“The Little Iron Horse” in
Post-Human Perspective:
Contemporary Engagements with the
Canadian Horse in Rural Quebec

by

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Abstract:

By exploring a ‘flat-ontology’ as a method of analysis for ethnographic research, this apprenticeship ethnography of horse-training in rural Quebec blurs categorical presumptions about culture, nature, selves, others, humans and horses – allowing for new narratives of the world to emerge. By showing how ontological categories are slippery at best, my research demonstrates that the human-horse relationship at my field site is based on trust and reciprocity, affecting research participants in ‘life affirming’ ways that they describe as ‘therapeutic’. Furthermore, my research suggests that local conceptions of humans and horses are not necessarily in alignment with dominant Euro-American humanist frameworks and may have more in common with post-humanist paradigms. In this sense, my research demonstrates itself to be not an ethnography of Canadian identity, but rather an ethnography of subjects in the process of transformation through engagement with horses.

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“If you take care of the horses, the horses will take care of you.”

– Jacques

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Nestled between sun soaked mountains and a gaping river lies a little Quebecois farm run by a local man who was born and raised in this rural valley, like his father and his father's father. Here, on the fertile fields that stretch out from the riverbanks to meet the mountain rock, Jacques¹ raises Canadian Horses, the unique genetic breed that resulted from the harsh climatic and working conditions of pioneer life in Canada. Over time, the Canadian Horse developed traits that enabled it to adapt to the natural environment of this region; its big hooves began to resemble snowshoes, its long mane and tail protected it from swarms of northern bugs, its thick winter coat kept it from freezing in the winter, and its compact frame made this working animal one of the smallest, strongest and quickest all-purpose horses around. The Canadian landscape changed the shape of these horses, but these horses also changed the shape of the land through logging, farming, transportation, and war. These modest horses were integral parts of the environmental and cultural development of this region, but human activity also shaped the destiny of the Canadian Horse, locally known as “The Little Horse of Iron” or “Le Petit Cheval de Fer” due to its reputation as a tough, hard-working horse, and perhaps also due to its labour power in building the original railway systems in Canada.

These processes of co-creation led me to wonder not only about the historical relationships of humans and horses in this region, but also about the ways in which the contemporary Canadian Horse, recently canonized in the “National Horse of Canada Act”

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all research participants, including horses.

of 2002², acts as both a sign and a generator of signs³ in the field of lived experience, contributing to conceptions of individual, communal, national, and human identities.

My research was situated at a rural Quebec farm where Jacques and his partner Capucine have a breeding herd of over twenty mares and two stallions that act as the foundation herd. The baby horses, or foals, are then sold to residents of the region. Many of these new horse owners continue to board these Canadian Horses on site. There are currently over eighty horses that graze, free-range, on over two hundred acres, and a community of approximately forty boarders hailing from the surrounding areas.

Considering animals to be both “signs and generators of signs,”⁴ this ethnography originally aimed to bridge a gap that exists between semiotic theory and the actual lived experience of embodied beings. It began as a semiotic phenomenology of a rural horse breeding and training facility in Quebec, seeking to explore how ontological meaning is made and how this meaning informs constructions of identity, nature and culture in this region. However, what I discovered is that the world, as actually lived, is a world where perception and interpretation are simultaneous inseparable aspects of lived-experience. My research suggests that the ontological boundaries of human, horse, and environment are blurred and that notions of selfhood are in constant flux. Therefore, I approach this flux by decentering the human subject from the knowledge production process as well as posing questions based on affect⁵ as opposed to ontology. My research demonstrates that local conceptions of humans and horses are not necessarily characterized by the dominant

² http://www.laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/AnnualStatutes/2002_11/page-1.html

³ Levi-Strauss first considered ‘women’ to be “signs and generators of signs” in that they are both economic objects and subjective persons (Levi-Strauss in Greene 1996: 261).

⁴ Ibid

⁵ From this point on I employ the term ‘affect’ in the same manner as Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Affect can be considered to be the novel emergences that occur when two or more bodies come into contact with each other. “Affective” in this sense does not necessarily mean emotional, although an affect can be an emotion. In Deleuzian terms, affect is an impersonal, empirical result of two entities coming into contact.

Euro-American framework that rests upon humanist intellectual traditions,⁶ but rather, that local conceptions are more in alignment with post-humanist⁷ perspectives. This allows for alternative narratives of the world to emerge. This research specifically seeks to answer the question of how human-horse relationships are perceived of by locals on the farm and how this affects contemporary conceptions of selves, others, and the environment, by conducting an apprenticeship ethnography of horse-training in rural Quebec. By moving my analysis from the humanistic foundations of semiotic

⁶ Sharpe notes, "Descartes, Kant, and Hegel frequently appeal to the infinite difference between humans and "things," a category that includes nonhuman animals, by virtue of an exclusive mental power to think, will, and represent our sensations. Yet, for Spinoza, there are only differences of degree between humans, animals, machines, and rocks. Whereas Descartes maintains that beings have rational minds or they do not think at all, Spinoza asserts that all beings are, albeit to different degrees, animate (E IIp13s). We can see that Descartes's insistence on the universal rationality of humans was embraced by women and facilitated the dawn of humanism, in which each and every one is owed the respect of being called a "person." The flipside, of course, of claiming that mentality is all or nothing, that is it installs a stark opposition between minded and non-minded beings, and arouses debates that continue today about those putatively borderline figures – the cognitively disabled, the insane, the child, and the great ape – who clearly communicate but do not exhibit the acknowledged signs of reason and freedom of will. With the humanist tradition and its view of universal and equal dignity proper to all rational beings, it is absolutely wrong to use another person as a means to one's ends (Kant, 1997 [1788]). Nonhumans, however, ceased to belong to a spectrum of animate existence and became "things," the rightful means to the ends of persons. Arguments for a universal rational capacity proper to all humans and absent in all nonhumans, of course, coincided with the expansion of the slave trade and the millions of people who were used as tools were argued to belong to the category of "things." The logic of humanism is Manichean: each being is or is not a person" (Sharpe, H. 2011: 53).

⁷ For example, Wolfe argues that a piece of work that studies animal overpopulation in a community and seeks to solicit action for this problem would do well to place itself in the quadrant "humanist post-humanism", meaning that the internal disciplinarity of the research is humanist based, but the object of study is not (Wolfe 2010: 124). As another example, Wolfe states that Foucault (Rajchman 1985: 51) would fall into the "post-humanist humanism" quadrant because while he continues to challenge the "post-Cartesian philosophy of the subject" through a fragmentation of universal society and the ways in which structure creates subjective identity, his work is still centered on the human subject as he "undertakes a trenchant post-humanism on the terrain of the subject to match his anti-universalism in the domain of the object" (Wolfe 2010: 109). Furthermore, Wolfe considers that the category of "humanist humanism" requires little explication as most disciplines and studies fall into this category, with humanism being the content, as well as the theoretical and methodological foundations of research. He cites Habermas as an example of work to be placed in the "humanist humanism" quadrant (Wolfe 2010: 126). The main interest of this study is the "post-humanist post-humanism" quadrant of Wolfe's analysis. Wolfe asserts that true post-humanism is giving up the "traditional notion of "person"" (Wolfe 2010: 115). Wolfe places the work of Derrida (2008), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Latour (1993), and Haraway (1991, 2008) in this quadrant, stating that what places these works in this quadrant is the fact that they focus on the internal relations of "understanding," that is, looking at the consequences for understanding once the subjectivity of humanistic knowledge is rewritten along lines that decenter the human and place knowledge back into the frame of human/non-human interaction as the place of knowledge construction (Wolfe 2010: 126).

phenomenology to the post-humanist perspectives available in a 'flat-ontology',⁸ I explore theories and methods with the potential to bridge the gap⁹ between dominant Euro-American frameworks and local knowledge, resulting in the fragmentation of universalized epistemological representations.

Research Methodologies

This ethnography began by exploring forms of communication by conducting a semiotic phenomenology of sign, metaphor and corporeal practices among rural Quebecois horse-trainers and their horses. By applying phenomenological methods to the semiotic study of horse-training, I wanted to explore how meaning is generated, interpreted and understood through semiosis, metaphor and the embodied experience. I aimed to shed light on the ways in which the relationships between human and non-human bodies are inextricably linked to the creation of ontologies that make up our social constructions. I sought to do this by exploring human-horse sociality.

However, as I entered the field as an ethnographer, I was profoundly changed by my experiences, which drew me ever more deeply into a world whereby my initial research questions revealed themselves to be inadequate. What I discovered was a world where the boundaries between human, horse and environment are blurred and in a constant state of flux. Furthermore, it became clear to me throughout this process that what my research participants felt was important were the ways in which contact with horses enriched their lives: that is, how horses affect them. Likewise, I found that my

⁸ An in depth description of this process is provided in chapter two, where I describe the limits of pragmatism to introduce the phenomenological perspective, and then describe the limits of phenomenology in order to introduce the post-humanist perspective and a 'flat-ontology.'

⁹ I am referring here to the epistemological gap described by Paul Nadasdy (2007), which will be further described in the literature review of chapter two.

own personal experience of learning how to train a horse transformed my body, my mind and my capacity to act in the world. As such, my research methods rely heavily on participant observation, semi-structured interviews and my own personal experience in the field as an apprentice horse-trainer.

I participated in daily farm life including the training, care, display and competition of the horses. I made observations and took hand-written notes of each event, returning home to my computer in the evening where I made detailed notes of the day. Data on embodied experience and signs was collected through observation, interviews, and personal subjective experience. Comparative data was collected from sites such as the Calgary Stampede, The Standardbred Race Industry and Natural Horsemanship Clinics.

Field Site

The main field site for my research is a farm in Western Quebec that raises and trains Canadian Horses for riding, competition, driving, and farm work. I was first introduced to this community in May 2010 when I purchased a yearling filly who is now boarded at the site. Having only experienced well-trained school horses as a child, the endeavor of training an unhandled horse, as well as the cultural experience of rural Quebecois farm life, put me in the role of a new inexperienced outsider at this site. Furthermore, I was an Anglophone in a Francophone community. I worked as an apprentice trainer for this young filly, as well as observing the training practices of other trainers and horses. While at the farm, I also participated in some of the daily care and maintenance of the other horses on site and the cultural activities and events that occurred. I conducted fieldwork at this site for a full year from May 2011 to April 2012 as an apprentice in the local

training techniques used to prepare horses for riding, driving, and farm work. I also participated in the daily farm maintenance activities and associated events.

Analysis

I analyzed my data through several theoretical approaches, beginning with pragmatic semiotics, phenomenology, and finally post-humanist theories of association, before arriving at an acceptable means of describing the human-horse relationship in a way that was satisfactory to my research participants, my supervisory committee, and to myself.

In particular, Ingold (2000) discusses how humanist thought typically construes humans as having transcended 'nature,' while stereotypical perceptions of hunter-gatherers as remnants of the 'natural' condition of mankind do not jive with the actual accounts given by hunter-gatherers themselves. He compares hunter-gatherer societies with pastoral herding societies, which, according to Western frameworks of understanding, are differentiated through the domestication of animals. He finds that the social relationships that people have with each other cannot be differentiated from the social relationships that people have with the non-human components of their world (Ingold 2000: 62).

Ingold deconstructs the notions of 'wild' and 'domestic' as being extensions of the Western intellectual constructs of 'nature' and 'culture,' which have been shown to be ambiguous to say the least. The separation of 'man' from 'nature' leads to the modern conundrum between 'conservation' and 'participation' – and the problem of wilderness parks that are set apart from the rest of the environment and protected from human interventions. This is further complicated by the fact that hunter-gatherers can be found within these territories and have been, at times, categorized as part of 'nature' (Ingold

2000: 68). Despite the fact that the separation of 'humanity' from 'nature' is problematic, the conservationist view considers that human involvement with 'nature' is somehow exploitative and thus human contact is discouraged. However, if both human and non-human worlds are thought of in terms of 'sociality' this conundrum is resolved for, according to Ingold, just as we do not choose between exploiting kin and ignoring them altogether, so too the relationships between humans and animals can take on an aspect of treating each other with greater or lesser degrees of care and respect (Ingold 2000: 69). In this sense Ingold suggests that we move away from looking at differences between wild and domestic and instead look at differences between trust and domination.

In order to achieve this kind of analysis, it is necessary to view animals not as separate entities in 'nature' while humans inhabit a separate 'culture,' but rather that both mutually inhabit a social world together. Ingold suggests that the reciprocity found among certain hunter-gatherer groups is the same between human members of the community as it is between hunter and animal, in the sense that the animal is understood to have given itself to the hunter, and in return the hunter performs certain rights and rituals for the animal (Ingold 2000: 67). Thus, human and animal are viewed as having a reciprocal relationship in the same way as human members of the community depend on each other through reciprocity. Because people in hunter-gatherer societies rely on each other for survival, there is a fundamental concern with companionship that, according to Ingold, takes on the same qualities as 'sharing' (Ingold 2000: 70).

On the other hand, Ingold argues that herdsman do not base their relationships on trust and sharing, but rather obligation, in the sense that their animals do not have agency and it is assumed that they do not have the ability to reciprocate. He states, "they are

cared for but, they themselves are not empowered to care” (Ingold 2000: 70). Domestication then, according to Ingold, is not about trust but rather about domination, and is likened to the social roles found in societies in which there are masters and slaves. In a nutshell, Ingold is saying that hunter-gatherer societies are based on trust and reciprocity while pastoral societies are based on control and domination. Contrary to this, my study suggests that the human-horse relationship at my field site is perceived of as ‘reciprocal’ despite the fact that my research participants tend ‘domestic’ horse herds. This has new implications for Ingold’s framework of analysis.

Chapter Organization

In Chapter Two, I introduce the field of human-animal sociality and explore some of the theories and methods used for my analysis. The chapter questions the universalized representation of the Euro-American humanist framework, and of post-humanist perspectives as being predominantly held by ethnic others. By situating my research in the crux of debates surrounding the compatibility of overarching frameworks of knowledge and local knowledge (Nadasdy 2007), my literature review looks at how human-horse sociality has been configured in academic work and compares it with cases of human-horse sociality found in popular history, contemporary debates in North America, and the accounts of actual people on the ground.

Chapter Three presents my ethnographic fieldwork by first situating myself in my work and providing a brief overview of the land, people and animals at my field site. I then present the ethnographic data collected from my research. This includes a thorough account of my own experiences as an apprentice horse-trainer and the transformative effects that this research project has had on me.

Chapter Four moves on to the interpretation of my data, which is grouped into five major points that were emphasized to me by my apprenticeship mentor and three themes that contain the experiences described to me by other research participants. My data suggests a reversal of Ingold's (2000) "from trust to domination" in that my research site is a social world that actually moves in the opposite direction: from domination to trust. Because this is a Euro-American pastoral community, I also argue that notions of animal personhood or subjectivity are not limited to Indigenous groups, possibly bridging Nadasdy's (2007) epistemological divide between Euro-American knowledge and the knowledge of Indigenous 'Others.' Some of my research participants have the notion that "horses are therapeutic" at my field site because they enter into social relationships of reciprocity with both humans and non-humans. This reverses the psychic trauma caused by the humanist understanding of man as separate from nature, replacing it with a world of symbiotic associations.

Chapter Five provides a brief summary of my conclusions, my reflections, the limitations of this research and questions for further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Canadian Horse – Commodity and Kinsman

The Canadian Horse originated from the first stock brought over to New France from Europe in the 1600's. Very few of these horses survived the journey across the ocean, and even fewer survived the harsh climate in Canada. Over time, as livestock increased, horses were rented out to farmers for 100 livres a year, or one live foal as payment. After three years, the foundation horses became the property of the farmer. In this way, the hardy working horse known as the Canadian Horse developed and spread over much of what is now known as Quebec (Jones 1947: 126-127). According to Jones, by the 1800's, every man in the region had a sleigh and cart, pulled by at least one horse (Jones 1947: 134). "As a general purpose horse, useful both on the winter roads of Lower Canada and in light farm work, he was unsurpassed" (Jones 1947: 131).

The Canadian Horse, also known as the Little Horse of Iron (*Le Petit Cheval de Fer*), was popularly thought of as a workingman's horse, that is, a horse for the people (Beattie 1999; Bernier 1992; Montague 2010; Scanlan 2002). According to Art Montague's popular history of the Canadian Horse,

In New France, anyone could own a horse; in Mother France, horses were the preserve of the gentry – nobles, merchants, and clergy. In New France, if one were buying a horse, terms were available "on approved credit," as they are now when we buy cars. (Montague 2010: 38)

According to Montague (2010), the government tried to limit farmers to two horses and one foal, but the habitants¹⁰ ignored the law, as these horses were an integral part of life. With the help of these horses, distances could be traveled and land could be cleared for farming. For Canadians, horses changed time and space, the relationship to the land, and the landscape itself. The habitants viewed Canadian Horses both as popular commodities and as kin. The Little Horse of Iron was the ideal working horse, yet was also a kinsman in popular thought,

While habitants' treatment of their horses may seem to be callous by today's standards, in reality they were regarded almost as family members. In 1757 during the siege of Montreal, with food running out, the governor ordered that horses be slaughtered. The protests were so strong – owners' likening what was being proposed to cannibalism – that the official backed down. (Montague 2010: 43)

In the early 1800's horses were exported in large numbers throughout America and the West Indies for war and in 1815 the wheat crop failure in Lower Canada drove many farmers to sell their horses in order to survive (Jones 1947: 134-139). Clearly the Canadian Horse was an important commodity, however, it can be seen through the events of 1757 in Montreal, whereby the habitants declared that horses were kinsmen and that eating them would be similar to cannibalism, that diverging views on horse personhood have, in fact, been a part of recent Occidental history. In the following section, I will show how the concept of non-human personhood can be found in various cultures, as well as part of contemporary deliberations in North America.

