



## Becoming bovine: Mechanics and metamorphosis in Hokkaido's animal-human-machine



Paul Hansen\*

University of Tsukuba, Department of Anthropology, Folklore and History, Tsukuba, Japan

### A B S T R A C T

#### Keywords:

Dairy  
Hokkaido  
Bio-politics  
Technology  
Affect  
HAS (Human Animal Studies)

The fieldwork for my doctoral degree was carried out over nineteen months, a year of which was spent working on an industrial dairy farm in Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost Island. As in much of the industrialised world, dairy farming in Japan is rapidly changing. Many farmers are forced by neo-liberal agricultural policies to shift from small family operated farms to high-tech, high-speed, and high overhead industrial operations. This paper focuses on the history of dairy farming in the Tokachi region; more specifically one farm and the shift over a generation to a rotary parlour milking system. It addresses the linkages this mode of production has cultivated amongst humans, dairy cows and industrialized space.

The parlour system at *Great Hopes Farm* allows five workers (aided by three more stall staff) to milk over 1000 cows, fifty at a time, three times a day. The impetus behind moving to parlour technology is that it increases productivity through mechanically enhanced observation and control. However this recent mechanical separation of human and cow during the milking process has led to affectively shared interspecies and inter-human alienation. The technology of the parlour system sets daily rhythms for bovine and human alike, and separates both from a process formerly dependent upon, specialized knowledge, affective empathy, and embodied knowledge. Human and bovine experience the systemic violence of the machine and what remains is a complex bio-politics of interspecies affect and the separation of "bare" and "political" life.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

The ethnographic fieldwork for my doctoral degree in anthropology was conducted in Tokachi, Hokkaido. Hokkaido is Japan's northernmost island and by far the nation's largest prefecture. For a year I worked on an industrial dairy farm neighbouring a town with an ever-declining population of around 5000; a number down from over 16,000 in the early 1960s.<sup>1</sup> This research primarily focuses on a single agricultural community, in large part a single farm, and the people who work and live there. The analysis within this doctoral project essentially follows three tracks; how local people confront their ageing, urbanizing, and so decreasing permanent population,

why many family farms fail while several large industrial farms emerge, and why concomitantly, a large number of young Japanese from metropolitan centres arrive in this Tokachi community to temporarily experience rural life, with a small minority choosing to stay indefinitely (Hansen, 2010a). This article extends this research trajectory focussing on the move to rotary dairy parlour milking technology and the cow/human relationships that this shift creates as viewed through the analytical lenses of affect theory and post-human Human Animal Studies (HAS).

More specifically, this article offers a history and a present day ethnographic account of both the space and technology utilized in Tokachi dairy farming. In so doing, it also introduces the posthuman and affective processes that are involved in the increasing transformation towards 'progressive' industrialisation. First, the article historically situates the development of human, cow, and technology on the Hokkaido 'frontier'. It then describes dairy farmers' memories and imaginaries of a mixed farm past and lamentations about the industrial present. An ethnographic description of the rotary parlour as an animal-human-machine in motion is then offered. Dairy cows are then discussed *objectively* from a macro perspective and *subjectively* from a micro perspective. The final

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +81 (0)29 853 4506.

E-mail address: [hansen.paul.gp@u.tsukuba.ac.jp](mailto:hansen.paul.gp@u.tsukuba.ac.jp).

<sup>1</sup> I worked on the farm for a year (2005–2006) and then returned to the area and other farms on weekends for eight months while on JSPS Fellowship at Hokkaido University (2008). At the time of writing my family resides in Tokachi and I return from Tokyo on most weekends and during breaks from university teaching. In sum, this is very much part of a long-term and ethnographically informed project.

section of the paper is a discussion of the current state and promise of Hokkaido's animal-human-machine. Focussing on Hokkaido is important in the context of Japan because, as noted below, the island is an anomaly. However, in terms of the development of modern industrial dairy farming, it is a space that is readily comparable to Europe and North America.

Like North America, Hokkaido is a modern colonial appropriation. Originally called *ezo ga shima* (Barbarian Island), it was renamed Hokkaido (North Sea Route) and officially declared part of Japan in 1869. The island, and notably the Tokachi region (south central Hokkaido), was 'developed' largely through tactics of Euro-American colonisation eagerly sought and bought by the Meiji government (1868–1912). Thus, Hokkaido is an area that, from topography, to climate, to politics, to population, remains a particularly hard-to-place space in terms of industry, imagery, or imagination in the context of Japan. It is widely considered to be Japan's 'frontier'; a peripheral *kitanokuni* (north country) that is clearly set apart from mainland Japan as represented by Fig. 1.

