ABSTRACT

Communicating in Silence:
(Re)balancing Human/Animal Dynamics through Performance

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Animals have come to find themselves in a subordinate position in their encounters with humans in dominant culture. Their perspectives are rarely recognized, and when they are acknowledged it is often only in a limited sense, a sense that only allows the given animal certain elements of self and perspective (and often only the elements that most directly benefit the human). Animals are expected to serve humans in a variety of manners, even when those animals are considered our partners and family. We (humans) have placed animals in these positions by forgetting (or never knowing) how to hear their stories and recognize their agency. A significant step towards redressing these relationships is to learn to “hear” and engage with the nonverbal speaking of animals, and to recognize their perspectives and work to understand them. For this to occur, humans need to be able to understand the ways that meaning is made without words through relationship, to recognize how the expressive action of performance “speaks” in interspecies contexts.

For the purposes of this study I am focusing my discussion on the exchange and potential of human/equine relationships, and on how meaning is co-created between species in this culturally specific context. The first chapter sets up the historical, theoretical, and scholarly contexts in which this work, on human/equine engagement and the performance of communication, is being positioned. The second chapter explores the ways that interspecies communication is predominantly discussed and understood in the equestrian community through looking at the methodologies of Natural Horsemanship and Equine-Facilitated Learning. The third chapter focuses on performance analysis to gain insights into the work of France’s Théâtre Zingaro and Canada’s Cavalia, drawing together all of the previous chapters’ discussions of language, performance, communication and agency, to explore how horses are made to mean on stage. The fourth chapter delves into the potential of improvisational performance for collaborating across difference in interspecies contexts. This chapter focuses on the practice-
based research project Playing in Silence, which invites musicians to improvise with horses in an open and unstructured space.
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Introduction: Animal Stories

Stories are not just heard; they are seen and felt, and even smelled.

The need for sound is often equated with the need for voice. But as theatre scholar Theresa May points out, “The absence of spoken words is not the absence of voice” (4). In fact, the absence of sound is not the absence of voice. Identifying an individual’s voice comes from not just what they say, but how they say it, how they embody their intentions, and how they position themselves in relation to the world around them; this non-verbal “voice” speaks louder than words alone will allow, and is present even when words are not. However, this voice is often not heard, especially when it is an animal doing the speaking—though speaking here is often silent and communicated through their embodied interactions—and a human who is meant to be receiving and listening. Human/animal scholars Lynda Birke and Jo Hockenhull explain, “Understanding relationships with animals is about listening to stories—both human and animal […] Emotions and attachments are crucial building blocks to these stories” (31). But how can these stories be heard, if the one who is supposed to be listening does not know how? How can these interspecies stories, which are the foundation of relationship, be recognized, celebrated, and shared when often only verbal stories are recognized as such, and many animals do not speak in words?

Animals have come to find themselves in a subordinate position in their encounters with humans in dominant culture. Their perspectives are rarely recognized, and when they are acknowledged it is often only in a limited sense, a sense that only allows the given animal certain elements of self and perspective (and often only the elements that most directly benefit the human). Animals are expected to serve humans in a variety of manners, even when those animals are considered our partners and family. Even our family animals are often expected to be second-class, where they are only allowed to communicate what we want them to, and where they are

1 Here I am using the term “animal” to refer to those species that humans engage with socially, primarily other mammals and birds. This application of performance may be relevant to interactions with other species, but that is outside the scope of this discussion. See the terminology section for a more extensive definition.
Talking Animals (Intro)

often punished for their less desirable thoughts and actions. Human/animal scholar Leslie Irvine writes that, “if people simply projected onto animals the qualities they wanted them to have, then any animal would make a good companion” (2). While this is true, this also does not mean that humans always see animals in all of their complexities, or recognize the variety of ways that they articulate self and perspective, or that projection is not (often) part of the interaction. In the interspecies community in which we live, humans have claimed power by ignoring, overlooking, and refusing to recognize the voices and agency of the other members of the group. As David Williams has expressed, “Animals—‘trapped in a place of endless misrecognition,’ like all of patriarchal humanism’s others—have often been defined in terms of lack: of reason, memory, imagination, free will, conscience, language, and so on” (30). This ignorance of knowing, and reductionist understanding of these brilliantly complex others, have left humans to ignore the nonverbal talking of animals and to be oblivious to many rich opportunities for connection, discovery, and learning—which has allowed us to continue to use them and abuse them as we please.

We (humans) have placed animals in these positions by forgetting (or never knowing) how to hear their stories and recognize their agency. Animals are lacking these key aspects of self only in so far as we (humans) do not allow them these attributes, and/or do not recognize (or know how to recognize) their stories, offers, and impacts. Neither voice nor agency can be given or created by external influences; they must be claimed, and claimed by the individual. As Williams explains, “It seems an animal’s ‘dumbness’ is really the measure of our ‘deafness’”

I use the term “brilliant” here, and in other places in this work, in order to evoke a positive, expansive understanding of animal otherness. My use of the word draws on the various definitions of “brilliant,” in order to suggest that their otherness is bright (positive), as well as to evoke notions of their otherness holding its own impressive and outstanding aspects. Often animal alterity is seen as a lack, or suggests a less-than-human understanding of their differences, where I choose to take a different view, a “more-than-human” view, as David Abram has named the other-than-human world, and to celebrate this difference. As David Williams writes, “If the ‘animal’ comprises a constitutive outside of the ‘human’, (how) can this limit-horizon be experienced as ‘not that at which something stops but...that from which something beings its presencing’?” (29).
As no matter how loudly an individual claims voice and agency, if those around them to continue to be deaf to their way of speaking, or refuse to acknowledge the impact or possibility of their agency, then these messages become lost, and the individual is still left at a disadvantage. Philosopher David Abram asks, “How could we ever have become so deaf to these other voices that nonhuman nature now seems to stand mute and dumb, devoid of any meaning besides that which we choose to give it?” (*Spell of the Sensuous* 91). Despite all of our deafness to animal ways of speaking and being in the world, as Derrida suggests, it is not about “giving speech back” (48), but rather about learning to think about it differently, and to recognize all of the ways that one may speak without words.

What those in privileged positions, in this case humans, can do is to begin to recognize, and create a space in which animal agency and voice can be acknowledged, asserted, and then supported, aiding animal individuals in (re)claiming their own empowerment. David Abram focuses on reacquainting the human world with “a mode of awareness that precedes and underlies the literate intellect, to a way of thinking and speaking that strives to be faithful not to

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3 I reference these acts as a (re)claiming, and a (re)balancing (as in the title of this work), to nod to the fact that there are different levels of understanding and engagement with each of these ideas. Some animals may have been trying to claim these aspects all along, others may be trying for the first time, depending on their histories and experiences with humans. Some humans may have a long history of trying to engage with animals from a respectful position, others may be discovering these approaches for the first time. Often, in my experience, it is a combination of the two, where there are certain aspects that are well established and understood, and others that are emerging. This places the experience as somewhere between a balancing (as in a striving for a balance based on new concepts or current understandings) and a rebalancing (as in a reaching back to previous beneficial understandings of the relationship and bringing it forward into the present) of the dynamics. Children are often far more inclusive of animal voices and perspectives, which may be where the rebalancing is coming from. This also speaks to the notion that balance is a concept that is always becoming, and not a fixed state. So, what may once have been thought of as a mutually beneficial (balanced) exchange between humans and animals, often is then recognized to be skewed in favour of the human and require a renegotiation (rebalancing).
the written record but to the sensuous world itself, and to the other bodies or beings that surround us” (Spell of the Sensuous 264). For in this sensuous engagement with the world is the possibility for animals to once again be recognized as kin, as those who share this world with us, not as subservient groups, but as those who we rely on, and who share in shaping our existence, just as we share in shaping theirs. Our human denial (or diminishment) of this connection has hurt not only animals, but ourselves, in that we have limited our knowledge(s) and learning(s) largely to our own species, and to seeing the world through only our own eyes. We may learn about other animals, but we have largely neglected the possibilities of learning with and from them, by overly privileging verbal forms of knowledge/speaking and engaging in hierarchical understandings of the animal kingdom, which places humans in a position of superiority. We have diminished the understandings of animals as individuals with their own valuable way of knowing/being and expertise. As Una Chaudhuri states, “the process of reclaiming our close relation to animality requires an interest in animals as themselves” (39). In reclaiming our own animality, recognizing our connections and likenesses with animals, and through having interest in “animals as themselves,” is the potential to (re)discover the possibilities of interspecies exchange, creating opportunities to remove the marginality of animal perspectives and hear animal voices. Chaudhuri goes on to say, that “the animal is the latest figure to be enlisted in the ongoing exploration of identity that has defined progressive politics in the past several decades— the new critical animal discourse is targeting ‘speciesism’ as feminism targeted sexism and civil rights targeted racism” (39). Like these other areas of marginalization, reductive understandings of animals need to be challenged, as they limit the possibilities for animals and for the interspecies community in which we live.

“The time appears ripe for a recognition of animals as complex, living beings,” human/animal scholar Tracy Warkentin writes, “rather than as two-dimensional symbols, convenient metaphors, and passive objects of study” (102). Warkentin goes on to argue that what is required for this recognition is an “ethical praxis of paying attention,” but that this practice “requires much more than mere politeness or mildly observing […] Rather, the kind of attentiveness we are concerned with here involves one’s whole bodily comportment and a recognition that embodiment is always in relation to social others, both animal and human” (102). While I fully agree with Warkentin’s argument that we need to work towards an
attentiveness towards animals, and to recognize them in all of their complexity, how does one come to engage in this form of fully embodied attentiveness? What tools are needed to be able to perform this attentiveness and not merely fall into the trap of projection? How does one pay attention to a radically different other, and hear and see them accurately?

As I argue in this dissertation, in order to be able to see “animals as complex, living beings,” to acknowledge their perspectives in all of their intricate nuances, and to engage in this form of attentiveness one needs to be able to understand the ways that meaning is made without words through relationship, to recognize how the expressive action of performance speaks in interspecies contexts. It is through performance that a shared mode of exchange is found between humans and animals, one which recognizes and celebrates animal ways of knowing and being in the world. These ways do shift and change depending on the cultural context: what spatial dynamics mean to a dog, are not the same as what they mean to a horse (and a wild horse and a domestic horse will differ as well). The modes remain the same, but the meaning of an action or exchange may shift with each species and individual (which is also true of language and human/human exchanges). As human/animal scholars Anita Maurstad, Dona Davis, and Sarah Cowles write, “These are naturalcultural [sic] practices where mental and bodily performances matter in the species communication” (325). Within these contexts, the foundation of expressive action making meaning remains constant, creating an opportunity, through a shared mode of exchange (performance), to learn about another through critically engaging with these nonverbal languages, while recognizing the culturally specific contexts in which they occur. Focusing on performance in animal/human interactions offers the prospect of hearing animal voices and speaking in return.

In contexts where words cease to mean (such as in working with animals), meaning becomes dominantly created through the “expressive behaviour” of performance (Taylor xvi). Performance here is referring to the combined use of body language (including spatial dynamics, gesture, movement, and breath), resonance (including affect, emotion, vibrations, and physical projections/energy), and sound (other than words) in order to create meaning and communicate amongst two or more individuals (human, non-human animal, etc.). While this performance also speaks in verbal contexts, these layers of communication often take a backseat to the words being said, leaving them to inform primarily on a subconscious level. However, in contexts
where performed nonverbal communication is privileged, these aspects are used in a conscious and deliberate manner to evoke specific understandings and engage in the give and take of conversation in order to create shared meaning. While sound (other than words) can be an important aspect of this communication depending on the species, this form of communication is often privileged by humans, as it most closely resembles our own word-based speaking, so for the purposes of the discussion I will be focusing on the less recognized, but equally important (and at times more important for certain species), silent aspects of communication, body language and resonance. It is through increasing human comprehension of how all of the aspects of performance make meaning in animal/human contexts that animal voices may be heard, opening up a myriad of interspecies possibilities, from recognizing individual perspectives and nuances to collaboration, amongst others.

For the purposes of this study I am focusing my discussion on the exchange and potential of human/equine relationships. While the performances that I am speaking of make meaning in most (and perhaps all) human/animal contexts, and I (and my students) have explored this meaning making in reference to dogs, cats, squirrels, rabbits, birds, and many others, each of these contexts are culturally contingent. While the performances engage the same elements, in that body language, resonance, and sound all create meaning in each of these human/animal contexts, the meaning is not fixed, and differs according to species, and to some degree according to the individual. In order to avoid overly generalizing and suggesting that all animals are the same, I focus my analysis on the equestrian world and how meaning is made through performance in reference to humans engaging with domesticated horses. Speaking of all horses, even all domesticated horses, is still of course a generalization, as each horse (as I stress throughout) is a unique individual, so whenever possible I reference specific individuals whom I have worked with or observed personally.

**Human/Animal Relationships**

Many humans seek relationships with animals due to a desire for a unique partnership, but settle for control of, or shared proximity with, the chosen animal. They settle for this baseline relationship for a myriad of reasons: they have been conditioned to believe that this is the, so called, correct positioning for animals in relation to humans through the influence of patriarchal
humanist ideology; they have been told that this is all that is possible, that it is impossible to get to know another animal, as animals are too radically different from us (humans) and/or that there is nothing to get to know as animals are merely collections of instincts; or because they (humans) have forgotten (or have never known) how to consciously communicate without words, and therefore cannot recognize an individual animal’s voice and agency. To many, a dog is a dog, is a dog—they are defined by the characteristics of their breed, and that is the end of the story. But in truth species and/or breed specifics are merely the beginning, the beginning of getting to know another individual, another animal. Beyond those broad species/breed characteristics are the unique flares of the individual, the original ways that a given person (human or animal) brings together their species-defined attributes, adds their own original perspective, and builds their own experience of the world. As human/animal scholar Mark Bekoff writes, “many people do not make the effort to honour animals’ sense of self, and consequently deprive themselves of a rich and deeply satisfying relationship” (Forward x). A thoroughbred may be built to run, but that does not mean that they will necessarily want to. To stop at that breed definition is to miss out on the brilliant possibilities of the individual. Rather than stopping with generalized information, or accepting the textbook definition of an animal and how they (should) behave, there is another way of approaching understanding another animal, another way of viewing an interspecies relationship, and that is to read every movement, every gesture, every feel as the communicative act that it is.

The various ways that humans have come to marginalize animals has begun to be challenged across academic disciplines through the introduction of Human-Animal Studies (HAS), which explores the relationships and interconnections between animals and humans, and the work of scholars such as Kenneth Shapiro, Frans de Waal, Donna Haraway, Una Chaudhuri, and many others. Much of this literature does the significant, and needed, work of unpacking how humans think about, frame, and depict animals, and how these structures participate in the continued marginalization of animals. While many HAS scholars, depending on their discipline, also conduct field research and engage personally with their subjects, this work is often aimed at learning about the given animal, rather than with/from them. Within theatre and performance, the academic discourse on interspecies performance tends to revolve around talking about animals, but rarely fully engages in dialogue with the discussed animal in order to learn with/from them,
from their perspectives through performance-based research. Concentrating on performance in interspecies relations demands that the focus remain on the experience in the moment, offering a common ground and equal foundation for exchange (for both horse and human). This is a position that is notably lacking within human/animal studies in the humanities. In this way, the human is still positioned as the holder of knowledge, and the reciprocity of the engagement is often diminished or overlooked.

In this work, I aim to acknowledge and appreciate the lineage of HAS and all that it has come to offer by way of challenging and breaking down the normalized, yet marginalizing, ways that we understand and frame animals, while also drawing on the work of practitioners/clinicians, who have spent their lives learning with/from animals and applying this knowledge directly to their interactions, and training others to recognize animal perspectives through first-person engagements. This work exists on the edges of a collection of established fields, including performance studies, human/animal studies, and communication studies and draws on literature from a vast array of disciplines and theories, including phenomenology, affect, improvisation, and animal sciences, creating intersections between these disciplines and areas of inquiry.

The current literature on horses and human/equine engagement tends to exist in three separate areas, which only peripherally cross over or draw on one another, rarely offering a complete picture of human/equine interactions. These areas are popular literature on training; scientific literature on equine behaviour, abilities, perception, and veterinary medicine; and ethnographic and anthropological studies of human/equine relationships and interactions. There is a significant wealth of popular writing on equestrian training (Robert M. Miller, Pat Parelli, Rick Lamb, Monty Roberts, the Dorrances, Carolyn Resnick, etc.), which focuses on how to get the most out of your horses in riding and ground training through “gentle” methods. Anita Maurstad, Dona Davis, Sarah Cowles, and Kari Brandt offer brief, but cogent, studies on the co-domestication, and co-creation of language in equine/human engagement. Lynda Birke offers numerous studies of human/horse interactions and the cultural contexts in which these relationships are shaped. Carol A. Saslow and Stephen Budiansky explore the perception, cognition, and evolution of horses. Erica Fudge, Frans De Waal, Leslie Irvine, and Cary Wolfe offer a complex and comprehensive analysis of the hierarchical underpinnings that have created
the imbalance between humans and animals, and explore our relationships with animals. David Abram goes into depth on the possibilities of communication and communing with the more-than-human world from a phenomenological perspective. John Durham Peters, Kenneth Shapiro, and Susan Leigh Foster explore how to embody communication, and speak across difference (though each in very different contexts). And Una Chaudhuri, Theresa May, Michael Peterson, and David Williams delve into how animals mean and are read on stage, especially when their performances are framed within a human-centric narrative.

This thesis draws on each of these areas, theories, and experiences in order to unpack the relationship between humans and horses challenging the conceptual underpinnings of the relationship that keeps the horse in a position of serving (though narratives of “partnership” are common), while exploring the importance of nonverbal communication in interspecies interactions, and how meaning is created in this context without words through performance.

My position most closely aligns with scholars such as Warkentin, Maurstad et al., Brandt, Irvine, and Shapiro, who all explore how the body is used to sense another, and who argue, in various ways, that it is through our interactions with animals, which are built out of relationship, that elements of animal selves and perspectives are made available. Warkentin proposes that a “praxis of attentiveness can inspire practical applications of ethical interactions between species” (101). Maurstad, Davis and Cowles engage a “performativity focus” in order to explore how “horses and humans are co-beings, becoming in the practices they are engaged in, practices where sensations and emotions, as well as attention, cognition and affect, are crucial ingredients” (324). Brandt argues that the “body [is] a vehicle for expression” for “co-created language systems” between humans and horses (300). Irvine states that “our interaction with animals makes various aspects of animal selfhood available to us (2). And Shapiro, who was one of the first HAS scholars to start this whole trend and interest recognizing animal perspectives, suggests the use of “kinesthetic empathy,” in which one “empathize[s] with the motor intention or attitude” of an animal in order to gain insights to their world (185). Though none of these scholars are working with performance studies, each of them is in fact writing about performance and its importance for recognizing animal ways of being in the world, their perspectives and knowledges. Here I follow in the paw and hoof prints that they have learned from, and come to write about, and add an overt discussion of how this form of meaning making occurs through
performance, aiming to break down—or at least begin to break down, as this is an ongoing process—how one can hear and speak (or be attentive or empathetic) without words through performance in interspecies contexts. Part of this discussion also involves delving into the cultural issues that have often made humans deaf to the voices of animals, and/or unwilling to engage with them as agentive subjects, rather than passive objects for human use.

**Why Horses?**

I have chosen human/equine interactions as my area of focus both because of my own personal history working and training in this field, which allows me multivalent understandings of this cultural exchange and context, and because of some of the unique aspects of this partnership: horses are a liminal species (though domesticated they exist somewhere between companion species and wild animal), which allows for both a connection with humans and a useful heightening of their otherness that can shed light some of the complexities of

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4 I am a lifelong equestrian, having spent more than twenty-five years consistently working with horses and training in a myriad of disciplines and contexts. I grew up training in a large and well-respected hunter/jumper equestrian facility in Southern Ontario. Although I have competed in show jumping in both Canada and Ireland, my primary interest and focus has always been on training: working with young horses, corrective riding, and working with “problem”/hypersensitive horses. I have only “owned” one horse, Katrina, and have spent most of my equestrian career riding for other people. I have run a grand prix riding facility for a season in Ireland, been head wrangler on a massive working and guest ranch in British Columbia, taught riding lessons on and off for more than a decade, and in 2008 my horse Katrina and I crossed Canada from coast to coast. Though as any equestrian knows, this laundry list of accomplishments says little about my actual knowledge, as all of these tasks can be accomplished without critical engagement or a nuance of exchange between horse and human. Hopefully my expertise and experience as a critically engaged horseperson, committed to an expansive understanding of this interspecies interaction, comes through in my writing and how I describe the interactions of which I speak, as there is little that can be claimed in text, beyond this, that can truly establish my credentials in this area of the field.
human/animal relationships; they are animals of prey (when many of our other dominant interspecies partnerships are with predators, such as dogs and cats), which offers certain abilities and expertise that aide in demonstrating the various levels of this performance-based exchange; and because of all of the diverse ways that this partnership has manifested throughout history, and the extensive literature on both horses on their own and in equine/human interactions, such as learning to “speak horse” (Birke, “Learning to Speak Horse” 226).

When I speak of horses here, and throughout this dissertation, I am referring to domesticated horses who are generally, in modern contexts, used for sport and leisure pursuits, though some have a formal working relationship with humans such as in the context of working ranch horses and police horses. Each discipline and training methodology involves different (but overlapping) understandings of the human/equine relationship and the, so called, correct positioning of horses in reference to this. Some recognize horses from a fairly tool-based perspective, and others offer more of a companion species understanding. While most disciplines speak of some sort of partnership between humans and horses, how this partnership is characterised differs with each individual and setting. Horses domesticated in these contexts are different from horses that are wild, or where there is a more thorough integration of human and equine lives, such as we see in some nomadic cultures. Most domestic horses are not granted the privilege of having a stable, well-balanced herd throughout their lives. Herds are manipulated by humans, and are structured as much (if not more) for human as for equine needs. Domesticated horses tend to be made by their humans to move properties and change herds, and many are not allowed to live in direct community at all, only having contact with other horses across stall walls and paddock fences, due to certain performance and property demands. This structure often creates further emphasis on the human/equine relationship, in that at times that relationship is more stable and consistent than any equine/equine relationship that they may have. In these domesticated contexts humans are generally implicated in all areas of a horse’s life, from herd (or lack of herd) management, to nutrition, training, and socialization.

As Maurstad et al. write, “we can say that the species intra-acting creates a horse-with-human that is different from a horse in the wild, and a human-with-horse that is different from a human without one” (334). In contexts where co-domestication occurs, such as with humans and horses, each is affected and changed through learning to be with the other, and the give and take
that implies. And yet, as Maurstad et al. explain, “Every new relationship between horse and human is a new meeting between species, where trust and rules of conduct must be established” (333), making this relationship a constant becoming, which ebbs and flows with the influence of both individuals, and where each is changed through their experiences with the other.

Horses hold a special space in human perceptions in that they are a liminal species, they are not fully companion-species, in that they do not live in our homes and share our intimate spaces with us like dogs and cats do, and they are not fully wild animals separate from us and foreign to the human sphere of daily life. According to anthropologist Kirrilly Thompson, “symbolically the horse can be considered both wild and tame and apparently never established in either one or the other state” (228). In this way, horses offer a bridge between humans and the more-than-human world, in that to work with a horse demands that you learn to sense the world (at least partially) from their perspective, offering insights into moments of companion species connection, and moments of the fight and flight of wild animals, who are often too removed and foreign to human experience to easily invite understanding. This lack of stabilized tameness increases the recognition of equine ways of being in the world, as they have not been so fully moulded by human culture has to be seamlessly integrated into the human spheres of life.

As a prey animal—the most prominent human/animal relationships are generally with predators like cats and dogs—horses have certain abilities and sensitivities that allow them to more acutely read performances at a distance, and respond to subtle shifts in embodied messages and environmental stimuli. Horses have been chosen as teachers to train humans to better understand nonverbal communication and social dynamics (through practices such as Equine-Facilitated Learning and other equine-facilitated wellness practices) because of their expertise as flight animals and animals of prey, who have to read the performances of other animals at a distance in order to survive (Kohanov, Riding Between xii). They need to know if a predator is hungry, or merely passing by, and adjust their own actions in response (Kohanov, “Messages Behind Emotion”). If a predator is of no danger, then why waste the energy of fleeing? Horses, as prey animals, live in the moment and are alert to minute shifts in their environment, whereas predators tend to plan for the future (a goal-oriented perspective) and plot out where their next meal is likely to come from (Kohanov, Riding Between 81); each foundation creates different ways of engaging in the world. Horses’ lives depend on their ability to accurately understand the
performances of radically different others, such as reading humans or other predatory animals. Although domestic horses generally do not have to contend with these dangers in the same manner, their ways of being in the world still reflect the importance of having a keen alertness to their environment and perceiving the performances of other beings who cross their paths and share their spaces.

Horses have also been chosen for this work of training humans because they are highly social animals, with relationships being an important aspect of their societies, and one that is transferable to engaging with humans. As historian and science author Stephen Budiansky explains, horses have a “basic instinct toward bonding with other individuals,” as this is what keeps their herds together (83). An important aspect of this bonding is the capacity to recognize individuals, as an “ability to form bonds is meaningless if you cannot tell who you are forming the bond with” (Budiansky 85). EFL clinician Angela Dunning, of Equine Reflections in the UK, writes, “As herd animals, horses are highly social, making relationships key to them and as animals that are preyed upon in nature, they have retained a highly developed ability to sense changes in the stance and arousal levels of other herd members; an ability they easily transfer to interactions with humans” (“Why Horses”). Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence explains, that the “potentiality for dynamic interaction between people and horses arises from the social nature of both the equine and human species, which allows the development of a unique form of complementariness” (174). It is this complementariness that has contributed to the co-domestication that has occurred between horses and humans for over 6,000 years (Budiansky 42), and which makes them prime candidates for recognizing how meaning is made in relationship through performance, as this is an important aspect of their own societies. Lynda Birke explains that, “Given our long coexistence with dogs and horses in particular, it is not surprising that these animals have abilities to recognise [sic] and pay attention to our gestures and emotions […] how we interact is shaped partly by how much we attend to one another in that moment and also by our shared histories” (“Meeting Points” 55).

The equestrian world has spent a significant amount of time, perhaps the most of any human/animal pairing, breaking down this interspecies exchange and exploring how meaning is made in this context. Between the herd behaviour based analysis and training methods offered by Natural Horsemanship [sic] and clinicians such as Monty Roberts, and the understandings of
how emotion makes meaning in relationship, and other resonance-based aspects of communication, offered by the work of Equine-Facilitated Learning, and clinicians such as Linda Kohanov (more on these methods in chapter two), the equestrian world has spent considerable time and effort exploring and breaking down how to communicate with another animal: how to, as it is often expressed, “speak horse.” And yet the equestrian world has also largely missed the mark when it comes to fully recognizing equine perspectives, falling into the trap of using these interspecies conversations to manipulate horses for human means. This does not empower horses, or create a balanced partnership; it merely keeps them in their (so called) place with less resistance and force.

In the equestrian world, much has been done to remove a significant portion of the violence from the relationships of humans and horses, but this does not mean that the horses are empowered, or that their perspectives are being recognized. Partially this is due to the fear that to recognize equine perspectives would mean to stop using them in the ways that we currently do: to stop riding them, to stop competing with them, and to cease working with them in general (for pleasure or otherwise). But what if this is not true? What if marginalization just leads to resentment, anxiety (which leads to tension and injury), and an only partially willing partner (which is not a partnership at all)? By not working to empower our horses, we are limiting the potential of the relationship, and keeping it shy of being able to create a true partnership (which is generally the sought-after ideal that draws humans into equine activities to begin with). If (and when) we have treated humans in the way that we treat horses, limiting their agency and largely reducing their perspectives, while not necessarily legally abusive, it does not create the most confident or well-rounded individuals. If individuals are not able to express themselves in a relationship, and are only expected to serve, then they are unlikely to give their all to that relationship or to work to enhance its potential. By not engaging in conversation with our horses,

5 I use “our horses” to refer to the horses that we work with, rather than a claim to ownership, because while we may pay the bills for horses in our care we do not own them. They are individuals in their own right, and owning another sentient being is unethical, and a skewing of the relationship dynamics.
we are ignoring their contributions, diminishing their agency, and limiting the potential of the engagement and/or relationship.

Horses figure prominently in popular culture, representing what Una Chaudhuri and Shonni Enelow refer to as the “cultural animal unconscious, a web of ideas and images circulating around us, offering clarifications, mystifications, and inspirations” (3). Anyone who has seen an inspirational family film about horses (such as Seabiscuit, Flicka, or Secretariat) is familiar with the mystic appeal that is spun around horses to sell these films, and a variety of horsey paraphernalia that goes with them. The framing of the horses in these films overrides the actual individual and replaces it with a money making ideal—the horse as a magical partner who can heal your pain, read your mind, and make all of your dreams come true. Stephen Budiansky writes that, “horses have been enveloped in human dreams, myths, ambitions, and sentiment for so long that the story we have come to think of as theirs is often but a distorted reflection of our own desires, and then not always our most noble desires” (1). What is missing in this dream is the actual horse: the complex individual who has their own ideas, opinions, and ways of being that may be significantly different from what the human envisioned. There are two ideas being sold in these depictions of horses: 1) a horse that will obediently do everything you want (and love it), and 2) a connected partnership. These two notions are at odds, in that for the partnership to be possible both perspectives need to be recognized and considered. This means listening to everything a horse has to say, not merely the convenient bits that are what one is hoping to hear. If uncompromising obedience is what is sought, then a genuine partnership is unlikely, as only one member of the team’s perspective is deemed valid. Otherwise what is left is the common human/animal dynamic of human projection, in which the horse submits to the human’s will, and the narrative of connection is claimed, but not enacted.

To make a genuine partnership a reality the messiness of the relationship needs to be recognized, as no two individuals are ever going to agree all of the time. For it to be a full partnership both partners’ perspectives need to be considered; a partnership does not mean that one commands and the other does. However, this unbalanced understanding of partnership has become a common trope in human/equine relationships. This equestrian relationship has been billed by some, often proudly, as a “75/25 split of control” or as a “benevolent dictatorship,” where “care” and “protection” are traded for “absolute obedience” (Miller and Lamb 118).
Despite this domineering terminology, narratives of connection and partnership are often spun right alongside this understanding. However, if a human was on the receiving end of the 25% of control, or from whom absolute obedience was being expected, “partnership” or “connection” would unlikely be the words most readily used to describe the interaction.

This incongruity between objective and execution connects with Lauren Berlant’s notion of “cruel optimism.” In Berlant’s terms “optimism” is defined as “attachment,” in that “all attachment is optimistic, if we describe optimism as the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying something that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of, an object, project, concept, or scene” (1). To Berlant this attachment becomes cruel when the thing that ignites the sense of possibility actually blocks the ability to achieve it (2). While Berlant is talking about a very different context, the promises of a social-democratic society, this notion is useful for thinking about our relationships with animals. In these relationships, the ideal that is sought, and the methods that are employed to achieve it, are often completely at odds with one another, and directly hinder the ability to reach the goal. This optimistic attachment is at the heart of the equestrian relationship, as horses start off as an ideal that the human longs to be close to, but if the horse stays as an ideal forged and defined in the mind of the human, then the realities of the actual relationship and the individual are never recognized, and the relationship remains a one-sided myth.

The cultural understandings of horses, or how horses figure in the “cultural animal unconscious,” offer the dream of a simple, but extraordinary, interspecies connection that diminishes and overrides the actual possibility (which may be more interesting/fulfilling in reality, but likely differently interesting/fulfilling). Horses are constantly contending with the results of this cultural framing, as many humans are so caught up in this possibility that they cannot see the unique individual that stands before them, leading into the cruel aspect of this optimistic attachment. This optimism “become[s] cruel,” Berlant explains, “only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially” (Cruel Optimism 1). In this case the dream of connections actually impedes the ability to connect. The human starts with an unrealistic understanding of this partnership, in which every desire of the human is inherently the desire of the horse, and rather than adjusting this understanding many trainers set out to make it a reality. And while it is possible to condition a horse to do everything
that a human asks of them without question, it is unlikely that this dynamic will produce an expansive partnership. Dictatorship and connected partnership rarely go hand-in-hand, as one relies on obedience, and the other on compromise and understanding.

The desire of this connection, and the tools offered by trainers and clinicians to get there, which often do not recognize horses as complex individuals, directly hinders the ability to create connected partnerships. These tools favour the human’s perspective, and are focused on achieving the human’s goal with little consideration for what the horse may want. The horse may be completely adored by the human, but often the humans are not taught how to listen to the horse, recognize them as a unique individual, and take their views into consideration. Ignoring the agency, opinions, and interests of an equine partner is not likely to create the bond that many equestrians long for, or at least start out longing for. The methods of the mainstream riding world are often at odds with the goal of a film worthy interspecies relationship—like Katy and Flicka (Flicka), or any of the other numerous “magical” horse/human bonds depicted in film and literature—that bring together two unlikely partners and creates a fabulous bond that allows them to exceed the sum of their parts. If the objective is to train a horse to do the human’s bidding, then many of the current nonviolent techniques will likely get the job done. But if one is seeking a true partnership, and one longs for an equine partner that wants to be with you, enjoys working with you, and who can offer you a different perspective from your human interactions, then that takes an ability to recognize your horse for who they are, be able to see their contributions, and support their agency. It takes a nuance of exchange, not dominance and control. Otherwise the methods, which create a complacent horse, become an obstacle to achieving the real goal of interspecies engagement: partnership and connection.