¹⁰ The habitants were the early French settlers of Quebec, usually involved in farming or logging activities.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Non-Human Personhood

The notion that animals are viewed as subjective 'selves' or as 'non-human people' thus far in anthropological inquiry has been attributed to Indigenous 'Others' such as the Runa, the Wari, the Kluane, the Cree and the Ojibwa (Kohn 2007; Vilaça 2005; McCallum 1996; Nadasdy 2007). This leads to the positioning of such views as agentic Indigenous oppositions to dominant Euro-American ontologies. However, as I will show, views of animal personhood are not merely held by 'exotic Others.'

The attribution of kin status to horses and the issue of interspecies cannibalism are not unique to this incidence occurring among the habitants. It has also been extensively documented among various North American and Amazonian Native groups. For example, the problem of animal subjectivity, kinship and cannibalism has been thoroughly examined by C. Fausto (2007) when he asks,

In ontologies in which both humans and animals are persons, how can the consumption of game be differentiated from cannibalism? This question has been posed before by other Amazonianists (see Descola 1998; S. Hugh-Jones 1996) and by specialists on Indigenous peoples of the boreal forest. Brightman (1993) addresses it directly by acknowledging the instability of the ontological categories of animals and humans among the Cree. (Fausto 2007: 512)

While the instability of ontological personhood has often been attributed to Indigenous epistemologies, the changing nature of personhood in dominant Euro-American frameworks cannot be ignored. In North American governing policies, personhood was first legally granted to slaves, then corporations, and then finally women. Canadian legislation did not consider women to be 'persons' until 1929. In 1867, the

BNA Act was established by the Dominion of Canada, in which women were not considered to be people. In 1917, the Supreme Court of Alberta first declared a woman as a person, however, the Supreme Court of Canada did not recognize this shift until 1929, after the British Privy Council voted that yes, in fact, women should be considered people.¹¹ The interesting twist being that this occurred after the 4th Amendment was introduced in the USA, which granted personhood to slaves and also, in 1883, to corporations (Nash and Smith 2007: 178).

Nearly 100 years later, Dr. Thomas White (2007) published a book called “In Defense of Dolphins: The New Moral Frontier”¹² in which he argues that dolphins should be considered non-human persons based on their complex cognitive abilities. Furthermore, the American Association for the Advancement of Science facilitated discussions which urge support for the Declaration of Rights for Cetaceans, originally proposed in 2010.¹³ What this points to is that there is, perhaps, a fundamental discord between North American legislative policy and the ways in which the world is actually conceived of and experienced by people on the ground. What kind of ethnographic analysis allows for an objective inquiry into the status of human-horse relationships without imposing the preconceived frameworks of the anthropologist?

¹¹ <http://canadaonline.about.com/cs/women/a/personscase.htm>

¹² <http://www.indefenseofdolphins.com/book/index.html>

¹³ <http://aaas.confex.com/aaas/2012/webprogram/Session4617.html>

A Post-Human World

While pragmatic semiotic theory has often been applied to the study of human-animal relations, it is limited in the sense that abstraction reduces the world to a set of codes which obscure a deeper layer of understanding that lies beneath interpretation, in the form of perception. The field of phenomenology developed in response to objective inquiry, in which the perceptual experience of the subject is taken as the primary ground for observation of the world. This is why for my ethnography I initially set out to learn local training techniques and employ them with my own body, and with the bodily extensions of local cultural tools and objects, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the socio-cultural world inhabited by horse-trainers in rural Quebec. However, it became clear throughout my fieldwork that this approach is problematic: human subjectivity is not universally understood to be the kind of stable ground premised in phenomenological inquiry. A post-humanist approach is therefore preferred for the analysis of human-horse sociality, as it allows for an inquiry that includes views that are not necessarily contained within dominant Euro-American epistemological frameworks.

In both "Companion Species Manifesto" (2003) and "When Species Meet" (2008), Haraway challenges the view that animals form some kind of ahistorical part of nature evolving separately from humans. She asserts that humans and animals have "co-evolved in natureculture" (Haraway 2003: 12), and seeks out a way to bring this symbiotic relationship into view through a study of dogs and their people. By looking at the cases of Pyrenees dogs and Australian Shepherd dogs, Haraway explores how human and dog histories have been intertwined, forming intersubjectivities, and shaping each

other's destined futures. Human and dog subjectivities are altered in ways that Haraway calls 'symplogetic' (Haraway 2003: 32). Additionally, Haraway's "Companion Species Manifesto" looks at how dogs, and other non-human significant others, have found their way into human kinship systems. She states "My multi-species family is not about surrogacy and substitutes; we are trying to live other tropes, other metaplasms" (Haraway 2003: 96).

Kinship Categories Fall Apart

David Schneider's (1968, 1980) seminal work in "American Kinship" describes kinship systems in North America. He attempts to describe the symbolism inherent in the formulation of kinship categories in the United States, by looking for formulations of cultural units and how they relate to each other. His research participants describe notions of kinship as being mostly biogenetic, that is, based on blood relations or marriage. He finds that kinship is conceived of as a natural order, which then governs "a code of conduct" between kin (Schneider 1980: 26). He asserts that friends are not considered kin since "in American culture kinship is biology"; in essence, kinship is based on natural laws from which cultural codes of conduct ensue (Schneider 1980: 116). Schneider can be critiqued on the basis that he does not take into account the cultural construction of 'nature,' or 'natural law' but he does propose that variations in the system can and do occur. He states,

The question of whether there is a single kinship system or a variety of different kinship systems cannot be studied directly in those terms, for the whole problem is to locate and analyze precisely what kinds of variance occur and at what points they occur. If one kind of variance is a matter of rate and another kind is a matter of basic difference in cultural definition, then each

variation itself must be examined to see what kind it is. (Schneider 1980: 16)

While Schneider did not intend that variations could occur outside of blood relations or marriage, let alone across the human species barrier, Kath Weston (1991) sidesteps Schneider's data on blood kin with her book "Families We Choose." Weston finds in her ethnography of kinship among the gay and lesbian community that the conclusions that Schneider reaches do not apply in all cultural contexts. She finds that within the gay community notions of what is family vary greatly from the biogenetic model that Schneider articulates. Furthermore, she suggests that the alienation that occurs due to family disavowal when coming "out of the closet" is countered by the production of non-blood kin relationships. She states,

In displacing rather than disallowing biogenetic symbolism, discourse on gay families move obliquely toward the future, responding to hegemonic forms of kinship not with a defensive countermove, but by deftly stepping aside to evade the paradigmatic blow. (Weston 1991: 213)

In this way, Weston shows how subcultures in North America create their own systems of valuation and classification. Her research shows how these systems are not just metaphorical or fictive replacements for what Schneider's research participants would consider actual kin; these non-biogenetic kin are in fact considered to be actual kin by the research participants in Weston's ethnography. What Weston is saying is that Schneider's notion of "diffuse solidarity" is then applied to non-blood kin in the gay and lesbian community. In essence, Weston treats, what Schneider would call "variations" in kinship relations, as actual cultural transformations. She states, "I have adopted a very different approach by treating gay kinship ideologies as historical transformations rather

than derivatives of other sorts of kinship relations” (Weston 1991: 106). In sum, Weston shows how kinship relations in North America are in the process of changing; that kin have moved from the domain of biogenetics to the domain of chosen kin. In this case, friends, lovers and children can be conceptualized and acted upon in the same way.

In the same way that Weston extends kin relations to include ties outside of blood and marriage, it is now understood that animals can also be included in kinship categories within certain cultural contexts. Haraway (2003, 2008) challenges the assumptions that we have about the boundaries that supposedly delineate the categories of human and animal, kin and capital. Haraway takes a relational approach where she ultimately asks what one becomes when in fleshy contact with the animal. She says that categories of “kin and kind” (Haraway 2008: 19) break down in these intersubjective contact zones. She reports that sheep farmers consider their dogs to fall somewhere along the categorical spectrum of livestock and co-worker, not pets or family, but still commodities. Commonly held views about where dogs stand show clearly the unsatisfactory state of our current classificatory systems. Haraway states that dogs are considered to be family, but they are not really children. They are commodities, but not inanimate property, slaves or laborers (Haraway 2008: 67).

The reality of interspecies kinship relations makes a real mess out of typical Western kinship conceptualizations. For example, Haraway narrates for us: “A pet bird is the sister of a new dog, and human baby brother and aged cat aunt all are represented to relate to the human adults of the house as mom’s and/or dad’s” (Haraway 2008: 95). She notes that categories of “parent-child,” “guardian-ward,” and “owner-property” are all inadequate for describing the human-dog relationship (Haraway 2008: 51). In effect,

she challenges the relationships that supposedly define 'nature' and 'culture' in Western discourse, but also, by extension, she broaches the issue of agency, both human and non-human (Haraway 2003: 27). She breaks down the human/animal divide through a deconstruction of 'species' to assert that species is really semiotics in the flesh. For Haraway, the construction of nature is a semiotic cultural act. The Western semiotic units of 'species' catalogued the natural world as part of a colonial project, and ultimately subjected life to the cultural meanings thus attached. She uses the term 'flesh' to describe the world as not simply a construct of language, but also a complex unfolding of embodied co-experiences that constantly negotiate new meaning.

Similarly, Kohn (2007) finds that "life is a sign process" and "the origin of life...necessarily marks the origin of semiosis as well" (Kohn 2007: 6). In sum, he argues that, "the semiosis of the non-human biotic world is iconic and indexical. That of the human world, by contrast, is iconic, indexical and symbolic" (Kohn 2007: 6). This ultimately means that both humans and non-humans share the semiotic world of index and icon. Kohn believes that his proposed "anthropology of life" (Kohn 2007: 4) will have implications for those interested in human-animal sociality, the environment and for social theory in general. It questions the anthropocentric placement of humans as ultimate knowledge holders and decoders of meaning.

The Limits of Pragmatism

Semiotics have been applied to the field of human-animal sociality through the works of Charles Peirce, J. Von Uexkull, and in the emerging field of biosemiotics. In his very influential semiotic work, Peirce first established his theory of signs and defined it as such, "A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something

in some respect or capacity” (Peirce 1887-1910 in Innis 1985: 5). Peirce describes his notion of index, icon, and symbol as:

“anything whatever, be it quality, existent individual, or law, is an Icon of anything, in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it,” which therefore is differentiated from an index in that “an Index is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object,” and a symbol, which “refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object” (Peirce 1887-1910 in Innis 1985: 8).

While Peirce’s triadic sign theory is valid in terms of recording the sign processes that can occur, it does not, in and of itself, provide the ground for any kind of deeper understanding; it is limited to abstracted units of representation and interpretation placed over perceptual experience. Peirce himself described his theory of signs as possibly lacking in importance:

Logic, in its general sense, is, as I believe I have shown, only another name for semiotic, the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs. By describing the doctrine as “quasi-necessary,” or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know, and from such an observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements, eminently fallible, and therefore in one sense by no means necessary, as to what must be the characters of all signs used by a “scientific” intelligence, that is to say, by an intelligence capable of learning by experience. (Peirce 1897-1910 in Innis 1985: 4)

Peircean theory has been further critiqued by William Alston (1956). He asks, for example, how a sign is to be interpreted when it has been satisfactorily understood by the interpreter, but is not believed by the interpreter to be true. Alston asserts that these kinds of problematics have not been approached in Peircean theory (Alston 1956: 87). He also finds that one of the strangest problems inherent in Peircean theory is the “lack of any

specific and explicit connection between pragmatism and the general theory of signs” (Alston 1956: 79). This is what set Peirce on a search for the “ultimate logical interpretant,” that is, a “habit of action”. He was not, however, able to provide a ground for what constitutes true understanding within the semiotic processes (Alston 1956: 86-88). Furthermore, Richard Shusterman finds that the problem with biosemiotics is the question of what lies “beneath interpretation” (Shusterman 1991: 102). He argues that there is a real difference between understanding and interpretation, yet that they are also fundamentally intertwined. He states, “understanding and interpretation are epistemologically different in terms of their functional relations: understanding initially grounds and guides interpretation, while the latter explores, validates, or modifies that initial ground of meaning” (Shusterman 1991: 123).

This is why semiotics, being an interpretive science, cannot account for the whole picture of the human-horse interface. Clearly there are lived experiences that occur beyond the scope of semiosis, particularly if sign and metaphor are understood to be manifestations of embodied experience. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1980) practice theory, as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) phenomenology, are helpful for the creation of a pragmatic ground for deeper understanding of semiotic processes. For example, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology can be characterized as the view that the body is like a sense organ. He challenges Cartesian dualism in order to assert that the embodied experience of the subject, as it moves through time and space, is a valid form of knowledge. He argues that the body is the primary medium for sensing information from the world. To understand the manufacturing and interpretation of signs in the world, it is important to base one’s observations on the body, as the body is the locus of experience

for all sentient beings as they engage in practices that inform their perception of the world. For Bourdieu the body becomes a kind of “analogical operator” (Bourdieu 1980: 71) both embodying and creating the structured reality that it finds itself in. He concludes that “habitus” is a metaphor for the external objective world, and that the objective world is itself essentially composed of metaphors (Bourdieu 1980: 75). He argues that physical power is intertwined with social power that creates a “political mythology”, which then informs all experiences of the body (Bourdieu 1980: 78). While these aspects of human behavior are important to understand, equally important are the ways in which practice informs, constructs, and is informed by the bodies and cultures of non-human-animals as they co-mingle with human-animals.

Both practice theory and phenomenology rely on theories of embodiment to understand the social world that we find ourselves in, allowing us to draw conclusions about socio-cultural realities. For example, Shawn Lindsay (2006) gives an account of his experience as a student of African percussion. He argues for the whole experience as corporeal as opposed to just aural. He asserts that habitus is flexible when “being-in-the-world” is taken as a starting point. This does not mean that he is asserting the fundamental will of the subject, but rather that habitus is constantly changing with the flux of the “nature of human activity” around it (Lindsay 1996: 211). In addition, he includes external tools, such as the drum, as part of habitus in that we use them as extensions of our bodies (Lindsay 1996: 210). He suggests that anthropologists in the field learn the bodily techniques of the community in order to comprehend more fully that social world.

A second example illustrates how Greg Downey's (2002) experience of learning how to perform Capoeira taught him how "hearing" music is much more than just listening to notes and sounds with the ear, but rather a whole body experience. Following Merleau-Ponty, he says that music needs to be understood beyond just an "objectivist approach" and instead be understood as "social and individual processes of musical encounter" (Downey 2002: 489). By musical encounter he means that the interaction of musician, instrument, and audience are all-important elements of the musical experience and that they inform each other. He therefore takes a phenomenological approach, insisting that the body is not only a kind of sensory apparatus in that it feels the music, but that it is also a "social product" in that cultural elements necessarily inform how the body feels it (Downey 2002: 504). Thus, Downey takes a phenomenological approach of bodily perceptions in order to get at the elements of understanding that occur more subtly beneath cognitive interpretation.

The Limits of Phenomenology

On the other hand, Kohn's (2007) "anthropology of life" considers not just humans and their interactions with external objects, but also the entangled ways in which aspects of life, both human and non-human, are enmeshed. Kohn finds that the Runa Amazonians blur the ontological boundaries of subject and object in what Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2004) has called a "perspectival multinaturalism," which considers that all sentient beings perceive themselves as persons, and the ways in which other beings are perceived of by them depends on the perspective of the observer in relation to the observed (Kohn 2007: 7). This is why keeping semiotic distance and maintaining difference is so important for the Runa. There is a fundamental sameness that creates the risk of ontological slippage.

Recording and understanding these perspectives is important for anthropology because they challenge the discipline's main epistemological premise; that of "cultural relativism," whereby many cultures represent one fundamental nature. Whereas for the Runa, the epistemological view of "multi-naturalism" is held, whereby there is one fundamental culture represented by many different natures (Kohn 2007: 7).

Kohn understands this process as one of "ontological blurring" (Kohn 2007: 7) and describes how the Runa protect themselves from dangers that they believe are inherent when failing to see other sentient beings as selves (Kohn 2007: 7). To compare the Runa understanding of the world with Euro-American frameworks, one could consider that the West conceives that there is a fundamental difference between humans and non-humans, and often sets out to discover what we could possibly have in common despite our differences. For the Runa there is a fundamental substrate of sameness that humans and non-humans share, and it is therefore important to maintain an understanding of what makes one different in order to protect oneself from slipping into other forms or modes of being. The Runa fear not only slipping between ontological boundaries, for example becoming an animal, but they also fear the opposite pole, that which Kohn calls "cosmological autism" or the inability to recognize other beings as selves (Kohn 2007: 9). Arguably, Western intellectual traditions that objectify plants and animals might be understood by the Runa to be an example of this kind of cosmological autism.