Beyond *Ainu* studies, *Ainu* being an indigenous ethnic mix of people in northern Japan, there is little focus on Hokkaido even within the academic milieu of area studies.<sup>2</sup> This paucity of research on Hokkaido is true of both the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, most English language research on Japan is firmly fixed on aesthetics, urban concerns, or comparative public policy and not on developing industries or the impact of new technologies in rural areas. Recently, some research has focused on a cycle of depopulation, decline and attempts at rejuvenation (Hansen, 2010a; Kitano, 2009; Matanle and Rausch, 2011; Mock, 2006; Woods, 2012). But, rural Japan, though often romantically imagined as the essence of "rice culture" or the quintessence of seasonal aesthetics, is largely viewed as unimportant for investigations of contemporary Japan. Thus, the industrialization of Tokachi area dairy farming is a 'novel' research topic amongst a sea of 'epic' or essentialist discourses; for example investigations into the oft cited "uniqueness" of Japanese culture in terms of martial arts, tea ceremony, animated film, *etcetera*.<sup>3</sup>

Though this article is informed and influenced by the particular backdrop of rural Tokachi, it greatly owes to a long "low-level engagement" (Grossberg, 2010: 310) with affect theory (cf. Clough, 2010; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2003) and posthuman studies (cf. Bennet, 2010; Haraway, 2008; Hayles, 1999; Wolfe, 2003, 2010). As such, some elaboration is useful here to tease out the theoretical connections.

In this article, I draw attention to a symbiotic past shared between Tokachi pioneer and a 'pet like' family cow; a cow that, to lift from Haraway, existed ever-present in the "contact zone" of human and technology entanglements (2008, 214–245). The impact of the recent shift away from an, albeit likely romantically idealized, version of the self-sufficient family farm is particularly notably considering the move to high-technology, high-output and high-overhead milking practices and bovine husbandry methods over the last generation. Again, under scrutiny in what follows is the

influence of rotary dairy parlour technology on bovine and human bonds and how the linkages shared between human and non-human are remarkably similar in the face of increasing industrialisation. Towards this end, affect is an area of theory where pointed phenomenological comparisons can be drawn.

Theories of affect are utilised by a diverse range of humanities and social science scholars. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 258–262), via Baruch Spinoza, is generally viewed as the contemporary key reference for understanding affects as a tangible force at the heart of what scholars such as Patricia Clough (2010, 206–225) has coined "the affective turn" in social theory; the notion that non-human elements, material environments or non-human actants can influence events, or even "structures of feeling" to lift, as Gregg and Seigworth do in the introduction to their co-edited volume of affect, from Raymond Williams (2010, 7–9). More to the point at hand, Brian Massumi has turned to affect as an analytic space that allows agency to be discussed in terms of non-linguistic, even precognitive, communications and perceptions; embodied memory for example (2003). For scholars inclined towards more teleological schemata of cause and effect – explanations of the if *a* then *b* variety – discussions of affect can be frustrating. Affect is a motivating factor impossible to deny in earnest, yet particularly slippery to secure. Kathleen Stewart aptly describes this dilemma in defining Ordinary Affects as:

...abstract and concrete...more directly compelling than ideologies, as well as more fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings. They are not the kind of analytic object that can be laid out on a single, static plane of analysis, and they don't lend themselves to a perfect, three-tiered parallelism between analytic subject, concept, and world. They are...a tangle of potential connections.

(Stewart, 2007: 3–4)

This tangle of connections is concomitantly what posthuman research attempts to address beyond the scope of a human centric perspective.

Posthuman thought ought not to be confused with any idea of the "end" of the human (Wolfe, 2010). "Post" here marks a shift from any authentic or justifiable belief that *Homo sapiens* are at the apex of evolution or are singular as conscious world dwelling and making actants. An explanation of the posthuman oeuvre is well beyond the scope of this short article, but for what follows it is the recognition that other agents, animate and inanimate, are co-constitutive in making phenomenological experiences.<sup>4</sup> This way of analysing human and non-human interactions has had an influence in contemporary social theory, notably found in writers of an ANT (Actor Network Theory) sensibility or sensitivity (Braun and Whatmore, 2010; Haraway, 2003, 2008; Latour, 2007) and through more open-minded, or renegade depending on one's inclination, animal behaviourists (Bekoff, 2007; Horowitz, 2009). Staying true to my discipline, there have been recent moves towards a more inclusive "transspecies anthropology of life" (Kohn, 2007), including "multispecies ethnography" (Kirksey and Helmreich Ed., a special issue of Cultural Anthropology in 2010), and "trans-biopolitics" focussing on boundary crossing (Smart and Smart, 2012) more-than-human-publics (Blue and Rock, 2010). With this theory outline in place, the following section turns to this history of both the town and the farm where I conducted fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> Walker (2001) provides an outstanding history of *Ainu* and Japanese history, Watson (2013) discusses contemporary *Ainu* issues outside of Hokkaido, and Fugita (1994), Irish (2009), Mock (1999) and Morris-Suzuki (1998) all provide rare accounts of Hokkaido history in English beyond studies of *Ainu*.

<sup>3</sup> The juxtaposition of novel and epic is a nod to the influence of Bakhtin (1981: 1–40) in understanding individual, embodied, and affective narratives to be as important as social ones, if not more so. The point here is that misleading, though popularly accepted, notions of Japanese homogeneity and notions of socio-cultural uniqueness are issues that surface (or ought to surface) in any post-Befu (2001) study of Japan. Nevertheless, the image of Japan as 'uniquely unique' has an amazing tenacity despite numerous studies underscoring the hollowness of this claim (Harootunian, 2000: 25–58).

<sup>4</sup> The University of Minnesota Press on going *Posthumanities* series edited by Cary Wolfe is an essential introduction to this broadening interdisciplinary area of research.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545872>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545872>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)