In order for the ambition of partnership to become a reality humans need to learn how to recognize individual equine perspectives; not only how to speak horse, but more importantly how to listen; and for equestrian training to actively recognize all of the aspects of each animal’s experience, the physical, mental, and emotional components. And as I argue in this dissertation in order to be able to recognize equine (and other animal) perspectives one needs to understand how meaning is made without words through performance, and be willing to challenge the dominant understandings of human/equine relationships which place humans in a hierarchical position of power, and which encourage dominance and control.
Terminology

Animal

While “animal” is a fairly broad term referring to “any living creature, including human[s]” or “[a] living organism which feeds on organic matter, typically having specialized sense organs and a nervous system and able to respond rapidly to stimuli” ("Animal, n." OED), this is often not what is colloquially meant by the word. As Erica Fudge writes, “Animals present a challenge to humans. They are both similar to and different from us. That is, they are like us—they form bonds, communicate with each other, some of them, like some of us, even manage monogamy—but they are simultaneously completely lost to us” (7). Though humans are technically animals, part of the animal kingdom, as Fudge suggests, we (humans) often position ourselves outside of this definition as a distinct category unto ourselves, and are constantly seeking ways of distinguishing “us” (humans) from “them” (animals). We are both part of this category and stand separate from it in our attempts to define and understand these animal others. In her book Animal, Fudge uses the term “to refer to creatures that are not human” (160). However, this is not explained until the conclusion, yet is clearly understood and established throughout, as this is such a common understanding of the term.

While some scholars choose to use the term “non-human animal” to refer to all of the animal others, the dominant convention within the field (Human/Animal Studies) is to use the common understanding of animal, meaning an animal other than a human. In this work, I choose to use “animal” in this way, not in order to suggest that humans are outside of this group, as much of my discussion is based on using the similarities and connections between humans and horses (and other animals) in order to offer a way into understanding them, but for the sake of simplicity. To continuously refer to non-human animals and human animals becomes overly wordy, and at times confusing, as referring to humans as animals in this way is not common; to only refer to non-human animals and humans (rather than human animals) would continue to reinforce the divide, by defining animals based on their relation to humans, rather than through their own merits. Fudge poses the question, “Does the ‘nonhuman’ aspect of this new nomenclature enhance the status of animals, or merely reinforce the sense that the primary creature of research is always the human, with the animal distinguished from this originary term with a designation of ‘non,’ not being?” (161). In this way, using “animal” (rather than
“nonhuman animal”) can also be perceived as an expansive term, in a similar vein to the “more-than-human world” (rather than “other-than-human world”), by suggesting a presence that is equally valuable, yet differently orientated in the world, and with each animal holding their own unique positioning in the interspecies community in which we live.

In the context of this dissertation, I am also using the term “animal” to refer to “creatures that are not human” (Fudge 160), but am also engaging the further understanding of the word, which speaks to those species that humans engage with socially, primarily other mammals and birds. “In this sense ‘animal’ is understood to refer to other animals, animals excluding humans, and often is used to just refer to other mammals” (‘Animal.” Merriam-Webster). The animals that I am thinking of when I speak of the possibilities of performance-based interactions are the animals which share similar social structures with humans, and who tend to invite a certain amount of recognition and connection. Though each animal has their own ways of being in the world, and will have different points of connection and divergence from human ways, there is enough aspects of kinship to invite understanding and exchange. While the discussion of performance-based meaning can be applied to understanding animals outside of these relationships, as is done in behavioural analysis, here I am speaking of interspecies performance as an exchange and a communicative act, rather than as a tool for observation. I am using the term “animal” to refer to those individuals who most readily engage in these interspecies relationships. The more closely aligned the animal is to the spheres of human life—whether that means as a companion animal who shares one’s home, or the squirrels and birds that frequent one’s yard and feeders—the more likely the human is to recognize the other’s performance and perspective, and the more interest the animal is likely to have in the human and this form of performance-based exchange.

I am primarily thinking about those animals that humans already have a close relationship with, and who have a mutual interest in the interaction, such as companion animals and other domesticated animals, as respect for the animals means not forcing an exchange, but looking for invitations and recognizing offers. However, I have also employed these performance-based understandings to recognizing how my own presence means in the company of wild animals that cross my path and engage with my presence—such as rabbits, squirrels, deer, raccoons, etc.—and I employ this performance-based learning to discover more about our connections, their
understanding of me, their personal perspectives, and the communities that we share. This is not to say that this application and understanding of performance is not relevant to interactions with other species, it may very well be, but that is outside the scope of this discussion.

*Resonance*

Throughout this work I have chosen to use the term “resonance” to refer to the invisible aspects of nonverbal communication, the aspects that are felt, such as emotion, affect, empathy, energies, and sound (such as sonic resonances and tone), but which are not easily pinned down and are often difficult to demarcate and explain. My choice of term draws heavily on Equine-Facilitated Learning clinician Linda Kohanov’s understanding of “emotional resonance,” though I expand my use of “resonance” to include all forms of nonverbal communication that affect us—which extend beyond what is often thought of as purely emotional. In Kohanov’s experience emotion works as a sense organ; however, as Kohanov explains it, “this sense organ does not function at the skin level of touch, but as an internal excitation brought about by resonance—much like sympathetic strings resonate to an outside sound even though they have not been struck or bowed directly” (“The Message”). According Kohanov, “emotion function[s] [in her experience] as a tangible energetic force. Like a sound or smell that travels through the air, invisible yet powerful and full of information nonetheless, emotion emanates from each and every one of us and can actually be picked up by others in our general vicinity at a physical level” (“The Message”). This understanding of resonance also speaks to David Abram’s concept of a sensuous, sensing body, that engages with the world through a myriad of embodied ways. Abram writes, “perception is nothing other than this open-ended relationship—the active allurement of my body by a sapling or a stretch of river, or by a crumbling wall of an old

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I speak of “embodied ways,” “sensual expression,” and “speaking bodies,” amongst other “embodied” references, not to reinforce the Cartesian divide of mind and body, as all expressions and experiences that are perceived as originating in the “mind” are also connected to the “body” (and vice versa), but to draw attention to these forms of knowing and speaking that are marginalized in comparison to the verbally literate aspects of our thoughts and communication.
riverside mill—and the consequent reply of my limbs and my listening senses, to which the other
responds in turn, disclosing some further aspect of itself to my gaze or my attentive ears” (Spell
of the Sensuous 45). This attentiveness goes beyond what may be seen and heard, to also what
may be felt and affected; as Abram also explains, “none of [the] roles [of speech] would be
possible without the primordial power of utterance to make our bodies resonate with another and
with the other rhythms that surround us” (Becoming Animal 11). Some of these rhythms may be
easily explained and understood, while others may exist at the periphery of understandings,
where we recognize that a sensation may mean, and matter, but do not fully comprehend how
this is achieved, or how exactly we are affected.

To me the term “resonance” is highly useful in that the sonic and metaphorical
understandings of the term are readily found in popular parlance, and evokes a certain
connectivity and intuitive coming together of individuals or things without suggesting a physical
joining or contact. Most people have experienced some form of sonic resonance, and can
recognize how an instrument, such as a double bass, affects one’s body without touch, offering a
useful point of reference for understanding affect in general. This term offers a familiar starting
point, while not limiting or overly defining the ways that these invisible aspects of nonverbal
communication may in fact work. Even within the scholarship on nonverbal communication
these more elusive aspects are often avoided, referring to emotion and facial expressions, but not
to the affective influence of these communications (Knapp and Hall 10), or how this affective
meaning is achieved.

While I do include sonic resonance in my definition of “resonance,” and speak about
sonic resonance explicitly in chapter four, the important thing to note about this form of
resonance is that though it is created through sonic waves, resonance in this context references
the tangible (physically felt) aspects of the sound. Resonance, in general terms, refers to the
transferring of energies. Often in this work, I am speaking about resonances which do not start
from sound, but these sonic resonances are equally important, and are included in my definition.
In this work “resonance” is the umbrella term I use for the invisible, felt aspects of
communication. This may then be broken down into three subgroups: sonic, emotional, and
physical, with physical resonances speaking to affects that are not clearly associated with, or
initiated through, either sound or emotion (such as the energy of intent). All of the resonances of
course have a physical aspect to them, in that they affect one’s body often in a tangible way, but when I reference “physical resonance” I am speaking of affective forces that do not clearly fall into either of the other two categories.

In my use of the term “resonance” I am speaking of “that which affects,” a fairly basic understanding of affect. I have opted for this more expansive term in that notions of “affect” and “emotion” carry their own academic lineages and meanings which do not necessarily always align with my own use, or offer a narrow definition of the term, when I am seeking to evoke a broader understanding. As Deborah Lupton writes in *The Emotional Self*, “the concept of emotion is ephemeral, slippery, difficult to ‘pin down’ […] The term ‘emotion’ is both commonly used to denote the constellation of phenomena including somatic, feeling, and behavioural aspects, but also more narrowly to refer to the feeling component only” (5). “Affect” is at times used interchangeably with “emotion” (Dillard xix), and at other times it is more connected with “empathy” (Losoya and Eisenberg 21). According to communication scholars L.K. Guerrero, P.A. Anderson, and M.R. Trost, “Although some researchers use the terms affect, emotion, and mood interchangeably, there is growing consensus that affect refers to the general valence of an emotional state, emotion refers to specific types or clusters of feelings that occur in response to particular events, and moods refer to relatively enduring and global states of pleasant or unpleasant feelings” (5). Writing about affect in performance Erin Hurley explains, “‘Emotion’ then describes the ‘events’ of affect—that is, the visible and invisible bodily changes (e.g. blushing, increased or decreased heart rate) that arise and that may be conditioned and managed […] And feeling is the conscious registration of emotions, where the event of emotion is given shape and meaning through narrative” (7). In Hurley’s usage emotion refers to both the visible and invisible aspects of the events of affect, where in my use of the term resonance, though emotion is included in the understanding, it is speaking solely of the invisible aspects, which often work in tandem with the visible aspects, which I include under “body language.”

My use of the term resonance speaks to an embodied listening that goes beyond the affective aspects of sound and speaks to all of the ways that we may affect each other. As composer and improviser Pauline Oliveros writes, “Animals are Deep Listeners. When you enter an environment where there are birds, insects or animals, they are listening to you completely. You are received. Your presence may be the difference between life and death for the creatures
of the environment. Listening is survival! (xxv). However, this Deep Listening also goes beyond sound, as animals are listening to our every movement and feeling, to all of our body languages and resonances (including, but not limited to sonic resonances). Kohanov explains that,

To horses, emotion is simply information. It is important for them to know when another herd member is feeling afraid or angry as it is for them to know when that same horse is feeling content or playful. Because they are preyed upon in nature, these sensitive, mindful creatures have maintained a highly developed ability to respond to subtle changes in stance, muscle tension, breathing, and hence the general arousal level of other horses as well as predators, an ability they easily transfer to human beings. (“The Messages”)

It is these invisible aspects of nonverbal communication that often get overlooked in conversations of how meaning is made. In *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction* these aspects are hinted at, such as referencing the tone of voice, or “*how something is said*” (10) or the “intensity of some emotional states” (9), but it is not given due focus on its own. It is the “communicative environment,” meaning the physical and spatial environment (or proxemics) (7-8), and “body movement and position” (including gesture, posture, touch, facial expressions, eye and vocal behaviour) that are overtly acknowledged. Whereas James Price Dillard states, in the *Handbook of Communication and Emotion*, that one of the “essential aspects of the communication process” is affect (xvii), and as the title of this book suggests communication and emotion (in all of its forms and references) go hand-in-hand. As Guerrero et al. argue,

Clearly, emotional experience and expression is part of the fabric of thoughts, feeling, and behaviours that blend together to characterize the tapestry of interpersonal interaction. Yet despite the relevance of emotion to our daily interaction, most contemporary books in communication and related disciplines treat emotion as a ‘stepchild’ that stands at the periphery of scientific enterprise.

(4)

Emotion, affect, feeling, and all of the other resonances that one may encounter in our interactions with others (human and animal) make meaning and add levels of understanding to our interpersonal interactions, and are an important part of nonverbal communication. These resonances may be invisible, but they affect and make meaning in all of our relationships and
exchanges. From my experience, the term “resonance” speaks most clearly to these aspects of nonverbal communication in an expansive manner, which does not limit the meaning to any one form of invisible meaning making.

_Equestrienship_

The terms used to refer to humans working with horses, and to refer to a high level of skill in doing it are inadequate for two reasons: (1) the terms are highly gendered and skewed towards masculine terminology, and (2) they privilege riding over other forms of equine/human engagement. While the horse world is made up of significantly more women than men, the terms that are used to refer to skilled individuals in this area use “man” to stand in for all, while subtextually suggesting that only male practitioners are able to become experts in this field (this is also troublingly reflected in the disproportionate number of Olympic riders and famous clinicians that are male compared to female, which is likely a reflection more of funding and perception than of skill, knowledge, or work ethic). As Lynda Birke states, horsemanship “is a particularly sexist term, given that the majority of riders are women, and there is a significant majority of women in Natural Horsemanship” (“Learning to Speak Horse” 237). My preferred term in the currently used language to refer to humans who engage with horses is “equestrian,” but an issue with the definition of this term is that it privileges riding, as the only form of human/equine interaction, and in doing so suggests a positioning of human control over horses, as this has been the common understanding of the riding relationship. The popular understanding of the term “equestrian,” at least within the horse community, speaks more accurately to how I use it throughout this dissertation, which is to expand the dictionary definition from “of or pertaining to horse-riding” or “mounted on horseback” (“equestrian, adj. and n.”), to mean “one who engages with horses (not necessarily through riding).” One is not only an equestrian when riding, though mounted or under-saddle work is most often a significant aspect of the engagement, ground work and driving are also equally important parts, and should not be left out of the definition and understanding.
I have also coined the term “equestrienship,” to replace the problematic “horsemanship,” to suggest the art of creating a human/equine relationship that is based on collaboration and a nuance of exchange and communication, rather than on a hierarchical or controlling relationship in which the human is the master. Here I am choosing to base my terminology on a hybrid of the masculine and feminine forms of the term equestrian/equestrienne. I have chosen to use a hybrid form for this neologism to nod to the influence of women within the horse world, especially when it comes to striving for a more balanced, nuanced, and relationship-based approach to human/equine interactions, which I am advocating for throughout this dissertation. This slight variance in terms allows for a clear understanding of the context in which I am speaking, while also reminding the reader that I have redefined these terms to recognize the influence of women in the field, to challenge the privilege of riding as the dominant form of human/equine engagement, and to redirect the goal of this relationship away from notions of human dominance and equine subservience on to explorations of collaboration, which I refer to as the art of equestrienship.

When referring to a human who works with horses in any discipline or mode, I will be using the term “equestrian,” and to refer to the larger art and field of striving to reach a more effective and enlightened levels of understanding and practice in human/equine engagements, I will be using the term “equestrienship.” Equestrienship acts as a replacement for “horsemanship,” which as Dr. Robert Miller and Rick Lamb indicate is not the same as riding: “horsemanship encompasses the entire horse-human relationship, and a great deal of that relationship takes place with the human's feet flat on the ground” (116). What the term “equestrienship” offers (beyond removing the “man”), is the suggestion of recognizing the horse as partner by seeking to act and train in a way that honours this relationship with a balance of power, and a coming together of perspectives, whereas horsemanship, at least in Miller and Lamb’s view, is a relationship based on “benevolent dictatorship” (118).

7 I do continue to use the term “horsemanship” in the context of Natural Horsemanship, as this is a distinctly understood term that references a specific approach to working with horses that is widely understood under this title. The specifics of this area of practice are explained in further detail in chapter two.
"The Singular “They”"

Human/Animal studies stresses the importance of using animate personal pronouns when writing about animals, moving away from the previous tendency to refer to animals by the inanimate, “it.” However, what has been less addressed is how to speak about animals when the focus is not on a specific individual, but a generalized, hypothetical, individual. When speaking of horses that I know personally, such as the equine performers in Playing in Silence, I refer to them as “she” or “he,” depending on whether they are a mare or gelding/stallion. However, when it is a theoretical individual about whom I am speaking, I have chosen to use the singular “they” rather than arbitrarily assigning gender.

In the bulk of popular writing on horses, horses are still often referred to as “it,” or if not “it,” as “he.” It is exceedingly rare that a non-specific horse would be referred to as “she,” which again links back to the gender biases found in the field. These biases are not reserved for humans, as there are considerable biases against mares, which suggests that they are often less worthy due to being perceived as more difficult to work with because of their so called, emotional fluctuations, with the predictable aggression of stallions and/or complacency of geldings being preferred. And while there is some truth to these narratives and stereotypes, it also overlooks the fact that each horse is a unique individual who may or may not share in these features, and that there are positives and negatives to each characteristic. These gender biases overlook the positive aspects of emotion (such as heightened connection), and downplay the negative aspects of competitive aggression (such as a lack of focus, and danger) and complacency (such as a lack of caring and drive). So rather than conjuring these notions of the implications of a given gender of horse, I choose to leave things open by using the singular “they.”

An alternative option to the singular “they” that has been proposed in my writing has often been to speak of “horses,” rather than a theoretical individual horse. The issue with this notion is the implicit suggestion that all horses are alike, rather than suggesting that a specific horse may behave or act in a certain manner. Given that a significant point of my work is to suggest that animals must be recognized as unique individuals, not as a unified species who all behave in the same way based on their instincts, being able to speak about a theoretical individual is important. To say, “If horses pin their ears it means they are angry,” is to overlook
the fact that all horses will pin their ears in slightly different ways, and for different reasons, and understanding why a specific horse may be showing their displeasure is an important aspect of understanding the nuances of this communication, and recognizing the complexity of the individual. Using the singular “they” allows for the recognition that the theoretical horse of which I am speaking is a complex individual, and could be of any gender. It is no more acceptable to make sweeping generalizations about animals, in this way, than it is of humans, and the singular “they” allows for this specificity.

Methodology

My methodology involves the combined use of practice-based research, interviews, literature review, and performance analysis. In order for this work to not be entirely human-centric, equine perspectives and contributions must be included; due to my experience working with horses this is most readily achieved through first-person observation, and performance-based research. When working in an interspecies context, in which there is an interest to learn with and from the animal (in this case horses), choosing to engage in practice-based research is an ethical consideration as much as it is a practical one, especially when the practice being engaged is performance. As horses are highly fluent in this manner of exchange (nonverbal performance), focusing on performance-based research creates a more balanced methodological engagement within the interspecies field of inquiry. Much research that involves animals attempts to understand them from a distance, and though the humans may be learning about the animal, they are not attempting to learn with/from them, or to engage them in the process as a collaborator. The practice-based aspects of my research are then balanced with theoretical analysis and existing literature written by the human experts working in these fields.

Each of my chapters involves a different balance of methodologies based on the nature and needs of the case studies. The first chapter focuses primarily on literature review, setting up the historical, theoretical and scholarly contexts in which this work, on human/equine engagement and the performance of communication, is being positioned. The second chapter engages in a balance of literature review, interviews, and performance analysis in its discussion of interspecies communication and language through looking at the methodologies of Natural Horsemanship and Equine-Facilitated Learning. This chapter focuses on the works of Monty
Roberts and Linda Kohanov. The third chapter focuses on performance analysis to gain insights into the work of France’s Théâtre Zingaro and Canada’s Cavalia, drawing together all of the previous chapters’ discussions of language, performance, communication and agency, to explore how horses mean on stage, and the influence of the various layers of performance found in equestrian theatre. The fourth chapter is drawing significantly on practice-based research, and the project Playing in Silence, which invites musicians to improvise with horses in an open and unstructured space. This work is grounded in theoretical literature, but the primary research comes from a practice-based model of learning with/from the horses through performance, offering a different depiction of human/equine performance in comparison to the equestrian theatre of Théâtre Zingaro and Cavalia.

The Trail Through: Chapter Breakdown

The first two chapters focus largely on explaining the contexts in which I am working, and framing my analysis both within academic and popular fields of research and practice. These chapters offer a foundational understanding of my use of performance; establish understandings of human/animal and human/equine contexts, which have led to animals being granted a lack of voice; and delve into the specifics of two equestrian practices, Natural Horsemanship and Equine-Facilitated Learning, which have significantly influenced the understandings of “speaking horse” and the dynamics at play in human/equine interactions. The last two chapters rely heavily on case studies and offer examples and critiques of various forms of human/equine performance, both equestrian theatre and more openly structured improvisational practices, while expanding on the concepts established in the first two chapters.

CHAPTER 1 — Meaning Beyond the Human: Focusing on Performance in Animal/Human Interactions

Chapter one argues that by shifting the emphasis in human/animal engagements away from verbal language and concentrating on performance-based knowings, space emerges for animals to claim their rights to voice and agency. This chapter delves into defining what performance means in this context, and explores how performance makes animal perspectives available to us through relationship. It offers an overview, and an initial situating, of some of the key aspects that have placed animals in a marginalized position, such as humanist ideologies of
knowledge and species hierarchies, which do not recognize (or minimize the recognition of) animal voices and agency. This chapter presents the idea that employing performance as the primary way of making meaning in human/animal interactions has the potential to level the playing field, and create an interspecies ethics of engagement, by focusing on a shared mode of exchange (nonverbal performance). In order for this to occur the anthropocentric privileging of verbal language needs to be challenged, creating an opportunity for non-dominant modes of knowledge exchange, in this case performance, to gain recognition.

Performance in this context can be as straightforward, and yet complex, as sharing aspects of one’s self and perspective with another. And yet, not all forms of performance are equally liberating for animals, nor do all forms of performance recognize animal perspectives. Depending on how performance is employed and framed, performance paradigms can be equally used to keep animals in their marginalized places, through the reinscription of the dominant narratives of human control and animal subservience. In order for performance-based practices to fulfill their potential of offering an expansive form of interspecies engagement, this performance needs to be used to listen, as much, if not more, as to speak; it needs to focus on collaboration rather than control; and it needs to engage an improvisation-based framework, as it is in the now that animals can most fully contribute and influence the course of action. Through drawing on examples from Théâtre Zingaro’s production On achève bien les Anges (élégies), and my own experiences of working with horses, and specifically working with my primary equine partner Katrina, this chapter offers an initial exploration of the potentials and downfalls of employing various forms of performance when working with animals, and specifically horses, which is then explored in further depth in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2—Human/Equine Foundations: A History of “Speaking Horse”

Chapter two delves into how performance makes meaning in the culturally specific environment of equine/human interactions, exploring the trends and history of, as it is often referred to, “speaking horse” within the equestrian world. Although, equine/human communication is not overtly acknowledged as a form of performance within the equestrian community, there is a long history of interest in comprehending how meaning is made between humans and horses through drawing on an understanding of equine/equine herd behaviour. The chapter looks at two significant trends within the equestrian community, Natural Horsemanship
and Equine-Facilitated Learning, which offer crucial concepts needed to create a complex awareness of how meaning is made between humans and horses through performance. This chapter argues that in order for performance to make meaning in interspecies contexts an understanding of both body language and resonance are needed. It is only through critically engaging with each of these aspects of nonverbal performance that a nuanced analysis of the exchange can be reached.

The dominant discourses within equestrian training focus on body language as the primary method of communicating with horses, and overlooks the importance of resonance for clearly communicating through performance. While body language is without question a foundational aspect of this form of performance, no one gesture continually means the same thing, and it is through an understanding and reading of the resonances that the meaning behind a gesture is complexly informed. Other, more recent, areas of equestrian discourse, specifically Equine-Facilitated Learning, focus predominantly on resonance as the key aspect that enlightens interpersonal interactions, exploring the importance of emotional intelligence (or reading resonances) for recognizing and making meaning through relationship. In these conversations, the importance of body language is largely overlooked. This chapter traces a history of these two methodologies and understandings, and delves into the specifics of how each of these practices came about, their intentions, and their impacts on recognizing equine voices and perspectives through performance. An important aspect of understanding these lineages of speaking horse is to grasp the contexts from which they emerged and the complexities of, and contradiction found within, the equestrian relationship. It is important to understand the intricacies of the equestrian world in order to recognize how horses are largely employed and discussed, as these frameworks directly impact how and when equine voices and agency are recognized, highlighting the need and importance for expanding the understandings of the exchange as a nuanced performance of communication, and potential of this performance to expand human perceptions of animals (in this case horses).

While the work of both Equine-Facilitated Learning and Natural Horsemanship are foundational to understanding how performances make meaning in human/equine interactions, I am largely taking the methods and insights of these practices and placing them in a different context. In the framework of this dissertation, I am advocating for the use of these performance
practices not in order to enhance human or equine development or training exclusively (as is this original intent), but rather arguing for the combined use of these aspects of communication in order to improve the recognition of equine perspectives and agency. This is of course still applicable to training (of both horses and humans), but shifts the focus from commanding to collaborating. Engaging performance in this way has the potential to level the playing field and create more expansive understandings of horses (and other animals) through engaging in performance-based exchanges, which focus on collaboration.

CHAPTER 3—Equestrian Theatre: An Off-centered Performance of Collaboration

Chapter three moves into a focused analysis of the ways that performance is employed in equestrian theatre, looking specifically at the work of Canada’s Cavalia and France’s Théâtre Zingaro. This chapter argues that Cavalia and Théâtre Zingaro are missing the potential of interspecies performance and equestrian theatre to (re)balance human/equine dynamics by focusing on selling limited depictions of the equestrian relationship, depictions which prize control, diminish equine perspectives, and sell a humanist dream of partnership, while situating this marginalization as a beautiful and expansive depiction of horses and the equestrian relationship. Although, the performance-steeped spaces of equestrian theatre heighten the recognition of the exchange between horses and humans as a form of performance, this does not mean that this performance is used in a way that celebrates the perspectives of the equine performers, or demonstrates the complexities of this interspecies interaction. In fact, the opposite is often true. Much like the wider equestrian world, the performances in equestrian theatre are frequently used to reinforce the dominant ideology of human dominance and equine subservience in human/equine relationships. Equestrian theatre pushes this understanding a step further by framing these exchanges within human-centric narratives that suggest that this imbalance of power and influence is harmonious, beautiful, and/or the ideal to be strived for (both for horses and humans).

This chapter focuses on Cavalia and Théâtre Zingaro, as they are the two most renowned and recognized equestrian theatre companies in the world, and explores the various ways that horses and the equestrian relationship are framed within these theatrical performances. It begins by delving into the notions of freedom and control found within human/equine relationships in these productions, and demonstrates the various ways that horses are used to serve human goals
as well as the problems with the anthropocentric lens of this interspecies theatre. From there, it goes on to how and where moments of collaboration may be found in these engagements, exploring the potential of rehearsal, with its more improvisational structure, for recognizing equine perspectives and offering an interspecies balance of exchange. As an example of the potential of these more improvisational engagements I look at the experiences of the horses at the Academy of Equestrian Arts in Versailles, Bartabas’s training company. Though this facility offers weekly public performances its structure is somewhere in-between the traveling theatrical productions of Zingaro and Cavalia, and a competitive training facility for equestrian sports. This company offers a bridge between the restrictions of equestrian theatre, and the more improvisational performances discussed in the following chapter, while still existing in an interspecies realm heavily steeped in performance understandings, both theatrical and intimate (co-creating understandings between two individuals).

CHAPTER 4—Playing in Silence: Engaging Performance to Recognize Animal Perspectives

Chapter four focuses on the case study, Playing in Silence, which invites musicians to improvise with horses in an open and unstructured space, with a focus on collaboration and getting to know one another through performance. This practice-based research project, which I have designed and facilitated, offers an exploration of interspecies performance that relies on improvisation, and has little external framing and no audience, offering a different version of human/equine performance. Much like Academy of Equestrian Arts in Versailles this performance exists somewhere in the middle of the interspecies performance continuum, in between the performance of theatrical productions and equestrian sports/leisure practices. However, the balance and structure of these engagements is quite different from the Academy in that the humans involved have little-to-no experience working with horses, though like the ecurries they have a complex understanding of the ways performance may make meaning without words. This chapter brings together the understandings that are established in the earlier chapters—the importance of combining body language and resonance in order to critically engage with nonverbal performance, and the significance of employing an improvisational

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8 Bartabas is the Artistic Director of Théâtre Zingaro.
framework in interspecies interactions—in order to delve into the possibilities of utilizing this form of performance to connect and communicate across difference.

Playing in Silence explores the ways that performance may be used in order to create more inclusive interspecies spaces, which rely on collaboration and focus on bilateral and symbiotic exchanges between horses and humans. Five horses and five musicians participated in the project while exploring understandings of nonverbal communication, agency, collaboration, and difference in the context of co-creating an experience through performance and relationship. This chapter offers an examination of each of the sessions, and the questions, issues, and realizations that arose through these sessions of play and discovery.

**Conclusion: Playing with Animals**

Despite the dominant ways of speaking about animals and performance which often focus on animals on stage, behaviour analysis, or sport-based understandings of performance, the most significant potential of performance in human/animal contexts is found in recognizing performance as a shared mode of exchange between humans and animals. It is through playing with animals in this way, and grasping performance as a co-created communicative act that this mode of engagement opens up space for animal perspectives to be recognized, and for their voices to be heard, making interspecies collaboration a genuine possibility. Animals, like so many of patriarchal humanism’s others, have spent far too much time in the service of the dominant class (in this case humans), with little appreciation for their impacts, influence, and contributions (beyond our direct usages of their bodies). Seeing and hearing animals in all of their unique, individual complexities holds the potential not only for enriching our own lives, but more importantly for expanding the possibilities of theirs, and improving their welfare (physical, emotional, and mental), through having their perspectives recognized and appreciated. This dissertation explores the various ways that performance is employed in human/animal interactions, some of the stumbling blocks that have hindered the recognition of animal perspectives, and the ways that performance may be used to speak and collaborate across difference.
CHAPTER 1—Meaning Beyond the Human:
Focusing on Performance in Animal/Human Interactions

Introduction: A Story about Relationship, An Ethics of Engagement

A human and a horse enter an arena. They are set free to work at liberty. The two move around the space, weaving in and out, adjusting their proximity to each other. At times their bodies almost touch, and at other times they are distances apart joined only by the physical structure of the arena, existing in a shared place at a shared time. The horse kicks up their heels in a buck. The human runs to one side and jumps. Nothing is said. On one level, it appears that very little is going on in this encounter, just a human and a horse messing about, randomly moving through a space. The horse bucks because horses buck. The human runs because they feel like it. It all seems to have very little meaning. However, the appearance of insignificance only reflects the surface act. There is another level, and on that level this interaction is a complex exchange, a detailed conversation that communicates information about self (both for the human and the horse), shares perspective, and co-creates knowledge through performance.

What exists beyond the façade of triviality is a human and horse in relationship, and with relationship comes the opportunity to learn something about another. For that opportunity to be embraced each individual needs to be able to recognize the ways that meaning is made and communicates through performance. Victor Turner argues that, humans reveal themselves to themselves through performance (81), but they also reveal elements of themselves to others in this way; humans are not the only animals that do this. As Leslie Irvine explains in If You Tame Me: Understanding Our Connection with Animals, “our interactions with animals make various aspects of animal selfhood available to us” (2). But what Irvine does not mention in her depictions of human/animal relationships, is that for animal selves to be made available to us through interaction we must first have an understanding of how the self is made through performance. The more nuanced the understanding of how performance makes meaning (or communicates self), the more levels of another’s self (and perspective) one may recognize. In these animal/human interactions no words may be spoken, but each moment speaks, and each movement adds another layer of dynamics that inform the exchange. And yet this conversation—the conversation that occurs between bodies through the “expressive behaviour” of performance (Taylor xvi)—is often overlooked and discredited by humans, especially in the company of
animals. If words are not present, many humans will assume that nothing of worth has been communicated, that little meaning has been made. But narratives are not always about bringing the past forward into the present, or articulating a story in words. They can also simply be about sharing something about the here and now with another. It can be as basic (yet complex) as communicating something about oneself in this moment to another. It is this form of communication that is most readily possible in human/animal relationships, and it is this form of meaning making that is performed between bodies in human/animal interactions.