Furthermore, Vilaça (2005) has recorded how the Wari of Brazil contrast with Western notions of subjects and objects in that alterity is highlighted over universalism, and perspective is privileged over the biological, resulting in what Vilaça calls "chronically unstable bodies" (Vilaça 2005: 445). He shows the importance of

transformation of the body in Wari thought as opposed to Western notions about the construction of body, and states that “the general uncertainty over forms is a key factor in understanding the concept of body found in the Amazonian region” (Vilaça 2005: 446). Vilaça finds that the transformational ability of bodily forms in Amazonian thought are directly linked with the relationships they are in, and since relationships are always changing, bodily form is then always in danger of changing as well. For the Wari, “humanity is above all a position to be continually defined” (Vilaça 2005: 448).

The definition of humanity through Wari eyes depends on who is looking. The state of being human is one of relationship to other beings and various life forms can be considered to be human depending on their relationship to other beings in that moment. Like the Runa described by Kohn, the Wari are perspectivists in the way that the perceived universe depends on who is looking at it and the relationship that entity has with others. For the Wari, subjectivity is unstable and depends on intersubjective relations to other beings; therefore, for these people, the subject is not a suitable tool for objective observation in the way that the West has conceived of it. In these cases the Runa and the Wari conceive of a vastly different world than Western intellectual conceptions in that the world is based on incompatible frameworks of understanding.

Additionally, C. McCallum’s (1996) studies among the Cashinahua suggest that the body is not a naturally given biological entity but rather a socially constructed knowing whole. Viveiros De Castro (2004) outlines for us the ways in which Amazonians consider humanity to be the fundamental substrate for all beings, meaning that “animals are ex-humans as opposed to humans as ex-animals” (Viveiros De Castro 2004: 465), and therefore the quality of the interaction of people with nature should take

on the quality of “social relations.” This challenges the traditional anthropological foundation that culture is what distinguishes humans from animals. For the Amazonians, culture is the common binding force and objective forms are only particular manifestations of various points of view (Viveiros De Castro 2004: 466). Vilaça (2005: 458) suggests that anthropological theories of embodiment, such as those outlined by Merleau-Ponty and Thomas Csordas, are flawed in the sense that they take the body to be a stable subjective position from which to perceive the world (Vilaça 2005: 458). In contrast, the Wari consider subjective alterity to be the norm. Therefore, ones perspective on the world can be drastically altered depending on the relationships one has with other beings in that moment. Each of these Amazonian views challenges dominant intellectual conceptions about objectivity, subjectivity, the body, nature and culture.

Interestingly, conceptions about alterity and non-human personhood are not unique to Amazonia. They can also be found in North America. For example, Paul Nadasdy’s (2007) “The Gift in the Animal: The ontology of hunting and human-animal sociality” argues that attempts by North American governments at integrating Indigenous knowledge into larger Euro-American constructs result in non-accommodation and negation. This is due to a fundamental difference in worldviews. Since many northern Indigenous groups consider animals to be persons, these views conflict with the humanist view of humans as persons and animals as sentient objects. Nadasdy argues that even anthropologists have negated Indigenous worldviews in their works by asserting the symbolic or metaphorical value of animals as persons; that Indigenous views consider animals to be “like” persons when, in fact, animals are actually considered by Kluane, Cree and Ojibwa groups to be non-human persons, meaning that animals are not ‘like’

persons, they 'are' persons (Nadasdy 2007: 30). This leads to continued Western hegemony in the supposed consideration of Indigenous knowledge in environmental planning processes, since these views are dismissed as figurative. Nadasdy suggests, in order to address the unequal power relations involved in Western humanist thought, that a "theoretical framework that can accommodate the possibility that there might be some literal truth to what hunters tell us" should be considered (Nadasdy 2007: 37).

Meso-Anthropology and Flat-Ontology

Bruno Latour (2005) describes how over-arching social structures are conceived of as solid, while the micro-social is conceived of through movement; and how social theory oscillates between these two poles, which leads us to explain, tautologically, the social through the social. He finds that social scientists conflate three stages of analysis: that of structure and agency, social entities in play, and their ability for political action. He finds that the topography of the social is in constant composition and that, without context, it is too abstract to do anything with. For example, both structure and interactions are abstractions. For Latour, analysis should, instead, be a kind of sociology of associations that resituate the global as local, redistribute the local, and connect the two through association. He introduces the concept of "plasma" (Latour 2005: 244), or looking at both nature and society as a collective of material associations.

Latour's cartographic move towards a sociology of associations is similar to Deleuzian (1987) theories of affect and becoming, as Latour dismisses the two poles of microsocial and macrostructural – advocating instead for a mesocollective made of associations that compose both nature and society. Latour views the body not as a substance, but rather as "an interface that becomes more and more describable as it learns

to be affected by more and more elements” (Latour 2004: 206). He does this by initiating a kind of “body talk,” or ways of looking at the body according to what it does, as opposed to what it is (Latour 2004: 206).

In Latour’s attempt to flatten the phenomenological and physiological worlds into a single plane through his actor network theory (ANT), he has managed to reproduce his own criticism of science and its omission of the factor of time (Latour 2004: 221). That is, while ANT allows room for actors and the spaces between them in the form of plasma, it does not make room for the double articulation of space, which is time (Law and Hassard 2004: 42). Therefore, while ANT successfully flattens the realms of physiology and phenomenology into a single plane, it does so by omitting the Deleuzian double articulations of content-expression in the form of space-time.

Both of these problematics are addressed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who do not have the view that interpretive meaning overlays physical matter, but rather that bodies are necessarily composed of a kind of “double articulation” that is composed of “form of content” and “form of expression” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 44, 76). In other words, every body is a temporary assemblage of physical matter that conveys signs. Deleuzian theory is empirical in the sense that it takes an object-relational view. It is with this view that this research takes both matter and meaning to be contained within the same body, and will investigate what happens when human bodies and horse bodies come together in various assemblages. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) “becoming” can be used to explain the flows of identities that occur in complex society. Following in the footsteps of Spinoza¹⁴, Deleuze and Guattari ask not what is a body, but rather what can a body do?

¹⁴ Deleuze G. and Guattari, G. 1988. Spinoza: Practical Philosophy. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

From where does a body generate, how does it maintain boundaries and integrity and how does it affect other bodies. Everything in nature is a body and so the environment becomes just a field of bodies, interacting and affecting each other as they come together into different assemblages. Instead of looking at ontologies of being, Deleuze and Guattari look at “affect”.

Therefore, for Deleuze and Guattari, an organism is not its form or function, but rather the things of which it is capable. Deleuze and Guattari state,

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, whether to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 257)

Inspired by Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari look at the ways in which an organism is affected by and affects the world, seeing the world as a plane of assemblages that come together, create, disentangle and disappear, all while moving through time and space. The subject is therefore destabilized. Deleuze and Guattari further this notion with the idea of “becoming animal.”

Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing, corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or produced through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to “appearing,” “being,” “equaling,” or “producing.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 239)

Deleuze and Guattari find a way out of the two major modes of thinking that have dominated much of Western thought. They state, “For natural history conceives of the

relationships between animals in two ways: series and structure” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 234). On one hand, series is a mode of thinking that is based on resemblance. In a series A resembles B, B resembles C and so on. Serial thinking can be seen in both theology and evolution. For example, what theologians used to call the “analogy of proportion” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 234) can be seen in the idea that animals resemble humans and humans resemble angels, but all are made of the same kind of fundamental substrate, that of a divine God. Likewise, Darwinian evolution considers that species emerge from previous forms, but are all contained within the same genus line, like the various primate forms that are seen to compose the genetic lineage of the present day human.

On the other hand, structural thinking is based on difference and considers that $A : B :: C : D$. Deleuze and Guattari use the examples that gills are to water as lungs are to air, in that while the function is similar, their fundamental structure is different. As a second example, he sites that Levi-Strauss’ totemism orders “differences to arrive at a correspondence of relations” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 236), in that the crow is to the falcon as one human group is to another. However, both modes of thinking, that of series and that of structure, dominate Occidental thought and assume that there are static subjects and objects that exist. Deleuze and Guattari step out of the bounds of these two forms of thought with their theory of “becoming.” They state,

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. The whole structuralist critique of the series seems irrefutable. To become is not to progress or regress along a series. Above all, becoming does not occur in the dynamic level, as in Jung or Bachelard. Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 238)

Joao Biehl and Peter Locke (2010) state that as anthropologists, our own “sensibility and openness become instrumental in spurring social recognition of the ways ordinary people think through their conditions” (Biehl and Locke 2010: 335). In their ethnographic study of a Brazilian psychiatric patient and the Bosnia-Herzegovina struggle against neoliberal ideologies, they apply Deleuzian thought to the processes of both individual and collective becomings in which “anthropologists render publicly intelligible the value of what people, amid new rational-technical and political-economic machineries, are left to resolve alone” (Biehl and Locke 2010: 335). Biehl and Locke attempt to conduct a kind of anthropology that is neither caught up with the over-arching structures, which impose themselves on social lives, nor stranded among the individual actions of micro-actors. By avoiding the draw to look at global level assemblages to explain phenomenon, they employ Deleuzian thought as a means of conducting a kind of meso-anthropology. They state, “at the horizon of local dramas, in the course of each event, in the ups, downs, and arounds of each individual life, we can see the reflection of larger systems in the making (or unmaking)” (Biehl and Lock 2010: 337).

Hence, between these macro-structural orientations and the micro-social ways in which individual people actually live in the world, lies a meso-layer of configurations that come into being and pass away, in turn molding individual experiences and shaping the ways in which society is structured. This study of humans and Canadian Horses in rural Quebec seeks to give voices to people and horses that might otherwise go unheard in academic discourse, and potentially bridges the gap between local knowledge and universalizing theory by looking at how interspecies relationships shape notions of “selves,” “others,” and “the environment” for contemporary Canadians. This research

investigates the ways in which Canadians in rural Quebec conceive of and experience their relationship to Canadian Horses, while also exploring relational meso-level theories and methods in the form of a flat-ontology – which may prove useful for contributing new insights into Ingold’s conceptualization of “wild” and “domestic” as “moving from trust to domination” (Ingold 2000: 61-76). Furthermore, this study explores a flat-ontology as a possible means of bridging the epistemological chasm between humanist and post-humanist frameworks as described by Nadasdy (2007). By shining a light on the reciprocal relationships of people and horses in rural Quebec, this research concludes with a critique of Ingold’s spectrum of wild/domestic conceived of as trust/domination, a critique of Nadasdy’s ethnically based epistemological chasm, and a critique of humanist thought. Finally, my research questions whether the incidence of social economies of trust and sharing at my field site are remnants of the historical relationship between humans and horses in this region or part of a new larger social movement of “natural horsemanship”¹⁵.

¹⁵ Lynda Birke (2007) describes “natural horsemanship” as “a radical departure from traditional methods... practices and beliefs of the conventional horse-world” in that the methods are perceived to be more “natural” and therefore “kinder.” Practitioners of natural horsemanship consider that they offer “markedly better ways of relating to horses and a more inclusive social milieu” (Birke 2007: 217).

Chapter 3: Becoming Cowboys

This chapter provides a detailed account of my fieldwork at a horse stable in Quebec. It situates me, as the ethnographer, in my research and provides a brief overview of the land, people, and horses at my field site. This ethnography includes a thorough account of my own experiences as an apprentice horse-trainer, and the transformative effects that this research project has had on me. In fact, this ethnography is ultimately a story of transformation. It not only documents my own story of transformation, but multiple-narratives of shifting identities in a modern capitalist society. It suggests that 'horse' is not some ontological natural being upon which cultural constructions are inscribed, but rather that horse bodies are reported to have certain effects on human bodies and vice versa. At my field site, a breeding and training farm for Canadian Horses in rural Quebec, both horses and humans co-create a community that transforms horses as well as people through reciprocal relationships.

Subjective Ethnographer in the Field

Tumbling out of a tumultuous Canadian childhood peppered with frequent moves across province and country, the alcoholism, depression, and subsequent suicide of my father, the slow and painful death of my ailing grandmother, and a crumbling personal partnership still close on my heels, I arrived on the doorstep to graduate school, shell-shocked and shaken. As I drummed up the courage to leave a deteriorating relationship with a man entrapped by his own addictions, I reached out for something – anything – that would enable me to continue on past the tremendous string of personal loss I had recently suffered. With the small inheritance left to me by my father, I walked out of my

black hole of despair and into a world that not only transformed me, but also lead me to discover that many of my research participants reported similar transformations through their engagement with horses.

I first learned about my field site when I walked into a small country convenience store and found a little paper-advertisement on the bulletin board that read; “for only \$250/month, anyone can have a horse!”¹⁶ It took me a few weeks to call and then finally visit the farm, but when I did, I found that the horses roamed free on hundreds of acres of pasture. Likewise, the people were also free to play with their horses without the strict rules found in other barns. The atmosphere was friendly, relaxed and seemed to embody some of what at first glance seemed to be old traditional ways. Behind the barn, old horse-powered farming equipment laid scattered around, traditional training implements such as lassos and whips leaned against the wall. The barn was full of harnesses, western tack and cowboy hats. Dogs and cats scampered around and people drank beer and smoked cigarettes around the campfire. It felt to me like I was stepping into a place steeped in old Quebecois tradition.

This horse farm was different than other horse farms I had been to. Horses were not kept in box stalls, but rather ran free with their herd year-round. There were no strict rules regarding use of equipment or space. Anyone could play with their horse in almost whatever way they chose. This stands in stark contrast to other stables I had been to where, for example, one could only head out on a trail ride on their own after months or even years of training! This farm did not have an air of pretension, but rather inclusion and growth. This farm was not about prestige, it was about freedom. Because of the low

¹⁶ This phrase has been altered from its original form in order to protect the identity of research participants

prices for boarding, there was room here for people of various social classes and backgrounds that formed a kind of sub-cultural family.

The appearance of old traditional ways, an open social group based on inclusion, and the promise of the freedom to work and play with my horse in wide open and free spaces – these are the things that set this farm apart from all others and these are also the reasons why I was initially attracted to this site. I thought perhaps I would find some undercurrents of local knowledge left over from a time when humans and horses lived and worked together, a time before the institutionalized routines of the public stable took over. My undergraduate training in Anthropology and Religion had given me a variety of perspectives on the ways in which cosmologies are understood. Being a practitioner of Vajrayana Buddhism, I was open to the idea that I might be able to learn something from other sentient beings, be they horses or otherwise. I was searching for something that would help to ease the trauma of my father's suicide, the slow death of my grandmother and my crumbling partnership. I was drawn to horses because I knew from my previous experience with horses¹⁷ that riding made me feel better.

The Farm: A Multi-Species Community

As I entered the farm laneway for the first time, there were horses to the right of me in the gelding field. To the left of me was the riding ring, which also doubled as a stallion paddock when not in use for training horses. At the end of the laneway was a big old white farmhouse with seemingly endless pastures dotted with horse bodies extending out

¹⁷ I had taken riding lessons at several different barns growing up and worked as a stable hand in high-end dressage barns as a young woman. I found these environments to be highly restrictive for both horses and riders, which is why I was interested in my field site. It seemed to embody the opposite of what I had come to know.

to the sides and behind the house. The laneway ended with a small gravel parking area to the left where farm members parked their cars and trucks along the fence to one side and to the other side two long hitching posts where horses could be tied. This parking area served as the central meeting place where cars were parked, horses were prepared for training and riding, and horse handlers relaxed at picnic tables under the pine trees in the summer or at the fire pit in the winter. At the end of this central area was the barn, which housed two stallions, all the horse tack and equipment, and a small workshop and storage area. The barn also served as a shelter for dogs and a place where injured or sick horses could convalesce. Behind the barn were more pastures, the round-bale storage area and broodmare pasture, by far the most expansive land area, stretching out to the Northwest. If imagined from an aerial view, to enter this farm was literally to enter into the horse's world. Once I debarked from my vehicle in the central area I found myself surrounded on all sides by horse herds.

The farm was set up in a way that differs greatly from the typical stable where horses are isolated in stalls, restrained in controlled environments, and trained in isolated indoor rings away from other horses. Some research participants considered this less structured environment to be less safe, however it allowed space for horses to behave as horses do, in relationship to their environment with movement and awareness. This, at times, resulted in "exploding" horses as they reacted to happenings in the central area, but the farm was constructed in such a way that handling these explosions was all part of the process. As Jacques would say,

A horse is like water, it flows. Humans must control the flow of water like the banks of a river. The horse must keep on moving. If it stops because it gets blocked it will explode. (Jacques, October 7, 2011)

In this metaphor the horse is central, while the human is peripheral.

