

BECOMING THE CENTAUR : DEVELOPING NON-
DOMINANT HUMAN-HORSE RELATIONSHIPS IN
YORKSHIRE

Kirsty Roisin Cameron Ferrier

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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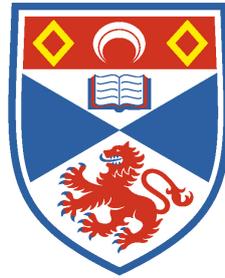
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Becoming the Centaur: Developing non-dominating human-horse relationships in Yorkshire

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University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD in the
department of Social Anthropology at the
University of St Andrews

Date of Submission: 5th October 2017

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Abstract

This project will add to and build upon the existing anthropological literature on human-animal relations by challenging how categories such as ‘nature’, ‘culture’, ‘ethics’, ‘domestication’, and ‘kinship’ are deployed in a multispecies ethnography. I will use the knowledge practices of natural horsemanship in the UK as a lens to explore them through ideas of domination, the role of exemplars, personhood, becoming-with, ideas of freedom and control, the role of touch and embodied learning, mutual emotional responses, and the development of ‘skilled visions’. By building on the emergent anthropological field of multi-species ethnography through this ethically charged life-world, I propose to investigate natural horsemanship so that the outcome is relevant to the anthropological community, but also of interest for animal behaviourists, welfare experts, biologists, the ‘part-time-practitioners’ who were my informants, and more broadly, to the general public with an interest in human-animal relationships. It will hopefully provide new insights on multi-species ethnographies; expanding the potential of such endeavours by creating new anthropological theory on areas such as animal welfare, ethical worlding, kin-like relationships, and how the horse as an agentive subject in these relationships can affect these outcomes. This knowledge can then engage with branches of biological and veterinary science and provide detailed knowledge for animal welfare experts. It will consequently provide critical reflections on present equine training and welfare in the UK.

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Firstly, this project would not have been possible without the kindness of my informants who opened up their stables and their homes to me. Special thanks go to Sue, Daniel, Stuart, Julie, and particularly to Fiona, who has changed how I see horses for the better. My equine informants played as much of a role as human ones, and although they will definitely never read this I would like to thank them all, particularly; Shannon and Haffy for being my escape routes, Tilly for not killing me, Mary for opening my eyes, and my own horses Myr, Freya, Yellow, Perdi, Hannah and Darcy who provided endless companionship and manes to cry into during the writing up stage.

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Prescript

I asked the horse under me to canter and received a buck instead. My instructor yelled “hit him!” from the centre of the arena, so I smacked him hard with the whip just behind my leg. Sox bucked again in protest. “Hit him again!” So I did. And he bucked, again.

“Keep on at him like that until he stops bucking!”

Introduction

Natural horsemanship in Yorkshire

The recent horsemeat scandal in the UK has shown that while horses may be ‘good to think’ with, they most certainly are not good to eat for most British people (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 89). Horses are working animals, competition animals, companion animals and cherished animals. They can be food. They can be a form of business as ‘genetic capital’ or ‘economic capital’. They are a form of transportation and can be bought and sold as easily as a standard family car. In the UK, the horse occupies no definitive position with regard to legislative practice; they tread the line in legislation between agricultural animals and companion animals and as such the legal status of the horse-body and its welfare is open to ambiguity (Ewbank 1985; Ödberg 1987). But these things that a horse can *be* are not just ‘accidental or inadvertent positions’ (Strathern 1992: 72), and instead are determined by how the horse is characterized or thought about by the people who interact with them, and not exclusively by the space they happen to occupy. Even in death the horse body is redefined again, and the ‘replacement value’ of a horse ‘is not the market price of the animal’ (Haraway 2008: 51). Previously, horses have been the possessions or pets of the rich and the upper classes, and used as a status symbol to convey wealth or prosperity (Cassidy 2002, 2007a; Clutton-Brock 1989; Knight 2005; Ritvo 2004). However, the extravagantly low prices that horses are now being sold for in the UK and the severe overpopulation of all equines, encourages horses to be treated as cheap commodities that can be treated as objects to be abandoned.¹ The idea of how people ‘think’ about horses in different scenarios – the trainer, the dealer, the part-time-practitioner and the horse as pet/animal/person - radiates throughout this piece, and invites awareness to the shifting of the horse in the imagination of the human in separate scenarios and at different temporal junctures (Franklin 2007).

Natural horsemanship (NH) is the collective term for many different groups that train and live alongside horses that has built up momentum and popularity as a global

¹ The main urge of the British Horse Society (BHS) now is to avoid indiscriminate breeding of horses with their ‘think before you breed’ campaign

phenomenon among recreational horse owners and riders throughout the last three decades who are attempting to ‘be the owner your horse would choose for himself’ (Intelligent Horsemanship website). This new method is posited as a violence-free way of living with horses, directly opposing more traditional and dominating Western training methods and instead aims to work with the horses natural behaviour with a large emphasis on understanding horse psychology in the application of training methods. Human and horse are aiming to create a ‘shared elementary language’ (Harding 2000: 19) as they learn the ‘correct’ way to be with each other (Roberts 1997); all the time advocating the horses ‘right to choose’ whether or not to become an active part of the relationship. Horses are now such a part of people’s lives as companion animals in the UK that it would be wrong to not at least consider the possibility that they may be treated like ‘kin’. This produces a universe that has the potential to expand as well as contract networks of recognised ideas of kinship or relatedness inside the idea of ‘mutuality of being’ that Sahlins puts forwards as a network that consists of intersubjective ‘participation in one another’s existence’ (2013: 18).

Although there are many different groups, companies, and trainers of natural horsemanship, the most popular ones to be found in the UK originated in the US - forming easily marketable products as an idea that people ‘buy’ into and believe in. The two biggest competing trainers in the UK are Monty Roberts and Pat Parelli: this project focuses almost exclusively on the Monty Roberts ‘style’ of training that has been championed within the UK. People such as Kelly Marks, a student of Roberts, promotes the brand Intelligent Horsemanship (IH) which is an offshoot of the original Californian based training method. Intelligent Horsemanship principles have been integrated into teachings of the British Horse Society - an influential institution in the creation of policy documents and legislation for equine welfare. There are a variety of smaller companies which practice natural horsemanship within the UK that are affiliated with Monty Roberts and Intelligent Horsemanship, and run by Recommended Trainers (RTs – please see Appendix A) who have undergone all the official training offered by Intelligent Horsemanship. The names of these companies reflect the aspirations that many recreational users of these techniques hope for, for example, ‘Hearing Horses’ and ‘Equus Harmony’. This more ‘natural’ way to create a mutual relationship between humans and horses stands in stark contrast to much of

the previous literature in anthropological studies which casts these relationships in terms of domination. However, the recent turn towards multispecies anthropology has seen a transformation in how animals and humans are considered within the discipline (For reviews of this see Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Mullin 2002). Notably, Natasha Fijn and Rane Willerslev provide detailed ethnographies that complicate Western assumptions of human-animal relations from their work with animal herders in rural Mongolia (2011) and the Yukaghirs of northeast Siberia (2007), respectively. Work by Eduardo Kohn (2007; 2013) and Vivieros de Castro (1998) on Amazonian perspectivism also provides an interesting alternative on how we might consider such relations by placing humans and non-humans on a continuum which incorporates nonhumans as equally active subjects.

Fieldwork and Methodology

My fieldwork took place in North Yorkshire (please see Figure 1. for approximate locations) as a multi-sited project that combined work on busy horse training yards with the everyday lives of ‘part-time-practitioners’ at their homes or on smaller livery yards. I was the ‘anthropologist as apprentice’, learning and living among horse trainers and recreational horse owners. The nature of NH training - as an implicit set of skills that must be communicated through observation and experience, with clear hierarchies of expertise that facilitates the transmission of knowledge – places the learner of NH in the role of the apprentice. As Coy suggests, apprenticeship is ‘personal, hands-on, and experiential’ and is ‘utilized where there is more to performing the role at hand than reading a description of its content can communicate’ (1989b: 2). Although the specialised skills of NH could be seen as ‘human capital’ (or of course ‘horse capital’) to be possessed and transferred (Aronson 1989; Deafenbaugh 1989), many practitioners of NH do not take on the role of apprentice with the goal or expectation of employment or economic gain. Quite often the opposite occurs as training courses can cost substantial amounts of money and may strengthen the authority of the trainer – this could potentially be seen as a reversal of the weakening of the authority of the masters that Rorabaugh notes in his study of American history where apprentices are paid (1986: 73-75). However, this does not negate the emotional achievement of the practice and the skills that develop.

Interestingly, many practitioners may find themselves forever in the position of the apprentice, even if they become trainers themselves, as there seems to be a general consensus among my informants that it was never possible to stop learning. Importantly, they often stated that it was the horses that still had so much left to teach them. Classically, ‘horse whisperers’ appeared to possess ‘secrets’ that enabled them to control horses with ease - to those outside or new to NH communities it may appear that these training methods provide an education in the ‘secrets’ of horsemanship. However, the open and welcoming nature of these communities sits in contrast to many examples of apprenticeship which are considered as providing access to closely guarded secret bodies of knowledge, where it is often the fact that they are considered ‘secret’ that is important, rather than their actual content (Coy 1989b: 3; see also Dilley 1989).

My fieldwork locations were within one hour of each other, and roughly spanned an area that extended across mid-Yorkshire from Kendal to Scarborough. I began fieldwork at Daniel’s yard in the North-west of Yorkshire where I learnt the basics and witnessed many horses coming to his yard for training. I worked alongside his regular rider, Tracey, and yard hand, James. Between us we were mostly responsible for preparing horses for work and exercising those further along in their training - yard duties were done early in the morning by Daniel, his wife, his son, James, Tracey and I. From the second month of my fieldwork I also worked alongside travelling trainer Stuart, usually for one or two days a week, while he did home visits to clients yards to work with them and their horses. Finally, during the last quarter of my fieldwork period I spent time at an equine rescue on the east coast of Yorkshire with Julie, her daughter Sarah, and their head trainer, Rebecca. I briefly spent time with a trainer who only used positive reinforcement (just south of the rescue centre), however, the focus of this project was NH, so I have placed very little emphasis on this stage of my fieldwork. My informants were more than willing to discuss their lives within NH groups, and gave consent for them to be incorporated into this thesis. Consent from my equine informants was harder to determine; however, I finally determined that those horses I developed a relationship with would be happy to be included. Consent for others was given by their owners.

Although natural horsemanship is not an explicitly 'Yorkshire thing', the northern England association to horses provides an interesting backdrop for this emerging way of living with horses. Within the current Yorkshire landscape, natural horsemanship is placed in opposition to traditional British methods which continue to be championed by many supporters and partakers in the sports of hunting and racing, as well as across almost all competitive equine disciplines. The traditional lifestyles of Gypsies and Travellers across Northern England also fit this category and are exemplified by Appleby Horse Fair held every year in June, just over the boundary in to Cumbria, that my informants described as 'barbaric', 'unnecessary', and 'cruel'. Traditional horsemanship in Britain is steeped in history and built from a long engagement with horses as a working animal where the horse is expected, and not asked, to work for humans - where horses were 'broken' to ride, exhausting the horse until it has no fight and no will left. Latimer and Birke (2009) have also suggested that belonging to this traditional world of horsemanship is often tied to class and status (see also Cassidy 2002). These western methods of living with horses are heavily influenced by military training practices of Europe and by the 'cowboy culture' of the United States. However, ways of living with horses varies across cultures. For example, Fijn addresses ideas of co-domestication in *Living With Herds* (2011) where herded horses in Mongolia are active agents, recognised not only as economic commodities but also as 'persons' with distinct personalities. Fijn suggests that 'herders and herd animals live with each other in a shared landscape', highlighting that 'it is the degree of social interaction and engagement with humans within this ecosocial sphere that dictates whether an animal is a co-domesticated or not' (19).



Figure 1. Map of Yorkshire. Daniel's yard was approximately located at site A, and Julie's yard at site B. Stuart travelled across all of North Yorkshire and in to Cumbria and Lancashire to visit clients. Original map without annotations is from www.picturesofengland.com and I am using it for educational purposes only.

The county of Yorkshire in the United Kingdom has a very long history with horses, with racing in York dating back to Roman times and the development of the oldest established English non-draught breed of horse, the Cleveland Bay, that was once a popular riding and carriage horse (and are still used to pull carriages in royal processions). Yorkshire is also well known for its rich history with coal mining: less well known is the role of the pit pony. The last five pit ponies in the UK left Wheldale Colliery, Yorkshire, in January 1972 (from The Guardian Online). These ponies were used to turn 'horse whims' which worked pumping and winding machinery. Prior to this they were also used, alongside women, to haul tubs of coal underground. In 1842 the use of women was banned, but it wasn't until 1887 that detailed legislation was put in place to protect the ponies, since then, no other working horse has received such detailed protection. In 1984, Yorkshire had 56 collieries, but in December of 2015 the last of these was closed due to the drop in coal prices, marking the end of deep coal mining across the UK. Further to this, the actual landscape of Yorkshire means that pastoral farming has largely been more profitable. A lot of the rougher

ground, therefore, is given over to sheep and beef cattle, and the horses are ‘a waste of good grazing’. The horses of many of my informants were either in small paddocks just off the streets of single-road small Yorkshire villages, with hidden stables behind terrace houses that were once the homes of carriage horses: or, on rough, steep land more suitable for sheep. A local horse trainer assured me that “it makes them stronger out on the hills, not like those silly southern buggers, show them a hill and they don’t know what to do”.

Now that horses are valued as companion animals as much as commodities and status symbols, they are not only the property of the elite upper-class as they had been for the majority of the 20th Century; many of my informants were distinctly middle-class (although in Yorkshire, they considered ‘them down south’ to have more money and ‘better’ horses). Many trainers came from working-class backgrounds and from family lines where grandparents worked with horses for agricultural use where horses are ‘in the blood’ (Cassidy 2007). There are approximately 1.3 million regular horse riders in the UK (BETA National Equestrian Survey 2015), but the number of people practicing NH is unknown. In certain circles, horse owners are still considered the ‘aristocratic elite’ (Cassidy 2002), however, within natural horsemanship groups, having a horse with competition prowess is low down on the criteria for most owners; horses are instead valued for being ‘kind’, or as ‘partners’, than for specific skills. As Haraway asks ‘what happens when the undead but always generative commodity becomes the living breathing, rights-endowed, doggish bit of property sleeping on my bed...?’ (2008: 46). Here it can be seen that horses, too, have a complicated history and cannot be thought of as simply ‘a horse’, external to its historical placement. And as Dolly the sheep was both a ‘simple ewe and a threatening clone’ (Franklin 2007: 117) capable of multiple identities and transgressing previously held categories, horses in the UK also demonstrate this ability to fluidly move through the imagination of the British public.

This work comes from approximately twelve months of fieldwork in north Yorkshire; my own lifetime of experiences alongside horses helped me to understand the complexities of this world. Without this knowledge of horses and riding, I do not believe that this project would have been possible. My first memories of horses are unfortunately rather negative – I distinctly remember getting my fingers bitten by a

small grey pony and on a separate occasion, balling my eyes out because I wasn't allowed to ride in my dress. My official equine journey began on my 9th birthday when my mother gave me the gift of horse riding lessons (after much begging prior to this on my part!). For the next two years, Tuesday afternoons at four o'clock could never come soon enough. When I was 11 years old we moved to Perthshire in Scotland from Somerset, and after another year of lessons and begging I somehow managed to convince my mother that it would be cheaper for me to have my own horse than to have weekly lessons – and so a Warmblood mare named Clicquot became my first equine companion. When I was seventeen, Clicquot was sold and I went to university and barely went near a horse for four years – I had turned towards what my mother had tried to steer me away from with horses for all those years, boys and partying. I got back 'in to horses' properly at the start of a Masters in Anthropology when I purchased two spotted Knabstrupper² mares to train and sell on for profit: I still own them. My practical knowledge of natural horsemanship at this point was next to nothing; I knew who Monty Roberts was, but I didn't understand how Parelli achieved anything by swishing ropes around. My fieldwork ensured I was dropped in at the deep end!

This was a multi-sited project that mainly focused on part-time practitioners as they negotiated the trials and tribulations of living alongside horses using natural horsemanship methods, and the trainers who were involved in the business of training horses and humans. My 'field-sites' were actual fields, paddocks, stables, arenas, covered barns, living rooms, and the whole world from the back of a horse. Although these locations were spread out, and many of my informants did not know each other or had minimal connections with each other, they all declared a similar passion for horses and living alongside them in harmony. They all identified themselves as 'horse people' and natural horsemanship enthusiasts and as such became a single 'interpretive community' (Fish 1980: 3) through their dedication to natural horsemanship. This 'shared interpretive activity' (Reed 2002: 128) brought them together as a community where they shared the same goals and acted in ways that helped achieve them.

² Knabstrupper are a Danish breed of horse made famous by the Pippy Lonstockings stories. They were also the original circus horses, with a distinct Spanish influence over their breeding.

Cassidy has also written in depth about a different group of ‘horse people’ in the UK, specifically amongst racehorses and racing people in Newmarket (2002). However, it appears to be more detached from the actual horses than what I offer here. Cassidy’s work offers a fascinating perspective on the business side of horse racing and the people within it, but there is little on the one to one connections between humans and horses that I focus on here. I argue that these moments are key to understanding and seeing the relationship between human and horse in natural horsemanship communities. Where Cassidy’s work is mainly focused on big events or specific industry interactions between people discussing horses, I mostly consider the smaller events in both the private and public sphere where everyday interactions *with* horses shapes each partner individually.

These moments made up my fieldwork. As much as the places may be different, the variety of experiences overlap; there are rides with friends, and confrontations in the arena, quiet moments alone in the field or the stable, anxious moments, happy moments, joyful, sad, depressing, hopeful. And they are experienced everywhere. Interviews and informal chats over wine gleaned more information than formal interviews where my informants were too prepared and considerate in their answers. Moving hands and bodies makes for moving tongues and I learnt more from the back of a horse or through a shared activity than anything else. This work is therefore presented mainly from the side of those who practice and who ‘do’ the everyday ‘horsey stuff’, and not the upper echelons of famous horse trainers. These were the people who assumed local identities of what it is to be a ‘horse person’ – even the well-groomed ones could be marked out by a certain physical strength, patches of mud, dirty fingernails, or hay clinging to garments.

There was a gentle scrutiny of myself as a newcomer but my ability to ‘talk horse’ well, and a genuine desire to practice natural horsemanship granted me membership to the group. As Coy notes, apprenticeship is a form of gate-keeping, where those inside the gate are allowed access to the craft (Coy 1989: 10). ‘Membership’ in my case constituted a desire for living in a better way with horses as well as adopting an ethical code of conduct towards horses as thinking, feeling members. Most people took on my student role fervently and I was often met with questions like, “learning much?” I was generally welcomed because I, very quickly, was obviously ‘good with

horses' and a 'hard worker'. Fieldwork here would not have been possible without either of these qualities. Cassidy experienced something similar in her own fieldwork:

My acceptance by many racing people depended on my ability to perform tasks involving horses with the minimum of difficulty and fuss.... Though the manner was casual and the task usually straightforward, its completion often depended upon a confidence with horses and a knowledge of their specialized equipment, which indicated to 'horse-people' that I was 'one of them.' (2002: vii)

As Cassidy also noted, without prior horse knowledge, this type of fieldwork would not have been possible. It was a similar but very different world for me - one that involved not just learning new skills or knowledge, but actively unlearning a lifetime of others. A lot of equipment and horse care was the same, but the interactions, the crux of what I came to study, was a world apart. With myself as an analytical device, as a student like many of my informants, I was trained in the same way they were. And so just like during training where my fellow trainees and I were always told to let the horse lead your movements, the horses led the movement throughout my project as well. It would not be possible without them. It is only through them and *their* actions that the actions, decisions, feelings, and emotions of the people in my fieldwork (and consequently to you reader on the page) can be felt, understood, and observed. I was an apprentice to these horse masters as much as their human handlers.

Natural horsemanship participants side-step the problem of 'representing' their horse by embracing ethological and behavioural knowledge of horses and actively engaging with them on their terms. So, whether I find that I can 'represent' a horse or not in my language is irrelevant - partly because I do not wish to dethrone the human in this work, but also because my informants have done a grand job of trying to do it for me. I am merely the scribe to their thoughts, actions, and feelings – on horses or otherwise! Occasionally it seemed that I was unsure which species I thought I understood better; horses were my silent companions throughout fieldwork and sometimes the lack of human words that passed between us made for a relationship that was easier to write about. We 'talked' and it was often a conversation that was easier to put into written words than my sometimes scrambled attempts to describe

that area between the lines of spoken words and their real meanings found burrowed in between levels of sarcasm, lies, jest, emphasis, and inflection.

Much previous work on or from within natural horsemanship groups has lacked the ethnographic focus of my work, instead focusing merely on the observation of horse events (Latimer and Birke 2009) or based on information from formal interviews (Birke 2007; Maurstad *et al.* 2013). This previous work has provided an interesting base to work from, but does not concern itself with the actual moments of training and becoming-with alongside horses, or the everyday interactions that augment and solidify the relationship outside of formal training. Nor does it integrate the human-horse relationship of natural horsemanship fully with other multispecies themes, or provide a critical comparison with other multispecies academic work. Although the affective, kin-like relations between human and horse are mentioned in previous pieces of work, they are not dealt with in detail, nor backed up by detailed ethnographic writing. This project gives both a personal insight into the world of natural horsemanship and its practitioners from myself as an apprentice, as well multiple accounts of the lay practitioner and trainers in their everyday worlds living alongside horses.

What is natural horsemanship?

Natural horsemanship is a training style that makes the human more aware of naturally occurring behaviours of the horse by adopting the position of the dominant horse. Horses are herd animals, and wild herds are often comprised of a stallion and a group of mares. Young male horses over the age of two years often form their own separate herds until they can gather mares of their own. The stallion pushes the herd in the direction of his choice from behind and protects the herds from intruding stallions and potential predators. Older mares within the herd are responsible for social order and discipline within the herd (Fey 2005; Goodwin 2002). The highlight of Roberts' style of horsemanship is a method that he has coined as 'Join-up', which is often the base for all other training. Join-up depends on the human acting like the dominant matriarchal mare of the herd who disciplines unruly horses. By pushing the horse away, through a combination of aggressive body language ('eyes on eyes, shoulders square' (Roberts in demonstration 2013)) and the gentle throwing of a soft

rope towards the horse, the horse is encouraged to run in a circle around the person inside a round-pen. When the horse begins to show submissive signals the human stops chasing the horse. My informants tell me that at this point, the horse is ‘asking’ to be let back into the herd by the lowering of their head, licking and chewing motions, and decreasing the distance between them. If Join-up is achieved, the horse will submissively follow the human around inside the round-pen. This interaction is the basis for the language of ‘Equus’, described by Roberts (1997: 79) as the language of the horse that humans can share. Once the horse understands what you want, and that you might speak a part of a shared language, it is said that it begins to trust you.

Prior to further training, it is important for the horse to trust the human enough that they can be touched all over (‘high where the big cats go, low where the dogs go’ (Roberts, in a public demonstration 2014)), and lift up each foot (‘this is important, he is giving you his means of escape’ (Roberts, as before)). After this initial moment of trust, where the horse and human are said to be in tune with each other, training is channeled in particular directions depending on what level of training the horse has previously received, or to combat specific problems. The special Dually Halter is often used for this work (Appendix A); it features an extra band of rope over the lower part of the horses nose that tightens when pressure is applied from a rope that it attached to a metal ring, it quickly loosens when pressure is removed (Image 1). This halter is used to ‘gain control of the horses feet’ by asking the horse to move in particular directions; forwards, backwards, and to each side either following their human, or moving out of their space. Here, they are learning to communicate in a give-and-take fashion; the horse is learning what space it can occupy and what certain physical cues from the human mean. Simultaneously, the human must ‘learn to be affected’ (Haraway 2008). By this, Haraway suggests that the human must also adapt to the changing environment of living alongside companion animals and be open to their responses. Based on the training of her own dog for agility, she states that; ‘technique, calculation, method – all are indispensable and exacting. But they are not response, which is irreducible to calculation’ (Haraway 2008: 226-7). By training alongside companion animals, the human must be prepared to adapt to the animal’s actual performance. This is often said in natural horsemanship circles where the horse’s behaviour and actions help guide the process.



Image 1. The horse on the left is wearing a standard headcollar, the grey horse on the right is wearing a Dually halter. Note the extra strap over the nose on the Dually halter.

Public touring displays by Monty Roberts and Kelly Marks are held every year in the UK - other, lesser known, trainers may perform at large equine events and tradeshow. These demonstrations represent the polar opposite of the ever-popular Rodeos held in the United States. In the UK there are no explicit demonstrations of traditional horsemanship training, it is more of a close-kept secret masquerading as public knowledge. I have often thought that it would be much harder to do a project on this. Natural horsemanship people appear much more open about what they do and were keen to teach me all they knew in the hopes that I would continue spreading the idea and message. These demonstrations serve to remind people of the power of natural horsemanship techniques in the hands of the master. During performances the audience is still and filled with anticipation, a stark contrast to the loud and boisterous attitude of the Rodeo that Lawrence discusses (1982). IH affiliated courses are run across the UK mostly during the summer months, and individual training is available all year round. These courses generally focus on particular areas of training, or on particular aspects of horse care or handling.

Natural horsemanship prides itself on being inclusive, where the breeding, conformation, movement, or jumping ability of the horse does not matter; it is a marketable, straightforward, common sense way to interact with horses in a way that people see as morally acceptable. It is an example of a 'business for a better relationship' (Haraway 2008: 35). Traditional methods force the horse to obey commands through repeated pressure on reins, ropes, or the rider's legs, often with the use of the whip or spur to punish incorrect behaviour. Natural horsemanship advocates the horses right to choose whether or not they want to work with humans. However, this 'choice' is not without initial pressure placed on the horse. Once the horse has experienced the 'negative instant consequences' and the instant relief of pressure for doing the correct thing, it is obvious that most horses would choose to comply for the 'positive instant consequences' - Roberts describes this as 'PICNIC' training.

Monty Roberts continues to be one of the main figureheads of Intelligent Horsemanship in the UK where he presents the movement as pushing away from a violent past towards the moral authority of a perceived non-violent future (Humphrey 1992; 1997), and is held in high esteem by practitioners of all natural horsemanship groups. In performances and demonstrations, people are in awe of his abilities and many of my informants talked openly about how exciting it would be to meet him. He holds a celebrity status in the worlds of natural horsemanship practitioners, and many consider a visit to Flag Is Up Farms in California (the base of Monty Roberts) as a pilgrimage of sorts to 'see where it all began and just feel the magic'. Further to this, receiving recognition from trainers they respect for good progress appears to legitimate my informant's ethical worlds, building on their belief that they 'are on the right track'. Roberts operates with an explicitly Christian ethos and as a moral exemplar, he lends weight to the ideals and tenets of natural horsemanship. This future vision captures natural horsemanship within the wider 20th and 21st century shift towards reshaping nature as something to be protected instead of dominated, paralleling many environmentalist movements, as well as aligning itself with animal rights groups as a step towards better animal welfare.

Recently (2009), the 'appropriateness' of these training methods placed Monty's techniques and teachings under scrutiny in the form of court cases, alleging that they

are not as new, natural or non-violent as they seem. As one mode of opposition against these claims, Roberts and a ‘conventional’ trainer went head to head to each train a group of young horses. The ‘natural’ and ‘compassionate’ approach to training horses showed average lower heart rate levels at key-stress points in the training of a young horse in comparison to the horses trained with a more conventional approach. As such, Roberts’ methods have now been branded ‘scientifically proven’ (Fowler *et al.* 2012)³. Natural horsemanship is now contested terrain, encompassing a plurality of movements and masters. Linda Birke (2007; 2008) has also mentioned in her work that because many practitioners often lack the skill of more experienced trainers, communication between horse and human can often be confused. This results in a disparity between the partnership that they seek, and the control over the horse that they end up attaining. This suggests that there can be a tension between the freedom of actions that they seek and the amount of pressure that they must use to attain it. Birke also (2007; 2008) notes that the ‘natural’ emphasis of the training methods are often at odds with the final desired outcomes of being able to control horses effectively. Further to this, she highlights the tension in the teachings themselves, where the equipment used is often interpreted in a different manner by different people; some see them as further means to control the horse, whilst others manage to justify their use as necessary to the method (2007).

Most ‘part-time-practitioners’ (those who recreationally practice natural horsemanship and who own horses exclusively for personal use and pleasure) generally adopt a ‘pick and mix’ approach to natural horsemanship, participating and borrowing from multiple practices and trainers (also noted by Hurn 2010 and Birke 2008). The adoption of these new methods is often framed within conversion narratives when discussing their personal movement away from more traditional methods. However, it is not an entirely new way of living with horses; many people have been utilising similar methods for centuries but they would have been considered

³ The paper by Fowler *et al.* (2012) measured the heart rate of 14 horses using a monitor placed around their necks during training and their performance in both an obstacle test and a flatwork test. The horses were between 3-5 years of age and unbacked. Each trainer, one using Roberts’ methods and one using traditional methods, was allowed 30 minutes training time per day for 20 days. During the performance tests at the end of this time, heart-rate was similar for both groups, however, the horses trained with Roberts’ method gained better scores. During the training process, heart rate was recorded at the point of wearing their first saddle and carrying their first rider – the horses trained with natural horsemanship had significantly lower heart rates at these stages, suggesting they were calmer and more accepting of these new challenges.

the exception by most. The popularity and massive uptake of natural horsemanship around the world and the communities that form through it are what makes it so remarkable. Natural horsemanship, as previously stated, seeks to break away from the perceived Western history of ‘man’s domination over horses’; the heads of these groups want to see a literal break from past human-horse relations and portray natural horsemanship as a completely new way to live alongside horses – as Roberts often remarks at his public demonstrations ‘there has never been a non-violent way of living with horses, until now’.

‘Becoming-with’ horses as a form of ethical living

Natural horsemanship as a form of ethical living (or ethical ‘worlding’ (Moore 2011)) is an interesting phenomena as it is not just a ‘relative’ way of looking at the world (Laidlaw 2014: 23) but could instead be considered as a ‘historically located, multispecies, subject shaping encounter in a contact zone fraught with power, knowledge and technique, moral questions – and the chance for joint, cross-species invention that is simultaneously work and play’ (Haraway 2008: 205). Natural horsemanship has emerged from a pre-existing set of cultural norms that have long been practiced and accepted within the UK, precisely as a means to stand against them. It is not a case of relativism or of unquestioned means, but an actively questioning approach to horsemanship within an already-made set of societal norms. It is the creation of new ideals and of a new ethical imagination that the practitioners use as a way of living that has emerged from both an awareness of animal consciousness and welfare, as well as a regard for human exceptionalism and their own personal response-ability (Haraway 2008) towards horses in their care. Further to this, it is also the uncertainty of never knowing exactly what another animal is thinking or feeling that engages with the ethical imagination; we create particular subjectivities as we fill in the blanks of possibilities and reflectively consider ourselves in relation to others (Moore 2011: 59).

This multispecies relationship means that human and horse grow alongside each other, not as two divergent paths meeting, but as parallel trajectories that aid in each other’s development. In their own way, the charismatic beings that horses are -

steadfastly returning the gaze of the human as they negotiate each other - has meant that horses play as much of a role in their humans actions as the trainers and the friends, and the non-friends that tell someone *how to horse*. In this regard, humans could also be seen to become ‘domesticates’ through this process (Cassidy 2007b). Humans and horses have shared a long history, and the contribution of the horse as a living creature with distinct characteristics that can influence, affect and transform relationships, should not be ignored (Franklin 2007). If a human (and why not a horse?) is ‘the carrier of a unique collective-cum-personal history’ who is ‘constantly interacting in ways that are co-productive, and continually plastic and malleable’ (Long and Moore 2012 paraphrasing Toren), then these relationships merit investigation.

Maurstad *et al.* identify three specific intra-active points of ‘relational co-being’ between horse and rider in their paper on co-being (2013); firstly, moments of corporeal synchronisation (please see Argent 2012; Evans and Franklin 2010); secondly, how the meeting of two agentic subjects allows for a specific communicative intra-action between, potentially, two self-aware individuals; And finally, how they learn to adapt and respond to each other as a form of co-shaping or co-domestication. They augment these ideas by suggesting that:

Horses and humans are co-beings, becoming in the practices they are engaged in, practices where sensations and emotions, as well as attention, cognition and affect, are crucial ingredients and need to be better understood (Maurstad *et al.*, 2013)

These are important points that Maurstad *et al.* address by using the idea of ‘intra-acting’ put forwards by Barad in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). Barad considers every ontological unit as a phenomenon where actions and events entangle multiple agents who intra-act - in opposition to interacting, which is, Barad suggests, where both parties leave the entanglement unchanged. Humans and horse are relational beings that become through their engagements; they meet as two agentic subjects, and part permanently changed. Maurstad *et al.* used open-ended interview questions (which were sent out by post) to glean information on the ridden human-horse relationship, however, although certainly important, these moments of

‘becoming centaur’ they identified are only the final stages in natural horsemanship practices. Therefore, Barad’s idea of intra-acting could fruitfully also be used in the everyday lives of these beings that I discuss– in the smaller, more subtle, moments of being together, which are still ‘ontological units’ (Barad 2007: 8). The aim of NH as a training method is to foster engagement between human and horse by allowing them to meet as two individuals who can begin to understand each other through the practice. This initial framework of communication can then be built upon in different scenarios where ‘ontological units’ are created. However, that is not to say that every interaction constitutes an intra-action, and not every intra-action is a positive one.

It is widely agreed upon now that ‘cultures are not fixed and bounded entities, they are internally diverse and individuals may have allegiances to more than one simultaneously’ (Moore 2011: 11). Natural horsemanship is just one such movement, and one of the many ways of life that people can practice their ‘art of living’ (11). It is not a moral world entire to itself and instead acts within other social structures of traditional horsemanship, where many natural horsemanship trainers and participants advocate to these others to change their actions and way of living with horses to their practice of ‘ordinary ethics’ (Laidlaw 2014: 24). Horses themselves in this case act as vehicles of action for change; people act in a way that aligns themselves with a vision of the moral future they seek, and the actual ways that they interact with horses makes these ethical and moral concepts real to them (Luhmann 2006). Without de-centering the human, I here analyse human sociality in conjunction with horses because these mutually constitutive relations of power and knowledge are a product of their entanglements with each other (Knight 2005). They are enacted through discourse, practice, and action in both active moments of engagement in training sessions, and in the small everyday actions that constitute the foundations of the relationship where each subject occupies multiple positions in layers of networks (Latour 2005). This re-centering of the human opens up the question of what it is to be human in a manner similar to Kohn’s project of going ‘beyond the human’ where he suggests that ‘attending to our relations with those beings that exist in some way beyond the human forces us to question our tidy answers about the human’ (2013: 6).

It could be suggested that previous horse-human studies by people such as Cassidy and Lawrence treated the horse as part of a pre-figured landscape (Cassidy 2002,

2007; Lawrence 1982). Through the investigation of 'shared sensoriums' (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010) and overlapping lived worlds (Kohn 2007), I show that horses are an integral part of the changing British landscape - in a similar way to Franklin, who complicated the idea of a sheep to show its changing relationship to place (Franklin 2007). Horses have been transformed in the imagination of Yorkshire people from work horse and pit pony, to the loved and listened to companions of current Yorkshire people who utilise old rough farming land and backstreet stables of sleepy Yorkshire towns. This change in previously accepted ways of living with horses provides a powerful tool for looking at the emerging field of the anthropology of ethics (Laidlaw 2002; Zigon 2007; Faubion 2011) as well as potentials and limits of multi-species ethnography. In his public demonstrations, Roberts often mentions the moment of becoming the 'centaur' in ridden work, where horse and human are in harmony. I suggest that these moments of harmonious communication can also be found outside of ridden work in moments of becoming; in everyday interactions, the moment of Join-up, and during training where horse and human share empathetic responses and corporeal unity.

Thinking with animals: A historical perspective

Anthropology studies what it is to be human (humanity) 'through its diverse manifestations' (Lévi-Struass 1985 [1983]: 49), or, more correctly, as 'a comparative study of 'otherness'' (Hurn 2010: 3). Animals and non-human 'others' are currently fulfilling this role in multispecies assemblages. Previously, however, animals have often been at the periphery and studied as symbols or objects to be utilized. It could be suggested that the 'animal question' has arisen in anthropology from the so-called reflexive turn which made anthropologists more critically aware of the discipline itself. Previously, dominant ideologies of anthropology resulted in the perpetuation of specific knowledge-making where the use of 'anthropology' as a tool led to specific, previously premised, outcomes. It could be said that some human-animal anthropologists have been correcting the void in knowledge that the reflexive turn left open; where previously 'muted groups' (Ardener 1975), such as non-humans, were found to be lacking within ethnographic work.

Much European thought on the similarities and differences of humans and animals owes much to the thinking of 17th Century philosopher René Descartes who presented a mechanistic approach to animal life – that they were merely animated machines that did not feel pain or possess consciousness (2007 [1649]). However, Voltaire argued against this machine-like categorisation of animals, suggesting instead that animals shared many of the same emotions and feelings as humans and that they most definitely possessed a consciousness of their own kind. On the work of this ‘machinist’ approach he says:

Barbarians seize this dog, which in friendship surpasses man so prodigiously; they nail it on a table, and they dissect it alive in order to show the mesenteric veins. You discover in it all the same organs of feeling that are in yourself. Answer me, machinist, has nature arranged all the means of feeling in this animal, so that it may not feel? Has it nerves in order to be impassable? Do not suppose this impertinent contradiction in nature. (Voltaire 2010 [1764])

Philosophers John Locke (1631–1704) and Jean-Jaques Rousseau (1712–1778) echo some of the thoughts of Voltaire by concluding that animals are capable of feeling, but not reason. For similar reasons, German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued that while humans do not owe a moral duty to animals, committing violence against animals is a failure of a person’s moral duty to other people. He extended recognition of animals so far as that when they were the property of humans, harming them harms the ‘humanity’ of the one committing the act, lowering them to the level of animals:

If a man shoots his dog because the animal is no longer capable of service, he does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge, but his act is inhuman and damages in himself that humanity which it is his duty to show towards mankind. If he is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men (1997: 212)

These debated ideas go back as far as ancient Greek times where Aristotle originally presented work that suggested that humans could be seen at one of a spectrum as having attained ‘perfection’, and animals at the other, incapable of attaining a similar status. However, in his *History of Animals*, he recognizes that the differences between humans and animals varied more often by degree, and only occasionally by kind:

In most other animals, there are traces of the qualities of soul that are more evidently differentiated in human beings. For there are both gentleness and savagery, mildness and harshness, courage and timidity, fear and confidence, spiritedness and trickery, and, with respect to intelligence [*dianoia*], something like judgement [*sunesis*], similar in many ways, just as we have spoken of the parts of the body. For some of these qualities differ only more or less with reference to human beings, and so is man in reference to many things of animal. Some of these qualities are greater in man, others are greater in other animals, but in others they differ by analogy (Quoted in Hurn 2010: 17 from Aristotle 2004: 588a, 18-31)

Most interestingly, much of these ideas are still debated and form the basis of some modern day ideas towards animals, which seems to be no less divided than it was in the 17th Century and before; as seen in Hoon Song’s work on the Labour Day Pigeon Shoot (2010) in Pennsylvania. Animal rights activists come head-to-head with local advocates of the yearly slaughter, where these conflicting sides both have a voice. It is also seen in the stark contrast of vastly different multispecies ethnographies; for example, the off-hand object-like display of the rodeo horse as a tool for entertainment in the writings of Lawrence (1982), against the mythical and magical lives of dolphins and the ‘enchanted encounters’ that people have with them (Servais 2005: 212).

The turn towards human-animal studies across disciplines has arisen, not solely because of, but certainly in parallel with the animal protection movement, most noticeably in the Western world. In a similar manner to how ‘women’s studies’ and ‘African-American studies’ rose in conjunction with feminism and the civil rights movement respectively, the place of the animal, initially as a category but now as active subjects in scholarly work, is recognised (DeMello 2012). Philosophical works

on animal rights and the animal subject have furthered interest in the fields of critical animal studies, philosophy, human geography and anthropology – as well as increasing awareness in broader disciplines and in the general public (Herzog 2011; Singer 1975). Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, and his continuing works in this area, have been a particularly strong voice in the case for animal rights and for taking animals seriously as feeling, thinking agents capable of response and higher levels of consciousness (1975; 2006 please see these titles for a more detailed historical perspective towards animals and animal rights).

What is important to note, however, is that while the argument for animal rights and welfare has progressively improved over the last two centuries, most notably with regards to the introduction of laws and organisations to protect them (I.e. The RSPCA in the UK) that gives animals legal rights to some extent (as property), the overarching notion is that humans 'in their superior wisdom' should protect animals (Morgan 1868: 281). Within Western thought animals have rarely been the equals of humans, or considered in any terms on a similar level to humans other than through anthropomorphic projections. These continue to hold animals beneath humans by virtue of attributing 'human-like' qualities to them. Rather than recognising them as persons or individuals in their own right, they only possess inferior versions of human qualities.

Rather ironically, it could be said that discoveries and theories outside of the argument for animal rights have been most successful in the grand rethinking of human self-knowledge and exceptionalism. It appears easier for humans to understand animals through the re-thinking of their own life worlds than to directly investigate the life-worlds of animals - potentially once again iterating the gap between *us* and *them*. Sigmund Freud suggests that there are three existential blows to the ideas of human 'megalomania'; Copernicus' revelation that Earth is not actually the centre of the universe; Charles Darwin's release of *The Origin of The Species*, which led to a dramatic blow to ideas of creationism and the revelation of our 'ineradicable animal nature'; and that psychological research and his own theory of the unconscious that 'seeks to prove to the ego that it is not even master in its own house, but must content itself with scanty information of what is going on unconsciously in the mind' ([1963] 2001, 284-5.) Haraway adds herself to the list of those who seek to burst the 'fantasy

of human exceptionalism' bubble by stating that: 'I want to add a fourth wound, the informatics or cyborgian, which infolds organic and technological flesh and so melds that Great Divide as well' (2008: 11-2).

The new multispecies ethnography work in anthropology sits atop a long history of human and non-human interactions (Kirksey and Heimrich 2010). A retrospective study by historians has led to informative and detailed descriptions of these relationships (Darnton 1986; Lansbury 1985; Ritvo 1987), but alas, it would appear that the more emotive and affective aspects of past relationships will mostly be lost – although, notably, except for the work of people like Argent who work to combine history and archaeology to rediscover the nuances of past interactions (2012). Earlier anthropological work on non-human animals suggested that it was a 'fruitful' field because of the diverse ways in which 'animals are used, how they function in various societies, and how their many meanings are derived' (Shanklin 1985: 379-80). More recent work has focused on the affective and emotional relationships that humans and nonhumans share (Haraway 2008; Locke 2017; Servais 2005), the importance of these bonds to societies (Campbell 2005; Marvin 1994 [1988]), the awareness of nonhuman animals as 'persons' (Campbell 2005; Haraway 2008; Arluke 1994; Mullin 2002), what the animals treatment and care can tell us about the human society that they are a part of (Cassidy 2002; Kohn 2007; Mullin 2002; Noske 1997; Swabe 2005), and more broadly, as social actors in their own right (Fijn 2011; Latour 2005; Willerslev 2007).

Although whether animal cognition and behaviour should be considered at all has been debated (Ingold 2000; Tapper 1994), much of the crux of the work presented here relies on a general awareness of horse behaviour and sociality. This is not to say that all multispecies work needs an element of animal cognition and behaviour, but that here, it adds a fruitful element to the project, and the descriptions of horse behaviour add a helping hand to the reader who is potentially not as familiar with the subject area. What became clear from my fieldwork amongst natural horsemanship practitioners, is that the horses individuality and intentionality is recognised by the human-other that is working alongside them (see de Castro 1998, Kohn 2007 and Willerslev 2007 for similar awareness of other animals). This was only possible because of an awareness of horse behaviour and response-ability (Haraway 2008), which is more than just an anthropomorphic projection of human traits on to horses

(Carruthers 1989). NH is a space where scientific principles of horse behaviour meet the fluid realm of direct experience and belief.

It is often assumed that the way people act and think about the world are constructs that are formed because of the specific social roles, places, and structures in which they live; where 'fixed, culturally constructed meanings are attached to things and these become taken-for-granted assumptions which enable individuals to 'construct' a world view' (Hurn 2012: 14). However, individual experiences form an important role in shaping how humans interact and think about other humans and non-human animals, which in turn may determine how their own values and actions are enacted. Human evolution alongside horses from working animals to recreational pets or companions in NH is an example of 'ethical world making' (Moore 2011: 11). Often, it is after being witness to some aspect of cruelty towards horses, or being violent towards horses themselves, that people try to discover a better way to live in the world alongside horses. The fairly recent surge in natural horsemanship practices over the last few decades goes against many of the previous generations 'culturally conditioned' attitudes towards horses as mere object-like creatures to be dominated for human use. Instead, horses are elevated to a level equal to that of the human where the horse is considered a 'person' in its own right, and allows for a more equal relationship between human and horse that lacks previous power struggles seen in the human-horse relationship, and allows for a bias towards an ethically fruitful relationship (Singer 2006).

Ingold has suggested that many 'post-domestic' societal ideologies consider 'every attribute that it is claimed we [humans] uniquely have, the animal is consequently supposed to lack; thus the generic concept of 'animal' is negatively constituted by the sum of these deficiencies' (1994a: 3). However, although Ingold may be correct in saying that in many societies humanity exists as a 'state of transcendence over animality' (1994a: xxi) and notes that in many societies 'personhood as a state of being is not open to nonhuman animal kinds' (2000: 48), natural horsemanship interpretative communities place the horse on an equal playing field as a social actor, as well as praising what would be considered positive human traits in the horse such as kindness, generosity, willingness, and patience. Ideas of human exceptionalism that would ignore the role of animals in shared ontologies, and more specifically, the

active role that animals play in these relationships would be ‘foolish’ (Haraway 2008: 244).