Marvin Carlson writes, “performance implies not just a doing or even just re-doing, but a self-consciousness about doing and re-doing, on the part of both the performers and the spectators” (195). In the performance that I am speaking of both individuals are simultaneously performer and spectator, communicator and receiver, but the point about consciousness is equally important. It is important not in terms of the individuals being able to recognize or name the act as performance (which would place animals at a disadvantage), but in reference to the individuals being consciously aware of communicating (or trying to communicate) something to another through expressive action. This intentionality informs the act, transforming it from the instinctual action of behaviour into the communicative expression of performance. This conscious awareness turns (what may otherwise be seen as) a random or impulsive gesture into a statement of knowledge, or an articulation of perspective. If a horse kicks out at me, I may instinctually move out of the way to avoid harm, but there are many levels to this act beyond the basic interventions of danger and defense. How I respond communicates aspects of myself to the horse, just as the horse’s action communicates elements of them to me. If I am aware of the fact that animals (including humans) make meaning in this way through expressive action, and have an understanding of how this performance may make meaning, then I am able critically to engage with the communication and deduce the significance behind the statement. Have I

9 I amend “communicating” with “trying to communicate” here, as communication often communicates something other than that which was intended (which is discussed in further detail later on). Although, what is shared may not be precisely the message that was planned, something is communicated nonetheless, and it is important to be consciously aware of, and engaging with, that something.
offended the horse in some way? Is the horse in pain? Did something scare the horse? In order for this act to speak, I need to be able to recognize the ways that horses can perform their perspectives, and to be able to break down all of the aspects of the performance to clarify the specifics. A horse may kick out for a myriad of reasons, so the question becomes: why did this specific horse kick out in that way, in this moment, in this context? Being overtly aware of the ways that performance may manifest and make meaning in interspecies contexts allows for a conversation to occur, for each individual to learn more about the other, and for co-created understandings to be formed.

The terms of performance are always permeable, debatable, and influenced by the perspectives and interests of the individual(s) framing the act as such. When it comes to nonhuman animals, defining what is or is not performance is often closely linked to the humanist need to keep certain realms of experience the sole proprietorship of the human species, for our own insecure interests in standing apart from nature\textsuperscript{10} and having control\textsuperscript{11} over our environment; we have a desperate stake in being different from—and therefore more powerful and important than—all of our animal kin, which allows us to use or ignore them as we please. In this context, whether or not there is a “consciousness of doubleness” on the part of the performer (Carlson 71), or an intentionally aesthetic aspect to a performance, is not as important as the ways that performance can influence our understandings of relationship and how knowledge is recognized, created, and shared amongst individuals (human and animal) and between species. The possibilities of animals and performance expands beyond the double narratives of the stage, and metaphorical representations, to carve out a space in the middle ground of the performance continuum, between the aesthetics of the theatre and the unconscious performance of behaviour. This performance is about consciously communicating (or consciously trying to communicate) something to another through expressive action. When framed in a collaborative interspecies

\textsuperscript{10} The concept of nature is a constructed fallacy, which suggests that nature exists where humans do not. As Annabelle Sabloff writes, the common definition of nature is “"all the living world exclusive of human beings" (xi). But, of course, nature is also found intertwined with and amongst human life, and that humans also constitute part of the natural world.

\textsuperscript{11} Control is always an illusion, something we (humans) tend to strive for, but never achieve.
context, animals and performance can be about communicating self and working together across difference. Animals and performance can be about recognizing animal perspectives, rather than about selling humanist notions. Marvin Carlson, drawing on Richard Bauman, indicates, “performance is always performance for someone” (71). So, what if that performance is equally as much for the horse as it is for the human?

In the opening anecdote, if both of the parties in the arena (human and horse) are consciously aware of the ways movement, space, gesture, and feel may communicate, if they are fluent in the ways meaning is made through performance, and if they understand that communication between species is possible, then this (seemingly) random series of acts—the adjustments in proximity, the bucks, the movements—becomes a conversation. And while it is a rare horse\(^\text{12}\) that does not recognize the ways that meaning is made in relationship through performance, as this is their primary mode of discourse in their own communities, it is a very common human who completely overlooks any conversation that does not occur through words, and any conversation not evoked by a human.

The anthropocentric fixation on verbal language blocks the potential of these performance-based interactions, by teaching us (humans) to honor words and analytical dialogue over all other forms of communication and knowledge creation. Centering language as the dominant mode of making and sharing meaning denotes that only human perspectives are recognized and acknowledged as valid. As Jacques Derrida points out, the wrong of granting only humans language was committed long ago (32), but it has long-term consequences that continue to reverberate throughout our societies, and impact human understandings of animals. This focus on language in human culture privileges the human perspective and marginalizes the forms of meaning-making that are more readily shared with other animals. David Abram

\[^\text{12}\text{ In my twenty-five years as an equestrian I have never met a horse that is not aware of the ways that space, movement, and gesture mean in relationship. However, these understandings are co-created, so the depth and nuance of a given horse’s knowledge will differ based on their life experience (how much time they have spent in herd communities and in the company of humans, amongst other factors), but the foundational understandings tend to be consistent, and are the starting point for creating more complex notions.}\]
explains that literate culture influences the ways that humans interact with the more-than-human world, creating a tendency of verbal privilege that distracts from other forms of communication:

While persons brought up within literate culture often speak about the natural world, indigenous, oral peoples sometimes speak directly to that world, acknowledging certain animals, plants, and even landforms as expressive subjects with whom they might find themselves in conversation. Obviously, these other beings do not speak with a human tongue; they do not speak in words. (Becoming Animal 10-11)

It is this humanist ideology that diminishes the sensual conversations between bodies (of like or different species), and conditions humans to believe that little, or nothing, is going on between a human and a horse, unless the human is clearly in control and dictating the course of the actions. As John Berger explains, “What we know about them [animals] is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them” (257). Humans have been conditioned to look at animals, as Berger explores in “Why Look at Animals,” and to judge animals, but not to understand them. So, what if we were see animals from a perspective of what joins us, rather than what separates us? What if we were to approach our interspecies interactions from a position of like or shared, rather than different or less than? What if we were to believe that an interspecies exchange was possible? What if we were to focus on performance as our primary mode of discourse in our interspecies interactions?

In Dwight Conquergood’s analysis of cross-cultural performance he states that there is the “epistemological potential of performance as a way of deeply sensing the other” (3). While Conquergood is talking about the ethnographic study of human cultural performance, this potential holds true for the cross-cultural performance of interspecies interactions. Unlike the performances that Conquergood is speaking of, in which the ethnographer then performs the other as a form of “dialogical performance,” the performance I am speaking of here is the first level of performance exchange, in which one performs elements of self and perspective to another, and receives information about the other’s self in return. This form of performance holds many of the same ethical and moral promises and potential as Conquergood’s dialogical performance, in that it also allows for “cross cultural accessibility without glossing over differences” (9), for having a two-way engagement in which one speaks to and with, rather than
about, the other (9-10), and for “celebrat[ing] the paradox of ‘how the deeply different can be deeply known without becoming any less different’” (10). This form of performance celebrates the distinctions of each individual, while relying on the instances of “like” or “shared” to invite glimpses of another’s experience and to gain a better understanding of that other individual. It creates the opportunity for animal perspectives to be acknowledged and contemplated, rather than glossed over and marginalized.

By shifting the emphasis away from verbal language and placing it on to performance-based knowing(s) an opportunity is created for animal voices and agency to be recognized, making co-created interspecies understandings and collaborations possible. This embodied speaking is not an alien language, one that we cannot access; rather it is a language that we share. As Walter J. Ong suggests, humans have countless ways of communicating that make use of all of our senses, and these forms of communication can be “exceedingly rich” (6). It is time we consciously engaged with these other ways of communicating in order to include more voices, perspectives, and stories. In performance, there is the possibility of a human and animal starting from a mutual mode of engagement, a place of movement, space, gesture, and feeling—a shared tongue. The dialects may not be identical, the bodies may be radically different, but there is enough in common for us to begin to learn the intricacies of another’s way of being. Animals are reading us all the time: they read our intentions (are we hunting or passing through, a threat or a friend); it is time that we regularly return the favor and employ our own knowledge of performance, and how meaning is made through expressive embodied action to learn more about them, who they are, what they want and need, and how they see the world through the common language of performance.

In order for this to happen the privilege of verbal language needs to be challenged; humans need to (re)learn how to consciously listen, speak, and mean in this way, through nonverbal performance; humans need to (re)discover how others (human and animal) share elements of themselves and their perspectives through the dynamics of performance; understandings of animals and performance need to be reevaluated; and humans need to acknowledge the importance of the present moment, and all that it can communicate. The dynamics may still not be equal, as the long history of marginalization will not be overturned overnight, and the conditions are still inherently skewed in favor of the human as the one often
initiating the engagements, but in these performance-privileging moments genuine collaboration may occur, expanding understandings of human/animal relationships, and inching towards a more inclusive foundation for the future.

Focusing on performance-based knowing(s) and communication is the foundation for creating an ethics of engagement in interspecies interactions, as it creates the opportunity for a balanced exchange by focusing on shared forms of knowledge and communication. Forms of performance that privilege action and feel, over words and abstractions, can level the playing field and create opportunities to learn with/from animals, and discover other realms of experience and knowledge previously overlooked or marginalized by humans. Performance privileges animal ways of engaging with the world. Starting from performance offers the possibility of an interaction that honors all of the species involved, creating an opportunity for animal perspectives to be recognized. Neither voice nor agency can be given, but conditions can be established that create a greater opportunity for them to be claimed; engaging a performance-based methodology in human/animal interactions is a valuable way of creating such conditions.

The Isolation of Literate Culture: Speaking Beyond Words

It is in their relationships with humans that animals have primarily lost their voices, due to our ignorance and deafness to their ways of speaking and creating meaning. The desolate thing about the loss of animal voices is not that we do not have the ability to hear them—we do (at least to some degree), as we (humans) also make meaning in these ways (through performance); rather, it is that we have chosen not to listen. “Postmodern [or posthumanist] thought,” as Leslie Irvine points out, “opened possibilities—at least in theory—to hear the voices of those long silenced by virtue of their positions on the margins of power” (173). Still, acknowledging that animals have voices is not all that is required to be able to hear them; we (humans) must also (re)discover how to listen in this way, how to hear animals in all their nuanced and specific ways of speaking, and to critically engage with this speaking in order to avoid negative anthropomorphism.

We are so enamoured with the written and spoken word that we often forget, at least in the academic world, about the richness of nonverbal forms of speaking, and the possibilities of communicating more (or other) than can be expressed in words. As Ong points out it is
exceedingly difficult for those indoctrinated into literate forms of knowledge to escape word-based thinking (13-14), but that does not mean that the value of other modes of engagement and knowing cannot be appreciated. Our words are informed by our sensual experiences, and our experiences by our words. To diminish one is to detract from the other. By recognizing and honouring the connections between the literate and the sensual, worlds can open up which could not be accessed through either form of engagement on its own. In fact, verbal language can offer a way into embodiment for those less familiar with recognizing these forms of communication. Writing and speaking about our sensuous experiences, as Abram does in *Becoming Animal*, and attempting to find language to break down how we make and receive meaning in this way can increase our awareness of embodied communication. Conversations about “kinesthetic empathy” (Shapiro 185), “emotional intelligence” (Kohanov 177), and “embodied subjectivity” (Brandt, “Intelligent Bodies” 141) in human/animal studies can combine with the more overt discussions of performance-based meaning found in the performance studies, such as “embodied expression” (Taylor 32), “kinesthesia” (Foster 2), and the circulation of energies (Williams 36), to create a rich vocabulary and collection of experiences to draw on to understand better our own and others’ embodied communication. The more we can speak about how performance means through sensual embodied experience the more we will (perhaps) not need to, as more individuals will have a strong grasp of these forms of meaning making, allowing this communication to speak in and for itself. But in order to reach this level, these understandings need to be become common, and these nonverbal conversations need to become consciously engaged. Performance studies, and many other embodied practices, offer a way into understanding the dynamics of nonverbal communication, how it performs meaning, and how it applies to interspecies interactions. However, as Keri Brandt suggests, meaning is co-created (“A Language of Their Own” 309, 313); our understandings of this communication need to continue

13 How meaning is made through performance is what is being discussed in these works on human/animal interactions, but this fact is not overtly acknowledged; rather, each author finds their own way into discussing nonverbal communication specific to the context and field in which they are working. However, what connects all of these works is an interest in how nonverbal performance communicates between individuals (humans and animals).
to evolve with our relationships. Language is an important tool in the process of expanding human comprehension of nonverbal communication, and how it means across species, but it is not the only tool. Language cannot be allowed to hold the same place of privilege in this conversation that it has become so accustomed to; rather, it must be made to work in tandem with embodied learning. Language means little in a live engagement with another animal, but it is important for its ability to share what occurred with other humans, making these modes of knowledge more known and less marginal.

**Animals and Performance**

In the equestrian arts, and other areas of human/animal sports and engagements, performance is understood primarily in terms of the functional vocabulary of athletic ability and execution. Horses perform dressage tests and are evaluated on their performance over fences, amongst other exercises; they are judged on their abilities to complete a task, to perform. Although rarely acknowledged beyond these skill-based references, performance is a foundational concept in the equestrian arts as it is the medium of equine/human communication. This notion is glossed over in practice by focusing on body language, gesture, or the physical aides manipulated in riding (the rider’s legs, seat, and hands). But all of these concepts are about speaking without words, and how the expressive behaviour of performance communicates to another species, through touch, feel, sound, and visual cues from a distance. Performance holds the potential to be an equalizing methodology that balances the mode of inquiry by honouring each species’ inputs, perspectives, and ways of knowing, but this potential is not always (or even often) realized. Performance is often used in the equestrian world for human-centric purposes, which refuse to recognize equine perspectives in their own right. In these performances, the humans wield their own expressive actions to manipulate horses for their own purposes. It is about molding a horse to do a human’s bidding, not about discovering the vast potential of this interspecies partnership. Humans are taught to speak horse, but rarely to listen. Many know how to affect a horse to move around an arena (clinician Monty Roberts is famous for teaching this “horse speak”), but learning how to listen requires a deeper understanding of this form of meaning-making. For a genuine partnership to be possible, learning to listen is as important, if
not more important, than speaking. It is the listening that allows one to know what to do next, and to understand the nuance of the context in which one is working.

In a theatrical milieu, when animals and performance are discussed, it is often in reference to animals on stage being framed within a “non-animal narrative” and how animals “read” in this context (Peterson 34). Animals have shared the stage with humans throughout the ages, usually as “verbal images and references,” as it is a rare occasion that they have gotten to share the stage as “their own organic persons” (Chaudhuri 37). A horse on stage is infrequently a unique individual with a complex and nuanced life, and more often a representation of freedom and/or control, of human superiority over “nature,” and/or of beauty and magic. Drama, and the arts more generally, Chaudhuri explains, turn animals into metaphors (37). Edward Albee’s The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia? could not possibly be about an actual goat, human relationships with animals, and/or speciesist privilege; it must be about “the ‘powers of procreation, the life force, the libido and fertility’” (Chaudhuri 37). It is within these limited metaphors that animals are once again framed to serve humans: to teach us about ourselves, to aid in telling our human stories at the expense of their animal ones. As is discussed in further depth in the third chapter on Equestrian Theatre, it is in this way that the language and symbolism of these performances damages the animals of which it speaks, by restricting them to the space of the metaphor, glossing over their voices and individuality, and making them interchangeable—where one horse (or goat, or another animal) stands for all. As Anabelle Sabloff suggests,

a different relation between humans and animals obtains in each domain [companion animals, livestock farming, and animal rights], each patterned by a separate metaphor that constrains our cognitive ordering processes, influences our emotions, and guides our behaviour in different ways […] we observe or hear about so often—companion animals treated like coddled children, livestock farming operations structured like assembly lines, animals rights promoted as a struggle for the rights of citizenship—are not accidental, not mere anthropomorphisms or mechanomorphisms. Rather, and perhaps more interestingly, they are contextually influenced by behaviours based on the few metaphors we have available to live by. (13).
The stories that we tell ourselves about animals, and the metaphors we build around animals, influence how we see them, and interact with them in our daily lives. These projections of our human intentions and desires do a disservice to the animals by only recognizing the human narratives, rather than including, and celebrating, the animal narratives that are also occurring simultaneously.

When an individual horse is included in a production the ways that horse is read to mean rarely has much to do with that horse’s perspective and interests, and more to do with the ways that the horse is framed for the purposes of the narrative. Or as semiotician and circus studies scholar Paul Bouissac argues, in reference to horses in circus acts, “liberty horse acts create metaphors for human social patterns” (83). Generally, this framing has little to do with recognizing the horse as a unique individual, and rather ploughs over this meaning and these equine layers of communication, in favour of ascribing human-centric metaphors to the body of the horse. This creates the subtextual understanding that the voice of an individual horse is inconsequential, and that whatever they are saying, whatever they are communicating about their personal experience in the moment is irrelevant, and should be overlooked in favour of the “real” meaning, the human intentions behind the act. This approach not only diminishes the voice of that specific horse, but goes so far as to suggest that the horse has no voice to begin with, a trope that humans are all too familiar with, and therefore often accept without question.

In the Théâtre Zingaro production, On achève bien les Anges (élégies), Bartabas, the theatre’s artistic director and a lead actor in this production, ground drives14 an equine actor around a graveyard while playing blind. In one of the two nights of this production that I witnessed, the horse’s performance was not communicating the elegance of a “blind” man being so connected to his equine partner that he could steer him seamlessly around an intricate pattern of gravestones to the music of Tom Waits, but rather suggested discomfort with the situation and Bartabas’s request of him to step into a highly contained piaffe (a collected and springy trot almost on the spot). This horse displayed his displeasure with the request by kicking out at

14 Ground driving refers to a mode of working with a horse in which the human walks behind or beside the horse with long reins run through a surcingle round the horse’s barrel and attached to the bit.
Bartabas twice, before being reprimanded quickly with a stroke of a dressage whip. The horse responded to this scolding by raising his energy, tossing his head, and reluctantly stepping in to the manoeuvre that had been requested. From the human perspective, what the horse had been saying—that he did not want to piaffe for whatever reason—had no place in the show, and his resistance had to be tempered for risk of damaging the illusion of the artful partnership that the show was aiming to portray.

However, this response had the opposite effect, in that it destroyed any appearance of unity or partnership, and left only human dominance. Partnership requires that both partners’ perspectives be valued and considered; it requires compromise. It demands that the message behind the act be understood and accommodated for, rather than merely shut down for insubordination. The narrative may have been selling connection, but this display of authority suggested a skewed understanding of the union, as no adjustments were made to consider the horse’s perspective. All that was seen in this kicking out was a horse disobeying (a common understanding of any “negative” animal actions) when in actuality this action was about the horse communicating something of vital importance to him. The horse was upset enough with what was being asked of him to make a strong statement about it. Even here the horse was not trying to hit Bartabas, as the kicks were very short and contained (he easily could have made contact if he had wanted to), but rather to make a point. Still, all that was acknowledged within the moment was the insolence of the act, and the importance of completing the human’s objectives.

In the human construction of the performance a piaffe was “needed” to express the depth of this connection/control. The contrary aspect, however, was that improvising in response to the horse’s narrative would have also served the human goals: adjusting to the needs of the horse in that moment would have suggested a connected interspecies partnership. The performance may not have had the artful dance that was intended, but the message behind the dance would have been saved. The notion of a human and a horse working together in union was destroyed not by the horse’s actions (only the illusion of absolute control was dashed by the kick), but rather by the human’s response to the horse’s comments.

The next night, the horse still showed signs of discomfort, but objected far less, and complied much more quickly, allowing those viewing only that second performance to, likely,
stay more contented in the human narrative, permitting them the space to believe that the
dominant narrative of interspecies harmony was accurate for all involved. It was a more
straightforward experience, in that the human narrative was never challenged. However, the first
night’s performance missed an opportunity to express the difficult harmony of a genuine
partnership in which one’s partner does not always say what one would like them to, and where
compromise and compassion are more important than control.

Now, of course, this is my meaning, my desire for the act, what I would have found
impressive, and what I hope for when I witness an interspecies relationship—genuine
partnership—but in reality, this dominance-based understanding of “partnership” is so common
that few question the validity of the use of the word “partner” in this context. Equestrian theatre
consistently offers opportunities for these other dynamics of human and equine relationships to
be addressed, as most productions I have seen hold at least one moment of a horse expressing an
alternative equine narrative. In these instants, the horses “[kick] out’ against meanings and their
making” (Peterson 35), turning the meaning that has been ascribed to them on its head, but it is a
rare performance that embraces these moments of equine agency. It is a rare performance that
seeks to challenge the dominant narratives of human control over animals, and to offer a more
complex understanding of these dynamics. It is a rare performance that is genuinely interspecies
to the degree that it fully celebrates both the human and equine narratives, and all of the messy
opportunities of this relationship.

**Performing Across Difference: Horses & Nonverbal Communication**

Performance at its most fundamental level is about communication; it is about
intentionally sharing some notion with another through expressive behaviour. When this
performance is used to listen, as much as it is to speak, then this performance can be about
discovering the lives of the animals (and others) with whom we share our homes,
neighbourhoods, and planet. This performance of expressive behaviour holds the possibility of
liberating animals from the ignorance of the human gaze, by making their perspectives
recognized, rather than glossing them over in favour of metaphors or anthropocentric notions.
This performance holds the potential to remind humans that animals are individuals with vibrant
and inherently valuable lives. It is one thing to theoretically understand that other animals have
rich and full lives; it is another to be able to recognize the elements of selfhood and nuances of perspective for oneself. In these nonverbal performances interspecies relationships become possible, and co-learning/co-creation becomes the mode of inquiry. Understanding how meaning is made through performance in interspecies context holds the possibility of being invited into understanding another animal.

In human/animal contexts, meaning is made through body language (including spatial dynamics, gesture, posture), resonance (including affect, emotion, and the energy of intent), and sound. Kari Brandt, in reference to human/equine relationships, calls this the “embodied work of sensation consist[ing] of sensing (as in perceiving) and making sense of something (as in interpreting),” and that sensing and making sense of things are two interconnected ways through which beings (human and horse) negotiate understandings (“Intelligent Bodies” 143). By focusing on these nonverbal elements of performance the ways that meaning is shared and created opens up to include, and even privilege, animal ways of knowing and being in the world. Human and equine bodies may differ significantly, and yet, as the equestrian arts (which includes liberty/ground work and non-riding-based human/equine engagements) have shown, communication through this form of performance is possible even between the radically different individuals of a human and a horse. This communication is often referred to as “learning to speak horse” (Birke, “Learning to Speak Horse” 226), but this speak is the nonverbal speak of performance. By increasing the understanding and awareness of this performance, and how it speaks in human/equine relations (as these dynamics will be different between species, and somewhat between individuals), the space and possibilities allotted to horses begins to expand. If humans can be made aware of the detailed ways horses (and other animals) communicate and make meaning, then a buck is no longer merely a buck, but rather a statement about that horse’s experience.

Any time you share space with another animal you are in relationship with them, and any time you are in relationship with an animal you are making meaning (whether or not you are fully aware of what that meaning is). This form of human/animal performance draws on Diana Taylor’s notions of performance as “a way of knowing,” creating and transmitting knowledge (xvi). It is the “embodied action,” “cultural agency,” and choices that occur between two species that create these ways of knowing (Taylor xvi), producing the opportunity for a human and
another animal to co-create a shared experience and expand their own knowledge(s). If the humans are not aware of the ways that this performance communicates, then they are likely performing ignorance, deafness, or worse, complete disinterest in the horse’s perspective, due to their lack of responsiveness. Whether or not the human wants to be communicating, the horse they are working with is picking up a nuanced articulation of self and perspective from the ways that the human is engaging their body, feel/emotion, and space. However, when no acknowledgement is made in reference to the horse’s embodied statements, it becomes a one-sided conversation that suggests the horse’s thoughts do not matter, and results in them needing to act louder (bite, buck, kick etc.) in order for them to be heard. These interactions set the tone of the relationship, so if partnership is what is sought, then listening is key to making that dynamic possible.

My primary equine partner, Katrina, engages in an initial conversation with every new human she meets.\textsuperscript{15} This allows her to establish how much consideration a given human deserves, and this assessment is based on gaging a human’s awareness of this silent conversation. Katrina goes about this evaluation by ever so subtly stepping into the new human’s space. She is so refined about the manoeuvre that the human often assumes that it is their own fault, that they are crowding her, and respond by moving out of her way. The test usually begins while leading Katrina in to the barn, or while standing around talking in advance of the session. Whatever the context, Katrina will find a way to crowd the human lightly so see if a) they notice, b) how they understand the message, and c) how they respond. Most humans, especially those new to horses, will apologize to Katrina (assuming it is their fault for getting in her way, even though she can walk or stand wherever she likes, and they have not moved) and then yield their position to her. This tells Katrina that they either do not understand the meaning behind the movements, or that they are not worthy of being leaders, and therefore do not deserve her respect as an empowered

\textsuperscript{15} Katrina and I have been working together for almost ten years, with our initial relationship being forged during our across Canada journey in 2008, where Katrina and I spent 160 days together crossing the country from coast to coast. I have seen her perform this assessment with numerous people, and how they respond to her test directly connects with how willing she is respond to their requests and commands.
lead horse. If I inform the human about Katrina’s assessment, and instruct them to hold their ground when Katrina crowds them, and even to ask her to step back and be respectful of their personal space, then Katrina’s evaluation of the person changes. They still may not know enough to deserve her full respect, but they are at least no longer pushed around, or schooled, in the same way. With this information, the human learns a fundamental life lesson about human/equine interactions—space matters. To the human in this situation, until they are filled in on the proceedings, it seems that nothing of importance in going on, other than (perhaps) the conversation that we (humans) are having. However, if they are planning on working with Katrina, this other conversation is of vital importance, as it is setting up the parameters of their pending relationship with Katrina. The foundation of their interaction, and potential partnership, is being established, and they are often completely oblivious to it.

As Keri Brandt suggests, humans who work with horses develop the ability to think in this performance-based context, to recognize the nuances of how their bodies speak to another (human or animal), and to begin to decipher the messages being performed in return (“A Language of” 306). Their human bodies become tuned to their equine partners, and this (predominantly) nonverbal engagement becomes not only the way of speaking, but also the way of thinking, listening, and engaging in the moment. Diane Dutton argues that “shared somatic awareness is a feature of close human-animal relationships,” and that this is achieved through attuning your consciousness to the embodied expressions of your animal partner (102). The challenge then becomes being able to recognize how you have come to a certain understanding, being able to consciously recognize and break down the elements that have created a certain meaning, in order to avoid negative anthropomorphism.

The more noticeably different the other animal’s way of being in the world is, the more likely the anthropocentrism will be perceived and adjusted, as the moments of miscommunication/misunderstanding are more pronounced. We may only be able to see the world through our own human eyes, but that does not mean that we cannot recognize other ways of being and perceiving the world. The more that we can learn about another animal, the more

16 Here “performance-based context” is my term for what Brandt is speaking about; she uses the terms “body language” and messages conveyed through the body.
likely we are to be able to recognize elements of their point of view. In thinking about the implications of communication, media historian and social theorist John Durham Peters writes, “the task is to recognize the creature’s otherness, not to make it over in one’s own likeness and image” (31). The ability to recognize this otherness, while also finding moments of connection, is needed to begin to recognize the perspectives of other animals. With horses, and other animals we work closely with, as Stephen Budiansky points out, “there are enough similarities between [...] societies to allow for co-domestication to occur” (61). Or according anthropologist Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, the “potentiality for dynamic interaction between people and horses arises from the social nature of both the equine and human species, which allows the development of a unique form of complementariness” (174). There are enough instances of shared understandings for this relationship to be recreated again and again throughout history.

Durham Peters suggests that, “communication is perhaps the ultimate border crossing concept, traversing the bounds of species [...] Deliberations about communication are exercises not only in self-knowledge, but in living with the other” (228; 230). Concentrating on communicative potential of performance creates a shared foundation of experience that draws on both animals’ ways of knowing and being in the world, producing the opportunity for relationship to build and meaning to form through co-creation. As Brandt writes, “through a co-created embodied (iconic) system of cues, shared meaning is possible in the absence of spoken verbal language” (“Intelligent Bodies” 145). Embodied systems of speaking open doors to interspecies conversations. Privileging improvisational performance furthers the instances of “like” or “shared” meanings by inhabiting a mutual space in the present and starting from a place of embodied engagement, which allows for connections to be made while still acknowledging the differences between individuals.

Playing in the Now: The Importance of Improvisation

When those working with animals create spaces steeped in performative knowings, the prospects for interspecies connections begin to open up, generating vast potential. However, all forms of performance—even all forms of nonverbal performance—do not hold the same potential for creating expansive interspecies relationships. Théâtre Zingaro employs nonverbal performance as its primary mode of engagement, and yet, On achève bien les Anges (élégies)
failed to appreciate the equine commentary due to the prescribed nature of the acts. For a performance to have genuine interspecies potential it must work within a framework that allows for, and celebrates, animal contributions. For this to occur, the production, or interaction, must have an interest in collaboration (not control), deal in the present moment, and employ an improvisational methodology. Seeking a genuinely interspecies performance in any sort of non-improvised, staged theatrical production is impractical, in that the performance is operating on grounds that permit little interspecies collaboration. In these productions, the foundational decisions have already been made—the map of the performance has been established—and this structure does not create space for animal agency, which operates most effectively in the now. It is one thing to work in this manner when all of the participants can have a solid understanding of these conditions, and how and why a production is proceeding in a given way, but it is another when key agents, the animal actors, cannot recognize or fully comprehend these parameters. This leaves the horses in Zingaro’s productions at a distinct disadvantage, with their only options being to follow or disrupt, not to lead or add creatively to the narrative intentions. Small moments of genuine collaboration may be glimpsed, but the highly structured format of a non-improvised theatrical production is inherently anti-interspecies. The greatest opportunity that animals have for influence in the company of humans is in the moment, and while the moment is still important in these productions, the larger meaning behind the act has been established in advance without the animal’s knowledge or input.

As Ajay Heble suggests, “At its best, improvisation can encourage us to take new risks in our relationships with others, to work together across various divides, traditions, styles, and sites, and to hear and see the world anew” (99). While Heble is largely speaking about human relationships, this promise of improvisation holds as much, if not more, weight in interspecies contexts. Concentrating on improvisational performance in animal/human relations demands that the focus remain on the experience in the moment, offering a common ground and equal foundation of exchange (for both animal and human). Improvisation happens in the now, in whatever moment in which two individuals currently reside. Humans are notoriously bad at being present in the moment, and often dwell in the past or obsess about the future. Verbal language allows us to share these notions with other humans, and continue this throwing of time that skips past the current moment. However, improvisation offers the gift of now, of playing in
this moment, and receiving what is offered at this time. Later the experience may be reflected on and future encounters dreamt of, but if those spaces are dwelt on in the time of the performance, the connection will be lost, and little of worth will be communicated. Improvisation is about sharing the now with another and creating something exclusive to that moment. It cannot be recreated, but what is created may reverberate far beyond that moment. Lessons may be learned, and insights may be shared and discovered. It is in the now that animals most notably dwell (at least on the levels that we, humans, can perceive), and it is the now that we can most fully share with another. Through learning the skills of improvisation, such as to be present in the moment, flow and adapt, embrace change and difference positively, recognize embodied communication, and open one’s self up to the expansive possibilities of the unexpected, this distinct form of engagement can bring about a more interconnected state of being, creating the opportunity for connections between individuals (of like and different kinds). Improvisational performance holds the possibility of cracking open other ways of meaning and co-creating across species lines (examples of this are further explored in chapter four). It holds the potential of a co-created act that is genuinely inter-connected and inter-species.

**Conclusion: Silent Meaning**

When I am working with horses, the embodied fluency is complete, in that I do not think my intentions in words, nor do I translate my horse’s messages verbally (unless translating for another human), but rather I think in action, and communicate through feel. There are moments of humour, moments of connection, moments of frustration, moments of elation, moments of departure, and they are all communicated and created through a sensorial dialogue of body, space, movement, gesture, tension, fluidity, feel, emotion, intuition, resonance, and affect. Often many of these layers are working together all at once. To work in this way is to not think in the linear manner of an English sentence, but rather to make meaning through a word cloud of feel and motion. All those embodied “words” come together to inform and share an understanding, or understandings, with another. As equine trainer Carolyn Resnick explains, communication with a horse is always a dance (141). To work with horses on a co-creative level is to recognize the conversation is constant; if you are sharing space with a horse then you can assume you are talking, whether or not you are fully aware of your messages or what is being said. There is no
escaping the performance, but there are many possibilities to learn to recognize expressive action (your own and theirs), and to begin consciously to co-create understandings and share meanings in this way. Leslie Irvine argues that the human reliance on language as the dominant way to meaningfully communicate limits, and overlooks, a lot of information that contributes to the defining of selfhood, which comes out of dynamics of interaction (9). As Kari Brandt expresses, “de-privileging of spoken language as the form of meaningful communication would create a model of self that allows animals' subjective presence to become visible through interaction” (“A Language Of” 302). It is through performing for another—focusing on the nonverbal expressions and communicating through relationship—that aspects of subjectivity and selfhood are defined.