At the farm, horses were never fully removed from their herds. They continued to be surrounded by their peers, even in training and handling practices. The training of horses at this farm was not just about humanizing horses, “desensitizing” them to the human practices imposed on them, but also about a kind of “re-wilding”¹⁸ of the human, a desensitizing of the human to the ways of the horse. As these two beings began to associate with one another, two worlds collided, each one altered by the other. There was a kind of “becoming-horse” of the human and a “becoming-human” of the horse. One of the local trainers, who also happens to be an academic, stated to me that

Humans must be like walls on either side of the horse, not steering it but rather blocking it from flowing one way, allowing it to flow another way. Humans instinctively want to turn the horse from its head because we are head and hand oriented creatures, but horses move each other from behind. It’s important to learn how to speak the horse language and communicate by pushing it from behind since horses move away from pressure. (Sara, September 8, 2011)

Here again the horse is central while the human is peripheral.

Here, a multi-species community has formed around the breaking, training, and leisure activities that occur at the farm. While the human members of the community were largely francophone Quebecois, there were people from all walks of life: parents with young children, teenage girls, retired couples, adventure seekers, and escapists. There were those with competitive aspirations and those who were looking for respite from their busy lives. Some were there to enrich their already apparently successful

¹⁸ I employ the term “re-wilding,” not in its usual reference to practices of environmental rehabilitation and/or conservation, but rather in reference to the re-wilding of human subjects as they move away from the conditions and trajectories imposed on them by the modern world. See for example, Kidner in Hall 2010: 264.

lives, while others arrived broken at the doorstep. Some were passionate about animals and farming, while others were more into the social aspect of camaraderie that occurred among those who have shared the same adventures and experiences with horses. Some would get out of their car and head straight for the horses, others were drawn more immediately to other people, while still others were there for the “natural” farm environment – the fresh air, blue sky, the smell of wet earth and the sound of the birds and crickets punctuated with the occasional horse snort. But whatever their primary motivation, the end result was that all human activities at the farm revolved around the temperaments, instincts, and inclinations of the horse. The horse is so central to the social space of the farm that, at times, boarders would not remember the names of other boarders at the farm, but would identify them by their horse. For example, I heard community members referring to each other as, “you know, that guy who rides Sunny,” “I was talking to those kids that have Wonda,” “that’s Shamis’ owner,” and “Rona and Domino are going to a show this weekend.” In this way, the farm was experienced as a kind of heterosphere where humans would step out of anthropocentric frameworks and into a world of interspecies co-creation.

Why Do Humans Engage With Horses?

As an anthropologist, I entered the field searching for reasons why people engage with Canadian Horses, expecting to find some kind of relation to Quebecois or Canadian identity. What my research ultimately uncovered, however, is that these questions are irrelevant. The fact that these horses were Canadian Horses had very little to do with the reasons that most people frequented this site. What my research participants told me is that they frequent this farm because of the effects that horses have on their bodies, minds,

and hearts. From the interviews that I conducted three prominent themes emerged: “relationship building”, “feeling in control” and “feeling connected to life.” In essence, my research participants express that they engage with horses because of the ways in which they are able to form new relationships with other humans, horses, and the land. For some, being able to exert their will on another being makes them feel good, and they feel like they have more control in their own lives. For others who feel alienated, the experience of re-connection occurs. For example, one of the boarders at the farm, Guillaume, reported that Canadian Horses have nothing to do with his Canadian identity, and that he and his girlfriend’s reasons for attending the farm are about companionship.

Horses are one-step removed from nature because they are domesticated. Same with dogs... they cannot survive the winter. But Canadian Horses can. For me the horse is more like a pet, but for my girlfriend it is like a partner. It has nothing to do with Canadian identity. All I need for that is my passport. Maybe out West horses have something to do with Canadian identity, but not here. (Guillaume, August 4, 2011)

In fact, for comparative ethnographic purposes, I travelled to Western Canada to attend the Calgary Stampede in Calgary, Alberta and to visit other Western Canadian Horse Breeders. My interviews and field notes reveal that the Canadian Horse has little to do with Canadian identity in Western Canada. In fact, one of my Western study participants tells me “out East they are all about Canadians, but here, we’re about the Quarter Horse” – the Quarter Horse being the horse of choice for cattle management and rodeo activities.

Once back in Quebec, I attended a Family Day Fair. The owner of the farm, Jacques, told me as we offered wagon rides to the public, “Most people don’t know these are Canadian Horses, most people don’t even know what Canadian Horses are.” I had

reached the point in my research where it dawned on me that the Canadian Horse had very little, if anything, to do with contemporary Canadian identity. Upon further investigation I found that, like Guillaume's girlfriend, many people come to the farm because of the kind of relationship they build with their horse. For example, Sophie, another boarding client stated,

I like to ride because I am human; horse is not. When I touch him or when I look at him in the field I know that I am not that. It reminds me that there is something beyond human. He is not like a dog because he is heavier, but he is a pet... a companion animal. I like it because I can connect, touch, take the time to play doll with them – you know, to take care of them. (Sophie, July 25, 2011)

One of the local trainers, who also happens to be an academic, said to me, "Horses replace men for women, they are Oedipal pets. Often teenage girls abandon riding when they get a boyfriend." Another young woman at the farm, Jeanelle, said, "For me, horses are people."

On the other hand, some of the other boarders on the farm found that horses allowed them to feel in control. Gregoire said, "I like to ride because I like power and control. Having a horse is like having a project, something to dominate... a challenge." While David found that,

It is about dominating something bigger than you; sometimes when you feel like your life is out of control you can feel like if you can control this one big beast – you feel better because it takes your mind off things and makes you feel in control. (David, July 5, 2011)

Yet, for many people, being with horses goes beyond companionship or control. Pam said, "Horses saved my life. I had chronic fatigue and burnout and being with horses...something about the contact healed me." In fact, since many people reported

that being with horses is ‘therapeutic’ for them, it is worth taking a closer look at the story of one individual named Dominique.

Dominique

Dominique lives in the village nearest to the farm with his wife and two children, one of whom has a developmental disability. The additional care required for this daughter has caused significant stress on the family, especially when compounded with the emotional and financial strain of Dominique’s ailing parents who require both physical and financial support. He works a desk job in the city, where he feels constrained and isolated. Dominique found himself slipping further and further into feelings of rage and depression. He said,

Sometimes at work I just feel like yelling. My doctor told me that I need to do something for myself and right away I knew that meant the farm. Sometimes my wife can see that I am starting to get tense or I am not feeling well and, like, she says to me, you need to go to the farm. Go to the farm. Everything is different at the farm... it’s the people, the horses, the fresh air. It picks me up and I feel better. I am happy at the farm. Being with the horses... and the people. It connects me to life. I become someone different at the farm, and then I go home and I kind of go back to who I was before, but some of that stays with me. It helps me in other areas of my life because I know that it is there, that I can go there....that I can get away from this and escape. It is getting away, I forget all my problems there, it’s something different...it’s a whole different world. Everything changes and I feel better...but it is not a solution because I have to go back...but if I can get there at least once a week, it helps a lot. I can be somebody different. (Dominique, March 2, 2012).

Dominique worked with a horse named Jasper, although he has not been able to purchase this horse due to financial constraints. He said, “Jasper is not really my horse, but he IS my horse and I am his human.” Dominique said that his co-workers had noticed the impact that being at the farm has had on him and offered to buy Jasper for

him, but he does not feel comfortable with that. “My friend at work tells me that she wants to buy me the horse because she sees what it does for me and how it helps me. I am tired of being inside, I become somebody different when I go at the farm, Jasper is like an anti-depressant for me.” To which I replied, “Wouldn’t it be great if you could get your doctor to write a prescription for Jasper?” “Yes,” he said, “that would be...whefff” and he trailed off with a look on his face that conveyed to me that while it seemed impossible, it really would be a dream come true.

The owner of the farm, Jacques, recognized that “many people come here because they are traumatized,” but he also asserted that, “I am not doing this for the people, I am doing this for the horses.” Jacques thinks that for some people “horses are in their blood” or “in their genes,” and that without horses they cannot be happy, like him for example.

The horse is an extension of myself... horses are human extensions... without horses there is something missing from me. Horses complete me. Without horses I would not be whole... I would not be happy. Many people come out of (the local equine school) with the idea that horses are part of the environment... they don’t love horses, they love the farm environment... but for me, horses are not part of the environment, they are part of the man. (Jacques, December 30, 2011)

Jacques emphasized this point to me several times throughout my fieldwork.

The five conceptual points raised by Jacques and the three experiential categories of my research participants will be explored in more detail in the following chapters by asking what affects do the bodies in the farm environment have on the urban bodies that congregate there? What does it mean when people say “horses make me happy?” Is it possible, as my research participants insist, that contact with horses is a cure for the kinds of alienation that can occur as a result of living and working in the civilized (domesticated?) world? What happens when a horse is domesticated, and a human is “re-

wilded”? Are there differences between academic theories of human-animal sociality and human-animal sociality as it actually plays out on the ground? Are horses considered by locals to be “persons” accompanied by certain “rights”? What is it like inside a world where the human is de-centered? With these questions in mind, step into the world of the Canadian Horse.

Into the World of the Canadian Horse

As I turned down the dusty driveway in my little hatchback, the curious ears of a dozen mud-caked horses stared at me as I bounced my way through the potholes. I noted that they were mostly all black, with a couple of lighter colored horses sprinkled throughout the herd. I found a place to park on a bit of dry land, stepped out of my car and into the world of the Canadian Horse. A man in denim, black suspenders and a beige work shirt greeted me. An old round leather hat covered his long grey hair. From under his thick beard I heard, “Hi, I’m Jacques and this is my wife Capucine.” Capucine smiled at me from under her flowing red mane, not unlike the cascading black manes covering the massive necks and faces of the Canadian Horses. I explained to them in my Quebecois French¹⁹, with mild Anglophone accent, that I would like to embark on their program to learn how to train my own horse.

At this farm, Jacques and Capucine breed purebred Canadian Horses and offer a program whereby ordinary people can learn to break and train their own horses in a traditional farm environment. The mares live out their lives in the open pasture, grazing

¹⁹ My field site was largely bilingual with most activities conducted in either French or English, and most often a combination of the two. I am fluent in spoken French due to my French-Immersion education in primary and secondary school, as well as French language courses that I completed at the university level. My interviews were conducted in French and English and as a result my field notes were taken in both French and English. I performed any required translations myself.

on wild plants and dropping their foals in the cover of night on the cold ground not long after the spring thaw. He explained to me that these horses have evolved over time from the horses brought over from Europe in the colonial period. Most horses did not survive, but those that did went on to become the genetic forefathers of the Canadian Horse known for its hardiness, strength, docility, and work ethic. At this farm, he explained, everyone has the opportunity to work with these horses. "I think that everyone should have a horse," he says, "and this program allows people to do that. But I don't do this for the people...I do it for the horses. I think people need to learn how horses should be treated." Jacques has developed a system where ordinary people can learn to break and train their own Canadian Horse. It is here, at this farm, at the interface between man and horse that I began my research in the form of an apprenticeship ethnography, in order to discover what Canadian Horses, so intertwined with the history of the land and people of this region, have to do with being Canadian.

Jacques, born and raised in a fertile Quebec valley, was driving horses at the age of five as part of his daily farm routine of tending cattle herds and working hay fields; horses have always been a part of his life. It is from this man that I decided to embark on a project as an apprentice horse-trainer, learning from him just exactly what it takes to train a horse. What I did not expect, however, was that I was embarking on the journey of a lifetime, a journey into the realm of man and horse that lies much deeper than the notions of what it means to be Canadian.

From his vast field of horses that range over the land in semi-feral fashion, he procured a few horses for me to look at in order to decide which horse was for me. "Take your time," he said, "choosing a horse is like choosing a marriage." The first horse I

looked at was called Jacques Angel Shamis in the official way of naming a Canadian Horse after the breeder, the stallion that fathered it, and finally, by its own personal name beginning with the letter of the alphabet that signifies the year in which he was born. Angel Shamis was a huge black beast with a tangled mane. He looked at me, nodded his head and pranced around, dangerously missing my toes by only an inch. I raised my hand to touch his neck and he promptly bit my finger so hard that blood dripped down my wrist. I was terrified. Jacques then produced more horses; Tiger, Wonda and Adage.²⁰ Tiger was an older horse, already full grown, while Wonda and Adage were yearlings barely taller than my chest. Wonda was a calm, docile and steady filly. Adage was a head-shy, biting, stomping, dancing, prancing, wild beast.

After meeting several other horses over the next few days, I finally settled on Adage, a dirty hairy animal that had barely been handled and was afraid of most humans. Something about this gangly yearling filly attracted me; her wildness, her refusal to be handled, her raw spirit, the fire in her soul. While on the outside she wore a matted winter coat of dirt and mud from her short life in a vast open pasture, she had an inside that was fierce and indomitable. This was the Canadian filly that I set out to learn about training horses with.... or, as Jacques had put it, this was the horse I decided to marry.

“Joining-Up”

The next day I excitedly rolled down the driveway. I was going to work with my new best friend, at least that’s what I thought. I parked my car against the horse paddock where several horses jostled each other for a spot at the gate hoping that their human-

²⁰ I chose the name “Adage” as the pseudonym for my horse, because an adage is a traditional expression that imparts knowledge. While the Canadian Horse is celebrated for its historical roots, these horses continue to shape our present world in new ways.

partners would soon arrive. But Adage was nowhere to be found. She, as the alpha mare of her small yearling herd, had driven her band out to the far corners of the pasture. I grabbed an apple and trekked out across the rain soaked land. As I approached the herd Adage perked up her ears, lifted her tail, and promptly gathered her herd to get away from me. Yet, I was determined to get my horse. Through a series of submissive stances I eventually got close enough to touch her. As soon as my fingers made contact with her neck she jumped sideways and took off to a safe distance several feet away from me. We spent hours in this way, me trying to get close, her jumping away. I tried all the tricks I could think of to get a rope around her neck, but she would have none of it. I invented all kinds of traps with oats in a bucket, but her will was stronger than mine, and I eventually started to tire. In fact, I began to feel angry and rejected. Finally, Jacques exited the old white farmhouse on the mound and ambled over to see me. Together we tried to get her cornered so that we could get the halter on her, but she was smart and she nimbly evaded our advances. Finally, two others came in to help us and the four of us got her cornered. She just ploughed right through the human group several times. I began to wonder, "What am I doing with this wild problem horse? Have I just made a big mistake? What on earth have I gotten myself into?" After some time, we managed to pair her away from the herd and corner her into the hand built wooden wind shelter. Jacques lunged in, and hanging by her neck as she reared up, he put on her halter and handed me the lead rope. "Here you go," he said. "Just great," I sarcastically thought to myself. "What did I just get myself into?" I took my horse, and although she hesitated, she nervously followed me out of the gate and I was able to feed and brush her, determined to turn her into the friend she was supposed to be.

For the next several days the scenario repeated itself to varying degrees, until one day I arrived and Adage's herd had been moved into their summer grazing pasture. Jacques said "You probably won't catch your horse today; they are eating new fresh grass." Yet, I had battled my way through the city traffic and traveled a long distance just to come work with Adage. I ignored his warning, peeled off my city clothes, replaced them with the mud-caked boots and jacket from my previous visits, and hiked out across the horizon with a bucket of grain to "catch" my horse.

After almost an hour of rejection from my horse, her cunning ability to dodge me enabling her to get mouthfuls of grain from the bucket and skitter out of range before a rope could be slipped over her head, I was on the verge of tears. "My horse doesn't like me," I thought to myself. "I'm a terrible horse-trainer. I can't even catch my own horse. I feel like giving up." But a little dose of determination snapped me out of it, and I decided that my horse was coming in, period. My frantic attempts to get a hold of Adage stirred up the whole herd, and eventually they all came thundering into the corral beside the house. I quickly closed the gate as the other community members looked on at the giant dusty spectacle I had created. The horses were trapped in a smaller space, and with the help of three other men from the farm community, I was able to bring my horse in, however, this was much too big of a fuss for a timid girl such as myself. Everyone else's horse seemed to greet them at the gate and I thought to myself, "Why must Adage be such a wild untamable thing?"

The following weeks I just sat in the field. I sat on the ground, on big rocks, and finally, I brought a chair out and just sat there. It didn't take long for the curious horses to come over and check me out. Their great muzzles breathed heavy hot air on my skin.

Adage smelled me, was disinterested, and turned away to graze. All the other horses wanted scratches and kisses, but she wanted nothing to do with me. She turned her giant rump my way and ripped at the grass with her fuzzy muzzle. I started to bring carrots and apples with me, when she would get close enough I would give her one and just sit there pretending to ignore her. Eventually, she stopped associating me with getting “caught,” and instead I became a trusty apple dispenser. A step in the right direction, I hoped.