Kay Milton posits the idea of egomorphism to understand nonhumans, as an alternative model to anthropomorphism. Rather than recognising human specific traits in nonhumans, Milton suggests that we take the ‘self’ (or ‘ego’) as a starting point to perceive inherent characteristics *in* them. Milton argues further that anthropomorphism is an unhelpful concept as it increases the emotional distance between humans and nonhumans as it is ‘not based on the direct experience of mutual understanding’ (2005: 266). Egomorphism, however, allows for the empathetic recognition that another is ‘like me’, based on inherent characteristics. Thus a nonhuman animal does not lack human qualities, but is an individual in its own right with distinct qualities. Willerslev recognises in his work that the Yukaghirs do not attribute personhood to all animals at all times but is something that emerges ‘in particular contexts of close practical involvement, such as during hunting’ (2007: 8). Outside of these engagements, Willerslev suggests that they draw distinctions between human subjects and nonhuman objects much more clearly than we do. I suggest that this is the recognition of egomorphic traits in animals through interactions.

The domestication of humans and horses in natural horsemanship

For many years the process of domestication has been regarded by academics as humans control over animals through force, where domesticated animals were ‘bred in captivity for purposes of economic profit to a human community that maintains complete mastery over... breeding, organization of territory, and food supply’ (Clutton-Brock 1989: 7). Domesticated animals were thus incorporated into social structures as objects to be owned and exploited, conferring wealth, status, and livelihood. However, this ‘control’ method of domestication should be viewed on a spectrum; with, for example, intensive factory farming on one end where there is little or no benefit to the animals and could be seen as parasitic, and on the other, the life of the semi-wild horses of Mongolia or Kyrgyzstan which have very few limitations on their movement or breeding (Cassidy 2009). Hurn instead wishes us to consider domestication in terms of ‘symbiosis’ (2012: 64) that does not reiterate the

‘problematic’ history of Western perspectives on the matter (Cassidy 2007). While it may be true that some animals played an active role in the process of their domestication (or ‘co-evolution’) because it was beneficial to them in some way I.e. for food or for protection from predators (Leach 2007), for many animals (including horses bound to natural horsemanship communities) it is often humans pushing towards an idea of how they wish to structure the social relationship between themselves and animals. Ingold considers the social element of domestication when he states in relation to reindeer, ‘I do not mean selective breeding towards a form that is physiologically dependent on man, but the element of socialisation of the animal into a human environment’ (Ingold 1974: 524). This is an interesting base to work from when considering horse training as an extension of the domestic process because the physical attributes of horses are not changed, but their behaviour is shaped in a way that makes them socially acceptable. However, Ingold does not consider the animal itself as an active agent in this process and rather considers the inclusion of domestic animals in anthropological thought because they ‘furnish a crucial testing ground for some of our most general theories concerning the role of animals in human social evolution’ (1986: 5). Ingold’s later work (2000) proposes that we think of animals as being ‘grown’ or nurtured by humans as a way to reconsider and dispose of distinctions between categories such a ‘wild’ and ‘domesticated’, suggesting that to further break down Cartesian dualisms between nature/culture we consider those who are ‘with’ animals in their day-to-day lives (2000: 76). I agree that the assumption that ‘wild’ and ‘domestic’ as either categories or as a part of a spectrum that animals must exist within at one point only is entirely unhelpful. It’s not the fact that such categories exist, but that they should not stand in opposition to each other. I hope to show in later chapters (3 and 4) that these categories do not occlude the other within NH groups.

Fijn takes this as the base point for her work with Mongol herders who *live with* their herds (2011). She describes a co-domestic relationship between herders and their ungulate herds (specifically horses, sheep, goats and cattle) where both humans and non-humans are active agents in the process of domestication. Interestingly, she rejects Ingold’s assertion that ‘the relationship of pastoral care, quite unlike that of the hunter towards animals, is founded not on a principle of trust but of domination’ (1994: 16) and instead states that herders engender a high degree of trust from their

herds by taking the place of the lead animal. Fijn (2011) emphasises that it is not a relationship free of any form of domination but defines it as a form of leadership where:

Mongolian herders... behave in a dominant manner towards their herd animals to retain control over the herd.... They take the place of the lead animal within the hierarchical structure of the herd. Inherent in this dominant role, however, is a high degree of *trust* from the entire herd, otherwise the herd animals would not accept the role of the herder and could readily flee, as there are no fences to obstruct them (44 emphasis in original).

I, too, consider humans who live ‘with’ horses within this project. In the UK, horses are already considered as domesticates, so the training may be seen to shape this relationship away from direct control over the horse, and towards the more symbiotic, willing, relationship that my informants desire. In turn, this way of becoming-with helps to shape their ethical life-world to fit more comfortably with their ideals as modern and educated humans who desire to live alongside horses. As one of my informants Fiona often said to me “The horses were just happy out in the field being horses before people came along”, however, people appear aware of their responsibility and response-ability towards horses under their care (Haraway 2008), and seek to communicate and cooperate with them in a less violent way than previous traditional horsemanship methods allowed. This produces a flexible tension between the control and freedom that horses experience.

Horses in training progress through a series of loosely defined stages. Throughout these stages, the level of control that the human working with the horse has over the horse body and exhibited behaviour is increased, with a corresponding increase in the complexity of equipment used and placed on the horse in preparation for a rider. In contrast to this, one of the highest levels for a trained horse and rider in natural horsemanship to achieve is to ride a horse using no saddle and bridle at all, with everything done through subtle touch and bodily movements to convey instructions –

this is the Centaur par excellence.⁴ The basics of natural horsemanship training permeate throughout the human-horse relationship and across different aspects of duties that the horse is expected to perform. However, as most of my informants in their day-to-day life were mostly concerned about achieving a fruitful ridden relationship with their horse, much of my work naturally focus' on their progress to this pinnacle point. Hurn (2012) wishes for the process of 'symbiosis' to be thought of as a liminal phase through which animals and humans go together. Lawrence has previously placed Rodeo horses and the fully trained horses of cowboys on this spectrum; where behaviour, response to human presence, the level of equipment that is used on the horse's body, and whether or not they are able to be ridden are key factors as to whether they are 'wild' or 'tame' (1982). In the case of natural horsemanship, this liminal phase could be seen as the horse's progression from a state of untrained (or semi-trained) to fully trained. They become biddable, experienced horses who understand the wishes of humans and human action towards them, and react appropriately: simultaneously, the human must learn how to act and react using the language of the horse.

Although my informants appear to 'live off their animals physically and emotionally' (Hurn 2010: 67), the horses also take up time, money, and physical labour. In turn, the horses receive love, care, food and shelter – but are ultimately restricted from being truly 'natural' and are not able to perform all of the innate behaviours they possess. This mirrors Hurn's work on the breeding and showing of Welsh ponies and cobs by Welsh farmers, which she suggests was both a relationship based on domination and simultaneously a form of symbiosis (2008a; 2008b). Human intimacy for horses and the prepositioned return of these feelings leaves open the potential for the horse to be exploited (Knight 2005: 8). Relationships such as these, therefore, hold both negative and positive outcomes for both parties (Clark 2007), but in this work I show that the negative effects are often easily over-shadowed by the positive emotional and physical benefits. My informants most often highlight the positive aspects of their relationships with horses, and leave the negative elements pushed aside with only light-hearted expressions of concern or anger; touching and being around another

⁴ I do not discuss this at any great length throughout this piece of work as my informants (except the trainers themselves) were all still 'in training' and I did not witness this 'free riding' throughout my fieldwork.

engaged, responsive being in a controlled and productive way produced feelings of joy, happiness, and calmness in my informants.

Although the domination framework for analysis of human-animal relations has been rightly critiqued for its limits (Argent 2012; Cassidy 2007b; Haraway 2008; Ingold 1994b and 2000), the emphasis in natural horsemanship on horses as kinds of person, complete with individual 'horsenalties', has potential to open up anthropological theory to include ideas of animals as both subjects and objects simultaneously (Candea 2010; Cassidy 2007b). Considering the horse as an individual does not necessarily mean that they do not continue to be under the control of humans and it could be said that natural horsemanship merely produces *acceptable* forms of violence and domination simply because it comes under the heading of 'natural'. The Mongolian herders in Fijn's work also recognise their animals as 'persons' where 'herders conceive of individual animals as having specific behavioural and physical characteristics, or as beings with an individual *personality*' (101 emphasis in original). These herders also utilise various aspects of horse and herd behaviour to manipulate and control both individual animals and the herd. For example, the foals are tied to a long line during morning and afternoon to ensure that the mares that are to be milked stay close by. She notes that many of these foals are very stressed by this process and are visibly tired, some to the point of exhaustion, from struggling with their restraint (138). Some mares or cows are also hobbled to prevent them from moving during milking (71 + 138). However, Fijn does not readily highlight the tension that appears to arise from these methods of control, disguised under the rubric of 'natural behaviours'. However, imaginings and enactments of animal welfare are embedded within particular socio-cultural settings and cannot necessarily only be considered by single standards. Perhaps the 'natural' methods of NH repackage ideas of violence and domination, providing interesting new boundaries for what could be considered a dominating relationship on one hand, and on the other, one that advocates the horses individual freedom and right to choose. Consequently, even the (misguided) misuse of natural horsemanship techniques may seem to be a more palatable means to control a horse.

Making new kinship connections through natural horsemanship

The flexible means of considering the horse across multiple categories allows for a rethinking of specific kinship ideas found in anthropology. Although ‘the idea that nature is everywhere and always the same thing and that it always stands in opposition to culture has been dismissed by anthropology’ (Cassidy 2007: 9), it is fruitful in this instance to consider how ideas of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ interact with regard to how these ideas of relatedness (or kin-like structures) are enacted and created. In this case, horses and humans are not bound to biological rules of relatedness, or even to some culturally constructed ideas; it is a collision of animals and humans and nature and culture, creating mutualities of existence where before it could have been said that there was a separation between humans and the natural world of horses. At the same time as being a domesticated animal, kept for human pleasure, horses certainly transcend the one-sided relationship of ‘petishism’ that people such as Paul Shepard have actively condemned; He argues that, ‘[pets are] biological slaves who cringe and fawn...[who are] organic machines conforming to our needs’ (Shepard 1997: 151). Instead of this rather Cartesian view of pet-keeping, horses actively engage in these relationships and have the power to affect its eventual outcome. Again, although horses as pets could be seen as ‘commodities that many people use, like other consumer goods, as a means of constructing identities’ (Mullin 1999: 215-16), they are also truly considered as kin-like.

This is certainly not a study of kinship in the traditional sense that is has been dealt with in much anthropological literature. British kinship was once considered less fundamental than kinship systems in non-Western societies where kinship was reduced to the study of people’s roles that were ascribed by birth and position and were regarded as fixed and unchangeable with an active assertion to the implications of the present, and less regard for future possibilities. Even then, the study of English Kinship within anthropology ‘at home’ was deemed of little importance and relegated to the periphery of study (Cohen 1982, 1990) until the late 1970s and early 1980s (Fox 1978; Strathearn 1981, 1982). Much work before this time described it as ‘cognatic’ or ‘bilateral’ by anthropologists, and the study of English Kinship was recast as the study of the nuclear family, and the property of sociological study. As

Cassidy (2002) succinctly describes of the progression of the study of English kinship during this time:

The sociology of the family traced a historical progression from a pre-modern era in which roles were ascribed by birth and tradition was looked to as an authority for the present, through a modern period in which tradition was replaced by scientific rationality, faith in progress and individualism. The nature and even the name of the third stage of this progression, most commonly described as ‘post-modern’, remains contested (7)

NH sits in what could be considered this much-debated ‘post-modern’ era where the ‘facts’ of kinship and the differences in the meanings of the terms used to describe it are no longer fixed (Cassidy 2002:8), and people have the ability to ‘make’ their own families. I investigate both the ‘natural’ ideas that my informants hold about horses developed through their training practices together that result in what I will consider as ‘becoming-with’, and the empathetic response to the horse as kin. As Sahlins says, ‘where being is mutual, their experience is more than individual’ (2013: 2) and these interacting forces between human and horse help to further solidify the horse being considered as kin by my informants in their ideas and actions. This further complicates notions of domestication; if a horse is considered as family, can it still be considered a domesticate? Natasha Fijn states that ‘the herd animals are seen as part of the herders’ family, and the ‘wild’ equivalents are seen as part of the extended family network’ (2011: 28) suggesting that kinship and domestication are not opposing ideas in Mongolia. Quite possibly, it is the co-domestication of herd animals and humans in this example that makes such a thing possible.

Harold Scheffler and Floyd Lounsbury have said that: ‘relations of genealogical connections’ are ‘kinship proper’; they are ‘fundamentally different from and are logically and temporally prior to any social relations of kinship’ (1971:38). However, now that the basic discourse of the anthropology of kinship is no longer solely concerned with biological facts, kinship terminologies, rules of descent, marriage and post-marital residency, it seems fitting to adopt a broader approach to what could be considered kinship relations which are instead ‘predicated upon cultural conceptions that specify the processes by which an individual comes into being and develops into

a complete (i.e. mature) social person' (Sahlins 2003:65) (or horse in this case). Sahlins calls for the study of a 'mutuality of being' rather than woolly ideas of 'relatedness' that tend to replace the term kinship with an impossibly broad network of connections rather than the specific actions that contribute to relationships of importance. As Sahlins says, 'kin-folk are persons who participate intrinsically in each other's existence; they are members of one another' (2003: 2). Natural horsemanship creates kinship through associations – not just through family ties. Kinship is created (enacted) through people's actions with horses in their active attempt to create new futures by living and working with them like kin. My informants actively described horses to me as kin with assertions that they were 'part of the family', and that they felt strong emotional connections to them.

Putting the nature in culture

'Post-domestic' societies as described by Bulliet (2005), of which the UK would be considered one, frames humans as being separated from the 'natural' world. Ingold highlights a rift between academic disciplines which has perpetuated 'a separation between humanity and nature that has had fateful consequences in the history of Western civilisation' (1990: 224); namely between what he calls 'really natural' nature (that which can be studied by natural scientists) and 'culturally perceived' nature that is studied by social anthropologists. Ingold wishes to 're-embed the human subject within the continuum of organic life' (224) through discussions of those who live 'with' animals. However, although post-domestic societies would suggest a detached role from the animal body and is presented in opposition to 'domestic' societies where humans and animals live in close proximity, this is not always the case (Kirksey 2014). Many people are now actively seeking out ways to be close to other non-human animals, with natural horsemanship being one such example of people forming close relationships with other animals to connect themselves to the world in particular ways.

Ideas of nature in natural horsemanship can be seen in (other than in name) the awareness of the horses 'nature' or 'naturalness' where it is perceived as holding precedence over our own beastly 'human nature' and society. The horses natural behaviours could be considered as the 'really natural' nature Ingold (1990) discusses,

as practitioners draw on knowledge from equine behaviourists and ecologists (see Goodwin 2002; Linklater 2000). This interacts with their own opinions of horse sociality, both alongside humans and other horses, as ‘culturally perceived’ nature (Ingold 1990). There is most certainly an awareness of a manipulation of the horses ‘really natural’ nature for human purpose that many of my informants are happy to keep at ropes length. They often choose to ignore the overt implications of what training eventually achieves – a perfectly constructed (humanly) cultural horse. On the control of nature in Newmarket, Cassidy states that:

Nature is perceived as a recalcitrant but talented child who refuses to fulfill its own potential and so must be strongly directed. However, the opposite notion, that animals, particularly horses and dogs, are fundamentally the same as humans, and that all are part of nature, is also present, facilitating an intersubjectivity between the thoroughbred and its human attendants. (2002: 9)

Although the second part of this extract does not appear to be discussed much within her work, the idea is certainly one that has facilitated a lot of the natural horsemanship movement through an empathetic response to the horse as a person. The first part of this extract would be disagreed with strongly by most of my informants, who instead insist that a ‘well trained’ horse will be a happier horse because they aren’t constantly fighting with you; that if you can work with them rather than over-power them, the end result will always be a better one. Nature, then, is constantly being engaged with, and employed as a tool in different stages of training to legitimize the use of force in some scenarios, but not others. But, as Strathearn says ‘no single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in Western thought, there is no consistent dichotomy only a matrix of contrasts’ (1980: 177).

Natural horsemanship exemplifies this with the embrace of ‘natural ideas’ in a constructed cultural context. This spectrum of nature and culture colliding chaotically in the barns, the arena, and in the fields is beautifully contrasted by the way the horse moves within its status of object and subject; which, of course, is also a matrix that is not limited to these dichotomised poles where horses are constantly shifting between companion, kin, object, tool, and person during interactions. More importantly, they

are not limited to one of these liminal spaces at a time – there is constant potential and opportunity for the horse to be any number of these simultaneously. Cassidy also hints at this fluid nature of the horse within racing society, where the racehorse is ‘an ambivalent creature. Not animal, not person, not object, not subject, not entirely artificial and not entirely natural’ (2002: 9). The position of the horse is not fixed and is instead open to both imagination and negation dependent on the particular situation. Strathern has argued for the idea that social relations are made up of ‘partial connections’; in this case the ability of the horse ‘to slip between things’ helps to ‘reveal how partial the constructions are’ (Strathern 1992: 71).

Therefore, because a horse could be considered in social relations as an agentive actor, it makes the connection to kinship all that more feasible - whilst making their categorization in other areas more complicated! Cassidy considered horses as almost kin-like through their relation to class and status in Newmarket through ‘local ideas of relatedness’ that are not restricted to the ‘biological facts’ of kinship, where ‘talking family’ is the same as ‘talking racing’ (Cassidy 2002: 33). Horse pedigree and human pedigree builds connections between people in Newmarket. Just as people confer status from their pedigrees and family connections, they also confer their status from their horses pedigrees and connections to various famous horses. This piece provides an interesting juxtaposition to Cassidy’s work, precisely as it is not restricted to ideas of class and status. Instead, this work explores the performative construction of kinship - through ‘mutual becomings’, and the different constructions of what a horse ‘is’ within different relationships as it moves across boundaries of culturally imagined categories. I consider how the shared learning of skills and movements augment how feelings and emotions such as joy can help to transcend the material facts of the relationship and lift it into a plane of complex, intermingling, kinetic energies; A true example of Sahlins ‘mutuality of being’ (2013), where both are free to express themselves within the presence of the other and the ‘pedigree’ of each party is unimportant.

That the possession of ‘culture’ has been used to elevate humans above other animals soon fails to make logical sense when it is realised that animals too possess some of the defining characteristics of what it is to ‘be human’ in varying degrees I.e. The possession of their own language, societies and conscious thought. A Tyloean

perspective, which, rather unfortunately, became the bench mark for what constituted ‘culture’ in humans throughout anthropological research, would have us recognise that only humans possess the ability to have ‘culture’. However, more recent work from ethologists and animal behaviourists is beginning to recognise the possibilities of non-humans to be considered as ‘persons’, who have their own languages, experience emotions, and have rational thoughts (Hurn 2010: 28). If this work is to be taken seriously by anthropologists (as called for by many including Kirksey 2014; Kohn 2013; and Mullin 1999), then the more basic definition of ‘culture’ by Erikson may open up various interesting angles through which to study humans and non-humans together, with their own kind of cultures. As Erikson suggests ‘[‘culture’ consists of] those abilities, notions and forms of behaviour persons have acquired as members of society’ (2001:9). Hurn furthers this to suggest more specifically what prerequisites are required for animals to join the exclusive club:

So while the implication is that ‘culture’ applies to humans, other animals might be included if (a) they are accorded personhood, (b) their social organization is regarded as a form of society and (c) they exhibit the requisite ‘abilities, notions and forms of behaviour’ which constitute culture. (2010: 28)

In this work, I do not debate whether or not horses possess their own culture, but definitively suggest that their incorporation into the realm of humans makes them a part of human culture, and that their active presence shapes this ‘culture’. On the face of it, however, natural horsemanship practitioners recognise that horses have; hierarchal societies with complex inter-personal relationships with other horses, their own language, the ability to consciously and cognitively make decisions based on past, present, and future outcomes, and are ‘persons’ – all suggestive of their own type of culture. And although the imposition of human control over them negates any definitive awareness of a specific ‘horses-in-the-wild culture’, it does make for an intriguing multispecies cross-cultural clash.

Of course, there are many examples of animals incorporating human inventions and objects into their ‘natural’ world to mirror human behaviour or for personal gain. For example; stone handling by Japanese Macaques that imitates the human use of worry

beads (Huffman and Quiatt 1986; Leca *et al.*, 2007); the location and use of specific stone tools for nut cracking by chimpanzees (Matsuzawa 1994); Carrion crows in Sendai in Japan utilize stopped cars at traffic lights by placing their walnuts under the wheel that then get cracked when the car drives off, and the nut inside is revealed (Sax 2003). In contrast, Candea shows how meerkats actively ignore the researchers and their equipment in his work as a means of interacting by dis-association and habituation (2010). But it is much less common, ethnographically, for humans to incorporate another animal's *knowledge* into their worlds. The approach that natural horsemanship sets out, with a distinct awareness for the horses behaviour and language, involves the incorporation of species specific pieces of information in their training method.

As Kohn says, 'how other kinds of beings see us matters. That other kinds of beings see us changes things' (2013: 1). This is certainly true with regards to the training of and living with horses. The type of person that is presented to the horse determines the outcome of the final relationship, or more correctly, the outcome of how the relationship progresses - emotional responses and previous connections all have a role to play here. Further, through natural horsemanship training, it is said that the way the horse and human 'see' each other changes (chapter 2). Both learn to interpret the other, with a desire to 'work together' rather than through domination. Kohn suggests that being aware of a different way of being in the world would change the way that anthropology (ethnography) is conducted and written about (2013): that active engagement with other beings, taking them seriously (Haraway 2008), would alter our long held opinions and inferences about what it is to be human in the anthropocene. That other beings may see humans differently from the way we see and study them could open up new interpretations for long-held anthropological ideals. Kohn suggests, most importantly, that it could change our understanding of anthropology's main object, 'the human' if 'in that world beyond the human we sometimes find things we feel more comfortable attributing only to ourselves' (2013: 1). Kohn uses various examples from his work among the Runa, mobilizing Amazonian anthropology to think about multiple ontologies without turning it into different cultures; whereby there are literally different lived worlds, not just different worldviews of a shared world (Candea 2010: 175). He argues that anthropology could be used to make 'general claims about the way the world is' (2013: 10) - with an

awareness of how far our claims of relativism can be made to go - if we look ‘beyond the human’ where worlds are made up of more than just *human* action or viewpoints. He proposes the interesting analytic of taking seriously such things as ‘how forests think’ as one such way of opening up this ‘closed circle’ of anthropological thought and discussion (2013: 8). And I second this.

This is not a study of perspectivism. During mutual becomings where human and horse intra-act within a shared world, human and horse may adopt elements of the other to communicate, but there is no danger of completely becoming the other or adopting a ‘double perspective’ (Kohn 2013). Willerslev discusses the mimickry of the elk and its behaviour by hunters as moments of ‘not me, not not me’ (2007: 12) to describe how hunters inhabit multiple identities. In NH, the human is always still acting as a human; they may adopt elements of dominant horse behaviour to produce mutual trust and leadership, but there is never the danger of becoming the other. However, I would like to stimulate the thought throughout this work that there is more than what we see that makes up either the world we live in. That there is ‘more at stake’ (Haraway 2008) than what initially concerns us as humans, whilst remembering that we are ‘all too human’ (Kohn 2013: 14), and our individual worlds all too often do revolve around *us* in the singular. This attention to others creates another way of being ‘in the horse world’ as participants work towards becoming a centaur with their horse. Whilst natural horsemanship itself as a movement stands in opposition to more traditional methods, the anthropological endeavour of looking ‘beyond the human’ in this project - and recognizing shared or new elements to life – has grown through my attention to a horse’s capacity for living alongside humans.

Chapter summaries

This thesis is loosely structured around horse and human progress from untrained to fully trained members of a natural horsemanship community - moments of my own training run in parallel to this. The idea of what a horse ‘is’ is constantly being negotiated within NH groups, and the fluid categorization of horses is explored throughout. I open this piece by describing the spectacle that is natural horsemanship in action. Chapter one discusses the people and the horses involved in NH through

ethnographic material from public displays run by IH to highlight how and why people choose natural horsemanship. These demonstrations provide a stimulating and eye-opening show for many whilst highlighting the role that the trainers play as moral exemplars to practitioners.

In chapter two I discuss the difference between part-time practitioners and trainers of NH by using Grasseni's (2007) idea of 'skilled vision' to explore differences in embodied expertise. This chapter considers how NH produces a change in how people 'see' horses as the first step to successful training and recognizing horses as individuals, and how training changes how horses 'see' humans. The first step for many horses coming to NH is the process of Join-up – chapter three highlights the importance of this step for both humans and horses. Join-up fosters ideas of detachment to horses by considering them as members of a species whilst promoting engagement with an individual horse and human. By recognizing that detachment is the counterpart of engagement, and not its opposite, I show how these two ideas work together in NH. Further to this, chapter three discusses how training aids in the transition of horses from being 'wild' to 'tamed' through a process of enculturation.

Chapter four unpacks how human and horse create a shared method of communication during the next stages in training. My informants suggest this language allows horses to express that they are choosing to work alongside humans by showing trust in their human companion. I use the ideas of choice and trust to consider ideas of freedom in NH, and how the horse could be seen to be subject to *degrees of freedom* through certain interactions with humans. I then consider the limits and potentials of these degrees of freedom in the process of training, where ideas of domestication are considered further through discussion on the 'wild' and the 'tame'.

In chapter five I detail the emotional connections between human and horse that literal physical contact can provide through the role of touch and descriptions of shared feelings, with particular focus on the role that joy plays in these mutual relationships. Chapter six considers the everyday actions of human and horse and how they solidify the affective responses developed in NH training. The shift that NH produces in these 'horse cultures', from domination to respect, are shown through the

creation of horses as kin. Further to this, I highlight how becoming kin produces tensions in rational and emotional responses to horses.

Finally, in chapter seven I discuss more broadly ideas of horse welfare and horse rights within NH groups by investigating how ideas of the ‘natural’ are deployed by NH practitioners to validate claims of improved welfare in a cultural setting. The techniques of NH are often cited as being the ‘correct’ way to live with horses; I conclude by considering the extent to which this is true, and the damage caused by incorrect use of these techniques.

Chapter 1

Becoming Inspired: The people and the horses of a natural horsemanship community

'My goal is to leave the world a better place, for horses and people, than I found it'

Monty Roberts (1996: 365)

Natural horsemanship is a self-consciously ethical project. As the above quote from Monty Roberts shows, he is concerned with improving the lives and worlds of others. Natural horsemanship is often conceptualised by practitioners as a new ethical practice that it sits within debates of animal welfare, however, what is especially interesting about it as an ethical practice is that it does not spring from a discourse or language of animal rights or welfare. It is its own ethical vision for the improved welfare of horses that resonates with wider ethical debates surrounding animal welfare and rights. Roberts' own biographical narrative and his narrative of the necessity of NH is an overwhelmingly powerful aspect of his role as a moral exemplar. There are, of course, similarities between the language of animal activists and natural horsemanship practitioners, but it is through the narratives of trainers like Roberts that people reject the socially accepted norms of traditional horsemanship in the UK to adopt this method of living with horses. The following paragraphs attempt to reveal the seductive and persuasive nature of Roberts and NH:

We arrived at the equestrian centre early to try and secure ourselves tickets and good seats for the evening performance on the 'Stablemate to Soulmate' tour - run by Intelligent Horsemanship (IH, see Appendix A). These tours are run every year across the UK - each year a different inspirational name for the tour is decided – and feature performances by Monty Roberts and Kelly Marks. Many of us were not members of IH, and as such were not entitled to the £5 discount afforded to those who joined the (free) IH community officially. There are no private boxes or 'cheap seats' as in horse racing or the theatre: at a flat rate of £25, tickets were not cheap, but not so expensive as to be an exclusive event. By 7pm we had our tickets and joined the queue of other people anxiously waiting to enter the indoor arena and secure a seat with an unlimited

view of the proceedings. At a distinctly average 166cm, I live in fear of sitting behind tall people at the cinema or theatre, and this was no exception and potentially more important than ever: How was I to witness this incredible feat of horsemanship that everyone had told me about if I could not see it? I was not about to let someone with annoyingly big hair impede my view.

Luckily, we found seats on the ascending gallery lining one side of the spacious indoor school; technically we were in ‘the heavens’ in comparison to the other seats closer to the round pen, Roberts’ stage, but still close enough to share in all that happened. At what appeared to be over 80m in length and 40m in diameter, the space was more familiar with indoor showjumping competitions, but tonight it would allow us to witness Monty Roberts and Kelly Marks in action. The high ceilings did nothing but amplify the excited whispers that circulated the cold, airy, space - the perfect acoustics to build tension as we sat huddled together in our seats. In front of us, in the middle of the sand covered arena, is a circular pen made of two-meter high meshed metal sections that slot together, approximately eight meters in diameter. This round-pen is the hub of the whole show, everything important happens in this circular area; however, on first appearance, the pen does little more than remind me of a cage in which Roberts and the horse are trapped together and images of lion tamers in red tailcoats flash before my eyes.

An intimidating scaffold tower overlooks the round-pen; inside it and on top of it are many large lights and cameras for filming the work done inside the round pen. Outside of the pen is a pile of equipment that Monty or Kelly may need during the demonstration. There are saddles, bridles, bits, plastic sheets, hats, sticks with plastic bags tied to the end (for desensitizing nervous horses), blinkers, ropes, and lunge lines. Behind the spectator seating sections there are a few business stands advertising Monty Roberts or IH affiliated products. There is also a stand with a large banner overhead that signposts where you can ‘meet Monty!’ before the demo starts and during the half-time break and have him sign one of his own books. From our position above the crowds we saw people queuing at this stand for over forty five minutes for a brief meeting with their equestrian celebrity idol before the show started. Most of the people standing in this queue are women, and a few children, whilst their patient

partners that have been dragged along willingly or otherwise, keep seats warm and bags protected.

As the people behind us settle in to their seats I am knocked on the back of the head by a large, expensive, leather bag. The woman attached to the handle of the bag gives me a good look up and down before settling down on to her seat in her designer jeans, without saying sorry. She is dressed in what appears to be her finest equestrian gear; a Barbour jacket that barely conceals a loudly coloured Joules jumper, and sparkingly clean Dubarry boots. And she is not alone, many of the people (mostly women) here appear to be wearing equestrian or 'country' clothing that looks like it has never been near a horse. Perhaps it is because I am less familiar with men's equestrian fashion, but I did not notice the men to be as dressed up 'to the nines' quite as much. The phrase 'all the gear but no idea' is commonly uttered by those working in the equestrian world to describe someone dressed in these types of functional clothes but no practical ability with horses. I looked down sheepishly at my old faithful boots that were once upon a time used for competitions but are now relegated to yard wear, feeling foolish that I hadn't 'dressed up' for the occasion. I can see my fluffy blue sock poking out of the hole between the upper and the sole.

The only comment about the dress code before we left was "make sure you wrap up warm, these things are always freezing". I pulled my boots on carelessly that morning and will undoubtedly toss them just as casually back in their place at the end of the day to be replaced by fluffy (clean) socks, and I will mourn on the day that I have to throw them in the bin. The other people I work with are all similarly attired; James's laces are tied together in multiple places which makes them difficult to tie effectively and leaves him with a gentle shuffle; Daniel's jumpers regularly have holes in and he has to change his jacket multiple times a day if it rains before the water soaks through to his damaged knitwear; Tracey doesn't appear to own anything other than jeans. Back in their day our clothes and shoes would be considered expensive but they are now worn-in with a multitude of concealed holes, broken zips, and temporary repairs to eek a little more life out of them - but we are comfortable. When Tracey rides anything young or difficult she turns up the back of her well-worn body protector which is perfectly moulded to her body, lessening its effectiveness and ruining its sole purpose in life. This reduces its ability to protect her but it does make her more

comfortable and she argues that things are less likely to go wrong if she feels capable of moving freely. New or unworn clothes feel stiff and unforgiving against the body, foreign and at odds with familiar movements. If James doesn't do well at a competition he blames his expensive competition boots, "these bloody things won't let me bend my legs properly! How am I supposed to wrap them around the horse if I can't feel my bloody ankles!" We were the working class of the expensive equestrian world (and make up little of the audience): and the woman behind me seemed to know it.

In her book on Newmarket racing society, Cassidy provides an elitist account of a very different horse society in the UK where 'success' is a composite notion involving appearance, residence, connections and winning - a way of 'being in the world' which offers (self-fulfilling) proof of the theory of pedigree' (2002: 44). She also suggests that the relationship between human and horse is an 'intersubjectivity whereby gains and losses in status of the racehorse accrue to those with whom it is associated' (124). Samantha Hurn also notes in her work among Welsh cob breeders in Ceredigion, west Wales, that these horses were integral to her informants sense of identity and produced an intersubjectivity where it could be said that humans are equally as dominated by their horses, and the way of life it produces (2008a). The Welsh Cobs that her informants owned and bred were very much attached to ideas of value, either monetary or for social status, and 'a successful horse will bring 'fame' to all those hands he or she passes through' (Hurn 2008a: 347). 'Fame' in this case is linked to prestige in the showing ring, or in the production of successful offspring. Although Hurn notes that 'desirable human characteristics, both masculine and feminine' are 'projected on to nonhuman animals' (2008b: 25) (in this case the Welsh cobs), I did not observe a similar engendering of horses throughout my fieldwork.

Natural horsemanship practitioners experience a similar but different relationship with horses compared to these two examples of British 'horse culture', emphasizing that horses are picked for purpose in a different way. Success is measured by the development of the individual relationship and not in public spectacles or competitions; success or failure is measured on a more personal level that directly reflects individual opinions of the self. Natural horsemanship is viewed as having no specific elitist following and instead, skill with horses and training is celebrated and

held in high regard, but is not a necessity. Racehorses and successful Welsh cobs are the epitomisation of years and years of careful breeding whereas any horse can be used in natural horsemanship training. Horses are celebrated simply for being horses, not because of their pedigrees. In the case of both Hurn (2008b) and Cassidy (2002), this careful breeding is recited in patrilineal terms. As Cassidy notes, sales catalogues often give a more detailed report of the dam line. Her informer explained that this occurred:

...on the grounds that the dam line is the weakness that must be shored up by being associated with successful relatives, as if to reassure potential buyers that the mare will not detract too much from the ability of the stallion in his offspring. (2002: 147)

I found that natural horsemanship is a nation-wide community that is not protective of its secrets. There were no suggestions of ‘outsiders’ that I could find (except perhaps a gentle tension between different groups) and access to the club is granted simply by showing enthusiastic interest. On the other hand, Cassidy (2002) suggests that the inner workings of racing society are protected by insider knowledge and the use of an intentionally mystifying language as a means to keep people out:

The style and content of the language is also significant, because communication is not only intended to exclude, but also to create the impression that the interlocutors are in possession of greater power than is actually the case. The content of the language serves to mystify the outsider or newcomer by implying that the speaker holds powers over uncontrollable processes (21)

Words about racing are ‘exercises in mystification’ (21), where conversations between trainers, owners, lads, and jockeys are shrouded in mist to ‘outsiders’ and dominated by names of horses, pedigrees, performance records, relationships to winners and dates of victories. In natural horsemanship, words are used to include people, or to inspire, or to encourage, or to educate. From the outside, the ‘horse world’ in general still seems complicated and ungraspable to many, but the specific language of natural horsemanship groups are open to the public, and people are

actively encouraged to learn in order to become a practitioner and connect with horses. Being a part of Newmarket racing society extends beyond talking about pedigree, class, and language; it is also literally embodied. The ability to ‘talk horse’ is augmented by the appearance of people in these circles: Clothes are a major factor in this translation of pedigree into class. They should be ‘worn in without being scruffy’ and be fit for purpose (2002: 27). Cassidy describes two types of Newmarket ‘body’, the trainer and jockey, that represent racing nobility and the hard-working employee; but each of these two body types fit the landscape that they are a part of, helped in part by the clothes that they wear. Even the horses wear ‘clothes’ that are a reflection of the owner or trainer; the colours that the horse and jockey wear represent the stable that the horse is from, to the point that Cassidy remarks that it is hard to tell where the rider ends and the horse begins.

Most part-time practitioners of natural horsemanship wear branded, new looking clothes, whereas trainers tend to verge on scruffy (at least on their home turf). I noticed no definitive class distinction present within these groups, although I would note that the majority of those I worked alongside would describe themselves as middle-class women. However, a hierarchy is formed based on recognized levels of experience and ‘horsey’ qualifications. There is the potential to gain status through the horse if it performs well, whereas only personal pedigree will do as the ultimate status symbol in Newmarket (Cassidy 2002). At the time of Cassidy’s fieldwork, only 11% of Jockey Club members were female - and this was considered too much by many in this male-dominated industry. However, at the lower levels of this world, stable hands and the like, women dominate. They were considered to have a ‘gentler touch’ with the horses that is appreciated on the studs and training yards where a closer connection with the horses is valued (2002). The opposite is true in the wider horse-world where, in general, more women partake.

Cassidy normalises the traditional modes of horsemanship that are still widely practised in the horse racing industry (2002, 2007) - although the harsher aspects are glossed over by Cassidy - but which are highly criticised by NH enthusiasts of every group. An interesting link between these two projects that stands them on opposite sides of an intricate chessboard, is how many ex-racehorses end up in the hands of natural horsemanship practitioners who firmly believe that they have ‘saved’ them

from the racing industry. Racehorses are started under saddle at a physically and mentally immature age, and are destined for glory or betrayal at the hands of their humans. As much as natural horsemanship would see itself as the saviour of the racehorse (and potentially all horses that are under the domination of humans), there are some distinct similarities between these two societies that highlight their differences through shared characteristics. Racing is one of the ‘traditional’ strongholds of horse society in Britain, whereas natural horsemanship embraces ideals of the ethically charged 21st century: from the outside both are seemingly exclusive worlds of embedded knowledge, however, NH as a community of practice is open and available to all.

Natural horsemanship in action: The role of the public demonstration

Indoor schools have a very particular way of evoking a response from me, and they hold a multitude of memories: the memory of my horses; the cold air hitting my lungs; sand and rubber that has crept inside my boots; the fresh paint smell from wooden jumps; a hint of leather, both the smell and the feel of its suppleness from the reins in my hands; a waft of coffee as someone passes through; the springy feeling under your feet as you walk across it; the feeling under your horse's feet as you ride across it. It reminds me of competitions as a teenager; late and early mornings schooling horses when it's quiet; being too cold to speak; walking jumping courses with friends full of nervous excitement about the round to come; the euphoria that comes from a great performance put in by my equine partner and I. They remind me of horses from my past, and make me excited about horses I've yet to meet. Just being in such a place for the demonstration leaves me feeling expectant.

The whole room is full of a soft buzzing noise before the show starts, reverberating against the high ceilings and reflecting back to us. Everyone appears to be experiencing a similar feeling of anticipation. This oscillating hum is punctuated by the odd caught phrase as you walk past an excited cluster of people; “Henry jumped his socks off last night in my lesson”; “the vet said it will take another few months before he's back in work”; “well, you know Sara! She's up for anything!” Many of the people in attendance booked their tickets months in advance, and it is seen as a real privilege to come and see Monty work, as many believe him to be the pinnacle of

what a trainer should be. Next to me is Caroline, a client of Daniels, who told me after the show was over about her personal introduction to IH:

I suppose it was about ten years ago now when I first got interested in all this Natural Horsemanship stuff, just on a casual basis. And then I saw Monty work, and everything just fell into place! He showed me what I had been imagining – in a very abstract way of course! I had been looking for a way to work with Henry [her horse], to get him to understand what I wanted, and to trust me. That demo I attended started the ball rolling! This is the third one I've attended now, but Henry and I have been using these techniques, and having lessons with Daniel. We aren't pros obviously, but the progress is incredible! He neighs every time he sees me, and seems happy to work. I truly believe in these techniques; it's what has made Henry and I really bond.

Other more seasoned visitors I chatted with from the audience after the show do not seem to value the experience any less:

Every time it gets me! I have to bring tissues because I know I'm going to cry. Everyone else seems to be transfixed and here's me blubbing away in the corner! But these horses, when they make that decision to trust him, it's just amazing. You can actually see the moment I think; just a little glance his way, a moment, a hesitation. Every horse is different, each one has experienced something different, but when they end up here, with Monty, you just know that they're going to get better now. That their lives are going to be better. Their owners knew they had to do something, and they turned to Monty. It's so incredible.

People seem to have come to the demonstration with friends or family that are also 'horsey' - although there are a few unwilling husbands who have been dragged along by enthusiastic wives – and when you put horsey people together they are, undoubtedly, going to 'talk horse'. The ladies sitting in front of me were enigmatically discussing a mutual friend who was having difficulties with a novice horse she had purchased recently. The seemingly more experienced lady said: "that is

why a novice person should not own a young horse”; to which her companion replied optimistically “yes, but they can grow together”; “apparently they only paid £750 for it”; “well, you get what you pay for”. The whole audience seemed to have an opinion on one thing or another about one person or another, yet everyone I talked to was there to learn (and see a show of course!). Having respect in the horse world will get you a long way, from a personal and business perspective, and Roberts is held in extraordinarily high regard by many Intelligent Horsemanship practitioners and part-time enthusiasts alike; many would give – maybe not a hand – but, a finger to learn directly from him. Annabel, a horse trainer and business owner who I met after the demonstration described what it would mean to her to train with Roberts:

If I could go to Flag is Up Farm, if I could work alongside Monty, that would be incredible. If he could just watch me work and then praise me for it, that would be a highlight of my life! Just to have recognition from someone like him, that I was a good horsewoman, it would mean so much coming from him.

Because of the mantra of different natural horsemanship groups, everyone I talked to felt like they had something to learn from Monty tonight. Many feel that it is not possible to ever stop learning with natural horsemanship, and Monty often humbly admits that even he has much left to learn, that there is so much left for the horses to teach him:

Often, when I see people working with horses, it seems clear to me why a horse might be confused. We humans are far from perfect at understanding the mind of a species whose behavioural patterns are so far removed from our own. I wish I could live another hundred years because I believe we will ‘get it’ much better as time progresses. (2007: 3)

Suddenly, the lights dim and the conversations are stopped in their tracks - gossip can wait. Inspiring music begins to play and Roberts runs in to the centre of the arena, accompanied by loud applause and swinging spotlights.

He is always shorter than I expect him to be, and older. “He’s turning eighty you know!” Daniel exclaims, “I hope I’m doing as well as him at that age!” I can feel Caroline’s excitement on the left hand side of me, and James and Tracey’s scepticism on the other. Caroline is a believer, she expects to witness something great tonight; Tracey is waiting to be convinced; Daniel is his usual calm self, critical but fair; James believes whatever Daniel and Tracey do; I am trying not miss anything. The lights come back on and Roberts begins to talk. He is enthusiastic and engaging while he speaks, and possesses a natural gift for story telling. He thanks everyone for coming before launching into a brief history of his life, “By the time I was 11 years old my father had broken over 100 bones in my body....” His story is shocking, heartbreaking, and convincing. His father was rough to his horses and rough to his children. The family had a horse business in the US, where horses came to be trained by Roberts’ father and where horses were, literally, broken; “I saw my father on countless occasions nearly beat or ride a horse to death, and I knew I had to find a better way”. Yet he does not condemn many of those who are cruel - “they just don’t know any better yet.” He implores us all to consider our actions with horses, and to educate others as best we can when the opportunity arises. Briefly he discusses his work with the Her Majesty the Queen’s horses: as a career highlight, as an interesting anecdote, and as a convincingly authoritative example of his method. Before the show starts we are impressed by his life’s work and collectively prepped for a miracle.

An excited silence settles across the crowd as Roberts says: “Well, let’s begin then. Can I have the first horse please?” The slight tension that follows these words is accompanied by a wave of movement across the crowd as the first horse is brought out and people crane their necks and pivot in their seats towards the doors to see what type of horse it is. It’s a small grey horse with a head that looks too coarse for its more athletic body. It has a forwards, active, walk step that suggests a slight arrogance. It takes stock of the crowd and the paraphernalia outside the round-pen with little more than a cursory glance before marching straight through the doorway and in to the round-pen. It is there to be saddled and ridden for the first time in its life. Most of the other horses that were brought out that evening had a good look and a ‘spook’ at all the commotion that they are suddenly confronted with as they come into the arena. Monty tells the crowd in his soft American accent that he picked this horse “because it looks like a buckner, like it will buck like a professional”. The owners of the little grey

horse are then brought into the arena to introduce the horse. Roberts is barely half listening to what the owners say, he is far more engaged with the horse already:

Roberts: “Hello, hello, good evening. And how are you today?”

Owner: “Hi. Good, thank you.”

Roberts: “Good. What’s your name? And your horses?”

Owner: “Sam. And my horse is called Cassey.”

Roberts: “Pam?”

Owner: “Sam.”

Roberts: “Sam and Katie, eh? What a pair...”

Kelly: “Cassey”

Roberts: “What’s that now Kelly?”

Kelly: “The horse is called Cassey.”

Roberts: “Oh, ok..... and why is she here?”

He then chats briefly with the horse’s owner, who is sitting down with Kelly and a microphone just outside the pen, about what training they have done with the horse so far. The answer is very little. They mention that the horse has worn a saddle (but with no girth strap under the horses belly to hold it on) briefly ‘to see what it would do’, but provide no more details of exactly what the horse did do. Roberts then emphasizes how important it is to girth a horse correctly from the start, to always use a girth with a saddle on a youngster and to do it up firmly. All the while the little grey horse is meandering casually around inside the round pen, nonchalant and unfazed by its new environment. The man standing in the middle of the pen holds very little interest to

her. But then it was time to work and pay attention to this quiet stranger in the new centre of her world: “Ok, Katie. Let’s get started” says Monty.

