body dies. The body dies, but the spirit lives. The spirit is a dove, but in God. I am God, and I am in God.' (p. 127)

The spirit itself must die. It must become a dove and in that becoming embrace God. Nijinsky in his so-called diary kinetographs a series of transforming walks that should be seen as lines of flight, as intensities not compositions. It is the raptures and transfigurations which these kinetographies reveal that I proposed to call becoming. History of kinetic imaginaries needs to be as sensitive to the molecular transformations like those described in Nijinsky's diary as to the molar processes (in this case Nijinsky's career and his illness). The former are a key to the modern variant of plasticity of being perhaps even to a larger degree than the latter. Nijinsky-becoming-horse-becoming-God can be positioned as a bodily transformation by means of movement writing which takes place in a specific cultural space delineated by, among others, modern art criticism and clinical psychiatry. It is in these discourses that they have been reterritorialized as modernist literature and/or schizophrenia. It is through this double lense that we are accustomed to perceiving Nijinsky's writing which becomes a case of modernist genius gone made akin to Nietzsche, Strindberg, Artaud. And yet plasticity is constantly at work and rapture can

befall on anyone. Nijinsky's becoming-horse is (un)like Little Hans becoming-horse. Each case is completely different but they meet on the ground of universal becoming. Nijinsky's horse reminds us of Nietzsche's horse, Dostoevsky's horse and so on precisely because it does not become them. Each horse is singular and each one is a horse. Each one is born out of the common will to live and each one suffers alone. We need to acknowledge that. Only then the horse will indeed fall *forever.*

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Footnotes

1. https://cs.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=28944
2. Nijinsky himself considered his text not to be a diary (the entries are not dated) but a manuscript of the book, his *ouvre* to be published as *Feeling* (rus. *Chuvstvo*). He was writing a letter to the world rather than keeping a daily account of his thoughts and actions. More on the literary status of *The Diary* in Orte 2016 and Svobodny 2016. It was his wife, Romola that upon publishing a heavily edited version of *Chuvstvo* titled it *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky* (Nijinsky 1936). The title became so widely used that it was kept even in the semi-critical edition of the complete manuscript (along with Nijinsky's letters) by Joan Acocella (Nijinsky 2006). As it became common to refer to the text this way, as well as for the sake of terminological variety, I also use the term from time to time.
3. Among the many publications about Ballets Russes Garafola 1989 remains the most comprehensive single study of this complex cultural phenomenon that ignited the process of

ballet's modernisation in the West.
4. In the biography of her husband Romola confirms his habit of going on solitary walks. Still it is uncertain that the walks in the notebooks happened as they are described or happened at all. Some of them might be literary fantasies. Even so they are an invaluable testimony of a personal kinetic imaginary as well as of a certain kind of plasticity that is today usually labeled as schizophrenic.
5. See Ruprecht 2019 and Klimczyk 2020 for coresponding concepts of "gestural imaginaries" and "kinesis", respectively.
6. For similar attempts see Cull 2009. More on the category of lived body in Fraleigh 1987.
7. The Nijinsky here and in what follows refers to the character Nijinsky that marries God in *Chuvstvo*. The character's relation to the real Nijinsky is of secondary importance in molecular kinesiology I am proposing.
8. Due to lack of space I am forced to make substantial cuts in this crucial text. I strongly suggest reading the full version in Nijinsky 2006: 13-16.
9. More on the motif of the tree in *The Diary* in Svobodny 2016.
10. More on the qualities of Nijinsky's stage dancing and its effect on the audience in, for example, Kirstein 1975, Kopelson 1997, Järvinen 2015.
11. The case was analyzed by Freud in a paper entitled in English translation *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy* (1909). The paper can be found in Strachey 1955.
12. The distinction between human and animals is made on a couple of occasions in the notebooks but also blurred at times. In general Nijinsky identifies with what we could call graceful animals (horse, cat, bird) but distances himself from beasts (predators) and stupid ones (he mentiones monkeys and apes in this context). The confusion that arises is perhaphs best expressed in the following quote: 'Nature is life. Life is nature. An ape is nature. Man is nature. An ape is not the nature of man. I am not an ape in man. An ape is god in nature because it feels movements. I feel movements. My movements are simple. The ape's movements are complex. An ape is stupid. I am stupid. But I have reason. I am a reasonable being, but an ape is not reasonable. I think that apes are descended from trees and man is descended from God. God is not an ape. Man is God. A man has arms, and so does an ape, but in his spiritual makeup he does not resemble an ape.' (Nijinsky 2006: 17-18)
13. It is for this reason that, although tempting, approaching the issue from human animal studies perspective is not possible. Still one could probably try to look at the encounter from the horse's perspective. In that case horse-oriented studies like Birke, Thompson 2018 and Argent, Vaught 2022 would prove very useful.

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