Jacques, who had been observing me since the beginning, appeared at my side and gently described to me the technique of “joining-up.”²¹ This technique consists of bringing the horse into a small round pen and chasing it around, using one’s own bodily movements to make the horse run. Jacques explained to me that, in the horse world, the leader moves the feet of the other horses. One must get the horse’s feet moving to get the horse’s attention. Just as the lead horse will push out a herd member as a way of disciplining a rogue horse, a trainer must push the horse out to the rails of the round pen. Once the horse demonstrates signs of submission, such as lowering its head or licking its lips, I am to turn sideways and allow the horse to join me in the middle of the ring. If the horse comes, the “join-up”²² has been successful. If the horse doesn’t come, I must push it out to the periphery of the ring and get it running again. “Make the wrong thing hard to do,” said Jacques. “Make it more comfortable for her to be with you than to be away from you.” So, I brought Adage out to the small round pen and I chased her around for a

²¹ While many trainers describe this practice as being a traditional practice, the “join-up” is now a registered trademark of Monty Roberts: <http://media.zibb.com/trademark/join-up/29579181>

²² While many of my research participants perceive that some of these techniques are old traditional techniques, it can be considered that “natural horsemanship” is part of a new social movement that seeks to treat horses with more kindness and respect than in the past. See for example, Lynda Birke 2007.

good half an hour before she finally turned in and came to me. I patted her neck and rewarded her by exiting the ring and brought her back to the pasture.

One morning, just after sunrise, not long after Adage and I had “joined-up,” I headed into the misty morning fog to find the whole herd asleep on the ground. I quietly tiptoed into the center of the sleeping field of horse-bodies and tenderly placed myself on the ground so as not to wake the snoring beasts. I was only able to observe the sleeping animals for a few seconds before one of them stirred. It was Adage. She was the boss and she woke up first to check out the intruder, me. She woke, lifted her head, looked at me and then heaved her huge body up off the ground. She took a minute to stretch out her hind leg and then come over to nuzzle me for a carrot. Soon they all followed suit, and I aimed to get out of there before getting trampled. Adage followed me all the way to the gate. For the first time she would rather be with me than with the rest of her herd! I no longer have to “catch” my horse. From that moment on she would come to me, follow me, and actually wanted to be with me. It remained this way, each day, throughout the duration of my fieldwork. The “join-up” technique was a success.

“Roping-Up”

After several days of removing the caked-mud out of Adage’s shedding spring coat, her smooth black summer coat began to shine through. She was beautiful! As I started scraping the winter coat off her hind end, she kicked at me and her hooves sailed by my head by only a few inches. I continued to work away removing the dried mud. She kicked again, just grazing my forearm with a small scratch from her massive hoof. “No!” I scolded her. I moved around to the other side of her rump and she planted her hoof squarely into my right thigh. I doubled over in pain. I was in such shock that I could not

even react. "Why was my horse, my supposed partner, kicking at me?" The next few days an ever-expanding purple and blue hoof print moved through all the colors of the rainbow and I talked to Jacques about it. "I don't know what to do, she is just always trying to kick me," I exclaimed! "Well, kick her back," he said matter-of-factly. I considered this. While on one hand I didn't like the idea of kicking my horse, on the other hand I had observed that this is one of the ways that horses communicate with each other. They kick each other all the time in the pasture while jostling over food, water, hierarchy, and even when just playing. I resolved to try it. The next day, as I was cleaning Adage's hooves, she kicked and I dodged the flying hoof while simultaneously landing my steel-toe boot into her belly. She turned to me with a look of genuine surprise in her eyes. She seemed to be saying, "I can't believe you did that!" Something between us shifted that day and Adage never kicked me again.

Adage did, however, still have a problem with things touching her rear end. Jacques explained to me that being a prey animal she is highly sensitive and has the urge to run away from anything strange or uncomfortable. As I worked with her on the "long reins" teaching her how to respond to cues to turn right and left with long ropes attached to a bridle, she flinched and spooked each time the ropes touched her hind end. Knowing that she would one day need to get over this fear in order to wear a harness for pulling a sleigh or wagon, Jacques taught me the technique of "roping-up."

On this day, Adage came trotting and nickering up to the fence. I put on her halter and took her out, grooming her smooth black coat to perfection. I led her to the round-pen with Jacques at my side. He was holding a rope that he described as a kind of wax-coated rope used especially for lassoing. When we arrived at the round pen he

placed the rope loosely around her neck. We got her trotting around the small pen and he explained to me that we must flip the rope around so that it lay across her rump. He did it first and Adage, in a panic, ran, jumped, twisted and bucked, trying to rid herself of the frightening rope. He left it there and let her run until she figured out that the rope would not hurt her. Next, it was my turn. We got her running in the opposite direction and I flipped the rope around over her buttocks. I had heard from someone at the farm that the two halves of a horse's brain are not connected and, so, whatever one does to one side of the horse must be repeated on the other side, since the same exercise may be experienced as new by the horse. Her ears flattened and she picked up speed but seemed to understand that the rope was not as horrid as she had previously perceived. She eventually slowed and stopped, allowing us to rub the rope all over her body and legs. Jacques said that now she has been "desensitized" to the rope, meaning that she no longer fears it. The three of us walked back together. Adage was hot, wet, and frothy from her exertion in the unusually oppressive spring sunshine. Amidst the visible heat waves rising up from the ground, I gave her a quick bath with cool water from a bucket, but that, as you can imagine, was yet another eventful story of "desensitization."

"Harnessing"

Throughout the hot summer days I worked with Adage on the long reins, teaching her the verbal commands of "gi," (right) "haw," (left) "whoa," (stop) "walk," and "trot." She learned to walk in front while I drove her from behind. We explored the rings and pastures of the farm environment, and began to venture out into wooded areas and surrounding trails. As the mornings became crisp and the leaves began to turn red and orange, Jacques decided to teach me how to put on a harness.

In the beginning, he slowly and gingerly made order out of the seeming chaos of leather straps and chains, showing me exactly how to place them on my horse and where they should buckle up. Adage stood frozen, immobile under the strange sensation of the heavy equipment on her body. We repeated this process five or six times over the next couple of weeks, not only for the benefit of Adage's comfort and confidence in the harness, but also so that I could remember how to put it on and remove it. Once I was sure I could work it on my own, I began to take Adage out into the paddock to gradually increase the intensity of new sensations. I dropped the chains, I added a whistle-tree, I dragged a pole behind me, and finally I attached a tire for her to pull. She balked and jumped at the feeling of weight behind her, but then over the next few days she became very comfortable with it.

I decided to take her out for a walk on the trails with a few other horses and their trainers. As we entered the field, the gate slammed behind us, and Jasper, the stocky brown horse behind me, jumped. This made Adage jump pulling the tire behind her, and causing the entire herd in the corral to jump at the same time. Within seconds everything exploded into an escalated panic and Adage took off at full gallop through the fence and across the pasture causing a stampede into the forest. I feared for her life, envisioning a tangled harness in the bushes, a broken leg, or worse, a broken neck. As I ran off into the pasture to chase her, other members of the community got to work fixing the fence so quickly that by the time I returned with my horse the fence was mended, and both horse herds were safely in their respective pens. Adage luckily only suffered minor cuts and scrapes on her legs, but she was afraid of tires for some time afterwards. This incident reminded me that no matter how much confidence and trust one has in his or her horse,

these animals are literally explosive animals, and the slightest unexpected thing can set off the always-present flight instincts of the prey animal.

“Backing”

In preparation for riding Adage I began taking riding lessons on one of the older horses at the farm. Rona, with her jet-black coat, flowing mane and tail and flashy dressage movement, was one of the finest Canadian Horses at the farm. While many of the horses at this site were used as trail or work horses, this horse was gifted to one of the talented riders at the stable with the hopes that she would show the mare in the dressage ring. The young rider built a relationship with her horse, working, training, and showing her regularly. A deep and lasting bond was forged; however, things were soon to change. This rider also happened to fall in love with the son of the farmer. They soon married and moved to New Brunswick to start their new life together, leaving her beloved horse behind. The horse was put up for sale at the price of \$12,000, very high for the prices that Canadian Horses usually fetch at this site, and soon a deal was struck with a local riding coach to get the horse fit and ready for sale.

The training process began and the riding coach brought in an outside student, as well as myself, as additional riders to help with the daily training of this horse in preparation for sale. Months rolled by. The riding coach put in many hours schooling Rona, giving lessons to me and the other student rider on the horse. Despite the fact that Rona was for sale, we all became quite enchanted with her. I began to describe my relationship to Rona as “a friend,” while the other student rider began “falling in love” with the horse. Her family, plotting a secret Christmas present to bring horse and rider together, began negotiations for the purchase of Rona. Then, only days before the

purchase was finalized, the farm-family decided that their new daughter-in-law should remain with Rona. Arrangements were made to ship the horse out to New Brunswick. The student rider, who had heard news through the grapevine, arrived at the farm choking back tears, “heart-broken” was the term used by the coach to describe her student’s condition.

As I stepped out of my car, breathing in the pungent smells of wet earth, manure and horseflesh, I heard from the barn the sharp sounds of human distress. “It’s not the money,” she said, “it’s the emotional investment!” Upon further investigation, I found the source of this exclamation; it was the riding coach who had agreed to train this horse. In a personal interview with the riding coach she told me that what concerns her about this sudden decision to send the horse to the East Coast is not the loss of money, but rather the loss of her time and energy, and “more importantly,” the loss of the growing bond between her student rider and Rona, who had begun to form a solid partnership together.

The student rider experienced this loss as “heartbreak” and the loss of her future horse-partner to be. While Jacques described the decision as “a family decision” to unite his daughter-in-law with her long lost horse-partner, Rona, and at the same time, to see the horse succeed in dressage training options that were available in New Brunswick. In due time, the heart-break subsided (as heart-breaks always do) and the student rider set out to find herself a new partnership with another horse, however the bonds and memories that she forged with Rona would never be forgotten.

In the meantime, Adage was getting ready for me to mount her. Feeling well prepared from my lessons on Rona, I began the preliminary training for Adage’s first

ride. I desensitized her to the bridle, saddle, and saddle pad. I really took my time, as I wanted the backing experience to be an easy one, not one marked by broken-ribs or a wild ride. Jacques said, "When you finally mount your horse, you are going to feel like you've just won the Olympics!"

The day finally came when I was out late one night working with my horse. The moon was full and the sky clear and crisp on that cold night. It was dark and no one else was around. I was brushing Adage when the irresistible urge to climb up onto her back overcame me. I pushed a small square hay bale up beside her and climbed onto her bare back while she ate her grain. As I pulled myself up onto her enormous back, she stopped eating, looked at me out of the corner of her eye, shifted her weight... and went back to eating from the bucket! To me, it did not feel like I had won the Olympics, but rather like I was a vulnerable waif-like thing cuddled up in the dark to a powerful dragon. I lay on her neck and listened to her breath. I could feel her heat rising up through my chest and her heart beating in my legs. Horse and I were one, if only for an instant. I dismounted with an inner smile grinning expansively across my chest and I bumped along the country road in the dark carrying that feeling with me all the way home. My heart was full and I felt different. "Had I changed? Was I changing? How have horses changed me? Certainly, I have changed my horse." I slowly made my way home to ponder these things.

Many of my experiences were typical of others who embarked on the program to train their own horse. They, too, passed through various stages preparing their horse for mounting. Of course, each human-horse partnership is unique and presents different challenges. For me, it was the challenge of gaining the respect of a very dominant horse.

For Adage, it was learning to trust. For others, it is about learning how to move softly, to create boundaries or to overcome fear. Each horse and each human have their own challenges to overcome, but in each case there is a relationship that is formed, and each relationship has its effects.

In conclusion, Jacques emphasized five major points throughout my apprenticeship with him. He believed that: (1) everyone should have a horse; (2) he doesn't do this for the people, but rather for the horses; (3) people need to learn how horses should be treated; (4) choosing a horse is like choosing a marriage, and finally; (5) horses are not part of the environment, but rather part of the man. Furthermore, I have organized the experiences described to me by my research participants into the following three themes; 'relationship building', 'feeling in control' and 'feeling connected to life'. These points will be examined further in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: The Canadian Horse and Contemporary Canadians: An Ethnographic Analysis

I first entered the field bracketing my own worldviews and carrying with me my graduate training in phenomenology. I also carried the grief of my grandmother's death and the suicide of my father on my shoulders. On a personal level I set out in search for my maternal roots in the form of Quebecoise heritage. On an academic level, I set out to discover the semiotic aspects of horse-training practices and, according to Alston (1956) and Shusterman (1991), what lies "beneath interpretation" in the form of some kind of pre-interpretive understanding. By attempting to collect data on embodied experience, as described by Merleau-Ponty (1945), I soon became hopelessly stuck in the conceptual space of Descartes - the dualism of body and mind, matter and meaning, nature and culture, subject and object. The anthropological view that there is some kind of 'real' world underlying our cultural constructions of it became more and more irrelevant as I continued my research. My experience, and the experience of my study participants, soon revealed to me that perception and interpretation are simultaneous, and I began tracing the phenomenological footsteps of Ingold (2000).

While Ingold is useful in the sense that he collapses the layered view of a "real nature" underlying our cultural constructions of it into a single plane of lived experience, he left me with no actual practical methods for further ethnographic inquiry.²³ I began to create conceptual maps of the metaphors and similes that people use to describe horses and their relationships with them, somehow still holding on to the idea that there is some

²³ It has been argued that Ingold's work continues to be human-centric and further perpetuates Cartesian dualism while his methods are impractical and problematic for ethnographic research. While ignoring the political and historical aspects of the socially and naturally inhabited world, Ingold at once uses Deleuzian rhizomatic theory and a reversal of Hegelian dialectics, which are incompatible analytical vehicles (Uchiyama 2004: 723-724).

kind of ontological being that is 'horse' and that we, as humans, culturally construct it in different ways, placing our interpretation of nature on nature itself. However, the repeated notion that horses are inextricably linked with the creation of new identities brought the whole study to a grinding halt.

My experiences, and the experiences reported by my research participants, led me down a different path. On the one hand, my field site was described to me by Jacques not as human-centric but rather as horse-centric, challenging the humanist foundations of anthropology and leading me to explore flat-ontologies. On the other hand, the 'therapeutic' aspects reported to me by many of the members of the farm community revealed this work to be something more akin to a post-humanist anthropology of happiness.²⁴ Ultimately, these two lines of thought came together when I began to understand that it is by inhabiting a world where the human is de-centered that the nature-artifice dichotomy at the heart of humanist thinking collapses, and symptoms of alienation disappear as the perception of the human separation from 'nature' reveals itself to be an illusion. Furthermore, I discovered that the human-horse relationship at my field site is a reciprocal social relationship between human and animal that has implications for Nadasdy's (2007) view of epistemological difference based on universalized representations of ethnicity, as well as Ingold's (2000) argument that the movement from hunter-gatherer to herdsman be conceptualized as a progressional movement from economies based on trust to economies based on domination.

²⁴ See, for example, the Vital Topics Forum on Happiness in American Anthropologist: Journal of the American Anthropological Association: 114(1): 2012.

After approaching my data through various theoretical lenses,²⁵ I finally settled on a ‘flat-ontology’ as the primary method for analysis:

So we opt, instead, for a ‘flat ontology’, largely based on the work of Deleuze, DeLanda and Schatzki. In it we conceptualize ‘sites’ as immanent (self-organizing) event-spaces dynamically composed of bodies, doings and sayings. Sites are differentiated and differentiating, unfolding singularities that are not only dynamic, but also ‘hang together’ through the congealments and blockages of force relations. The ‘actuality’ of any site is always poised for compositional variation – subject to reorganizations and disorganizations – as its inexhaustible ‘virtuality’ or potential continually rearticulates itself (Deleuze 1994). Finally, the ontology is called ‘flat’ because it neither incorporates a priori transcendental forms nor deploys ‘axiomatic’ or typological analytics that pre-ordain a series of solutions to critical inquiry. As we mention, these too often characterize the analytic procedure of scale theory. Sites must be approached problematically through analysis conditioned by the compositional specificities particular to each. (Jones, Woodward, and Marston 2007: 265)

This kind of analysis collapses the poles of binary thinking and allows for alternative perspectives of the world to emerge, in essence, a flat-ontology allows for novel conclusions to be drawn. Flat-ontology developed in response to hierarchical methods of analysis that create distinct poles such as structure/agency, global/local, self/other, human/non-human, culture/nature, and others (Jones, Woodward, and Marston 2007: 265). Hierarchical analysis is based on an analysis of scale that leads to certain kinds of conclusions, whereas a flat-ontology compresses these poles into a single democratic plane – leading to different sets of conclusions to be drawn.

This chapter now turns to an analysis of my ethnographic data. Jacques emphasized five major points throughout my apprenticeship with him. He believed that: (1) everyone should have a horse; (2) he doesn’t do this for the people, but rather for the

²⁵ Chapter five provides an explanation of this process.

horses; (3) people need to learn how horses should be treated; (4) choosing a horse is like choosing a marriage, and finally; (5) horses are not part of the environment, but rather part of the man. These concepts show how notions of human, horse and environment are conceived of and experienced in ways that blur anthropological notions of analytical categories. By asking questions based on affect as opposed to ontology – that is what does the human-horse relationship ‘do’ as opposed to what it ‘is’ – I have collected the experiences of other apprentice horse-trainers. Furthermore, I have organized the experiences described to me by my research participants into the following three themes: ‘relationship building’, ‘feeling in control’ and ‘feeling connected to life’. This chapter will now investigate each of these ideas in greater depth.