Marc Bekoff, in writing about his canine companion, Jethro, suggests that Jethro’s language is “richer and deeper than mere words” (xx). Bekoff’s analysis presents an alternative interpretation of nonverbal communication, one that suggests this form of engagement is more complex than words, diverging from the common narrative of verbal superiority. This is also perhaps the reason that so many humans shy away from focusing on this elusive form of speaking; it is much harder to demarcate and contain, highlighting the value of subjective knowledge, and discounting the fantasy of concrete objectivity where meaning is constant and there is no danger of being misunderstood or of misunderstanding. But no relationship, exchange, or performance is ever perfect, and being brave enough to misunderstand can lead to a more complex place of consideration and comprehension, creating a space for genuine communication.

In *Listening, Thinking, Being*, Lisbeth Lipari reminds us that meaning is never precise; even when it comes in words, misunderstanding is always part of communication (7). The act of listening is in many ways also an act of misunderstanding, where our own perspectives meld with those of another. We cannot share consciousness with another, human or animal, so why pretend this is possible, and doom communication to failure before it has begun? As Alan M. Turning argues, if this “shared consciousness is the criterion of success in communication, then communication is impossible” (qtd. in Peters 235). Rather, we need to become comfortable with the reality of misunderstanding, and accept that the aim of communication is to get merely a glimpse of another, to share in a tiny aspect of their rich experience, and to understand that each
fragment communicates something about them to us (and vice versa). And while we should continue to strive to reach the most thorough understanding of another possible, we must accept that this is often based on collecting these small, incomplete, and imperfect hints.

Engaging in communication with another animal through performance is no different; we need to be prepared to get it wrong, for our interpretations to spill over into negative anthropomorphism\textsuperscript{17}, and to make grave mistakes of knowing. But with these mistakes humans can begin to critically engage with the performance of nonverbal communication (their own and others), to recognize the nuances of their animal partner’s contributions, to speak effectively (which is generally, to a significant degree, ineffectively) in this way, and to hear another animal’s voice. Theatre scholar Lourdes Orozco explains that, “While the language that humans use to think, talk and write about animals is often another example of naturalization of human exceptionalism and a way to exercise it, it can also constitute the first step towards change, an opportunity to destabilise [sic] the status quo” (7). The more that we talk about animals, even if our language is imperfect and lacking in a variety of damaging ways, the more the contradictions and human-centrism in our thought may be perceived, allowing us to find better, more inclusive, language and better ways of engaging with animal others. Erika Fudge suggests, perhaps anthropomorphism is not always the sin it is claimed to be, but rather a way into another animal’s experience through recognizing the similarities, and suggesting that animals are far more like us than we are perhaps comfortable with (144, 132). Human and animal performances

\textsuperscript{17} Anthropomorphism becomes negative when the recognition and connections are not grounded in the actual offerings and performances of the animal, and are rather human projections on to the animal of how the human would like to see the exchange. The more positive forms of anthropomorphism recognize elements of connection between us and other individual animals, and employ these similarities to discover the complexities of animal perspectives. According to Frans de Waal, “The most common anthropomorphism, however, is the naïve kind that attributes human feelings and thoughts to animals based on insufficient information or wishful thinking” (72). De Waal refers to this negative anthropomorphism as “anthropocentric anthropomorphism,” and labels positive anthropomorphism as “animalcentric anthropomorphism” (77).
may not be identical, or, at times, even remotely similar, and they may connect on only a handful of levels, but there are still connections, no matter how small, and from those connections relationships can begin to form, and a sharing of perspectives can occur. Traci Warkentin explains that, “Bodies, however physically and physiologically different, can be grounds for nonverbal communication and for interpreting behavior through attending to the embodied movements of others” (109).

John Durham Peters points out that the trouble with human/animal communication is that animal talking comes off as “the sounding of alien intelligences that seem to lack interiority” to the human ear; they cannot respond to us in the medium of our approach, they cannot speak back in words, and therefore we cannot hear them (224). If we know this, then why do we continue to focus on this form of engagement when in the presence of other animals? If we, as a species, are as intelligent as we claim to be, then why do we not change our medium of engagement, and stack the deck in favour of connection? Changing the medium of engagement from words to performance allows for this shift towards the favouring of interspecies connection, and the hope of understanding. Performance, especially improvisational performance, which will be discussed further in the following chapters, offers the opportunity to speak in a common tongue, to articulate in the grammar of action, gesture, movement, and resonance. It acknowledges that meaning can be felt, and learning can be achieved through being, sharing, and doing. Focusing on performance in human/animal relations allows the focus to remain on the experience in the moment creating the opportunity for a reciprocal engagement in which both human and animal have the ability to create meaning, share knowledge, and dictate the course of action. Animals are constantly made to mean in human-centric contexts, but the notion of improvised nonverbal performance creates the opportunity for these structures to be challenged, by creating an interspecies ethics of engagement, which equally honours animal perspectives and celebrates animal agency—an experience that is all too rare in human-animal interactions.
CHAPTER 2—Human/Equine Foundations:
A History of “Speaking Horse”

Introduction: Shifting Perspectives

In the not-so-distant past, the idea of speaking horse, or speaking with any animal, through the expressive action of performance or otherwise, was considered by many a futile and ignorant notion. Animals were deemed to lack language (Wolfe, *Animal Rites*) 2), and were considered to be merely a collection of instincts, with little individuality or agency. According to René Descartes, animals can feel the sensation of pain, but “do not experience them [the sensations of pain] as suffering because there is ‘no one home’” (Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism* 45). If there is “no one home” then there is no one to communicate with, and little of worth to be said. Humans have spent considerable time arguing for the differences between us (humans) and them (animals), leading to the marginalization of animals, and a lack of consideration in terms of the possibilities of connection and communication. Even when interspecies communication has been explored it has often been skewed in favour of human language, exploring not whether there can be some sort of meaningful exchange between a human and an animal, but rather whether an animal can learn to speak human (in some manner) and address us in our own dominant modes of language. According to Erika Fudge, “what is revealed in ape language and many animal intelligence experiments, Davis and Chomsky argue, is not so much the animals' capacity, or incapacity, as our inability to look beyond our own frames of reference” (138), our inability to hear or see a language that manifests differently from our own.

As I reference in the introduction, each human/animal relationship holds its own cultural context, as it is a specific meeting of two cultures (one human and one animal), which co-creates an intercultural context that needs to be understood in order for its performances to be critically engaged with. While the key aspects of performance—body language, resonance, and sound—make meaning in the majority (if not all) of human/animal interactions, the specifics differ with each intercultural exchange. For example, horses are predominantly silent animals, with only a small percentage of their conversational contributions coming from sound, meaning that sound holds significantly less importance in human/equine interactions, than it does in other forms of nonverbal performance. Sound still speaks to horses, though not as words do for literate humans, but as a form of sonic resonance, which speaks through the feel and energy of the sounds. In
order for performance to make intelligible meaning in a specific human/animal context an intuitive understanding of the other and/or a solid knowledge of the other individual’s cultural ways of being is necessary to be able to critically engage in the performed exchange. In the setting of equine/human interactions an understanding of both body language and resonance (and to a lesser degree sound) are needed in order to make meaning. While the equestrian world has a meaningful history of being interested in understanding equine communication, with a clear trend emerging around the 1980s, with the development of Natural Horsemanship, this intercultural exchange has also largely missed the mark only recognizing body language as the foundational aspect needed to speak horse, overlooking the importance of resonance in making meaning through this physically demonstrative language, this performance. In order for performance to clearly make meaning in human/equine interactions understanding of both body language and resonance need to be employed. The greater the understanding of these aspects of performance, and how they make meaning in this specific intercultural context, the more likely the performances can be critically engaged with, and accurately understood (as much as any communication is ever accurate), making equine perspective more readily recognized.

There are two significant trends in the past few decades that have offered critical pieces for creating a complex understanding of human/equine communication. The first trend towards understanding equine language, Natural Horsemanship, which is largely associated with Monty Roberts and his methods of speaking horse, was originally geared towards removing the physical violence in equine training, and (claims) to focus on schooling horses through understanding equine psychology, and learning to speak horse (Birke, “Learning to Speak Horse” 233). This methodology, as I mentioned above, only recognizes body language—primary the angle of the body, direction, and speed of travel (Roberts, The Man Who 23)—and not energy, emotion, and resonance, as the key elements of this human/equine communication. It was not until the development of Equine-Facilitated Learning (EFL) in the early 2000s, and the work of Linda Kohanov, that the emotional/feel side of communication began to be overtly recognized as a complementary primary element of nonverbal communication in equine/human interactions. This second, more recent, trend works towards understanding the emotional lives of horses, and how emotion, affect, and resonance create meaning without words in human/animal relationships. Kohanov shows, through employing horses as teachers, how intuition, feeling, emotion, and
resonance make meaning in interpersonal contexts (human/human and human/horse), offering a crucial piece of the interspecies communication equitation that had previously been overlooked (at times implied, but not overtly discussed). EFL focuses on training humans in emotional intelligence. And while this form of training is not concerned with making humans better equestrians, more versed in understanding horses, the lessons that it teaches are very applicable to improving human/animal relationships, and informing interspecies communication. With these two trends (more on them to follow), learning to speak horse, and understanding this interspecies communication in a complex manner, became a mainstream interest in the equestrian community. Yet, what it means to speak horse, what is involved in the speaking—how the “grammar” is embodied and demonstrated—and how complex this communication is, continues to evolve. These two trends, Natural Horsemanship and Equine-Facilitated Learning—appreciably influenced by Monty Roberts and Linda Kohanov respectively—have been working throughout the last few decades towards expanding human comprehension of horses, and the possibilities of human/equine communication.

Even within these trends, which are significant steps forward in human/equine communication and the comprehension of horses, three noteworthy aspects have often been lacking or diminished in the conversations: 1) how this communication can be used to not only command, but also to hear and recognize the complexities of equine perspectives; 2) how understandings of both body language and emotion/resonance are needed to critically engage with this form of communication (generally only one aspect is overtly discussed in each of these methods); 3) that this form of communication is performed—it is not merely about mimicking equine movements, but about fully embodying an intention, and co-creating meaning through expressive action. It is only through appreciating how each of these aspects of nonverbal communication come together in performance with another (in this case with a horse) that a complex understanding of an exchange can be reached. This speaking horse, or more accurately this interspecies, equine/human, speaking, is co-created between individuals (human and horse) through relationship and a nuanced knowledge of performance in this specific intercultural context.
In the Past

Much training of the not so distant past relied on pain, aggression, and fear to “break” horses (as it is commonly refered). Breaking in this sense meant to destroy the horse’s spirit, placing them in a mind frame of disassociation from which they could be easily controlled by humans. The goal was not to speak with horses, but to turn them into willing machines who would work for humans with little comment or complaint. Horses that are broken, in these terms, have been restrained and hurt until they realize that there is no way out of this abuse other than to give up. In order to survive, these horses shut down, stop trying, and merely do what is asked of them with as little disruption (and heart\textsuperscript{18}) as possible. And while the end result may be a human who is able to maintain control of the horse, it is not an expansive or mutually beneficial relationship. While this is not an uncommon human/animal dynamic (where only the human really benefits from the exchange), what makes this instance strange is the duality of intentions: the desire for a reliable partner, one who will look after you and allow you to do things you cannot do on your own, in contrast with the harsh methods employed to achieve such a partnership. As Erika Fudge writes, “We live with animals, we recognize them, we even name some of them, but at the same time we use them as if they were inanimate, as if they were objects” (8). We treat many animals, and horses in particular—with their long history of providing horsepower to humans—as perfect machines, ones who are meant to do our bidding without question, while having just enough personality for us to love them, but not so much personality that they may challenge us. The history of humans working with horses is riddled with these strange contradictions, in which the human claims a desire for special relationship with a horse, but then proceeds to marginalize the horse (at times to the point of physical and emotional abuse), diminishing the horse’s individuality, and reducing the horse to a fraction of their potential.

Elizabeth Lawrence Atwood writes, “associated with the equine capacity for providing traction and transport have always been the horse's extreme sensitivity and an unusual

\textsuperscript{18} “Heart” in the equestrian world refers to a horse’s try—how much they are willing to do/give to achieve what is asked of them by a human—how much consideration, passion, and effort they are willing to put into that relationship.
potentiality for fine-tuned communication with people” (ix). However, this communication has often been limited, due to marginalizing perspectives of horses, and only appreciated for how it can be wielded to get horses to do the bidding of humans, and not for the ways that it may create a mutually beneficial exchange. This communication has also often not been so fine-tuned, though that potential has always existed, and been embraced by some, if only a minority of trainers. As Marc Bekoff writes, “the behaviourists, those who believe animals are little different from machines, preprogrammed to respond predictably to a variety of stimuli, are gradually losing ground to those who take a more common sense attitude to what and who animals are” (xi). Of course, this is not the only view of speaking with animals; according to David Abram, “the human discourse within indigenous, oral communities responds directly to the felt expressiveness of other species, of the elements, of the intelligent, animate earth” (The Spell 154). While there have always been more expansive understandings of animals, and ones that recognize the possibilities of human/animal communication, these perspectives have often been forced to the fringes. Reductive understandings of animal intelligence and agency, which deny the possibility of humans and animals connecting and communicating on more than a basic level, have often been far more common in many human societies (both in the past and the present).

The lofty goal of the equestrian relationship is to build a willing partnership that is more than the sum of its parts, and which honours and harnesses two ways of knowing and being in the world, one horse and one human. However, what is often actually created is a complacent horse that merely does what they are told. The horse’s flares of personality are often not appreciated, especially if they challenge the humans’ plans, as they may come in undesirable forms, such as not wanting to work in a given way, or articulating displeasure with a buck or other, so called, bad behaviour. When a human creates an understanding in an engagement that says, “your perspective doesn’t matter,” by ignoring the performed communication of the horse they are working with, the possibility of a mutually beneficial partnership (a genuine partnership) is lost. If only one member of a team is able to speak, and be heard, then only half the team’s knowledge is being employed, making it not a partnership, but a dictatorship, in which the body of one (the horse) is used for the benefit of the other (the human).

So, in the late 1970s and early 1980s when, the now famous “horse whisperer,” Monty Roberts was beginning to build recognition and respect for his methods of speaking horse, this
idea of listening to horses was a fairly radical notion, and one that he received significant backlash for from many in the equestrian community (34). Roberts’s methods of speaking horse, and bringing these notions to a mainstream equestrian audience, proved to be one of the largest and most influential steps towards recognizing equine voices, and acknowledging that partnership comes more readily through communication, rather than domination. Roberts demonstrated through his “Join-Up®” method for “starting” horses (more on this to come), that understanding their ways, and listening to their body language was a far more effective way of training horses, rather than the more common methods of breaking, which relied on fear, pain, and aggression. Still, this was only a first step towards recognizing equine perspectives and understanding how meaning is made without words through performance in human/equine contexts.

As I reference in the previous chapter and argue throughout this work, in human/animal contexts (and specifically here, in equine/human contexts), meaning is made through the expressive action of performance, which includes not only body language (spatial dynamics, gesture, posture), but also resonance (affect, emotion, and the energy of intent), and sound (but often to a much lesser degree, depending on the species, and to a much lesser degree in human/equine contexts). However, it wasn’t until the more recent arrival of Equine-Facilitated Learning, and the works of Linda Kohanov, that the notion that emotion and resonance also make meaning, and allow us to communicate in nonverbal contexts, was brought widely to the equestrian world—though this is still an emerging understanding, whereas the notion that body language communicates in equine/human engagements is widespread. Both of these trends (though decades apart) were responding to lacks that were perceived in the equestrian world: first a lack of recognition that violence is not needed to train a horse, and second, that emotion and resonance matter, and communicate in ways that are often overlooked and diminished, but which provide crucial context for understanding nonverbal exchanges (human/human or human/horse).

Yet, these two streams of study are rarely overtly combined, as one focuses on training horses from a position that predominantly recognizes the physical lives of horses, focuses on the importance of body language in communication, and only considers physical abuse (not mental and emotional trauma); while the other focuses on training humans, who often have little-to-no experience working with horses, and mainly focuses on the invisible aspects of communication
(intuition, emotion, affect, and resonance). Some practitioners may study both methods on their own, and combine these teachings, but in the larger trends of the trainings many focus on dedicating themselves to one method, leaving significant gaps in the common understandings of horses and how they make meaning and communicate in relationship, and the breadth of equine experiences. For there to be complex, nuanced, and expansive understandings of horses, and human/equine relationships, both the human and the horse need to be equally considered in the methods, and the physical, mental, and emotional qualities of the interaction all need to be engaged. When combined, these two methods offer a significant way to challenge the mythic concept of the horse (as perfect magical being, and/or of unfeeling machine) and address the narrow cultural understandings of human/equine relationships, by expanding human comprehension of horses, and moving the focus away from horses existing to serve humans, to a more multivalent understanding of horses as partners with complex and nuanced perspectives. When combined these two methods offer a complex understanding of how meaning is made in human/equine contexts through the performance of nonverbal communication.

**Nonviolence and Expansive Equestrienship**

Even the most respectful human/equine relationships have historically been about horses serving humans. While this is not likely to change entirely (at least not in the near future), the perception of what it means to be beneficial for a human can and does change with the cultural climate. With a shift in the understanding of beneficial, space can open for equine perspectives, providing equine agency with some room to manoeuvre. Horses have gone from being beneficial primarily as farm labour and transportation, and shifted to being beneficial as leisure/sport partners. These shifts in culture have the potential to change the relationship between humans and horses from one that is reductive and labels horses purely as instinctual beings whose role is to serve humans (an understanding that has played out in both farm and leisure/sport realms), to an understanding that stretches beyond these limited narratives, and becomes an on-going evolution of expanding potential, constantly discovering new facets and possibilities of interspecies collaboration. These shifts have been taking place and making significant steps forward throughout the last few decades as more humans have begun to question the hierarchical
relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, and the notion of animals as machines.

The greatest shift in equestrian understandings in the last few decades has been the movement that has come to be known as Natural Horsemanship. Natural Horsemanship is a term coined by Pat Parelli (Natural Horse-man-ship), and refers to a method of working with horses that comes from a position of understanding herd dynamics and communication, and employing this knowledge to train horses. It is meant to be a gentle method of training that relies on knowledge and an understanding of horses’ innate behaviour and inclinations, rather than relying on violence and punishment to achieve the desired results.

According to Miller and Lamb (2005), Natural Horsemanship—while building on long-established ideas of rapport with horses—really took off after the 1970s. The “revolution” began, they suggest, on American cattle ranches. Despite the stereotypes, cowboys—Miller and Lamb argue—had to be gentle with horses, to see the world through their eyes. (Birke, “Learning to Speak” 220)

Natural Horsemanship has become one of the fastest growing movements in the equestrian world since the 1980s, and is often associated with specific practitioners (such as Monty Roberts, Pat Parelli, Ray Hunt, and the Dorrances19) and the western discipline in the United States (though it has grown to international levels of practice and recognition). It is worth noting, though, that this method of training is still highly based on a model of human dominance and equine subservience (though often framed as partnership), and frequently only acknowledges physical abuse as an intrinsic negative to be avoided, overlooking the larger implications of equine marginalization,

19 Tom and Bill Dorrance are brothers who grew up ranching in Oregon, California in the early 20th century (Tom, 11 May 1910 – 11 June 2003, and Bill, 19 January 1906 – 20 July 1999), and are considered the fathers (or grandfathers) of Natural Horsemanship (“Tom and Bill Dorrance,” Wikipedia). While they did not have a direct hand in the creation or marketing of the movement, they were the mentors to many of the key clinicians whose names became synonymous with the movement. Dr. Robert Miller and Rick Lamb claim the “revolution” started with Tom Dorrance (v), while others, such as Monty Roberts, credit Bill as having the most influence on his training and program (The Man Who 28).
and the emotional trauma it can cause. The level of dominance involved in the training models varies from clinician to clinician.

As Verlyn Klinkenborg writes in the *New York Times* in reference to the passing of Bill Dorrance in 1999,

Bill Dorrance saw that subtlety was nearly always a more effective tool than force, but he realized that subtlety was a hard tool to exercise if you believe, as most people do, that you are superior to the horse. There was no dominance in the way Dorrance rode, or in what he taught, only partnership. […] Plenty of people have come across Bill Dorrance and borrowed an insight or two, and some have made a lot of money by popularizing what they seemed to think he knew. But what he knew will never be popular, nor did he ever make much money from it. You cannot sell modesty or undying curiosity. It is hard to put a price on accepting that everything you think you know about horses may change with the very next horse.

While Bill and Tom Dorrance’s methods may have been at the heart of Natural Horsemanship, at its conception, the desire to make money and market sellable methods has meant that there are many different strains of the movement, with various levels of connection to these original goals. Natural Horsemanship has become a catchall phrase to refer to those individuals who have come to define themselves through their “alternative” approach to working with horses, and their associations with certain equestrian “gurus” and a strict adherence to their methods. As Lynda Birke suggests, the term Natural Horsemanship is used to “cover a range of approaches advertised as being ‘new’ methods. Although these methods are disparate, what they have in common is that they are advertised as being based on gentleness and are seen as departing radically from traditional approaches” (“Talking About Horses” 108). “Within this mode of narrative, the horse is ‘other’ and must be understood through the human learning to communicate and through appropriate training” (Birke, “Talking About Horses” 107). But there have always been practitioners who adopted a gentle view in (likely) all disciplines and practices, with Xenophon, the ancient Greek author of the *Art of Horsemanship*, being the most frequently cited example of the longevity of this this mode of thinking (Birke, “Learning to Speak Horse”; Budiansky; Lamb and Miller; Leblanc; Parelli; Roberts; amongst others). Birke
states that, “Good classical riding, too, has retained that traditional belief that the relationship and the skills of riding must be firmly based on something called ‘horsemanship’—an ability to understand what the horse is thinking and feeling and to act accordingly, with sensitivity” (“Learning to Speak Horse” 219).

Natural Horsemanship has taken advantage of a collective desire to move away from certain violent tendencies in training that had become common in the horse world, specifically responding to certain “breaking” practices, as Roberts recounts in *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, and has been the most effective at marketing this perspective and bringing it to a mainstream audience. Whether or not it is actually a gentler more inclusive practice depends on what aspects are being focused on and what methods are being compared. Birke studies “Natural Horsemanship (NH), as a definitive cultural change within the horse industry,” and states that, “Practitioners are often evangelical about their methods, portraying NH as a radical departure from traditional methods. In doing so, they create a clear demarcation from the practices and beliefs of the conventional horse-world” (“Learning to Speak Horse” 217). Yet there are also many equestrians who do not identify as Natural Horsemanship practitioners who also engage in nonviolent methods of training that use equine behavioural studies and a nuanced understanding of horses to train—a critical thinking approach to working with horses, rather than a punishment-based approach.  

Still, removing the violence from training is only the first step in reaching a

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20 Many professional equestrians, who compete in all levels of the seven FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale) sanctioned sports, including the international riders, practice methods that are also found in Natural Horsemanship programs, though they are unlikely to identify as Natural Horsemanship practitioners. FEI is the international governing body of the seven primary equestrian sports (which does not include racing or rodeo events). The six FEI sports are dressage & para-equestrian dressage, jumping, eventing, driving & para-equestrian driving, endurance, vaulting, and reining. There is a cultural divide within the equestrian world, between “serious” equestrians who compete in FEI, and other formalized sports, and train in a structured manner with professionally accredited coaches, and those who are deemed “less knowledgeable” for their (perhaps) less structured, and (perhaps) less competitive approaches to working with
positive and expansive experience of partnership with horses, as there are many levels to understanding the ways that animals may be marginalized, oppressed, and abused in their relationships with humans, with physical violence only being the most obvious.

Rather than referring to all of the advancements in equestrian ideology as Natural Horsemanship, I am going to speak to these shifts in approach and ideology as moving towards an “expansive equestrienship.” I am choosing to use a broader term with less cultural baggage than Natural Horsemanship in order to equally honour those individuals working to advance equestrian practices who are not directly connected with the Natural Horsemanship movement and who do not identify as being part of that group. Within the movements towards expansive equestrienship both Natural Horsemanship and Equine-Facilitated Learning have played significant roles.

*Natural Horsemanship*

Natural Horsemanship grew in three waves, with the third wave becoming the internationally recognized trend that it is today. The first two waves were much subtler and localized, but set up the conditions for Natural Horsemanship to emerge and be claimed across the United States and beyond. The first wave was the grassroots movement initiated by Tom and Bill Dorrance in a very quiet manner in California in the 1940s and 50s, and which continued in a personal, localized, manner throughout their lives. The Dorrances encouraged an approach to training based on understanding the horse and working with and for horses, rather than against horses, and it is these, so called, “backyard riders” that are generally associated with the Natural Horsemanship movement.

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21 Natural Horsemanship has become a culturally and historically contingent term, which has been branded and “owned” by certain individuals in the field, and with others being lumped into this movement with or without their consent or having an interest in being labeled as part of a movement. The term Natural Horsemanship has become more of a marketing tool, rather than an actual indication of a certain perspective or approach. It is a catch phrase that suggests certain ethics around working with horses that may or may not be ethical and gentle in practice.
them. While the Dorrances continued to be significant influences for the clinicians who became the key players in the movement towards Natural Horsemanship, after the 70s the focus shifted from them to their protégées, with Monty Roberts being the first, and perhaps the most widely recognized clinician, followed by Pat Parelli. While Roberts and Parelli both published their first books around the same time in the 1990s, Roberts’s work on nonviolent methods of “starting” (rather than breaking) horses gained enough international attention pre-book to receive an invitation from the Queen of England to demonstrate his methods at Buckingham Palace in 1988 (The Man Who 189). From that visit Roberts received the Queen’s support and endorsement, drawing significant international focus to the notion of nonviolent training and starting of horses through learning to speak horse. It was this recognition that laid the foundation for these new gentle methods to spread, expand, and gain respect throughout the 1990s, as Natural Horsemanship emerged as a movement, associated with a handful of clinicians across the United States.

Both Tom and Bill Dorrance have since published books on their notions and approaches to horse training, but neither have received the recognition or acclaim that their students have, leaving them comparatively unknown outside of the circles dedicated to Natural Horsemanship.

A “clinician” is an equestrian who teaches and disseminates their knowledge through a workshop style platform. So rather than working with individuals and their horses in a private training scenario, a clinician holds workshops (often across the country and/or around the world) on their methods, and human/equine teams pay to work with them for the duration of the workshop, which often includes many human/equine teams and has a gallery of spectators. Clinicians may also have private students that they work with regularly, and be involved in other areas of the horse industry, such as a horse trainer and breeder, but they often are most recognized for their work as a public speaker that teaches in this workshop model. There are also many professional riders who run clinics, but they are generally recognized first as knowledgeable riders, and second as a clinician, and generally offer far fewer clinics in a year.

The third wave of this movement is Natural Horsemanship, not a discipline, but as a distinct ideology of training, which as Birke indicates, “has been taken up, marketed, sold through educational clinics, and has spread widely in North America and Europe” (“Learning to Speak Horse” 220). As Miller and Lamb suggest, “Natural Horsemanship is no longer an upstart movement: it is a large and lucrative industry” (9). Natural Horsemanship has moved beyond being just the pithy description that Parelli assigned to his training ideology, and has become a commonly understood term in the equestrian world, which has specific connotations. While the term is generally associated with certain clinicians and those who follow in their footsteps, the term also means independently of the key players, making it more akin to a belief system than purely an approach to training. While Roberts may not directly consider himself part of this movement, and does not necessarily involve himself in the larger implications of the movement, he would be generally considered a significant influence on the field, or “revolution,” as Miller and Lamb name it, and he is included in Miller and Lamb’s list of key Natural Horsemanship practitioners (40).

Monty Roberts

For this study, I focus on the works of Monty Roberts, as Roberts is the clinician most known for training from a perspective of understanding equine language, a language he has named “Equus.” While all of the Natural Horsemanship clinicians engage in Equus to some degree, whether or not they use that term specifically, Roberts has spent much of his career trying to break down the language into specific body language phrases (specific performed actions). These phrases are gestures that Roberts considers to mean the same thing consistently to the majority of horses, and can be learned and used by humans to speak horse in order to train effectively. As Roberts describes the language,

[It is a] silent language [that] uses movements of the body—"signs" that can be read. I've called it Equus but I believe this is a universal tongue understood not just by all wild and domestic horses, ponies, mules and even donkeys but also by other "flight" animals such as deer. Once learned, the language allows a new understanding between human and horse. (The Man Who xviii)

Roberts’s professional life goal is to remove violence from horse training around the world, and he believes that the most effective method of achieving this is to educate humans on how horses
think and speak, so that interspecies communication is possible, removing the “need” for aggression. It is Roberts’s international demonstrations and teaching of Equus that has allowed him to make significant headway into removing the tendency towards violence in horse training. In Roberts’s best-known book, *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, he details how he came to discover the language of Equus as a young teenager in the backcountry of California rounding up mustang herds for rodeo events, with the help of Bill Dorrance.

Roberts was more interested in spending time observing the herds and how they communicated amongst themselves, than he was in his job of wrangling the horses. Studying wild horse behaviour became a lifelong obsession for him, drawing him back to the open country where he could spend time in the presence of the mustangs whenever he could manage it. From his experience with mustangs, and how the lead mares (horses live in matriarchal social structures) push adolescent horses away from the herd as a performed form of reprimand for undesirable behaviour, and then invite them back in once the appropriate amount of contrition has been demonstrated, praising them for their change in behaviour, Roberts devised his training method Join-Up®. This method is used to gain respect from horses through claiming a position of leadership similar to that demonstrated by the mustang mares. In Join-Up® Roberts “enters into communication with the horse that will result in the horse voluntarily (a critical distinction from the past) deciding to work with this human in this new endeavour” (*The Man Who* xix).

Working in a round pen, one begins Join-Up® by making large movements and noise as a predator would and begins driving the horse to run away. She then gives the horse the option to flee or Join-Up®. Through body language, the trainer will ask, “Will you pay me the respect due to a herd leader and join and follow me?” The horse will respond with predictable herd behavior: by locking an ear on her, then by licking and chewing and dropping his head in a display of trust. The exchange concludes with the trainer adopting passive body language, turning her back on the horse and without eye contact, invites him to come close. Join-Up® occurs when the animal willingly chooses to be with the human and walks toward her accepting her leadership and protection. This process of communication through behavior and body language and mutual concern and
respect, can be a valuable tool to strengthen all other work with horses.

(“About Join-Up ®”)

As Roberts describes it in *From My Hands to Yours*, Join-Up ® is achieved through using various body postures, which push the horse away, such throwing a lung line at them, keeping his shoulders square, his eyes locked on their eyes, and his body positioned at a certain angle to the horse’s body (41-42). It is only once the horse starts to show signs of submission and a desire to stop running, demonstrated through four gestures—an ear turned towards Roberts, starting to move their circle nearer to him, licking and chewing, and dropping their head—that Roberts then softens his posture (drops his gaze and changes the angle of his body), and stops driving the horse forward, inviting them into the middle of the pen and to be near to Roberts (*From My Hands* 43-45). If Join-Up ® has been achieved, the horse will then calmly walk into the middle of the pen and position their head near Roberts shoulder, demonstrating a willingness to follow Roberts’s lead. Roberts breaks down this method through a serious of illustrations showing the correct body posture and gestures needed to achieve Join-Up ®, but says little about the energy associated with the gestures, beyond marking them “predatory,” “piercing gaze,” or “passive” (*From My Hands* 43; 40; 45). Though these gestures alone will achieve little if they are not delivered with the correct energy, and timed well with the horse’s offering, there is little discussion of how to achieve these more elusive, felt, elements.

What is significant at this point in the discussion is that it was this turn to understanding how horses communicate (through performance), and the belief that communication between humans and horse is possible (and not a magical ability of some special individuals), that spurred on the revolution, or more accurately, the cultural shift, in equestrienship. While a variety of equestrians had likely engaged in this interspecies language previously, it was Roberts’s work of exposing and systemizing the specifics of the gestures that made the (likely) subconscious process of many intuitive equestrians more of learnable skill and less of mystical ability that
some innately possessed. This work began to break down the magic of the “horse whisperer,” a “magic” that had some burned at the stake in previous centuries.25

While Roberts has named the language of horses, their “mother tongue,” “Equus” (*The Man Who* 238), and claims that he can “now enumerate about one hundred or more signs the horse will respond to” (*The Man Who* 23), it is not Equus that he, or other humans, are actually speaking when they are communicating with horses through body language. Horses are unlikely to view a human (or any other species) as another horse, and are in fact discouraged from engaging with humans in this way, because equine/equine communication often involves encroaching on personal space, and using teeth or feet when misunderstandings and arguments occur, an outcome that can be devastating for the softer bodies of humans. Rather, the humans are drawing on a basic understanding of equine communication in order to co-create an interspecies language, a language of equestrienship that honours both species and their methods of engagement. As Keri Brandt argues, “Because humans and horses do not have a shared symbolic language, they must both use their bodies as a basis for iconic transaction” (“Intelligent Bodies” 145). While body language may be a universal language of sentient beings, to a certain extent, that does not mean that there are not specific dialects and cultural understandings at play within the language that change how the gestures are understood and received. Humans must gain an understanding of these culturally specific meanings in order to co-create an interspecies language with a horse; they must gain an understanding of Equus, and be able to negotiate reinterpretations appropriate to an interspecies context (eg. kicking is not an appropriate response to human misunderstandings). As Roberts states,

The key ingredient in equine language [as perceived by humans] is the positioning of the body and its direction of travel. The attitude of the body relative to the long

25 Morocco was “a white stallion exhibited by Master John Banks at the Belle Sauvage Inn in London and on extensive provincial and overseas tours, who performed such an elaborate and impressive act - including counting tricks, returning gloves to their owners, and spelling out words- that he and his owner were eventually burned at the stake in Rome as sorcerers” (Dobson 119).
axis of the spine and the short axis: this is critical to their vocabulary. It is their vocabulary. (The Man Who 23)

However, it is dangerous to assume that a human can have a full understanding of equine language, as it limits that language to our own individual modes of intelligence and perception, closing the door on other aspects that are yet to be recognized by suggesting that we, humans, have a solid comprehension of horses. The notion of being able to fully understand a fabulously different other being is likely to lead to a lack of exploration, falsely ending the need to improve the relationship and reach other levels of understanding.