Then, with a quick flick of a coiled lunge line across his body, he sends the horse away from him around the inside of the round-pen, in whichever direction the horse chooses to go (clockwise or ant-clockwise). Accompanying this obvious show of movement, Roberts’ body language is also always sending the horse forwards. He stays slightly behind the horse with square shoulders and keeps eye contact – the stance of a predator. Round and round the pen the little horse runs, if she breaks pace from a quick trot Monty looses the lunge line towards the horses back-end so that they make contact - this merely serves to push her forwards and does not hurt. After she has travelled approximately ten times around the perimeter, Roberts asks her to change direction by moving across its path. After another ten laps in this direction she is asked to change direction again to the original one. The little mare is still enthusiastic and full of running, but glistening slightly with sweat under the bright lights of the arena. From here Monty explains that he is looking for certain behaviours from her to show that she is ready to Join-up with him; lowering of the head, licking and chewing, the inside ear locked on him, and a decrease in the size of the circle. As if on cue, she begins to exhibit these signs. Roberts sees these movements and allows her to walk and gently come to a stop before moving across the horse’s path with his shoulders hunched and eyes lowered. He passes his left shoulder in front of her and away again and ‘asks’ her to join him.

The pressure of the air around us, the audience, feels like it is literally pushing us closer together. If Monty fails now we’ll feel it, together. Hope, disbelief, and anxiety all mingle inside of us, willing the horse to Join-up – as if our thoughts and feelings could make it happen. By contrast, Monty is calm. Waiting. Expectant. He already knows that she is ready, he’s just waiting for her to know it too. My momentary realization of these feelings makes me acutely aware of my extremities. Do I always sit like this? My face is scrunched up, will people notice? I’m breathing too loudly, surely? Or maybe I’m not breathing enough – inhale - how much oxygen do I need again? But if I move, if I change anything I’m doing, I might mess this whole thing up. If I uncross my legs the horse won’t do it. But it does - exhale. The little mare does not even hesitate and walks straight over to his left shoulder. As Monty walks

around inside the round-pen the mare looks to be attached as if by an invisible string, like a well-trained dog staying to heel.

He stops, walks forwards, stops, turns, and turns the other way to show that she is truly following him. At the exit she hesitates, swinging her head longingly to stare in the direction she came from. Roberts waits patiently with his back turned and she comes back to him. As they pass through the centre of the round pen together he stops to pick up a lunge line and clips it on to the special Dually halter that she is wearing, creating a physical connection between them. Her movements are now limited to the length of the line that Roberts chooses to use. Although she has 'joined-up' with him, a rope is used for the next stage to keep her close by. He explains quickly what happened and what happens next:

She chose to come to me. There was no force used. No brutality. She made the decision to come to me. I put pressure on her, pushing her, pushing her, until she was ready. Until she asked to be let back in, close to me. Because that's where it's safe. So now I need to check that she's with me, and that she trusts me. We touch high where the lions go (Roberts runs his hand across her back), and low where the dogs go (he runs his hands across her stomach and behind her elbows).

He goes on to explain that it's necessary to see if she'll pick up each one of her feet, that it only has to be for a second, because a worried horse won't give you their feet, their means of escape. Now they need to learn to communicate with each other. During the process of Join-up, Monty was using the language of 'equus', his own term for the way that humans mimic the natural movements that horses use to communicate with each other: Now they need to create a shared language that both parties can understand and respond to. He clips a second lunge line on to the opposite side of the halter and sends her out on the circle again. One line goes straight from her halter to his right hand, the other line goes from the opposite side of her head, around her back end and to his left hand. Like this he encourages her forwards, changes direction and asks her to stop and back up:

The back-up is so important, and so often forgotten. I'm not pulling her back, you can see I've only got two fingers on the ropes. Two fingers, that's all you need. You should only use minimal pressure, the smallest amount possible. If you start strong or firm you will always have to be firm.

After five minutes or so of this basic lunge work, Roberts halts the mare, drops the lines and goes to her head to unclip one side – “ok, I think she's ready!” A staff member then places the saddle, saddle pad, girth and breast strap in the centre of the pen and Roberts adopts the imaginary voice of the horse as she goes over to investigate this new presence in their space:

Roberts: “What do you think that is?”

Horse: “It's a wolf Mr Roberts. (Crowd laughs) My uncle taught me to run away from wolves”

Roberts: “No, it's a saddle”

Horse: “Well, my uncle told me about them too. He said you have to buck 'em off”

Roberts: “Why would you do that?”

Horse: “Because they tickle”

Roberts: “Oh really? What else did your uncle tell you?”

Horse: “He said not to trust humans”

Roberts: “Oh. Well then why did you come over and Join-up with me a second ago?”

Horse: “That's different” (crowd laughs).

Caroline explains to me quietly that it is a similar pretend conversation that he used for the last display she went to for a horse that had never worn a saddle before in a

demonstration, and that even seasoned audience members still chuckle as he says it. But, as the saddle is quietly put on the grey horse's back the audience is transfixed. At one point the horse begins to move before Monty has had a chance to get the saddle on securely and a communal intake of breath can be felt from around the room. But Monty remains calm and gently stops the horse quietly uttering "she's a keen one, I told 'ya!" before continuing to saddle the mare and send it back out around the inside edge of the pen again. No bucks from the little grey horse. Most of us have probably never met Monty or this little grey horse, but momentarily we feel like we know them. Both have had to become vulnerable in the process of trusting each other, to emerge stronger together – Roberts places himself in danger by working with a young, unpredictable horse and the aim of the performance is for the horse to trust him with new phenomena - and the audience can see this. Roberts emerges as a leader, to both the horse and to us. Indoor schools now also remind me of the first time I saw a horse join up with Monty Roberts.

In the space of ten minutes Roberts and the little horse appear to form a connection: They went from perfect strangers to allies against the various questions that Roberts then begins to ask the little mare. As he begins to expose her to strange stimuli their connection becomes clearer to the audience. Join-up is merely the initial building block to the relationship; the challenges that the pair of them are exposed to after that are what shape the relationship. Roberts is, of course, in control of the initial parameters of these events, but the horse provides the variables that Roberts then has to work with - both are responsible for shaping the outcome. As the saddle was placed on the horse it looked worried, but gentle reassurance from Roberts was enough for the horse to accept this new item. There seems to be a constant steady flow of language between them, one that is non-verbal. The slight shifts of each of their postures, small glances, ear flicks, head tilts, and exhales all contribute to the continuation of this silent conversation. This connection is temporary and fleeting, at the end of the demo this horse will go back home with its owners – to form new kinds of connections with them, and potentially forget that Roberts ever existed.

These performances of natural horsemanship are enough to stimulate transformative social processes to the public who witness it. Human and horse both play a role in the production of the performance, and both are affected: even with no audience, the act

of Join-up is a performance in itself, where human and horse react to the other, and the human momentarily adopts behaviours of a horse. The connection made by the performance is ultimately temporary in its nature as the human and horse will become separate from each when the horse goes back to the stable, or to the field, and the human back to their job, their house, their family – but that is not to say that one or the other is not more permanently changed by the encounter. Watching the performance we are on a threshold of belief – betwixt and between the outcome that we want but don't dare to assume – and Roberts gently guides us in the direction that he believes is right. He takes on the imaginary voice of the horse – speaks for one that can't – to help us to understand what the horse is experiencing. He seems to have an ability to connect with a horse that feels foreign to us bystanders and daydreamers in the audience. He helps us to understand this connection to the horse that he is working with by explaining his actions and his responses so that when he connects, we can catch a glimpse of what it might feel like.

Horse trainers as moral exemplars

Horse after horse comes in to the arena to be worked on, six in total (four for round-pen work and two horses that are bad to load into a horse-box), and we are transfixed by each one. Monty and Kelly take a horse each for this final stage of loading horses into a box. Both have on headsets to talk to the audience and work within view of everyone. For this section the round-pen is removed and a horse box and a car with a trailer attached are brought into the arena. These horses are not asked to Join-up with Kelly and Monty, instead, both are schooled with the Dually halter. They are made to back-up, come forwards, and move sideways until minimal pressure can be used. Monty and Kelly explain that it is natural for a horse to be scared of loading in to a dark, confined, space and show us that by breaking the process down into small training steps that it is possible to overcome this fear. The horse might be scared of the noise of their feet on the ramp, so the horse is asked to step on and across a wooden board on the floor first to become accustomed to the sound; the horse may also be scared of its sides being touched in such a cramped space, so two sections from the round pen are used as a channel for the horse to walk through, that are gradually narrowed until their sides rub against them; the horse might not know how

to manoeuvre their feet inside the box, so Kelly demonstrates how to move the horses quarters around in a small space.

While doing these things, all eyes are fixed on Monty. Kelly is undoubtedly an exceptional horsewoman but Roberts' showmanship keeps the audience entranced. He is a performer, a business man, a father, a husband, and a horse lover. He understands that horses must have a job to do in this world if they are to continue to have a purpose, and horses are his business but also his life. He has an easy grace around the horses, which must be hard to come by at the age of seventy nine. He is calm and gentle, but also persuasive with the horses in the demonstration and the audience can't help but feel respect for him as they watch. But more than anything, he is inspirational to people. At another demonstration that Caroline and I attended together, she voiced her admiration for him:

He's just incredible! Every time I see him work I'm just in awe of him. He really does seem to speak to the horse. I stand in the school and I swear my horse is giving me the finger half the time, like she knows what I want but I can't say anything to convince her. She is a French mare though, maybe I should try speaking French?! And he's always so calm, I read somewhere that his pulse is always under 60 beats per minute – wait, that can't be right can it? – regardless, he's very calm. When things go wrong I feel like there's a little hurricane inside of me.

Natural horsemanship breaks from a traditional past, both in the US and the UK, in previously accepted horsemanship practices and celebrated skills in horse handling, care, and riding. NH people are moving away from these practices they consider as 'violent' and 'outdated' towards new ones that adopt principles that will lead to a 'better future with horses' (Roberts in a public demonstration). Trainers such as Roberts break with the traditional history of horsemanship as they seek to counter these ideas using a 'moral authority' of a non-violent future, one that stands in stark contrast to the 'rough and ready' style of many traditionalists. Trainers who are held in high regard act as exemplars, even at the more local level, and lend great gravitational weight to their cause as they push for these moral ideals alongside horses. In a similar way, Humphrey's discusses how Mongol people in a post-socialist

society use the idea of a powerful or wise person from their ‘deep past’ as an exemplar to lend a ‘moral authority’ to their current decisions (1992: 375).

Humphrey states that an exemplar (*üligler*) is chosen who possess qualities that they admire as a process of ‘discovering and cultivating oneself’ (1997: 36). She goes further to say that in Western traditions, sympathy for others is considered in moral actions whereas Mongols place more emphasis on individual growth where ‘the core of morality is primarily referred to the self, adjudicating one’s own actions as good or bad *for oneself*’ (32, italics in original). The exemplar is represented by both their role as a teacher or as someone to take inspiration from, and by their words or actions. These discourses have multiple meanings and as such are interpreted subjectively by the individual - thus how these words are interpreted often leads to the particular moral authority that the individual desires to negotiate particular circumstances or decisions, as such the *üligler* is ‘made exemplary’ (1997: 37). Trainers of natural horsemanship often fulfil the role of an exemplar for many part-time practitioners. Their words and actions are put on display during demonstrations to the public, or in one-on-one training sessions where they put on a show of their skills to validate these more acceptable methods and techniques in front of the eyes of dedicated part-time practitioners and newcomers alike. Much of the training places great emphasis on the development of the individual and their ethical journey alongside horses, however, their actions are considered in conjunction with the individuality of the horse. Therefore the process of cultivating the moral self in natural horsemanship is only possible with regard to the feelings, emotions, and welfare of the horse.

Monty Roberts himself provides a particularly strong, effective, case because of his enigmatic, open, and engaging personality which appears to give him the status of a ‘celebrity’ horse trainer. Even those who practice a different branch of natural horsemanship will be familiar with his work and some of his life story; even many non-horsey people whom I talked with recognized the name, or associated him with the book (and film) *The Horse Whisperer* as ‘the man who listens to horses’ (although the book and film are actually a fictional portrayal of another well known, though less idolized practitioner, Buck Brannaman). Roberts was born in Salinas, California, in 1935 and was literally in the saddle and on the back of a horse before he would walk, sitting in front of his mother on her own horse. During a busy, turbulent, and

interesting childhood, Roberts was a ranch-hand, riding instructor, child film star, stunt double horse rider, quarter horse racing jockey, and champion rodeo rider. His father features prominently in his autobiography as a key figure in shaping his life. Roberts witnessed countless acts of abuse towards horses by his father, and was often beaten himself: on one occasion he witnessed how his father, a police officer at the time, beat a man to death. These early experiences at the hands of his father has made Roberts reiterate on several occasions throughout his five books that he owes everything in his life to him - both the opportunities that his father afforded him around horses from a young age, and the realization that he wanted to do it very differently. However, it wasn't until the age of thirteen when Roberts got the opportunity to round up one hundred and fifty Mustangs in the wilds of Nevada for a Wild Horse Race⁵ that he got to watch and understand horse behaviour in a natural environment for the first time. It was then that he began to develop the language of 'Equus' for himself and, subsequently, the process of Join-up:

From this experience I'd begin to learn a language, a silent language which I have subsequently termed 'Equus'. I'd learn the basic theories which were to allow me to define accurately and convincingly the principles of my life's work. (1997:79)

Although it has never been explicitly stated by Roberts in any of his work what (if any) his religious upbringing or beliefs are, his words and actions have struck religious tones with many of his followers; these people have suggested - in blogs and articles written about Roberts - that his teachings and techniques resonate with a distinctly Christian ethos. The strength with which people believe in the power and transformative potential of natural horsemanship, both to the horse and to themselves, has a religious-like weight in their adoption of it. However, many people do treat their change in horsemanship beliefs with a corresponding change in their whole perspective of horses, drawing on secular versions of conversion narratives to

⁵ These races are made up of untouched horses. In a team of two or three people they must saddle, bridle, mount the previously unridden horse and complete one lap of a track. The first pair of horse and rider across the finish line wins. It is often a very rough and barbaric spectacle with humans and horses often getting physically injured in the process, not to mention the large amount of mental trauma the horse is exposed to.

describe their transformation in horsemanship practice and philosophy⁶. During a semi-structured interview with a few of the audience members at various demonstrations throughout the Autumn I asked them the question: “Do you feel like your attitude and awareness towards horses has changed since practicing natural horsemanship?” The overwhelming consensus was that they had ‘more patience’ and ‘more respect’ for horses along with growing awareness that traditional methods were ‘unacceptable’ and that natural horsemanship had ‘opened their eyes to a better way’. One participant went as far to say:

It was like I had walked around with a blindfold on for years. I just believed what everyone told me about horses because I knew no better, and I assumed that they did. When they told me to smack my horse, hard, with a whip, for bucking..... I did. And if it bucked again I was told to hit him again. And I did. I didn’t understand that it was so wrong. But now it’s like natural horsemanship has opened my eyes to what horses are feeling, and I know I don’t have to walk around with that blindfold any more. I’ve started to really appreciate that horses, that all animals, deserve to be treated with kindness and patience. I went from a person who accepted cruelty to horses as long as I didn’t feel responsible, to someone who gets irate when they see horses being badly treated! I actually shouted at someone the other day for smacking their horse! That’s something I would never have dreamed of doing before, but now I feel like I know enough. I discovered Monty’s way, and it changed everything.

While Roberts is displaying his skills with a variety of difficult, untrained, or seemingly wild horses, he is constantly talking about past abusive techniques that horses have suffered at the hands of humans, often citing his father’s methods. His words are meant for the audience around him, but his body movements and actions remain focused on the horse he is working with, and their responses. It is a powerful sight to see him leading a horse that appeared unwilling and untrainable a mere ten minutes ago, to one that follows quietly at his shoulder. The horse does not appear to

⁶ This project was originally intended to be done in California, and I had anticipated a much stronger religious presence within the worlds of NH practitioners. However, throughout my fieldwork, there was never any assumption that NH was influenced or shaped by religious or spiritual actions, and rarely did ‘horse talk’ coincide with a religious-like discourse.

fear him or be at all stressed in these moments as he explains what this horse may have experienced at the hands of a more violent, traditional, horse trainer.

Roberts' personal experience plays a vital role in his own journey to what later became branded as 'natural horsemanship'. His words suggest a better way of being in the world, and we hear them and witness their power through actions in front of us. It is easy to feel empathetic to Monty, as a fellow human, but this extends to the horse he is holding, and to other horses that have suffered through what natural horsemanship practitioners would consider abuse at the hands of traditionalists. Monty absentmindedly scratches the horse as he talks, a fond gesture that seems like second-nature to him, and one he has probably done hundreds of times to hundreds of different horses, and it becomes clear to many in the audience that other methods are not necessary. His words remind people of a past while his actions bring his ideal future into reality. The simple steps that are laid out by him and other trainers seem both miraculous and achievable at the same time. As myself and my co-workers and -practitioners leave the arena, we seem to walk with a positive feeling of hope and possibility that makes us want to go home and train horses! From the sceptics such as James, to those who are already dedicated followers such as Caroline, to myself trying to be as unbiased and opened minded as possible – we all felt uplifted by what we had witnessed that night at the demo. Even James managed to grudgingly agree that “yeah, he was pretty good”. On the drive home from the demonstration Caroline said:

Every time I come out feeling optimistic, that I can really make a difference to my horse. I'm always excited to get home and just see him again after these demos. See his big ears bobbing over to me in the dark, welcoming me. I just want to get going and achieve things. Of course, it never works out as well as when Monty does it.

This feeling of inspiration always filtered in to the next few days during training. If something went wrong or we were faced with a difficult situation, upon the return of calm after a horse had become lively or potentially out of control, we would joke to each other, “what would Monty do?” This was usually shouted from across the yard

or from the edge of the arena from someone casually watching all from afar whilst leaning on the wooden fence, most often it stimulated a collection of smiles from everyone within earshot. This phrase was never meant as a means to mock or patronize (the handler, the horse, or Monty himself) but as means to reflect on the situation in a positive manner once the training was back on track, that maybe we had ‘done what Monty would do’. A quick shout of “WWMD?!” was sure to release any residual tension in the training area. We reached out to the idea of these exemplars in moments like these, where things could go wrong. Never was the phrase “you should have done that better” used during teaching sessions. Instead, these gentle jokes allowed the handler to reflect on their own response, and a myriad of potential different outcomes - how it might have been done better, or alternatively in the least. However, ‘what would Monty do’ also gives a feeling of accomplishment when the desired outcome was achieved, that we reached a goal that we were striving for. To do what Monty would do.

Concluding thoughts

Throughout her fieldwork, on a variety of yards and environments, Cassidy was constantly taking on the role of the apprentice (2002). Like myself, although she was a horse person prior to her fieldwork, becoming an apprentice was the perfect avenue into these worlds. Tuition and guidance for both of us was less than forthcoming initially, with great emphasis being placed on learning by doing – even if this did amount to mental stress and physical injuries! Many horses that end up at a NH-focused training yard are often there because their owners have run out of other options. It is an expensive method but the emotional value of the animal means that people are prepared to pay large amounts of money to create their ‘perfect partner’. Working with these horses often had the potential to be dangerous, although the risk of this is carefully managed, unlike Cassidy’s experience where she was often told that:

Those who chose to deal with them [racehorses in training] were deranged, whilst those who agreed to ride such creatures clearly had a death wish. In retrospect, by accepting this challenge I tacitly assumed that there was some

mechanism as legitimate peripheral participation, whereby, 'if learning is about increased access to performance, then the way to maximise learning is to perform, not to talk about it' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 22). It was only when I began to accumulate scars that I realised the extent to which my own body was implicated in this process (2002: 114).

After a few days accruing bruises and rope burns, I certainly began to learn how to avoid personal injury. However, the myriad of books and online facilities that are dedicated to teaching people 'natural' techniques and how to improve their relationship with horses, would have the greats of the horse racing world turning in their graves; this type of 'book learning' is heavily frowned upon by the racing community where it is widely assumed that you either have the skills innately within you or not. Cassidy was believed to have the skills hidden within her by virtue of her Irish heritage (the Irish are commonly associated with 'good' horsemanship), whereas natural horsemanship sells itself as a form of training that anyone can do, with or without innate connections to horses. The positive results of this training method allow the individual businesses and groups to sustain their own, self-perpetuating, momentum in a similar manner to that of the importance of careful breeding in Thoroughbred racing societies. People only need to witness one 'miracle' to believe in the elite breeding hypothesis (or natural horsemanship respectively) - the talk of the auctioneer, the trainer, the owner, all add to this veil. The same could be said of Roberts' words (or those of any respected trainer) that preclude the 'miracle' of an untrainable horse being 'tamed' for a performance witnessed by people. The role of trainers as exemplars act in a similar manner to those which Humphrey discusses in her work in post-soviet Mongolia (1992, 1997), where they help people to focus on and navigate towards the desired moral outcome of their training. However, while Mongols are ultimately concerned about individual growth, practitioners of natural horsemanship rely on the discourse and actions of their chosen exemplars in order to help them grow together with their horse in a manner that they see as being morally appropriate. Natural horsemanship is placed in stark contrast with traditional methods of 'cruel' horse training by using the moral authority of respected trainers to lend weight to their ideals of a non-violent, mutually beneficial, future with horses.

Chapter 2

The Horseman's Gaze

We were surrounded on all sides.

Twenty or more thoroughbred horses circled around us - their wild manes and streaming tails billowing as they danced lightly across the ground. There was a gentle camaraderie between them; a playful nip here, a raised leg there, with the occasional powerful leap into the air or burst of speed. They moved as one swarming mass as we stood, transfixed, in the middle of them. Our critical eyes moved across their bodies and down to their feet: assessing their movement, joint flexion, and overall confirmation. The complete picture of each horse we became interested in became branded in our minds as we contemplated their physique, and matched it with an assumption of their personality. Horses that were not deemed worthy of our time were forgotten as we turned our shoulders to follow the ones that were.

Our situation could have been precarious; we were merely feet away on occasion from flashing hooves and heaving bodies. But each horse seemed very aware of their personal space, and how close they were to us at all times – even though it felt like they tested these boundaries on occasion! And while we were watching, assessing them, they were doing the same thing to us. We were intruders in their environment, and they couldn't work out what we were doing there yet. Were we a threat, or something to be intrigued by? Were we objects placed for their amusement, or a danger? So far, we had done nothing to startle them and our presence was a source of excitement more than anything.

We were there to buy some horses for a client of Stuart's. Each horse that surrounded us was a thoroughbred, bred for racing or already in training, but most were unaccustomed to human presence. Unspoilt. We were there to see how they moved and how they acted without restraint – just as horses. Their behaviour within the herd was a good indication of their personalities if you know what to look for. Stuart was

looking at they how they reacted to each other, their place in the hierarchy and how they interacted with those that appeared to be above and below them. Hierarchical dominance was not an issue to be concerned with, but aggression or an unwillingness to be submissive to those above them could potentially be an issue for handling and training.

“Just go out to the field”, they said; “They’ll be fine”, they said; “Just be aware”, they said. I suppose they were right, nobody died – but at the time it felt like one close call after the other. Each time a horse got too close I flinched and shrunk backwards into an empty space behind me, Stuart barely blinked:

Look at how this one moves! Do you see that Kirsty? That line from his haunches down to his hock, perfect. Great angle on his shoulders too, I bet he really moves when he gets going. He looks kind too, he keeps glancing this way, a little inquisitive. I like that. Not the boss, but not bullied; he seems secure in himself, that’s a good thing.

Stuart and Daniel, along with their clients of both human and horse persuasion, played an instrumental part in my ethnographic fieldwork and apprenticeship in natural horsemanship. Both trainers are based in Yorkshire, with Stuart travelling around Yorkshire and Cumbria visiting private yards and homes to teach clients or train horses. Daniel’s influence came mainly from his family background in horses, which were very much ‘in the blood’ in his case. Stuart came from a self-taught background; he came to natural horsemanship slowly, dabbling and practicing many different types until producing a hybrid version of his own.

Stuart saw so much in this horse just from this brief encounter, a stare that is perfected over the years. His critical, educated, gaze picked up positive physical, behavioural and emotional traits about the horses he was interested in. Where I was a true outsider in this herd, Stuart fitted in because he understood where each horse belonged, and could see how they were going to react. I could not. I was just lost in the middle of a swirling mixture of different brown horses; and it was terrifying. His lifelong experience with horses, and repeated practice in reading horses based on an understanding of horse behaviour and herd dynamics, has given him the skills to ‘see’

these horses in a way I couldn't. I was able to see these physical attributes (at close proximity!) but was, at the time, unable to make such judgments on personality or their potential reactions from such a brief moment with them.

Being able to see in the way that Stuart was capable could be considered as a form of 'skilled vision' (Grasseni 2007b: 3). Ingold suggests that 'what we see is inseparable from how we see, and how we see is always a function of the practical activity in which we are engaged' (Ingold 2000: 260), as such, there is no single way of seeing but a multitude of possible interpretations. The outcome of these indefinite ways of seeing 'depend on the type of practical relationship we establish with things and people around us' (Willerslev 2007b: 25). Grasseni describes 'skilled vision' not as an impartial, disembodied 'overview' from nowhere, 'but as a capacity to look in a certain way as a result of training' (2007a: 65). She further shows through her work with Italian cattle breeders that 'skilled vision, tacit knowledge and social mimicry are fundamental factors in the formation of professional identities' (50). These breeders of the Brown Breed of cow were aiming for a particular desired aesthetic, an international standard that educates attention and constitutes communities of practice through; industry templates of the 'ideal cow'; diagrams of udders and 'functional traits' for producing milk; the opinions of cattle-fair judges whose standards are in turn influenced by specific breed protocols; commercial adverts for bull semen and listings of 'best bulls, heifers, calves, and embryos available on the market'; as well as physically accurate toy cows and statues (Grasseni 2007a: 48).

NH groups are also influenced by standards of practice through the social hierarchy of knowledge transmission by apprenticeship, regular publications of magazines and articles and demonstrations. For the development of 'skilled vision' in particular, apprenticeship appeared to be the way for myself and others to learn through an 'ecology of everyday practice' (Grasseni 2007a: 59). I had to learn how to see both the aesthetic and behavioural characteristics of the horses in front of me, but also how to 'see' the distinct personalities of the individual and their emotional responses. It is only possible through training that these things were revealed as an active onlooker rather than as a detached observer. As Grasseni says, 'skilled visions are embedded in multi-sensory practices, where look is co-ordinated with skilled movement, with rapidly changing points of view, or with other senses, such as touch' (2007b: 4).

I learnt, slowly, throughout the year to correctly assess horses and situations: and I made a lot of mistakes. Watching the trainers and the horses together was the first step, and Daniel and Stuart began to train me like this. Eventually, I was under the scrutiny of the trainer's 'gaze' once I was set loose on some horses, whilst being carefully watched by the horses I was working with! The trainers 'gaze' is more than a strict visual assessment and instead combines the proper evolution of a series of well-executed movements, reactions, and decisions. Trainers understand their end goal and how to get there – not through force, but through *feeling*. Though they 'see' the horse and the situation in front of them, I would add that their particular 'skilled vision' necessitates an empathetic engagement with the task due to its multi-agentive nature. Interestingly, this 'skilled vision' must also differentiate from moments where the horse is to be treated as an individual, and where their egomorphic traits be suspended in favour of recognising species-specific behaviours. The recognition of a horse as a kind of person, with a unique 'horsenality', is just one step in the development of a 'skilled vision'. As Haraway (2008) rightly says, the category of companion species is a messy one that is 'less shapely and more rambunctious' (18) than a clearly demarked outline of a relationship of domination or domestication. But, it is a fruitful mess that helps to highlight some of the semiotic and ethical aspects of human-animal relationships. My exposure to this world, and my personal training within it, allowed me as the anthropologist to shift my thinking and 'see' in a particular way, to take these relationships seriously as called for by Haraway (2003).

Natural horsemanship practitioners are intertwined with horses as their chosen companions, and their lives are both shaped by and through interactions with them. Beginning to see horses through the natural horsemanship lens was the first step to me 'learning to pay attention', both to the horses individuality and to my informants perspective of horses. The development of my own 'gaze' in this case, helped me to see things from my informants perspective. Had I not been an apprentice, I would never have been able to 'see' the horses in the way that my informants do. It allowed me to achieve a level of understanding that would have been impossible by merely observing the actions of others and hearing their words. As Coy notes, 'Apprenticeships seem to be associated with specializations that contain some element that cannot be communicated, but can only be experienced' (1989a: 2). Without

becoming an apprentice I would have listened attentively, but a vital component in how *they see* their horses would have been missing in my representation of them and their horse companions.

Training begins

I wasn't exactly sure what I was hoping for, or even what I was going to find. I suppose I was looking for some spiritual horse awakening! I mean, I had read the horse whisperer - and cried enough for a lifetime over it – and I knew it wouldn't be quite so idealistic, but I was looking for *something*. Not just as an anthropologist, but also as a progression of my own set of horse skills and knowledge. I had a new riding hat, new boots, and new jodhpurs; all of which I consequently decided to not wear until the following May. They felt too new, too clean, too stiff, too correct – and I didn't want to be judged on them. Unfortunately, because of this wardrobe choice, I spent the first few months with wet feet because of holes in my old boots, and I was always just a little bit cold: but I did feel like I fitted in, in how I looked anyway.

My training was 'personal, hands-on, and experiential' (Coy 1989b:1), although to begin with I was only allowed to watch, observe and learn. I began to learn more by watching than I ever could of actually practicing initially; the horses were untrained themselves and letting me loose on them, untrained as I was, could have ended in disaster. By watching the trainers interact with the horses I began to 'see' how to work with them, how to move my body: how to not move my body. I was 'learning to see' like so many apprentices from anthropology have noted before me (Dilley 1989; Johnson 1989). When I was younger watching other people jumping in competitions, I would give a slight tilt of my upper body every time they went over a fence, mimicking the riders on board. The same thing occurred while I watched the trainers - I began to anticipate how they would move their bodies, producing my own micro-movements of which I was not aware. It was far more productive for my learning experience than flailing with ropes and misguiding horses with mixed signals. Coy suggests that apprenticeships provide excellent roles for anthropologists to inhabit during ethnography as they are gateways 'for individuals who are seeking to learn cultural and technical skills' (1989a: 117). However, as an anthropologist I remember

thinking constantly ‘I better write this down later: Remember this!’ I was learning how to ‘see’ the horses and the training methods at the same time as contemplating how I ‘saw’ it as an anthropologist – commence my year of little sleep and cold feet.

The first time I met Daniel it was a truly autumnal day. From the seat of my car I spied him with another man standing under a small awning outside some untidy looking stables. With the great British weather rushing around me I hurried down the slope towards them and shouted something through the wind about whether or not I was at Brooke’s Farm; I had previously gone to two incorrect places. They responded with a casual nod. Nothing is hurried in this yard. The barns and stables are in a state of disrepair: with holes in the walls from flying horses legs, and chewed stable doors, and a lot of the concreting on the yard areas appears half done or abandoned (Image 2). There was the briefest of apologies about the state of the yard and a muttering about never having enough money: Half the stable doors I couldn’t even open for the first few weeks because of stiff bolts or awkward catches that really required three hands to open (or a good shove and simultaneous lift as I later learned). The barns and stables may not be in the greatest condition but they are functional and the twenty or so horses behind these broken doors are the picture of health (although this number is changing all the time as new horses come in or trained ones go back to their owners or are sold). The autumnal breeze battered me gently as I walked around the yard that first day, banging doors against walls, and pulling at loose fixtures; as if nature was trying to regain what was once its own. It is a stark contrast to the perfectly manicured and manipulated ‘nature’ that greeted Cassidy (2002) in Newmarket. Here, in the middle of Yorkshire, with straw being blown on to my face and into my eyes, I felt entirely out of place.

I felt very useless to begin with, more about the little things than anything, but everyone was very patient with me, and always had half an eye on me initially. I knew that I wouldn’t know about the training methods but there is a very certain type of feeling useless that comes from not knowing where the muckheap is and wandering around aimlessly with a wheelbarrow filled high with dirty straw. Mostly I was told to “put that there” or “bring that here” or “hold this horse” when it came to the training of horses initially: at first I was told to “just watch for now, see what happens. The horses will teach you far more than we can”. Every now and again, the training of a

particularly interesting horse was prefixed with the phrase “come this way, you’ll learn something now!” Coy also notes that the start of his apprenticeship period was dominated by long sessions of watching his Tugen Blacksmith master at work:

After watching his finishing work for endless hours, he would occasionally comment on what he was doing, calling my attention to the striking angle of the hammer or the care with which he worked an edge. Only very late in my apprenticeship period was I permitted to try my hand at such work (1989a: 120).

By the end of the first day I was tired and ached all over, although I am used to physical exercise relating to horses, the intensity on a busy yard is very different. We barely stop from 8am through to 4pm. Most professional horse people I have ever encountered have a similar, intense, kind of work ethic: You work until it’s done. When I mentioned feeling useless at the end of the first day Daniel replied with “yeah I hate standing around too”. I’m not sure if this was an attempt to empathise with my feelings or a mentioned notice of my lack of activity when I wasn’t sure what to do.

Daniel treats the horses that come to him as more of a business, perhaps because money in the horse world is not always easy to come by, but he cannot disguise the affection he holds for horses. As he and I walked around the yard, he introduced me to the horses that were in, highlighting the particularly difficult or interesting horses. As he talks about them they come up to the stable doors and gently nuzzle his shoulders; they show him the utmost respect when he is working with them but they also show him affection when he is not asking them anything specific. As one little grey mare comes to the door he begins to talk about her fondly while rubbing the side of her face:



Image 2. Top, Daniel's yard – the rough ground is where we began all our rides. Below, the view from Moe's stable, complete with well worn wood.

This here is Mary. I think that's her name anyway, it could be her owner's name. She's here to school because the rider, a small child, got scared of her. I don't think she's a bad horse but everything just escalated and it's very easy to scare children and that just made it all worse. The owner, the girl's mother, said we had two weeks to fix her or she was going to be shot. Well, we took the two weeks and she was coming on well so we got an extra couple of weeks with her, and she's coming round nicely now. She's a little

sharp and not really a kids pony, and she can have a rear and a fuss and gets strong, but it's a nice pony.

Horses need the opportunity to be a 'good horse', you have to give them the ability to choose to be a good horse. It's all too easy for a horse to get labelled as a 'bad horse' when all that has happened is incorrect training and the horse has never had the time to show that it can be a good horse. Some horses are quirky, but that doesn't mean they are bad.

I think different horses need different amounts of time. Different timelines. Some horses can skip a step in training but then sometimes you have to go back and do it later. Like the little Connie mare, Mary, she jumps well so we put the jumps up big for her, she's brave and she's happy doing them but she doesn't have correct technique. So you might have to go back and literally teach her to jump, to give her correct technique later. But she can certainly jump!

He is a quiet man but not without words; He enjoys talking and always has a good story to tell about a horse or a person, and is a keen gossip while working around the horses. But his body is quiet, never a sudden movement or a raised voice. As an older man I did wonder how he coped with the more lively or dangerous horses but one session watching him at the end of the long-lines with a particularly exuberant homebred youngster of theirs showed me otherwise. Tracey, his regular rider, and him easily fall into gentle gossip about other local people whilst they work with the young horses. They both seem completely at ease when they work together - even while the horse fidgets and fusses around them, their conversation continues, punctuated with the odd word of encouragement to the horse that barely breaks the flow of conversation. He is often on the phone or appears to have his attention directed somewhere else but he never misses a movement or reaction from the horse he is working with at the time. Occasionally, a small amount of feed appears in his hand to distract a worried horse, and quite possibly comes from the same pocket as his phone. He told me once after giving me a leg-up onto one of the young horses, having given it a small amount of feed from his hand, "it's not a great habit, but it's not a bad one

either. And it stops them bolting off.” Monty disagrees with feeding from the hand and although Daniel acknowledges its bad points he also sees the potential in using it to his advantage.

Tracey is an exercise jockey, full of stories about various crazy racehorses she has ridden, as well as Daniel’s regular rider of the freshly backed young horses until they are ready for Daniel’s son to take over and produce further for their chosen discipline. She is slight and jolly, and is constantly smoking roll-ups while riding the horses. Tracey is a jockey for her main job, riding horses for Daniel in her spare time, and so has ‘stickability’ (the ability to stay on a horse even when it is doing handstands underneath her) and a casual but firm way of riding that the young horses respond to well. We always wait a few minutes before the particularly lively horses are exercised for Tracey to prepare a stock of roll-ups for the ride. Other than the occasional spark of a lighter I doubt the horses even know she’s there. She is very fond of classifying horses based on their personalities and the possible likelihood of them being unruly or not – “some you’re fine on and some you die on” she told me, and “it is important when to know when to get off the second group”. She often throws in a phrase about her own opinion of a horse (usually right before I get on it...) such as: “Big Bee is a man’s horse. I hate riding her and she knows it. She threw me off last time”. Oh to be as casual as Tracey on the back of a horse! The thought of taking up smoking briefly crossed my mind during these first few weeks of my apprenticeship; it seemed to work for her!

Horses are expected to behave well when they are in the realm of humans, and mostly, bad behaviour is not tolerated. If horses are going to share worlds with humans then they must conform to a certain acceptable standard of behaviour and manners, for pleasure and for safety. Many owners are incapable of enforcing such things because they have very strong emotions towards their own horses and do not want to feel like they are being cruel to them; this is why many horses are sent away to trainers. If we expect them to work with us, then should we not also work with them? We have a duty of care towards these animals that we expect to share our worlds; all Intelligent Horsemanship enthusiasts believe this. As such, these people try to reach an understanding with horses, to build mutual respect and confidence in

each other. One of Stuart's clients, Lucy, explained how she views IH, and the importance of it:

Intelligent Horsemanship is about getting the horse to want to work for you. Because you are being kind they want to be with you. More flies with honey, that kind of thing. You can have a conversation rather than just demand. It's about being firm and consistent without being violent. I truly believe that it is irrationality and anger that lead to violence. If you understand how to communicate, and be understood, it is no longer necessary to be violent.

Lucy stresses the importance of a mutual understanding through non-violent communication, where both parties are constitutively making the relationship. She references that idea of having a 'conversation' with the horse, an idea that is put forward by many trainers, to highlight the give-and-take of interactions. These processes are constant works in progress where the messy edges of companion species relations are a continual process of 'becoming with' (Haraway 2008: 18) and are, as Haraway says, 'a much richer web to inhabit than any of the posthumanisms on display after (or in reference to) the ever-deferred demise of man' (19). Whether a horse is considered to be 'good' or 'bad' is often dependent on the complexities of these relationships, and the degree to which each understand the other. Harmonious relationships that involve a 'conversation' of mutual responses are more likely to represent the horse in a positive light.

Bad habits

Many horses that end up on a yard like Daniel's do so because they possess unwanted behavioural problems; curing these problems by building the relationship between humans and horses is the cornerstone of NH training. Most of these horses will previously, in some capacity at least, have undergone traditional training; whether this is in early handling as a youngster, breaking in, or advanced training. Although already popular in the UK, natural horsemanship is still a growing trend, with many people still preferring to start training with traditional methods – not least because it is

often less expensive but mostly because it is built on a vast history of human-horse interactions in the UK. Accessibility is also a factor - most larger yards or equestrian centres will have a resident 'professional' horse trainer, or someone locally who travels to nearby yards. In comparison, there are only a handful of Intelligent Horsemanship Recommended Trainers in each area of the UK, and only one for all of Scotland (although there are other practitioners who adopt a similar, but slightly different, training method).

Generally, the initial training process is similar regardless of the specific problem of the horse undergoing training. That being said, the training may look very different because each horse's problems may only become evident in different stages of training. For example, a horse that is easy to handle on the ground but rears when ridden will require more focus on ridden work, but training will always start with some basic groundwork; a horse that doesn't like picking up its feet requires more work on general handling on the ground; a horse that can't be touched obviously needs more work from a distance at the start. Join-up is a very effective means of achieving trust for horses that are scared or wary of people, whereas those that already have a certain level of trust in humans but can be difficult to manage at times require more halter work with the Dually (which would usually come after Join-up for those less well-handled).

Many people who interact with horses on a casual basis (people who ride recreationally or intermittently) are not often in possession of their own 'skilled vision' towards horses. They may miss certain behaviours, or not be able to respond accordingly and, as such, give horse's incorrect signals; alternatively they may be actively demanding of the horse in a violent or dominating method to achieve results, which is what natural horsemanship is trying to educate against. People themselves have as many bad habits as horses when it comes to communicating effectively with them. Animal behaviourists claim that horses are instinct driven animals and many times are merely acting out natural behaviours in response to a stimulus (Fey 2005). Unfortunately, many of these 'natural' behaviours are seen to be unwelcome or dangerous to people (or to the horse) in our human world with specific cultural demands. Horses are beautifully adapted to be horses, they are athletic, and agile, and sociable with each other in their natural environment: but we take horses from this

place where they are comfortable and impose certain expectations on them. Here are a few examples of labels that horses receive and their natural counterpart. Each behaviour may stem from being unaccustomed to such an event, or because of a previous traumatic experience; natural horsemanship practitioners believe that a horse is rarely 'bad' for no reason:

- The 'untouchable' horse: One that can't be handled or may be aggressive when the issue is forced: Without correct handling from an early age, any horse could act like this through fear of the unknown.
- The 'bucker' or 'rearer', a horse that chronically tries to unseat their rider: In the wild, a horse would not tolerate another animal on its back, and would instead buck or rear to throw it off – under pressure or through fear or pain (associative or actual) a horse may do this with a rider on board.
- The 'bolter', a horse that takes off at high speed with a rider on board and cannot be stopped: Horses are flight animals and naturally feel the urge to run away from predators or dangerous objects.
- The 'napper', a horse that refuses to leave the field or yard to be worked: Horses are naturally herd animals and many fear being on their own unless they are trained to be so.
- The 'bad loader', a horse that does not like going in to a horse box or trailer: Again, horses are flight animals, being asked to go in to a small, confined, space that they may not be able to escape from is worrisome for a horse.

Upon arrival at Daniels yard, the horses are left to settle. Those that are already fairly well-handled or tolerant of humans on the ground around them will be brought in each day and groomed a couple of times in the day, whenever we have a spare moment:

We didn't used to bother with all this grooming, the horses don't go any better when they're clean. But this one woman, years ago, who brought a

horse to us for starting insisted that we groom it before we did any work on it in the day, and I tell you what, it was the easiest, sweetest horse to start that we've ever had. Took everything in its stride. The grooming really helped it to bond with us, strangers, so it trusted us much more when we asked it to do unusual things; now we do it with all the horses that come in.

Once the horses are settled in their new environment, training begins – or doesn't as it turns out! The first step in assessing any horse in NH is visual observation. A very important step in NH training, and one which seems to be a very underrated part in most descriptions of it as the moment *before* training starts. This observation phase appears to be rarely adopted to this level in traditional horsemanship where a more 'rough and ready approach' is taken, matching the view that the horse is a work animal and must 'get on with the job'. This 'gaze' that the NH trainer uses on the horse is more than just a recognition of actions or behaviours – although this is an important aspect of it – but a means to see past the physical traits and potentials of the horse and to recognize aspects of their personality. It is a means to withhold preconceptions about the horses past offences and truly see the horse that is in front of them, in that moment. Owners and riders bring a story with every horse, a personal history told from the point of view of that person; these stories often label the horse as being 'bad' or 'naughty' and these words can have a certain power over the people that use them, changing how they act towards these horses. The trainers 'gaze' allows them to take in what they see in the horse, and not be swayed by the history presented to them.

The process of grooming and bonding is an extended period of observation for the horses in training, and a chance for them to observe and gel with those working with them. When Stuart travels to visit clients horses on their own yard, he does not get the chance to groom and bond to the same extent – he does not have the same control over their environment as he would if they were at his yard – so the period of initial observation is particularly intense. When the horses are based on a training yard, their first sessions are all done slowly and carefully, and their reactions to events and new experiences are monitored. Before the horse is ever put in a position to be 'bad' it is given the opportunity to learn and get things right. There is recognition of the potential of dangerous or unwanted behaviour but the horse is not judged solely by

their history. The horse is forgiven for past mistakes and the small training steps in NH make positive results easier to achieve.

The people who begin to practice natural horsemanship experience something similar to their horses; most will have come to NH from a more traditional background and have their own associated behaviours to re-learn. They also receive similar labels from their horses where the horse comes to expect certain behaviours from their human in the same way that humans expect difficult behaviour from 'bad' horses. Training together helps to undo this connection in favour of a new, more positive, one. Trainers adopt a position where they can be the bridge between the owner and the horse. They are privy to a special understanding of horses through their own lifetimes work, and use this understanding of horses to educate others. Below is a short example of one of Stuart's private sessions with a new client that highlights the role that the owner plays in the labelling and creation of a horse's behaviour:

We were welcomed at the yard gate by two very friendly, very overweight, black Labradors, closely followed by their owner: "oh boys come back here! Danny, Benji, come here!" Their wagging tails and panting mouths showed little concern for their owners frantic calls. "Come in, come in, would you like tea or coffee? No? ok, well Jasper is just over here!" We were led around the side of the house to the stables at the bottom of a beautifully manicured lawn, flanked by Danny and Benji, to see four spacious loose boxes each with their own water supply and rubber mats. To the side of these stables were the most perfect wooden post-and-rail fenced paddocks that could be imagined. It was a private horse owners dream yard: certainly my dream yard anyway! What could be better than rolling out of bed, donning a pair of wellies, chucking the horses out in the morning, and then going back to bed! No one would have to see me without make-up, and sensible driving shoes could be thrown out! To be fair, if I had the kind of money that this place cost, I would probably also have a groom to do these tasks for me (effectively, I would have a me).