1. “Everyone should have a horse”: Horse as commodity

Jacques believes, as many people did during the pioneering times of this country, that the Canadian Horse is a horse for “the people,” a workingman’s horse (Beattie 1999; Bernier 1992; Montague 2010; Scanlan 2002). The Canadian Horse, for the most part, has not been subjected to generations of royal breeding lines, incubated in heated box stalls or associated with upper class activities. The Canadian Horse, also known as “The Little Iron Horse” (Le Petit Cheval de Fer) worked alongside farmers and laborers tilling fields, building railways, hauling logs, fighting wars and withstanding the harsh Canadian climate, often with little food or rest. This horse ploughed through the mud to plant crops, hauled wood out of the forest for homes, and acted as common transport systems to carry ordinary people across the frozen land and rivers to churches and markets (Beattie 1999; Bernier 1992; Montague 2010; Scanlan 2002).

The hardy working horse that developed as a result of these efforts was not a bourgeois horse by any means. Some of my research participants suggested that the Canadian Horse is a horse that “can do anything, but is good at nothing,” thus pointing out this horse’s ability to do almost any task assigned to it, but not to excel in high-level competition in any one discipline. The Canadian Horse is, therefore, a multi-purpose horse for everyday living. Obviously, due to technological advances these horses have become less essential for livelihood, replaced by tractors, logging equipment, cars and other machines that have taken over many of their jobs. Nowadays, many horse related activities have fallen into the hands of those who can afford the costly pass-time of horse ownership for hunter-jumpers, polo games, leisure horses and show prospects. The costs involved in horse ownership often mean that these activities remain in the hands of the upper and upper-middle classes.

At my field site, however, Jacques works hard providing sleigh rides and wedding carriages for the public in order to keep his sale and boarding prices low; so low in fact that the ordinary citizen can easily afford to have a horse. There are even high school students paying for their own horses through part-time jobs after school. In this way, Jacques conserves the historical place of the Canadian Horse as a horse of the ‘workingman’. In keeping with the spirit of the Canadian Horse as a horse for the people, Jacques provides programs that enable almost anyone to engage with horses should they so desire, and thus, the opportunity to experience the affective nature of the horse – so entangled in our history and evolution as human beings – despite their declining presence in our modern era. In this way, Jacques describes the horse as an important commodity.

2. “I don’t do this for the people, I do it for the horses”: Horse is central

Paradoxically, however, Jacques also says that he doesn’t operate his farm for the people but rather for the horses. Following Haraway (2003: 53), we can speculate that the human belongs to the horse as much as the horse belongs to the human; or, as Dominique says, “Jasper is not really my horse, but he IS my horse... and I am his human.”

When I probed Jacques further about the statement that he doesn’t do this for the people, but rather for the horses, he reported that he feels that his Canadian Horse breeding business has contributed to the propagation of an amazing animal, a breed that has been brought back from near extinction several times through careful breeding management and conservation efforts. Jacques said, “I am just doing my part to keep this horse going.”

What becomes clear in both Jacques’s and Dominique’s statements, is that the world that they described is not human-centric, but rather animal-centric, or more specifically horse-centric. What does it mean to inhabit a horse-centric world? According to Ingold (2000: 218), the view of ‘nature’ in the center and human on the periphery can be called “anthropocircumferentialism” and can be critiqued as further perpetuating the nature-culture dichotomy since humans are still seen as separate from nature. However, a horse-centric world is the world that Jacques has described to me and so this is what we must work with. Jacques once said to me, “First there are the horses, they come first, then the clients, and then, there is the government.” As he said this, he demarcated big concentric circles with his arms to demonstrate that in his world, horses were central, human were peripheral to that, and “the government” was on the furthest

periphery. As a ranchman, his horses are both his capital, in the form of livelihood, and his kin. "I know all these horses like they were my children," he said one day in response to a client asking him if he knew the names of all his horses and could tell them apart.

De-centering the human may allow for alternative perspectives of ourselves, others, and the environment to emerge beyond anthropocentric discourses. Anthropology at one time needed to move beyond ethnocentric analysis, and it may well be that a shift out of anthropocentric frameworks will provide us with alternative versions of the social world. Humanist thought finds its roots in association with Ancient Greek, Renaissance, Enlightenment and Modernist movements. What each of these shifts in consciousness has in common is the ideal of human values and interests as their core, sometimes called the ideals of "man" or "mankind." These core beliefs were challenged through the structuralist and deconstructionist critiques of the 1970s, and finally Derrida challenged the foundations of humanism by de-centering the human subject (Derrida 2008). By extension, these changes impacted the notion of 'woman' as will be discussed later on in this chapter, as well as slaves and animals.

As of late, many studies that bring the non-human into their scope are lumped into the category of post-human works. However, Wolfe (2010) clarifies for us the ways in which "animal studies" or "human-animal relations" can be understood to be more or less humanist based on internal/external relations and disciplinarity.²⁶ Wolfe asserts that it is not just the content of a study that can be considered post-human, but also the theory and method used in its approach (Wolfe 2010: 99).

In Haraway's 1991 piece, we again see a rewriting of what it means to be human when she looks at primate studies. She suggests that by looking at primates as self-

²⁶ Please refer to chapter one for a more detailed description of Wolfe's analysis of post-humanist works.

representing subjects, instead of models of the pre-human, we may see different narratives emerge in biopolitical theory and in human relations with nature. She further notes that by rewriting the narratives that have supported scientific theories of dominance, causality, and functional organization, new narratives emerge: “matrifocal groups, long-term social co-operation rather than short-term spectacular aggression, flexible process rather than strict structure” (Haraway 1991: 19). Haraway asserts that these kinds of revisionist accounts can actually alter the foundations by which we live and understand ourselves, and “humanity”. In this way, Haraway exemplified what Wolfe calls “post-humanist post-humanism” in that not only the content of her study is the non-human, but also the ways in which she alters epistemological and ontological foundations; she brings her research out of the realm of humanist thought and into the realm of possible worlds and new meaning through the creation of new narratives.

Haraway’s (2004) later research situated “women” in the post-humanist landscape, arguing that humanism, in fact, excludes women. Haraway states that the humanist landscape paints the face of humanity as “man” and that this is due to figuration of historical narratives (Haraway 2004: 27). By looking at configurations of historical narratives Haraway shows how the notion of “humanity” is not generic, and excludes beings on the basis of race, class, gender, and bodily boundaries²⁷. She attributes this to the “plot of Enlightenment humanism,” and suggests that a new plot be written so that a new understanding may come to the fore (Haraway 2004: 49). She asks, “how can humanity have a figure outside of the narratives of humanism; what language would such a narrative speak?” (Haraway 2004: 49). She follows the story of Sojourner Truth, a black woman who spoke out on inequality in 1851, and how this woman’s story shows

²⁷ For example, the human-genome project (Haraway 2004: 49).

clearly how she is excluded from “humanity.” Haraway concludes that women like Sojourner Truth occupy a “critical position” of being at the borderlands of personal and political boundaries, in a liminal space between bodies and narratives. She argues that these “eccentric subjects” (Haraway 2004: 60) challenge us to rethink what it is to be human. I would venture that Derrida’s “question of the animal,” like “the question of the woman,” places both women and animals as “eccentric subjects”, and that both women and animals challenge formerly held imaginations of “humanity”.

While humanist leanings have dominated much of Euro-American academic thought over the last few hundred years, is it possible that the common experiences of people on the ground represent something altogether different? This ethnography reveals that the thinking about horses at my rural Quebec field site falls into Wolfe’s “post-humanist post-humanism” quadrant, as demonstrated by Jacques’s assertion that he works primarily for the benefit of the horses. It provides a representation of what it is to inhabit a horse-centric, as opposed to a human-centric universe, according subjectivity – and even primacy – to the horse. New narratives of our place in the world are revealed and a whole new perspective emerges. The idea of a horse-centric environment, however, is theoretically problematic in post-humanist thought, since it can be considered to be a reversal of, and therefore a perpetuation of humanist thinking. Yet this is the world as explicitly described to me by my apprenticeship mentor, Jacques.

3. “People need to learn how horses should be treated”: The subjective horse

Horse-training methods come in a variety of forms. They range from “crude” horse-breaking, “involving leg-ropes, fixed side reins”, and “sacking-out,” to other methods that bank on trust rather than fear, whereby the horse can actively decide to co-operate

(Patton 2003: 84-88). In this way horses are not only learning the linguistic and bodily forms of communication of humans, but humans are also learning to read the forms of communication emitted by the horse. Patton states, "These are signs employed for the command of horses by humans, but this "language" of command only works because it is integrated within a larger, somatic framework of interspecies communication" (Patton 2003: 89).

Domestication is often thought of in terms of the humanizing or civilizing of an animal, removing its 'wild' and innate instincts so that it is capable of living a life with humans.²⁸ What I observed at my field site, however, was that horse-training is not only about the 'becoming-human' of a horse, but also equally about the 'becoming-horse' of a human. Vicky Hearne argues that humanist thought has created a gap between the human and non-human world, a gap that can be bridged by "the ability to command and the full acknowledgement of the personhood of the being so commanded" (Hearne 2007: 47). Anthropological studies among the Cree and Ojibwa reveal that personhood is attributed to non-human animals (Nadasdy 2007, Fuentes 2006). Nadasdy (2007: 31) argues that for the Cree and Ojibwa these notions are not merely symbolic or metaphorical but rather ontological conceptions that would have profound impacts on animal management practices if it were not for the epistemological power imbalances that maintain these notions as figurative.

²⁸ This definition is in accordance with the Oxford Dictionary of English that defines domesticate as: "tame (an animal) to live with humans", domesticated: "kept by humans for work, food or companionship: not wild" (2001: 412), however, the concept of 'domestication' is not without problem as shown by Ingold (2000).

Jacques says that he breeds and trains for the benefit of the horses. Horses benefit by having their breed continue on to exist into a modern era that is generally inhospitable to their autonomous survival due to human sprawl, the destruction of habitat and the declining need for the commodified horse in both urban and rural environments. Through careful breeding techniques Jacques improves the general health, conformation and wellbeing of the herd generation after generation. In addition, since his program teaches people how to work with horses, people are trained to 'gentle' their horses instead of 'breaking' them. At this farm, by considering horses to be sentient beings with certain rights, and as non-human subjective 'selves,' the gap between human and horse is bridged. Patton states, "good training establishes a form of language that closes the gap, which is another way of saying that it enables a form of interaction that enhances the power and the feeling of power of both horse and rider" (Patton 2003: 97). In this way, Haraway speaks about not only the pursuit of happiness of the human, but also the pursuit of happiness in the animal, both manifesting in the training process. She states, "a dog and handler discover happiness together in the labor of training. That is an example of emergent naturecultures" (Haraway 2003: 52).

4. "Choosing a horse is like choosing a marriage": Horse as kin

Haraway (2008) has shown that dogs, with their entry into human kinship systems, have entered into systems of capital both as commodities and consumers of commodities. The closer their kin relationships with human-others, the more capital they generate. Furthermore, dogs are also commodities themselves. They fetch record prices for pureblood lines at elite breeding facilities or backyard puppy mills, and also work as show dogs, guard dogs, guide dogs, shepherds, therapists and companions. Paradoxically

apart from human-kinship relations, Haraway (2008) finds that the closer a dog's kinship relation is with their respective humans, the greater the dog's commoditized value becomes. She states, the "replacement value" for a companion animal that dies is not the market price for that animal, yet it is also not the same as for human casualty. She notes that categories of "parent-child," "guardian-ward," and "owner-property" are all inadequate for describing the human-dog relationship (Haraway 2008: 51). Similarly, horses are also companion animals, described as family and property, as producing subjects and produced objects. They also challenge popularly held beliefs about kinship and capital categories.

Relational intersubjective encounters generate new ontological meaning through intertwined histories, symbiotic evolutions, and body-minds that co-habitate in mutually inclusive naturecultures. The ways that these relationships form subjects of both people and horses can be seen through a study of the impacts that companion species have had on former intellectual conceptualizations of kin. That is to say, that while many anthropologists may have neglected to take human-animal kinship systems into consideration, what occurs on the ground, in life, between humans and horses may, in fact, be another story.

I discovered in my fieldwork that many people relate to their horses as if they were kin. Throughout the year that I conducted fieldwork in rural Quebec, the horse was described to me variously as "a family member," "a partner," and "my child." Like Haraway (2003, 2008), I found that humans are implicated in complex interspecies families, whereby the horse not only appears to have kinship terms attached to it, but the horse's human counter-part is also ascribed kinship terms. For example,

Ethnographer: "I thought my horse was old enough to pull a sled this year?"

Farmer: "No she is too young, she is only two."

Ethnographer: "She is two years, seven months...."

Farmer: "Whoa, there Mom. Be patient. She looks big, but she is not old enough to pull yet."

Not only did I observe kinship terms being applied to human-horse interactions, but I also observed familial actions and emotions being applied in this context. People develop close and lasting bonds with their horses in only a short amount of time, expending time, energy and money for medical care, grooming and accessories. Throughout my ethnography I heard people describe their relationship with their horse as one of "love." As you will recall from chapter three, horses were described variously as people, pets, friends, and partners.

The configuration of kinship in the human-horse interface is often referred to as one of "partnership." In particular, the notion that "choosing a horse is like choosing a marriage" will be looked at in terms of the partnership between horses and humans. This trope, which I have heard employed by several people at my field site, is further supported by A. Wipper (2000) in her ethnography entitled, "The Partnership: The horse-rider relationship in eventing." Wipper bases her argument around the idea that human-horse partnerships are created through the development of the qualities of respect, trust, confidence and close communication. She presents two preliminary examples:

A Texan who grew up with horses says that he doubts if he has ever known a cowboy who liked women as well as he liked horses and suggests a "sacramental relationship between man and horse," a deep bonding he calls "mateship." (McMurtry in Wipper 2000: 50)

According to the trainer Jimmy Williams, "Matching a rider to a horse is a little like getting married: some personalities just clash and nothing will ever come from pairing them." (Wipper 2000: 56)

Wipper found throughout her three-year ethnography that the qualities of respect, trust, confidence and close communication are of utmost importance for the human-horse relationship in eventing. She suggests that these same qualities must be present for a functional human marriage as well. For Wipper's research participants, finding the ideal eventing horse is about "building partnerships" or, if they are lucky, about finding the "perfect partnership" (Wipper 2000: 47). She describes the different kinds of horse-human partnerships that she observed during her three-year study. There are some riders who need to be in control of their horse, other times, the horse needs to be given the freedom to make his own rational decisions about the obstacles at hand or else he performs poorly. She cites the famous racehorse Secretariat as an example of a horse that would "refuse to give his all unless permitted to do it his way" (Wipper 2000: 48). At other times, mutual task sharing occurs between horse and rider, as one of her sources puts it; "It's not just one athlete, it's two athletes and a combination of personalities, a combination of physical skills, and a combination of minds" (Wipper 2000: 48). Sayings such as "timid riders need bold horses" and "timid horses need bold riders" are commonplace (Wipper 2000: 56).

My observations of horse-human relationships at the farm suggests that humans allow horses to be included in culturally constructed categories of kinship, and equally horses allow humans into their kinship system: their herd, their hierarchy systems, their personal space and their hearts. As can be seen in my process of relationship building with Adage, I needed to learn how to behave and communicate with her in a way that she could understand before she would accept me as one of her own. It is not that kinship exists between horses and humans because humans have decided that this will be so, but

rather that horses and humans co-create familial bonds through a process of constant negotiation and re-negotiation of reciprocal relationships.

5. "Horses are not part of the environment, they are part of the man": Horse is man

Historically, horseflesh has been in frequent contact with the human. We have co-evolved together. However, as opposed to looking backwards at the co-creation of "historically specific joint lives...bonded in significant otherness" as Haraway does (Haraway 2003: 16), this ethnography looks forward at the process of co-creation as it happens, at the frontiers of becoming as described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Since, according to Haraway (2003:6), both "biological and cultural determinism are both instances of misplaced concreteness," this ethnography takes on a more slippery notion of the subject, one in which the subject is in constant flux, in a constant state of becoming, and thus asks: who do we become when human and horse are in fleshy contact? Or as Jacques put it, what happens when the horse "becomes part of the man" and vice versa?

Raffles (2002) problematizes the "frontier" as a space with temporal links to colonialism and metaphors of the Wild West. Raffles argues that these aspects of the frontier continue the expansion of colonial attitudes in modern thought, as well as the perpetuation of the linear separation of people, ideas and places (Raffles 2002: 152). Contrary to Raffles, however, I employ the term frontiers as a way of describing the cutting edge of becoming. With becoming there is a past that falls behind us, as we flow through the present moment on our way towards something else. I argue that the frontier is to be understood as the immediate moment where becoming is in the process of unfolding, flowing into the unknown. The frontier of becoming is that place where

Heidegger's (1993) first nature and second nature collide. To stand on the frontier is to stand on the edge of what is known. It is to be aware of the process of becoming as it happens.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming explains the flows of identities that occur in complex society. While Merleau-Ponty (1945) would consider that it is an immanent subject that opens up to a world of perception, this research suggests that what happens is a process of becoming in which contact with other bodies not only alters human perception but alters the actual human body/mind – both the form of content and the form of expression – that is, both the matter and meaning of the human body. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated in the following section of this chapter, this research has found that these becomings subdue the perception of alienation by forging new relationships that alter environmental correlates, resulting in a different way of experiencing the world.