While many Natural Horsemanship clinicians claim that the positioning of the body is the most important aspect of this performed language, an article by Lynda Birke, Jo Hockenhull, Emma Creighton, Lisa Pinno, Jenny Mee, and Daniel Mills reviewing three independent studies regarding how horses “respond to variations in human approach” indicates that the speed of the approach matters more than the posture (Birke et al. “Horses Responses” 62). When the energy associated with the intent of the approach is directed and fast, horses tend to initiate their flight responses much sooner than approaches undertaken slowly (no matter the posture and eye contact). In this case the energy and movement mattered more than merely the posture. This said, posture, gesture, and energy are difficult to fully divorce from one another, as it is extremely challenging to approach with speed, while maintain a relaxed posture, and vice versa. The motion affects the energy, changing the meaning behind the message. Only discussing body language, as Roberts does, is to overlook the connections between feel and gesture, simplifying the exchange in a manner that diminishes significant (invisible) aspects of the interaction, the resonances, which are crucial for understanding.

Believing that “knowing” equine body language is all that it takes to comprehend a horse is a narrow view of a complex engagement. As Brandt argues, creating an understanding between a horse and a human “is not just a one-way relationship of humans merely imitating ‘horse language.’ Horses, too, are thinking, emotional, decision-making beings who, like humans, develop ways to communicate their subjectivity to their human partners” (“A Language of Their Own” 307). If a basic understanding of gesture were all that was required for interspecies communication, then “horse whisperers” would not be nearly so impressive and captivating. As Linda Kohanov states,
Even experienced equestrians aren’t fully conscious of how they respond to nonverbal input from the horses, which is why clinicians promoting a certain method find that some students can perform the exact same moves as the experts and have no impact whatsoever. (*Riding Between* xxix)

It is this elusive quality of the art of equestrienship, often referred to as “feel,” that has kept the horse whisperers in business. The words to accurately describe and teach feel have often evaded equestrians at all levels, leaving it as an intuitive ability that you either have or do not. Much like actors must possess or acquire a presence on stage, equestrians must develop a feel for horses in order to be successful; however, an exact definition of feel, what it means, or how one goes about acquiring it, is often left up to the individual to discover, which can mean they never do. While feel is always likely to be a somewhat equivocal virtue, one that becomes a lifelong quest to find and reach new levels of, that does not mean that it is not possible to get closer to being able to understand and explain this ability, inviting more humans into the fold of being able to recognize equine offers and contributions, and understand how they, their human selves, mean in nonverbal human/animal contexts. If more humans can comprehend, at least to some degree, how nonverbal communication speaks and means through performance, then they are less likely to be the ignorant human in the room in the face of interspecies exchanges, creating space for animals to speak and claim their rights to voice and agency.

Understanding body language and spatial dynamics is (perhaps) the first step to acquiring nonverbal literacy in this realm, with this physically demonstrative language (the physical aspects of the performance) being reasonably easy to recognize and unpack. It is the second level of comprehension that is much more difficult to articulate and recognize. However, it is understandings of feel, and how the energy of intent and emotion (the resonances) bring layers, and nuances of meaning, to an awareness of body language that complicate and synergize silent communication. It is this area of communication that Equine-Facilitated Learning (EFL), and Linda Kohanov (the most recognized clinician in the field), focus on in their work of teaching humans to recognize and comprehend nonverbal communication. Where Roberts, and many of the Natural Horsemanship practitioners, focus on body language as the key ingredient for human/equine communication, Equine-Facilitated Learning practitioners focus on emotional
intelligence and the energies of interactions as the driving elements creating meaning in nonverbal communication (human/human and human/animal).

**Equine-Facilitated Learning**

Equine-Facilitated Learning (EFL) is arguably the fastest growing trend in the equestrian world at the present moment. Equine-Facilitated Learning has many names and is associated with, and incorporated into, a number of wellness practices with horses, such as therapeutic riding and Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy. Equine-Facilitated Learning refers to a mode of working with horses in which the horses are engaged as teachers to help humans recognize emotional resonance, intuition, and connect with their authentic self (as it is often termed). The majority of the work done in Equine-Facilitated Learning practices and workshops involves working with horses from the ground (generally riding is not part of the experience), while focusing on human learning, rather than on horse training. Unlike therapeutic riding, which is based on the wellness benefits of the physical contact between interspecies bodies through the act of riding, EFL deals more with intellectual/emotional (rather than physical) development. EFL differs from Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy in that it may, or may not, involve an accredited therapist, and focuses on developing life skills through working with horses, rather than delving into personal traumas. EFL is more about general life coaching, rather than therapy. As EFL clinician Linda Kohanov explains in reference to her workshop *The Art of Freedom*, “it explore[s] the emotional dimension of the horse-human connection, it [is]n’t designed to delve into personal trauma” (*Riding Between* 102). Still, whether or not a therapist is present, working with horses (especially for those new to the practice) has a tendency to trigger a lot of emotions,

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26 There are many variations of this term that have come to reference this type of work, such as “facilitated equine experiential learning” or FEEL (trademarked by Horse Spirit Connections in Ontario), “equine facilitated wellness,” and “equine assisted growth and learning” (EAGALA). “Equine-Facilitated Learning” and “equine experiential learning” are the preferred term used by Kohanov and Eponaquest Worldwide. I have chosen to use the term “Equine-Facilitated Learning” (EFL) for the focus on the horse as the agent facilitating the learning.
and reach into places often only accessed through therapy. But unlike psychotherapy, EFL does not specifically go looking into those places, and generally focuses on broader skills applicable to many areas of life, such as emotional congruency,\(^{27}\) leadership, nonverbal communication, and analyzing social situations.

EFL engages horses as experts in non-dominant forms of knowledge production and communication. It focuses on unpacking the layers of nonverbal communication present in relationships (human/human and human/horse) with a specific focus on the emotional and intuitive aspects of this communication. The physically demonstrative elements (body language and gesture) take a backseat to the more felt properties of the performed exchange. However, this practice, like many traditional practices found in the equestrian arts, privileges the human, and is not necessarily about engaging with horses from a position of partnership that is equally beneficial for the horse. One of the most significant critiques of EFL is that, while it brings valuable expansive perspectives of horses to the table, it also recreates the conventional human/horse dynamic, by focusing the exchange on the human. EFL is not about increasing interspecies communication or balancing relations between humans and horses (though many of the practitioners may honour this perspective in their own equine relationships); it is about training humans to better understand themselves and the social dynamics of human society through gaining a more thorough understanding of the nonverbal aspects of communication in their daily lives, which may or may not involve animals (beyond the training).

\(^{27}\) Emotional congruency refers to a state of being in which all emotional states are recognized and genuine (not forced), with the internal state being in harmony with the demonstrated external state. Or as Kohanov explains, “emotional incongruity [is] the act of hiding one emotion by trying to feel something else” (emphasis added, Riding Between xii). “The body language of someone ‘putting on a happy face’ is incongruent with the rise in blood pressure, muscle tension, and emotional intensity transmitted unconsciously by an individual who’s actually afraid, frustrated, or angry” (Kohanov Riding Between xiii). Emotional congruency recognizes and honours one’s own embodied experiences, and does not try to override them with artificial performances of other states of being.
The most acute demonstration of how human-centric this work can be is found in the programs being geared towards corporate development and leadership skills, such as in Horse Spirit Connections’ leadership workshops. As their website states,

Working with horses helps build dynamic leaders. Using the horses’ sound sense and unerring judgment, you can refine your leadership style and develop new skills. Today’s complex business environment demands that special something more in a leader – the ability to motivate, to inspire and to connect deeply with others. The insight of the horse helps nurture these capabilities as a leader. (“Leadership”)

Here the work is about becoming better leaders in the business world, and how to recognize and change the destructive tendencies of this community in order to gain increased economic benefits without losing personal wellbeing. It is not about the horses, or seeing animals differently; it is about horses being a catalyst for human development. And while this may be needed work, it is also reinforcing the traditional human/equine relationship in which the horse is meant to serve the human.

On the one hand, EFL has created a space for equine perspectives to be recognized and celebrated by acknowledging that horses have their own expertise and wisdom, bringing a previously lacking dimension to this interspecies conversation, but on the other hand, the actual practice has not managed to move away from human-centricity in the design of this interspecies engagement. That being said, EFL does take a different view of the relationship in that the horses are engaged as teachers, rather than as tools. The structure of EFL, with the horse positioned as expert, inherently challenges notions of human superiority by focusing the paradigm on equine modes of being in the world; rather than analytical thought and word-based knowledges being privileged, the sensory experience, led by the horses, is the focus of the engagement.

When placed in an equestrianship context (rather than a life skills context), EFL offers an understanding of horses that has previously been largely absent in the equestrian world. EFL recognizes horses as experts in nonverbal communication, with their own unique knowledges and abilities that are worth learning from. The more typical understanding is the one shared by Natural Horsemanship practitioners, in which horses are considered largely instinctual beings, driven by movement and gesture. In Natural Horsemanship, Birke explains, “the horse is ‘other,’
an animal apart, driven by a genetic inheritance; the horse can be tamed and brought into human worlds only by understanding that heritage and overcoming it by training” (“Talking About Horses” 109). Natural Horsemanship often relies on scientific language to explain horse behaviour, and this language “renders the horse acted-upon - whether that is by external stimuli or inherent instincts, or via human action” (Birke, “Talking About Horses” 114). However, this so-called scientific understanding, which restricts horses to instinctual beings, is often at odds with the experience of working with individual horses. According to Birke, often horse “owners” view their horses as “intelligent, thoughtful, loving” (“Talking About Horses” 114), not a mere collection of instincts. The scientific understandings of horses do not often leave room for these subjective experiences, creating a tension and contradicting duality in the popular comprehension of horses. This scientific approach to understanding horses places the personal experiences of equestrians at odds with the mainstream teachings of Natural Horsemanship, and other disciplines, which reduce horses to automatic beings, with limited intellectual and emotional engagement capacities. It is this incongruity that prompted the interest in EFL, as EFL offers the opportunity to focus on the subjective experience and personal perspectives of horses, and to consider these a valid realm of exploration. In EFL emotional engagement, and intuitive knowings, are important forms of knowledge.

**Linda Kohanov**

Linda Kohanov is arguably the most significant and influential figure in the field of EFL. With Kohanov’s first book, *The Tao of Equus*, a world of interspecies exchange, not previously explored in detail, opened up for equestrians across North America and eventually around the world. *The Tao of Equus* created the opportunity for like-minded individuals to come out of the shadows and bring conversations about less known areas of equine knowledge and expertise into the light, a conversation that had originally caused Kohanov to be viewed as an outsider unworthy of consideration by “serious” equestrians (*Riding Between* xxv). As Kohanov explains, “not so very long ago, people were ostracized, if not burned at the stake for relating to animals as sentient beings” (*Riding Between* xxvii). As a result, Kohanov doubted her decision to publish *The Tao of Equus*, fearing the negative response she anticipated for the “unusual theories” she presents (*Riding Between* xxvii). The response turned out to be far less negative than expected, indicating a shift in perspectives just below the surface of the equestrian community.
Kohanov’s books, workshops, and facilitator training programs at Eponaquest Worldwide (Kohanov’s training facility in Amado, Arizona) have initiated and encouraged the spread of EFL, creating opportunities for these expansive notions of horses to slowly creep into the mainstream equestrian cultural consciousness, and to begin to change the climate of the wisdom surrounding horses and equestrian training (though, as previously mentioned, the intended focus of these teachings is still on human advancement, not equestrian education). As Eponaquest head trainer Lucinda Vette attests, adapting to the Eponaquest perspective and approach is often most difficult for conventionally trained, high-level equestrian riders (like herself) (Vette). Yet, rather than being rejected, as Kohanov feared, she “received thousands of letters and emails about the deep, transformative relationships other women and men shared with their horses” (Riding Between xxviii). While various aspects of what has come to be known as Equine-Facilitated Learning have often been integrated into equestrian practices, if only on a subconscious level (Tao of Equus xxv), Kohanov was the first one to bring this understanding of horses to a wide audience, to focus on the importance of the invisible aspects of nonverbal communication in human/equine interactions, and to create a comprehensive program to train humans in nonverbal skills, awareness, and understanding through working with horses. A significant aspect of Kohanov’s program is focused on recognizing emotions as a form of communication that provides information that allows us to know ourselves and others better. These invisible forms of communication are vital aspects needed to create a fuller understanding of nonverbal communication, and how this communication is performed in interspecies contexts.

A significant portion of the EFL practitioners working in North America and around the world have been trained at Eponaquest, or by one of Eponaquest’s accredited instructors, with

28 Since the Tao of Equus, Kohanov has written three additional books on her experiences and learning as an EFL practitioner: Riding Between the Worlds, The Power of the Herd, The Five Roles of a Herd Master.

29 “As of 2015, over 280 Eponaquest Instructors on five continents have graduated from the Eponaquest Apprenticeship Program, one of the most innovative, in-depth facilitator trainings in
Kohanov’s insights being rearticulated on the websites for their programs. As Kohanov argues, horses are especially adept at facilitating the forms of learning explored in animal-assisted learning models, with EFL being tailored to their distinct skills. “The intuitive gifts and sensitivities of this nonpredatory species, combined with its [sic] natural penchant for cultivating authentic relationship, make *Equus caballus* especially well suited to acting as a catalyst and a mirror for innovations in human consciousness” (*Riding Between* xxvii). Such notions of horses, which focus on their distinct skills as a prey species and what these skills can teach humans about themselves, are common throughout the EFL and larger equine-facilitated wellness field.

These equine narratives are angled quite differently from those discussed in Natural Horsemanship, and, indeed, in much of the riding world. Here the innate skills of the species are not diminished as merely instinctual traits (unthinking and automatic), but rather celebrated as a specific form of knowledge, a form of knowledge that humans are noticeably less adept at.

This expansive understanding of equine nuances has encouraged the conversation around equine traits to move beyond basic notions of flight responses (often referenced as the “defining” aspect of this prey species), into a multivalent exploration of what insights equine perspectives offer, celebrating their markedly different (from humans) experiences of the world. We, humans, have long aligned ourselves with the predators of the planet (the felines and canines), to such a degree that we have often convinced ourselves that we are naturally predators, not merely a vulnerable species that has learned to predate (Kohanov, *Riding Between* 81-82). Natural Horsemanship often states that the human is the “ultimate predator” and the horse the “ultimate prey” (Miller and Lamb 163). However, as Kohanov points out, “we are omnivores, with characteristics of both predator and prey,” but we live in a society that dominantly rewards the predatory characteristics, and overlooks the “wisdom of the prey” (*The Power* 84). When this wisdom of the prey is recognized in human/equine interactions, as it is in EFL, non-dominant notions of engagement, knowledge, communication, and relationship claim focus. In this wisdom of the prey narrative, horses “model the strengths of what are often referred to as ‘feminine

the fields of Equine-Facilitated Learning, Equine-Facilitated Leadership Training, and Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy” (“Overview”).
values’: cooperation over competition, relationship over territory, responsiveness over strategy, emotion and intuition over logic, process over goal, and the creative approach to life that these qualities engender” (*Riding Between* xxx). This form of thinking about horses, and human/equine engagements, highlights aspects of relationships, knowledge, and communication (human/human and human/animal) often overlooked and marginalized by contemporary human culture.

Kohanov’s notions of how these equine skills translate into expanding human understandings of emotional intelligence, nonpredatory power, and leadership are highly applicable to balancing human/animal dynamics and increasing interspecies nonverbal literacy. According to Kohanov,

> Psychologists have shown that only about ten percent of human communication is verbal. Somewhere around ninety percent of the messages we send back and forth to each other are nonverbal. And yet in our culture, we are increasingly mesmerized by words, conditioned over time to ignore that crucial “other 90 percent,” leading to a self-imposed de-evolution of human intelligence if left unchecked over time. (“Welcome to”)

This reference to the “other 90 percent” speaks to a popular understanding, without a specific known reference. Jeff Thompson in *Psychology Today* suggests that reference is likely loosely connected with researcher Albert Mehrabian’s work on the importance of nonverbal communication in comparison to verbal communication, but this study does not break down the percentage specifically as 90 percent being nonverbal (1). Rather the formula accredited to Mehrabian, but actually coming from two research studies (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967 and Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967), results in a breakdown of: 55% body language, 38% tone of voice, and 7% words (1). Thompson explains that this breakdown specifically references situations in which the verbal communication and nonverbal communication are incongruent, making the argument that the nonverbal matters more than the verbal in such matters (2). Mehrabian states in *Nonverbal Communication*, “When there are inconsistencies between attitudes communicated verbally and posturally, the postural component should dominate in determining the total attitude that is inferred” (108). The significant point for this study is that nonverbal communication often speaks louder, and more accurately, than words. However, Mehrabian’s work is focused on human/human nonverbal communication, and overlooks some of the more elusive aspects of this
communication, with “tone of voice” gesturing to them, by suggesting that the feel of the words, and intentions behind them matter significantly. However, this suggestion does not go far enough, as this is not only true of voice, but is also true of body language and gesture. It is these aspects, all of the ways that feel (or resonance) influences and creates communication, which Kohanov delves into in her work. It is these complex understandings of nonverbal communication that are needed in order to recognize animals in all of their nuances, to see the dynamics of their ways of being, and to learn with/from them through performance.

*An Example of EFL*

When emotional intelligence, and understandings of resonance, are combined with kinesthetic intelligence—body language and gesture, as focused on by Natural Horsemanship—and are based on a solid understanding of the culturally specific contexts in which the communication is occurring (in this case between humans and horses), much can be said and discussed without words, opening up a valuable space of exchange and debate. However, these elements of nonverbal communication are much more difficult to break down and explain without a direct experience attached to them, which is likely one of the reasons Kohanov has not published any instructional manuals (where the Natural Horsemanship practitioners have published many), and relies on anecdotal evidence in her books to illustrate the importance and possibilities of the invisible aspects that inform nonverbal communication. Much of this work is best explored in workshop style settings, where knowledgeable instructors can help illustrate these concepts through doing and showing, and through first hand explorations.

In February 2015, I traveled to Eponaquest Worldwide in Amado, Arizona to meet Kohanov and participate in an Equine-Facilitated Learning workshop called *Between the Worlds: Peace and Presence with Horses* run by Eponaquest head trainer Lucinda Vette, therapist/Eponaquest graduate Susan Crimmins, and the Eponaquest herd. At this four-day workshop various introductory EFL exercises were introduced. The workshops at Eponaquest generally begin with an initial session that encourages the humans to learn to engage with the horses through their intuition, by watching the horses from afar, but not being allowed to touch them or interfere with them in any way. Upon meeting a horse for the first time, many humans have the desire to touch and pat them, even though no relationship has been established. This is an example of human privilege, which suggests that all domestic animals, especially companion
animals, should appreciate being touched by humans, but this is not always the case (though many horses have been conditioned to accept this). This initial session is designed to get away from this tendency and to begin a conversation around listening to others and respecting boundaries in relationships. One of the key aspects of this work is the idea that if you are the one advancing, then the other individual gets to set their boundaries and establish how close they are comfortable with you being. If you are being advanced upon, then you get to set the boundaries. This is a fairly radical notion in terms of human/animal interactions, in which it is often the human advancing, but the animal’s interest or comfort are rarely considered, unless the animal is overtly dangerous. Most of us (humans) assume that all friendly dogs should want to be touched by us, and that we have the right to do so. The same can be said of horses: most humans assume that all horses should stand and politely accept all of our caressing, even though horses in their own communities have clear definitions of personal space, and only touch in this way once an intimate relationship has been thoroughly established. Despite this, it is fairly rare for a human to be asked to wait, and only to approach a horse once they have been invited and it is clear that the horse is comfortable with the context—horses are generally not allowed agency over their own bodies in human/equine interactions.

Though body language is employed in all of Eponaquest’s work, it is the energy behind the actions, the invisible aspects of the performances, that primarily are discussed and highlighted, leaving the associated body postures to materialize out of the intended feel, rather than as the starting formation. In an exercise where each human is tasked with getting an individual horse to follow them, without the use of any leads or halters or other equipment, or even any touch-based contact with the horse, a sweeping motion that follows the path of a half circle around the front of the horse is encouraged, but it is the energy—the positivity of the engagement, the confidence of the human, and the clear performed communication of intent—that gets the job done; the action is merely there to back up the energy and hold the horse’s attention if it is lost or waning.

As Kohanov writes, “Equine-Experiential Learning [another name for EFL], whether practiced formally with a trained facilitator, or informally with one’s own horse, first and foremost expands nonverbal awareness” (Riding Between xxx). This work is about recognizing emotional resonance as a form of communication, and that “to horses, no emotion is good or bad.
It’s just as important for them to recognize when another herd member is afraid or playful, angry or boisterous, depressed or resting peacefully. So-called negative emotions tend to carry a bigger charge because they often must be acted upon quickly to ensure survival” (Riding Between xix). As Kohanov goes on to explain, the key aspect is “to get the message behind the emotion, adjust behaviour, relationship, or environment accordingly, then let go of that feeling and return to homeostasis,” or return to grazing, as it is often expressed in horse terms (Riding Between xix). It is about receiving these messages from others, but then also employing resonances to communicate a specific message, whether it is “follow me,” or “move here,” or any other desired statement. An important aspect of this is to be able to critically engage with these messages in order to understand how one’s own resonances may be communicating mixed messages if the horse (or other individual) does not respond in the desired way. Initially this is done at Eponaquest through the help of a human instructor who is well versed in resonance-based meaning, and who can help the participant more fully tap into their embodied messages, often through doing a body scan (mentally exploring the sensations and resonances in each area of your body) and recognizing what may be causing the confusion and learning how to acknowledge and rework one’s own resonance-based messages as needed.

Equine-Facilitated Learning has brought important perspectives to the conversation of equestrian engagement that have often been overlooked due to a lack of language to explain these invisible aspects that make meaning. The difficulty in demonstrating and unpacking the elusive qualities of this nonverbal communication has tended to lead to an avoidance of the subject in a scientifically focused world: if you cannot see it, cannot touch it, and cannot judge it objectively then how do you critically discuss it and reliably draw attention to it? Equine-Facilitated Learning (and the philosophical field of phenomenology) has created a space for honouring and discussing these valuable sensory experiences that create other forms of knowing, but which often cannot be seen, touched, or judged objectively, adding a critical dimension for understanding nonverbal communication and how it is performed.

**Conclusion: Seeing Through Their Ears**

When combined, the teachings of Monty Roberts/Natural Horsemanship (body language) and Linda Kohanov/Equine-Facilitated Learning (emotional resonance) offer crucial
understanding of the most significant factors at play in nonverbal interspecies communication between humans and horses, but for their own reasons, and due to the specific focuses of their programs, each is only teaching the area of the communication that speaks most significantly for them, leaving gaps in the human comprehension of horses. Monty Roberts focuses solely on body language and gesture, and while he recognizes the importance of these other elements, he does not offer a way of teaching or learning about these elements, other than through discovering it on your own through trial and error. Linda Kohanov takes the opposite approach, teaching humans about feel and resonance through working with horses in Equine-Facilitated Learning, but Kohanov only minimally acknowledges the impact of body language or the language of Equus. Roberts takes the stance that if body language is understood, then the resonance will follow, and Kohanov reverses that, suggesting that if the resonance is understood, the body language will be engaged. But neither of them explore the significance of how these aspects work together to create a complex understanding of the performance for nonverbal communication between horses and humans. Each has created in-depth methods of teaching their own area of the language—Roberts for the purpose of training horses, and Kohanov for the purpose of training humans—but neither of them is teaching an integrated understanding of this performance that engages each of these areas. Both clinicians have created detailed methods of explaining their aspect of the communication to their students, but it is only when these understandings are combined that a sophisticated comprehension of interspecies communication is found, and can be consciously engaged for the specific intentions of expanding human/animal relationships and increasing the recognition of animal perspectives. Without recognition of each of these aspects of this performed communication, the human ability to communicate and receive messages across species lines is hindered, blocking them from perceiving horses (and other animals) in all of their expansive complexity.

It is through engaging the teachings of Natural Horsemanship and Equine-Facilitated Learning, or employing understandings of how body language and resonance make meaning in the intercultural exchange of equine/human relationships, which allows for this nonverbal speaking to be critically engaged with, and for equine perspectives to be acknowledged. Additionally, recognizing that this language is a form of performance, and that it makes meaning through expressive action, adds some useful context to the exchange, as it highlights the point
that this action is intentionally engaged in order to communicate, and that both individuals in the
exchange have agency (intentionality) and can influence the course of the engagement. This
recognition is important for liberating animals from the instinctual confines that they have been
ascribed to in the past, and celebrating animals as thoughtful individuals, who are worth listening
to and speaking with, and that exchange occurs through the purposeful engagement of expressive
action: it is made possible through performance.
CHAPTER 3—Equestrian Theatre:
An Off-centered Performance of Collaboration

Introduction: A Limited Narrative, Horses on Stage

If, as I am arguing, focusing on performance creates space for animal perspectives to be recognized, and for human/animal dynamics to find balance, then equestrian theatre should be the ideal grounds for this transformation, and should offer significant possibilities in this regard. On the one hand this is true: equestrian theatre heightens the experience and understanding of the engagement between humans and horses as performance in ways that few other human/equine engagements do. Equestrian theatre, with its focus on nonverbal interspecies performance, has the potential to demonstrate expansive understandings of horses and human/equine relationships, by creating a space rich in nonverbal discourse and meaning-making (as most contemporary equestrian theatre does not use verbal dialogue). It employs humans who are highly versed in the ways that meaning is made through performance, and the dynamics of human/equine interactions. However, the realm of theatre is also expressively humanist, and the way the performances of equestrian theatre are framed can also diminish the individual perspectives and contributions of the horses. As Theresa May explains, “theatre (in comparison to other arts) is doubly humanist—not only made by humans about human subjects, but made through the human form, dependent on human flesh, feelings, utterance, voice.” Equestrian theatre is no exception; it is largely about the human desire for a relationship with a horse, and about demonstrating the impressive things this interaction can bestow on the human, with little recognition of the experience of the horses. Its livelihood comes from being able to sell an understanding of human/equine relationships that is appealing to humans and draws in a (human) crowd.

In order to create this sellable product, equestrian theatre, such as that performed by Cavalia and Théâtre Zingaro, smooths over and/or hides the complexities of the relationship and limits the equine narratives to those that serve the humans. The message is quite simple: the human/equine relationship is magical, and/or horses make human dreams come true. As François Brousseau and Valérie Martin write in Cavalia: A Dream of Freedom, “Before he created Cavalia, Normand Latourelle [the artistic director of Cavalia] was not in the least a lover of horses! […] what got him interested is the notion of freedom and, in this case, the free-spiritedness of the horses—which man [sic] had taken away. But here is a paradox: thanks to the
And while Cavalia claims to right this imbalance of freedom, by “shin[ing] a light on a more humane world where human and horse may live in harmony” (“Odysseo Show”), the “harmony” that is sold is unbalanced and the dream is one of anthropocentrism, which privileges the human perspective of the relationship, reinforcing long established narratives of human dominance over horses. In Théâtre Zingaro’s 2015 production, On achève bien les Anges (élégies), horses are literally the partners of angels, and they are the ones that allow humans to fly. For Zingaro horses are “the mirror of humanity,” and the goal is to be “a mere presence in the background; becoming ‘horse puppeteer’ and with them, discover new lands” (“Shows of Theatre Zingaro”). However, these lands are the dreams of humans, and built out of the human notions of the relationship, for a human audience. They are celebrations of the equestrian relationship as a one-sided exchange in which the human commands and the horse executes those dictums. Dominique Day, one of the co-founders of Cavalia claims that they “emphasized the essential idea [of the equestrian relationship] in Cavalia—the special communication with the horses” (Brousseau and Martin 23). Day claims that “[t]hat was the true novelty that would touch people and attract audiences” (Brousseau and Martin 23). However, this communication is portrayed as a one-way relationship in which the human speaks and the horse listens (and obeys). While neither company is under any specific mandate to show a more expansive understanding of horses and human/equine relationships, the focus that each company states of highlighting this relationship, and claiming this relationship as a partnership, while only showing one anthropocentric side of the exchange, reinforces the marginalization of horses and equine perspectives.

What is missing in this messaging is the complexity of engaging with a radically different other (a horse for a human, or a human for a horse), and all the hard work and years of experience that go into recognizing this other perspective and all of the moments of dissonance and disagreements that continue to surround all of the instances of harmony—like any relationship between two individuals. This simplified message produces the limited narrative of partnered bliss, in which the horses are eager to do the human’s bidding, and their value ends at their physical majesty and compliance (rather than with their individuality and the dynamics of their unique personalities), with little appreciation for the idea that a partnership, as the word implies, should be the coming together of two perspectives, not the enforcement of one. The
spectacle and the grand narrative of interspecies harmony wash out the hours of confusion, debate, and little victories, which are part of training and creating a partnership. Of course, this smoothing out of the complexities of creation and collaboration are always part of theatre, but this glossing over creates a significantly different effect when it is used to frame a marginalized other, in this case horses. Though the horses in these productions perform, they do not act in the sense that they take on another distinct character and are able to recognize the ways that character works within the narratives and messages of the show. The horses may choose to work with the humans that ask them to, but they are not aware of the way that they are framed in these productions, or of the larger implications of being shown as the tools of a human’s imagination. They are always themselves, and focused on the dynamics of the exchange in the moment, though, perhaps, in a heightened state associated with performing in front of an audience. As Bartabas points out in an interview, some horses work better in front of an audience, and others only show their full potential in the privacy on training ("Theatre Zingaro – Chimère"). Because of this lack of duality in these equine acts—and despite the duality portrayed by the human performers that share the stage—the messages that frame the horses influence the larger understandings of the species, and inform the audience’s knowledge of human/equine dynamics. Much in the same way it is damaging to consistently portray people of colour always in supporting roles (backing up white leads), or as slaves and terrorists, it is damaging to constantly reinforce the notion that a partnership with a horse is all about the horse doing the human’s bidding, with little give and take or a highlighting of the horse’s own perspective. It reinforces the species as a type, rather than a group of individuals, and suggests that their worth is in their ability to serve humans.

This interest in selling a specific narrative of the relationship to a human audience (as most, if not all, theatre is created for humans by humans) undercuts the benefits of engaging with horses in a realm dominated by performance. Can a performance that is created for the sole benefit of one species be truly interspecies? The performance of genuine relationship, with all its ebbs and flows, that creates space for equine perspectives and agency, as I have outlined in the earlier chapters, is silenced in these acts in favour of the narrative of human dominance equalling harmony, and equine subservience being akin to freedom. These performances reinforce a single story, a dominant narrative, about horses, which does not benefit the horses. As Chimamanda
Ngozi Adichie explains, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” In this way, equestrian theatre often misses the potential of the form, as rather than expanding human understandings of horses by increasing the proliferation of diverse stories, equestrian theatre supports the status quo, which places the human as master and the horse as the beautiful tool present to fulfil human dreams.

**Performing the Status Quo**

Throughout the last decade horse-loving children and their families have flocked to shows by Cavalia, the equestrian theatre company that has become a household name to horse folk across Canada and the United States. While Cavalia’s two shows *Cavalia: A Magical Encounter Between Human and Horse* (2003-present) and *Odysseo: The Best Show Ever* (2011-present) have done substantial work to popularize certain less recognized forms of human/equine engagement that encourage a “freer” experience for the horses, such as liberty work, the message that the show communicates is still one of human privilege over horses. These liberty acts present horses, often in small herds, without tack (saddles, brides, etc.) and suggest that the horses are free to do as they please, while still obviously following the commands of the humans they are working with. The signals from the human in these acts are often subtle and/or hidden, to suggest that the horses are engaging in these patterns of their own accord. In the case of Cavalia, music is played over the act loudly enough that the words that the human is speaking cannot be heard by the audience, masking the actual conversation that is taking place. Unless, as happened in the performance I saw of *Odysseo* in June 2017, the horses are so distracted and

30 Cavalia’s primary market is North America, but the company has toured its first production *Cavalia* to Spain, Portugal, Mexico, Australia, Belgium, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China (“Cavalia”), and no longer tours this show in North America. Cavalia’s second production *Odysseo* has only toured in North American (“Cavalia”).