Jasper was tied up on the concrete yard space in front of the stables, his rope long enough that he could move around quite freely⁷. He was an average sized horse, brown, a little bit chunky, with two long white stockings⁸ on his back legs, suggesting a hint of heavy horse in his breeding. As we approached he turned to face us, arched his neck, and let out a loud, slow, snort through his nostrils; we were obviously quite an intimidating group! He seemed very unsure of our presence in his space, his yard. His owner, Sarah, rushed up to him mumbling “you silly boy, they’re just people. And you know Benji and Danny, silly boy”. His eyes remained fixed on us, refusing to believe in his anxious owners words or reassurance; no amount of patting and neck rubbing was going to save him. Stuart and I stayed a few meters away, carefully observing this interaction between horse and owner. Sarah was intruding in his space, yet he showed no sign of being aware of her presence. When she pulled on his rope to make him step backwards and allow her in front of him, he didn’t budge, or even flinch. His attention was entirely focused on us, and we were not a stimulus that should have been such a distraction.

Very calmly, Stuart and I moved around to the other side of Jasper, his whole body moved with us, barging Sarah out of the way. Stuart was watching Jasper, and Jasper was doing exactly the same. I was trying to watch both of them. As Stuart slowly moved around Jasper, from one side to other, Jasper kept swinging to look, never quite trusting him unless he could see him out of both eyes. I tried to follow as quietly, as carefully, as Stuart: he was slightly hunched over, head down, non-threatening, just giving the horse a chance to show who he was in his own space, before anything was asked of him. Sarah went to make tea.

When she came back – tray of tea in hand, dish cloth over her arm, all the perks of keeping horses at home – Stuart said “so tell us a little bit about Jasper”:

⁷ Usually horses are tied on fairly short so that they cannot move around too much, nor get their legs tangled in the rope.

⁸ ‘stockings’ and ‘socks’ are names for the white markings on a horses legs. Socks extend from the hoof to below the knee or hock joint, whereas stockings extend over the joint.

Sarah: “Well I got him about a year ago, and he was very difficult, quite bargy. I couldn’t do much with him on the ground so I sent him away to a professional trainer, and he came back really scared of everything, and not much better to handle! If I got firm at all he would freak out and try to take off. I’ve got him to the point where I can be around him and he’s not scared of me.”

Stuart: “Mmm, yes, he’s certainly very switched on to his environment isn’t he? It’s really great that he doesn’t feel scared of you, but what is not so great is that he also has no respect for you. He pushes you around in the space, he controls your feet, rather than the other way around. He should make space for you. OK, let’s take him round to the school –after you”

We followed Sarah and Jasper round to the outdoor arena, mugs of tea in hand. I was surprisingly nervous, and kept spilling tea on to my cream gloves – those stains did not come out. I was nervous about how Jasper was going to react if he was as scared as Sarah said, about not getting in the way, about trying to be helpful, about making sure I saw all the small events that happened in the middle of the larger ones - and the more tea I spilt the worse it got. I was a hopeless bumbling anthropologist, with tea all over my hands, and a lightly soaked notebook. Next to me, Stuart was the picture of calm, with a slight smile playing across his face at the prospect of this new challenge, a new project horse for him. His eyes never left Jasper and Sarah as we walked around the back of the barns, assessing how they interacted with each other; thinking about ways he could help them, and what had to happen next.

It is important to watch horses in order to determine the best way forwards with them, to see how they act, and what their past has made them into. Watching horses allows for a careful critique of their personality – trainers are looking for quirks that can be used to assess the horse for later training. The horse is observed to see how it responds to the gentle pressure of being sent away or led around by the owner before any actual training starts. As a part of my own training I often spent extra time just watching horses at rest out in the field, just taking a moment longer to see how they interacted with each other; or even how they behaved just when they were on their

own. At Julie's rescue centre that I spent time at towards the end of my main fieldwork period, we were actively encouraged to spend a couple of hours a day just out in the fields with the horses – gently moving around them in their herd, going where they went, observing their moods and behaviour, bonding, trying to be a part of their herd. These horses all had traumatic pasts, the nature of which we didn't know - all we had was what the horse presented to us each day. The horse itself plays a vital role in the development of its own training and in the development of the trainers skills and 'gaze' – the trainer only sees what the horse presents to them, they are not capable of deceit. At the same time, how the horse sees the trainer (or any person working with them) shapes how they act around them. Horses return their own 'gaze' that changes as the horse progresses in its training, as well as affecting the trainer.

Willerslev draws attention to the modes of seeing and being seen. By this, he does not mean the banal awareness of being seen by another subject, but that inherent in vision is the mirror-like quality of self-awareness. Just as he describes the hunter seeing the elk and the elk seeing the hunter, there is also the element of the hunter seeing himself seeing the elk as he adopts the double perspective of 'not me, not not me'. This distancing effect of vision is important as it enables the hunter to see himself being human and prevents a full metamorphosis into an elk. He suggests that the Yukaghirs use vision for 'world-disclosure but also as a defence mechanism against metamorphosis or the dissolution of the self' (2007b: 32). While there is no danger of metamorphosis in NH, competency in the everyday practice is achieved when the horse responds appropriately. There is a self-reflexive awareness that the development of a 'skilled vision' affects how the horse sees you, and how their actions are affected by you. So, to loosely adopt Willerslev's notion; the horse also acts as mirror that allows for a self-reflexive change in actions as you see yourself being seen as 'both seeing subjects and objects of being seen' (31). The awareness of this mirror effect deepens the desire for living with horses in what would be considered by NH practitioners as a more ethically acceptable fashion, because there is direct recognition of how human actions affect horses.

The development of ‘personhood’

As Ingold has discussed at length in his earlier work (1994a, 1994b), animals are often only considered in opposition to humanity, whereby animals are supposed to lack the many attributes that make humans unique and separate from the animal kingdom. Practitioners of natural horsemanship are trying to combat this form of humanity that Ingold suggests is ‘a state of transcendence over animality’ (1994a: xxi) by both overcoming the ‘animal side of man’ (Leach 1964) through the more ethical approach to training horses (Birke 2007, 2008), as well as (through this process), becoming more aware of the horses own self (ego) instead of the anthropomorphic projection of human traits.

Humans should not be considered ‘fundamentally separate from the rest of the world’ (Kohn 2013: 6) and other non-human animals should be given more consideration than only offering them individual personality based on the projection of anthropomorphic traits (Mullin 1999). There are undoubtedly many horse people who seem to anthropomorphise horses - they can be ‘rude’ or ‘kind’ or ‘mean’ or ‘willful’ or anything else – but it is the act of training alongside horses that allows these practitioners to consider the actual ‘horseness’ of the horse⁹ - Their egomorphic nature (Milton 2005: 255). This, combined with the overall shift in attitudes towards animals during the 21st Century means that practitioners have a very real desire to understand the horses in their care (Hurn 2012: 117) and not just how they are represented in problematic anthropomorphic discourse (Milton 2005: 255); certain characteristics do not *only* belong to humans (259). Unfortunately our language barriers with animals will always double this confusion, we do not know the words that they may use to describe themselves.

Ideas of personhood, or more specifically, who can be considered a person and who cannot, vary enormously between different societies. Hurn, referencing Vivieros de Castro, states that although the term ‘person’ is not universally only applied to humans, ‘the general consensus across cultural divides [is] that a “person” is an individual, animate, self-conscious being who becomes a person in a social context in which their individuality and intentionality is recognized and acknowledged by

⁹ ‘Horseness’ is made up of individual quiddities, how they respond to situations, how they process information, and the consequent behavioural output

another' (2012: 30). This is certainly the case through the training steps of natural horsemanship where the horse's individuality is drawn out through the process of training and they become a 'somebody' (Knight 2005: 2). However, this recognition of personhood is not temporary, flexible, or limited to only the individual horse – it extends to horses as a *species* as well, whereby once the horseness of one animal is seen, it becomes impossible not to see, at least the potential of, personhood in all horses. This stands in opposition to Willerslev who states that the Yukaghirs do not attribute personhood to all nonhuman animals, and where personhood is only seen through interactions (2007a). However, Fijn suggests in her work that Mongolian herders recognise personhood in all horses, both domestic and wild (2011). Although this 'light bulb' realization for NH people seems irreversible, this is not the case for all human-animal relationships; Shir-virtesh investigated the relationship between couples making the transition to parenthood and their household pet dogs in Israel, and suggests that the ability to attribute personhood to these animals is temporary and inherently flexible (2012). These dogs take the place of children within the household, until there is a child, whereby the dog was often demoted to 'just a pet' and stripped of their 'person' status (428). Potentially, it is the deeper relationship that is formed through active participation of both horse and human in training practices, combined with an attempt to reconcile humans historic abuse to horses that has led to this dramatic embrace of all horses as persons. This training could be considered as an example of a 'living semiotic dynamic' between humans and non humans which are indistinct from each other that Kohn suggests 'helps us see how "kinds" emerge in the world beyond the human' (Kohn 2013: 17).

The very fact that horses are not static in their ability to be characterised ultimately gives them a larger than life personality; These shifts during multispecies interactions creates an emotional rollercoaster and gives humans the chance to see horses from many different angles. It is a self-propagating system with momentum of its own that keeps horses shifting between these grey areas. They are multi-faceted just like humans. That they can be more than 'just a horse' means that they can more easily be seen to be a 'kind', giving them more personality, more depth, and more influence in the lives of their humans, perpetuating their shifts between categories all the more. However, the fact that horses can be seen to be multi-dimensional by different people means that it can occasionally highlight specific facets of a horse. The horse meat

scandal in 2013, for example, made horse owners more outright and outspoken about their horses personality and individuality. They couldn't be in a lasagne because they were sociable, friendly, gentle, charismatic animals! As it happens, they can definitely be both lasagne and charismatic - probably not at the same time. The fact that they *were* food, made them all the more real to people who connected with them on a personal level who refused to accept that horses could be both. They refused to accept horses as food, whilst those who do would mostly deny horses the realm of 'personhood'.

As Hurn says, the 'culture concept' has been largely debated by anthropologists in recent years, with the general consensus about whether animals possess culture or not being largely unimportant; either because they don't have culture, or because the realm of the anthropologist should rest solely with the human (2012). However, she goes further to suggest that 'whether or not other animals are cultural beings matters a whole lot, for a whole host of reasons' (2012: 29). Anthropology is, of course, concerned with the great and varied societies of humans, but if animals were to possess even a rudimentary kind of culture of their own, this could challenge much of the conceptual ideas and framework of the discipline as a whole. Currently, as Eduardo Kohn says:

sociocultural anthropology in its various forms as it is practiced today takes those attributes that are distinctive to humans – language, culture, society, and history – and uses them to fashion the tools to understand humans (2013: 6).

However, by utilizing Hurn's call to consider other animals as cultural beings within this project, it helps to broaden the realm of anthropology and to define 'horse culture' as more than just the 'horsey people' who make up half of these relationships, but to also include the horses in the rubric of 'horse culture'. If we take Erikson's idea of 'culture' as being 'those abilities, notions and forms of behaviour persons have acquired as members of society' (2001: 9) then the relationship that develops through training between these two species allows them to form this new hybrid 'horse culture'. Horses often only come under the umbrella of 'horse culture' in conjunction with humans, however, I would make the argument that they do have the potential of

being considered to have a kind of culture of their own. For example, in the eyes of natural horsemanship enthusiasts, horses have the language of 'equus' which is used by humans in training, that they also recognize that horses possess individual personalities that are present before interactions with people, and that they perform their own behaviours within a specific, developed, social society. This goes against the dominant post-domestic view that elevates humans above other animals in many contexts (Mullin 1999: 206).

As anthropologists, we are constantly adopting the position of the 'other' through participating in their lived worlds, doing this for a nonhuman animal is mostly infeasible; true representation of the animal will always be hard for anthropologists. Kohn discusses how the Runa of Ecuador's Upper Amazon become aware of other animals through activities that force them to adopt another's point of view (I.e. through fishing or hunting) which consequently makes them realize that others *do* have a point of view to consider, and that they can return the gaze of the human. The Runa realize that other animals can be persons, but not persons like humans. This idea is further elaborated in Kohn's book *How Forests Think*, through examples of jaguars and humans returning the gaze of the other - to 'not to become meat' humans 'must return the jaguar's gaze' (2013: 3). This cross-species example resonates with the core tenets of natural horsemanship society; By training alongside horses and recreating the natural behaviours of the horse by mimicking herd behaviour, it allows humans to become more aware of the horses point of view, and in return, gives the horse the chance to consider the human in a new light. Importantly, however, the horse continues to see the human as a human, and not a version of a horse. Importantly, the aim of training is to cultivate *specific* natural behaviours whilst dispensing with unwanted ones, not to train the horse to adopt the perspective of the human.

Because 'how other kinds of beings see us matters' (Kohn 2013:1), beginning to 'see' the other, not just visually but also for who they are, helps to open up this world towards an attempt at a level of fairer representation to all species. Being seen by other animals, and being *aware* of being seen by other animals, makes the relationship more than a two dimensional projection of humans onto them - it is a process of 'becoming' where 'in this encounter we do not remain unchanged. We become something new, a new kind of 'we' perhaps, aligned somehow with that predator who

regards us as a predator and not, fortunately, as dead meat' (Kohn 2013: 3). If both horses and humans are to be considered in conjunction as the creators of 'horse cultures', how they interact with each other in the world is important. There are, of course, obvious differences between jaguars and horses, but Kohn raises a valuable point about the importance of both parties learning to see the other in a different manner during the creation of a relationship. This change in the way horses see humans is as important as the way humans see horses in order to create this new 'horse culture'. Human and horse must learn to 'see' each other differently and become a 'we'.

Concluding thoughts

In conclusion, the process of training horses using NH methods begins by developing a 'skilled vision' that can be turned towards horses. It harnesses the ability to see physical, emotional and behavioural traits in horses and act and react appropriately to them. This shift from seeing horses as animals that can be dominated to persons to be worked with is an important step in the development of the relationship. Further to this, horses also undergo a change in how they see humans during training, from potential predators to partners. NH training facilitates this shift in how people see horses, with trainers possessing an even more developed 'gaze' that allows them to recognize inherent attributes in horses, and how to utilize them for effective training. My own gaze on horses is affected by my thoughts and feelings towards them, which is potentially why I may never be a great horse trainer! Does being a true 'horse person' come with an abstract idea of detachment towards horses, where emotions are removed: While being merely 'horsey' may come with all the pitfalls of emotional factors in the decision-making processes? Horses are naturally such charismatic animals that the ability to separate out emotions is difficult (or maybe even impossible); I know my 'professional training gaze' is meaningless when I turn it on my own horses. Each person who looks at a horse is looking at (or for) something different: a vet is looking for signs of ill health, a racehorse trainer is looking for any indication of speed, a breeder is looking for good conformation, an artist looks for beauty – the horse is classified uniquely in the eye of the beholder.

Chapter Three

The Moment of Join-up: Engagement and Detachment in Natural Horsemanship

This is so exciting isn't it? I barley slept last night. I think doing Join-up really is the cornerstone of these teaching methods. I remember reading about how Monty did it with that wild horse and I remember thinking, I want to do that one day! Obviously I'll never get the chance to do it with a wild horse, but this is close. I tried it once with my own horse but I was just running around behind him while he swished his tail. I think this connection is so special.

Lucy

Natural horsemanship does more than just blur the lines of the horse as a subject or an object. To suggest, universally, that horses are ever one or the other is limiting; and in the case of natural horsemanship, horses are very much considered as 'significant others' that are recognized as actively interacting in the process of training. These are moments of 'becoming' for horse and human; where each becomes committed to taking the other seriously, putting aside their 'inherited histories' in the anticipation of a joint future (Haraway 2003: 23). Here, each agent takes a chance on the other, discovering a transpecies playing field that is free from misplaced ideas of cultural or biological determinism and is, instead, open to the potentials that each individual brings to the pitch. Helen Verran may describe these moments in the round-pen as 'emergent ontologies' as both horse and human discover how each others knowledge practices 'get on together' (Verran 2002).

The moment of Join-up perhaps shows most obviously these moments of togetherness that are lost, found, reignited, corrupted, mistaken, flawed, perfected, analysed, created and sustained, or grasped for and missed. However this moment occurs, each 'person' has learnt something from the situation. Taking a lead from Barad, the

moment of Join-up is a prime example of two significant others intra-acting, where each agent is forever changed in subtle. However, throughout the training process, there is a continuity of intra-active learning that captures both moments that are considered a success, and those that are ‘put down to practice’ as a moment of becoming passes wistfully by. Human and horse are constantly learning about the other, and adapting based on the learned knowledge of each encounter.

The moment of Join-up with a horse in the round pen usually provokes a massive learning curve for people, often with them describing it as a ‘light bulb moment’ - partly because of the obvious connection that is made with the horse, but also because it is a direct reaction to something that they did correctly. The horses used for training people are usually fairly calm, slow-reacting horses, so that people can learn through positive experiences. In this way the horses play a very active role in training the people. It is the moment of understanding and action in these scenarios that make the relationship real to them, to both of them, horse and human. When people do not succeed at Join-up, or the horse makes a half-hearted attempt it is not viewed negatively but as a path to learn more. Natural horsemanship is very much about the continued training, and the progression of the bond between two actants. What is always important though is the notion of finishing on a good note for both the horse *and* human - which is emphasized less in traditional circles which is more about ensuring the horse finishes by doing what you want.

Horses have the capacity to behave in varying, complex, intriguing, and charismatic ways that add to the interest and necessity of natural horsemanship groups as humans learn to live with them. These mutual ‘choreographies’ (Cassidy 2007b) are often enacted within the round-pen, with peaks and troughs of achievement set against a background score of the trainers words and active hopefulness. This is more than just a metaphor for an active process, these are new naturecultures in action; horse and human dancing their way through a series of laid-out and free-style movements, rebelliously on occasion, adjusting to the rhythms of the other to make a hybrid connection of two very different ‘horsey’ natures. It is an attempt on both sides to understand and unpack the other, to make a new (joint)self. The domestication of horses and their current role as companion animals and kin within the natural horsemanship community creates certain expectations of how they are supposed to

behave. Simultaneously, however, these people believe that they are obligated to behave in a certain way towards the horses within the worlds that they have shaped together.

There have been many ethnographies of national parks and other 'wild' spaces that concern themselves with how these wildernesses are tied up in social, political and economical institutions, recreating them as a contested domain (Suzuki 2007). As Cassidy says, this idea of the 'wilderness' has 'successfully been complicated in such a way as to put the social back in to the wild' (Cassidy 2007b: 1, see MacNoughton and Urry 1998; Whatmore 2002). By contrast, natural horsemanship takes its lead from the behaviours of wild horses, whereby practitioners may consider that they are allowing their horses an element of 'wildness' through the recognition of expressed behaviours that are also seen in their wild counterparts. Other work by Mullin has also suggested a recent trend in the human-animal sphere of the 21st Century towards recruiting the historical legacy of companion animals wild affiliates when considering their behaviour or husbandry (2007). Mullin cites the competitive world of the pet food industry who invoke 'science' to give weight to what they consider to be the nutritional demands of pets, based on the lifestyles and habits of their wild relatives (2007); the wild 'serves as a powerful resource in commercial and popular culture' for reconsidering ideas of domestication (Mullin 2007: 277).

Although ideas of domestication are many and complicated, it could be said that 'domestication' refers to the taming and control of breeding of a species, whereas 'tamed' denotes a one on one relationship between an individual human and individual animal (Cassidy 2007b). Or, it could be suggested that domestication has been a process that is emphasised either from biological aspects (such as the control of breeding) (Clutton-Brock 1994; Bökönyi 1989), or as a co-evolutionary one that highlights the social aspects (Fijn 2011). Practitioners of natural horsemanship would happily consider horses as domesticated animals, but this does not occlude them from inhabiting elements of both 'wild' and 'tame' horses. The practice of natural horsemanship can serve to 'tame' an unruly horse or further the training of another, but they can still revert to type and have 'wild' moments. It could also be said then that horses are not fully domesticated at all, and merely 'tamed', retaining an element of wildness and that is always waiting to come out; depending on the situation this

‘wildness’ can be manifested as the horse being simply spirited, or seen as bad behaviour by my informants:

Lucy: The other day it was so windy that for the first five minutes it was like holding on to wild Mustang! I was literally skiing across the sand.

Sasha: Tilly was so wild the other day! She was doing handstands every time I tried to get near her.

In this chapter I consider the ways in which ideas of the ‘wild’, the ‘tame’ and ‘domestication’ are intertwined in the process of Join-up, the cornerstone of Roberts’ natural horsemanship methods. Domestication is no longer seen as being in opposition to the complicated notion of the wild, and instead investigating these avenues opens up interesting slippages in the deployment of these terms. This could lead to an unexpected level of complexity and the shaping of both parties. This is an ideal example of a ‘practice of domestication’ that Russell discusses (2007) that does not represent an unequal power relationship – where the human could be argued to undergo a form of domestication. This process aids in how horses could be seen as kin (see Chapter six), through simultaneous ideas of engagement and detachment (Candea 2010). It is an example of taking seriously ‘the impact of unintended consequences and the roles of nonhuman participants’ in a contemporary shared space (Cassidy 2007: 5). Ideas of the ‘natural’ are deployed in natural horsemanship idioms and practices to justify techniques: these ideas sit side by side with expectations and ideas of what a ‘horse’ should be as they become a part of a new, shared, world.

Irvine states that ‘although [horses] can bond emotionally to humans, they do not incorporate humans into their social groups’ (2004: 15). My work amongst NH practitioners has led me to disagree with this; my informants would certainly challenge this assumption as the back-bone of NH training works by mimicking the role of matriarchal horses in a herd. Fijn’s work with Mongolian herders also suggests that humans can be incorporated into a horse’s social group as a dominant member. Behavioural manipulation in these herds kept to a minimum and the horses are not restricted through movement, social interaction, or maternal interaction. Instead, these normal behavioural repertoires are utilised by herders to control the herd (2011).

Interestingly, although horses are considered a domestic animal, their wild counterparts have the potential to become ‘tamed’ and consequently could be seen to be ‘domesticated’ through training practices. My informants were keen to attribute this to the horses natural intelligence, generosity, curiosity and willingness. For example, Monty Roberts famously ‘tamed’ a wild horse, Shy Boy, in the plains of Nevada and brought him back home with him (Roberts 1999). The process of selective breeding for type and temperament has certainly made horses more biddable, however, domestication, like many categories, is not a fixed one with only a start and an end point, it is a spectrum of variations. Horses move fluidly among these spectrums. Therefore there is space for a reconsideration of domestication practices in this case that do not rest solely on traditional enquiries and classificatory principles (Clutton-Brock 1989) and instead I consider how engagement and detachment, and ideas of habituation, can help inform how this practice can be seen as a process of sharing worlds and creating a ‘mutuality of being’ (Kohn 2013).

Join-up: Training the human

During my personal training, Daniel adopted a very much ‘watch me and see what to do’ approach before telling me to “give it a go”, which usually either went very well or very badly; the latter being followed up by a good-natured “ah don’t worry, it will be better next time!” However, at official IH training courses, much more formal instruction was given so that progress was made at a faster, condensed pace, which was much more structured. At one of these courses I had the opportunity to try Join-up myself (properly!) for the first time, along with a group of people who had paid significant amounts of money to participate and learn. I was keen, to say the least, having seen it performed so many times in front of me at public demonstrations. People who come for courses start as total strangers, but through a shared love of horses they are able to (easily) open up into conversation with each other, with a nervous excitement at the start that is quickly replaced by deep concentration. These are people who are here to learn and are usually the most obvious example of people who need to be *taught how* to ‘know’ horses. For each individual there is a limit to how much they can learn on a practical front, much is said to be natural talent, but it can be taught to some degree through active practice and ‘book learning’ that was

once so chastised by more traditional practitioners (Lawrence 1982). There is now a plethora of resources, both in manuals and online, which are easily accessible to these keen students. At Julie's rescue centre, I was actively encouraged to delve in to these extracurricular methods of study:

Have you read her book yet Kirsty? It's more of a handbook really, so useful. It's got everything in it. So if you ever have a problem or a question, just grab it. We keep a copy in the dresser drawer and one out in the barn, so there's always one to hand. She's so great, she really **gets** horses.

People very strongly consider themselves as students on these courses and are there to learn from someone more experienced and also from the horses themselves. They are filled with an almost child-like optimism at the thought of all they could learn and achieve. Humans and horses have been in this world together for centuries and will be for many more to come – these people are choosing what they want that future alongside horses to look like by using natural horsemanship techniques. They want to be better, and the process of learning never stops. In a process such as this, what people don't know engages with the potential of what they *could* know. These people are committed to changing how they interact with horses, and this is a very powerful driving force in the pursuit of knowledge. It is impossible to 'know the other,' yet natural horsemanship practitioners strive to 'know' the horse every time they meet. Choosing to engage with horses in this way, with an incentive to become better horse-people alongside the horses in training, drives people to want to become exceptional – if only in their horses eyes. Most explicitly, these courses are expensive, but people are willing to pay the money to make the entwined lives they share with their horses better.

Our trainer for the weekend was David, with help from his partner Nikki. He began by telling us about his own life experiences, and how his life trajectory had brought him to natural horsemanship:

The change [in me] has been coming for a while, its not like I just woke up and knew what it was all about. It was a rocky start and I haven't finished learning yet. I think if there has been a change, it's been too slow and steady

to notice. I hope it changes other people for the better, I think it certainly changes the lives of many horses for the better. Individually they may also have been fine if their owner never discovered Intelligent Horsemanship, but it can't hurt can it? And then that person may go on to help another horse somewhere, even if only a little through someone else, and so on and so forth. Slowly I think it is making a difference.

David then went on to explain how natural horsemanship training fits a horses naturally expressed behaviours, explicitly discussing Join-up and how important it can be in the training of horses. His words left us feeling mostly inspired but with a strange sense of calm that was soon washed away as we all wandered out to the round pen next to the arena and saw the great big metal mesh pen containing a horse looking back at us. It seemed as if the horse could smell our vague sense of nervous anticipation, and he looked ready to exploit it. Luckily, this horse was not for us novices to train with!

David calmly entered the round pen - 'the space of embarrassment' as I was to come to know it later - every movement measured and controlled. The wilful gelding he would be working with was already within the steel circle, watching these moves carefully, a look of tense anticipation etched on his face, ears sharply pricked and nostrils blowing wide; his sparring partner had finally arrived. The gelding was already expecting of a battle of wills, and he looked prepared for a fight. His neck was arched and with slow swings of his head to the left and right he assessed the potential of an escape route, whilst taking in this new creature in his environment. David stood calmly in the centre of the pen, looking away from us towards the horse who stood at the far side - as far away from our small rabble as possible - "Everyone, please meet Patrick".

Hello Patrick. David stepped towards Patrick in an attempt to begin the Join-up process by pushing him away from himself and around the edge of the round pen, but Patrick stepped forwards in the same instant. Was he anticipating the process to come and attempting to skip to the end? Was this a sign of acceptance already, although his head was high and wild still? Or was this a

sign of aggression towards David, the unknown quantity in his private space? It was the latter. David made the snap decision and forcefully moved towards Patrick quickly, arms out and shoulders square; with a defiant toss of his head Patrick cantered off around the edge of the pen deciding that this fight was better saved for another time. This interaction took only a second, and it was only on reflection that these potential scenarios came to light in my mind, but David's expertise had helped him to determine the course of action he had to take – as a collective group of trainees, we all just stared in wonder.

In comparison to the large live demos that Monty and Kelly perform throughout the year, we were an intimate gathering of humans and horses: We were so close to the action that it was hard to separate ourselves from the tangled connections within the space of the round-pen. We were close enough that it felt like the pressure of our presence was enough to upset the delicate balance of energies between David and Patrick that were at play in front of us. David's positive energy was pushing Patrick, who was refusing to engage with it and only to run forwards away from it into empty space. Patrick was closed off, so far unwilling to direct his energy towards David. For a second, David took the pressure off to see what would happen: Patrick stopped dead. No longer being pushed along by a wave of pressure, he had the chance to consider the scenario that he was in, but the option of paying attention to David was not yet on his radar; instead his eyes wandered casually over towards our eager faces and the horses in the field beyond. A loud neigh exploded from his chest and David faced him again, flinging the lunge rope out over Patrick's quarters. A lion.

Running with renewed anger it seemed, Patrick circled the pen much more forcefully than before, his hooves digging deep into the sandy ground: and I pitied the person who was to ride him eventually. So far, I couldn't suspend my belief that he could ever be anything than the wild, whirling, bundle of seemingly uncontrollable energy that was in front of me. But David had hope (and potentially some foresight); "he looks like a lot right now for sure, but his ears are flicking towards me now, he's coming round, he'll come right". Blessed with the same tranquil belief in horses as Daniel has, David pointed out signals that we had missed as the onlookers to a private conversation. We got the gist,

but not the intricate details. It was like listening to a conversation in French for me; my high school knowledge of the language led me to believe that I could understand a simple set of communications, but the less obvious meanings, the messages between the actual words, were lost on me as a non-native speaker.

David continued to explain to us what he was looking for, and what we should be looking for when Patrick responded positively. Soon he was trotting gently round the pen, head lowered, all his attention on David. Their dance, a collaboration of energies, was nearly at its climax. Each of them had performed set movements that became distorted and adapted by the others actions. These moments of meeting, these ‘contact zones’, were merely stepping stones in their performance together. Without touching each other - until the very end where a rub on the forehead of Patrick from David signalled the end of their dance - they conducted their choreography together through invisible threads of connection. It had taken much longer than any other Join-up that I had witnessed before, about 20 minutes. Patrick’s sweaty neck and flanks didn’t wholly convince me that he wasn’t just tired of running around on a hot afternoon. One of the ladies next to me asked a question along my train of thought – “how do you know he isn’t just tired?” David replied:

That’s enough for him today, for sure, he’s fried. But that was also much quicker than the first time I did this with him, we must have been out here for about 40 minutes! He’s learning that it’s better to listen. I haven’t hurt him, just given him the space and the time to make that decision for himself. For sure, he’s got a lot of angst in him, his energy is high and he’s desperate to show me that he won’t be bought cheaply! He’s making me work for it too. But he’s listening more, showing me he’s more willing to listen now. We can start having proper conversations soon, a couple more Join-ups and some new tasks will really pull his training forwards now I think. But that’s enough for him for today, it’s a steep learning curve for him every time, it’s all so different from what he is used to, what he expects from humans.

‘Alright lovely learners, now it’s your turn!’

This was it, our moment. So we all smiled nervously at each other and gestured as if we were giving our chance graciously to the person next to us, so as not to be the first one up on the stage. Wild horses couldn’t of convinced me to be first. Luckily, my friend Lucy bravely volunteered, quietly, and with much muttering - And so her trusty steed was led into the round pen by Naomi, having been secreted up behind us while we were transfixed by Patrick and David. It was a much smaller, less intimidating horse than Patrick, who calmly wandered in and began to tear at loose tufts of grass at the edges of the pen. Lucy’s biggest challenge may have been to appropriate his desire to eat into a desire to work with her. “This is Bee, because he’s as busy as. His mind is always wandering on to something else, the key is keeping his attention!” And that was it, all the instruction she was given to begin with other than, “alright then, whenever you’re ready”.

“Ok then Bee” said Lucy, “be gentle with me”. With the lunge rope tangled loosely around both her hands she stepped towards the little bay horse in front of her. He looked at her then towards us at the far side, his eyes lingering momentarily on David, then put his head back down to eat grass; he was a ‘schoolmaster’ a quiet horse who knew all the ropes, and all the tricks to do as little work as possible. “Be firmer with you body, really square up to him, use that rope in your hands, just fling it out towards him” David suggested. Lucy did as instructed and marched purposefully at him; “go on Bee!” This time he mooched off in slow rhythmical trot – it wasn’t the canter that she was hoping for but it was definitely a start. “Come on, keep going, that’s it”. After a few uninspiring laps of the pen, Bee dropped down to a walk by us, exhaling with boredom loudly. Lucy turned towards David with a look of sad frustration on her face and shrugged her shoulders “well what do I do now?”

You need to bring your energy up! Get enthusiastic, inspire him! He isn’t scared of people so you don’t have to match his own nervous energy, but

you do have to create positive energy in this case. This is a really good example everyone for your own horses, because they won't be worried by your presence either. But you need to encourage the connection. Horses are badly behaved when they don't understand, are frustrated, or confused, or scared – so you need to inspire confidence in them. Try again Lucy, but you need to mean it, keep pushing him, get his attention!

This attempt was much better, Bee cantered boldly around the pen while Lucy kept up the pressure – including a running commentary under her breath “go on, keep going, that's it, go on, go, yes, much better, keep going”. After a couple of well-executed changes of direction (“block his path with your body and push him the other way”) that encouraged Bee to see that his movements were controlled by Lucy now, Bee made the decision to stop running and Join-up with Lucy. However, Lucy's movements were not smooth like David's, they were unsure and stilted, which undoubtedly played a role in Bee's actions, and how long it took him to respond. He joined-up in a very perfunctory manner, as if he was bored by the situation and knew the fastest way to make it all end. It was hot and he wasn't playing by the rules that Lucy wanted him to follow. Although Bee wasn't worried about people, he also didn't care about working with them either. Join-up in this case was used to encourage him to pay attention to people.

When David worked with Patrick before, we were transfixed. His attention was intense and focused - I would hate to be under that stare. While Lucy was working with Bee, there were instances of attention from him that could have been capitalised on, and instead they were missed and left to fester in Bee's mind. Moments of communication missed by the person affect the horse who then does not understand what is expected of them. Both of them were floundering in the unknown quantity of a relationship that Lucy wanted but was unable to truly convince Bee of; instead they spent most of their time in the pen on different sides of a chasm, shouting at each other across the gap, words blowing astray in the wind. Each was unsure of the others actions and intentions and this resulted in a haphazard, ramshackle, structure to build from. Their foundation was shaky from the start, and lucky at best. Was it Bee's kind nature

that saved them in the end? That prevented Lucy from looking like she fell at the first hurdle of the course? Probably not: the potential of food back in the stable and some respite from running is probably the main cause, but the experience for Lucy had still occurred. She still learnt a little bit about what it is to attempt Join-up with a horse - to be present, and be open to the horse's presence. After she left the round pen her, Lucy's excitement was obvious:

That was amazing! Did you see it? I really thought it wasn't going to work, I had to keep telling myself 'Lucy, just keep going'. How embarrassing though, I don't think I've ran that much since I was 18 and I nearly missed a bus, am I sweating? I didn't know what to do with my hands or body at all, I feel very flushed. Flushed with joy! Oh Kirsty, it really is wonderful. Now I know it wasn't perfect but still! What a thing to do. For just a second there we were really connected and in synch.

And now it was my turn.

'you want me to do what now?'

I entered the round pen with what I thought was an appropriate amount of confidence – “smile Kirsty, it's not all bad!” – my equine partner and teacher stood in front of me, waiting patiently. She was a pretty little grey pony, and she viewed me with a hint of skepticism as I approached the very centre of the pen, hands inadvertently shaking the rope as I began to push her around the edge. All credit to the little thing, she ran away very quickly, but I feel this was very much due to my own nerves. I tried to control my movements as David had seemed to do so easily, but my breath was ragged and uneven. Not a way to convince a horse I was a person to be trusted.

Everything outside of our mutual space (the limits of the round-pen in this case) blurred away to almost nothing, if David had said anything I couldn't recall it; It was just me and the pretty little grey pony that I didn't even know the name of. I kept my eyes focused on hers to begin with, furiously trying to remember everything we had been taught so far. How long did I push her for again? I

made a change of direction and slowly became aware of her inside ear locking on to me, she was just starting to listen and I had to do her the honour of the same. Now when she slowed and dropped her head I let my eyes slip back to her shoulder, taking off the pressure. We both began with a lot of nervous energy passing between us and feeding off each other, but I was beginning to control mine. With a few deep breaths from me she exhaled loudly too.

I changed the direction she was travelling in again at a steady trot, and I felt ready to Join-up with her: but as I anticipated this next step she began to move faster again. She wasn't ready, and my small increase in energy had been enough to alter her actions. After a few more laps I had steadied my breath again, recovering from my potential mishap, and moving on with what was now in front of me. I dropped my eyes to her back legs and she slowed to a walk. This was it. Now she was paying attention and understood what my small movements meant to her; before I felt like I was adapting to her actions, now she understood what I was asking of her. I stopped turning my shoulders with her body and I felt her come to a stand still behind me. I cautiously snuck a small look at her over my shoulder just to make sure I knew where she was, then, head lowered I walked gently towards her. I sensed her body tense as I approached so I stopped for a second to let her settle, then I moved forwards again. I walked at an angle to her, passing in front of her nose by about one meter, my left shoulder angled away from her, hoping against hope that she would follow me as I began to move away from her again.

She did. What a feeling! It was all I could do not to shout for joy. I was definitely smiling this time as we circled the pen, connected by the dance we had just participated in together. We were partners: when I stopped she stopped, as I turned left she sped up to keep her nose close by my shoulder. It had not felt fluid, and I'm sure it looked even worse than I thought it did, rough and muddled with a lack of casual serenity that David managed to achieve. But, here we were, listening to each other through movements, engaged and willing to be with each other. I didn't want to give the pony back to Nikki when she came in to get her. She was my new friend, although I doubt she remembered me after that day: I'm still writing about her enthusiastically.

I feel like I can almost see it in the horse sometimes now that I've watched a lot of horses during the Join-up process. Horses that have never been in the round-pen before seem to show a particularly obvious reaction when they 'get it' whereas the more experienced horses used for training people look like they are just waiting for the human to get it right! It's not the moment right at the point of Join-up where the horse meets the person, but before that where the signals the horse gives seem like an attempt at communication, where they are waiting to see if the human truly understands. This process of adjusting to the others rhythms, movements, and personality can be a minefield of mistakes and achievements; it is a messy but necessary form of engagement. Join-up is a particularly visually obvious example of the co-creation of behaviour (Birke *et al.* 2007) between horses and humans, with complex modes of attention, attachment, and engagement (Csordas 2002). Although Birke (2009) has suggested that there is a lack of work on moments of co-being where each species meets as self-aware partners, the work of Davis *et al.* (2015) provides a useful place of reference to start from; where they look at moments of co-being between a horse and rider. The moment of Join-up adds to this work done on the ground with horses but includes moments of two bodies being in synch (Argent 2012; Evans and Franklin 2010), the engagement of two agentive individuals, and learning from each other for the co-shaping of behaviour and actions. However, and interestingly, Join-up is achieved with almost no moments of intercorporeal connection, it is all done without touching each other. It is a contact zone with no contact.

Engaging With Detachment

Most research of human-animal relations are premised on ideas of engagement. Natural horsemanship shows new forms of engagement, mediated by strategic forms of detachment, with horses that both cherishes the scientific rigor that trainers and practitioners suggest the training principles are bound by, but also embraces the subjective relationship between humans and horses so criticized by the classic scientific approach to researching animals. Natural horsemanship training is not just a progression of pre-existing equine sociality, nor about learning all the customs and behaviours of an equine language and reproducing them. Humans do not wholly enter the equine habitus even though they may temporarily adopt the role of the dominant

horse during training, nor is the horse expected to act like a human. It is not about entering each other's realities but finding an acceptable compromise of copresence, 'a shared transspecies habitus' (Kohn 2007: 5). However, it can often be hard to tell what 'getting it right' actually entails!

More specifically then, when discussing ideas of engagement and detachment, what counts as social relations and who can participate? The most settled upon approach in recent times, following from the reflexive turn and actor-network theory, is one where social relations are made between subjects and mediated by objects - recent work on animal cognition and subjectivity has made the inclusion of animals as actants in social relations more clear. Latour (2005), however, argues for social relations to be considered using 'the associations of different entities' to trace the effects these have on each other - a meta-view of social relations if you like - that places animals, objects, and humans on the same level by 'suspending the (anyway problematic) question of intentionality' (Candea 2010). It is exactly this messy, difficult to explain, web of connections that should be investigated! The questions of intentionality and morality should not be ignored but embraced and natural horsemanship gives human-animal researchers a chance to muddle through these ideas. Relations in NH are actively sought after, and the moral content of the actions is clear (if not always wholly grasped). Ideas of engagement and detachment in NH could help to understand the new shaping of these worlds, which are in constant state of being redefined and moulded with *actual training and living with horses*; not some by-product of a moment, but a constant recreation.

Much work on Euro-American interspecies relations has mainly critiqued the attempts that people have made to be distanced or detached from animals, or, has shown that anthropological claims of dispassionate acquaintances with animals are not necessarily the case. Candea instead argues for space to be made within the concept of the 'relationship' to 'engage with detachment' and a recognition that engagement and detachment can be a part of each, and grow from one another, and make the other possible – they are not in opposition to each other (2010: 241). He suggests, in his paper on the Meerkats who are researched at the Kalahari Meerkat Project (KMP) in South Africa's Northern Cape province, that a dichotomy between engagement and detachment is not a helpful or productive heuristic for thinking about many human-

animal relations – he similarly suggests that placing love and exploitation, or trust and domination in opposition to each other when discussing human-animal sociality produces a similar, reductive, affect.

The meerkats at the KMP are closely monitored, weighed, assessed, and analysed – whilst the scientists and volunteers move freely among them. The meerkats are habituated to the presence of humans, and a strict line is drawn by the researchers themselves between ‘being with’ and ‘being together’ to secure the scientific objectivity of the project. Some moments of interaction, such as when weighing the meerkats (which may require brief moments of handling), challenge the structured ideas of detachment that the researchers practice, yet these ‘contact zones’ are repartitioned for scientific validity, being seen as ‘necessary’ (Candea 2010: 256). As Candea says about both these approaches, ‘connections, relationships and engagement are the key matters of concern’ (2010: 245). As much as many human-animal relations have been premised on an implicit normative distinction between engagement and detachment – a contrast that plays the role of a clear moral dichotomy – natural horsemanship practices continuously tread the line between the two. It is set up with the rational scrutiny of training techniques, backed up by knowledge from animal behaviourists. In the example of Join-up above, pushing the horse away provides a very clear form of physical detachment that equates to a form of social exclusion for horses. It is a particular way to engage with horses, which occasionally calls for detachment (or a less than black and white response) from situations that intends to prioritise the rational approach over the emotional one.

Non-human animals can be active creators of sociality, not just symbols of it. In NH groups, horses are necessary to the way in which these social ties are formed; their personalities and ‘likeableness’ helps to create the magnetism that draws people to them and to connect with them. They are not just a symbol of the relationship but play an active role in its production. NH is an ethical project, not just an ideological projection, that is undertaken with the aim of improving a person’s personal relationship with a horse. It also aims to educate others to improve the lives of horses in general – it is so much more than the sum of its parts. NH worlds are produced alongside, and because of, the horse as a ‘person’ - however, for training purposes, the human must detach from the idea of a horse as a person, and recognize it as a part of a

species, subject to the laws of animal behaviour. NH trainers and practitioners negotiate a plurality of worlds and variations in necessary ‘detachment’, whilst trying to limit the negative detaching actions present in the wider horse world to facilitate engagement in a variety of different ‘contact zones’.

Candea’s ethnographic description of practices of ‘habituation’ among meerkat scientists (2010: 245) may be usefully juxtaposed to theories of Join-up in NH, and to the ways in which ideas of domestication and domination play out in NH training. Horses are a domesticated animal, with years of strategic breeding and care securing their position as a domestic animal in the UK. However, domestication does not equate to ‘tame’ when used by horse people to describe the behaviour of a horse. My informants may suggest that a horse is ‘wild’ to say that they are not trained or willful: ‘tame’, in this case, suggests a biddable, trained animal that is comfortable in the world of humans. The idea of habituation that Candea raises then while considering the interactions between the scientists and the meerkats at the KMP, problematises the boundaries between wild and tame when considered under the umbrella heading of domestication. In NH, a horse may be domesticated but not habituated to people and thus could be considered ‘wild’: The meerkats of the KMP are considered to be both wild and habituated, but not domesticated.

The KMP meerkat research was set up to recreate the ‘truth-value’ of the lab whilst not extensively altering the natural habitat and behaviour of the meerkats. For these meerkats to speak for meerkats as a whole, there required some distancing of the researchers to minimize human interference rather than embrace the ‘irreducible uncertainty’ of the field (Stengers 2000: 140). Physical contact with the meerkats is actively kept to a minimum, and it is stressed by the scientists and volunteers that they are habituated to human presence, not domesticated; signs of affection are equated to natural behaviours, not emotional responses; and it is claimed by the researchers that the animals are unchanged by the interaction, rejecting ideas of mutual modifications to behaviour through generative processes (Candea 2010). In contrast to this, the goal of training horses is to encourage active engagement, where signs of affection are often equated to emotional responses by my informants: Natural horsemanship alters specific horse behaviours, whilst bracketing these new ideals into a culturally constructed idea of what is ‘natural’.

Habituation as a ‘non-relation’ is not an act of false consciousness but one among many effective practices of repartitioning and detachment (Candea 2010: 244), this is opposite to the goals of natural horsemanship. As much as one of the goals is to make the horse comfortable in the presence of people, more specifically, the goal is to make a horse comfortable *engaging with* people. The idea that habituation could simply be equated to ‘ignoring’ and ‘being ignored’ was critiqued deeply by primatologist Barbara Smuts by pointing out what a complex behaviour ‘ignoring’ is in a baboons social world (2001). Similarly, being ignored by a horse does not equate to their being habituated to your presence. Further then, the idea that Join-up (or natural horsemanship as a whole) is a process of habituation is not entirely correct because the aim of natural horsemanship is to actively engage with horses. A horse is ‘tamed’ through the process of training, whether or not they were considered as being domesticated or not before hand. Conversely, a non-domesticated horse (see Shy Boy, Roberts 1999) could also be ‘tamed’ to some degree. The process of habituation plays a role in both these modes of engagement with horses as a means to achieving ‘tameness’ by accustoming horses to the presence of humans. However, as Candea has shown, the process of habituation can also be a form of creating active detachment by producing feelings of comfort (or nonchalance) to the presence of humans, complicating what the terms ‘wild’ and ‘tame’ could mean in both cases (2010: 245).