According to Deleuzian thought, all bodies are formed of physical matter and necessarily generate signs through their very existence. This is a kind of double articulation in which all bodies are composed of a “form of content” and a “form of meaning” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 44, 76). Double articulation brings the realm of semiotic meaning and the realm of matter together in a way that avoids the dualism inherent in constructionist versions of the world whereby human consciousness maps meaning onto primordial nature. In order to avoid re-inscribing the power imbalances described by Nadasdy (2007), and instead of negating the statements of my research participants as just cultural constructions lain over nature, this research considers the information conveyed to me by my research participants to be the literal expressions of

their relationship to horses. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) relational meso-theory suggests that the ontologies of both human and non-human subjects are unstable, slippery and in constant flux, and my data begins to unveil not what the human-horse relationship is, but rather what it does for people at my field site. With this in mind, my research now turns to the reported ways in which horses have affected my research participants.

6. "Building Relationships"

Three themes emerge from the experiences of my research participants: "building relationships"; "feeling in control" and "feeling connected with life". From the conversations I had with people on the farm, and from my own experience of training Adage, these themes can be interpreted to be responses to feelings of alienation, powerlessness and depression. Karl Marx (1959) describes alienation as related to our economic structure, labour processes and consumer habits:

According to the economic laws the estrangement of the worker in his object is expressed thus: the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes; the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker; the more powerful labor becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker; the more ingenious labor becomes, the less ingenious becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature's servant. (Marx 1959: 30)

All these consequences are implied in the statement that the worker is related to the product of his labor as to an alien object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes, the less belongs to him as his own...the alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he

has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. (Marx 1959: 71)

Likewise, as can be recalled from the story of Dominique in chapter three, many of my research participants described themselves to me as having had experienced symptoms of isolation, powerlessness and depression – often related to our social structure and economic processes. Recall how Dominique's stress relates to the economic pressures of caring for so many dependents in his family and extended family, and how these economic stresses have him working in a desk job that makes him feel frustrated about being stuck inside, alone at a work desk. At the farm, he feels re-connected to the environment, the horses, and to other people. The farm, for him, is a kind of balm that eases the feelings of depression and rage associated with his situation. Furthermore, Pam can also be recalled from chapter three when she explained that horses had enabled her to regain strength from chronic fatigue and burn-out, and that she believed that "horses saved my life."

From my own experience, I found the academic world of graduate school to be extremely alienating, as I was obligated to spend extended hours on the computer to work – at the expense of my social relationships and physical health. Entering the field, for me, resulted in my ability to become someone else, as I formed relationships with horses, people and the environment. For many people at the farm, relocating into a new environment allowed us to alter our relationships – and therefore our experience of the world.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have re-interpreted Marxist alienation in a way that allows us to explain these experiences; in Deleuzian terms my research participants are not merely trapped in symptomatic alienation due to labor processes, but rather de-

territorialized out of situations which trap them in alienating configurations, managing to counter the effects of alienation by increasing the lines of flight available to them by re-territorializing into new configurations. In this sense, my research demonstrates itself to be not an ethnography of Canadian identity, but rather an ethnography of subjects in the process of transformation through engagement with horses. Take for example the case of Dominique, who describes for us in chapter three the ways in which his relationship with Jasper reduces feelings of anger and depression and increases feelings of connection.

For comparative purposes I call on the case of equine assisted therapy for Aboriginal youth overcoming solvent abuse (Dell 2008). The program, based on providing the opportunity for otherwise disenfranchised youth to interact with horses, claims to be effective in rehabilitating these young people because of the changes to their identities and their ability to form new healthy relationships. In a nutshell, Dell claims that building relationships with horses is easier than with people due to the obvious and truthful body language of the horse. Trust and sensitivity are learned by the human-horse duo and then extended outwards to the community fostering a social support network and forging links with the community. As with the research participants at my own field site, Dell reports that relationship building with horses affects humans in positive life-affirming ways that can easily be described as ‘therapeutic.’ Dell finds that “although not EAL²⁹ specific, some equine-assisted interventions have demonstrated an increase in trust/unconditional love and acceptance among participants” (Dell 2008: 94).

In much the same way, my own experience and the experiences reported to me by my research participants, demonstrate that the effects of the human-horse bond extend beyond the farm by enabling people to counter the perception of alienation through the

²⁹ Equine Assisted Learning.

creation of human-horse bonds based on reciprocity. In turn, they create a small-scale community based on the same elements of trust and sharing, and thus not only perception is altered, but also social structure. As Haraway so eloquently puts it, “like the productions of a decadent gardener who can’t keep good distinctions between natures and cultures straight, the shape of my kin networks looks more like a trellis or an esplanade than a tree” (Haraway 2003: 9).

7. “Feeling in control”

Marxist alienation (1959) can be re-interpreted through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in order to shed some light on the ‘de-alienation’ that has been reported by my research participants. While for Marx the opposite of alienation would be self-actualization (Marx 1845), for Deleuze and Guattari the self is not a static being: there is only a becoming of the body as it enters into new relationships and new configurations with other bodies. Some of my research participants report that they enjoy the feeling of being in control of their horse. For some it is because they like feeling in control, while for others it is specifically related to counteracting the feeling that the rest of their life is out of control.

Clearly, in this case, power imbalances are explicit. As with any social relationship, human or otherwise, there is a process of negotiation that occurs. Haraway argues that dogs and their human handlers “construct ‘rights’ in each other, such as the right to demand respect, attention and response” (Haraway 2003: 53). The question of control in the human-horse assemblage is that bodies are allowed to enact a “different kind of social contract than the one they were born into” in this sense, horse-training is one of many

kinds of “subject transforming technologies” (Haraway 2003: 93). This is a process of transformation, of becoming powerful, of entering into new relationships in order to become something different. According to Haraway:

This sort of ontological choreography, which is that vital sort of play that the participants invent out of the histories of body and mind they inherit and that they rework into the fleshy verbs that make them who they are. They invented this game; this game remodels them. Metaplasma, once again. It always comes back to the biological flavor of the important words. The word is made flesh in mortal naturecultures. (Haraway 2003: 100)

So what does this mean for the horse handlers that enjoy the aspect of feeling in control? Patton finds that “horse-trainers often speak as though it were a matter of horse and rider becoming one body, in which the human is the head that commands while the horse is the body that executes the movement” (Patton 2003: 90). This view, and the view of some of my research participants, demonstrates how horses allow people to feel in control. To reiterate, Gregoire says, “I like to ride because I like power and control. Having a horse is like having a project, something to dominate... a challenge.” While David finds that, “It is about dominating something bigger than you, sometimes when you feel like your life is out of control you can feel like if you can control this one big beast – you feel better because it takes your mind off things and makes you feel in control.” It is clear that for these research participants training is an exercise of power over the horse and this means that it is inextricably linked to both external and internal social power relationships. In fact, Patton suggests that training, no matter what the method, is still a means of inscribing power on animal bodies:

The difference between conventional cowboy methods that employ leg-ropes and “sacking-out” and the methods of Hearne, Roberts³⁰ and others is not a difference between the exercise of power over animals and communication with them. It is a difference between less and more sophisticated techniques of exercising power over others... we might describe the difference between their training and conventional methods as that between an exercise of power that blindly seeks to capture some of the powers of the animal for human purposes, and an exercise of power that seeks to capture the powers of the animal in ways that enhance both those powers and the animals enjoyment of them. (Patton 2003: 93)

The views of my research participants Gregoire and David, as well as Patton can also be understood through Ingold’s (2000) treatment of wild/domestic as trust/domination. In this sense, those who view their relationship with horses in terms of domination and control are subscribing to what Ingold would call economies of hierarchy and dominance, while those who base their relationships with their horse on trust subscribe to economies of sharing and reciprocity.

It was interesting to watch the shift in community members who arrived with dominance techniques as they interacted with other community members who often light-heartedly reprimanded them for their horse handling practices with joking comments about their “unkindness” towards their horses. Jacques quietly discouraged extreme dominance practices on the farm. For example, there was an incidence when one of the community members attempted to help another to lunge a horse that was not cooperative. He hit the horse repetitively with a whip and the horse became confused. It reared and bucked. Jacques then quietly sent the man’s wife over to tell him to stop and that these actions were not appropriate. Social relationships between humans and horses are encouraged to be based on trust and reciprocity rather than dominance in this

³⁰ Vicky Hearne and Monty Roberts are world-renowned animal trainers, known for their gentle methods.

community. In Ingold's flat ontology, he finds that the social relationships that people have with each other cannot be differentiated from the social relationships that people have with the non-human components of their world (Ingold 2000: 62). As reciprocal relationships are formed between humans and horses at my field site, so too are human relationships of reciprocity molded at this farm, where everyone pitches in to make it work. Paying clients come to shovel manure, feed hay, set up fundraising events, and lend their own heavy equipment and general labor, all in the name of making the farm work for the benefit of everyone involved. In this way, a social economy of trust, sharing and reciprocity is modeled, not only in the human-horse relationship, but is also extended out between humans on the farm.

Ingold argues that herdsman do not base their relationships on trust and reciprocity, but rather obligation, in the sense that their animals do not have agency and they "are presumed to lack the capacity to reciprocate" (Ingold 2000: 70). He further states, "they are cared for but, they themselves are not empowered to care" (Ingold 2000: 70). Domestication then, according to Ingold, is not about trust but about domination and is likened to the social roles found in societies in which there are masters and slaves. Ingold ultimately argues that hunter-gatherer societies are based on trust and reciprocity while pastoral societies are based on control and domination. Contrary to this, my research demonstrates that the relationships between humans and horses at my field site are based on reciprocity, despite the fact that my research participants tend domestic horse herds. Furthermore, community members who use extreme dominance techniques are encouraged to change their practices.

In essence, the movement from domination to trust at my field site suggests that people can be 'trained' to move from social relationships of domination to social relationships based on trust – moving backwards along Ingold's (2000) spectrum or perhaps, beyond it. Ingold's (2000) assertion that for pastoralists animals lack the capacity to reciprocate may perhaps be part of the cognitive structures of those pastoralists, however, this may not be necessarily and universally conceived of as true by all herdsmen. My research demonstrates that the perception of reciprocal relationships occurs among people who tend domestic horse herds, and therefore movement along Ingold's spectrum of trust and domination can possibly occur in more than one direction.

8. "Connection to life"

Some of my research participants have reported that at the farm they feel "connected to life" and that this lifts them out of feelings of depression, frustration or alienation. But what does it mean to be "connected to life"? How is it that we arrive at the perception of disconnection in the first place? This research suggests that alienation in our current modern capitalist society is also experienced as alienation from 'nature;' that humans experience themselves as some kind of 'cultural' entity while 'nature' resides somewhere 'out there.' This is the by-product of humanist thought that considers humans to be cultural 'persons' while animals to be natural 'animals.' In other words, that 'nature' is some vast realm of forms upon which humans overlay meaning. It is this view that constructs humans as subjects and all other life as objective resources to be harvested for our benefit. This view sets humans apart from the rest of the world and leads to the feeling of separateness or dis-connection. By viewing nature as a vast cultureless base

upon which humans inscribe meaning, the perception and experience of alienation comes about.

Tim Ingold suggests that form and meaning are not separate entities, and that to analyze them separately is to perpetuate an intellectual tradition that has little to do with the ways in which people and animals actually live their lives. Ingold investigates how anthropological notions are largely based on showing the ways in which nature and culture are socially constructed (Ingold 2000: 40). In this view, nature is seen paradoxically as a “constructional process” and a “precondition,” a “conceptual form” and a “physical substance” (Ingold 2000: 41). Ingold basically shows how the idea that nature is culturally constructed is also construction; in other words, cultural construction is itself a cultural construction (Ingold 2000: 41).

Through a discussion of tropical hunters and gatherers he shows how their relationship to the environment is one of kinship (Ingold 2000: 43). Bird-David argues that the metaphor “the forest is a parent” is an interpretation of the forest in that it provides sustenance and shelter like a parent would for their children, however Ingold suggests that using metaphor analysis, as outlined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), is imposing our own cultural construction of a divide between “actuality and metaphor,” imposing a Western separation analysis that is not found in the cosmology of these people (Ingold 2000: 44). He argues that in this case, the forest is not ‘like’ a parent, the forest ‘is’ a parent. This seemingly small semantic change has profound implications for the understanding of the environment. Ingold suggests that, rather than view nature/cultures as culturally constructed, that they be viewed as relational, through what he calls “interagentivity” (Ingold 2000: 47). He advocates for moving from an analysis

of construction to engagement in which humans are not manipulating nature, but rather situated within a field of relations. He finds that things like hunting/gathering, storytelling/myth cannot be situated in dichotomy of mental and material, for “ecological interactions in nature and cultural constructions of nature” are both ways of dwelling (Ingold 2000: 57). That is, environments are constituted in life, not just thought. He states,

In short a cultural constructionist approach to environmental perception, far from challenging the prevailing ecological models of hunting and gathering as foraging, actually reinforces them, creating by exclusion a separate logical space for organism-environment interactions wherein those models are appropriately applied. (Ingold 2000: 59)

Ingold attempts to break down the nature/culture dichotomy by thinking of the “evolutionary origins of human beings within nature,” as opposed to the humanist notions of the emergence of humanity from the environment occurring when “humanity transcended nature” (Ingold 2000: 78). In essence, he states that humans “do not transform material world, but rather play their part, along with other creatures, in the world’s transformation of itself” (Ingold 2000: 87). In Heideggerian (1993) terms, Ingold’s phenomenology moves from a building perspective to a dwelling perspective through reversing the “normal” order of thought-form over process to “agent-in-its-environment,” or “being-in-the-world,” for only through being inhabited can a world take on meaning (Ingold 2000: 173). Indeed, for Ingold, the building perspective is problematic in that there is a difference between “real” nature and “perceived” nature, that is, that there is a separation between perceiver and the world; however, the dwelling perspective takes the “animal-in-its-environment” rather than as a “self-contained individual” (Ingold 2000: 186).

In this way, my research participants at the farm overcome the sense of alienation from nature, handed down through humanist epistemological structures that set the “cultural” human apart from “natural” nature. Instead of living life with the perception of an ontologically self-contained atomized subject separate from “nature,” to be a member of this farm community means necessarily to dwell in a world where the human is de-centered. It is also to dwell in a world where social relationships between both humans and non-humans are reciprocal. It is to have non-human kin. In a post-humanist world, to be human is to be part of nature itself, and thus the perception of “connection to life” occurs.

9. The Training Practices

Like Gregoire and David who were in transit from one social landscape to another, I also made the journey from domination to trust through my visits to the farm. To invert Ingold’s supposition that wild/domestic be conceived of as trust/domination, in the process of “domesticating” my horse I had to learn how to have a relationship based on reciprocity and mutual respect. As noted in chapter three, I first visited the farm in order to choose my horse; I chose Adage, but she had not chosen me. I had decided that I was going to work with this horse, but it took me months to earn her trust and respect before we could actually do any real work together. Like many others who first arrived at the farm, I began with a dominance mentality. I wanted to ‘catch’ my horse so that I could ‘tame’ her. It was only after Adage and I began to establish a basis of trust and sharing that I could get close to her.

Once Jacques taught me the join-up technique, I learned how to treat Adage like a horse and act in ways that she could understand. Adage began to trust that I was not

going to hurt her. Furthermore, I am told by other horse-trainers that what has happened is that I had acted like an alpha mare would, telling her when to move her feet, so that she now trusts me to make decisions, the same way that the herd trusts the instructions of the lead mare.

Likewise, the roping-up process was a process of learning to trust as well. My experience with Adage proved to be much more like a parent teaching a child not to be afraid of the dark. Jacques tells me that horses, because they are prey animals, are born afraid of anything unknown. Their first instinct is to run, kick and buck if anything frightens them. In this way, Adage tried to avoid the sensation of ropes because she was afraid of the unknown. By showing her that there was nothing to be afraid of she calmed down and seemed to gain more confidence. The technique of “desensitization,” despite the unfortunate term, is more like checking under a child’s bed for monsters to prove that there is nothing to be scared of, rather than about imposing one’s will over another. Roping-up was not the only desensitization that occurred. Adage was afraid of everything: buckets, shovels, poles, pipes, the garden hose, tractors, bicycles, snowmen, fire crackers, flags, loud noises, dogs, cats, birds, rocks, wind, lightning, thunder, water... the list is endless. By showing Adage these things one by one, by comforting her, and by teaching her to look at these things instead of running away, I gave Adage steadfast confidence and in return I earned a deep trust from her. She now trusts me to lead her into unknown territory and through new obstacles without fear. In turn, she carries me safely across the landscape. I give her assurance direction and composure and she gives me power, strength and speed. I feed her, clean her, treat her illnesses, increase her trust in the world around her and give her love. In return, she reciprocates by allowing me to

harness her great strength. I believe that she enjoys my company. She taught me how to be a leader. I did not have to dominate her into submission, but rather, she gave me permission to enter her world, to lead her into the unknown. I can feel her excitement and curiosity as we saddle up for a ride in the woods. She never ventures into the woods alone, she waits eagerly for me to show her in which direction she can safely explore. Adage and I form a little herd of two and in this way we have become a symbiotic whole.