31 Liberty work is often considered a way of working with horses that provides horses with more agency or freedom, but whether or not this is actually the case greatly depends on the approach taken.
disconnected from the human handler—focused on jockeying for position amongst themselves, and working out herd squabbles with ear pinning and nips—that she has to yell loudly to keep their attention, making her demands heard, but still muffled by the music. Though, in this case, exactly what is being said was not comprehensible, the tension associated with the need to yell was clear, and created a dissonance with the soothing music that is meant to increase the experience of harmony between the horses and human, and the fluid beauty of the horses moving through their choreography as a herd. So, while communication may be the claimed focus of Cavalia’s shows, the show’s main interest is still in spinning a narrative of harmony, not in highlighting all of the conversations that are occurring in a performance, which included both conversations between herd members, and the demands being expressed by the human “controlling” them.

Cavalia promotes that the trainers do not use whips, “only a small stick, used with restraint” to communicate (Brousseau and Martin 17). However, these sticks are in fact whips, generally dressage, driving, or lunge whips. By claiming this distinction, the company is aiming to set themselves apart from the narratives of control (and abuse) that can be associated with riding or racing, and the use of equipment such as whips and spurs (though neither of those aides are inherently abusive). But abuses can occur in any form of exchange between a human and a horse, whether or not these common tools are used. Abuse can occur without the use of these tools through various forms of marginalization and control, and abuse can be equally absent even though whips and spurs are employed. Of course, both whips and spurs can be used to cause pain, but that is not the only way to use them, and calling them “sticks” does not guarantee that they are used positively. Though the horses in a liberty act do not have riders, and are moving without the influence of worn equipment, they are still expected to do the bidding of the human in the formation, and the methods used to achieve this obedience can range from positive to negative/abusive just like any other act. I do believe that Cavalia uses positive techniques in its training, and in the four times I have seen their productions, I have never witnessed any questionable behaviour on the parts of the humans, even when the horses act out, but that does not mean that the horses are truly free or at liberty, or that the partnership is genuinely balanced. My point here is not to condemn Cavalia, or any other equestrian theatre company’s practices, as I do think, from what I have seen and read, that Cavalia engages in positive training techniques,
as does a significant portion of the equestrian world; however, that does not mean that horses are not still marginalized, and that there is not further work to be done in terms of how humans approach and understand horses and the equestrian relationship. In the case of Cavalia, the shows are merely portraying an illusion of freedom, while overlooking the potential of performance to represent a more expansive understanding of horses and our relationships with them. Cavalia’s productions, with their mass popularity and huge audiences, have the ability to influence how human/equine relationships are perceived and understood on a fairly wide level. However, the images of human/equine dynamics that Cavalia has chosen to focus on are ones that reinforce the dominant narrative of human privilege and that sell this hierarchy as a harmonious partnership for human and horse.

Cavalia is by no means the only production performing this perspective; they are merely the most prominent company in North America. But there are many others, including the most internationally recognized equestrian theatre company, Théâtre Zingaro, which is based in France. Théâtre Zingaro, and its artistic director Bartabas, claims to have invented equestrian theatre ("Bartabas: Presentation"), and has been selling its own version of this dream of equine subservience and “partnership” since the 1980s (“Shows of Theatre Zingaro”). While Cavalia and Zingaro are quite different companies in many regards (more on this to come), both of these companies present versions of human/equine relationships that glorify human control and the “beauty” of harnessing the abilities of the horse for human use and display, while diminishing the perspectives of the actual horses involved. They sell the idea of an interspecies partnership, but frame that partnership as one in which the animals give over their agency to the humans and are elated to do everything that is asked of them. While this is a very common narrative found throughout the horse world, these performances elevate, and celebrate, this marginalizing perspective. With the aesthetic attraction, spectacle, and enchanting narrative of these productions, the appeal of this partnership is undeniable, but how does this performance influence the ways that horses are understood, and perceived in life beyond the stage? How does this dream translate to the real world, and what does dreaming of control really mean for both human and horse?

According to Normand Latourelle (the founder and Artistic Director of Cavalia) “the horse was never really free. Indeed, the horse is a fearful animal in constant flight. Flight is his only
means of defense. The horse needed man [sic] to ensure his security and provide him with food. Indeed, in his stable, the horse regains a form of liberty—the freedom to live” (Brousseau 44). Latourelle’s description here places the horse as needing humans to gain a positive life. This narrative overrides any question about the ethics of engaging horses on stage, and framing them in a human-centric narrative, as it suggests that captivity is the desired goal of all horses, and that they can only achieve their full potential in service to humans. But in the highly structured, restrictive world of being an equine actor in a Cavalia show, is there really so much freedom? Of course, the horses are fed and cared for, but they also spend little time in a herd (which is not uncommon for a performance/competitive horse), and go through long periods of time, during performances, where they live in urban spaces—though Cavalia claims they get some turnout on site every day (Harris)—and are expected to perform 5-7 times a week in repetitive, and highly scripted acts. Though Cavalia has worked to include as much variety of work and welfare practices as they reasonably can within the structure of the theatre, “freedom” is still not the word that I would use to describe this arrangement. Both companies skew understandings of partnership in the ways that they present the equine performances and frame these interspecies interactions within the non-animal narratives of the stage, overlooking (or making light of) the unscripted equine contributions. Bartabas claims that the shows come from the horses, and that he does not know what he is going to do until they tell him (“Theatre Zingaro – Chimère”). While this may be true of the maneuvers that each horse performs, and speaks to the way that Bartabas works with each horse’s own interests and talents, the larger spectacle of Zingaro’s productions clearly comes from Bartabas’ imagination, and does little to reflect the natural worlds of horses. Whether or not the horses have input in the initial creation of an act, once the performance reaches an audience and is framed with in the larger spectacle of the production, this agency is lost (with the exception of the moments when the horses push back against what is being asked of them). Once an audience is present, all that is seen is the horses aiding the humans in bringing their (human) vision to life

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32 “Of the 63 horses in the stables, only 50 are used in the show at one time. A rotation plan for every scene in the show allows the horses to perform a variety of acts which keeps them interested, agile, and constantly learning new things. Over 80 percent of the horses in the stable can perform multiple disciplines, which allows for a lot of flexibility” (Hamilton).
Equestrian Theatre (Ch.3)

(which entails the horses doing as they are told). By minimizing the equine perspectives in these multifaceted narratives, while engaging with live equine actors on stage, these performances suggest that the horses do not matter as unique individuals, and that the only story of value is the humanist desire to control the body of the horse, or to become a centaur, and the impressive spectacles that that this control can create.

While there are many equestrian theatre productions around the world, I have chosen to focus on Théâtre Zingaro and Cavalia, as they are the most recognized. Zingaro has been creating equestrian theatre for more than thirty years, and Cavalia, though newer, has brought this form of theatre to a mass market scale with an audience capacity of 2,000+ at every performance, and a constant touring of their productions since 2003 (“Cavalia: About the Show”). They are the companies that have spent the most time influencing the ways that humans think about our relationships with horses, and selling a vision of that relationship which influences popular understandings of horses and this interspecies relationship.

About the Companies

Théâtre Zingaro

Théâtre Zingaro was founded in Fort of Aubervilliers, France (just outside of Paris) in 1985 by Clément Marty, known as Bartabas (“Bartabas”). Bartabas remains the Artistic Director, lead performer, and main trainer of the company, including its most recent production On acheve bien les Anges (elégies) 33, which ran from 8 June 2015-31 December 2016, and explored the music of Tom Waits and the afterlife (“Shows of Theatre Zingaro”). Zingaro both has a permanent home theatre in Fort of Aubervilliers, and travels the country (and sometimes beyond) touring their shows. The tickets for Zingaro’s shows are a fraction of the price of Cavalia’s; the front row tickets that I purchased for Zingaro’s On acheve bien les Anges (elégies) in April 2016 were around the same price Cavalia’s cheapest seats (with an obstructed view of the stage),

33 Translated as “They Shoot Angels Don’t They – (Elegies)” by Théâtre Zingaro (“Zingaro”).
around $60 CAD, and with less than half the number of seats\(^{34}\), making Zingaro’s shows more intimate and accessible. The company began with cabaret style performances\(^{35}\), which mixed together the equestrian arts with physical theatre, music, dance, and acting. The performances were done (and are largely still done)\(^{36}\) in theatre-in-the-round, but in those early performances the adult audience was seated at tables surrounding the dirt ring, only separated by a low barrier, and at times not even that, as Bartabas would jump the barrier into the laps of the audience in at least one comic act, where he flees from his, seemingly, aggressive horse (“Cabaret”). Unlike the way that equestrian theatre is thought of today, which is geared towards children and families, these first productions were very adult in nature, with the Cabaret culminating with a mare and stallion mating on stage (“Cabaret”)\(^{37}\). From Zingaro’s cabaret beginnings the company has moved into a more dramatic theatrical setting by offering shows with a focused (albeit often abstract) narrative, which frequently explore specific cultures that prominently feature horses. However, elements of Zingaro’s first acts can be found throughout the years, with some productions leaning more towards variety acts with a unifying theme—such as in *On achève bien les Anges (élégies)*\(^{38}\), which is based around notions of the afterlife and death, and the music of Tom Waits. There is little to no verbal dialogue in any of the productions, but all include music and singing. Zingaro’s aesthetics may have started out inspired by the traveling

\(^{34}\) Zingaro’s home theatre boasts around 700 seats (Moss), in comparison to Cavalia’s 2042 seat big top tent (“Odysseo: About the Show”). Yet, Zingaro performs for around 60,000 people for each production (“Equestrian Theatre Zingaro”).

\(^{35}\) Théâtre Zingaro produced a three-part Cabaret Équestre with part one running 1984-87, part two 1987-89, and part three 1989-1990 (*Zingaro: 30 Ans*).

\(^{36}\) Le Centaure Et L'animal (The Centaur and the Animal), 2010, was performed on a proscenium stage (*Zingaro*).

\(^{37}\) In the DVD version of the performance, which is directed by Bartabas, it is unclear where one cabaret ends and the next begins, or if there are acts that occur in each part, as all three parts have been cut together into one performance, which is Bartabas’s filmic version of the production, rather than a straight capturing of what was presented onstage.

\(^{38}\) Translated as “They Shoot Angels Don’t They – (Elegies)” by Théâtre Zingaro (“Zingaro”).
circuses and the nomadic culture of itinerate performers (as seen in the caravan setup of Zingaro’s home venue in Fort d’Aubervilliers), but have gone on to share many stylistic devices with theatre and dance, while maintaining the circus influences of trick riding and acrobatics.

Though Zingaro has moved through a variety of theatrical styles throughout in its thirty years, Bartabas’s vision and direction have remained at the centre of the productions, and Bartabas, himself, is often a key performer, creating an auteur-style cohesion of performance across the years; Bartabas and Théâtre Zingaro have become synonymous. This constant artistic engagement with theatrical forms means that Zingaro showcases a more diverse array of equestrian interactions (assuming audiences are following the company and attending each new production). Unlike Cavalia, which has toured the same two shows for the past fifteen years, Zingaro creates an entirely original show every year or two, having presented thirteen shows in the past thirty years (“Zingaro”). This constant re-envisioning of the possibilities of equestrian theatre holds the potential to continuously question the parameters of the engagement and the ways in which human and horses work and interact. Still, viewing the DVD collection of Zingaro’s thirty years of performance, and witnessing On acheve bien les Anges (élégies) live, demonstrates that this opportunity has not been largely embraced. The recurring equine performers are often typecast, and asked to perform similar routines worked into the new narratives for the given production (Zingaro: 30 ans), with demonstrations of precision and control being the dominant mode of the performances.

These depictions of control are mixed in amongst comic moments of physical theatre, acrobatics, and occasional moments of liberty work. The shows are drastically different in terms of theatrical style and visual display, but the relationships performed between horses and humans are recreations of a fixed theme —horses as obedient actors performing manoeuvres that highlight the control and precision of their human dictators. This is a familiar and well-recognized narrative that does little to expand human perceptions of horses, or challenge the limitations of this long-established dynamic. Bartabas claims that, for him, “the performances, [are] always about the relationship between human beings and the horse […] the real work is the evolution of that relationship, from the beginning, it has been about what I can show of that relationship of man [sic] and horse, that is more important than the story of the performance” ("Theatre Zingaro – Chimère"). However, the evolution that Zingaro’s productions demonstrate
is one that ended with the benevolent mastery of horses by humans. Demonstrating the complex dynamics of the relationships between horses and human seems secondary in Zingaro’s productions to presenting an impressive spectacle. Focusing on depictions of control reinforces the marginalized position of horses, in which voice and agency are minimally granted.  

**Cavalia**

For North Americans, Cavalia is likely the company that most readily comes to mind when equestrian theatre is mentioned, but Théâtre Zingaro is the original equestrian theatre from which, along with Cirque du Soleil, Cavalia was inspired. Cavalia was created in Quebec, Canada, by Normand Latourelle, one of the first members of Cirque du Soleil, in partnership with Fédéric Pignon and Magali Delgado, horse trainers from France (Brousseau 20). The first show, Cavalia, began touring in 2003 (“Cavalia: About the Show”). Latourelle, who has no background with horses, sought out Pignon and Delgado to bring his vision to life, after realizing the audience appeal of horses on stage (Brousseau 16-19). Cavalia has been commonly described as Cirque du Soleil with horses, and holds significant resemblances to both Cirque du Soleil and Théâtre Zingaro. Cavalia’s shows are based around a series of acts with horses, with little unifying theme or story, other than “rediscovering the century-old relationship between human and horse,” in front of a multimedia backdrop that “lead[s] spectators on a great journey in a world of dreams where, together, they discover some of the planet’s most unforgettable landscapes” (“Odysseo: About the Show”). These acts include acrobatics, African drumming, dance, trick riding, liberty work, roman riding, and dressage. All of the acts are accompanied by live musicians, and at times a singer on stage. These musical elements encourage the audience to respond to the acts with excitement (for the trick riding), and encourage feelings of awe and harmony for the liberty acts, and dressage, amongst other combination acts. While most of the acts include horses, there are some demonstrations of acrobatics and dance that only feature humans.

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Here I am referencing the performance of the relationship on stage. In the training process the horses, likely, have more agency, and more opportunity to freely express themselves.
Cavalia’s dream of freedom was more apparent in their original show, *Cavalia: A Magical Encounter Between Human and Horse*, when Pignon and Delgado were at the helm of the production, but this interest seems to have waned with the creation of *Odysseo* (and Pignon and Delgado leaving the company). I vividly remember when *Cavalia* first arrived in Toronto. The images that the show highlighted in their publicity were of Pignon joyfully playing on stage and rolling in the sand (literally) with his stallions at liberty. Pignon would run around the stage with his horses with such joy and appreciation for their movements and feisty gestures apparent in his expressions. He would encourage the stallions to lay down and roll in the sand, and would join them in these moments, kneeling down and stroking their faces and bodies. For many, such as myself, this was my first experience with liberty work on this level, as well as with the elements of play that could be found on stage with a loose herd of horses. It was magical, and did introduce many people across North America to another way of engaging with horses, one not based on riding, but on running around uninhibitedly together and communicating through body language and resonance. When I view Pignon’s work now, this joy is still clear, but Pignon and Delgado are no longer associated with Cavalia. The relaxation and apparent enjoyment of the horses in these first acts with Pignon are not something that I have witnessed since in seeing Cavalia’s subsequent performances without Pignon. With *Odysseo*, Cavalia has moved away from the freer liberty acts into sequences that showcase the horses as a homogenous herd, and has increased the focus on trick riding and acrobatics. Trick riding offers the least agency or individuality to the horses, in that the horses are merely expected to run straight and fast (or consistently on a circle that fills the stage, depending on the setup), while the focus is on the humans doing impressive physical acts off the backs of the horses. While there is some give and take in this relationship, as the balance of the two individuals is highly intertwined—the horses must be able to accommodate for the ways that the humans affect their own movements, while

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40 An example of Pignon’s work may be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1YO3j-Zh3g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1YO3j-Zh3g)

41 Cavalia does technically still tour *Cavalia*, but it has not returned to Toronto since the loss of Pignon and Delgados, but *Odysseo* has returned to Toronto multiple times.
maintaining consistency in that movement for the humans—this engagement is rarely about a relationship in a mutually beneficial manner, and yet these acts are still framed within the narrative of a shared bond, and expansive interspecies exchange. The horses are essentially live vaulting mounts, interchangeable tools that allow the humans a platform from which to do impressive manoeuvres. Training a trick horse takes considerably less time\(^{42}\), knowledge, and relationship-based exchange than working with a horse to engage artfully at liberty or through dressage.

In Cavalia’s productions each horse is on stage for no more than 5-10 minutes, and there is always more than one horse that can fill any given role (Sumanaec). Horses in Cavalia’s shows, are celebrated, but they are not recognized as individuals, nor are their individual perspectives acknowledged. Only in the final act of Odysseo is a single human/horse relationship showcased, in the sole moment that shows (what is meant to be) high level dressage. This focus on a single pair, with both rider and horse represented as distinct individuals (unlike the rest of the acts, which focus on visually similar horses, and/or herds), offers a glimpse of a conversation between two individuals. However, in my most recent viewing of Odysseo, none of the dressage maneuvers were executed cleanly, with the rider clearly having a lot of difficulty getting the horse to passage or piaffe. To the show’s credit, the rider did not respond harshly to the horse’s reluctance (discomfort?) in executing the requested maneuvers. The rider tried to work with him, opting for basic trotting and cantering when he was not willing (able?) to comply. The horse’s actions in this final scene, where the arena is flooded with water and horse and rider are meant to dance, splashing across the stage in various dressage moves, did highlight the horse’s agency, but also demonstrated that perhaps being part of this show is not so freeing for this horse. Despite the horse’s clear disinterest in performing, he still had to offer some form of act. It was not the seamless dance that was intended, but it did at least showcase a collaboration, and a conversation that was bidirectional. However, highlighting this conversation was not intentional.

\(^{42}\) A trick horse may be trained in a number of months to do their job effectively, whereas a high-level dressage horse will require many years of thorough training (often 6-10) to produce the required athletic movements and lightness, and requires a much more in-depth level of communication to achieve.
and was glossed over as much as possible by the music and the rider’s subtle attempts to get the horse to comply.

Cavalia’s training and enactment techniques can be impressive, and at times hold elements of genuine partnership, but their production style limits the horses’ impact and agency. In Cavalia the power of the performance is in the spectacle of the stunt riding, the human command of the herd, and the precision of dressage—the abilities of humans to control and manipulate horses. Behind the scenes the horses may have more say, and are recognized as individuals to at least some degree, but the framing (and celebrating) of the equestrian partnership as one-sided is damaging in that it normalizes this anthropocentric behaviour in equine/human relationships, and limits the possibility of other narratives being recognized. This is the dominant narrative in the equestrian world (subservience framed as partnership), but it is not the only narrative, nor the only dynamic available in human/equine engagements. The horses are used as an element of production in a massive, multilayered spectacle – as tools of human entertainment. In the original book on Cavalia, Cavalia: A Dream of Freedom, all of the horses (and humans) are referenced in the credits, with names and pictures, but this practice has stopped, as Cavalia’s website now only references the breeds represented in the shows, and only the key artistic (human) figures (designers, directors, and such), not the performers (“Meet Odysseo’s”). These horses are not the only performers that appear interchangeable to Cavalia, but the humans are entering freely into this agreement, and understand the implications of how they are framed. The horses do not have the same agency and understanding in this regard, and as marginalized individuals, the limiting portrayal and lack of agency demonstrated has more significant consequences. In Cavalia’s shows the horse is represented in a plural, species-homogenizing manner, in which one horse can easily be exchanged for another, with the intrigue being found in the larger herd appeal.

43 In the training the horses are treated more as individual in that each horse has their own human with whom they work exclusively. Their feeding and training programs are tailored to their own individual needs. And the focus in training is claimed to be on the bond between a specific horse and rider. (Imaginetvnetwork)
The Power of Narratives

The damage that humans do to animals is not limited to the physical evidence that may mark their skin; it is often found in the narratives—the ways that animals are described and positioned in relation to humans—that allows for these abuses to be considered (and normalized) in the first place. While there are many benevolent practices in place, and organizations fighting for animal welfare and rights, it is the narratives that run below the surface, and which are reinforced in popular culture, that make the fight necessary. Inclusive spaces for animals are the exception, not the rule. Equestrian theatre companies, which have greatly increased in prevalence and popularity in the last decade, are often perpetuating the myths of human/equine dynamics that keep horses in a marginalized position in their dealings with humans: giving humans permission to accept and promote interspecies relationships that claim partnership, but which greatly favour the human. They do so in a way that goes beyond many other equestrian activities, in that they spin their own romanticized narratives that claim this as the best dynamic possible for human/equine relationships. They are failing to educate the audience on the expansive possibilities of interspecies performance, and, even worse, celebrating depictions of equine marginalization.

There are three different perspectives that performances can take on interspecies relationships: 1) they can support the status quo, and the current dominant understandings of a given animal and their positioning in their relationships with humans; 2) they can diminish the understandings of a given animal by presenting the most limited understanding of that animal, such by making them a prop to be laughed at or a symbol of an ideal that has nothing to do with the actual individual animal; 3) or they can try to expand perceptions, and present an understanding of an animal that offers a more complex and dynamic comprehension of that unique individual, and the possibilities of an interspecies relationship with the given animal (both individual and species). In terms of equestrian theatre discussed here these options generally manifest as one of the first two positionings, and often as a combination of the two, while claiming to be the third, and more expansive, option. Either the horses are treated as a homogenized species, where one stands for all, and any one will do, or they are there merely to represent an ideal, such as the human dream of freedom, as they are in Cavalia. As mentioned above, Cavalia claims to offer a “more humane world where human and horse may live in
harmony,” but in comparison to what? This claim seems similar to the rhetoric found in natural horsemanship, where it boasts a more positive relationship between horses and humans (as discussed in chapter two), but it is making this claim in comparison to the physical abuse that horses have been subject to in the training methods of the past (not that this violence is not still present at times). However, Cavalia’s claim of harmony speaks of a relationship that goes beyond moving past abusive training methods, and reaches towards an expansive understanding of horses and human/equine relationships (despite what is actually portrayed). Zingaro makes less overt claims on their website, and in their publicity, in reference to promoting a specific message about horses and human/equine relationships; however, this notion of doing things better, of showing the possibilities of the equestrian relationship, with the focus being all about the horses still underlays the public image of Bartabas and the company. Bartabas claims that “the love of horses [is] a religion” (“Theatre Zingaro: Presentation”), and that “In contact with them [horses] we have learned to grow wild to receive the lectures they have been willing to teach us” (“Shows of Theatre Zingaro”). But what exactly are these messages, and how are they shown when the horses’ own perspectives are lost in these spectacles of human creation? The focus of horses as teachers is clear within equine facilitated learning practices (as discussed in chapter two), but this learning from horses and sharing in their (so called) wildness is lost in Zingaro’s productions in favour of demonstrating the impressive ways that a human may shape the body and movements of a horse. This positioning mimics the positioning of horses in many equestrian disciplines, where the horse is only as good as the last ride, and more importantly the last ribbon (or last performance). While the ideal of the sport is connection and partnership with a brilliantly different other animal, the reality of the experience is that horses matter first and foremost for what they can do, and not who they are. Though a difficult horse may teach their human more, and advance their abilities more significantly, they are often less valued because they may garner fewer material rewards (ribbons and cash). While this is understandable, to a certain degree, in the professional equestrian world, in that they are in the business of selling horses, and getting clients to shows, it is exceedingly confusing in the world of equestrian theatre, which is in the business of selling a vision of the human/equine relationship.

By depicting these relationships in this narrow light, Cavalia and Zingaro are promoting, around the world, that the equestrian relationship is based on the subservience of horses to
humans, and encouraging the next generations of equestrians (as their audiences are largely filled with children who dream of horses) to this way of thinking. As Cavalia performer Jessy Lucavo explains, “Most of our artists are, of course, our horses, and they have minds of their own […] We try to make everything look like everything is under control here, but there are times when these horses take over and our job is to make it look as beautiful as possible and work with the animal. We have to work with what they are willing to give us” (VOA News). So rather than the horses being celebrated for their unique contributions, their inputs are meant to be hidden within the spectacle of beauty. However, these moments can often not be fully hidden, as glimpses of the equine contributions are always there, for those who choose to look for them, for those who are familiar with the language, and for those who are able to see past the enchanting spell of the spectacle, and focus on the subtle conversations among bodies, human, and horse. As Bartabas says, “Horses are very interesting to work with in the theatre. They are very just, they are there at the moment, they can’t play a role, they are of the moment […] they are here, and they are what they are” (“Theatre Zingaro – Chimère”). And yet their individuality is masked by the spectacle of the theatre.

Below the surface level of the spectacle, the horses’ perspectives are there in each gesture—in every feisty flare of movement, pin or perk of the ear, reluctance or exuberance to work, or even just in how they shift their weight and stand. Yet it is exceedingly difficult to concentrate on these moments and what the horses are saying, when the horses are presented as a homogenized herd, or they are only on stage for a minute or two at a time, or the human control of their actions is what is being highlighted. It is easier to grasp the spectacle and be carried away with the positive emotions that the music is encouraging the audience to have; it is easier to buy into the narrative, to buy into the dream. Yet, when these equine articulations break free of the overarching narrative and become easily recognizable, such as a horse kicking out or racing about the stage ignoring their handlers, these are also the moment that often get the most reaction from the audience. There is a pleasure to be found in watching the horses push back against the restrictive framing of the act, challenging the centrality of the human perspective, and asserting their own desires, perspectives and interests. As Michael Peterson suggests, these moments “kick out” against the meaning that has been ascribed to them (35). While Peterson cautions about romanticizing these moments (35), it is equally important not to underappreciate these
demonstrations of agency, or underestimate the influence that they have on the way that the horses are seen and understood by the human audiences. It is in these moments that the horses’ personalities are most acutely seen, as they opt not to do as they are told, and rather to do as they please. Often these moments read as a comic defying of human authority, and the audiences respond very favourably to this disrupting of the anthropocentric narrative.

In another scene of Cavalia’s *Odysseo*, which seemed to include the entire cast of the actors (at least those who work with the horses, as not all of the human performers do) and most of the horses performing that night (around thirty horses), the horses start loose on the stage, roaming around freely. The horses play, have little fights, roll in the sand, and mill about, doing as they please until the human actors start making their way in amongst the herd. Each human actor joins up with a horse, initially just spending time with them in relation to whatever the horse has chosen to do. Here, briefly, the horses are individuals. They are clearly spread out around the stage, making it easy to follow their movements, and to recognize their decisions about how they are going to spend their free time (rolling, wandering, or fighting). However, as the act continues this moment of highlighting the individual pairs gets washed away as the humans start weaving throughout the stage, with their individual horses following at liberty. It starts with a one-to-one ration of human/equine pairs, but soon some of the human performers subtly hand off their horse to another, meaning that each human on stage now has two horses following them, and then four. The humans continue to weave in and out around each other filling the stage, now each having four horses under their control. This creates a beautiful and impressive choreographed image of movement, as the colours of the horses flow around the stage, but any individuality that was recognized at the start of the act becomes lost—that is until two horses break away and claim their individuality back.

Two horses break away from their handler and race up to the top of the stage, bucking and running, clearly enjoying their breakaway. The rest of the act continues, as the rest of the horses stay with their human leaders, and continue to weave about the stage. Two human performers move in from the sides, where they were monitoring the horses, and blocking the exits, should anyone try to leave the stage. The walk over calmly, and with as little attention drawn to themselves as possible, and engage with the renegade horses, keeping them contained to an area, and then gaining their focus once more, and leading them back to the performer that
they are meant to be following. All resumes its normal course for a moment, and then the two horses break away once more. This time one of them is more reluctant to be reworked back into order and double barrels (kicks out with both back feet) at the performer who tries to work with him. The human stays calm, gives the horse a bit more room, and then once again gains his attention, and encourages him to follow back to the group he is meant to be part of. The laughter and reactions coming from the audience clearly indicate that they are enjoying the horse’s escape, and the joy that he exhibits running around in what is likely an unscripted moment of freedom (though probably some horse claims a similar moment in most shows). Though there is something exhilarating about watching the horse run and play of its own accord, this opportunity is not embraced, with the horse being continually brought back into line, and merged back in to the collective act, no longer an individual. Due to the similar appearance of many of the horses, it is even difficult to keep an eye on this feisty individual, and follow his movements, until he breaks away again for a third time. This horse seems intent on doing his own thing, in a sea of horses doing as they are told, presenting a reminder that they are in fact individuals with their own interests. Embracing this moment of equine agency, and celebrating this horse’s vision of the act are not something that the structure of Cavalia allows for. There is some room for improvisation, as the handlers at the sides of the ring are there to deal with just such diversions from the script, but the goal is get back to the original choreography, not to embrace the rebellion and appreciate this individual horse’s perspective.

In Zingaro’s *On achève bien les Anges (élégies)*, they harness this interest in observing unscripted horses, with minimal external framing, in their opening equine act (a clown playing a musical saw offers a prelude). The lights go down on the clown, and flicker on and off as a herd of black horses with white markings⁴⁴ enter the stage through a vaulted side entrance and run (or meander) down the banked sides of the area into the middle. The horses are completely at liberty, meaning that they are loose and not being influenced through reins, riding, or other cues from humans. In fact, there are no humans present in this act initially. The horses are free to do whatever they like in the confines of the space. In theory, given the design of the theatre, which has a relatively steep grade leading up to the audience’s bleachers, with no dividing structures,

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⁴⁴ All of the horses are of the same breed, which I believe is Gypsy Vanner.
they could climb out and visit with the crowd (though those actions would likely be thwarted by the handlers perched around the edges of the audience). The horses mull about in the dim light, and engage in their own narratives of herd politics and individual interests. One horse rolls, another pushes his way through the group and lightly threatens those around him, but most just hang about, or explore the dirt floor with their muzzles. This act is very straightforward, the horses being horses, and most importantly being themselves, in whatever way that manifests for them in the moment. Despite this simplicity, or perhaps because of it, this act is completely captivating, and the audience chuckles as they watch the horses interact.

It is exciting to see horses free to do what they please. And due to the improvisational structure of the performance, it is still exciting to watch a second time—what will they choose to do this time? This loose play goes on for around four minutes, before the human performers, dressed as eccentric (fallen?) blindfolded angels begin to slowly drop down from the ceiling, head first, and find their places on the backs of the loose horses. During this diversion of the angels working their way down, Bartabas quietly enters the arena and is hidden kneeling in the centre of the herd of horses, which have now taken up a more formal positioning in a circle around him, facing in. The lights come up higher, as the angels settle themselves on their mounts and tie their legs up behind them (so they are kneeling while straddling the horses). From here a more choreographed act begins, as the horses move out to the rail, and begin a carousel routine around Bartabas. But what is most intriguing here is the appeal of watching horses be horses, and how placing this act on the stage and lighting it as something worthy of attention fully engages the audience, perhaps more so than the more structured moments that follow.\(^{47}\)

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\(^{45}\) The rail refers to the outside track of a given arena.

\(^{46}\) The horses work in a circle around Bartabas and do small circles and do other simple maneuvers in unison.

\(^{47}\) I acknowledge that if this act were to go on longer than a few minutes this attention would likely have waned, but this can be said of most simple or repetitive performances. All of the acts in this production are fairly short, and rely on a variety act approach (rather than a continuous narrative) to hold focus.
If these are the moments that spark the most affective responses, and appear to create the most pleasure, then why are these equine narratives—for they are narratives based on histories, relationships, interests, and emotions—not more predominantly included in equestrian theatre? *On achève bien les Anges (élégies)* has no clear plot to speak of, and in many ways the social dynamics of the herd of horses is more complex and holds more mystery than the variety show structure of the production. So why are the narratives spun not more interspecies in nature, offering more of a balance of acts and perspectives? Is it merely a lack of interspecies imagination on the part of the humans? A fear of what may happen if equine perspectives are recognized and considered? Why is control deemed more engaging than free improvisation? Or is it just the by-product of years of conditioning humans to believe that this is the correct place for animals to stand in relation to humans, and the only way to hold an audience’s interest? As Normand Latourelle found in producing *Les Légendes Fantastiques* (the show that inspired the idea of Cavalia), audiences are drawn to horses, even, as in the case of this production, where a horse is only passing through a throng of actors in an insignificant scene, “the spectators were totally riveted on that horse and they were neglecting the rest of the action” (Brousseau and Martin 16). It is this audience appeal of horses that inspired Latourelle to create Cavalia. Audiences flock to these shows because of the horses, and yet it is the human perspectives that are highlighted on stage. By perpetuating these narratives on stage and in life, humans are continually closing the door on more expansive interspecies possibilities. If we do not believe a balanced and reciprocal relationship is possible, and desirable and interesting, then why would we ever leave space for it to emerge? By claiming these boundaries for human/equine engagements we leave little room for the unexpected, and no room for learning anything that we did not already know. What might a truly interspecies narrative look like on the stage? I explore this question further in chapter four.