Detachment facilitates engagement in natural horsemanship

Horses have the capacity to stir-up emotions in people - from overwhelming joy, to anger, to fear, to happiness, to peacefulness, and more – the projection or suppression of these can cause horses and humans to engage and detach from one another.

Emotional responses are often seen to be the sign of engagement between humans and animals, whereas a calm and measured projection of feelings and actions is more often linked to objectivity and a scientific, rational, response. Engagement is often presented as the cure to this seemingly cold response. However, rational responses are sought after in NH training for forging connections with horses where actions are clear and controlled and can be understood by the horse: and negative emotional

responses can often be the foundation for detaching oneself from a horse, either actively or passively. Detachment and engagement are not the antithesis of each other but they do present the potential for a moral dichotomy within relationships that lie on a spectrum between a ‘complete lack of connection, on the one hand, and actual “intersubjectivity,” on the other hand’ (Candea 2010: 244). Candea asks for scholars to acknowledge the vast array of ways that humans and nonhumans can interact within the concept of ‘relationships’ and to engage with detachment to this end:

For once it is envisaged not as false consciousness but as a telos for people’s actions, and traced through everyday micropractices of the self, detachment emerges as the constant counterpart and complement of engagement, not as its radical alternative (2010: 244).

Natural Horsemanship training makes emotional connections stronger by encouraging a bond to form between human and horse that is aided by a rational training programme. However, outside of training moments, horse behaviour and unexpected situations can produce either negative or positive emotional responses on both sides. The ‘shifts’ (different ‘contact zones’) in the relationship between humans and horses could be looked at as variations of engagement and detachment between these two actants, partly mediated by changes in the emotional (or of course rational) response to the horse as its status changes fluidly through a spectrum from subject and object.

NH training produces an obvious physical detachment both when the horse is sent away during Join-up, and when it is reprimanded by pressure on the rope for unwanted behaviour. However, both of these actions are done because of a distinct training programme that recognises horses as individuals but does not explicitly train them as such. The horse, as a species, has its own set of distinct behaviours and responses that are innate and hard-wired. NH training principles respect these and are structured to fit with these naturally occurring behaviours - the person responsible for training the horse must detach from the horse as an individual in order to produce rational, controlled actions and not emotional responses to situations. Therefore, every horse is treated and trained the same way, regardless of their particular ‘horseness’. Certain personality quirks may make training take longer, or be more difficult, but the actual method and procedure remains, by and large, the same for every horse. All

horses are equal in the round-pen. But it is this detachment from the horse as a person – a temporary suspension of their egomorphic qualities - that allows engagement with a horse as a member of a species, which becomes most noticeable in the process of Join-up. The horse is actively chased away so that it wants to come back; importantly, the horse may show a physical movement to engage with the person, but it also does so on an emotional level according to many of my informants:

You push them and push them until they want to come back. Until they think ‘ok, they seem to understand me, I’ll take a chance’’, and they come back to you. The moment they start asking to come back to you, you stop pushing them. Give them the chance they are looking for.

Join-up gives the horse the opportunity to choose to engage with the person after a period of detachment; by detaching from the individual horse and recognising it as part of a species it facilitates a connection between human and horse that can be built on. This training teaches someone how to be understood by the horse for visible desired results, but it also teaches patience, control of the body and emotions, and to remain calm – these things are learnt (embodied) over time and are the hallmarks of a good ‘horse person’. Roberts regularly claims that his method is ‘proven by science’, and the detachment from the horse as a ‘person’ certainly produces a scientific objectivity to the training process.

Concluding Thoughts

Horses have the ability to behave in surprising or predictive ways, and they are as much a part of this project as those people who choose to share their lives with them. The symbiosis that arises from engagement and detachment is played out in different environments between human and horse, where shifts in the particularities of these situations and responses are an example of the ‘vital, necessary, ever-changing, and often a microscopic co-implication of two profoundly different forms’ that Candea discusses (2010: 255). Natural horsemanship makes it possible to engage with detachment differently to how ‘inter-patience’ between the meerkats at the KMP and the scientists are described by Candea – although both are situated, cultivations of

detachment. NH does not use detachment to *limit* connections, but to build them through cultivated detachment that comes from an ethical orientation. Unfortunately, negative emotions or incorrect training can foster unwanted forms of detachment that do not serve to improve the relationship between human and horse, and could instead be used to highlight discrepancies in the discourse of NH about violence and domination.

Detachment of natural horsemanship practitioners to horses is not cultivated in the same manner as it is at the KMP, but rather embraced as an initial starting point to their relationship. In the round-pen they are ‘with’ the horse, but not ‘together’ until the moment of Join-up. Similar moments are observed throughout the relationship in different environments – being on the horses back being the most striking as it is the least ‘natural’ thing for the horse to embrace (see chapter 5) whilst also having the potential to create the harmonious moment of becoming the centaur. Join-up could also perhaps be considered the pinnacle moment of ‘being together’ in a Monty Roberts-style relationship. Different contact zones when humans and horses are ‘with’ each other are punctuated by moments of ‘togetherness’: and the moments when they are simply ‘with’ each other does not occlude them. These moments of ‘togetherness’ produce a very different kind of ‘centaur’ than the fusion of human and horse bodies that occurs during the riding of a horse.

These ‘horse cultures’ create a new kind of natureculture, where the ‘naturalness’ of the horses themselves are called into question and an awareness of a subject-object divide occurs by their very existence. The way that people expect (or want) them to behave in different communities, governs the subject-object status of the horse. Naturecultures are constantly created in moments but these are not consistent through every situation, however, it is the continued creation of naturecultures that matter to human and horse being, co-being, and well-being (Davies *et al.* 2015: 2). It is all very well to suggest terms such as ‘naturecultures’ as ways to side-step the issues of what it is to bracket ideas of ‘nature’ or ‘culture’ but they are two very real nouns that are in use by people who interact with horses, as such, it seems necessary to address them. The fluid idea of the horse to these people, who shift between these ideas easily within different scenarios, aids the understanding of how their relationships are created, perfected, lost, gained, changed, and altered. During Join-up, these horses are

said to be at their most ‘natural’, behaving the exact way nature intended them to, with people utilizing these behaviours.

Although NH has picked up popularity in the last few decades the ideals that practitioners have worked towards are not new ideas in the world of horses. Often, when people don’t understand how to get a horse to do something they resort to violence, natural horsemanship practitioners would ask ‘how can I achieve the same result without being cruel?’ It is not a new way of thinking with horses as a whole, but a new way of *living with* horses in contrast to methods that are considered as more cruel. Horses have been being horses since they evolved, and they don’t need people to tell them how to do it; but they do need people to teach them how to be horses *with* people. Because of the methodical methods used in natural horsemanship training, which are widely broadcasted to be able to train any horse, they create similar levels of constraint for everyone and every horse within it. If every horse is trainable using the same method it actually limits the ways in which horses are viewed, as well as simultaneously spreading the idea of the horse as a subject with distinct personalities. Because of the constraints on expressed horse behaviour that natural horsemanship sets up, it turns them, by degree, into objects in the sense that they *should* be able to be moulded or trained. However, the awareness of their subjectivity by people allows horses to tread the line between object and subject and their position on this spectrum can shift in as short a time span as it takes to get them from the stable to the arena for training.

Chapter 4

Creating a Transspecies Method of Communication: Trust, Choice and Ideas of Freedom

Among beings who recognize one another, who respond to the presence of a significant other, something delicious us at stake

Haraway 2008: 236

It was such a little pony that I was almost embarrassed at my lack of skill with it; but don't let little ponies fool you, though they be but little, they are fierce. With their tiny stabby, quick, hooves and teeth that are perfectly level with the height of my face. Ginge, an apt name for a diminutive bright orange pony, had more guts than most, and a healthy amount of fear to fuel the angst behind his wilful actions. All I was meant to be doing was to lead him out to the arena whilst his even less well handled companion frolicked around us casually, but from the moment we left the stable, I didn't feel in control. We were connected by a rope but we were not together. He was pulling against me, trying to break free, while I was holding on to the rope with everything I had, trying to coerce him towards the arena entrance. The moment we were over the threshold he pulled away even harder into empty space and the rope slipped through my tightly gripped hands, shredding the skin of my palms as it did.

I had spent the last week bonding with Ginge, working up to being able to clip on a leadrope without the slow extravagance of subtle movements that I had had to use previously to gently work my hand from his shoulder up to his chin. After a week of gentle brushing and spending time with him in the stable I could walk up to him normally, and clip on the leadrope with little fuss. I then gently asked him to move around me and away from me in the stable, before progressing to the enclosed yard. Going out to the arena was the next step.

And this is why you should always wear gloves. Always. Even when you think it doesn't matter - lessons are often learnt the hard-rope-burning-of-hands-way. Earlier that morning I had already sustained a rope burn across the top of one of my thumbs from Moe and 'the 15-hander'; two horses that should probably have never been led

together but I insisted that I was fine (I've still got the scar to prove that it wasn't). When Daniel asked what I had done to my hand I shrugged it off as 'nothing much' while subtly wiping away a few tears. But while Ginge and I stood there, my full weight against the rope - regretting again my lack of gloves - him merely bracing against me, everything was wrong: he didn't understand what I wanted from him and I didn't understand him. His instincts were telling him to do something very different from what I wanted him to do. In that moment he had other needs, wants, and desires (very separate from my own) and we couldn't communicate effectively enough to get past this (neither through my brash force, nor in a moment of mutual understanding).

The variety of horses I have worked with have taught me that no matter how good of a horse person I feel I am, everything can change very quickly. The horse; this big, strong, snorting, beast, beside you, that is only connected to you by a thin rope that acts as a line of communication, can make you all too aware of your own human-ness. You feel your inferiority next to such a powerful animal. But, it also gives you an enormous feeling of joy when things go well. When you do manage to control such a powerful animal, and not through strength but through careful teaching, it's intoxicating. When a horse is listening to you, and working with you, it's easy to understand more fully why people have continued to seek this relationship throughout history; through a variety of methods, through domination or cruelty or mutual trust, being in control of such an animal is like a drug. Horses can both release and connect you to the world. They make you feel alive, scared, powerful, free, cautious, brave, and transformed – depending on the situation that you find yourself in with them.

And this is a fine line.

We were at the point of calamity: Ginge and I had a fraught and tense relationship that was not as comfortable as I thought it might have been. This difficult moment highlighted the precarious nature of our relationship, and what happens when both parties aren't communicating effectively. We did not understand each other; As Haraway said of her and her dog, Cayenne, during training, 'we did not yet have a contact zone entangling each other (Haraway 2008: 215). Had I been more prepared I may not have been as willing to try and lead him around to the arena, but it was the middle of winter and they needed to stretch their legs, we were out of options in that

moment - at least, we were out of good options. It was unfair for us to expect him to react any differently in that situation, as much as we had hoped for an easy run through. Even with the help and restrictions of ropes that attached us to each other, we couldn't work together. Many traditional relationships constantly work at the edge of this line, on the border of chaos, usually culminating in the human's exertion of superior control over the horse through force. Natural horsemanship practitioners work with horses in a way that limits this chaos by improving communication. These more traditional methods recognize elements of 'wildness' in horses as being innate, and always just held in check by cultural constraints. In her work on rodeo culture that exemplifies the use of traditional methods in the US, Lawrence discusses what her informants consider to be the 'true nature' of the horses that are used in this spectacle:

It is said that a riding horse 'goes bad' or 'turns sour', starts bucking riders off, learns he can do it, and is henceforth unsafe to ride. No special event or cause brings this about, the bucking trait is just 'in' this particular animal, and presumably has been previously held in check. The dichotomy of wild/tame is exemplified here, as it exists in the horses dual nature. Thus the animal has the capacity to be in either realm; it can shuck off the restraints of culture that have been imposed on it by man's training, and revert to the wild – its true nature in the case of the bronc. (1982: 150)

Natural horsemanship aims to have a more encompassing impression of horses as a species – one that is kind, and generous, and forgiving when the chance is given to them - where a horse that is perceived as having a 'bad attitude' was made that way by humans. However, ropes and halters in the hands of the over-enthusiastic, but under-skilled horse person, can create an unfortunate scenario through the over-use of force (Birke 2007). Because the lines of force and control in NH are not too clear, with no complete write off of negative punishment, it can be hard to make the correct decisions. This can lead to unhappy, unwilling or scared, shut-down horses. But, as Haraway says, it is by attempting to recognise that the other sentient being that you're working with has 'his or her own exacting species interests and individual quirks' that it is possible for 'training with a member of another biological species [to be so] interesting, hard, full of situated difference, and moving' (2008: 213). There was hope for Ginge and I yet!

The first step of this for many is Join-up, or a version of it, followed by simple work on the ground using a rope and halter to build a language between horse and human. Join-up works by the human attempting to speak 'equus' (Roberts 1996: 79), a modified form of the horse's own body language that is used between horses. This language is a non-verbal one, led by actions and body movement – but it is more for the horse than the human. There is a give and take between them, until each can read the other and a method of communication is built up between them. The human applies pressure on the halter when an incorrect movement is made by the horse, and the pressure releases when the horse is doing the task correctly. Through this method the horse learns what movements of the human I.e. walking forwards, will lead to pressure and how it can be avoided. As described by Haraway about dog training, the human 'decides for the dog [or horse in this case] what the acceptable criteria of performance will be' but that they must simultaneously respond to 'the authority of the dog's [horse's] actual performance' (Haraway 2008: 221). In a similar manner, adjustments to methods and actions during NH training sessions are necessary for the horse to learn and respond appropriately. This can mean going back a few steps; upping the intensity; taking a moment to calm down; or giving reassurance.

Natural horsemanship teaches people how to be the more dominant part of the human-horse relationship, to interact with them in a way that that a horse would with their own herd – both to bond with them and to more effectively manage their behaviour by speaking a language that they understand. You don't become a horse, and the horse does not become human: Monty quotes the idea of a centaur for these moments of connection – half horse, half human – interacting in a way where both can communicate and participate to create these moments. These are often temporary connections, fleeting moments in the training of horses in the human world, but the aim is for a more permanent bond between human and horse. These moments could be read as the 'taste of copresence' that Haraway senses in the 'shared building of other worlds' (2008: 237), and Smut so aptly puts in to words:

[copresence is] something we taste rather than something we use. In mutuality, we sense that inside this other body, there is 'someone home',

someone so like ourselves that we can co-create a shared reality as equals (2001: 308).

Ginge and I were working on this.

Trust and Choice: Discovering degrees of freedom

Everyone may not know what breaking in is, therefore I will describe it. It means to teach a horse to wear a saddle and bridle, and to carry on his back a man, woman or child; to go just the way they want, and to go quietly. Besides this he has to learn to wear a collar, a crupper, and a breeching, and to stand still while they are all put on; then to have a cart and a chaise fixed behind, so that he cannot walk or trot without dragging it after him; and he must go fast or slow, just as his driver wishes. He must never start at what he sees, nor speak to other horses, nor bite, nor kick, nor have any will of his own; but always do his masters' will, even though he may be very tired or hungry; but the worst of all is, when his harness is once on, he may neither jump for joy nor lie down for weariness. So you see this breaking in is a very great thing. (Sewell 2014 [1877]: 7)

The above exert is direct from a famous fictional horses mouth, Black Beauty. The full tale is a distinctly anthropocentric story told from the view-point of the horse, dealing with the many types of people, events, and working jobs that a horse would have had to deal with in 19th Century Britain. Although a fictional portrayal, it speaks loudly to how humans have dominated horses throughout history, even by those who were 'good thoughtful men.... That any horse may be proud to serve' (8). Horses experience the world very differently, so how do we communicate with them in a way they understand? How do we convince them that these strange things are not going to hurt them?

Horses learn to understand in NH through the actions and movements of people, mediated by equipment. It is a cross-cultural negotiation of a very different kind,

where each party learns to trust each other - though trust is a difficult thing to categorize or recognize. The horse learning to trust the human is the main step in successful training, exemplified by the act of Join-up. Consequently, the human must present themselves as a person who can be trusted, with consistent movements and reactions, topped off by unbelievable patience. The horse displays trust by allowing themselves to be manoeuvred by their human in a willing manner, allowing the human unfettered access to their bodies and legs, and learning to react calmly to strange stimuli. The horse must choose to trust humans, relinquishing themselves to the realm of being 'unfree' (Haraway 2008). Schopenhauer suggests that in western traditions, having choice, mediated by will, could be considered the quintessential elements of freedom and what it is to be human, and that expressing them expresses our individuality. It is only through *choosing* to do something that freedom becomes a reality.

Schopenhauer outlines three faces of constructing freedom; physical, moral, and intelligent. He largely ignores ideas of intelligent freedom, where the mind has clear knowledge of the motives to action in his essay *On The Freedom Of The Will*. For this argument, I too do not explore the idea of intelligent freedom with regards to horses, partly because it would be impossible to have knowledge of whether or not the horse understands their own motives, partly because Schopenhauer's work is situated for humans and not for nonhuman animals, and partly because ideas of physical and moral freedom provide plenty of interesting angles in this case without extrapolating philosophical ideas too far. Physical freedom, as the absence of physical obstacles, restrictions or restraints is the simplest way to understand what it is to be 'free'. Moral freedom could be seen as the act of reacting to a stimulus without necessity; that the response comes from a decision based on free will, as one choice among many that has not been influenced. As Schopenhauer says:

...in this physical meaning of the concept of freedom, animals and human beings are called free when neither chains, dungeon, nor paralysis, and thus generally no physical, material obstacle impedes their actions, but these [actions] occur in accordance with their will...this physical meaning of the concept of freedom, and especially as the predicate of animals, is the original, immediate, and therefore most frequent one...as soon as an animal

acts only from its will, it is in this sense free, and no account is taken here of what may have influenced the will itself. (1999 [1839]: 4)

In Schopenhauer's argument, horses would still be subject to natural laws of behaviour and stimulus-response behaviours to situations. They are not free to use understanding *and* reason as humans do, only the former. Natural horsemanship enthusiasts suggest that the horse is doing more than just reacting to the stimulus in an input-output model and are instead assessing situations and using *reason* as they learn to trust their human and understand their questions. They concretely believe that horses have a choice in their actions, although they may also concede that horses don't necessarily have '*freedom*'. Freedom in this case could be considered to be negatively constituted by the overarching limits of society and institutions in the UK that are always factors in the control of behaviour or movement of horses to some level (Hannan 2013; Keane 2014b; Laidlaw 2014; Schopenhauer 1999 [1839]), I would suggest then that horses could be seen to be subject to 'degrees of freedom'.

So in considering ideas of physical freedom in relation to these new 'horse cultures', one must also attend to the motive (external or internal) and the individual character of the actor. Physical freedom in this case then is not as unproblematic as Schopenhauer suggests for nonhuman animals; it is precisely the physical and moral categories of freedom that intertwine horses and their humans and the subsequent choices that they make during interactions that develop these degrees of freedom. My informants would argue that horses have distinct characters, that they have a will of their own and are actively assessing situations and outcomes. Therefore, if we take what Schopenhauer says, 'in essence motivation is not different from causality, but is only a form of it, namely causality that passes through the medium of cognition' (1999 [1839]: 41) and that it is the will of the individual that determines an outcome of a given situation, then it could be seen that horses as persons in natural horsemanship have the capacity to *choose* to work alongside humans. In turn, this confers a degree of freedom to an otherwise unfree horse.

Experiences of freedom could be spilt into idioms of knowing, or one of actions; Humans are, of course, reflexively able to experience either of these but horses can only express ideas of freedom through action. However, I would also suggest that

horses and humans are subject to a third sub-category of how they experience freedom where it is sensed as a feeling or an emotion as much as an action (Humphrey 2007). My informants suggest that the horse is able to express their feelings of freedom through physical actions and the visual release of energy I.e. through running and bucking when being turned out in the field after time spent in the stable (Image 3). They can also show the release of energy when moments of pressure are lifted during training – when Roberts releases the pressure of the ropes in the round pen after a successful change in direction (by applying pressure on the opposite side of the Dually halter) he calls it the ‘celebration’, and the horse appears visibly relieved by the release. In chapter five I will probe this idea further to discuss moments of shared feelings of freedom during ridden work, expressed as joy.

Many may argue that it is not possible to understand freedom and determinism without fully exploring the philosophy of mind (DeMello 2012). Obviously there is not the scope to do that here (nor potentially would it even be possible to understand a horses philosophy of mind). Instead I aim to explore ideas of freedom in a broader sense, using my own ethnography to highlight these ideas and how it juxtaposes with other multispecies work to discuss how horses are subject to ‘degrees of freedom’ throughout the course of their interactions with humans. The amount of physical freedom that the horse has during training is often mediated by the length of rope between them and their human - how ‘free’ the horse seems is formed both through a construction in the minds of practitioners, as well as the horses subjective appearance in an objective reality. Further to the actions of the horse, mediated by humans, the human considers degrees of freedom for the horse, bringing natural horsemanship into an ethical stance.

Webb Keane has asked for a middle ground between naturalistic explanations and a normative argument for ethics; he suggests that the problem with the current framework for ethics in anthropology is ‘the association of ethics with cultural determinism and the familiar idea that we can identify ethical differences with cultural ones in any straightforward way’ (2014a: 7). The move away from traditional methods of horsemanship is an active shift away from former socially accepted methods (Laidlaw 2014) that pays attention to a horse’s innate behaviours. I argue that move may make it is possible to return (in part) to naturalistic explanations of

ethics rather than rely solely on the normative constraints of the modern 21st Century, as we become more open to ‘listening to horses’. This could be seen as an example, through ethnography and the consideration that horses are subject to degrees of freedom, of an alternative approach to discussing ethics that Keane is calling for, as NH is an ethical rupture from the standard cultural norms of traditional horsemanship.



Image 3. Moe and ‘the 15 hand-er’ expressing themselves in free time

Resorting to Ropes: from the ‘wild’ to the ‘tame’

Knight opens his edited volume of *Animals in Person* by saying that they are concerned with animals as *subjects* rather than *objects*- ‘in animals as *parts* of human society rather than just *symbols* of it, and in *human interactions and relationships with* animals rather than simply human *representations of* animals’ (2005: 1, emphasis in original). However, Lawrence shows in her work among US rodeo cultures that the idea of a horse is not fixed, and that they are inherently flexible in their movement between cultural categories:

I think that of all animals the horse is uniquely suited to represent, and demonstrate through constant recapitulation, the conquest of the wild- the extension of culture into nature. For the horse embodies, and is able to demonstrate, the polarities of wild/tame, and within one species it encompasses the varying degrees between them. (1982: 132)

Taking a lead from Lawrence who discusses horses as both parts of rodeo society as well as a symbol of it thanks to the horse’s ability to transition between the categories of nature/culture and wild/tame, I hope to show how these categories are also not stable within NH groups. I’m not asking for a return to the idea of animals as ‘non-subjects’, but how the idea of the horse as a person is reconciled in natural horsemanship training where horses are constantly in a shifting position within society. Further to this, I do not want to discredit the ideals that Knight is calling for, nor to disregard other important pieces of work that have been done on human and animal interactions where the animal is considered a subject over an object; however, within NH and the wider UK horse world, there is not always a complete departure from the aforementioned idea of animals as objects.

Knight calls for the recognition of animals as a ‘somebody’ and not just as ‘substitutable items in a common category’ (2005: 2). Animals are often represented ‘as the very image of disindividualised collectivity’ (3) whereas NH training principles seek to promote the differentiated perspective that comes from an awareness of the horse as an individual, and highlights Knight’s claim that ‘individual

variations become obvious and meaningful' (3) during the formation of relationships. Knight acknowledges that an awareness of the individual animal as well as their possession of specific species traits has the potential for more effective 'communication and interaction with them' (3). NH practitioners also strive to work between these two categories in their work alongside horses. In contrast, Ingold has also suggested that human-animal relations are geared towards knowing animals in general, as in the hunter-gatherers he writes of, and not as the individual (Ingold 1994b). This idea stands in opposition to many 'horse people' who learn specifically about the individual using knowledge gained from a species-centric training approach. Ingold furthers his argument by ignoring the encounter between an individual hunter and individual animal, and instead focuses on the symbolic relationship rather than the actual, messy, physical, human predation on a prey animal. Although much of Ingold's work may be applicable outside of his ethnographic context, his actual phrasing suggests a species-centric approach rather than an individual meeting an individual. Specifically, and most importantly, Ingold says you get to know the *animals, not the individual*:

To know someone is to be in a position to approach him directly with a fair expectation of the likely response, to be familiar with that persons past history and sensible to his tastes, moods and idiosyncrasies. You get to know other human persons by sharing with them, that is by experiencing their companionship. And if you are a hunter you get to know the animals by hunting. (1994b: 16)

The subjecthood of horses in NH is not up for debate at all - my informants are all clear on that front! – but the horse is in constant flux between these grey areas as they get to 'know' them. They are expected to behave in certain ways in particular situations, but this does not necessarily conform to previous ideas of a horse as an object that can be dominated their subjecthood is still recognized. That a horse is a person with a distinct personality does not need to be proved time and time again by scientific practices and rigorous tests (Knight 2005: 2), because it is done so time and time again by the words and actions of my informants. Counter to this recent trend in anthropological thought within human-animal relationships (Kirksey 2014; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Knight 2005), it is the key of recognizing a horse's

‘object-ness’ as members of a species at certain times, even in face of their unique subjectivity, that makes their relationship to humans so interesting.

Relationships in natural horsemanship are very much shaped through the actual training which lays the ground lines for all that is to follow. In Join-up the basics of the ‘contact zone’ are created, with training, they are negotiated (Haraway 2008). Unlike in Join-up where ‘non-contact’ events are very clear as missed moments of connection, the presence of the rope and halter leads to a shift in the dynamic. No longer does the horse have complete free-will, they are bound by nylon to their person in that moment, and their actions are subject to this. Suddenly the idea of ‘non-contact’ is almost impossible because there is a connecting line between them: this leads to a shift in the degree of freedom that the horse experiences due to the level of coercion through negative reinforcement that can be applied by the use of a rope.

Horses are constantly in shifting degrees of obvious physical restrictions to their freedom through stabling and fencing, and less obviously through the use of equipment such as ropes, bits, and headcollars that restrict certain movements through pressure to parts of their bodies. These degrees of freedom are often mediated through equipment during training; early training begins with very little equipment and builds on the foundation set using the Dually or a rope halter, depending on the particular brand of NH that is being followed. After this comes saddles, bridles, bits, long lines, breastplates, and occasionally dummy riders before the real deal mounts up. In traditional horsemanship circles, equipment is often used as a way to control or physically subdue horses, or to punish unwanted behaviours (Latimer and Birke 2009: 6). In NH, as little training equipment is used as possible to help cultivate a trusting partnership where emphasis is placed on the horse choosing to work rather than being made to by extraneous items (also noted by Birke 2007, 2008). Latimer and Birke have suggested that natural horsemanship is ‘less about harnessing the power of the horse, and more about taming the wild behaviour of the horse’ (2009: 15) through the minimal use of ‘gadgets’ that they suggest are not ‘intrinsically cruel’.

On the other hand, Hurn suggests that the clothing of nonhuman animals is an attempt to control the ‘animality’ of these others, whilst the removal of clothing or ‘material paraphernalia’ suggests a break away from societal norms towards a more ethical

future alongside horses that recognizes their agency and personhood (2011: 109). Although horses may be seen in some circumstances as a status accessory (Cassidy 2002, 2007; Hurn 2008b, 2011), I found this was rarely the case among my informants. Many of my informants were certainly among the middle or the upper classes with many spare pennies to spend on the ponies, however, the justification was always for the ‘good of the horse’. It is important to them that the saddle fits just right, so that it is comfortable, even though this may cost substantial amounts of money. Special bits were bought that conform to the natural shape of the horses mouth at four times the price of a standard snaffle bit¹⁰. Protective boots were often put on for even the lightest exercise. It is a stark contrast to many other NH practitioners who preach minimalism at all costs: I encountered very few of these during my research, as many were inclined to use *more* equipment to ensure their horses comfort than to remove it all for their horses ‘naturalness’.

Fijn suggests that a key behavioural feature of a co-domestic animal is *tameness*, and not that tameness is pre-requisite for domestication. In Mongolian herder groups, process of taming is ‘acquired within an individual’s lifetime, but some animals have a greater genetic predisposition for tameness than others’ (2011: 129). Although Mongolian herders recognise some animals to be inherently ‘tame’ or ‘quiet’ (*nomkhon*), they also begin socialising young horses from birth to foster tameness and make them well socialised with humans. This socialisation continues throughout the animals life. ‘Tame’ in this context appears very different to the use of it within NH groups. In NH, a tame horse would be one that was comfortable around people, being tied up, led, touched all over and potentially ridden. The herds of Mongolian horses, however, are mostly free to roam (although are herded back to camp twice a day during the summer and autumn, and tend to stay near the camp during the winter for protection and extra provisions or salt in some cases) and considered ‘tame’ if they can be approached on foot or horseback to within a few feet (139).

After basic control is established in NH - with particular emphasis on being able to make the horse walk backwards as this is used as a means of correction for unwanted

¹⁰ Snaffles are considered to be the most basic type of bit (see Appendix A).

behaviours¹¹ – the next step is often desensitizing the horse to unfamiliar objects (Image 4). The actual nature of the unfamiliar object in this process is irrelevant; one ‘scary’ object (as perceived by the horse) is as good as another, unless the horse has a particular phobia of something. During demonstrations, Roberts often uses a plastic bag on the end of a stick for this task as rustling plastic is generally something that horses find very scary, and it gives excellent visual responses for the audience. The plastic is not actually dangerous nor painful to the horse, so is a good tool to use to overcome some level of ‘spookiness’. The horse often moves violently away from the plastic bag, at which point the halter tightens around the horse’s nose. Once the horse is still again the pressure is automatically released. Training like this creates a two-fold reaction; the horse both learns that the bag is not scary, and that staying still while the human presents an unknown object or task into their world, is beneficial. The plastic bag is presented to both sides of the horse - often with a similarly extreme reaction on both sides – because horses are herbivorous flight animals with eyes located to the sides of their head, meaning they lack binocular vision. Each eye sees a whole new image. The horse has the choice to continue to move away or to stand still and accept this new object in their environment. The overtones of coercion in this scenario would seem clear – moving around creates a tightening of the headcollar, staying still is met with reward. However, if you thought that the horse could not get away if it wished you would be sorely mistaken. Half a ton of solid mass and muscle is more than a match for a human and some rope if they set their minds to it. But they rarely do.

Whilst working alongside elephants in Nepal, Piers Locke (2017) notes a similar occurrence of mutuality between humans and these powerful animals. The elephants are deployed by the government elephant stable to help clear areas of forest and for protected area management, as well as for making their own food that is then carried home. The mahut sits just behind the elephant’s ears, giving signals with their feet and voice and carrying a small stick to help back-up commands. During ‘working hours’ the elephants are not physically restrained and seem to work willingly. The elephant and ‘their human’ form a working bond, but as Locke notes often, he would not trust a

¹¹ Walking backwards is a physically demanding task for the horse that is not seen in many naturally occurring behaviours and shows ultimate control over the horse’s feet and how they move.

strange elephant in the same way as his elephant Sitasma Kali (2017). These are very large, very powerful animals and the control humans have over them is granted by the elephants themselves, and is not a product of domination. As if they could! Locke tells of one mahut who had been drinking who was squashed underfoot by his elephant – whether he had been cruel, or whether the elephant was confused by the change in her handler’s actions is unclear. There is a very real danger that comes from working in such close proximity to these animals, and the same could hold true for horses. In natural horsemanship, horses are not tied down or made to fear people, but their opinions of people are slowly changed through consistent training. They ‘take a chance’ on a human (Roberts, demonstration Autumn 2015), and express an element of choice in the process. My informants would consider horses free to make their own decisions in this process; that there is a degree of freedom in their actions.

The next steps of saddling the horse and attaching long-lines (see Appendix A) are often done with few problems as the horse has learnt to stand still (Image 5). They are allowed to move and run with the saddle, and then again with the ropes on either side of them, expressing a natural behaviour that allows them to work out for themselves that the wearing of a saddle and lines may be unusual, but not dangerous. Once the horse has accepted these new items on their body, the human begins to use the lines to turn and steer them in different directions. Finally, even pressure is placed on both lines (which puts equal pressure on both sides of their head) to teach them how to halt, and rein-back (Image 6). These are the same cues that will be used when they are being ridden, first in the halter, and then progressing to the bridle with a bit (Image 7). As each item of tack is presented and placed on the horse, starting from the simple halter right through to a fully tacked-up horse ready for a rider, it represents the continuing transition from the colloquially ‘wild’ horse to one that is ‘tame’.

Lawrence (1982) discusses how the training of horses for ranch work reproduces this:

in the case of horses, they are seen as possessing great beauty and power, but to make them useful for human ends they have to be first subdued and then trained to do man’s bidding in this process they must leave the realm of the wild and enter the sphere of the domesticated (133)

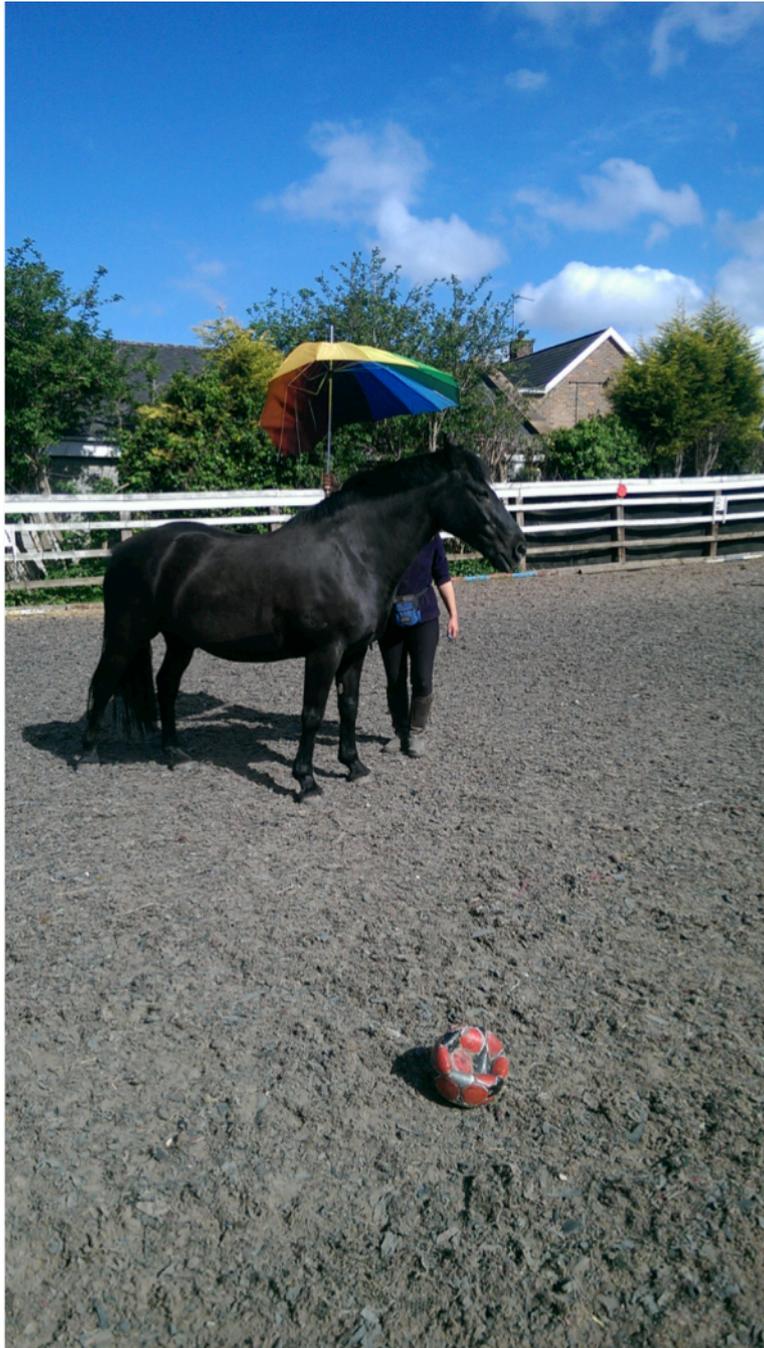


Image 4. Desensitisation to objects can be taken even further and incorporated into more advanced training. Here, Tom is learning to station himself under the umbrella.

She wishes to consider horses as being a ‘symbolic bridge between nature and culture’ (133). However, reducing horses to mere symbolic elements in two opposing networks goes against everything that multispecies research has been working towards. Horses are capable of treading fine lines along a continuum of nature to

culture, which Lawrence represents in her book *Rodeo* by using the idioms of ‘wild’ and ‘tame’. In the case of natural horsemanship in the UK, these idioms are just one way to consider how a horse is able to cartwheel around our conceptions and preconceptions of what it is to be subject only to the laws of nature, or to be a cultural construct.



Image 5. Hector and the author. Hector came to NH with a fear of ropes tightening around his quarters, so we used a modified version of long-reining until he was accepting of the pressure. A: a single rope is used until he is comfortable. B: two ropes, but no pressure on his quarters. C: Classic example of long reining, note that he is going forwards with his head low in a relaxed fashion.



Image 6. Shannon and the author long-reining in the countryside in preparation for ridden work.



Image 7. Hector's second time being ridden properly. The author is on board. He is being ridden with a bit, but the Dually halter is still on.

Training certainly tames horses, moving them along the spectrum away from ‘pure nature’ (144), but it does not remove their innate or ‘natural’ qualities. The horse is not created by humans, but in spite of them. The horse's own nature is what makes it what it is, not the natural or cultural categories that it can be a part of. However, as Lawrence does reiterate, horses are capable of reverting to their more natural selves – they are never wholly tame and possess an element of wildness that is always held in check, but ready to appear at any moment as in the case of the rodeo broncs in her work (1982).

Training and the ‘enculturation’ of horses slowly replaces the naturally occurring things in their environment with means to control them. Very few things that humans place in the environment of a horse are there purely for their pleasure. We take the horse out of the small paddock that we keep them in, and expect them to walk quietly alongside us, no matter what exciting or scary things appear. We bring them in to dark barns and make them stand in small places that does not allow them to act out their innate instincts to run from trouble, yet we expect them to remain biddable and easy

to work with. As Fiona, a trainer originally with a background in natural horsemanship but who now works using only positive-reinforcement training, said to me:

It is very punishing to leave the horses alone, we are basically ignoring their behaviours, and horses hate being on their own. But we use techniques to punish them all the time because it works for us. We put them in stables. We use electric fencing. We put them in trailers. We aren't actively hurting them, but we are controlling them still. Keeping horses isolated in stables, in small spaces, is very punishing; but that's how we choose to keep them. It would be impractical for people not to do this. And so it's the only way that we can keep horses. So it must be rewarding for them to want to live like this. It's all very well saying natural-this natural-that, but it's just not true. We make them into the horses that we want them to be in this process, and many of them cope very well.

Other multispecies relationships can also be investigated using ideas of freedom and the process of the transition from the wild to the tame. In contrast to natural horsemanship, the relationship between *matador* and fighting bull that Gary Marvin (1994) describes is dominated by the removal of the bull from the realm of being free once the bull is brought into the cultural space of the arena (*corrida*). Although the bull is not restrained by ropes or chains, other cultural artefacts are used to impose control over the body and will of the fighting bull. By bringing the wild nature of the bull into the realm of culture and restricting the innate behaviours and movements of the bull, the relationship becomes contrived and there is only one way it will end:

Although the *corrida* involves initial disorder in that the bull, once in the arena, is uncontrolled, the matador must impose order and control, and the whole event turns on a thorough imposition of order through form and formality. The working out of the relationship between man and animal is far from indeterminate – the two are not simply put in an arena to sort things out; there is a set process which must be followed through.... The rules and the process which are set out for all toreros provide the outer framework of order, of the imposition of culture, but within this framework the man must

impose order directly on the bull and actually take it through this process
(Marvin 1994; 168)

They may ‘dance’ together, but they are not becoming-with each other. The bulls are ‘out of place’ and made to fight by removing their free will through spatial restrictions and the use of *banderillas* (sharp sticks which are stabbed into the shoulders of the bull) to weaken them. As the bull’s strength is reduced, Marvin suggests it is brought into the realm of domestication - the process of the performance denatures the bull, both by removing its physical strength and adorning it with colourful human items. Marvin also states of the horses used in the performance that the point at which it becomes domesticated is after it is ‘broken’ and succumbs to the will of the human. It is the removal of free will that Marvin suggests is the mark of domestication. NH training practices could also be seen as an act of controlling natural behaviours and produces tension in the ideas of domestication and domination. It is a taming practice, but it could be said that it does not domesticate horses because practitioners strive to accommodate their individual will throughout the process. The Bullfight is a much more brutal way to negotiate the control of nature by humans:

when the bull first comes into the arena it usually charges powerfully and erratically, and is extremely difficult to control. Slowly the matador forces it to charge the way he wants it to charge and where he wants it to charge; he bends it to his will.... If the matador is unable to control the animal he will have failed in his task, for the minimum expected of him is that he control the bull.... If the man is unable to control the bull, the meaning of the event collapses, for then it is the bull which is imposing its will on the man.
(Marvin 1994: 137)

This is a battle between two actors that transforms the will and decreases any level of freedom (or the chances of possible future freedoms) of the bull in the process. The outcome of NH is not as set in stone (nor as morbid), and is reliant on the outcome of correct choices by both parties. In the next section we will see what happens when horses display their right to choose, wrongly.

‘Hanging out’ with horses: A different way of building trust

Natural horsemanship comes in many shapes and sizes, although one of the most practiced, approachable, and fashionable forms in the UK currently, is the one taught by Monty Roberts. It could be said that the main differences in training techniques between groups of people are based on how the horse is viewed by the person who is training it. Professional trainers base their methods more on the horse as a *species*, and stick closely to what it is for a horse to be a horse and train them as such; Recreational trainers of their own individual horse tend to base their training more on the horse as an individual with a known personality, allowing them to tip over in to kin-like relations (see chapter six).

Of the people who I have worked with, Stuart stuck most closely to the Monty Roberts curriculum - previously he was a Recommended Trainer (see Appendix A). Daniel’s techniques are based on the ideals of NH by using non-violent methods that work with the horses natural behaviours and instincts, but blended with a lifetime around horses and shared knowledge from his father before that. Fiona has scrapped her NH upbringing in favour of positive-reinforcement training. The public demonstrations put on by Roberts are mainly for show, and most training does not take place over such a short time scale, and certainly not when an owner needs to be trained as well. Julie believes strongly in the message of NH but actually attempts a much more quiet and subtle approach to training horses - almost the opposite of the spectacle that occurs in the demonstrations. She straddles the idea of what it is to be a professional horse person and the more lay-equestrian who owns and/or rides and trains horses purely for recreational purposes. She takes inspiration from both Monty Roberts and Pat Parelli, although places the welfare and ‘happiness’ of the horse above any training. Horses are her business, her passion, her family, and now her life’s work:

I just saw that there were so many horses in the world that needed my help. People just treat animals so badly because it doesn’t occur to them that horses might have feelings too, that they might actually understand more than people give them credit for, that they have emotions. I mean, even I

didn't know all this stuff, this 'natural horsemanship' stuff as they call it. And once I learned it all just seemed so simple! I can't believe that I wasn't working like this before and now I just want to spread the word, make other people aware of it. I mean, loads of people are already on our wavelength, but more should be. It's my job to help convert people to it, to teach them how to live with horses properly.

Julie is the manager of an equine rescue and re-homing centre, and a firm believer in just spending time with horses and not asking them questions – they are not initially in training per se compared to other standards, but Julie feels that it is important to spend time with them in their own space to learn their habits and their personalities when they are, what Julie would describe as, 'free'. After learning about how they are 'free to be horses' with each other and once they are comfortable with humans in their environment, then the training can begin. It is a form of attempting to 'be with' horses that involves much less active interference from the trainer: there is no expectation that the horse must stay near you, and the horse is not made to by using ropes or halters. The best way I can describe it is as 'hanging out' with the horses in the field.

Well we don't all have access to round-pens and things do we? And it's all very well being Monty Roberts but we're just human! So we work with what we have, and what we have are fields full of horses. I love just spending time with them, getting to know them, and I don't think it works any less well than Join-up. It takes a bit longer, but it also doesn't involve the same stress. This way, they have no negative moments with people – it's all positive.

This charity rescues horses and then rehomes them, but the charity retains ownership of the horses after they find new homes. Many of the horses that end up at here are often old or injured in some way that decreases their monetary value, others are brought there because their owners can no longer afford to keep them or can no longer manage them. The Yorkshire branch, near Scarborough, is one of three charities that are funded by a group of trustees. To augment funds, Julie actively buys and sells items (horse related and otherwise) from car boot sales and house clearances. Most of

this stuff is stored in the large barn on the farm, and is mostly collected, not sold. Occasionally, strangers arrive at the farm to collect items that have been sold, or Julie begins a mad week of selling things on Ebay. The farm and house is a recent investment, prior to this the horses were allowed to be on the land but Julie and Sarah were living elsewhere. They lived a very frugal existence in a small house in the middle of nowhere, with limited electricity and luxuries. They are both dedicated vegans, and attempt to live as eco-friendly a way as possible, with limited electricity use, growing their own vegetables (we always had a surplus of courgettes!), second hand clothes, and no luxuries such as a TV - the internet is a recent edition to their lives and necessary for the development of the business through email, websites, and social media. Julie is also concerned with an active Ebay account for purchasing and selling horse equipment: However, neither Julie nor her daughter Sarah have a personal Facebook account as they are worried about strangers knowing about their lives and private information.