In this way my relationship with Adage was transformed thanks to my apprenticeship with Jacques and my interactions with both human and horse members of the farm community. It was transformed from a relationship based on dominance to a relationship based on reciprocity. By learning how to have reciprocal relationships beyond the human, I have been able to counter my own sense of isolation, alienation and depression as I find myself connected to a world that just keeps on giving.

Summary:

Blurry Ontologies: A Critique of Nadasdy's Epistemological Chasm

To summarize, five major points were distilled out of my apprenticeship with Jacques on his farm and three themes emerged out of my interviews with other research participants in the farm community. By entertaining the idea that “everyone should have a horse,” my research looks at the ways in which the Canadian Horse developed in Canada and how the farm is managed in such a way that preserves the socio-cultural and economic heritage values of the Canadian Horse as “a horse for the people” – that is, a workingman's horse (Beattie 1999; Bernier 1992; Montague 2010; Scanlan 2002). In this sense, Jacques describes the horse as an important commodity. By making horse ownership affordable to people with average incomes, Jacques continues the legacy of

the Canadian Horse as a horse for everyone. Ironically, Jacques also says, “I don’t do this for the people, I do it for the horses,” meaning that he understands his farm to be ‘horse-centric,’ or at least, not ‘human-centric.’ In this sense, my research discovered that this field site is an example of a socio-cultural world in which the human is de-centered, which led me to conduct a post-humanist analysis. In turn, this type of analysis elucidated alternative perspectives of the world in the form of new narratives of human-horse-sociality. Jacques asserts that “people need to learn how horses should be treated,” thus attributing selfhood to the horse, and according it certain rights. While clearly horses are not viewed as humans at my field site, some of my research participants described their horses as “persons” and this is comparable, to a certain degree, with Cree, Ojibwa, Kluane, Wari and Runa views on non-human personhood, as described by Kohn (2007), Nadasdy (2007), Fuentes (2006), Vilaça (2005), and Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2004). Furthermore, Jacques says that “choosing a horse is like choosing a marriage,” and this has implications for our understandings of the possibilities for kinship and partnership across the species barrier, as demonstrated by Haraway (2003, 2008) and Wipper (2000). Finally, when Jacques states that “horses are not part of the environment, they are part of the man,” the humanist boundaries of animal and man, nature and culture are blurred, allowing for a critique of dominant notions of objectivity and subjectivity and an analysis of the transformative process of “becoming” through a destabilizing of the immanent subject entertained by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Vilaça (2005).³¹

³¹ Please refer to chapter two for a detailed theoretical discussion of the limits of analytical methods based on the humanist approach, and the ways in which a post-humanist analysis such as flat-ontology allows for the accommodation of perspectives which do not necessarily place human subjects in the center of a world of objects.

The Human-Horse Relationship: A Critique of Humanist Thought

My research also examined the experiences described to me by other research participants on the farm. These experiences are grouped into the three themes of “relationship building”, “feeling in control,” and, “feeling connected to life.” Firstly, by building relationships with individual horses and then extending those networks out into configurations that build a small-scale community, the atomization that results from notions of subjective man vs. objective world in the humanist tradition, is not resisted but rather transformed.

Secondly, some of my research participants described that they enjoyed the aspect of exerting control over their horses and experienced feelings of greater personal power through engagements of dominance over their horse; however, this behavior is discouraged at the farm by Jacques, as well as by other community members. I observed that through socialization at the farm, horse owners who used extreme domination techniques began to change their method, moving from a social relationship with their horse based on domination to one based on trust and reciprocity. As a result, over time both perceptions and practices were altered as these research participants frequented the farm. Finally, some research participants reported that there are ‘therapeutic’ effects when engaging with horses that replace feelings of depression or illness with the feelings described as a “connection to life.” By entering a world where the human is de-centered, the perceived disconnection from ‘nature’ experienced in humanist nature-culture dichotomies inherited from overarching frameworks, is dropped and humans experience reconnection to horses through a simple shift in perspective. Humans, once again, become part of their ‘environment’ in the sense that the nature-artifice distinction

collapses and is replaced by the realization that 'humanity' has never been separate from 'nature.' By entering a world where the human is de-centered, the humanist perception of separation from all other life is confronted to the very fact that there has never been a disconnection. In a post-human world, humans exist in a greater field of social relations. Thus, as people build new social relationships in the farm community with humans and horses, there is a shift from dominance to trust that shakes the foundations of humanist thought. This is experienced as 'therapeutic' due to the perceptual shifts that occur when one inhabits a world where the human is de-centered. The perception that one is separate from 'nature' begins to fade.

From Domination to Trust: A Critique of Ingold's "Domestication" as "Domination"

The horse breeders of my field site in rural Quebec are "herdsmen" in that their lives revolve around the keeping of a herd of domestic grazing animals. However, my research demonstrates that social relationships between humans and horses are based on trust and reciprocity, thus inverting Ingold's supposition. In this respect, the human-horse relationship at my field site has more in common with the social world of Ingold's hunter-gatherers than of his herdsmen.

In this sense, there is no shifting between the worlds of 'nature' and 'culture' but rather a shift in what Ingold would call "the terms of engagement" (Ingold 2000: 75), or the ways in which social relationships between both humans and non-humans are conceived of, perceived, and enacted. Ingold writes that the shift from hunting to pastoralism among Eurasian reindeer herdsmen led to a change in human social relationships as well; there was a shift from a trusting and sharing community to a hierarchical community based on dominance strategies (Ingold 2000: 76). In inverse

fashion, I would suggest that at my field site there is a shift in human social relationships, as new members to the farm community move away from dominant relationships inherited from the mainstream Euro-American social system and into relationships of reciprocity modeled in the social world of the farm. That is to say that my field site is a place where people move from social relationships of domination to social relationships of trust and sharing through interacting with the horses and people of this close farm community.

Thus, by looking in greater detail at the five conceptual points that Jacques emphasized during my apprenticeship as a horse-trainer on his farm, my research uncovered that the ontological boundaries of human, animal and environment are blurred and that notions of selfhood are in constant flux for both humans and horses at my field site.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Conclusion:

By conducting an analysis based on a post-humanist flat-ontology as opposed to humanist hierarchical scale, my research shows how human-horse relationships at my field site defy categorical dichotomization in that horses, as sentient selves, occupy various slippery ontological positions. Horses are described variously as commodities, kinsmen, central figures, subjects and human extensions. They are claimed to affect research participants in 'life-affirming' ways they describe as 'therapeutic.' My research shows how relationships between humans and horses at my field site are based on trust and reciprocity. This adds new dimensions to Ingold's (2000: 61-76) analysis of "wild" and "domestic" as moving "from trust to domination." My field site has demonstrated itself to be a social world where people move from relationships of domination, inherited from the humanist frameworks in mainstream Euro-American society, to social relationships based on trust and reciprocity, modeled in the social world of the farm. Whether this should be considered to be due to undercurrents of local knowledge that developed historically in the region or as part of the larger new social movement of 'natural horsemanship' is yet to be determined. This social emergence may very well be the confluence of both a historical revival and new social change coming together. However, one thing is sure, this research has captured an instance of social movement as it happens. It has documented humans and horses in the process of personal transformation and social change occurring on the ground in contemporary Canada.

Furthermore, by using flat-ontology as an analytical vehicle to understand human-horse relationships at my field site in rural Quebec, my research shows that in both recent Occidental history and within contemporary Euro-American populations, there are views which support post-humanist paradigms of human-animal sociality and challenge dominant frameworks rooted in the humanist philosophy of the human transcendence of nature. From this, the benefits of using a flat-ontology for ethnographic inquiry, both as a theory and a method, provides us with a useful lens with which to make empirical observations about the world around us. It allows for an analysis that is free from the biases and dualisms inherent in polemic, hierarchic, scalar and humanist frameworks. It allows for alternative narratives of the world to emerge, and it aids in bridging epistemological and ethnic difference. My research implies that a flat-ontology may have the potential to bridge the epistemological chasm described by Nadasdy (2007), in the sense that it allows for new narratives of social order to emerge. This method may prove useful for anthropologists, in that it offers a productive way for radically different cosmologies to be understood and may allow for discordant epistemologies to engage in democratic dialogue in contemporary Canadian society and abroad.

Reflections on the ethnographic process

I first entered the field with the idea that I would be able to record the semiotic aspects of horse-training practices, as well as discover what lies “beneath interpretation” in the form of some kind of ‘pre-interpretive’ understanding. This research question was formulated because much of my anthropological training as an undergraduate and as a graduate student had taught me that the basic tenet of anthropology was ‘cultural relativism,’ in the sense that there is some kind of fundamental ‘nature’ that makes up physical reality and

then different human groups inscribe meaning on this nature through ‘culture.’

I arrived at my field site with the notion that, by conducting a semiotic phenomenology of horse-training, I would discover how cultural meaning had been inscribed on ‘The Canadian Horse’ – and what role this played in contemporary Canadian identity conceptions. However, both my theoretical foundations, and my pre-conceived ideas about what kind of data I would collect, were shattered after only a few weeks in the field.

The way I understand it, phenomenology is based on the idea that the ‘subject’ is some sort of stable ground from which to make perceptual observations about the world. However, the tremendous changes that took place in me – not only throughout the duration of my field work but also on a day-to-day basis – led me to conclude that the ‘subject,’ as a perceptual tool, is in constant flux. The phenomenal subject cannot provide any kind of consistent experiential data. Furthermore, the task of taking ‘pre-interpretive’ data in the form of perceptual experience and attempting to transform that into linear thought processes through written words was counter-intuitive, if not truly impossible.

I therefore dropped the phenomenological approach to my study, and began to focus on the different ways in which my research participants had described the human-horse experience to me. Sifting through my interview quotes, I began systematically coding metaphors that people used to describe their experiences. I then collected these metaphors into groups and made diagrams with the intention of conducting a modular analysis as described by A. Pietarinen (2011: 1-15), in his “Iconic Logic of Metaphors.” This exercise allowed me to see how preconceived categories such as ‘kin,’ ‘capital,’

'culture,' 'nature,' 'subject,' 'object,' 'human,' 'horse,' and 'person' do not have integral boundaries, and my diagrams began to resemble some sort of three-dimensional web. To further complicate my analysis, the ways in which the human-horse relationship was expressed to me by my research participants was paradoxical, and in constant flux. Horses were simultaneously described as kin and capital, pets and partners, persons and animals, subjects and objects, natural resources and lovers. But one thing seemed to be sure: Canadian Horses had very little, if anything, to do with notions of Canadian identity for my research participants.

As the preconceived categories for analysis fell apart, I searched for a way to make empirical statements about my research, and discovered the flat-ontology. Flat-ontologies, such as those described by Latour (2005) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) collapse the world into a single plane; a plane where man and animal, nature and culture, perception and interpretation all form aspects of the same democratic social world. The flat-ontology provided me with an accurate means of describing my field site as a place where bodies, human, animal and otherwise, inhabit a social world together. These bodies come together in various assemblages allowing for certain experiences and identities to emerge in a temporal space.

As my approach to my research data changed, I began to see my field site in a very different light. Instead of a complex set of abstractions, I began to see that horses had certain 'affects' on humans and vice-versa. I began to see that the human-horse relationship was about building bonds of trust. As I saw through my own experience of training a horse, this is a long and slow process. 'Domestication' being not so much about dominating the horse, but about learning how to read, understand and speak the

horse's language – both visual and verbal – and in turn teaching the horse to understand human language. My research participants describe this process as having certain life-affirming benefits that they call 'therapeutic.'

The voice of my key participant, Jacques, is of particular importance because he acts as a kind of 'world-bridger' for both human and horse participants of his program, assisting each human-horse partnership to grow in ways that nurture the qualities of trust, respect and reciprocity. Interestingly though, he describes his world as being 'horse-centric' in the sense that he doesn't work so much for the benefit of humans, but for the benefit of horses. Jacques's world is a 'post-human' world, in the sense that he does not consider the human to be of central importance, nor does he consider that humans have 'transcended' nature. Being a man who has worked with the land and with animals for most of his life, he views man, animal and land as being intertwined and interconnected in inseparable ways.

In addition to the basic practices involved in training a horse, many of the concepts that Jacques impressed upon me were more philosophical in nature. I believe that the reason Jacques imparted this kind of information to me was partially due to the fact that he had become a kind of paternal figure in my life and that he had the wish to impart knowledge, not just about horse-training, but with deeper philosophical implications.

I entered the field after the recent suicide of my own father, followed by the death of my grandmother and the loss of my partner. In this process, my grandmother's farm, which has been in my family since the early 1800's, was sold. I felt de-territorialized and alienated. Likewise, Jacques also suffered the loss of his father while I conducted field

research, in the wake of five boys who had recently grown-up and left home. He also struggled for most of his life to re-territorialize himself, since his inter-generational family farm had also been sold before he could take possession of it. Perhaps because the conditions were right, or perhaps because I followed him around day in and day out asking questions, as any good anthropologist would do in the field, we began to develop a close relationship that I would describe as paternalistic. He became not only my mentor as a horse-trainer, but also a kind of mentor for life.

Research limitations and questions for further study

Some of the weaknesses of this study lie in the fact I have not taken ‘power’ into consideration. For example, it could be argued that the reason that this community holds the values that it does, is that Jacques, being the owner of the farm and mentor of the apprentices, shapes the general experiences and perceptions of people and horses in the community. While Deleuze and Guattari (1987:8) do consider power in terms of “multiplicities,” with the idea that the greater the number of associations a body has the greater its potential to act in the world, the consideration of ‘power’ is beyond the scope of my analysis. Questions about power and its impact on perception or the communal consensus of values would be an interesting dimension for further study, which could conceivably be approached through Deleuze and Guattari’s “multiplicities.”

Furthermore, my study can be further critiqued on the basis that ‘domestic’ animals do not really have a choice when entering these supposedly ‘reciprocal’ relationships with humans, while humans have the option to engage or not to engage – thereby raising questions of agency. However, I will put forward the idea that, from this vantage point, Nadasdy’s (2007) piece about reciprocal relationships between hunter and

hunted can be critiqued in the same way. Both of these critiques arise from an analysis based on humanist thinking, approaching the research from an already defined framework of understanding and may obscure the actual views of research participants. For example, Nadasdy (2007) explains how hunter-gatherer communities consider that their prey give themselves to the hunter. Similarly, at my field site Jacques says, “if you succeed in gaining the trust of your horse, he will give you his heart and soul forever.” In this sense, my research is interested in documenting the perceptions of my research participants, and not in placing value judgments on their statements or experiences. Horses at my field site are not considered to be captive slaves, but as members of the family.

This is one of the limitations of a flat-ontology. It is not compatible with the kind of hierarchical thinking that dominates many of our interpretive processes. This problem is really at the heart of what Nadasdy is wrestling with, the interpretive ‘stale-mate’ that occurs when incompatible frameworks attempt to converse. My study demonstrates that the epistemological gap Nadasdy describes is not necessarily demarcated by ethnicity and can be found in our own backyard. This, I believe is an important area for further inquiry, which may help with cross-cultural understanding, inter-religious dialogues, and even an acceptance of the wide variety of sub-cultures and individual mind-states found in our own societies.

This ethnography, while taking into account my own personal corporeal experience and several training practices, relied heavily on interviews and conversations to get at the elements of experience of my research participants. I found that, in general, what my research participants described to me about their relationship to horses seemed to be in alignment with the general quality of their interactions with their horse. I think

an interesting study would be to follow a horse's journey through life, as an animal and as a commodified object, as in Kopytoff's (1986) "The Cultural Biography of Things: commoditization as process," in order to see more clearly the relationship between discourse and materiality in human-animal sociality.

Finally, one of the most interesting questions that I have been left with is whether this research has documented historical undercurrents of local knowledge or new social emergences that are part of a larger social movement of 'natural horsemanship,' or perhaps a coming together of the two. Whether or not this research is an instance of unchanged regional history, nostalgic historical revival or simply a local example that reflects changes in the human-horse relationship on a more global level is yet to be determined. An interesting way to further this research would be to look at if, and how, this local knowledge has come full circle – perhaps the old is new again?

As can be seen, my research has left me with more questions than answers, and several tensions remain unresolved. Questions of power and agency; network formation and identity flux; perceptual shifts and their relationship to health and happiness; knowledge production and social change could all take this study in new directions. It is my hope that the representations and interpretations of my own humble experiences, and the experiences of this farm community, will somehow aid in the development and use of the kinds of theories and methods that have the potential to bridge the rifts of epistemological differences that lead to inequality in this world.

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