**Homogeneity: Where One Stands for All and All are Interchangeable**

In these freer acts that highlight equine interactions both Zingaro and Cavalia choose to minimize the visual distinctions of the horses, making it more difficult for the human audience to identify the horses as individuals. These horses are not on stage for long (5-10 minutes generally), and by choosing like breeds and colours the herd identification of the horses is increased, suggesting that they are one and the same: a homogenized group. On the one hand,
there are clearly multiple beings on stage, but in many ways these beings are almost identified as clones of one another due to their visual similarity, decreasing their distinctiveness as individuals. The horses are displayed not as a common herd, but as a beautifully curated collection of sameness—a moving painting of flesh canvas and light. As Una Chaudhuri explains, “animal identity is inherently plural. Not only do animals exist in herds, packs, swarms and flocks, but there are countless species of animals, outnumbering their self-styled ‘paragon’ [household pets] by billions” (38). Humans are accustomed to seeing animals in this plural sense, especially due to the way that animals are predominantly discussed by species and through species distinctions—we speak of horses, and horseness far more than about individuals and their interests and preferences—unless discussing a unique individual that you personally know, such as a companion animal. The understanding that horses are herd animals, and prey animals, becomes the dominant distinction, and overrides the notion that they are also unique individuals with a lot of expressive possibilities within their species parameters, just like humans are.

In the opening equine act in *On achève bien les Anges (élégies)*, referenced above, it becomes clear on multiple viewings of the performance that each horse has their own performance preference for this free roaming intro. The ones that roll do so in each performance, and it is one or two primary troublemakers who like to interfere with the others and instigate the squabbles. The subtle differences in markings and demeanour allow for the horses to be identified and for their individual perspectives and choices in the performance to be seen. However, this only happens with multiple views of the act. In a single viewing, it is the sameness that seems most recognizable and highlighted.

With just my two viewings of the performance, and a keen eye for detail, the horses go from being a generalized group to a collection of unique individuals. In the first experience, it is obvious that not all of the horses are behaving in the same way, but there is the potential assumption that, because they are all visually similar horses, they all behave in the same way. But with a second viewing it becomes clear that the quiet, relaxed one is unlikely to become the troublemaker and vice versa. They may be like, in breed, build, and colour, but they are drastically different equine individuals. However, this point is often lost in these types of performance because of the lack of familiarity with these specific horses, and the cultural conditioning that suggests one horse is just like the next. As David Williams writes, “Horses, for
example, are often homogenized as a species, despite the enormous diversity of forms and types of *equus caballus* [sic], and the very particular qualities of individual horses; and, like ballet dancers, their bodies are often defined in relation to an abstract ideal (‘conformation’)” (30).

Adding to this is the feature that it is exceedingly difficult to recognize the differences in animals that one is not familiar with. The more one interacts with a given species, the more likely one is able to differentiate between individuals. I can easily recognize the features of different horses (even those of similar size and colour), as I spend a considerable amount of time observing and working with them, but I have a much more difficult time differentiating between squirrels, unless they have significant markers. Increasing the visual distinctions between horses enhances the ability to recognize them as individuals and to follow their personal performances.

In *Odysseo*’s liberty act the visual distinctions are slightly increased, as the herd that is used for this performance is a collection of Arabians of various shades and styles of grey, but the actions that the horses are instructed to perform are far more scripted, decreasing the individuality of the horses. In this eight-minute act, the horses circle around a female (human) performer with synchronized movements. The positioning of each of the horses is precise and they are always in a line formation of some sort: either following nose to tail, or advancing in a fan formation, where they are standing next to one another and moving at different paces to maintain a central pivot point following the human conductor. At other points, they all spin on command and then continue on in their circle. Their actions, other than the squabbling and threatening of each other, are all prescribed and leave little room for their individual perspectives to be seen. The herd politics that come out in their little fights, or the occasional lagging horse (the ones less on cue to perform a given action), are the only aspects that suggest these horses are individuals, and that there is a range to equine dynamics—they are not merely clones of a type. However, these threads of equine narrative are exceedingly hard to follow due to the repetitive movements and the visual similarities. It is difficult to track if the same horses are consistently having disagreements, or if they are each having their turn at expressing their displeasure, or their interest, based on the circumstances. This increases the experience of sameness, and inscribes a similar demeanour on all of the horses, promoting the notion of equine homogeneity.

The way that they move through the space, and the way that their colours blend making them (appear as) a harmonious group, has a certain aesthetic appeal, but this appeal is also
objectifying, highlighting their bodies and overlooking their minds. They are presented as a unified collective, despite the squabbling and moments of dissonance amongst them. This unity suggests that the decisions they make are because they are horses, and like horses, rather than that these performances are articulations of self and perspective. The horses roll and threaten because horses roll and threaten. This is accurate to a certain degree, but it is overlooking the point that a specific horse in a specific instance is making these choices and that these choices communicate aspects of themselves.

The human performers in both *On achève bien les Anges (élégies)* and *Odysseo* are given costumes that also present them as a unified “herd,” but their costumes also offer elements of variation allowing for a clear individuality. In *On achève bien les Anges (élégies)* all of the human actors are dressed similarly in shades of white, with wings and tuxedo jackets at times, but their hair and makeup create an understanding of uniqueness, with each performer being afforded their own style, which highlights the differences amongst them. This allows them to both be read as a cohesive group, and as individuals who have specific roles and characters to play. Even the musicians are presented in diverse clown costumes that emphasize their personalities as they circle the arena and interact with the audience. The white and red colour scheme of the musician/clowns presents them as a group, but they clearly stand out from one another, intentionally showcasing their differences. This encourages the audience to connect with individual characters, even when all of them are present. The same connection is limited with the horses, other than in the acts where only one horse is employed. In these single horse acts, they are then highlighted as an individual in comparison to their herd-situated companions, but they are also highly controlled and directed in these pieces, placing the focus on the human command of the horses. The horses that are used in the herd scenes are not the same ones that are given scenes of their own, creating a “star” and “chorus” understanding of the performers. This aspect of star and chorus is clearly present in reference to Bartabas in comparison to the angels and clowns as well. Bartabas is the only one with more than one costume, and all of his costumes make him stand out as unique, whereas the musicians and actors have stylistic connections that distinguish their groups. Only Bartabas is marked as a distinct individual. He interacts with the other groups, but through his costuming he stands out as the focus. Within the chorus setup the humans are given aspects of individuality that the supporting horses are denied.
In the trick riding acts of Cavalia the horses are much more limited in terms of their actions and agency than the free roaming horses of *On achève bien les Anges (élégies)* are. Although, because these horses are clearly different from a visual standpoint they more readily read as individuals. Here each of the horses is performing the same movement, one after another, and yet they stand out as unique, with their own approach and performance. In these acts, the horses are easily differentiated, as their colours are often strikingly different (palominos, paints, bays, and greys). This creates a noticeably different understanding of these horses, with the individual perspectives of the horses coming across more clearly. Their visual distinctiveness makes it reasonably easy to notice who pins their ears on each run, or how they carry themselves, which are all aspects that allow them to communicate aspects of themselves and comment on the acts and their own experience of them. But much like the individual horse acts of Zingaro, the more individuality the horses are allowed in terms of visual distinctiveness, the less agency they are permitted. It seems in these acts that agency is a trade-off for individuality: the more agency permitted, the more the horses are encouraged to be viewed as a type; the more individuality they are granted, the more control they are subjected to. Either the horses are celebrated for their homogenized visual form, or appreciated for how their individual strengths may be harnessed by humans.

Even for the experienced equestrian who is familiar with the uniqueness of each equine they work with it is easy to generalize and forget this aspect when presented with a group of visually like, unfamiliar individuals. Equestrians are accustomed to generalizing about horses based on breed and discipline, and while an Arabian and a Clydesdale are starting from some very different foundations in terms of general temperament and body structure, the nuances of difference go much further than that when it comes to personality. Breeds, like with dogs, are a short hand for understanding not just the physical characteristics, but also the generalized behavioural traits that influence personality. These characteristics, though, are by no means fixed, as you can easily have a quarter horse that behaves like a thoroughbred, and these generalizations, while helpful when choosing a breed to start with for a given activity—as it would be unwise to barrel race a draft horse, if you want to get good times—can also limit our abilities to see horses in their own individual right. We see them as a breed, with the certain understandings of that breed, and forget to see them in and for themselves.
A Limited Narrative: Equid Typecasting

In Zingaro’s earlier shows (Cabaret Équestre and Opéra Équestre) the formidable black horse Quixote performs a tap-dancing routine (and canters backwards) through very controlled dressage movements and stalls, or holds of motion, set to music (Zingaro: 30 Ans). He performs this act in each of these performances. Tap dancing, and other highly controlled dressage movements, appear to be Quixote’s main role in the company, allowing for one specific demonstration of Quixote as an individual and performer to be shown. Highlighting certain specific skills of a given performer is also common in human performances; however, when the class of performer is marginalized (whether it is through race, gender, or species) this typecasting can reinforce narrow views of that given group. In the case of horses, if individuals are always shown in tightly controlled circumstances, where little room is given for personal expression, then that becomes a reinforcing performance that suggests this is the only, correct, dynamic for this relationship.

There are various ways that horses can be limited and typecast within a given show. There is the larger framing of the species as referenced above, and the typecasting of individuals, which is generally based on breed, athletic ability, and physical characteristics. These narratives apply further understandings to individual horses, and ascribe temperaments to “match” their physical appearances. Horses like Quixote are only employed in serious acts that heavily spotlight their abilities. They are the stars, and the understanding seems to be that because of their talents they should only be presented with a certain reverence, whereas other equids (horse, donkey, or mule) deemed less talented, due to physical appearance, ability, and/or breed-based narratives\(^48\) (common assumptions found in the “cultural animal unconscious”), may only be allowed to perform “lower” (comic) acts, such as the donkeys in On achève bien les Anges (élégies). The donkeys—who are listed only as “the donkey” and “the mule” in the program, in comparison to the personally named horses—are typecast as the appropriate mounts for the

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\(^{48}\) Much as certain breeds of dogs may be deemed dangerous or stupid, equids are similarly typecast, partially due the common cultural narratives that are spun around them, such as donkeys being more stubborn and less elegant than horses. These narratives may differ from culture to culture.
clowns ("Shows of Theatre Zingaro"). Their size distinctions are proportionately matched with the clowns for comic effect, a mammoth donkey (or based on the name, likely a mule) for the tall clown, and a miniature donkey for the clown with a form of dwarfism. The clowns are dressed respectfully for a funeral, and parade around the arena aiming to look dignified, despite their makeup, and over-the-top attire, while riding such an “undignified” mount, or at least that is the perceived joke.

These equids simply walk around the parameter of the arena, placing the focus on the demeanour of the clowns. Donkeys with their large floppy ears and shaggier coats (though they could also be clipped like the horses), tend to be viewed as less majestic and prized than horse breeds, especially those breeds used for the dressage sequences. But there is nothing to say that a donkey, or more likely a mule, cannot do more advanced manoeuvres, and that they cannot challenge these perceptions. In both cases, the depictions of Quixote and of The Donkey and The Mule play on a single facet of who they are, and limit them to these stereotypes, which the audience is already highly familiar with as they are popular equid tropes. Donkeys may not be equipped to do the same manoeuvres as horses, but mules can be, and there may be other impressive manoeuvres that donkeys and mules can perform that horses cannot. They are limited largely by our imagination, the narratives in which we cast them, and the social constructs that are created in reference to what is possible and appropriate for a given species, breed, or individual equid. Biased standards of physical appeal, and artificially connecting these aesthetics with athletic performance, are common occurrences in the equestrian world, which often means that the animals that are deemed less attractive are marked down, even if their technical performances are on par with the individuals that are considered prettier. While the conformation of a given equid, which influences understandings of these aesthetics, will influence their athletic abilities, the floppiness of the ears, colour of the coat, or shape of the head is unlikely to. If these positions were to be challenged, it may take the audience a moment to readjust to a mule performing a serious act; still when it is recognized that the mule is up to the task, the impact may be all the more impressive.

This is not to say that a donkey should never be cast in the comic role, or that Quixote should not perform dressage—they may be very well suited to these acts and enjoy whatever manoeuvre is being asked of them—but through the production showing only one aspect of their
experience it is limiting and reinforcing narrow understandings of these equids. What if Quixote also likes to play and has a knack for comic timing? And what if the mule can also perform some very artful manoeuvres? These dynamics are rarely showcased, which undercuts the range of equid experience.

*The Centaur*

The equestrian riding relationship is often depicted as a centaur engagement, where (like the image of the centaur) the human mind (head and torso of the human male body) is seamlessly integrated with the body of the horse (replacing the horse’s own head and neck). This connects to what theatre historian and performance studies scholar Kim Marra refers to as the “rougher models of horsemanship based on Cartesian dualism, which positioned the human male rider as the controlling mind and the horse as the obedient body, eliding the corporeal interconnectedness of the two species” (4). Though Marra is referring to the separation of bodies in certain historical modes of riding—rather than the blending of bodies suggested by the centaur image—the divide and hierarchy of mind (human) over body (horse) is still present. For Marra, Zingaro presents a counter to this model, recognizing an “intercorporeal melding” in Bartabas’ approach (4). Yet, how this melding is recognized in these performances ebbs and flows, with moments of synchronicity that celebrate this interconnectedness, along with moments of dissonance that highlight human control and equine subservience. As Anita Maurstad, Dona Davis, and Sarah Cowles find in their exploration of the equestrian relationship, “Even though riders reveal sensations of deeply embedded intercorporeal mutualities, in ways that led Game (2001) to compare the pair to centaurs, our data show that the connections riders sense are also fleeting and partial. Riders are not centaurs in all their horse-related activities” (327). Whether or not the centaur-like experiences are fleeting or continuous, the notion of the centaur representing an ideal to be sought after continues to be problematic, and yet it is an idea that is often referenced when speaking of Bartabas and Théâtre Zingaro. David Williams explains that,

For Bartabas, human-horse interactions represent the possibility of a conjunction of two very different ontologies and epistemologies – one sensory-motor/perceptual, the other intellectual – and, in riding, the temporary creation of a third composite assemblage much greater than the sum of its parts: equestrianism as becoming-centaur for both rider and horse? (33)
While it is interesting that Williams references this experience as a “becoming-centaur for both,” the use of the image of the centaur still implies a Cartesian model that prizes the human mind and equine body, and overlooks the equine mind and human body—all of which are integral aspects of this becoming.” Even while the image of the centaur is situated as celebrating these two ways of knowing and being in Williams’s description, the message is still focusing on the human control of equine bodies, and celebrating horses for their sensory-motor/perception (rather than their own equine form of intellect), and referencing only the human’s intellectual offerings, and not their physical engagement. As Williams suggests, riding creates a new entity that is more than the sum of its parts, but this becoming should be based on the joining of two bodies and two minds (not selectively choosing the preferred parts that most readily serve the human).

Even when these roles are reversed, as they are in the iconic image from the Zingaro show *Le Centaure et l’animal* (The Centaur and the Animal), where Bartabas’s head disappears into the shadows and is replaced by the head of Soutine, a black Frisian stallion, the human envisioning of the relationship is still somehow central. In this image, the stage disappears into shadow, along with Soutine’s body, and only Soutine’s head and Bartabas’s torso (standing below him) are lit, creating the effect of an inverted centaur: the body of a man with the head of a horse. Here, even as the head of Soutine is spotlighted, it is the mastery of the man that is being celebrated—Bartabas’s theatrical vision, and the precise control of Soutine that allows him to create this effect. Soutine exists in the anthropocentric world of the stage, and a proscenium stage at that, which, unlike Bartabas’s home theatre at Aubervilliers, is not a stage designed for the movements of the horse. No matter how much Soutine is centered in this act, it is still about the mastery of one man, Bartabas. Bartabas explains that in *Le Centaure et l’animal*, “Guided by man during the long apprenticeship that is dressage, the horse accesses a level of ‘knowledge,’ thus turning man and animal into a centaur. Conversely, man looks to bring back to the surface the animal instinct at the origins of his creation, like a journey back through evolution, a regression back into the deepest layers of his being” (“Shows of Theatre Zingaro”). This articulation of the relationship, while it speaks to Soutine being able to gain certain forms of knowledge, also suggests that the only knowledge of worth comes from a human’s instruction,
and that all a horse may teach a human comes from instinct, not another, equally valuable, way of knowing and being in the world.

Bartabas has also created this inverted centaur image with Zingaro, another black Frisian and Bartabas’s original equine partner, from whom his company gets its name. This image speaks to the way that Bartabas sees his process, in that he claims that the ideas come from his horses (“Theatre Zingaro – Chimère”), and that his job is to “bring out the personality of the horse as you might with people, to let the horses express themselves” (Marra 3). However, as Kim Marra points out, “This cultivation of individual equine expression is not an end in itself; however, it is a means of using the horse as a vehicle for expressing his own artistic vision” (3). No matter what Bartabas’s articulated interests and goals may be, or what occurs during the training and rehearsal periods, when the act reaches the stage it becomes about the human narrative and Bartabas’s vision, and the horse as an individual disappears into the shadows of human mastery.

In Cavalia’s shows the centaur imagery is less significant than in Zingaro’s productions, due to a decreased emphasis on dressage, and a heightened focus on trick riding and liberty acts, which destabilize the human-topped image of the centaur. Cavalia’s original logo also disrupts the centaur depiction by presenting an image in black and white of a grey horse prancing on a black background on the top half, mirrored below by the black shadows of two humans (one male, one female) on a white background; the humans compose their bodies to mimic the horse’s movements above (Brousseau and Martin 64). In this image, the horse is sketched out in full detail, and the humans are merely shadows below that embrace the horse’s gestures. This sketching (as it is a drawing not a photograph) is a far more inclusive depiction of the equestrian relationship, and one that places the humans in a position of following and supporting the horse, rather than leading and controlling.

In Odysseo dressage riding, and a full celebration of the centaur figure, is only featured prominently in the final act (though there are other moments of simpler riding throughout), in which the arena is flooded with water, and horse and rider dance through its depth. In other acts, the centaur image is disrupted by the separation of equine and human bodies. In the trick riding, riders hang off the sides of the horses, with their hands at times brushing the dirt and their heads
inches from their horses’ feet. Even in the jumping and Roman riding acts, the space between bodies is referenced, as the humans lift off the horses’ backs over the fences, and juggle their footing while they command their teams. These acts visually suggest the centaur relationship as both joining up and separating, referencing, as Maurstad, David, and Cowles suggest, that “the hyphenated ‘co-’ in ‘co-being’ connects but also separates” (330), positioning the horse as a separate entity from the human. However, rather than providing further agency for the horses, or highlighting their artistic contributions, these acts cast the horses as tools and celebrate their bodies, as discussed above, positioning them as platforms for human acrobatics, while overlooking their minds and agency. In the moments when Cavalia does evoke the centaur image, the seamless integration of the two bodies is furthered by the flowing costumes that hide the human’s legs and create the illusion of one form.

Underneath these various images of the blending and separating of human and equine bodies the message somehow still remains the same: mastering the horse’s body is the ideal to be achieved, and this mastery is what creates aesthetic appeal. This message leaves horses in a very tenuous position that requires a human to participate in the fulfillment of their potential, and ignores what humans may learn from an interspecies meeting of both mind and body, and by celebrating equine perspectives and narratives. Is it possible to engage a horse on stage and not have it be all about the human? How might a show be framed to recognize and celebrate both perspectives (horse and human)?

**Space for Collaboration**

It is in rehearsal, due to its more improvisational structure, that a horse has the most agency and is most likely to have their perspective be recognized and appreciated. It is in the realm of improvisational performance (which includes training and rehearsal) that the promise of performance as a (re)balancing of interspecies dynamics is most readily found. In the final theatrical productions for both Cavalia and Théâtre Zingaro every action has been decided and

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49 Roman riding is a popular circus act, in which the rider stands on the haunches of two horses (one foot on each horse), while controlling the horses via long reins. It is done usually with two to four horses in a team, and one rider controlling them.
the aim is to recreate what has already been scripted with as little variation as possible—to create a reliable product that can be sold, and which is reasonably consistent from night to night. While the horses may have been instrumental in creating these acts initially, once the production becomes fixed there is little room for articulations in the moment beyond what has already been established. Horses can only truly collaborate with humans in the moment, as it is the realm of experience that can be shared most readily amongst individuals without words. Any act that is not grounded in improvisation requires that the parameters be established ahead of time, leaving less room for the inspirations and articulations of the moment. The horses are not privy to the overarching human narratives in which the acts are being framed. They know what is expected of them, and have repeated their required pieces countless times, but by the time the performance reaches the stage the act has very little to do with them as individuals, and everything to do with reproducing a performance night after night. Of course, there are still negotiations occurring in every moment and movement between horse and human, but in the final productions the aim is generally to hide these conversations in order to create the illusion of mastery and co-being, not to foreground these exchanges. It is this diminishing of the interplay of perspectives that reinforces the human narratives and marginalizes the horse’s contributions. In rehearsal (or training) the reverse is often true, as in these contexts the conversations about relationship and the perspective of the horse as an individual are central to the process.

In training there is generally some consideration given to horses and their views, but as discussed previously, there are still issues of degree, which are influenced by how the humans involved understand their equine companions—is the human interested in everything the horse has to say, or are they commanding more than listening, and paying attention to the bare minimum of the horse’s comments to get the job done? How is the division of agency established, and from what perspective is one engaging their performance? The most common perspective comes from the dominant humanist understanding of animals, in which they are meant to perform the human’s will and be a tool of the human’s bidding. At the Academy of Equestrian Arts (l’Académie du spectacle équestre), the training company created by Bartabas in 2003 (“Presentation”), it is in the (training) interactions during the week that the horses are given the most agency, and in which their perspectives are most appreciated. Life at the academy revolves around training and preparing for the weekly public performances, which generally
occur on the weekend, put on for tourists visiting Versailles. And yet, for many of the established equine performers their activities during the week have little to do with the acts that they will perform for their public audiences and are more about their relationships with their assigned “equerries” (“The Academy”), and keeping the horses physically and mentally happy in their limited living circumstances.

Academy of Equestrian Arts

The Academy is, essentially, a conservatory-style program that trains humans in the art of equestrienship (primarily haute ecole dressage) and the performance arts (dance, stage fencing, voice training, and traditional Japanese archery). The website for the Academy refers to it as “a unique ‘corps de ballet’” (”Presentation”). The Academy is housed in the Royal Stables (La Grande Écurie) of Louis XIV, directly across the street from the Palace of Versailles, in Versailles, France. As Bartabas explains,

I wanted to create a school; a new kind of school, a kind of company-cum-school at the heart of which a “community” spirit would develop, a school where horses would teach us how to work in harmony, fully respecting each other, a school in perpetual movement, without any pre-established rules, curricula or diplomas.

I devised this Academy as a top-level school, capable of training artist-riders, but also as a place to blossom, a place where beautiful people can bloom. I never considered the act of passing on as simply amounting to communicating your technique or expertise to others.

In order to do this, the Academy’s deep-seated originality is to give every rider a full education incorporating dance, stage fencing, voice training, traditional Japanese archery, as well as horse work. […] Learning all of these techniques only has one purpose: a better understanding of equestrian work by developing the rider’s feeling. (“Presentation”)

The Academy focuses of training “artist-riders” through a paid apprenticeship program, in which the riders devote two years of their lives to learning the arts of the Academy, before going on to become part of the established company (Academy Interviews). Previously, each apprentice was only allotted two years at the Academy, but now there is no set duration, and the trained troupe
of artist-riders may stay with the company for many years after their apprenticeship concludes (Ponet). In April 2015, I spent a week at the Academy observing their training, attending their shows, and speaking with the company members (some who have been there for years, and some who are recent recruits, just starting their training). Though I viewed the public performances multiple times during my stay, my focus was on the training and unscripted moments between horses and riders during the week, exploring equine agency within the framework of the Academy. While at the Academy I interviewed the equerries, observed lessons and training sessions, and attended Bartabas’ critique of a new group of equerries in training. While I was not permitted to film, I took notes during my interviews and on what I observed, as well as photographing of facilities and training.

Though Bartabas oversees the training at the Academy, and directs each production that the company performs, he is not involved in the daily training, which is managed by three trainers who were original students of the Academy and have been there for many years. Life at the Academy revolves around caring for the horses, training and exercising the horses during the week, and then presenting shows for tourists 2-3 times on the weekend. Bartabas creates a new show for the Academy to present every year or so, but within that year it is the same show that is performed at each public presentation. The shows are inspired by the historical setting and the cavalry origins of dressage, but also include driving (both ground and with carts), a little bit of liberty work, and acts inspired by basic reining/cutting (two forms of western riding), in addition to the theatrical pieces (dancing, singing, stage combat, and archery). The Academy has between 42-45 horses at any given time (Ponet), with many of them being cream coloured Lusitanos, along with some Hanoverians, Quarter Horses, and others. The Academy’s horses live in the cobblestone Royal Stables and only leave their stalls to go for morning rides on the palace grounds, or to be exercised in one of the two rings built inside the courtyards of the stables, in the round pen out back, or in the formal indoor performance arena. The horses are always in their stall or working with their assigned human, they are never turned out, and only the newest

\[50\] All interviews conducted as part of this research received ethics clearance from the University of Guelph’s Research Ethics Board either through the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation or through a project specific proposal.
recruits spend time playing free together in the area (which is part of the formal performance and a way of introducing the new horses to the audience).

*Agency in Rehearsal and Training*

In the performances that the company presents, mostly on weekends, the acts are very fixed, with little room for adjustment or consideration. So, during the week, leading up to these performances the focus is on each horse’s needs and preferences. One of the horses under the charge of established equerry Zoé San Martin gets easily bored, and given that he is already fully trained and experienced with what is required of him in the performances, during the week his training is focused on play and do things that he enjoys (San Martin). This allows him to be excited for the shows, and perform what he needs to with ease (San Martin). His training is arranged so that he will want to do what he needs to in the show, with his preferences being catered to in order to establish that desire. As one equerry explains, “the horses here (who are largely rescues) are bored with their jobs, and they have physical issues, so it makes it extra hard to keep them focused and wanting to do it” (Academy Interviews). However, when a horse at the Academy clearly indicates that they are not interested in doing their job at a given point that horse is then given time off. The fixed location, and long-term performance schedule of the Academy allows for more leeway in this regard. There are always new horses being trained, and each established equerry has 4-5 horses that regularly perform, as well a newer horse in training. The horses are moved around between the riders as needed to ensure that they are interested in doing their jobs, and that each of the riders has a horse to perform with in each of the acts that they are assigned.

In comparison to Cavalia and Théâtre Zingaro the Academy is in a unique situation, much closer to a standard training facility, in that the location is fixed, and the schedule is fairly consistent, with the audience coming to them, and the horses staying in one place, allowing for more flexibility in their approach to issues, and in their ability to make accommodations for the horses as needed. In the theatrical touring productions, which both Cavalia and Zingaro engage in, the timeline is much more intense with the horses performing often six days a week, and at times with more than one performance in a day. This timeline increases the pressure to perform, and creates a very repetitive experience for the horses. The horses at the Academy, though they
often perform every week all year around, are only performing two to three times a week, and have significantly more diversity in terms of their daily expectations.

In terms of the performances, Zoé San Martin states, “with this type of work [rigid and classical] there isn’t any room for you to not be doing what you are supposed to or to not be where you need to be.” These conditions are on the horses as much, if not more than, the humans. The Academy specializes in dressage (both mounted and in-hand work) and largely performs synchronized movements that harken back to the origins of dressage, which came out of cavalry manoeuvres. There is no room in a tight carousel act for one individual to decide not to perform or to take a different track, as the entire image gets thrown off, and with so many horses in the act, there is little room (physically) for one horse to go off on their own.

During the training during the week, the performances between horses and humans are much more improvisational, and there is significantly more room for each horse’s perspective to be recognized and for them to express their own agency. For Zoé and her long line horse, Neptune, the focus during the week is on building their relationship and having fun, often doing exercises that Neptune will never perform for a formal audience. In the performance, Neptune needs to be precise as he is sharing the arena with a number of other horses, and they are all being controlled through long lines (long reins) that extend from their bridles down the lengths of their backs to their equerries who walk behind them. With so many horses and humans, and with only the long lines connecting them, the possibilities of the teams getting tangled if any of the horses were to stop listening to their handlers is significantly higher. While Zoé and Neptune do practice these manoeuvres during the week as needed, the focus is often more on liberty games. There is far more leeway for both Neptune and Zoé in these acts, as Neptune does not do these manoeuvres for an audience, so it matters less if he does it correctly; what matters is that he is listening to Zoé, and that they are having fun (building their connection and relationship) (San Martin). In this space, they can learn new things and explore other faucets of their partnership.

While I was visiting the Academy during the week, the energy of exchange is quite different from what I observed in the public performances. Of course, precision and enhancing of the skills and abilities of both the horse and rider are still key aspects, but there is far more room for the individual relationships and for each member of the given partnerships to express themselves. Each pair trains on their own, and is able to structure the work to their own
preferences, with input as required from the “tenured equerries,” the head trainers of the Academy (“Academy”). As I observe Zoé and Neptune working together in a round pen at liberty, when Neptune no longer wants to respond to changes in direction, Zoé quickly switches to other work, and asks for a connected walking as she weaves around the arena with Neptune’s muzzle at her shoulder, before finishing with some rearing poses. None of this work will make it to the stage, as it is not what Neptune has been assigned to do in the performance, at least not in the current production, but these exchanges increase their understanding of each other and how well they work together, which influences their public long line act. As Marine Poncet (Director of Sales for the Academy) explains, “they train in performance to improve the communication between human and horse.” It is in observing this training that the personalities of the horses (and humans) are most clearly seen, making the compromises of perspective and desire more obvious, and creating an intriguing interaction of learning and exchange. For Julia Bougon, an equerry in training, she sees the training at the Academy as a dance, and one that is all about the subtle nuances of communication. And yet, on stage this performance is diminished in favour of the façade of perfection and control. Why is this performance deemed less worthy, less entertaining? Why are demonstrations of control, not collaboration, the goal?

**Conclusion: The Possibilities of Equestrian Theatre**

Equestrian theatre offers an interesting opportunity to challenge the dominant perceptions of horses and the human/equine relationship and to pose, “what if”? What if equestrian relationships were not so focused on control? What if equine perspectives were celebrated and highlighted on stage? What if there was a more balanced way of engaging that truly appreciated all of the aspects of equine/human interactions? What would this relationship look like? How might it be recognized and discussed? And what if the focus was not on the perfection of control, but rather on the dynamics of relationship, in which there is room to “fail”? This “failure” is often the result of equine agency, such as horses “kicking out” against the confines of what is expected (Peterson 35), and how they are experiencing the world at a given moment. What if this “failure” of mastery were not recognized as such, and rather embraced as a celebration of agency? “Failure” in equestrian theatre, though rarely planned, is highly probable, and can be incredibly entertaining, if handled well. Control of another animal is never completely possible, as we (humans) only have as much influence as they (animals/horses) grant us, making the
notion of control an illusion. How might a show be framed differently to allow for the celebration of “failure”—meaning the appreciation of unexpected equine agency—and what might an audience discover through this different perspective? In what ways might performance, and performance studies, influence our understandings of other animals, in this case horses, and challenge the preconceived conventions that surround human/equine relationships? These moments of “failure,” of horses pushing back against the confines of human expectations, happen in every equestrian performance that I have witnessed, but rarely do the humans shaping the theatrical experience appreciate them, or create room in the show for these improvisations to be admired and worked with, rather than managed and censored. These moments are generally contained as best as possible, such as by covering up the behaviour by simply asking again (or reprimanding the horses subtly and continuing on) or collecting a horse that has meandered off pattern as quickly as possible to get the show back in order. But these moments can also be entertainment gold, depending on the form of disobedience and how the humans handle it, as the lagging or distracted horse is generally met with laughter and a thorough appreciation from the audience. In these moments, these individual horses communicate their perspectives by refusing to be fully managed by the narrative in which they have been placed. However, celebrating these moments requires a confident human, as it may place their mastery in question, given that control is the dominant and expected narrative when it comes to animals on stage.

Here I am not speaking of these acts becoming dangerous, as has happened in other forms of animal entertainment (tigers and orcas lashing out against their handlers in performances) (Watson; Blackfish). Rather I am proposing that the notion of mastery that these shows promote (which is based on control), needs to be redefined. Human notion of human dominance needs to be challenged and moved towards a more posthuman notion of collaboration. Equestrian theatre has a significant opportunity to aid in this development by approaching their productions from a more interspecies perspective, in which equine contributions (scripted or not) are celebrated, not censored. The foundation of mastery could be based on the ability to adapt and appreciate what the horses are saying or offering, and to improvise in response to these shifts. What if we can move past seeing these improvisations as “failures,” and rather create space for the unexpected, and embrace the unscripted in performance? It is only in the space of an improvisational performance that interspecies collaboration is truly possible, and it is by celebrating this space of
performance that the possibilities of the relationship and a (re)balancing of human/equine dynamics can be found. While there are always elements of this more fluid performance in any human/equine exchange, these levels of interaction are often hidden, not highlighted, which reduces the perceived agency of the horses and skews the understandings of the relationship communicated to the human audience.