The farm has about 60 acres and a large barn plus some smaller outbuildings, but there is still not enough space to contain all of the paraphernalia from sales; it flows out of the barns and takes up lots of space in the yard and areas that we lead the horses through. This is a stark comparison to previous yards I have been on where everything has a place, and tidiness is a key goal throughout the day. Health and safety also doesn't appear to play a strong role in the lives of the people who come here, you enter the barn at your own risk. Julie hopes that people have enough common sense to avoid accidents without a plethora of warning signs or health and safety procedures. It is not yet set-up to be an equestrian property. There are no facilities for training horses, such as an arena, but plans were afoot for building two permanent round pens on site for training – during the time I was there, no progress was made on these. Despite the slow progress of the yard, Julie has extravagant plans for it and its occupants:

So we have about 20 horses right now; at the moment we are trying to work with them slowly, gain their trust and then try and find new homes for them. And then we are going to run clinics and do demonstrations, to help show people how we work and teach them better ways to be with horses. If people

come to us looking for a better way to be with horses then I'm happy to teach them because they've taken a step in the right direction.

Julie regularly attends car boot sales and brings back to the farm van loads of new-to-them possessions. She is a collector of 'stuff', and it is stacked high in the barn so that the horses have to delicately weave in and out of towers of items on small winding pathways; a wrong step can result in toppling cupboards or falling piles of clothes. She is a connoisseur of finding the value in things that people no longer want, including horses. Walking through the fields, Julie goes up to every horse for a scratch and a quiet kind word to them; she sees value in each of them and regularly bemoans the fact that people no longer want them. Julie recognizes their value as animals, as persons, in their own right:

Natural horsemanship is more like a lifestyle choice for me I suppose.....
An awareness of all living things..... About how to live in the world and try and make it better. Natural horsemanship is trying to do that for horses, and so am I.

Julie starts her day by marching into the barn and loudly greeting all the animals, sometimes she says good morning to Rebecca, her head girl, and I too while we muck out stables: "Good morning Rory! Good morning Indie! Morning Frankie! Morning Dixie! (the dog)" She then spends a few minutes having a quiet word with Rory, asking him about his night, and how he feels today. She gives him a scratch and a small bucket of a concoction of stewed herbs to help his many health problems. The barn often smells of lavender too because of the essential oils that she rubs on to the soles of his feet to keep infections away, the smell mingles with that of the horses rather well – it helps to cover the lingering smell of disused furniture and bric-a-brac from car boot sales and house clearances. Later in the day she takes the quad bike up to the field for an hour or so - because of an old riding injury she cannot walk around too much usually and instead motors between each of the horses. There is usually a head collar strapped on the front of the quad, and a bottle of aloe vera and homemade fly spray balanced precariously on top. Apart from the few horses that don't accept human contact yet, Julie checks over each horse, spending extra time talking with and stroking her favourites. She often just stops what she is doing in the day to come and

talk to a horse, no matter how busy she is, there is always time for a scratch and a kind word.

I start my morning slightly differently:

Being careful not to alert the horses in the barn to my presence - lest they start expecting breakfast - I creep out to the field to make sure that no harm has come to the horses in the big fields, a short distance from the barns, over night. This is my favourite time of the day. No one else is up and on the yard yet, and the horses are quiet and peaceful early in the mornings. The main gates onto the quiet country road are padlocked to prevent horse thieves (but I dare any horse thief to try and manoeuvre a lorry or trailer surreptitiously to the middle-of-nowhere where the rescue centre is located: the sides of my car often brush the sides as I drive down these roads), so I climb the gate whilst clutching a dual purpose carrot – it helps the difficult horses to want to be near me, and encourages them all to be caught easily (“There’s nothing wrong with a bit of bribery” as Fiona said multiple times). The first horse I come across is always Shannon, she sees me from the far end of the field where the small herd she belongs to spends most of their mornings, and begins to mosey over to me (Image 8). She wears a double layered, UV-resistant fly mask to protect her sensitive eyes from the sun (she is an Appaloosa, a spotted horse, with pink skin under her cream coloured hair that is very sensitive to the sun’s harmful rays) that makes her eyesight poor through the multiple layers of fine mesh. However, she expects her morning carrot to be hand-delivered and takes a chance that it might be me every time. She seems to struggle particularly with close-up objects, and takes a second to locate my hand near the end of her nose. But, with some soft inhales, she smells the carrot and finds the reward for her perseverance.

The next horse over is my other favourite, an older Haflinger mare, unoriginally called Haffy. She is slow and careful due to a combination of arthritis and sore feet, and she knows better than to push herself and get in the way of Shannon - there is a very definite hierarchy in this field! Haffy wanders over after Shannon has mooched away, eyes half closed in the bright morning sunshine, to claim her own piece of carrot - the rest of the carrot is reserved for Jester, Izzy, and Pea, the three ‘untouchables’. Haffy has a short, course, sandy coloured coat that seems to

constantly be moulting, and a wild cream coloured mane that can't be tamed with a brush. Her head is too large for her body, and she isn't classically what would be considered 'pretty' for a horse, but she has large, kind eyes, and a patient temperament; both with other horses and people. Close behind Haffy is Ollie, a young black horse, who is constantly getting in her way; rubbing against her, biting her sides, and following too close behind so that he trips over her feet. William soon comes over to put Ollie in his place. He is a big Spanish gelding that Julie believes needs 'more time' before he is ready to start working. The other Spanish gelding in this field, Jester, doesn't come over; he always looks miserable, but doesn't move away as I approach to give him a piece of carrot. Finally is Dapps, always the last one, because he is so grossly overweight. He is another older horse, very quiet to ride, Sarah's favourite, and has trouble breathing because of the extra weight he carries. This is my favourite field.

The next field over contains three grey mares, all of them fat, and on the point of laminitis. After some gentle persuasion from Rebecca and I, Julie agreed to let us fence off a part of the field to restrict their grazing. However, because Julie won't let us electrify the fence because it costs money that she thinks would be better spent elsewhere, the mares are constantly escaping. Bee is the ringleader. She is the smallest and the first to test the fence and push her way under it; the others just follow her lead. Finally, in the furthest field are 'the boys' (and Pea). 'The boys' are three rarely handled geldings and have a bit of a gang mentality. They are closely bonded and tricky to work individually. Pea is a little mare that no one can get near except me. I have been using Fiona's training techniques with her and it is working slowly but surely. Julie's approach to training is a very slow and gentle one:

I do find some of it [natural horsemanship] a little rough. I don't like the rope halters, I think they are cruel. And the dually, they are so heavy that they must hurt. It's too much pressure sometimes I think. What about a nice kind word and a scratch? People want quick results I suppose, but I much prefer to ask nicely and just be patient. So often once the horse understands they are willing to comply. Like putting on hoof boots... it must feel funny but Shannon and Haffy are such kind mares that they just need a little time. We just do everything nice and quietly.



Image 8. Shannon coming to greet me in the morning.

This ‘hanging out’ with horses is a much slower form of learning how to communicate with horses *on an individual level*: in contrast to Roberts’ techniques which favour the known behavioural responses of the *species* as the basis of his principles. On a basic level, it creates trust between individuals in a similar manner to Join-up, however, it does not create a willingness in the horse to accept pressure or address questions asked of them by humans. They remain ‘uncultured’ with only a field boundary as a form of restraint. There is no initial moment of tension, where the outcome hangs in the balance; correct moves and effective communication have to take place for a transformation in the horse and a connection between horse and human to be made in Join-up. Julie creates a much more romantic view of living alongside horses which entails no conflict or power struggles, but limited progression. For some of the horses at the rescue centre, learning to be near humans really is enough for them, but with the option of being able to move away (and no incentive to stay with their human).

These moments of ‘togetherness’ of horse and human, just the small moments, are what Julie considers to be the most important in the training of horses - no pressure, no conflict – but also no progress in a lot of ways. I do not believe that this is a moment of ‘becoming’: It is not a moment of acute awareness of the others thoughts

and intentions and an ability to create a relationship, but more of a passive moment closer to the idea of habituation that Candea (2010) postulates as only the human is changed in this interaction. Spending time with horses in their own space was very important for Julie and Sarah – and seen by them as an integration into the herd where they become more horse-like to the horses themselves. I'm not sure how much closer I felt to the horses because of this practice of 'hanging out', but it was still my favourite time of the day. The peace and quiet of the morning, with the horses still lethargic in the early light of the sun, was hard to rival. Julie was definitely right about one thing: seeing Shannon and Haffy actively coming to greet me (regardless if it was only for a piece of carrot) was a great feeling - and a far greater reward for getting out of bed than a cup of coffee. Julie also felt these moments of connections with horses:

It's important that they accept my, our, presence in their space. If they feel comfortable with me there that's a great step. If they come over to me that's amazing, it's so nice when they walk over, like they really want to be near you – it makes you feel so honoured. I think it's good just to go and talk to them, its nice to be able to go and pick their feet up or something, but just spending time with them is often enough, being a part of their herd, it's a part of their training. Talking to them is good for them, lets them know they are important, that you care about them. Rory loves a good chat.

The morning officially starts at 8am for Rebecca (the resident trainer and head-girl) and myself, although my early morning check on the horses was often before everyone else woke up and disturbed the peace. Julie arrives on the yard at 8:30am to feed the horses in the barn, and Sarah can be found after 10am to help us exercise horses, after some cajoling from Julie, and leaves soon after it's done. The basic morning duties include mucking out, soaking haynets, giving hay, and working with horses out in the field. Afternoons are devoted to a repetition of these jobs and the riding of some horses. Julie prefers the basic training of the horses to be done in the fields where they feel most comfortable. This is contrary to traditional training methods, as well as those utilised by Daniel, Fiona, and Stuart. These trainers all believe that the process of taking horses away from their field, away from their herd, is an important part of the their training. However, NH trainers all also agree that if the horse is not confident on its own that this area should be worked on initially, and

the horse should not just be forced away from its herd as it would be by a more traditional trainer and made to ‘just cope’.

The horse is very used to being a ‘horse’ in the field, and in fact it is very good at it. Taking it out of the field, away from its herd, and placing it in a space that restricts their ability to ‘horse’ (I.e. to graze, and run, and interact with other horses) places them in a structure that controls their instincts without a human having to use force to stop these instinct driven actions. It’s a well-known practice in both traditional horsemanship and natural horsemanship that horses should not be trained in their ‘own’ space, where they could potentially claim control; the arena acts as a neutral space for horse and trainer without the distractions of the herd or food and becomes a place where they can work together. Working with the horses in the field is often slow progress and John Boy, one of Julie’s charges, exhibited all the reasons it should not be done most days during training!

John Boy: A Tale of Two Kinds of Horse

John Boy was a good-looking, black, welsh-type cob. At about 15hh he wasn’t a small horse, and very powerful. Using Parelli- style halters (that Julie deemed light enough to be comfortable for the horses) Rebecca and I were supposed to teach him how to pick up his feet, lead, move away from pressure, and lunge – basic skills that must be learnt before he was taught to be ridden (Image 9). However, John Boy often had other ideas. Because of the proximity of his herd - his safety blanket - whenever he was worried or stressed by the training he would try to pull away from Rebecca back to the herd. By throwing his head to the floor and trying to hook his front leg over the rope he would occasionally succeed as well. Because of these ‘temper tantrums’, as Rebecca dubbed them, it meant that she often had to work him quite hard to get good results, and be quite firm (Image 10). No matter how much he pulled, Rebecca could not let go otherwise he would learn that he could escape to the safety of his herd whenever he wanted. It often turned into a battle of wills between them to see who could last longest - all the power and might of a horse contained by a single rope. Good behaviour from John Boy (where he was walking quietly around on the circle) was rewarded with a quiet ‘good boy’ from Rebecca and a slack rope:

The real reward for him is the lack of pressure. When he's misbehaving and pulling away the pressure of the rope is tight, when he stops pulling away the pressure comes off. He'll learn soon enough. But it's why I can't let him go, because then the pressure of the rope would be released as well and he would be rewarded for getting away from me. It feels a little mean, and it probably does hurt him a little, it's certainly hurting my hands, but he has to learn not to do it. That I'm the one in control. That he has to pay attention to me instead of the herd.

One day, when John Boy was having one of these 'temper tantrums', Sarah saw it happening. Up to this point, neither Sarah nor Julie had seen John Boy working, although we had previously told them about his behaviour and were met with comments like "he's just young, he'll learn" or "just keep being patient with him, he'll soon come round". This time, however, Sarah came roaring down the field on the quad bike towards us and demanded that we stop working John Boy immediately because he was too stressed. Rebecca disagreed because if she had stopped then John Boy would be rewarded for his actions up to that point and feel confused by the questions that had been asked and consequently disregarded. On the back of this potential argument, we all decided to go and consult with Julie to see what she would like done with John Boy now, and for the rest of his training. Julie's response was:

I really don't want him to be stressed, it's very counterproductive for his training. The horses come here to be safe, I don't want him to feel like he's being punished for just being himself. I know he's seven, but he's very immature. When he came I don't think we realised how sensitive he was. I'm not really sure what happened to him before, but I think they [previous owners] tried to do too much with him, and it worried him. He's going to make someone a great horse someday, he's so kind, but maybe we just need to take a step back with him?

To Rebecca, John Boy was a wilful horse with too much attitude; He needed firm training to bring out the best in him, rather than fighting with people all the time. Rebecca believes that, although some horses need their training tweaked depending on their individual personalities, all horses respond to firm, consistent, species

specific, training. However, Julie bases her training opinions on the horse as an individual, with sensitive personalities that needed to be recognised. There are many horses in the fields that Julie and Sarah cannot get near because they don't work with them, whereas Rebecca and I have no problem catching any of the horses, lifting their feet up¹² and leading them: but Julie doesn't see this so believes that the horses aren't ready for their training to be progressed. They always 'need more time'. The horses see Rebecca and myself as people to trust with their bodies and are happy to let us interact with them - even when they don't always understand what the funny two-legged creatures are doing. Julie is an unknown quantity that can be ignored and walked over (literally). She truly believes that the horses will turn into trainable horses who can become members of a human society just by spending time on them and caring for them:

If they know you care about them they will start to trust you..... Every horse needs different amounts of time.... It's so wonderful to see their eyes soften when they see you. When they allow you to lift their feet, and put on tack, and get on their backs; it's an honour.

Julie believes that horses like John Boy need time, but she also believes that there are some horses that simply cannot be trained based on their particular personalities – their individual quiddities. Sarah's old pony, Stan, is one such example. He was tame, enough, but both Julie and Sarah saw him as untrainable. Stan is an older pony (I would describe him as wise!) that Sarah no longer rides as she cannot control him and she doesn't trust him. Both Julie and Sarah describe him as unwilling and say that he cannot be effectively trained by any method. Roberts' training method attempts to turn horses into 'willing partners', unfortunately, Julie and Sarah's preformed opinions of Stan's individual nature mean that he will never get the chance to be trained in such a way:

He can be the nicest pony in the world, and the worst. If he doesn't want to be ridden, he won't be! It's the same with catching him, some days he stands like a lamb and the rest of the time he just buggers off. If he wants

¹² A horse will only lift their feet if it trusts you, giving you their feet means that they are giving you their means of escape.

something from you, he's happy to interact with you, but it's always on his terms. That's why you can't trust him. A lot of horses like him need to be dominated a bit, but there's just no point with Stan! We don't even bother trying.

With John Boy, Julie was worried that we were pushing him too hard, that we were being too firm with him: with Stan we weren't to waste our time. It is an extreme recognition of the horse as a thinking, feeling, subject – this is the recognition of the horse as a type of person (not human, but not *just* a horse either) with their own agendas. She used these very distinct personalities to base her training principles on. For Julie and Sarah, NH allows them to express their love and affection for their horse in a way that is perceived by them as a way that the horse can understand whilst allowing horses to exercise their own will and choose whether or not to work.



Image 9. John Boy waiting patiently to be worked, and being touched all over with the 'carrot stick'.



Image 10. John Boy trying his hardest to pull back to his herd.

The small acts and behaviours of the horse are seen to be full of intention, and help to shape how people infer horses individual personalities. ‘Personality’ is also often used more generically to describe a horse with lots of individual particular behaviours I.e.

one that unlocks stable doors, where they are described as ‘having personality’ - as if it is a possessive quality of only that individual and that all the horses with ‘personality’ get trained one way and those lacking this distinctive but unspecific trait, get trained in another manner. Livestock and other animals may not be afforded these same scruples as there is little or no recognition of them as acting, thinking, individuals by those who exist with them. By this same standard, ironically, horses that a recreational practitioner has no affective attachment to – a horse that is merely ‘out there’ in the world – may be seen completely differently to their doted on, carrot fed, personal horse. In the abstract, these horses still receive an element of imaginative caring because it is still a horse, a member of the same species that they love, but the actual nitty gritty points of relations between them place such unknown horses in a grey area of negative labelling. They are very definitely just horses, especially when they are behaving in an unacceptable manner.

Hearne (2000) and Haraway (2003) both comment on the fact that training appears to require the human to be in a dominant position over the companion species. NH practitioners and Mongolian herders alike also appear to adhere to this rule. As Haraway states, ‘inter-subjectivity does not mean ‘equality’, a literally deadly game in dogland; but it does mean paying attention to the conjoined dance of face-to-face significant otherness’ (2003: 41). NH uses artificial tools such as the Dually halter to exert dominance when the utilisation of naturally occurring behaviours is not enough or practical. For Mongolian herders, all herd animals must respect the role of any member of the human family – including small children who ‘have the advantage of being able to use tools, and are able to throw objects, or hit animals with a stick, to make up for their small stature’ (2011: 142). Free ranging horses are also caught from horseback by the use of a lasso–pole (*uurga*) that fastens around the neck of the horse, and coerced into returning to camp with the use of a whip (*shelbuur*) (143). Fijn does not consider such actions as cruel in her work, but necessary for retaining control. She insists that ‘herders rarely punish the herd animals’ and instead respect the horses and ‘work within the horses own social boundaries and disposition to become an accepted part of the horse’s social hierarchy’ (147). This resonates with the way that NH practitioners do not consider the use of pressure from artificial objects as cruel or exploitative. Such thought practices would not be allowed in a discourse of animal rights, however, the nature of NH as a distinct ethical practice means that it adopts its

own language and actions that are considered to be 'right' within these groups. NH does not see distinctions between an empathetic connection with the individual and the use of 'negative reinforcement' from artificial devices. Both of these practices can exist within acts of 'skilled vision' that can engage with both the inherent egomorphic nature of the individual, and species-specific behaviours.

Natural horsemanship produces a complicated set of relationships where people attempt to recreate horse-horse relationships through training, whilst moulding them into a horse that is seen to be suitable for being a part of a human-horse relationships. The training of a horse changes its status as it progresses and is transformed from the past horse into the present horse (from the 'wild' to the 'tame'), and is imagined as what it will be (with the realisation of training goals) in the future. However, different people see horses very differently based on their experiences and connections with them. How Julie talks about horses such as John Boy shows this; how she imagines him is very different to how Rebecca sees him. Julie also remembers him as he was in the past, and is confident in imagining him in the future through training. Training is used to gain trust, and helps to form and solidify the relationship between human and horse. People imagine these relationships forming - an important part of the process - as the horse becomes increasingly under the control of a person. They are actively trying to remove the horse's reliance on its herd and replace it with a new human herd-like structure. This herd speaks a different language, or two; they make confusing gestures and expect miracles; they want bizarre things.

Concluding thoughts

We love a very different kind of horse to the horse of thirty years ago. In this process we remember, and are affected by, our combined histories, which are extensive. We inherit the combined affect that all these shaping moments have had, that mingle in the possibility of these interactions during the training process. Similarly, as the horse progresses through training, we love a different horse at the end of this journey. Swabe questions about whether we can truly love our pets to death (2005). However, she highlights the way that animals as pets, as 'quasi-humans', are treated more and more like people, but badly; creating medical problems that would not be an issue if

we did not 'care' for them so much (2005: 102). The fact that horses now cross this boundary into one of companion species - out of the animal kingdom and into the human one - makes this a potential. This recognition of subjectivity works in both a positive and a negative way, and we create the 'horse' that we want through these differential processes. In a similar vein, Swabe has suggested that:

The boundaries between pet animals and humans seem to have become increasingly blurred within modern Dutch society. The fundamental problem with people-pet relationships, particularly those that are characterized by deep devotion to the animal, is that the biological needs and nature of animals may be inadequately recognized or appreciated. (2005: 116)

John Boy was wilful and too busy being a horse, giving Rebecca very little room to manoeuvre; He was refusing to let go of his instincts to stay close to his horse herd and why should he? The humans had worked him for so long, and it was hot, and the ropes are bothersome. He was in no mood to not be his very best horse-self at that moment. Negotiating these moments of potential chaos are tricky; use too much force to control them and slip away from all the ideals that natural horsemanship calls for? Call it a day and hope for better on another one? Or take so many steps backwards that progress feels impossible? Of course, this last option seems to be the best one. But for Rebecca in that moment, trapped between opinions and hard places, it seemed most practical to end the session there and re-evaluate the scenario and game plan with a clear head.

When human and horse are working together they are partners in crime, enacting a series of well-known steps and confronting new challenges together. They are in constant dialogue with both parties playing an active role in the conversation. But, when one member gets it wrong, the elements of freedom and control can shift. If the horse responds badly to a misstep, they could be seen to be less free in a physical sense than before as more pressure is applied to the ropes, but by choosing to do what the human says, they exert their free will, expressing their freedom in the process. If the human gets it wrong, the horse's freedom often worries them, and the horse may rebel by testing these boundaries further. Keane describes slip-ups in the human-human relationship as 'ethical affordances' where moments of reflexivity (and hence

the degree of freedom) can be negotiated by both parties in situations where one makes an unusual choice or an unpredicted action (2014b: 7). I would argue that, in a similar manner, these slip-ups in the human-horse relation are how the ethically centred relationship is made; how they are dealt with gives rise to the finished product. They are opportunities for each to express free will in their relationship, and the freedom to become with one another. The horse uses the choice they are given to accept (or not!) what the human wants, surrendering to human action perhaps, but a choice none-the-less. The processes of sustaining these moments over time are what further solidifies the relationship. John Boy, unfortunately, had no interest in choosing to work willingly and was consequently treated in firmer manner than what would be classed as ideal by many natural horsemanship practitioners. It was a slip-up that clearly exhibited how natural horsemanship *could* be used to dominate a horse.

Haraway describes the process of domestication as original sin separating humans from nature (Haraway 2008). Where animals become ‘unfree’, rather than not free, as indulged ‘affectional slaves’ for the acceptance of unconditional love (2008: 206). If natural horsemanship could be seen as a process of sped-up domestication through training, it could also be said that it is ‘making’ the perfect horse. Training mutes just enough natural instincts, their ‘horseness’, whilst leaving their quiddities intact to make them an acceptable companion by teaching horses to utilise innate skills in different ways. The process of training horses is a means of reducing certain ‘bad behaviours’ that horses intrinsically possess because they are not desirable if they are to stay in the human world. Horses rear in the wild when they are angry and feel that they have to attack something (I.e. Stallions fighting). They run away from things that they are afraid of. Training horses removes many of the horse’s natural behaviours and leaves them with a limited selection to choose from to fit into the ‘natural’ idea that humans want.

Horses that are being trained are often considered fully tame when they are ridden successfully for the first time, and are described as being ‘all grown up’ by their proud owners. The illusion of Julie’s natural horse in its herd, can very quickly be shattered by the start of official training and the use of equipment on them. When communication breaks down, it is hard to not use force to achieve results. I know myself that it is hard to not exert too much pressure or push too far in certain

scenarios. Ginge was the perfect example of that; I thought the training up to that point had been successful, but we still ended up in a battle of strength (that he won hands down). The ropes feel like electric wires in moments like that, ready to discharge into your body with one wrong move. People practice with just the ropes often to feel in control of them, to learn how they move so that the correct movements are made when there is a horse at the other end of them. Know your rope. They are there to help but can be a hindrance or a weapon in the wrong hands.

In summary, horses are tools for our enjoyment: But, people truly do love their horses and invest time, money, and affection on them. By bringing them into our lived worlds, by utilizing them, we make them objects and subjects simultaneously, dampening certain aspects of their 'naturalness' in the process whilst cherishing others. NH creates a very different kind of domination to traditional methods, but it does not seem to be the dominance-free relationship that practitioners strive for (Birke 2008). Even without active physical domination, the practices of keeping horses in stables or in electric fenced fields creates a sense of the horse being 'unfree' (Haraway 2008), even though the choices made during training confer an element of freedom to the horse. People accept the methods of natural horsemanship whilst the production of a non-dominating relationship is still at the core of what they are fighting against.

Daniel, Stuart, and Fiona are very aware that a horse is not truly natural in our environment but that because people want a certain kind of horse it is necessary to provide a means of training, a means of living, that can be good for both horse and human. Through training like this, the horse is not actively mistreated, and welfare is considered to be of the utmost importance: but, by saying that the relationship is non-dominating, it may be a means to open the door for continued domination. Many forms of natural horsemanship have their roots in the 'wild west', with people like Roberts using NH as evidence as a means to break away from the intensely masculine oriented and dominating nature of 'cowboy culture' (Lawrence 1982). These ideals are present in the UK where, to a lesser extent, these categories still exist in traditional training methods. Natural horsemanship training ensures that people can make their horses understand the subjective authority of people, as controllers in their lives, as a source of power that they have to gravitate towards – like the head mare is the nucleus

of the herd. It is a mutualistic relationship, but the idea of it being ‘mutual’ seems to exist more as a reflection of what humans want to see as their relationship with their horse. Haraway recognizes this dilemma clearly in her training with her agility dog Cayenne:

Let us consider the questions of relations of authority in the reciprocal inductions of training...I think I have good reasons for judging that Cayenne loves to do agility....however, I would be a liar to claim that agility is a utopia of equality and spontaneous nature.....(2008: 220)

She goes further to say that ‘training is antinatural domination made palatable by liver cookies’ (222), hinting at an awareness of bribery or coercion that is not found in many natural horsemanship groups. Agility training in dogs is achieved through positive reinforcement methods (where treats are given to reward correct behaviour), whereas the horse’s reward is merely the release of negative pressure. When Monty says “look, he loves the wagon now” at the end of a successful loading session with a bad loader, the horse could be said to only be going in to escape pressure being applied outside of the horse lorry. Nothing good actually happens in the lorry, it’s just better than being outside it. Is that enough for the ethical treatment of animals? That nothing truly bad happens to them? Or is that just enough for us to justify what we do with them? Haraway recognizes this dilemma in the training of animals for our own recreational pleasure:

In the contact zones I inhabit in agility, I am not so sure about ‘equala’; I dread the consequences for significant others of pretending not to exercise power and control that shape relationships despite any denials. But I am sure about the taste of copresence and the shared building of other worlds (2008: 236)

These different training moments provide opportunities for an awareness of freedom. As the horse continues along the spectrum of wild to tame, they do not necessarily go from having freedom to being unfree. All domesticated horses experience restrictions in their physical freedom, even if they are untrained, and the process of training does not release them. However, training does give rise to an interesting concept of

freedom that can be seen in the horses individual will and the choices that they make in training. They are potentially willing captives in many senses; by accepting their unfreedom, they achieve an element of freedom. Simultaneously, the humans who practice natural horsemanship recognise their horses right to choose as an example of their free will as an individual. Moments of Join-up or successful training points where the horse is calm and relaxed, where human and horse are communicating effectively with one another, are examples of ‘copresence’ (Haraway 2008). It could be said that each party in these cases are free to come and go from the shared moments as they please.

My days at all the yards I did fieldwork at ended by a final check on all the horses. At the rescue centre, because I lived on site, I often did my final check around 8pm; if I thought the mornings were my favourite time of day, this was certainly in second place. The sight of them contentedly motoring their lips across the short-cropped grass always made me smile. Their lips wiggled and rustled at top speed to find the most delicious morsels amongst the blades. After the heat of a mid-summer day the evening was a relief for them, allowing them to mooch away from the shelter of the trees and down to wide, flat space alongside the lane. They often appeared at their most relaxed at this time, putting aside their animosities for a spot of mutual grooming between distant friends. If the mornings were all about the carrots for Shannon and Haffy, the evenings were all about the scratches. They never sought me out on this check, but they were keen to return my scratches to their shoulders with some gentle reciprocal grooming of my upper arms and neck; rough upper lips moving side to side vigorously as I put my weight behind my attempts at grooming them with my hands. As the dominant member of these relationships, I was always the one to initiate mutual grooming. These were small moments of becoming where my position as a human in the relationship dissolved slightly and I became ‘more horse’ than at any other moment. I would consider these moments as becoming a very different kind of Centaur, a two-headed horse perhaps, where it was the recognition of the species-specific behaviours and not the ego-specific ones that came to the fore.

The peaceful evening sounds of songbirds and short snorts through soft nostrils followed me back as I wound my way back to the farm. It was easy to forget that they were once unloved horses, abandoned and rescued. They seemed completely content

to be horses with each other - surrounded by the fences that kept them contained in one place and occasionally caught the mischievous ones intent on making a break for the next field.

Here's looking at you, Ollie.

Chapter Five

Becoming the Centaur: The role of Touch and Joy In Riding

Riding is a very important part of building the on-going connections between humans and horses. It produces new ways of ‘becoming with’ (Haraway 2003: 16) each other that are manifested through emotional experiences such as joy and feelings of mutual trust. Importantly, it is the physical connection between horse and rider in this mode of ‘becoming with’ that sets it apart from previously mentioned naturecultures in action, and enhances the emotional and mental connections that help to create moments of corporeal synchrony and mutual empathetic responses. Maursted *et al.* mention that ‘a shared sense of co-being and becoming between horse and rider’ emerges in the narratives of their informants and from this they infer that ‘horses are soul mates, but also body mates to many humans, and the relationship is one that affects and defines both parties’ (2013: 322).

Riding can be taught, of course, but it mostly requires experience in order to become proficient. Even then, many people claim that skill in riding runs in families - although it may be more accurate to say that it runs in opportunities (to ride expensive horses, and have good teachers, and parents who are willing to invest lots of time and money at a young age) - but natural talent certainly plays a part. The basics are easy – stop, go, left, and right – and can all be learnt in an hour. Balance takes a bit more time to perfect, but it’s very possible. However, learning to apply the correct amount of pressure on the reins or with your legs and seat, to know when to reward, when to be firm, when to reassure, when to be gentle, when to take charge, is a whole different game – and the rules change with every horse – but this particular process of becoming starts from touch. The language of the horse is conveyed mostly through its body, so for the human to communicate effectively they too must adopt this mode of communication and use their bodies to elicit a response from the horse. As this understanding between each participant develops, owners and trainers state that they become more aware of the individual agency of the horse. It is an incredibly close relationship that involves personal communication between individuals through

contact where the body functions as the site of affect – as a form of embodied subjectivity.

In her opening of Tactile Communication in *The book of Touch*, Ruth Finnegan states that ‘touch is a powerful vehicle in the interactions between human beings’ that has ‘conspicuous potential for aggression, sex and physical coercion’ (Finnegan 2005: 18). However, as Blake points out rather more positively, touching another person has the potential to comfort as well as control, and can create a ‘strong emotional connection’ (2011). She describes her experience as an anthropologist as a ‘subjective sensual explorer’ while investigating the experiences of children with cancer; she discovered how the efficacy of touch had the power to convey comfort to those in pain. She notes that ‘what is touched touches back’ (Blake 2011), which is potentially a very fitting description to describe the role of touch in human-animal becomings. Horses communicate with each other largely through touch and bodily movements to form close social bonds with chosen friends (which can be other horses or members of other species) and to ‘seek warmth and protection from other horses, and communicate their desire for closeness and contact’ (Argent 2012). Horses tend to stay in close proximity to their preferred cohorts and engage in mutual grooming, play and grazing together to solidify relationships that are ‘long-term, cooperative alliances between unrelated individuals’ (Fey 2005: 83). Animal behaviourists say that horses also use touch for sexual activity and fighting, but it is most often employed between companions as a positively reinforcing behaviour (Goodwin 2002).

Touch is a sense that is integral to the building of relationships between humans and horses. Equally important perhaps are the moments when the two are not touching - as in earlier chapters where communication for training is done explicitly using equipment to mediate how a horse is ‘touched’. During training, most of the official work up until the point of riding is done at ropes length. However, the basis of this work centres around trust, and the horse must trust the human to touch them all over – “high where the cats go, low where the dogs go” (Roberts, see Chapter one and three). Being able to sit on the back of a horse is the ultimate display of their trust in humans. In chapter two I mentioned that grooming the horse acts as an important bonding exercise between humans and horses as a preface to formal training. Another important aspect of touch in NH is for *reward* (which I do not focus on as it is mostly

a side-bar in NH training, with most emphasis being placed on correctly timed responses and the release of pressure); ‘Although praise isn’t the horse’s first language, he can learn to enjoy these rewards, especially if you can couple them with the greatest reward of all – release of pressure.’ (Marks 2002; 207). As Paterson says:

Physiologically, touch is a modality resulting from the combined information of innumerable receptors and nerve endings concerned with pressure, temperature, pain and movement. But there is more to touch. It is a sense of communication. It is receptive, expressive, can communicate empathy. It can bring distant objects and people into proximity. (2007: 1)

Touch is tangibly solid and verifiable. It is ‘affirmatory and comforting, involving a mutual co-implication of one’s own body and another’s presence’ (3). That the ‘another’ here could be a something not human is not written out of Paterson’s work – though he probably didn’t mean it to be a horse. The communicative potential of touch has also been explored in the practice of healing, where ‘the notion of touch having the power to heal has a long history’ (Classen 2005; 347) in therapeutic touching such as Swedish massage, Reiki, Shiatsu and Hapto-therapy. Paterson suggests that acknowledging ‘that larger forces of energy and life force (*ki*) are central to this practice’ when discussing Reiki, and that touch has the ability to reach beyond the individual and draw others into a ‘felt proximity’ (2007: 13). He suggests that it is possible to go from *feeling* to ‘feeling with’ another (Paterson 2007: 13) – an idea that is reverberated by many horse riders. The act of riding, of feeling the warmth of the horse against your legs, and their movement under your seat is a multi-sensory experience that engages with the proprioceptive, the haptic, and the kinetic elements of touch (Argent 2012). The horse too, in these instances, feels the weight of the rider shift, the pressure of the rider’s body against them, and make adjustments of their own bodies and movements accordingly.

My informants explained to me that being literally attached to each other through the body makes it easier to interpret - and reciprocate accurately - mutual responses, and that quicker reactions were easier for both parties. This could potentially be because the resulting reaction from a stimulus doesn’t take the length of a rope to reach the other. I’ve found that great trainers can assess from the ground, the lay horse person

seems to feel more through the horse body than anything that they could ascertain through visual interpretations – the resulting connection is described by Roberts as the moment of ‘becoming a Centaur’. Everything that has been learnt previously through groundwork with ropes and gestures now has to be re-learnt, with direct contact. We are so much more at the mercy of the horse from our high position; we are examples of new ‘partners-in-the-making’ when we get on a horse, where the training parameters that were laid down before must be renegotiated (Haraway 2008: 208).

Finnegan discusses how touch is often used to mark the beginning and end of an encounter between two people and that this can ‘perform actions and confirm or develop relationships’ (Finnegan 2005; 20); between humans and horse, touch is used to continue the relationship. Phrases such as “keep your leg on” or “wrap your legs around the horse” are often shouted by instructors to encourage riders to continue physical contact with the horse – for support (emotional as much as physical) and for the continuation of clear signals. As Brandt suggests, ‘for both species, the body is a tool through which they can communicate a wide range of emotions and desires’ (2004: 304). It is a negotiation from both parties - as one of my informants told me jokingly once about their horse: “he picks the speed and I pick the direction!” I suggest that the shared drive and desires of both actants help to produce ‘Equine Landscapes’ like those that Evans and Franklin discuss in their piece on equestrianism in the UK. They define ‘Equine Landscapes’ as:

The socio-natures produced by equine activities in the countryside.... [that] are distinctive landscapes which provide the aesthetic, domestic, competitive, training and leisure spaces in which humans enact their relationships with equines (2010: 180).

They argue that the act of horse riding must be a partnership because they ‘act as one to produce acts neither would undertake on their own’ (2010: 173). Here they investigate the rhythms of horse riding that produce moments of ‘floating harmony’ where human and horse are completely in synch with each other and how the body and role of touch is incorporated; they discuss the riders bodily and emotional experience as well as the horse’s experience, represented by the rider. It is this unity that many riders are striving for. However, many scholars in the life sciences also

appear to privilege the role of the body in the act of riding horses over other moments of bodily interactions between other species of animal and human:

Another important distinction is the high level of body-to-body contact between humans and horses when engaged in interaction. Certainly, humans and their dog and cat companions connect their bodies for reasons of affection, play, occasional grooming, and, at times, for obedience training. Nonetheless, humans do not ride their dogs or cats and so do not ask them to do complicated physical and mental tasks while astride their backs. (Brandt 2004: 300)

Riding and learning to be in rhythm with a horse could be seen as a practice of entrainment, where human and horse learn to ‘be carried along in the flow, learning to become in tune with or in the train of’ the other (Game 2001: 3). Humans entrain with the horse’s rhythm, and vice versa, until the rhythm supports the movement. NH is a practice of training the horse, and training the human to train the horse – it is not specifically a method of how to *ride* a horse. Stuart explained to me that the emphasis on ground-work in NH means that by the time practitioners come to ride their horses, a solid foundation of connections has already been made. In turn, this allows riders and horse to trust each other more and experience a deeper connection during ridden work than may have been possible previously. The initial training helps humans to control their body movements and emotions, respect the horse, and be more aware of the horse’s emotions and subtle bodily responses. Henceforth, riders become more accomplished – or at least feel more confident and comfortable on the back of their ‘partner’.

As a mythical creature that we can imagine easily, Game suggests that we can ‘live the mixing of the Centaur’ when riding on the back of the horse, releasing us from the mundane of the everyday and inhabiting a fantastical world with the power of a horse underneath us (Game 2001: 3). These connections are the ‘creative processes’ (Game 2001) of becoming. Game suggests that we are already part horse, and that they are part human – that humans have ‘a capacity for horseness’ (2001: 1). Though I would further this thought to say that it is through interactions we learn to embody these parts of us (and us of them), we cannot learn ‘to horse’ without the presence of horses.

The fact that both parties are capable of adopting such different aspects of another speaks volumes about their potentials for interacting. Birke and Parisi have also echoed this idea that ‘to ride a horse well, in the sense of creating a harmonious partnership, we must ‘become horse’” (1999: 64).

During his public demonstrations (in 2014 and 2015), Roberts usefully uses the idea of ‘the centaur’ to successfully interact with other horses. He describes ‘the centaur’ as the flow of two bodies mixing together, that human and horse should seamlessly fit together to completely make one whole entity. He states that other horses see humans as different creatures once they are on the back of a horse. He often rides a more experienced horse to work on problems with another. His new body, as a mix of horse and human, is said to be seen as less threatening to the inexperienced horse who may already associate humans with pain, fear or discomfort. Combined with his higher vantage point, Roberts suggests that working together as the ‘centaur’ can be used in certain scenarios to work on a different horse’s issues. The inexperienced horse tends not to react so violently to the presence of the ‘centaur’ in their space, as they see the combination of horse and rider as less threatening. My good friend Lucy described how she feels as a ‘centaur’:

It’s like being completely comfortable. Like sitting on a couch at the end of a long day, just sinking in to them. Getting on Blue is so easy, my favourite couch! We fit each other, if that makes any sense? Riding Oliver is still tricky, all angles and hard surfaces still, but we’re working on softening out those edges together. I think that when Monty says ‘centaur’ that is the feeling that he means, that we’re connected physically but smoothly, that we should just flow in to the horse.

Vinciane Despret’s idea of ‘embodied empathy’ - that was originally postulated about how scientists use their own bodies when engaging with the animals of their research – is a useful concept to consider whilst discussing tactile communication between human and horse. She discusses how reciprocal interactions are important for forming affective relationships between humans and nonhuman animals, and that learning to understand and be understood plays a crucial role in the development of empathetic relations (Despret 2013). Embodied communication is exemplified by the riding of

horses; such a powerful animal could not be made to work without understanding what is required with a reciprocal amount of give and take from both parties (Evans and Franklin 2010). Despret's idea of 'embodied empathy' links closely to Paterson's idea of 'feeling with' another where, through touch, tactile communication has the potential to bring another into closer emotional proximity. It could be argued that the literal skin to skin contact of horse riding aides in the production of these moments of 'feeling with' where it is more than a physical connection that unites them. These connections create moments of shared emotions, goals, and desires, as well as literally feeling and experiencing the body of another at close quarters. Combined with other modes of touch - through the rider's seat and the saddle on the back of the horses, the reins that are connected to the bit in the horse's mouth, the occasional scratch or pat from the rider on the neck or shoulder of the horse, and the shared vantage point of both parties – these connections create a conglomerate of somatic senses and empathetic responses that stem from being in attention to another.

Being on the back of the horse produces literal 'contact zones' between human and horse through the seat, the leg and the hands. Along with the voice, these are called the 'natural aids'; the whip, spur, and other pieces of equipment are given the term 'artificial aids'. Moments of 'becoming' between human and horse seem to be easier to achieve when the bodies of human and horse are actually touching; many of my informants would attest to this, as well as how much more obvious it is when these moments are lost. It is easier to pay attention to the other and realize the effects of actions or movements when on board, but the actual breakdown or loss of these contact zones is often very surprising for the rider in the event of a fall from a horse! Steph experienced exactly this with her horse Bazaar:

We were just cantering towards the second the last fence, so in the zone it was unreal! These things so rarely happened, we were both in synch. I'm usually a moment or two behind her, but bless her, she always makes up for me; she knows her job better than I can tell her when it comes to jumping a course of fences! So we're coming up to this fence and feel her tighten up to jump, we're in the air, then we land, and then I have no idea what happened. She went left, I went right, and we ended up being torn apart from each other. Gravity does that. But I just remember sitting on the floor looking up

at her looking down at me and both us looking like we're thinking 'what the hell!?' She was surprised as I was I think!

I am regularly reminded of my own ineffectuality and the danger I can be in around horses. Daniels approach is very straightforward, you either get on it and it's fine, or it's not. If it's not then we'll work on it – and it is rarely not ok because the preparation up to that point has been thorough, with an emphasis on horse and human safety. Julie worries less about human safety as long as the horse is fine. We had some very hairy moments leading poorly trained horses with no prep work, and were asked to 'just get on' some horses that we didn't know whilst having to spend ages on basic training with others. She has deep concerns about tack being painful, but also uses this as an excuse when things go wrong I.e. "maybe the girth was pinching". There is always an excuse when something goes wrong. These 'things' (tack, weather, time of day...) are worried about in great detail in case they affect the horse's performance and are widely held viewpoints by many natural horsemanship practitioners. Julie emphasises that horses must have a job to do in this world, but also laments human treatment of them. While I was taking tack off Haffy one day she approached to check that she was comfortable:

Most horses are in pain from the moment that people put tack on them. They don't bother to take the time to flatten the numnah, and find the correct bit – honestly I wouldn't put bits on any of them if they were just going to be my horses. Everything that humans do to them can be cruel. People bang saddles onto their backs, and pull their mouths, and kick their sides. They make horses jump massive fences and work them until they are too tired. It's awful. Obviously not everyone is like this though....that's enough for her today.

Daniel agrees to an extent, but he rarely makes excuses for a horse's behaviour; he has a deep understanding that his training works, and has faith in it. Occasionally one of us will say something like, "oh, maybe the saddle is pinching" if something goes wrong and he'll say "yeah, maybe" - but you know he is only saying that to make you feel better. The tack fits. Horses will be horses. He understands that some days they may not want to play ball, but patience and perseverance will have them come round

if there are routines and boundaries in place. Being ridden by a human is potentially the least ‘natural’ thing that a horse could be asked to do. However, the majority of NH training could be said to be about preparing the horse to do unnatural things (I.e. Being ridden, wearing equipment on their body, or travelling in a trailer). Riding is thus controversial in both action and methods as although NH practices discuss ideas of working without fear or coercion, a lot of training is driven by the thought or the suggestion of negative pressure.

For example, at multiple demonstrations I attended, different horses were brought in to the round-pen that did not want to go forwards in their paces with a rider on board, or would rear when pressure was applied by the riders legs to encourage forward movement (known as ‘napping’). These ‘nappy’ horses were placed in the pen with hoods on their heads with blinkers that partially covered their eyes so they could not see behind them (in severe rearing cases, these blinkers were extended so that the horse also could not see above them) the horses were then mounted by a rider holding a piece of equipment called the ‘whip-whop’. This was a soft plaited piece of rope about two feet long that was flicked over the top of the horses shoulders from side to side, making contact with the shoulder, to encourage forward movement. It did not appear to hurt the horse. However, because the horse could not see what was happening, the whip-whop was an unknown, scary, object that they felt the need to move away from. The expectation of pain or discomfort was enough for them to try and escape by running forwards.

My impression from chatting with many part-time practitioners is the importance of having full control on the ground. More seemed to be forgiven of the horse for being a horse when they were on its back; small slip-ups are recognized as being done in ‘good spirits’ (maybe because the potentials of having feet stood on is so much less!). Of course, the dangers of being on the horses back are potentially greater – at least on the ground you could drop the rope and run out of the way in the majority of cases if needed (I’ve definitely done this before). In a recent pod-cast from a well-known natural horsemanship centred training centre in the South of England with a very active social media profile, a series of videos were posted that showed the progression of a horse’s training. In the video, which is taken from a helmet-mounted camera, the woman riding and training him is consistently using the whip on the horses shoulder

in a fairly firm manner. The video's short blurb was: 'I continue to work on building Ronaldo's confidence through supported leadership in the saddle, overcoming his objections firmly and fairly a step at a time'. Many people responded to this video with either outrage at the use of the whip, or curiosity as to why a practitioner of natural horsemanship felt the need to use a whip so often. The trainer's response in the comments section underneath the video to these queries was:

Although to the observer it may not seem the right thing to do, the horse has a different perception. I'm not smacking him, I am tapping him. When humans smack, they are in effect delivering punishment which isn't conducive to building trust. Shoulder tapping is an effective form of communication when delivered with right intent. The intent behind the action is just as important as the action itself. As soon as the horse realizes tapping has a message, they feel supported and directed thus their fear evaporates and trust increases.

Pieces of equipment like the whip or the whip-whop are passed off as tools to encourage forward movement and are labelled as methods of 'supported leadership' (see also Birke 2007 for a discussion of equipment in NH). The main point of the initial groundwork that carries over fully to the realm of riding is the idea of 'leadership' for the horse; you are in charge, you are the leader, you are in control, and they should listen and take confidence from that.

Finding the Joy

[Steph] Things aren't always great, but when they are it is the best feeling in the world. Nothing quite beats going for a blast across a field at the end of a long day, it really blows away the cobwebs. Nothing else matters in those moments. It's just me and Bazaar, a million miles away from anything else.

Riding is undoubtedly a dangerous and expensive pastime; it really is a wonder people do it. But they do it for these moments of connection, for the ability to ride a horse and to become a centaur, in control of such a powerful animal and to feel

released from the world momentarily (as above). Davies *et al.* (2014) also noted that their informants regularly attributed their equine activities as being 'pleasure-giving activities that enhance or maintain the human's sense of well-being in a variety of ways' and that becoming with a horse allows us to jump out of our mere human existence into something more. As Daniel says: "horses complete a part of us that we didn't know was missing until we find it. I belong on a horse, well, certain horses, but you don't know that until you feel it."

One of Tracey's favourite rides that we often did with the horses on Daniel's yard when we had the time involved a very long gallop across some fields. Tracey, being a jockey, felt most at home in this pace. Daniel would shout at us from the house as we left the yard on the horses: "Where are you going so I know where to find you if you get in to trouble?" To which Tracey would always reply: "How would you know if we were in trouble? We're going to find the Joy". Daniel: "Aye, I'll keep an eye out." We were going to find Tracey's Joy: mine was firmly routed in a peaceful collected canter most of the time. 'The Joy' in this case related to the feeling of freedom as we galloped across the fields, often racing the horses if we were on some of the experienced ones that just needed a leg stretch. To Tracey's credit, there are few things that match the exhilaration of feeling the horse power across the ground, head stretched out, ears pricked forwards, when things are going well. We had some rather unnerving moments with horses tripping or pulling away from us, but, on the whole, things went surprisingly well a surprising amount of the time: "Just have a little faith Kirsty!" And a bit of faith (and a pinch of bravery) were exactly what was needed for us to 'find the joy' most of the time. Riding home at a quiet walk or jog after this on sweaty horses, along country lanes, in beautiful scenery, passing a hastily rolled cigarette between us was pretty close to perfection some days. The horses always seemed happy too, with lots of gentle snorts and deep exhales that seemed to reach all the way from their nostrils to their tails. This feeling of calm after the joy often stayed with me all day. The same was true for Steph:

After a really great ride with Bazaar, or a particularly great round of jumping, the feeling of exhilaration stays with me for hours. I talk to her so much after these moments, praising her, that I'm sure most people think I'm

crazy. But I don't care, the joy I feel just being with her is so great. I get home and I'm still riding that high.

At Daniel's I was expected to ride anything he put me on – which meant a lot of trust in him and very little joy - moments of becoming were reserved for Daniel in his training process. On the first day I was there, a small black and white cob was brought out of a stable for me, already tacked up: “Aye, this one will see you right”. I assumed that this horse was a yard staple, used for the new the bad riders alike: “We call him Profit, because he was so cheap he can't help but make us one!” I felt pretty confident that Profit and I would hit it off. I got on and Daniel led me for a couple of laps around the tack shed on the rough ground.¹³ “Does he feel ok?” I was asked, in a manner that I assumed to mean ‘did I feel ok on him?’ I gave a positive response and was unclipped by Daniel. Tracey and I then trotted off up the road. Profit was mostly perfect and I soon started to relax. Back at the yard after our ride Daniel said to me:

Yeah, I'm glad he was good for you, you're the only other person than Tracey that's ridden him, he's only been backed a week or two. He used to have quite the buck when Tracey got on him!

He was not the safe horse wheeled out for the newbies that I had assumed, but I was safe. This was often the case with horses at Daniel's where *knowing* the moment when to stop and work on a particular area was of the utmost importance. These small ways of ‘knowing’ make the difference to how well a horse is trained (and how easy it is to train a person as well). It is all too easy to rush a horse or a person. This method of ‘all the time in the world’ (which is the attitude that Daniel tries to have while working with horses) contrasts Monty's thirty minute backing method that he uses in demonstrations. However, many NH trainers do emphasize that horses shouldn't be rushed and that it is important to make sure that the ground work is in place before ever considering getting on a horse.

¹³ I learnt later that these initial moments on bad ground were to discourage the horses in training without metal shoes on to not buck or bolt off as the stones were uncomfortable under their feet.

In contrast, at Julie's, I was in charge of choosing when to sit on a horse or not. Horses like Haffy, who have never suffered physical abuse and who are easy to handle, could easily be ridden in preparation for re-homing – although this took some persuading of Julie. The first time I rode Haffy, Julie watched me like a hawk, and would only allow me to sit on her for ten minutes at a walk in one of the paddocks. Once Julie had seen me ride her for a few days, and was happy that I was going to do her no harm, I was released into the world with Haffy. With a free rein, I was allowed to ride Haffy out on my own whenever I had the time. There are few things in the world that are better than being on a fun horse, on your own, in glorious summer weather – it is the ultimate way to release stress and be at peace with the world. I pity people who will never get to experience this. I looked down on the world from my, literal, high horse and felt an element of superiority as I squeezed past cars on the tiny roads, relishing in my eco-friendly choice of transport. A short while later we could be in the woods, or going across fields, or on the beach; we could be anywhere. Although I was in charge of when we went out, and where we went, I do believe that Haffy enjoyed our adventures too (Image 11). Her ears were always pricked, and she was keen to follow whatever path we took. Riding a horse allows them a means of escape from their field or stable, providing them with an element of freedom.



Image 11. A Variety of my adventures on Haffy

Many of my informants described to me similar situations that help show this mutual recognition and intersubjectivity when riding, where they felt completely in synch with their horse as the transformation in to the centaur:

[Toby's owner] We came up to this massive field, a gentle uphill slope, on perfect going. Toby had been perfectly calm up to this point but I felt him lighten underneath me as he took in the view in front of us. He lifted his head, and crunched his body together from head to tail, like a spring. And then he waited. I mean, we were still walking forwards, but it was like he was holding his breath and waiting for me to give a signal that it was time to go, to gallop. The world slowed down for a second, as I took in his feeling of excitement... and then we were off!

[Benji's owner] Earlier this year I went to cross an unfamiliar river with him, he doesn't like water and can be difficult but usually he can be persuaded, usually you can feel a little bit of wiggle room in his body, like he's just hesitating. But not this time. All I felt was resistance underneath me. He doesn't need to make big movements, to leap around and buck, all he has to do is tell me he doesn't want to. And I felt in all of my body, so much so that I didn't want to do it anymore either. He convinced me. Maybe it wasn't safe and he knew something I didn't. Maybe he was being supremely awkward. Either way, his body response changed mine, and we found a different place to cross.

These shared moments, just fractions of a big picture, help to solidify the 'becoming with' that happens between humans and horses. However, this often seems to be a partial becoming, or at least not a consistent becoming. Because of the horses individual agency and will, they are not always in synch with people; sometimes they have to be persuaded, sometimes they are just not in the mood. Often, when conflicting forces are present and the horse is distracted, it is less possible to 'become with' a horse. When the horse is focused and listening it is much easier. Although the mutual interactions may be limited to certain situations, the emotions and feelings are residual. The trainers also experience these moments of mutual becoming but their relationship to the horse is often temporary in its nature, however, this may not

occlude ideas of temporary forms of kinship. Haffy was my escape during fieldwork, she gave me a way out of the everyday – but I’m fairly sure that she forgets about me while she is out in the field being a horse.

Maursted *et al.* argue that in the relationship between horse and rider there are three distinct points of relational co-being that are created and discovered through ‘intra-activities that engage and entangle horses and humans’ (2013: 324); the first are the ‘intercorporeal moments of mutuality’ (see also Argent 2012; Evans and Franklin 2010) that could be seen to be similar to the moments described above as becoming the centaur; secondly, they suggest that horse riding is an engagement between two self-aware, agentive, individuals; thirdly, that co-being with horses is an ongoing process of ‘co-shaping and co-domesticating each other’ (324). I would extend this third point to the whole process of natural horsemanship training for horse and rider; it is the complete process of interactions that creates these more permanent features. However, the second point raised by Maurstad *et al.* (2013) is most clearly highlighted in my own work by moments in the saddle. Although there are definitive moments in groundwork training that take place between human and horse as individual agents, it is still mainly the human that controls the moves and holds all the cards. In riding, horses have the potential to seize power.

Haffy and I, or Toby and his owner, may feel free in those moments when the horse is allowed to run and express itself with its human, exactly as it wants to, *because it is under control*. If it were not perceived of as being controlled, then the horse would have been said to have ‘run away’ with them, a very undesirable behaviour. However, as Haraway mentions, and I agree:

I rather like the idea that training with an animal, whether the critter is named wild or domestic, can be part of disengaging from the semiotics and technologies of compulsory reproductive biopolitics (2008: 222).

As one of the least natural things that a horse can be asked to do, ridden work would certainly seem to qualify as a moment of disengaging from natural laws. Being at the mercy of a powerful ridden horse levels the playing field further and allows for a more mutual set of decision-making moments where freedom and joy are literally felt

with the bodies of both humans and horses. It is the very unnatural act of sitting on the back of the horse that makes these negotiations possible; it may be the most dominating thing a human could do to a horse, but is also the bravest and self-sacrificing act for both parties by giving oneself to the other entirely.

There is little in anthropology about humans and other animals using touch to communicate, or close physical contact to achieve shared goals through mutual relationships with animals as subjects: one notable exception is Piers Locke's work with elephants in Nepal which 'represents a privileged form of intimate, interspecies relations rarely subject to ethnographic inquiry' (2017: 354). His fieldwork was both shaped by his nonhuman informants and were an integral part of it. As Locke points out, experiencing 'embodied empathy' with his elephant allowed him to see different facets of her personality, preferences and desires, that helped develop particularities of their relationship that he otherwise might not have been able to. It also allowed him to take seriously the role that the 'elephant as informer' played in his research: 'Sitasma and the other elephants had not only become subjective actors but also informing participants with whom I developed the social relations necessary for communicative understanding' (2017: 361). Interestingly, as a trainee mahout in one of the *hattisars* of Chitwan National Park in Nepal he was apprentice to an elephant, not a human:

When the *adikrit subba*, the chief mahout, designated me to apprentice with Sitasma Kali, a 20-year-old female of good temperament who was always accompanied by her two-year-old son, Kha Prasad, I experienced a moment of ecstatic joy and excited anticipation (358).

Sitasma Kali became his teacher; from her he learnt how to ride, how to communicate together, and the task at hand (or trunk) through the 'empathetic and embodied engagement with an elephant':

From the outset I had to ride Sitasma bareback; there would be no *gada* for me (a padded cushion made of sackcloth filled with dried grass) and certainly no *hauda* (a balustraded seat secured on top of a *gada* to provide passengers a safe and comfortable ride). Riding astride Sitasma's bony spine

as she ambled along jungle trails and forded rivers was at first far from comfortable (better when loaded with bundles of cut grass), but it did allow me to learn the feel of her moving body and adapt my comportment to it. Indeed, the acquisition of a mutually attuned bodily proficiency represented one of the most crucial and foundational aspects of my apprenticeship with Sitasma (359)

In many ways, my own training in natural horsemanship was provided by the horses themselves. I often found that learning to communicate and ‘feel with’ a horse seemed more special than with human, and the non-verbal relationships that developed seemed to provide a more empathetic connection. I would go as far to say that the relationships I developed with horses over my fieldwork felt more authentic - they required more work on my part for sure, and a lot more mistakes, but the end result was worth it. Locke also touches on this feeling during his ‘kinaesthetic union’ with Sitisma:

My forays into the forests on elephant back represented more than just participation in authentic forms of hattisare practice: it was also about the sensuality of touch in communicating with, caring for, and being cared for by Sitasma. When I sat in the more comfortable and more intimate driving position, her warm ears flapping on my bare legs, I would be drawn to the alluring divot between the hemispheres of her gently bobbing head. I would stroke the curiously coarse hairs there, and I would enjoy the warm breath from her occasionally probing trunk that seemed to signify affection. (2017)

It is very rare to find a human to share that kind of deeply comfortable relationship with - from the feeling of being lost with another while out on hack, or the perfect moment of peace when a horse exhales calmly at your side. It certainly feels like more of an achievement; and many of my informants echoed this back to me whenever I mentioned a particularly intense moment I had with a horse. Argent (2012) has also suggested that the horses themselves take pleasure from these shared moments of unity, with particular emphasis on moments of corporeal synchronisation. My informants would certainly second Argent’s suggestion that horses often enjoy riding in NH circles. In the final legs of my adventures with Haffy, as I reach down to try

and straighten her wild mane, she seems content. She mooches on a long rein, her nose level with her knees, snorting out the flies that attempt to investigate her nostrils. She seems happy to be heading home, but, like me, is in no rush either.

Lucy's horses: Centaurs at work

I met Lucy through Stuart, and she intrigued me from the start. I now visit whenever she is having a lesson and we also ride out together most weekends on her horses. Lucy is an older woman - although she will always suggest that she is older than her years to either push aside a task that she believes is too much for her, or to defer a challenge to a more capable person. Probably in her fifties, she is always 'well turned out' with smart jackets, quality leather boots, pretty scarves, and an air of 'waftiness' about her. She drives a large jeep very slowly and with poor spatial awareness. She is a talented artist who draws mainly horses and dogs, and although she occasionally sells her pieces, does not have a job in any conventional sense. I get the feeling from our talks that her husband holds a well-paid position in a business that she doesn't seem to (or doesn't care to) understand. She is a generous, kind, educated, and soft spoken over-thinker who tries very hard to please others – to the extent that she is constantly worried about what people think of her in terms of her horses well-being and care, but not in general life. She always seems practical but I think it is a thinly veiled mask to cover her distinct airy nature.

Lucy owns two horses, both of which have the best quality haylage bought in for them at great cost instead of the usual stuff provided by the yard that she keeps her horses on (which is also very good), superior quality rugs, a whole host of expensive feed additives, and lovely tack. All in all, they want for nothing and have the best of everything. However, unlike many people who sit in her comfortable financial position, her horses are barely worth as much as the tack and rugs that they wear. To many people they are nothing more than shaggy, hairy, common cobs. To Lucy, they are her world. Blue is an older, fairly sedate horse, who enjoys a life of ambling around the countryside (however, in his youth he was apparently a bit of a tyrant). Lucy purchased Oliver without ever having seen him - a decision for which she was criticized for greatly by other people on the yard - and he is effectively a younger

model of Blue but with a fairly wilful streak. His original name when she bought him was Diego, but Lucy did not feel like it suited him: “It’s such a bad horse name, it makes him sound cheeky, I don’t want a cheeky horse”. So she changed his name in an attempt to somehow influence his personality, or, more exactly, the type of personality that she imagined him to have.

Oh I know they aren’t fancy horses! I know they’re hairy beasties, but I wouldn’t swap them. And really, what would I do with something like a Warmblood? I would probably only be on it for a second before I would be flying through the air! And they would never be happy with just walking around the roads and doing the occasional trot in the school, they want to run and jump! A horse like that is much better suited to someone more experienced than I am, can you even imagine it!?

Every week for the last six months or so, Lucy has had a lesson of approximately 45 minutes with natural horsemanship trainer, Stuart, who travels to her yard to teach her and one other client. Every week, Lucy and one of her horses work on basic things together like correct leading, getting the horse to move over and back-up, picking up her horses feet, accepting the bridle, and simple obstacle courses both on the ground and ridden. They are skills that many horse people take for granted but natural horsemanship places emphasis on being proficient in these basics before moving on to anything else. If something more challenging becomes difficult or unachievable, the idea is to be able to go back to these more simple steps to regain confidence and trust in each other before trying again. This simultaneous learning of horse and rider is something that Stuart feels very strongly about:

You have to adjust things depending on how well everything’s going. People don’t want to be under pressure near the end of a session if they still haven’t achieved the goals that we discussed at the start. Different people struggle with different things – Lucy, for example, likes to have everything explained very carefully and then time to process her own way of doing things so that she feels comfortable. And the same goes for horses, some pick up some things very quickly whereas others really struggle with things that others take in their stride. Oliver doesn’t like walking on the tarpaulin,

so this is always a big challenge. But his fear stems partly from the fact that Lucy expects him to be afraid of it and they come in hesitantly waiting for the other to get worried. You can almost see them looking at each other on the way towards it, trying to guess what the other will do. So if Lucy is confident, eventually Oliver stops waiting for her to be afraid and starts to take confidence from this. Luckily, because we've been working on leading a lot, it forms a strong, confident place for them to start from. Oliver understands now that to follow Lucy is easier and much more pleasant for him, so following Lucy over obstacles such as a piece of tarpaulin on the ground isn't a huge leap for his mind to make. In theory! It's a tricky circle, but it's one of the main reasons I like to train owners alongside their horses, then you can tackle their issues together. Otherwise, often you send the horse home 'fixed' and the owners issues cause the horse to regress in its training.

The day that Blue led us home

On a particularly beautiful late winters day, with the sun just beginning to have some warmth in it, Lucy and I were out riding on her two horses. As usual, Lucy had the route planned out with reasonable precision. She doesn't carry a map or a compass or anything fancy but she does enjoy exploring new places (within reason!) when riding out in company. As we both had the day free she decided that we should ride from the yard where she keeps her horses over to her new house along roads, across fields, and along an old railway line so that I could see it. I always rode Oliver as Lucy never hacks him because of his 'spookiness', and but she wants him to have fun and 'get out'. I find him a relatively pleasant ride, but he becomes a much nicer horse once you get him switched on and listening to you (the same applies to most horses in most situations). The easiest way to do this is to get him out in front at the start where he is least confident so that he has to take confidence from his rider when facing new obstacles. Once this is achieved he is happy to walk alongside Blue and is much less 'spooky' on the whole.

Lucy is a very pensive person and we often talked of the grander things in life, in the most light-hearted manner imaginable. She is always eloquent and takes her time

answering - I occasionally wonder if she has forgotten my question but when I look over at her she is sitting straight, looking at the sky with her head cocked at an angle, her reins loose and waving somewhere down by Blue's legs, deep in thought. I asked her about the potential for horses to have distinct personalities, and more specifically (as I thought she might give me an interesting answer), about whether she considered them as people in their own right:

They certainly have their own personalities and I think they understand more than people give them credit for, but they experience the world very differently to us. They experience it as a horse, so everything we think they understand only comes from what we understand about horses, if that makes any sense? So I don't think the word person is correct as it assumes a human-ness that they don't have. The idea is correct but the word perhaps isn't, although I don't know what I would use instead! Oliver is a very different person to Blue, and when they are together they are very different to when they are apart. Blue is very secure in himself, whereas Oliver is only confident when he's with Blue. I really like that Parelli uses the term 'horsenalties' to describe their little quirks, but I don't think its possible to group them in the way that the Parelli people do. It's too limiting, and a little gimmicky I think? I can't imagine trying to describe my horses as left-brain introverts for example, they are just horses after all. Quite frankly I think that they are too different and distinct to group in any way at all.

We continued ambling along in an amicable silence until Lucy piped up again:

They're such large animals, that it really is a wonderful thing that they allow us to ride them, an honour really. Of course, when Oliver is prattling around it does begin to feel like more of a chore, but he has never hurt me. Even Blue when I first got him.... He used to pull away from me quick as a flash and disappear into the distance when I was leading him..... he didn't ever try and hurt me. He just didn't want to go the same way! And he could, he could easily run over me to get where he's going, but he never did. I think that shows a certain intelligence, or an awareness maybe, that humans are not things to be harmed. Or more so, that we can be harmed. Which it makes

it all the more astonishing to me that people harm horses! If horses can understand that we feel, that we feel pain and have emotions, can we not do the same?

And she really does have a point. We place our trust in these animals every time we are even near them, yet there are still many people in the world that do not extend animals the same courtesy. Natural horsemanship trainers are attempting to spread the words of people like Monty Roberts to whoever wants to hear it. Every owner I have discussed such ideas with all agree that we have a moral responsibility towards horses, not just because they give so much to them, but because they are a living animal that thinks and feels. Although different people consider different things to be cruel and violent in the horse world – for example, some people are horrified at the idea of shoes or bits on horses yet they are the accepted norm in the UK – there is an overall awareness with many horse owners in NH that if we choose to bring horses into our worlds, then they deserve to be treated with respect. Lucy recognizes her horse's individuality, and responds to it by trying to understand them.

As Lucy and I meandered our way along an unknown track our conversation covered (among other things) my PhD, what I want to do afterwards, how nice her new house is, how well Oliver was going, a discussion about Blue's health, Tarka the Otter, men, riding clothes, to shoe or not to shoe horses, men, and whether Lucy should build an arena and stables at her new house (yes!). At some point in the middle of this discussion we managed to forget to turn off the main track we were following on to one of the many smaller tracks that went off to the left. Lucy immediately descends into panic. We rode backwards and forwards for a little bit on the track trying to workout how far wrong we had gone, to no avail. Lucy vaguely remembered something about turning left after a bridge, but was it a bridge we cross over or go under? Both of which we had done by this point. After about twenty minutes of literally going in circles and chasing tails, Lucy made the executive decision that the best thing to do was to ask Blue which way was the right way (not Oliver, that would be silly).

So Lucy let the reins go almost completely and sits very still for a few moments before very gently asking Blue to walk forwards with the tiniest of nudges from her

heels. Nothing. So she turns Blue around and does the same thing and Blue begins walking smartly forwards, to the nearest piece of grass. “Oh Blue you naughty boy! Come on, you have a job to do” said Lucy sending him forwards again. This time Blue marches back down the track we came down and takes the second exit, now on our right. Lucy turns around in the saddle, smiles, and says confidently “I think this is almost definitely the right way. I trust Blue”. It was a nice track but didn’t feel like the right way to me, Oliver was mostly happy just to be following Blue’s tail for the first time that day. We followed the track past some beautiful old cottages, where I was not allowed to ask for directions because “Blue is right”. After another half an hour I still couldn’t recognize any of our surroundings but Blue was marching as confidently as ever so I began to relax and enjoy the journey instead, leaving the directions to the centaur shaped figure in front of us.

Isn’t it wonderful what horses can do? I mean, Blue really understood what I wanted him to do back there. He’s such a good boy [leans down to pat him]. I had no idea where we were but Blue did. He has done this before you know, last year, we were completely lost. I just let go of the reins and said ‘take us home’ and he did! Every one else was convinced we were going the right way but Blue just didn’t seem happy. The moment I turned him that day he felt so much happier. He just seemed to exhale and feel better all of a sudden.

I have heard and experienced many incidences of horses being able to find their way home - their sense of direction and general orientation is undoubtedly better. But Lucy sees this response as a part of their personal connection. She believes that Blue is actively looking after her, and that he understood what she wanted from him and obliged. She understands that he would want to go home anyway, but interprets it as Blue understanding that she wanted him to do it as well. The idea of Blue as a person makes Lucy happy, her conviction that Blue is looking after her, that he wants to look after her, is enough justification for her to find ‘the joy’.

Concluding Thoughts

Communication through touch is a dualistic approach to communication where mind and body are linked. Riding often involves ‘imagining’ what you want to happen whilst in contact with the horse (Game 2001). It now seems obvious, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) has previously claimed, that the way we live and experience the world is mediated through our senses and perception of the environment around us. Of course, as anthropologists, we use our bodies as tools throughout research to experience the whole event – leading to yet more questions of representation- but the senses cannot be ignored. What you touch is as important as what you see (or hear or smell or taste) during fieldwork. As Haraway asked, what do I touch when I touch my dog? Seeking the phenomenological, full, shared history of both participants in her answer (2008: 6). Here, I do not dare delve so far. Suffice to say, that the physical connections between human and horse are an artefact of all previous human-horse and also horse-horse interactions.

Horses communicate through touch in an extraordinary fashion. They are an incredibly tactile species, and it is a wonder that humans are allowed to converse with them through their bodies in such a way as they do. Humans can both mimic some horse-horse interactions, as well as create a whole new shared language of the body when sitting on the back of such a beast. Horses are covered with hair but their skin is far more sensitive to touch; they are a cutaneous wonder, a tactile achievement that we try to be a part of with our shared fleshy feelings. Brandt suggests that horses ‘communicate their subjectivity’ through this shared language (2004: 307), and being able to learn this language was a highly praised quality amongst my informants. It goes beyond the mere physical connections of bodily signals and responses that Csordas calls ‘somatic modes of attention’ that ‘include the embodied presence of others’ (2002: 8). Lucy and Blue (and others of course) demonstrate that the embodied empathy achieved through direct physical contact with each other, while embracing each other as an agentic individual with wills and desires, is important for moments of becoming the centaur. These moments are not permanent, and could be seen as moments of co-being that both join and separate (Maurstad *et al.* 2013: 327),

but their temporary nature highlights them as an event and makes the experience more valuable and worth all the slippages and confusion of missteps.

Chapter Six

Making Horses Kin Through Everyday Interactions

'I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind. Queer messmates in mortal play, indeed'

Haraway 2008: 19

Eventually, horses that are trained with NH - or people that are trained with NH - go back to the original environments that they came from, leaving open the potential to recreate the problems that sent them to a natural horsemanship trainer in the first place. Once the horse and owner go home, a form of adapted horsemanship takes place, away from official trainers, and back in to the 'domestic' space. Whilst in training, horses are considered partners of the equine species, but at home, they easily fall back into family networks and are considered as kin. Becoming 'like-kin' here is not dependent on the natural facts of biology or ideas of relatedness, and instead stems from emotional connections mutual trust. The key to long-term successful training is for horse and human to negotiate these categories in a way that bridges these different ideologies. By investigating the everyday interactions played out through touching and 'feeling with' another within different equestrian landscapes (Evans and Franklin 2010), the affective creation of relationships is highlighted to reveal how it is possible for horses to become kin. Responding emotionally to the horse sits in opposition to the rational protocol of training and caring for the horse as a species.

Many trainers do home visits to private yards where they majority of people keep their horses. These livery yards range in the services and facilities offered, as well as in price. For a trainer to visit, an arena of sorts is usually necessary to work with the horse and owner. Stuart visited a few larger yards every week to work with people and their horses; normally the number of people on these yards who required Stuart's help increases once they see the improvements made in others. Success is contagious. On these larger yards, there are often up to five or six people eagerly lining up for lessons, usually over the space of a busy morning. Initial assessments are not done to

any set time scale, but follow up appointments are broken down in to forty five minute slots (enough time for a discussion before, working through issues, and talking again after).

The women (Stuart's clients were almost exclusively women) on Stuart's Tuesday morning visit to a particularly nice yard (Image 12.) wait in an expectant huddle as we arrive. This gaggle of women simultaneously turn their heads as we noisily pull on to the concrete outside the barns in his old, faithful, Land Rover Defender. One of the ladies closest to the barn moves in to action as we get out of the vehicle; she must be up first! Stuart engages in gentle chit chat with the others until the lady who rushed off on our approach returned with her horses, complete with a full set of protective boots and an expensive looking set of tack. "Ready?" says Stuart. Nervous nods in return. Her horse looks uninterested in the polite talk of families and events.

As Stuart and his first clients walk slowly off towards the indoor school, I take the opportunity to talk to the rest of the ladies while they get their horses ready for their lessons. They are full of gossip about other 'horse people' who aren't there, children's academic achievements, the weather, new products for their horses, and the cost of veterinary treatment: this chat is fuelled by a running river of nervous excitement about their lesson to come, all of them talking slightly too fast for plain enthusiasm. We are standing in a wide corridor in a large converted barn (converted from original sheep or cow barns), with stables lining either side of this passageway. At one end are large double doors, at the other end there are large round bales of hay, haylage and straw. Multiple passageways lead off from the main barn that go to feeds rooms, tack rooms, and towards the indoor school. Most stables have large plastic boxes outside of them for the occupants equipment, and racks to hang rugs on that are in regular use.

We waited like patients in a doctor's waiting room. Stuart was going to challenge each of them by testing their limits and their progress, in a good way. Waiting with anticipation mostly, they were eager to see the progress they've made, and to correct mistakes made in the week. One by one they go into the indoor school, cautiously, and one by one they come out, happy, smiling, and with ears pricked (the horse that is). We were standing outside Sam's stable; his owner, Angela, is busy rummaging in her box for some exercise boots to protect his legs during training. She pushes aside a

set of purple bandages that match the pad under his saddle (and his headcollar and leadrope, he is perfectly colour co-ordinated), before triumphantly pulling out some black neoprene boots: “Found them Sam!” She bustles towards the stable door carrying the boots under one arm, and fumbles with the bolt on the door: “back up Sam, back up. There’s a good boy”. Sam doesn’t move. “Come on Sam, back up,” and pushes him firmly in the chest to try and make him move. Sam pushes back on the pressure, rug buckles hitting the metal on the top of the door loudly, and receives a quick slap on his chest for the trouble. He grudgingly takes a step backwards and Angela enters the stable – “Good boy Sam, good boy for moving backwards”. It appeared that quick slap did not represent poor welfare for Angela’s brand of NH.



Image 12. This particular yard was so nice that it even boasted an equine solarium.

Once Sam is fully dressed and ready, Angela comes out to join our conversation. All the ladies are similarly well presented for Stuart; in a selection of gilets, cream breeches, and beautiful long leather boots. Angela's jacket is from Barbour, a well-known 'authentically British' brand, with links to the countryside but not specific to the equestrian world. I asked if she always dresses so well for lessons and she assures me that her good boots and breeches are still at home. I usually decided to 'dress up' for all external yard visits with Stuart – today I was wearing boots without holes or tied together laces, breeches without stains, and a gilet of indeterminate age. I topped it all off with a fluffy Jack Wills headband for some practical camouflage among the ladies who lesson.

We absentmindedly pat the horses as they move their heads towards us as we casually converse in the alley; straightening forelocks, scratching necks, rubbing cheeks, leaving our hands flat to be licked by keen tongues searching for tasty morsels. Rebecca is in the next stable gently grooming her horse with a look of soft happiness on her face, touching his sides when she wants him to move over, and running her hands down his legs to lift his feet - which he gives willingly – content to stand and eat haylage while he is fussed over and loved. The first lady, Charlene, returns from her lesson looking slightly flushed, but smiling. She begins to untack her horse outside the stable without tying him up, saddle first, then boots, and finally the bridle is replaced by a headcollar. All the while she is chatting to him, just nonsense, just words, things to say to someone who can't reply. These small interactions were all part of the daily ongoing negotiations between human and horse. That morning, Angela described how she felt when she comes to the yard to see Sam:

I mean, I know he probably sees things differently, but look at those ears. I love walking up to the stable or the field and seeing him there, ears forwards, staring straight at me. Waiting for me to get there. He knows the sound of my car, and he's always waiting at the gate for me. It's relief you know? That's what I feel when I see him: Relief. Nothing else matters right then.

Natural horsemanship 'horse people' are deeply concerned about their horse's well-being, and they strive for happiness in their horse's life and harmony in their shared

world. Their faces light up when they talk of their horses and discuss these stolen moments away from their ordinary human life and contacts. More importantly, this is not a bandwagon adventure into post-humanism for these part-time practitioners, but a necessity to each individual involved; it would be impossible for them not to live like this in exotic chaotic companionship. They see joy in their horses, both in their mutual interactions and when the horse is merely being a horse in the world that they have made for their beloved companion.

And so, what do these practitioners touch when they touch their horse? They touch for training, for reward, punishment, for a gentle scratch and mutual enjoyment, for pushing against another body for response, or just touching absentmindedly. Often, stray hands gently move towards manes and noses as we chat amongst our human-selves: when we discuss difficult or emotional experiences our hands reach out to find that warm equine body. Touching the horse is simultaneously a distraction, a connection, and a comfort. It's a movement that people are almost not aware of, reaching out to touch someone who can help or has helped. Horses don't judge you on past words and mistakes as they provide a comforting presence to their humans. They 'learn something about how to inherit in the flesh' (Haraway 2008: 7) when they touch their horse and learn to pay attention to these results of their wandering hands. By actively engaging with their horses through direct touch, they communicate more than with just words. This non-verbal communication is used by human and horse to help them learn to understand the actions and movements of the other. They regularly communicate requests, and experiences, and feelings through touch outside of the training arena— requests to move over, to calm down, to reward. A touch on the side produces a flick of an ear towards them, a scratch on the shoulder could stimulate a long exhaling snort from the horse.

Ingold has previously suggested that there are 'pervasive continuities in patterns of sociality that straddle human-human and human-animal relationships' (1994b: 80). Suggesting that these human-animal relationships (although different between hunter (trust) and farmer (domination)) are based on an awareness of the animal as being 'endowed with powers of sentience and autonomous action, which either have to be respected, as in hunting, or overcome through superior force, as in pastoralism' (Ingold 1994b: 74). He goes further to say that there are direct continuities between

how humans treat humans and how humans treat animals because ‘the sense in which hunters claim to know and care for animals is *identical* to the sense in which they know and care for other human beings’ (175-76). How these animals are cared for is not just a ‘figurative manner of speech’ but, in both cases, a ‘fundamental relational disposition’ (80). Ingold suggests that these different relationships are not just a comparison simply between the natural and the social because both ideas occur before the detachment from nature that such a dichotomization requires, as such, humans are not viewing animals as belonging to a realm unlike their own and are able to form connections that share similarities to the ones they form with other humans (1994b).

However, horses are not allowed in to the literal domestic space of their owner, but according to many of them, this is through practicalities not wants! Domesticated livestock are permanently under some kind of control (spatial) unlike close pets such as dogs and cats. Horses are under the control of a human when the human is in their space. Marvin also notes this distinction in his discussion of the huntsman and his hound, once the huntsman enters the space of the hound, he is in control (70: 2005). NH teaches similar goals for safety, and for the creation of the relationship – the horse must respect the human whilst being a willing partner. If we take Campbell’s suggestion that the human-animal moral community could be looked at as one that is linked by a social life of connection rather than through dichotomy (Escobar 1999: 8) while recognizing those instances of moral disjuncture that produce separations of humans from animals (Campbell 2005), we would see that the lives of natural horsemanship practitioners and their horses do not conform to a paradigm of domination, or of explicit mutual understanding and trust. This muddled world that they co-exist within is filled with tensions, conflict, understanding, and joy in moments. Difficult moments can be resolved or left open to new negotiations and joyful moments are often found in surprising places often stemming from these areas of tension; In the stables, in the walkways, in the feed room, over a cup of coffee, between a horses ears, while brushing their tail, or touching their shoulders.

Developing new systems of kinship

At the end of a busy day shadowing Stuart, I go home to Sue, who is my landlady for all intents and purposes, and who very kindly lets me stay with her in the middle of suburbia. She works on a ward with people who have mental health issues, specifically, split-personality disorders. She is a great believer in using positive reinforcement when training horses as much as possible – although she understood and appreciated natural horsemanship, she felt that there was something missing in her training techniques. She now feels that she has ‘a better emotional connection’ now to the horses she works with, rather than a dominating one. Sue uses a kind of ‘hybrid horsemanship’ - in that she uses natural horsemanship rope techniques but does also reward for good behaviour with food. Although she is regularly asked for advice on her own yard by other livery owners, she is not a professional horse trainer and owns a horse purely for pleasure. Sue has been incredibly welcoming to me, as my ‘fieldwork mum’ and she is always very keen to hear about my day and the horses when I get home in the evenings over a cup of coffee, or more likely, a glass of wine. We co-exist comfortably in her spacious two-bedroom bungalow, but have regular ‘study breaks’ over more coffee (or wine); Sue loves a gossip.

Xavi is Sue’s horse. He is an eighteen year old Arab, and she has had him since he was three. He was bought off a friend who ‘treats animals like handbags’ and who couldn’t handle him. He had put her in hospital after she had attempted to hose him in the stable; apparently he “piaffe-ed beautifully and then crushed her against the door”. At a moment like this, it would have been very easy for Xavi to be labelled as a ‘bad horse’, but instead, Sue gave him a chance. To most people he would have appeared to be a high-strung, dangerous, horse: to Sue, he is her world. She admits that she sometimes takes for granted all the things that she can do with him. She calls him her ‘baby’ (“I’m off to the yard to see my baby” or “my baby was really well-behaved today”), but is aware of these labels that she puts on him, especially when she is around me where she tries to justify or explain it! She believes he knows how much he can get away with around her:

I allow him into my space, my personal space, much more than another horse. So I don’t mind him here (gestures next to her) whereas I would want

another horse back here somewhere (gestures behind her), I trust him. I would trust him with anyone. The yard owners son is Autistic and he likes Xavi because he has a pink nose - all children just seem to gravitate towards him – he goes in the stable, round his legs, and I trust him. Although it is funny if I have to go away and Emma brings him in when he's on his toes. Because usually they don't see him like that, they just see him pootling along on the end of the rope, and he does 90% of the time, but the rest of the time the Arab comes out in him!

As an Arab, he is obviously more hot blooded than the heavy Cobs that Sue so despises (“bloody Gypsy horses, who would want one of them!”), and harder to handle on occasion because of this, but the bond between them is clear from how she talks about him; “I love that little rebellious streak in him”. Many trainers demand respect and control from their horses at all times when they are working with them, however, Sue allows Xavi into her space because she trusts him. She is more concerned with him being a happy, (mostly) well-behaved horse who will listen to her when she needs him to. This balance of controlling him versus his perceived happiness (allowing him to be happy and a ‘horse’ when he is around her) is enough for her:

I would hate to force him in to anything, or demand anything if him. I want him to want to do it all for me. Seeing his little face light up when he knows he does something right is enough. Sometimes I think I should be firmer, but then he looks at me with his big soft eyes and I can't.

Many trainers say that the horse should respect your boundaries, your person, at all times but Xavi pushes these boundaries because he knows that he is allowed in to Sue's personal space. It is an informal relationship without words or clear boundaries. Instead, it is based on a mutual understanding between Sue and Xavi where both are comfortable being in the others personal space. Animal behaviourists suggest that in the wild and during recreational time in the field, it is the dominant horse that enters the space of the less dominant one, or demand that they move out of the way with the use of bodily force, ear and head movements - the less dominant horse would do well to move quickly out of the way, or face an onslaught of teeth and hooves. During their

lifetimes, horses form very close bonds with a few special companions that they enjoy spending time with; they tend to graze near each other, indulge in a lot of mutual grooming, and stand near each other for protection from flies, or when sleeping (Argent 2012).

Sue and Xavi's relationship would appear to be similar to these horse-horse relations. They are undoubtedly close because of the vast amount of time that they have spent with each other over the last fifteen years they have been together, and are noticeably more comfortable with each other than many of my informants and their horses. They move gracefully around each other in the stable whenever I see them, each politely moving out of the way of the other; as Xavi slowly begins to move his shoulders towards his water bucket, Sue steps out of the way to allow him to drink; when Sue needs to get in or out of the stable, Xavi moves out of the way to allow her past him. His eyes are soft and calm when she is around him in the stable or field, and her body language is quiet and controlled. If he is lying down he allows her to sit down next to him in the stable or field without worry and often a small piece of apple is pulled from a pocket for these special moments. But they have worked very hard to get to this point - most of Xavi's lifetime in fact.

Sue and Xavi's small movements in moments are part of their daily ongoing negotiations with each other. They no longer need formal greetings as they can meet each other as friends, or at the least as causal acquaintances. These are often brief greetings; a touch on the nose as she walks past his stable, a quick whispered word as she releases him into the field, a small scratch on his shoulders as she begins to put on his tack. Smuts discusses greeting rituals between beings as a form of embodied communication that is always being developed and renegotiated (Smuts 1985). These are malleable interactions that Haraway (citing Smuts) describes as 'flexible and dynamic' (2008: 26).

In a similar manner, meetings with horses are communicated mostly through the body, and are developed over time. To continue building on these renegotiations, Sue has had regular lessons with an older natural horsemanship trainer for the last ten years, who was probably teaching methods like his long before it became broadly popular in the UK. He places emphasis on using the energy created in the body to

control the horse; Roberts also touches on this in his demos. When Roberts is doing Join-up his energy starts high to get the horse moving around him but then as the horse begins to concentrate on him, he lowers his energy even though he is pushing the horse. Once the horse's energy has come down too, he invites it in towards him. When he has a horse on the long lines and concentrating on work, his energy is low, but then he raises it for the 'celebration' when the horse does well and is allowed to go forwards unrestricted. Sue explains to me that it is about matching energy with the horse, to create the energy that you want from your horse, but also to be on an even playing field with them so you can communicate on a similar level. For example, when a horse challenges your space using these methods their energy is high, so yours has to be high to be able to regain control of your space. Once the horse moves away, your energy drops again. Sue also uses this technique to lunge her horse:

If I want him to speed up, to go up a gear, I just increase the energy in my body, raise my body up a bit. And if I want him to slow down I breathe out and relax. And he does it! My friend had a go and she thought it was amazing! She was like, 'Look! Look! He's doing it, it actually works!'

The idea of 'energy' is very much a mixture of feelings - a rise in emotions that are not necessarily negative or positive - body language and posture, and eye contact (or lack of it). Facing the horse and standing tall gives you a noticeable presence to the horse that can be viewed as intimidating or enthusiastic depending on the circumstances. In the wild, these changes in 'energy' can be seen in the horses in fight, in play, in flight, in investigation and so on, and is not always a negative response. My informants claim that herd dynamics mean that horses can pick up and feel the energy of the other horses around them and respond accordingly. The collective energy of the herd is a very important factor in the behaviour that is displayed, particularly during the flight response. Because humans change the behaviour of a horse simply by being around it, they very much have the potential to alter the way a horse acts and reacts. As much as horses are controlled through gadgets and specific signals, I firmly believe that they can interpret or feel the inner energy of humans. Obviously we can see when a horse gets excited or nervous, but the way that we *feel* this can vary. We can encourage the response by keeping our energy high (again, not necessarily negative or positive), or try and calm them down.

It's not just a feeling, or an emotion, but something that is inspired BY the horse, and you can *feel it with them*. Many of my informants would attest to this flow of energy between them and their horses in moments of mutual becoming as 'centaurs', and as Sue said:

When Xavi comes in on his toes I just love it! I feel completely in control of him, but he looks amazing! He looks so athletic, like he is really enjoying himself, and I'm enjoying seeing him like that. He makes me pick up my feet a little bit more too! When we are working together and he's like that it makes my heart feel joy, I feel like we are really playing together. The other day he was at the end of the school and I just whistled, not expecting much, I'm not even sure why I did it really.... But he came charging up the school towards me! I thought he wasn't going to stop for a second, but he slid to a halt in front of me and gave this little head toss like he was saying 's'up?' Just really casual, but he knew he had done well. So I ran at him like a game of tag and he flicked his heels and cantered off, but only a few metres and then came back to me again! So I ran at him again and the same thing happened! We were really playing with each other. We had to stop when I got tired but he would have kept going! His enthusiasm gave me enthusiasm, and when we stopped he came over and just rested his forehead on my chest, it was so nice. I just thought, 'yes, this is my horse. And I'm his'.

The idea of horses as belonging to the family, of being 'part of the furniture', is both the action and re-action to the situation that they are in: People feel the need to care based on responsibility, but also feel the reward from it which keeps it all looping back on itself and creating bonds of trust and respect. These people need horses. Natural horsemanship is not just a way of allowing horses to be a 'horse' more effectively while under the control of humans, or just a way for humans to feel better about their control over them. Nor is it just a way of becoming 'horse' or becoming 'human'. NH helps create new 'persons' and to form a different kind of kinship than that classically studied within Anthropology that produces a form of hybrid affectivity and mutual dependence.

Horses are needed in a way that they may never understand - as distractions, friends, partners in crime, and companions – where they are cared for but also *care for*. These feelings of joy, pleasure, happiness and mental stability that occur during these everyday moments aid in the production of these new kinship systems have been well characterized by other equine anthropologists (Argent 2012; Davies *et al.* 2014; Game 2001; Maurstad *et al.* 2013). There is often an oscillating response to the horse as the individual and as a part of a species based on action and interactions, but the overarching factor is the desire to care for the horse and to produce a social life of connection rather than a dichotomy of humans and animals. Other human-animal anthropologists have suggested that ‘bonds of intimacy, knowledge of character, and intersubjective communication’ could amount to the anthropomorphic sentimentalisation of animals (Campbell 2005: 80) - and horses certainly toe this line – but they are not just instruments of human society as hairy visions in matching clothing, but a very active part of a combined social life.

In Cassidy’s book *The Sport of Kings* (2002), she provides a detailed examination of human kinship and class systems, and how people’s lives are intertwined with those of the Thoroughbred racehorse in Newmarket - their lives are shaped both through horses and are subject to them by virtue of the fact that racing is ‘in the blood’. In Cassidy’s fieldwork, her own informants constantly pushed her towards adopting the ‘genealogical method’ through their descriptions of family and how each member of the family was connected to the racing industry – those who weren’t connected to racing were forgotten about promptly and a line drawn through their names on scribbled down family trees (as if they had died!). Horse family trees were similarly spoken of with a convenient lack of unsuccessful family members. ‘Talking family’ was equated to ‘talking horse’ for Cassidy as these selective approaches to kinship were given such precedence by her informants, where family cannot be separated from occupation. Although horses are afforded a status equal to that of humans in descriptions of kinship, they are never equated to humans or as kin. The gains and losses of the racehorse are also accrued by those that are closely associated with them, for example, Cassidy links a stallions stud role directly with the ‘manhood’ of the one in charge of them, as well as the status of the trainer being a direct representation of the success of the horses that they train. Horses could be seen to sustain kinship relations in this particular ‘horse culture’ (Cassidy 2002). Within natural

horsemanship circles, the breeding of the horse is irrelevant, yet by incorporation into the domestic sphere of my informants, horses produce new important kinds of kin networks between humans and horses that create new idioms of relatedness by actively considering horses as members of the family.

Horses are considered kin in Cassidy's work in so far as their pedigree can be described in similar language as people; their successes are their humans successes, and their failures side-stepped in a manner that is reminiscent of the forgiveness of families towards reckless adolescents (2002, 2007). Conversely, in NH groups, all horses have the potential to be family. Cassidy hints at the animate nature of horses throughout but there appears to be little attempt to 'know' the horse on an individual level within the racing industry in Cassidy's work, and the connection between horse and jockey or horse and trainer is often limited to their public and professional roles. Horses continue to be back-rounded as accessories to the life of racing society whilst making it unequivocally clear that they *are* racing society (2002). The change towards this recognition of horses as kin in natural horsemanship is not driven by a need for change within traditional modes of kinship, but a break from 'traditional' modes of horsemanship that parallel an awareness of animal minds and embracing moral responsibilities towards horses. As such, Cassidy's work is not necessarily an accurate representation of the entire British 'horse world'. The ethical practice of natural horsemanship then, could form a basis for personal and social transformation – including the inclusion of horses as kin and the rebellion against traditional British ideas of class and pedigree. Practicing these more 'natural' ideas helps to generate an ethical environment through the embodiment of their ideals.

A very basic perspective would have the world believe that many of the people in Cassidy's work are ruled by bloodlines (of both humans and horses) and bank accounts, and the language and jargon used by those within this society does nothing but perpetuate this image. However, Cassidy also delves into the more intimate nature of the racehorse as an animate creature that has the ability to unite social classes where 'all men are equal on the turf and under it'. Although racehorses could thus be viewed as a way to connect people in a multitude of assemblages that we do not at first expect to see, Cassidy uses these ideas to further show the separation between the people that are 'in' the racing industry and those that just partake of it. Other scholars

who discuss human-horse relationships have also focused on the ‘class’ aspect of these relationships. For example, Coulter in her work in competitive Equestrian cultures in Ontario, suggests that ‘while high-ranking social actors may use horses for sport and leisure, many of the daily interactions, including the “dirty work” of cleaning up manure, are the responsibility of working-class people’ (2014: 135), remarking that horses are intertwined in complex social hierarchies.

Coulter goes further to suggest that it would be impossible to investigate human-horse relations without ‘recognizing the influence of class’ (2014: 136). I disagree to some extent and instead suggest that the importance of class is dependent on particular social and cultural constructions. In the racing industry, this dynamic between classes is also noticed, where owners and trainers tend to come from wealthier backgrounds whilst the ‘lads’ and stable hands responsible for the day-to-day care of the horses are working class people (Cassidy 2002). However, Cassidy’s work and my own within natural horsemanship communities suggests that horses level the playing field between different classes of people through common connections with horses. Although the majority of my closest informants appeared to be middle-class, within the NH world, participants share similar goals and desires. Through training alongside their horses in the production of a new ‘horse culture’, previous markers or symbols of status or hierarchy become less important and emphasis is placed instead on the development of the relationship.

Emotional choices: How making horses kin is not always kind

Because of the deep, personal knowledge that practitioners develop about their own horses – particularly when they are considered as kin- emotional reactions to situations can often overshadow more rational responses. During training moments, humans are trained and instructed to remain calm and focused on the training at hand and what the horse presents to them in each moment. However, certain situations are not covered by routine natural horsemanship training. One of the most stressful and emotionally challenging of these is when a horse requires veterinary treatment. In these instances, a working knowledge of natural horsemanship and the helpful advice

of trainers is not always substantial enough. For minor issues of health and medical care horses are often treated by their owners unless prescribed medication is necessary. Major illness or injury definitively requires a vet according to all of my informants; and withholding this care is seen as cruel and ethically wrong. Vet call outs are expensive and often a quick internet search is the first point of call for basic veterinary care. This method of 'self-diagnosis' is fairly standard and other horse owners, either on the yard or over the internet in a variety of chat rooms and forums are a wealth of information for the worried horse owner. The owner appear to assimilate the new information alongside their own awareness of their horses condition and behaviour, and will work out a treatment plan that seems suitable based on the new information and their existing ideas about their horse. In contrast to information sought from other horse owners - where knowledge is circumstantial and based more on experience more than on any biological underpinning - professional veterinary knowledge is more detailed and based on facts of the systems and biological reactions of the horse as a species, and often must consider the horse as a whole organic being.

Ideally, the scientific practice of veterinary care would merge well with the owner's awareness of their horses personality and individual quiddities. However, it often appears difficult to accept this merging of details in sensitive cases where treatment may appear to go against some of the principles that natural horsemanship practitioners strive for when trying to keep their horses in the most 'natural' way possible, or when the best option placed forward by the vet is euthanasia. Here, two different sets of 'natural facts', those of horse physiology and behaviour collide. The owner's emotional response to the horse often clouds any rational decisions in these matters. The ability of the owner to make what would be considered to be the ethically 'correct' choice for the horse as an *animal* is often blurred by how they perceive of the horse as a *person* and as kin. These ethical ideals are played out in debates between vets and owners (and strangers on the internet) as to what constitutes an ethically 'correct' course of action, and the horse's body exists in a grey area between veterinary expertise and an owner's personal connection to the horses body and spirit.

One of the most striking examples of this occurred one day whilst I was working at the equine rescue centre run by Julie and her daughter Sarah. At the centre, vet visits were often delayed until multiple horses required treatment to save on call out fees. On this particular day, the vet was here to see a variety of horses including Haffy about her teeth, Rory and Indie about their feet, Ollie about an unusual lump between his back legs, Dolly and the foal, and Fleur about her behaviour issues. The vet handles all the horses proficiently and calmly, even if the horses themselves are agitated. This is a stark contrast to how Julie and Sarah handle the horses, especially Fleur. The vet holds the horses confidently and moves them with even pressure on the rope, always giving them clear instructions. Julie and Sarah give the horses a lot of freedom with the rope, and tug ineffectually when they give signals rather than keeping the pressure on until the horse moves the correct way, and releasing as a reward. With Fleur, they stay as far as possible from her, shooing her with their arms when they want her to move or holding on to her head collar very tightly as they are worried about being bitten by her. Indie and Rory are very much part of Julie's family, whereas Fleur (and to a lesser extent, horses like Dolly and Haffy) are not. Julie imagines these two types of horse very differently, and consequently treats them, and talks about them, very differently.

In preparation, we brought all the horses out of the field to one of the nearby paddocks before the vet arrived. But they knew something was up. They were never brought in en masse like this, away from their usual herds and placed together in tight quarters. They certainly had something to say about these queer proceedings and a chorus of neighs ran through them all, like a Mexican wave of noise. These shouts for help and companionship were echoed back to them from the horses in the far fields; they were out of sight but not out of earshot, and they missed their friends too. A short while later the gentle rumble of faraway hooves on the hard summer ground could be heard at the yard as the field horses charged excitedly around, rousing others in the process. These noises were almost too much for the young Ollie who appeared to be trembling from ears tips to tail ends: Old Haffy was taking the opportunity to pick at some choice grass near the fence of the riding paddock that wasn't often touched by horses. After examining Haffy, Ollie and Dolly, we all moved on to the barn where Rory and Indie were kept. Fleur was to be looked at last.

Indie and Rory are both kept inside the barn in two makeshift stables made from plaster board, with long gates across the front. They are prevented from touching each other by a wooden barricade because they bite each other ferociously at times. Horses that live in are often very frustrated and exhibit stable vices¹⁴ – in this case, the wood that lines their partition is chewed away. Neither of them are allowed on grass to help prevent an attack of laminitis and are kept in their solitary pens for up to twenty four hours a day. Rory is a pony, technically, but in Julie's mind he is a great horse. He stands at only 14.2 hands high, or, 148cm at the shoulder, but his achievements far outweigh his stature. Rory is an old Connemara jumping pony, grey, hard to keep clean. He is almost entirely crippled. Rory is her boy. Her favourite. Her 'once in a lifetime' horse – and she is happy to tell you all these things, all of the time:

I wish you could have met him when he was younger! He was, is, the greatest horse I've ever ridden. So sensitive, you just thought about what you wanted to do and he would do it. Strong out hacking but incredible to jump. You had to be careful because he would think nothing of just popping over a 5ft gate! I remember plenty of times when I was just riding across a field and he would lock on to the far gate or hedge, and it was a real fight to get him to turn away after that! It's such a shame to see him like this now, but I suppose it's better than him being dead. Horses are my everything, they are my world. I look at Rory and it makes my heart happy. And I can see it in him too – in his eyes. He looks at me and I can tell he knows it's me, and he's happy that it's me!

Rory has multiple medical problems that seem to prevent him from truly enjoying life. Julie believes he has Cushings, a metabolic condition - the veterinary tests have all come back negative – but he also has severe laminitis and other hoof issues. Laminitis causes the pedal bone in the hoof to rotate downwards causing severe pain and lameness. Unfortunately, one of the best remedies for the control of laminitis in a susceptible (or already suffering) horse, is to make sure they move around an adequate amount. Rory cannot go in the field because the sugar in grass is one of the

¹⁴ The reason behind stable vices are continually debated by equine behaviourists as to whether they are done through frustration at confinement, or whether it is the inability to perform natural behaviours such as grazing and chewing.

main candidates for a laminitis attack, so he is made to walk on the roads for an hour a day; because of the pain, Rory must wear hoof boots on every foot to do this. On multiple occasions, the vets have advised Julie to have Rory put down because, although his conditions are manageable, his quality of life is extremely poor. He is confined to a stable that is inside a barn for twenty three hours a day, for the other hour he is made to walk on hard ground; he is in pain all the time. Many days he must be dragged out of his stable as he does not want to move. Julie told me the day prior to the vets visit:

I have definitely considered having him putdown, but then sometimes he just looks at me.... Looking at me like he wants to live. He stares straight at me and it's like he knows what I'm thinking. I used to just work and ride them and that was good. It was fun, for me at least. But now I care about their happiness more. I wouldn't be lugging around soaking wet haynets in the middle of winter in the cold and the dark if I didn't! Natural horsemanship really allows you to get closer to them, to hear them. Not in a literal 'horses speak to me' kind of way, well, I suppose they do..... I'm just more open to hearing, or at least understanding, what they have to say now. We so nearly did it once. He was in so much pain, just lying down and not even wanting to stand up, and the vet came out and said we should seriously consider it this time, and that they would give him until morning to see if he improves on the medication. Well, about an hour later I came back to the stable to speak to Rory and put some more shavings down in his bed, and he got up and started throwing the plastic shavings bag around! It was like he was saying 'I can still move! Just give me a chance!' So I did. Thousands of pounds later and he's still here. I can't bear the thought of not having him in the world anymore.

Rory's stable mate is Indie, a horse who also suffers from laminitis and must be kept off the grass. Julie's desire to do right by her horses has led to her feeding Indie ad lib hay while he is inside to mimic how the horse naturally lives; allowing him to constantly 'graze' to prevent digestive upset and to fulfil the natural behaviours of chewing and eating (which in turn may prevent stable 'vices' such as the chewing of wood). Unfortunately, this means that Indie is continuously putting on weight whilst

being stabled, which is a problem for laminitic horses because of the added sugar in the diet and the extra weight on already sore feet. Julie often justifies her treatment of Indie like so:

Oh he's just gorgeous isn't he? Such a good looking horse. I know he's putting on weight but I don't really know what to do about it. The vet was out the other day to look at Rory and suggested I feed Indie less, but I'm not going to do that. Horses need to graze for 16 hours a day, so I have to give him hay for the entire time he's in. I did try putting the nets inside each other, to make the holes smaller, but he couldn't get the hay out very well and he just seemed to get depressed. He could still eat it obviously, but he was really frustrated by it, and would look at me in an awful way! I couldn't stand that. And he's part thoroughbred which doesn't help, so he really hates being in. I'm just trying to make it more enjoyable for him, so I give him a few little feeds a day to help him cope.

We all enter the barn with Sarah leading the way; winding our way around the piles of horse equipment, household objects, netting, and random junk that is stacked floor to ceiling in large piles which always vaguely resembles the large piles of rubbish shown on TV screens whenever recycling becomes a hot topic again. The vet is in front of me, dodging loose protruding objects and lifting feet higher over pieces of baling twine that are strewn across the makeshift pathways between the towers – he doesn't mention the state of the barn, as if he has been here before. Round the last turn we see two grey faces popping over the long doors of their pens, ears pricked and interested in our little expedition party. “Hello beautiful boys!” says Julie.

The vet comments that Rory is looking fairly well, which makes Julie beam and look very proud: He then glances quickly over at Indie in his gloriously fat state and mutters “he looks a bit too well”. Oh. He hums and haws as he enquires after Rory's health and general mental health – “well that's as good as to be expected I suppose”. He then gives Indie a quick check over; looking at the angle of his hooves, his overall condition, and if he has a strong pulse in his lower leg or not - all indicators of a potential Laminitis flare up. He then brings out a portable X-ray machine to take images of the bones inside his front feet to check for degrees of pedal bone rotation

(Image 13). There is some, but a less concerning amount than previously. Today, the vet repeats treatment choices that have previously been suggested for both of them.

For Indie and Rory, Julie's concern for their happiness outweighs her opinion of veterinary advice, and has led to poor decisions regarding their overall wellbeing. Indie was bought to replace Rory as Julie's main horse and he appears to also be following in Rory's medical hoof-steps. By contrast, one of the rescue horses, Fleur, has no obvious veterinary issues but does have some severe behavioural issues (Image 14). She shows extreme aggression towards Julie and Rachel because of various, failed, attempts to train her (although she has always been fine with me). Fleur is a beautiful black mare, and was once a very successful show horse. If her aggression could be controlled, or the underlying issues investigated and correct training given, she would be worth a lot of money.

Julie to me: She's a beautiful horse, yes, and she moves well...but she's not a nice horse, do you know what I mean? I just think there are other horses out there that are more deserving of help than her. She doesn't give you anything when you work with her.

Julie to the vet: So this is Fleur, be careful near her, she is dangerous at both ends! We got her a few months ago and she tries to bite you every time you touch her neck. She also does this funny thing where she looks like she is falling asleep when she's standing up, her legs buckle and nearly falls down! We think she has Wobblers. I googled it and she is showing loads of the symptoms!

Vet: Where did you read this? What makes you think she has Wobblers?

Julie: I read it online. Here, I printed off the pages. Well, she is grumpy all the time and looks like she is going to fall over.



Image 13. The X-ray of Indie's foot.



Image 14.
Fleur

But Julie does not like Fleur, and does not believe she is worth the time or effort to train her. Consequently, Fleur is left in the smallest paddock on her own, is only given poor quality hay, or Rory and Indie's leftovers, and is underweight. Julie's opinion of her is that:

The vet then does a few short examinations. He picks up one front foot and tries to cross it over the other front one, and then asks to see her walk and turn in a tight circle. Horses with Wobblers often have a problem with co-ordination because of a lack of nerve signals below the cervical vertebrae. It often looks like the horses don't

know where their legs are, and have trouble placing them in the correct place. It most noticeably affects the hind legs. However, Fleur walks and turns well, with no obvious difficulties in knowing where to place her feet, correcting where the vet tries to place her front feet.

Vet: “From a quick exam it is impossible to really tell what is wrong, but it doesn’t look like Wobblers. She would need a full neurological work-up to find out anything concrete. If her problems are psychological, which sounds more likely, then they will be very difficult to treat. Even if you do manage to ‘cure’ her, they could always reoccur, and you would never know what would trigger it.”

Julie: “So you think it would be best just to have her put down?”

Vet: “Well it’s certainly an option, if you didn’t think she would be safe to rehome? It’s not like the horse knows what’s going to happen. It’s less than a moment and everything goes dark, they never know, and it’s not stressful. It might be the best option for her.”

The decision to have fleur put down seemed to come all too easily to Julie, and she presented the vet with what appeared to be leading information on the mare. Julie is happy to keep other horses out in the fields doing nothing - and not interacting with them at all – but not Fleur. Instead, Julie had already decided to ask the vet about the possibility of having Fleur putdown. It’s not to say that Fleur should not be put down if she is going to be unpredictable and potentially dangerous, as it will make her very difficult to re-home, but why is it that Rory, an old and crippled horse who is destined for a lifetime of imprisonment, is more deserving of life?

Usually the decision of euthanasia for any animal can be a difficult and painful one. However, the mass killing of livestock is often normalized in Western culture and there are, of course, some owners that that act towards animals with negligence or disregard. For example, more dogs are put down before Christmas than any other time of year, and many horses are put down over the winter to avoid the increased costs associated with the colder weather. These instances of ‘non-criminal putting to death’

(Derrida 2008) are both examples of what Marvin terms ‘cold’ killings (2006), where the action is objective and dispassionate. Although acts of euthanasia and ‘cold’ killings differ in motivation, the decision to put a horse down is no easy one, and involves much deliberation and emotional pain. It may be the rational decision to make, but it is certainly not one that is free from an emotional element. Many of these people aim to minimize suffering and maximize quality of life by giving the animal a ‘good’ death (Pierce 2012). A horse’s monetary value does not appear to be an issue for Julie, so the decision to have Fleur destroyed appeared to be as simple and subjective as just not liking her. Rory and Indie are a part of her family, whereas Fleur is a relative intruder. On the other hand, even though Indie and Rory are her family, she still ignores veterinary advice that might make their lives better in favour of what *she* thinks will make their lives better.

In a very different case, Lucy, my hacking friend, worries intensely about her horse’s health and constantly seeks advice from vets. The vet’s advice is often to limit his food to protect his health, and although she hates doing it, she does. She is potentially overly conscientious about Blue’s health issues, ‘‘but, you know Kirsty, I just love him’’. He is in his twenties now, and has severe breathing difficulties brought on by allergies – it becomes worse when he is overweight and he can become laminitic too. Because of this, Lucy has Blue checked by the vet every six months (although she often calls the vet in between these visits if Blue has trouble breathing). During these attacks, not unlike asthma, Blue is prescribed Ventapulmen (a steroid) and 12 piriton tablets to be taken twice daily. To keep his weight in check he is kept on limited grazing throughout the summer, augmented by soaked hay to keep his digestive tract working well. The hay is soaked to remove most of the sugar so that it has limited nutritional value. This starvation diet has meant that Lucy has been bullied by people on livery yards who believe that she is starving her horse, and that she is not taking good enough care of him:

I had to leave because of it all, it made me feel so bad that I would stay awake at night worrying if I was doing the right thing! On one hand I have the vet - who is a professional, and experienced, and knowledgeable – and on the other hand are all the other horse owners who think I’m being cruel. And I don’t think I am being cruel, but it’s hard sometimes not to believe

people isn't it? I knew I shouldn't have brought them in the other night because the dust from the straw makes him ill, but everyone just kept going on and on about the weather that I felt like I had to. That I was being a bad horse owner, a bad mother, if I didn't! I had to call the vet the next morning for more of his medication..... but he did say that Blue was looking really well..... Please don't think I'm being cruel when you see him Kirsty, I'm sure you won't, but you can almost see his ribs.... The vet says he's fine....

Her voice trails off as she finishes this story, still unconvinced by her own actions, but willing to listen to the advice and opinion of the vet. She is desperately trying to do what is considered to be the right thing for her horses; even in the face of everyone else's negative opinions. I thought that Blue looked great. Lucy lit up when I told her this – any kind of affirmation of her actions is welcomed. Her horses receive the best care that money can buy; She keeps them at her house on well-fenced paddocks with field shelters; she is having new stables put in the barns; they have the best quality rugs and yet she still worries that she doesn't provide enough for them. She often questions her own knowledge, and over-thinks decisions until they seem wrong. Her concern for her horses care is evident, even if it isn't to everyone else on yards she used to be on.

Concluding Thoughts

Animal welfare appears to be a thoroughly moral issue across most of my informants and a failure in the care or training of one's own horse can be a difficult issue to face, as well as a social disaster. Equine forums on the internet highlight the many tensions in horse care; they contain a plethora of knowledge, as a beautifully conflicting tapestry of opinions. These forums (Facebook in particular) are often a battleground of horses 'rights', played out through what each person considers to be the correct or moral idea of horse care and welfare. For example, to rug, or not to rug? Straw, or shavings? Bits, or no bits? Shoes, or no shoes? These are everyday decisions about the health and prospects of horses. Swabe highlights in her own work with Dutch Veterinarians that:

As sociologists Arluke and Sanders have observed, when we more generally consider modern western attitudes towards animals, ‘one of the most glaring consistencies is inconsistency’ (1996: 4). Yet we do not necessarily have to look to animal abuse, laboratory science or rabbit stew to illustrate the paradoxical nature of this human-pet relationship (Swabe 2005: 102).

Swabe is suggesting that there are potentially as many tensions in ideas of animal welfare in the everyday worlds of companion animals as in the more sensationalized vistas of animal rights advocates. This proves true in NH groups where horses are given the status of kin which makes the ‘becoming with’ more vibrant and people experience it through what Franklin suggests are ‘enduring relations of mutual dependency’ (1999: 57). However, these acts also elucidate critical and contested points of equine welfare through the everyday acts of care and companionship.

Lucy tries, at all times, to do what she considers (or what others consider) to be ethically correct for her horse’s health: Julie has a more flexible approach to what might be considered the more mainstream approach in favour of her own ethical opinions and knowledge of her own horses. Both of these people care deeply about their horse’s welfare but assimilate and integrate knowledge presented to them in different ways, potentially partly to do with their position in the horse community. Lucy would be considered at the lower echelon, willing to listen to others: Julie considers herself to be higher up in this particular ‘horse culture’ hierarchy by running a business and possessing her own body of knowledge that she relies on in a day to day capacity, and has done for decades. Most work on the affective aspects of human-horse relations has considered the positive effects of these relationships (Maurstad *et al.* 2013; Sarmicanic 2007). As companion animals they give both physical and psychological benefits to their owners, and are suggested to be able to ‘ground and balance us as humans’, and produce feelings of ‘certainty and happiness’ (Sarmicanic 2007: 169). Swabe has also suggested of companion animal relations more generally that:

One could argue that the practice of sharing homes and gardens with select members of other species is deeply embedded in what social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has described as the nation’s habitus (Swabe 2005: 107).

However, opening up animals to the realm of being under the direct control of humans also leaves them open to exploitation, neglect, maltreatment, or even abandonment. Once these boundaries are blurred and the horse is given quasi-human status, the awareness of the horse's biological certainties as members of a species are lessened. NH training acts to make people more aware of species specific behaviours, whilst accommodating individual differences to bring the horse closer while keeping it at arms length, literally. Horses affect the emotions of humans deeply, repeatedly, and wonderfully; potentially precisely because of the fact that it *is* a horse, or, more precisely, that it isn't a human and able to advocate for its own rights. The making of kin in these 'horse cultures' allows them to share in the emotions and lives of others, allowing horses (and humans) to negotiate their way through their inherited, messy histories.

Chapter Seven

Concluding Thoughts: Considering the ‘Natural’ in Natural Horsemanship

Many of my informants openly asserted their love for their horse (and indirectly, all horses), which Birke (2008) attributed in her own research to the increase in communication between human and horse that is developed through natural horsemanship practices. I have argued that while this seemed certainly to be the case, the development of such heightened levels of communication are formed through actions in training *and* the deep emotional connections found in the everyday interactions and moments of mutual responses. This leads to the awareness of horses as both persons and kin as each learns to ‘see’ and respond to the other appropriately; where the horse’s choice to work alongside their human and their subsequent actions are viewed as examples of free will as partners in an intra-active relationship. These affective moments were most strikingly vocalised to me through the excitement of shared joy in riding, but also during the quiet moments spent alongside horses during the general day to day tasks of looking after them. Some of my informants suggested to me that it was these things that continued to bring them back to horses and connected to the world of natural horsemanship. As Lucy mentioned to me once:

I so look forwards to just spending time with Blue. I get up in the morning knowing that he is going to be waiting for me, waiting for breakfast, and it makes me happy to know that he will be there. We used to have such a tense relationship; he once trampled through a crop field dragging me behind him. I had to pay the farmer for the damage! But now that things are better I feel so much more connected to him. When I groom him I can sense his happiness, and he looks so expectant when I bring his saddle, like he is looking forwards to getting out riding. I can’t imagine the world without him now.

If these moments were to be seen as the pinnacle of the human-horse relationship to my informants, then the preparatory work in the round-pen or the arena made it

possible. The calmness, patience, and feelings of joy and happiness that are created through these interactions help to promote the over all ‘well-being of the well’ (Davies *et al.* 2013) and are often attributed to more general feelings of happiness in everyday life; Sue often said, “every thing seems a bit easier if I can look forward to having a horse to spend time with in the evening”. These, sometimes small, changes that a person makes in their encounters with horses constitutes a tentative step towards overall better treatment of horses, and an awareness of the potential suffering of other animals at the hands of humans. Although most of my informants were not vegetarian or vegan, they did hold very strong opinions of what should be considered as right or wrong with regards to animal welfare, aligning themselves with similar ideologies of animal welfare activists or charities. The words used by practitioners further suggests that they work within an ethical terrain by condemning traditional methods as being ‘cruel’ and ‘violent’.

Natural horsemanship training practices play an important role in creating new possibilities for living alongside horses with an ethical orientation through recognition of both individual personhood and species-specific behaviours. These ideas appear to be constantly in tension with each other and can create ruptures in natural horsemanship ideologies. Ideas of ‘naturalness’ continue to be debated within natural horsemanship groups, with proponents debating the degree to which horses should be afforded their natural status through critiques of the use of bits, shoes, and equipment more generally. However, not one of my informants would consider the abolishment of riding on the back of horses in their debates over what would constitute a ‘natural’ approach to living with horses. Monty Roberts himself appears to be aware of the paradoxical nature of his own training principles. In his autobiography (1996) he draws attention to the cruelty of humans against horses while also suggesting the continued exploitation of the natural talents of a horse:

The absence of communication between man and horse has led to a disastrous history of cruelty and abuse. Also, it has been to our detriment. We haven’t captured the willing co-operation of the horse nearly as much as we might have done, and that is our considerable loss – both in emotional terms and with respect to the performance and work we might selfishly gain for them. (345)

My work here work has, of course, not been a discussion into animal (or specifically horse) rights, but a broader account of powerful approaches to creating improved horse welfare, and ‘a better future for horses’ (Roberts, from 2015 autumn demonstration). The recognition of horses as kinds of persons has never, in my knowledge, precluded an argument by my informants for horse ‘rights’. The purpose of natural horsemanship very much aligns itself with broader animal welfare schemes, but where the active practice of it is for (almost exclusively) maintaining a working relationship alongside horses in a ‘better way’ than traditional horsemanship practices allowed, breaking away from both established methods of horsemanship practiced in Britain and many previous animal domination paradigms. There is a strong recognition amongst high profile trainers and part-time practitioners alike that the horse will always be a part of human social and cultural worlds – the key is being aware of how each party is affected and responds to these relations. As Haraway (2008) has advocated, learning how to engage with the many facets of a relationship within different kinds of connections is important, and that all parties contribute to this:

That means not that a particular animal does not matter but that mattering is always inside connections that demand and enable response, not bare calculation or ranking. Response, of course, grows with the capacity to respond, that is, responsibility. Such a capacity can be shaped only in and for multidirectional relationships, in which always more than one responsive entity is in the process of becoming. That means that human beings are not uniquely obligated to and gifted with responsibility; animals as workers in labs, animals in all their worlds, are response-able in the same sense that people are; that is, responsibility is a relationship crafted in intra-action through which entities, subjects and objects, come in to being (70-71).

Horses are still both a resource and a commodity, but that does not occlude them from also being kin or loved and cared for as reciprocal individual persons. As Haraway suggests, humans and nonhumans are intertwined in many different ways, and paying attention to these different themes within the relationship is important. In this

particular case, although notions of what a horse *is* (or should be) tend to be the determining factor in why a person chooses to practice natural horsemanship, it is the resulting connections and renegotiations of the relationship that really matter. The idea of ‘nature’ in this case provides a useful point of departure as it both determines the progression of natural horsemanship and highlights how response-able persons are created within it - more specifically, it shapes how people consider the response-ability of their equine partners.

The most extreme example of affording the horse its natural status I encountered during my fieldwork was of Julie and Sarah who toed the line between being advocates of natural horsemanship and proponents of the horses ‘natural rights’. The charity acted as a kind of ‘sanctuary’ for equine companions who were no longer wanted. Although I was often told that the aim of the charity was to rehome horses with suitable people, little work was done to make this a reality and much of my active vocalisations to participate in training the horses in preparation was often curtailed with statements such as “they’re just not ready yet” or “they need more time to just be a horse”. In this manner, the rehabilitation of horses for human companionship was often sacrificed for the more natural aspirations that Julie held for them.

Her desire for this partly stemmed from a fear of them going to what she called ‘bad’ or ‘unsuitable’ homes – at least if they were at the centre, their futures were certain. However, as noted by Elen Arbrell in his work in animal sanctuaries in the US, if animals cannot be rehomed, it means less space for other animals in need of care. In the case of the companion animal sanctuaries in Arbrell’s work, animals that could not be rehomed would be euthanized to make space for other animals that potentially could: ‘Sanctuaries, by definition, are spaces designed explicitly to foster life, but death is as woven into the fabric of sanctuaries as the practices of care that keep animals alive’ (254). The more exotic animals or wild animals that would be unsuitable as companion animals would remain at these sanctuaries. I found that in almost all cases, Julie would advocate for horses that ‘were not ready to be rehomed’ to stay for as long as needed, even resigning herself to the fact that some horses, like Jester, would ‘probably be here forever’. This is not to suggest that all the horses within natural horsemanship groups are subject to the same constraints as an animal

sanctuary, indeed they mostly lead pampered lives of relative luxury, however, there are some similarities that can be drawn between these two groups, particularly regarding Julie's rescue centre.

Arbrell suggests that the animals in these sanctuaries become 'sacrificial citizens' even at the same time as escaping from what he terms '*bestia sacer*' (a modification of '*homo sacer*', a term put forwards by Giorgio Agamben as a human who lacks all rights and legal protections (1998, see Arbrell 2016: iv)) stating that they are instead being protected from this bare life whilst still being held in a complicated loop of biopower that means whilst they have rights as individuals in the shelter, they are also subject to overarching institutions driven by economic needs (35 and 264). The carers of these animals are also denoted as 'sacrificial citizens' by virtue of their capacity to donate their time or money to the plight of the animals under the safety umbrella of the sanctuary. The animals have been 'saved' to have a life rather than to be dead, but it is a life where sacrifices of their animal qualities must be made I.e. they are kept in small captive spaces, or are not allowed to practice natural behaviours such as hunting. Further to this, Arbrell suggests that in their interactions with humans, some of the animals, in this case dogs, are expected to control their innate natures:

In a sense, dogs that exhibit reactive behavior must sacrifice an aspect of their dog-ness to become citizens of the shelter community – they must learn to respond to unfamiliar or scary circumstances in a way that conforms to human standards of appropriate dog etiquette rather than in the ways that make sense to them. (252)

It could be suggested that all domesticated horses within the UK adopt the position of the 'sacrificial citizen', to some extent, due to the restrictions on their physical freedom and breeding potential, creating tension in the ideals of 'natural' horsemanship. Also, because of their 'relationships of mutual dependency' (Sacrimanic 2007: 169), humans too could be seen to be sacrificing elements of their lives for their horses, however, the positive effects are often compensation enough.

Within other specific 'horse cultures', the realms of nature and culture have often been cited as being in contention with each other; where the perfectly manicured fields and fences of stud farms serve to tame nature whilst creating a place to control breeding of thoroughbred racehorses (Cassidy 2002), or the advancement of the horse from 'wild' to 'tame' in the arena of a rodeo where 'culture' is literally applied to the body of the horse through contact with humans and the use of equipment (Lawrence 1982). I have noted a similar occurrence throughout this piece where the 'natural' ideals of what it is to be a horse are cherished and given emphasis even whilst these characteristics are being shaped and streamlined to align the horse body and self with cultural ideas of what it is to be a horse. In this case, practitioners are using the 'naturalness' of horses as a lubricant to continue interactions with them. Both in that 'naturally' the horse wants to work with humans in particular ways, but also employing the horses natural behaviour as a means to train them. In this way, NH produces a methodology that becomes acceptable to those concerned with the 'correct' way to interact with horses, presenting itself so that the innate behavioural responses of the horse are given precedence, and hence, value and authority.

However, other works have noted the invocation of nature as a form of weighted argument for animal rights. Reed (2017) has suggested that the workers of an animal protection charity in Edinburgh, concerned with the use of snares for trapping animals, use the category of nature to 'give form to their notion of moral authority', and intertwine it with their ethical status to 'provide a language by which human relations to non-animals can be described' (70). Their constant redefinition and use of natural categories allows them to determine the biological facts of the animals as well as employing it to connect an individual animal to broader schemes of welfare for a more engaged awareness. It is also used to renegotiate their own position on the subject when advocating for animal rights against those more concerned with animal conservation during formation of legislation and land management. Reed suggests that these animal protection workers 'desire a natural world in which signs of human engagement are completely removed' and that their use of nature advocates for a world in which humans interference is kept to a minimum, or abolished all together (2017).

Many natural horsemanship practitioners debate the naturalness of horses in this 21st century world, but they do not seem to use ‘nature’ in a way to determine horse rights and it is not deployed to give moral authority to the practice in this sense. Although the overall practice is seen to be more ethical - in particular with regards to turning away from traditional methods – ideas of nature are mostly utilised as a way to promote the horses innate behaviours for training, and the debates over equipment and care are deployed for improved equine welfare. Nature is renegotiated within natural horsemanship groups with practitioners adapting the aspects of a horses ‘naturalness’ that are beneficial, in turn shaping what the horse is and the responses that they give to stimuli. As mentioned in previous chapters, many natural behaviours of the horse are seen as unwanted and the horse receives the derogatory status of a ‘bad horse’ when they exhibit them. For them to be good, other natural behaviours are exploited. All horses are seen as having the potential to be good, that they all have the potential for these unwanted behaviours to be trained out of them.

This practice draws more awareness to what is considered as an appropriate way to live with horses, although as Julie shows, there is more than one way to interact with horses under this umbrella definition. Further to this, sprouting from the natural horsemanship movement, new kinds of equine training are emerging. Drawing on the practice of positive-reinforcement training often employed by dog trainers where the aspect of ‘liberty’ is key in this concept, the idea of ‘choice’ is once again suggested by practitioners to confer ideas of freedom to the horse during training. These methods specifically critique the pressure-release system of natural horsemanship training in favour of working without ropes or any direct control over the placement of the horse’s body.

I was lucky enough during the end of my fieldwork to work with one of the few positive-reinforcement trainers in the UK. Fiona’s training works by breaking training down into small steps that are rewarded upon successful completion. Unlike traditional training where the pressure is applied constantly until the horse learns what it’s supposed to do, clicker training works the other way around, where the horse performs behaviours until it gets it right and is rewarded for that. Rather than be constantly telling the horse off for what you don’t want, you reward them for what you do want instead. They soon start working much harder to gain the reward. For

positive reinforcement, a click (from a clicker, a small device that makes a clicking sound when you push a button) is paired with a small food reward, such as a piece of carrot or small handful of grain. Fiona was often very critical of natural horsemanship techniques:

People like natural horsemanship because it makes them feel better about what they are doing with, to, their horses. Most of them don't understand the amount of pressure that is placed on the horse. If your horse's behaviour is at a 6 you have to be prepared to start your training at a 6.5, and be prepared to raise that too! People think they are doing their horses a favour by doing natural horsemanship. I don't know, maybe they sleep better at night, whatever. But it's just because they don't know any better. What do you expect? It's everywhere, and it's popular, and to some extent it does work. 9/10, that horse would not do it if the rope wasn't attached, or the bit wasn't in its mouth. They are naturally willing, but given the choice a lot of them would rather just be a horse somewhere in a field!

Many recreational users of natural horsemanship techniques are not able to recognize the subtle signals that horses give, and often do not remove the pressure quickly enough. The idea is always that the horses control the release of pressure, but many people actively use pressure at unnecessary moments. Although you are controlling the horse's feet you are actually controlling their expressed behaviour by limiting their emotional responses to situations. Fiona now feels very guilty about using these techniques. Although she has done them in the past, she understands the emotional response of the horse and no longer feels comfortable dominating them. She told me in a resigned fashion about her thoughts on natural horsemanship now after learning about positive reinforcement training:

If it gets a lesson in there, it gets a lesson in there. It's not about changing the horse's feelings, otherwise they would come in to me better. You effectively take the horse to a place where it feels a little defeated, but it's probably not a bad place for horses to be for most people where they are expected to be safe, friendly companions. You keep moving them about,

moving their feet, so that they do your bidding, by moving their feet you are checking your control over them.

Although these new training principles are slowly gaining momentum, they will be hard pushed to dethrone the place that natural horsemanship now occupies as a digestible, and more importantly, re-creatable form of training that is accessible for the many, not the few. Positive reinforcement training is much harder to learn for the human as it requires precise reactions and timings of rewards. It also does not obviously work alongside the naturally occurring behaviours that have made the idea of NH so popular. Roberts calls for a form of interaction with ‘no pain’ and that if ‘you can accomplish this process, then you have helped me in my quest to **Make The World A Better Place For The Horse**’ (1996: 358, bold text and capital letters in original). Horses will continue to be objects of fascination and intrigue to humans through their use in the popular culture - I doubt that there was a dry eye in the cinema during screenings of *War Horse*, and the stories of *Black Beauty* and *Seabiscuit* will continue to capture imaginations – but it is in the making of actual relationships that this imagination comes to the fore. Many of my informants allude to that fantastical space of shared joy and freedom that intertwine them with their horse companion in the making of the Centaur - where the ‘Centaur’ is not just the physical enmeshment of human and horse, but also a state that can be achieved through an active awareness of the mutual embodiment of feelings and communication.

Postscript

On a balmy summer day, Lucy and I were exercising her horses and talking of life as usual. It was near the end of my fieldwork and most of my days were taken up with work at Julie's centre where all workers were expected to adopt a vegan lifestyle. The horseflies were out and I was busy practising a variety of yoga moves as I tried to swat them from Oliver's body. During a particularly expressive almost-half-moon pose to try and get one that had landed between Oliver's front legs, Lucy asked "So how's the vegan thing coming along?" I turned my head up towards her to see her casually swatting the airborne flies between Blue's ears with her whip - he ignores the gentle sound of swishing that is occurring above the shambles of forelock at the top of his head. He knows that the whip will not be used to hurt him. As I brought my body up and back into a modification of a camel pose to get a particularly blood-thirsty fly that had settled at the top of Oliver's tail, I replied: "Shit. I actually had to sneak out to the shops the other night and devoured almost a whole roast chicken in my car".

My own transformation from traditional horsewoman to one that practices a hybrid form of natural horsemanship has not always been easy. It is harder than you think to handle ropes well and control your own body and emotions. Although I felt that most of my informants did not understand the purpose of my fieldwork, they were determined to give me an excellent education all the same! I was very lucky to work alongside some very good horse trainers, even if most of the time I felt like I was just hanging on to coat tails. During the course of the year I fell off twice, was pulled off my feet once, had my feet stood on and my hands burned with ropes, I was crushed against walls, and developed a repetitive strain injury in one of my wrists from too much sweeping – but I am eternally grateful to those who took the time to teach me or talk to me.

I opened this thesis with a personal account from my childhood and learning to ride in what I considered at the time to be the 'correct' way. I was just progressing from unaffiliated competitions to affiliated ones as I pursued my goal of one day riding in the Olympics. I was maybe 13 at the time. To say that I 'knew no better' would be

allegoric; the situation was not uncommon within the horse cultures I lived in, but I felt like something was wrong. However, to say that I felt bad would be an untruth too. I did not like the idea of hitting the horse and causing pain, but I had no capacity for understanding how the horse *felt*. This is the most important thing I learnt throughout this process, how to ‘feel with’ horses and how to pay attention to the development of the relationship.

For my particular type of research, becoming an apprentice was necessary for understanding how the horses felt. However, for multispecies ethnography more generally, although a form of apprenticeship may benefit many, I believe the same tropes apply for ethnography without nonhuman animals; let your informants lead you, and represent them as best as you can. If we are to take nonhuman animals seriously as informants within multispecies work then we are also ethically obligated to feel with them and try to determine what they perceive. My research may have fallen short of these points because of certain practicalities, but I do believe that within the scope of this project I went some way to represent horses accurately as agentive individuals.

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Appendix A

Glossary

Natural horsemanship

The collective term for a group of training methods that promote a distinctly non-violent approach, and one that shapes its practice around the natural behaviour of the horse. Its principles are grounded in the desire to treat horses as individuals with distinct personalities, and the formation of a mutual relationship between human and horse.

Many natural horsemanship trainers would openly admit that they didn't coin the term, nor do they exclusively agree with the term. However, I use this term with an awareness of many practitioners particular goal of wanting to work with a more reciprocal understanding of human-horse relations. Although there are some crossovers between natural techniques and traditional ones (in some cases, certain principles and techniques could be seen as common-sense horsemanship) it is the desire to work in a non-dominating manner with an awareness of horse behaviour that separates NH practitioners. Natural horsemanship aims to explain both what to do and why; it is the explanation of the answer to why certain techniques are used and why the horse reacts in particular ways that are grounded in horse physiology and behaviour.

Traditional Horsemanship

Generally considered to be more dominating, rougher, and with less emphasis on the connection between human and horse. It is often seen to be practiced as a method that utilises the horse as a tool as opposed to a partner.

I use the term 'traditional horsemanship' throughout to reference the more dominating forms of horsemanship found in the UK. However, the majority of commonly practiced methods of natural horsemanship in the UK are built from the active departure from the rough 'cowboy culture' found in the US.

Intelligent Horsemanship

This is the UK company devoted to teaching the methods of Monty Roberts. It is headed by Kelly Marks who was originally trained by Monty Roberts. IH offers courses and information on natural horsemanship, as well as running courses and exams for qualification to become a Recommended Trainer (RT) – specialist trainers endorsed by IH who have passed the Monty Roberts Introductory Certificate and the Intelligent Horsemanship Diploma Certificate, and completed 15 peer reviewed case studies that they have worked with and helped.

Parelli

The largest NH company other than IH in the UK – the business celebrates its 35th year in 2017. Originally started by Pat Parelli in the US, and later joined by his wife in the business, it is a highly commercialised method of training horses that focuses around training the human who then trains the horse using ‘behavioural psychology and maximising love, language, and leadership’ (from the official Parelli website). Much of this training of the human is done through the use of DVDs to learn at home. People progress through four levels of proficiency of incremental difficulty to develop ‘horse savvy’.

Much of this basic work is done using rope halters and long lines, with a large emphasis on pressure-release systems.

Dually Halter

The special halter developed by Monty Roberts and endorsed by IH. It features an extra band across the nose that sits below the traditional nose piece on a head collar. This double-layered rope has small brass rings on each end that ropes or lines can be attached to. If pressure is applied to the rings, the band across the nose tightens until pressure is released. The Dually halter is used for most preliminary stages of training and much of the groundwork.

Rope halters

These act in a similar manner to the Dually by placing pressure on the head of the horse until the horse moves towards the direction of the pressure, or until it is released by the human. Strategically placed knots in the rope create pressure points on sensitive areas of the horses face.

Long lines

These are usually flat ropes about 20ft in length with a metal buckle at one end, they may or may not have a hand loop at the other. For lunging or long-reining two lines are usually used for many styles of natural horsemanship, including IH and Roberts’ methods. All preparatory work and groundwork on two lines is done using the Dually halter with lines attached to both side rings, when only one line is being used, the side it is clipped to is alternated on a regular basis and kept on the side that the human is working from. During Join-up, these ropes can be used to encourage movement by slapping a coiled rope against your leg or extending the rope towards the horse – they are never used to hit the horse, or suggest violence in the slightest.

Parelli and other methods that use rope halters tend to use a special single round rope not dissimilar to thick climbing rope, with a leather tab on the end. The metal buckle on other end tends to be large and weighty to apply pressure more effectively on the

halter. Training ropes are 12ft or 22ft to allow the horse to move freely; they can choose to get away and then come back again. Other lengths or types of rope are also used (up to 45ft for advanced work).

Tack

The generic term for equipment that the horse 'wears' during training. This includes saddles, bridles, lines, boots, bits etc.... Although, more traditionally, tack refers to the saddle, bridle, bit, and breastplate (a strap that goes across the chest of the horse and attaches to the saddle to prevent it from slipping backwards) if one is being worn.

- Bit – a metal bar that sits on top of the tongue in the horse's mouth. It is used to signal to the horse when to turn or stop. They can be straight bars, single jointed or double jointed. Many different levels of harshness exist, with the snaffle bit considered the softest. Other stronger bits use leverage to exert pressure on the back of the horse's head, or chains that tighten under the chin.
- Reins – usually made of flat strips of leather and rubber for grip. They are attached to each side of the bit and are held by the rider to give instructions to the horse through the bit.

Other forms of tack can be used to exert more control over the horse, but as I did not encounter them in my fieldwork they are not mentioned here.

Arena, school or ménage

These are different names that are usually used interchangeably in the UK to describe fenced areas for riding or training horses. They can be open on all sides, or covered, or completely inside. Sizes vary tremendously but the standard size is a 20m by 40m rectangle for basic work – more space is often required for larger jumps and more advanced movements. Often the floor is a combination of sand and rubber, although recycled materials (i.e. including shredded old carpets) are becoming more popular.

Round Pen

Circular pens used for Join-up and other groundwork. Often they are comprised of sections of metal mesh that can be dismantled and moved, but they can also be fixed structures made of wood or concrete. Moveable ones are set up inside arenas or in a field, one section is a tall gateway for allowing access. They are most commonly about 60ft in diameter, although can be larger or smaller.