Demonstrating the dynamics of the relationship holds a lot of potential for expanding understandings of human/equine interactions. For willing to take a leap, and express to their human audiences the expansive possibilities of “failure” (meaning a celebration of a lack of complete control, and an embracing of the unexpected), or to have a more flexible definition of perfection, the result can be completely captivating and alluring. Collaboration is often riddled with both failure and success, especially in improvisational contexts, where there is little framework to fall back on. However, it is also this close relationship with “failure,” or more accurately the unexpected, that can also make improvisational performance so dynamic and engaging. It is the appreciation for the horses as individuals, and the joy found in playing with their unique approaches and perspectives, that made Cavalia’s first production Cavalia, with Fédéric Pignon so appealing.

Pignon’s energy on stage is one of play, and fluidity, as he runs around the arena with his stallions. The moments of control and precision acts are interspersed with games of running and freer movements, which allow the horses to be more clearly unscripted. While the act is obviously structured to a certain degree, there also appears to be room for failure, for the embracing unexpected, and for the horses to respond as they please, and for these articulations to be valued. It is the joy and appreciation that Pignon exudes that makes each of these moments captivating. In the DVD of the original production51 Pignon performs with three stallions in Liberty III, and while there are many impressive moments of “control” demonstrated, such as when Pignon sets up the stallions to lay down or asks them to rear together, there are also many moments that highlight the individual personalities of the horses. One such moment occurs when

51 Cavalia’s current version of Cavalia without Pignon, does not appear to be made up of the same acts as the original production. The DVD of Cavalia: Live le spectacle includes different acts from the DVD of Cavalia, which shows Pignon’s performance.
Pignon has two of the horses back on their feet (from laying down) and Pignon seems posed to move on, but the third horse does not seem ready to get up. Pignon responds by giving him a playful pat on his side, to indicate it is time for something else. The horse begins to rise, but then stalls in a sitting position, prompting amusement from Pignon and the audience. Of course, this act may very well be constructed for comic effect, as the audience erupts into laughter at the horse’s lazy ways, and the expression on his face, but the message that it communicates is one of equine agency. Even if the act is scripted, this celebration of equine agency promotes a very different understanding of horses and human/equine relationships than is commonly communicated on stage (as discussed throughout this chapter), as it is framing the horse as an independent thinker. Even if, in this moment, the horse not acting independently, the message is that horses are unique individuals, with their own perspectives and interests, and that is a valuable statement, as it works towards creating a more expansive understanding of these animal others. Pignon’s good humoured response (scripted or not) encourages an appreciation for the horses as individuals, and for the pleasure found in working with them as such. This theme of appreciation for the stallions as individuals runs throughout Pignon’s work, as he exudes a playful enjoyment of each interaction being a game and an adventure. All of the scratches and pats that he offers, and nuzzles that he receives in return, enhance the understanding of this relationship as an exchange and one that should be enjoyed on both sides.

Certainly, there are moments of a more formal control found throughout Pignon and his partner Magali Delgado’s performances, but at each stage this production seems to simultaneously celebrate and challenge notions of equine control by humans, encouraging a new definition of this exchange. Boundaries and communication are important in any human/animal relationship (and, I would say, any human/human relationship as well), especially with an animal as large and powerful as a horse, but Pignon and Delgado present this interaction as more of an exchange and suggest that both sides get to set these parameters, and that the relationship is about give and take. This is apparent even in the act named “Dressage,” in which Delgado preforms high level precision movements with her white stallion. This performance begins with the stallion in a formal bridal, and appears to be celebrating this control, but then Pignon removes the bridle and Delgado proceeds to do the same act with a single neck rein, and the horse’s head free from restraints. This changes the way that the performance reads, from one of
control and limited equine agency, to one of communication and partnership. Pignon and Delgado both present the human/equine relationship that is expected (one of humans controlling equine bodies to create something beautiful for themselves and other humans), while also challenging the notion of a one-sided partnership, and presenting multiples layers and forms of the relationship that exceeded these limited beginnings. The (suggested) perfection of control is terribly boring in comparison to the magical possibilities of the expansive and unexpected. It is this magic that Cavalia initially harnessed when Normand Latourelle chose Pignon and Delgado as equestrian directors of their first production, but which has somewhat been lost since the couple left the company, and these highly complex acts were simplified or abandoned. Perfect control is perhaps the most limited form of art, as it does little other than to recreate itself, and when engaged in reference to interspecies dynamics, it is highly damaging to our interspecies partners in that the perfection it recreates is one of marginalization for the animals, which has the potential to reach beyond how we think about animals, and impact also how we treat them.

The focus of these shows is generally on spectacle and pleasure, and yet we seem to have thwarted our own attempts at entertainment; rather than create shows that celebrate horses, and the possibilities of this interspecies relationship, we have created shows that celebrate the human vision, and the control and diminishment of our equine companions. Cavalia founder Normand Latourelle states, Cavalia’s shows are about celebrating what horses have done for humans, a tribute to their service, as they have greatly aided human development throughout the ages (VOA News). However, focusing solely on the human benefit is a problem. Equestrian theatre holds meaningful potential for challenging this human-centric status quo, but at present the drive to strive for this objective appears to be lacking, with the focus remaining on aesthetics and mastery. While placing the horses at the centre of the performances is an innovative approach that does raise the positioning of the equine performers in comparison to many examples of animals on stage, in which the animals are merely props in an anthropocentric event—made to mean as symbols of human notions, rather than as complex individuals in their own right—this shift has been prevalent for a number of years now (Zingaro has been at it since the 1980s, and Cavalia since 2003). The advancement of equine positioning and the recognition of equine perspectives in equestrian theatre has largely stalled at this stage, when there is so much more potential to be found, potential that could continue the work of expanding understandings of this
interspecies relationship. These equestrian theatre companies have created a valuable foundation in the ways they highlight their equine performers, but these performances are still not balanced in their interspecies approach, and greatly favour the human perspectives, reinforcing narratives of human dominance and control, rather than demonstrating the possibilities of genuine interspecies partnerships.

According to Kim Marra, “Today’s equestrianism re-creates to varying degrees how humans have derived power and mobility from horses and how horses have contributed to human efforts in ways that often go unremarked in historiography” (1). While recognizing the ways that humans have benefitted from their relationships with horses is a valuable step, it is not the only step that is needed in order to (re)balance the interspecies dynamics and create more expansive understandings of these individuals, and more space for non-human perspectives. As Ric Knowles writes in How Theatre Means, “Over history stories of conquest, colonialism, imperialism, and globalization are in large parts stories of struggle over meaning, as one cultural system seeks to dominate, control, and fix meaning, representing other meaning systems as imprecise, ignorant, primitive, weird, superstitious—or just “other” (3). Though Knowles is speaking of human theatre, the same holds true for interspecies performances, as the humans are often controlling, containing, and reframing equine stories and perspectives for their own gains. These theatrical productions spin narratives of mutual benefit and harmonious partnership in order to make the control seem benign (or even proper), and to allow humans to continue to believe that this is the correct (and only) way of engaging with horses. In order to maintain this illusion, the equine voices are contained and censored, and the parameters of the performances continue unfairly to benefit the humans.

Theatre scholar Nicholas Ridout writes of including animals in theatre, that “the theatre [...] is all about humans coming face to face with other humans” (97), and that “it [sic] [an animal] shouldn't be there because it doesn't know what to do there, is not capable of performing theatrically by engaging a human audience in experimental thinking about the conditions of their own humanity” (98). But what if the performance does not have to be about this, or at least, not only about this? What if the focus of the performance is precisely about recognizing a productive alterity through engaging with another animal, and exploring their animal ways of being and seeing the world? What if a performance is about the meeting of two radically different others,
and exploring these differences to both know our human-selves and their animal-selves better? What if it is about exploring the connections between two individuals of different species? What if the animals have agency and input in the course and form of the performance? Of course, Ridout is speaking specifically about theatre in a traditional context, and animals on stage in a fictional narrative, but he raises productive questions about the place of animals in performance, and highlights some of the difficulties of engaging animals in any form of performance—primarily how to step away from the anthropocentrism of our gaze and engage in an interspecies framework that is mutually beneficial.

Despite these issues, theatre holds potential for creating a space that invites and celebrates equine perspectives, because beyond the framing of human narratives the medium of nonverbal performance (especially when improvised) engages a mode of exchange that horses (and other animals) can employ and participate in shaping. If humans (performers and audience) can be taught (or shown) the value of recognizing equine contributions and listening to what horses (and other animals) have to say, then the world of equestrian theatre has the potential to be truly interspecies, and to demonstrate a posthuman way of engaging with the more-than-human world—a way of engaging that decentres the human experience and focuses on the combining and celebrating of diverse perspectives (human and horse). As Theresa May explores, “theatre might not only [hold the potential to] exercise our capacity for empathy beyond our own species, but […] this most human of arts might precipitate a reformulation of human identity that helps undo the very privilege the art seems to celebrate” (May, “Voice” 1). By focusing on the potential of this form of engagement, and educating humans on the shortfalls of anthropocentrism (in which a genuine partnership is not possible, amongst other issues), perhaps more people will choose to strive for a balance in their human/animal interactions, and begin to recognize that there are lessons to be learned from and with animals.

Equestrian theatre holds significant potential for presenting a reimagined version of this dynamic relationship, and to inform (and expand) the narratives that are spun around horses (on stage and off), by presenting a more inclusive world of possibility. Since leaving Cavalia, Pignon and Delgado have begun their own company in France, Eqi Cheval Libre. Though this company has only recently begun touring (two seasons), and on a fairly limited scale (“Eqi”), it appears to offer the prospective of continuing on where Zingaro and Cavalia have left off, or to continue on
from where Pignon and Delgado began with Cavalia, by venturing beyond depictions of control to communicate and celebrate the possibilities of human/equine collaboration.
CHAPTER 4—Playing in Silence:
Engaging Performance to Recognize Animal Perspectives

Introduction: Another Type of Interspecies Performance

What might a truly inter-species performance look like? What objective and approach would most readily co-create an experience that is for both the horse and human? How might a performance move away from the humanist focus of equestrian theatre, which is to appeal to a human audience, and create an act that is genuinely inter-species? Ric Knowles writes,

As with intercultural performance, there is, it seems to me, an urgent need to reconsider interspecies performance as a horizontalist and rhizomatic project in which no one partner in the exchange and negotiation dominates—a consideration that has significant implications for the question of who the “target audience” is for interspecies performance, who initiates and dictates the terms of the event, and, crucially, who or what benefits from it. (“Editorial” i)

How might an interspecies performance be structured in order to get at “a horizontalist and rhizomatic project”? As I have referenced throughout the previous chapters, improvisation is the form of performance that, in my opinion, most readily allows for equine contributions to be recognized and for a co-created experience to take place. As I discussed in chapter three, for example, in the equestrian theatre of Cavalia and Théâtre Zingaro, improvisation is only overtly employed in the public performances (rehearsal and training are different matters) when the horses kick out against the ascribed narratives and what is being asked of them. Improvisation occurs both in the horses’ articulations and in the ways that the humans work to fix or mask the failures of “control,” in which the horses exerting their wills and offering perspectives that do not align with the human goals. There are always elements of improvisation in any act or performance, in that no two acts are identical and performers always have some degree of agency, so labeling a performance as improvisatory is a question of degree, not necessarily kind. Improvisation is part of a performance continuum that goes from strictly structured performances on the one side, which allow little creative freedom for the performers, to free improvisation on the other, which focuses on the creative agency of the performers and the spontaneous crafting of an experience in the moment, with little-to-no formal (or preplanned) structure. In between these two ends of the continuum are acts that involve various degrees of both. As ethnomusicologist
Bruno Nettl proposes, “one way we may perhaps define improvisation is by measuring the degree to which the performer is creatively involved” (76). So, what if improvisation is employed as the foundational mode of performance in an interspecies act? How does this alter the experience?

In my practice-based research/equine-facilitated learning project, Playing in Silence52, supported by the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation53 (IICSI), which invites professional musicians to improvise with horses in an open and unstructured space (an indoor arena), I explore performance as a way of getting to know another and as a mode for collaborating across difference in interspecies contexts. Rebecca Caines and Ajay Heble openly define improvisation as,

Improvisation: a social activity that cannot readily be scripted, predicted, or compelled into orthodoxy […] Improvisation: a key feature of interpersonal communication and social practice […]As a form of artistic practice that accents and embodies real-time creative decision-making, risk-taking, trust, surprise, and collaboration, improvisation has much to teach us about listening—really listening—to what’s going on around us, much to tell us about responsibility and hope, about how we can adapt to change, about how we might […] choose to create a shared future. (2-3)

It is these notions of improvisation that I drew on to create the foundation and approach for Playing in Silence, focusing on a form of improvisation that is about listening to another (even when no words are spoken), and coming together in a moment of shared creation born out of relationship and interpersonal exchange. Yet, as Ric Knowles writes, “as T.L. Cowan here reminds us (via Amy Sehan), the notion of pure improvisational spontaneity is a myth, and, I would argue, a dangerous one. Left to our own devices, our ‘spontaneous’ actions tend to be

52 This project has received animal ethics clearance through the University of Guelph. A short video introduction to the project, created for the Social Science and Humanities Research Council in Canada, can be viewed at: https://vimeo.com/improvstitute/playinginsilencetrailer
53 A SSHRC partnership grant project based at the University of Guelph, that explores improvisation as a model for social change.
culturally affirmative” (“Improvisation” 3). This danger of affirming the dominant cultural trends, in this case the marginalization of animal voices and skewing of the dynamics in favour of the human’s interests and desires, is clearly present in interspecies performance, and just employing an improvisational model of performance does not negate this concern. However, as Knowles also indicates, “not all improvisation leaves us to our own devices; sometimes it is productively ‘curated,’ [...] the line between reproductive and productive improvisation—between the improvisor as the free-market individual entrepreneur promoted by the neoliberal turn in political life, and group improvisation characterized by deep listening and a sense of ensemble—may be understood to be the social (“Improvisation” 3-4). It is this sense of socially motivated improvisation that focuses on collaboration and exchange that I aimed to curate into the parameters of Playing in Silence, in terms of both the initial framework and how the sessions were discussed with the participants. This articulation of the framework of the sessions was primarily for the humans, though some aspects may have also been communicated to the horses through some of the establishing elements, such as removing their halters, and leaving them at liberty. Given that it is generally the humans who are given preferential treatment in human/animal interactions, these establishing factors matter greatly in the attempt to reach for a performance that offers a balance of interspecies perspectives and agency, and communicating these goals to the humans was an important aspect of striving towards this balance. As I discuss in chapter one, voice and agency cannot be given, but space can be created for them to be claimed, and it was creating such as space that was the goal of the curation of these acts.

In order to reach towards a “horizontalist” approach to interspecies performance I challenged the structure of the equestrian theatre discussed in chapter three in three ways: 1) by engaging in a curated improvisational performance as the foundation for all of the acts; 2) through making the performances both by and for each of the primary participants (human and horse), with no passive human audience to play to, placing both players (horse and human) as creative agents of the performance and as the audience; 3) in establishing the goal of the performances as being about connecting and collaborating, rather than aiming to impress or demonstrate control or precise movements within a human-centric narrative. In this project, there is no narrative framework, other than what the players discover and devise in the moment, and there are no set acts or defined structure, beyond two (and occasionally three) individuals
coming together to (potentially) make music and explore how to connect and collaborate. In the Playing in Silence session, I am always in the room with the players as facilitator in order to ensure that things remain safe and respectful, and to pose and answer questions as needed to help foster a collaborative environment (which generally means answering questions about equine behaviour and challenging preconceived human notions about horses, that may be keeping the humans from recognizing the horses’ perspectives). I also film the encounters. Although, the video documentation captured during these events (by myself) is solely for human consumption, in order to illustrate this work and demonstrate some of the dynamics of these performances, the performances themselves were for the musicians and the horses and there were no conditions that the sessions needed to unfold in any specific way (even making music was not mandatory). The sessions lasted for as long as the participants were both engaged (anywhere from 20 minutes to over an hour and a half).

This pairing (musician and horse) presents the opportunity to explore how to collaborate across difference, by drawing on aspects of shared connection (in this context an interest in and understanding of resonance), in order to build complex and diverse knowledges that are co-created – a crucial ability needed to create more inclusive interspecies communities. This project considers how nonverbal communication and intuition are employed in human/equine interactions, when the human has little experience working with horses, but a finely tuned understanding of resonance and how to communicate without words. Playing in Silence utilizes resonance as the starting point for human/equine collaboration, by bringing together experts in the field of physical/emotional resonance (horses) with experts in the field of sonic resonance (musicians), exploring how we hear and engage in the conversations between bodies, amongst our senses, mind, physicality, and being; between animals of shared or different kinds; between those who live in the sentient experience and share space, if only for a brief time. Asking musicians to collaborate with a predominantly silent animal is a strange proposition, until you start to explore the areas of “like” (or similar) rather than “different.” Animals are often viewed through a lens of what Frans de Waal calls “anthropodenial,” which disavows the connections between humans and other species, and sees animals from a position that focuses predominantly on all of the ways that we are different, rather than recognizing the aspects that also connect us (69). But what if those differences are accepted and appreciated, but it is the connections that are
highlighted? Or, as in the case of Playing in Silence, what if the focus is not on being two radically different species (human and horse), but rather on two individuals sharing space and recognizing that both humans and horses engage emotion and movement as forms of expression? The challenge for the musicians was not only to listen to the sounds that they and the horses contributed, but also to notice the feel of the exchange, and engage their intuition, inspired by these connections between themselves and the horses they worked with, in order to understand (or begin to understand) the way the moments and movements are creating meaning. If the musicians became overly focused on human notions of communication, whether those were sonic articulations or ideas of spatial politics and movement, then they would be unlikely to connect with their equine partners and find instances of collaboration where they were working together and communicating, rather than playing at the horse in the room. In the case of the partnerships specific to Playing in Silence, there were enough instances of “like” for each pair or trio to find instances (sometimes fleeting) of connection and exchange. It is the areas of “like” or “shared” which create the opportunities needed to find the common ground to begin to get to know another. The project asks: Can two radically different (interspecies) individuals come to see and hear each other in order to collaborate in a moment of improvised performance? Having little to no previous experience with horses, can these humans recognize opportunities for connection and collaboration? Can a shared interest in the communication of feel and resonance create a foundation for a reciprocal interspecies relationship? Can improvised performance create an act that is for both horse and human?

The musicians who participated in Playing in Silence had little to no previous experience working with horses (more on the specific details of all of the participants in the next section). A few of them had some familiarity improvising with other animals, primarily birds, but asking them to play with a predominantly silent animal (only a small percentage of equine conversational contributions come from sound) was a new experience for all of them. Much of the research on musicians playing with animals revolves around animals that have a distinct interest in sonic engagements, and who employ this form of communication actively in their own lives, such as with birds and whales, and most notably the work by philosopher David Rothenberg with each of these species. However, this work largely only explores the sonic elements of these engagements, and privileges sound over the other ways that these animals may
make meaning in social interactions. While Playing in Silence and these other projects start from a similar point, music as an entryway into interspecies communication and collaboration, the focus in this project is on the various ways that meaning is made in interspecies interactions, not only through sound. In his book *Why Birds Sing*, Rothenberg proposes that, “The humble question, Why do birds sing? forces us to reconsider what music is and where it came from, what sorts of thinking animals might do and to what extent we can communicate with them. Which of our human abilities are best suited to enter the minds of other species?” (ix). In the context of horses, and many other social animals, especially those not overly prone to sonic articulations, nonverbal performance (as I argue throughout) is the best suited of our human abilities to allow us to engage with the minds of these individuals of other species, in this case horses. Here sound is an offering, and a (potentially) intriguing aspect for the horses, but they are unlikely to respond in kind. The task for the musicians in this project is to start from a place of their own comfort, but then to be able to recognize offers, and responses from another (from the horses), who act and speak in their own ways and modes. As Stephen Budiansky writes, “horses have a distinctly limited vocal repertoire” (127), and while they do make other sounds, such as their hooves hitting the ground, these other sonic gestures do not necessarily make meaning for them in the way that music or verbal sounds may (for them or other species). This lack of sonic engagement meant that the musicians could not rely on sound alone in order to connect and recognize the horses’ perspectives.

All of the horses in Playing in Silence were familiar working with humans, though they had no known previous history of working with live music. The horses were chosen for their natural curiosity and comfort around humans, in order to keep the engagements safe, and unlikely to cause stress for the horses. The individual personalities of the horses impacted the sessions as much as the personalities of the humans. Each grouping chose each other, in that the humans were introduced to the horses and partnered with the horse(s) that showed the most interest in them. The horses were under no instructions as to how, or if, they should engage.

How nonverbal communication and collaboration were recognized differed in each session based on the interests and perceptions of the unique individuals involved. Some partnerships focused on how sonic resonances mean in their specific interspecies engagement, and other groups explored how physical and emotional resonance can be used to build
relationship. David Lee (human) working with Stuie (horse) and Shiva (horse) played with the energy of performance and sound, and how some sounds encourage distance and movement, and other sounds invite intimacy and settling. Stuie (horse) and Michael Kosir (human) played with the subtleties of vibrations and performer/audience dynamics. Lauren Michelle Levesque (human) working with Po (horse) discovered that without a conscious understanding of emotional resonance the nuances of relationship are often lost or confused. With Taco (horse), Lauren explored how to employ these messages of intent (physical/emotional resonance) to affect another. Katrina (horse) and Dong-Won Kim (human) explored how some sounds and movements push away, and others draw in. Jesse Stewart (human) and Katrina (horse) played with connecting from a distance and the potential of shared movement. Each of the partnerships started with a better understanding of the physical components of communication (space, movement, and gesture), and a confusion or uncertainty around the messages of certain resonances; recognizing the emotional/felt resonances came more difficultly for the humans, and the intentions of the sonic resonances at times confused the horses. Yet, through playing with each aspect and spending time together experimenting, all of the groups found at least a moment of connection, where the messages lined up, and they were sharing in a mutually created experience.

The relationships created in Playing in Silence hold an interesting potential in that the humans have not been fully indoctrinated in the dominant conventions of the horse world but have a solid understanding of performance and how meaning is made without words. In my experience in of the horse industry in Canada, the USA and the UK/Ireland, the majority of knowledgeable equestrians have been working with horses since childhood, like myself, and can no longer experience an interaction with a horse without the influence of these years of training (both positive and negative). On the other hand, those coming to working with horses later in life (as is often the case with the human participants in Equine-Facilitated Learning) are often also simultaneously learning about the potentials of nonverbal communication and how meaning is

54 Playing in Silence has engaged five musicians (Lauren, David, Dong-Won, Michael, and Jesse) and five horses (Po, Stuie, Shiva, Katrina, and Taco) in seven different groupings, with one-two sessions of play per grouping.
made in this way. The musicians offer an interesting perspective as they are highly versed in human performance (though may privilege sonic performances over the other forms), but are also coming to the engagements with a relatively blank canvas in terms of their understandings of human/equine interactions and their possibilities. It is difficult for me to remember what it was like to first stand in the presence of a horse and know nothing about their ways of being, or to recall the complex experience of simultaneously being drawn to spending time with this animal, while also being intimated by their size and flight. As I have worked with horses since I was a child, I cannot recollect how their movements first made meaning for me, before I knew anything about their language or perception. And while my perspective offers certain insights into human/equine relationships, there is also a significant area of exploration (the initial experience) that I cannot access without the help of others—those new to playing with horses, who are less conditioned in the (so called) proper ways of engaging. This dynamic offers a fresh perspective that illuminates some of the preconceived notions of horses held by individuals and offers insights into what can be recognized in a human/equine exchange without benefits of training. This pairing highlights the effects of the “cultural animal unconscious” (Chaudhuri, “Animalizing” 3), and illustrates how these common notions of horses inform live interactions with them. It also offers a foundational understanding of what one may experience of another, without much prior knowledge of the other’s ways of being (at least in terms of the humans, as the horses, though not familiar with these specific humans are familiar with humans in general)\(^5\). What offers can a human, unlearned in equine language, perceive? How do humans interpret a horse’s movements and the spatial dynamics of the interaction? Can these humans perceive the personal distinctions of a specific horse and recognize them as a unique individual?

\[^5\text{The decision to work with horses that are comfortable around humans was made in order to keep the interactions safe for everyone involved, and to allow this to occur without having to train the human in any equine behaviour prior to the engagement (as this would be mandatory for safety if working with wild/unhandled horse populations in an enclosed space).}\]
What needs to be known for a human/equine collaboration to occur, and what can be understood between two sentient beings sharing space? 56

**The Parameters of Play: Playing in Silence**

The power dynamics between humans and horses are inherently unbalanced, as horses are generally engaging with a human at the human’s request. No project or event is likely to be able to fully right this skewing of influence; however, there are many ways to diminish the impact of the species imbalances and to work towards a genuinely *inter*-species engagement. In the context of this project, a connected indoor and outdoor arena was chosen as the site for the performances to occur, as these spaces are familiar to the horses and allowed for unrestrained movement within the space, while still keeping them safe. Generally, arenas are recognized as spaces of work for horses, which come with certain understandings and expectations on both the part of the horse and the human. However, these horses are used to engaging with these spaces both as places of work and play, as many of these horses also get turned out in the arena for free time to run around and act out as they please. There are certain markers of work that were not present in these engagements, such as a lack of halters, lead lines, lung whips and other such work-based tools, in order to encourage the horses to see this time as play, in which they are free to engage and respond according to their own interests.

Removing a horse’s halter in a given space is often an indicator to the horse that this is “free time” in which the horse is at leave to act and move as they please. This is one of the reasons why the halters were removed from all of the horses when they entered the space, encouraging them to engage (or not) as they were inspired to do so. However, the body language of the human, and any requests made of the horse through this body language (intentional or otherwise), can override this no halter marker and change the parameters. But the musicians’

56 The musicians were not informed of these questions at the outset of the project. They were invited to improvise with the horses, but in order to keep the interactions as genuine as possible—to encourage the humans to engage as they were naturally inclined to do with a radically different other—they were given minimal instructions, and were merely encouraged to play and explore collaborating (whatever that meant to them individually).
lack of knowledge in this area, and lack of (training) purpose in their movements, encouraged a
free-flowing engagement which was less likely to trigger understandings of work in the horses.
This meant that the horses were less likely to recognize the engagement as a time to stop
interacting according to their own interests and wait for instructions from the humans. Horses
(and their relatives, other equids and flight animals) are extremely adept at reading the nuances
of intention in other animals, with the often-cited example of zebras in the wild being able to tell
if a prowling lion is on the hunt or merely passing through, in order to gage their response
appropriately. As I have noted in the introduction, horses, as animals of prey, are experts at
reading nonverbal communication, even from a distance, and it is this ability that is employed in
Equine-Facilitated Learning, where the horses read the postures and emotional messages of the
humans that they are working with and choose whether or not to engage with them, and how to
respond, based on their nonverbal messages. Given horses’ aptitude for reading intentions
through body language and resonance (even at a distance), there is no reason to assume that
horses cannot also recognize other subtle differences in communication in their general
interactions with humans, such as being able to distinguish between various types of work and
play, and the parameters of each. To assume that horses can only understand being in an arena
with a human from a position of work is to diminish the complexities of their perspectives, and
their abilities to pick up on subtextual differences in embodied communication, and the nuances
of a given context.

Many aspects go into an exchange to communicate what is expected. For these horses,
though the arena was familiar and the context of sharing space and interacting with a human was
a normal occurrence, the presence and influence of live music was entirely new in their first
sessions, and they were experiencing different instruments in each event. Both the human and the
horse were engaging with aspects of familiarity, and aspects that were outside of their previous
experiences. All of the musicians had little-to-no prior experience working with horses, and none
had attempted to collaborate with a horse in this way. For the humans, the music and performing
aspects were familiar, but the notion of engaging with a horse in these practices was an entirely
novel concept. For the horses, while the music was new to them, the idea of working with
humans was not. This created the opportunity for both human and horse to have areas of comfort
and areas that challenged them in their interactions with each other. Both exhibited signs of
tentativeness in their engagements with the unfamiliar aspects. For the humans, this hesitation was most apparent in the ways that they approached and perceived the horses’ actions and offers. For the horses, they were often most concerned about the new objects (the instruments) and would approach them with curiosity and/or caution, and at times concern (demonstrated by blowing at them). The two ponies, Po and Stuie, who are the youngest participants, approached the engagements with the most curiosity and openness to the unfamiliar aspects, while the older and more experienced horses tended to be slightly more wary and analytical about their approach. One of the five horses, Taco, was only employed once, in a specific instance where the human (Lauren) was clearly sensitive enough, and quiet enough, to share space with him, due to his tendency towards more energetic actions (bucking and galloping) in response to subtle shifts in stimuli. To work with Taco the human needs to be very present and self-reflexive enough to recognize the connections between their subtle offers and his somewhat dramatic responses. The other four horses tend to have lower levels of energy in these types of situations and are more respectful of personal space. The humans ranged in how dynamic their interactions were due to how intimidating they found the horses, how concerned they were with disturbing the horses, and how mobile their instruments allowed them to be.

Five musicians and five horses were invited into the sessions in various formats. Some of the musicians participated in only one session (Dong-Won, Jesse, and Michael), while others have done two or more sessions (David and Lauren). All of the musicians have some association with the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI), a SSHRC partnership grant project at the University of Guelph, headed up by Ajay Heble, which looks at the possibilities of improvisation as a model for social change. All of the musicians are experienced playing improvised music but have varying degrees of comfort with other forms of performance. These performance sessions had more of a workshop feel to them, as there was no external audience (other than myself as facilitator), and the participants were free to ask questions, seek reassurance as needed (at times the horses would stand near me when confused),

\[57\] Po and Stuie are full siblings around six and five years old, respectively. The rest of the horses engaged in Playing in Silence are between ten and fifteen years old.
or end the session at any time if they were feeling uncomfortable (I was watching for signs of stress or fear in the horses that would indicate that they wanted out).

All of the musicians, with the exception of David, worked with one horse at a time. David chose to work with the horses in pairs and worked with four out of the five horses. Both the musicians and the horses were chosen specifically for their interest in this type of work. For the humans, this meant that they were interested in exploring other forms of engagement, were willing to have their perspectives challenged, and have an interest in the idea of trying to collaborate with another species. For the horses, this meant that they had a curiosity with life and new situations, they liked being around humans, and were safe to be around in an unrestricted space (the horses were not restrained in any manner, and were able to move freely around the space).

The first participants in the project were Lauren (human) and Po (horse). Lauren at the time was a Post-Doctoral Fellow with the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI) at the University of Guelph, and though she is a very talented musician, both in terms of singing and of playing stringed instruments (such as the ukulele and guitar), Lauren rarely performs publicly due to performance anxiety, especially when it comes to singing. Lauren had some experience working with horses as a child through taking riding lessons, but she had had limited experience with horses since then (Levesque). Lauren brought to this exchange a dream of a connection that she believed was possible between a human and a horse, and focused on exploring this connection in her sessions (Levesque). Lauren completed three sessions, two with Po, and one with Taco. In her sessions Lauren explored connecting through sound, especially singing, and through movement and spatial dynamics.

Po (short for pony) is a small grey horse, and with a gentle nature. All of the horses involved in the project reside at the same private barn in Moffat, Ontario, and have for at least a few years. Po and her brother Stuie (also part of the project), are “owned” by the barn manager of the farm and were in the initial stages of training as riding horses and for jumping. Stuie is also a small grey pony, the smallest of the horses employed in this project, and the most

\[58\] With the exception of Po and Stuie each of these horses are the primary equine partners of individual boarders at the farm, and have been with their humans for many years.
inquisitive and adventurous of the equine participants. Whereas Po is very quiet, and sweet in nature, thoroughly enjoying being close to humans and acts of grooming or caressing, Stuie is a bit pushy (more of a pony attitude), and likes to take charge of the situation when he is in the company of other horses. Stuie proved to be the most out going in response to the strange instruments, and was the one most likely to walk right up to them and explore them with his muzzle. Both Po and Stuie are calm and relaxed around humans, with well moderated responses to changes in stimuli, often responding with gestures of curiosity and intrigue (ears pricked in the direction of the change, and advancing towards the new thing to explore), rather than backing off or being skittish. Stuie worked with both David (along with Shiva) and Michael. Po also worked with David (along with Katrina), in addition to Lauren.

David (human) is a double bassist and at the time was a PhD Candidate in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph with affiliations to IICSI. David has well over three decades working in jazz and improvised music (Lee, “Team Member”). Though a lover of animals, he had little experience working with horses, and was of the mind that the horses would not be interested in his performance (Lee, “Personal”). He was open to seeing how things would unfold, but expected the horses to have nothing to do with him (Lee, “Personal”). David chose to work with the horses in pairs, rather than to choose the one that was the most outgoing, as he felt that the quieter horses should be given the opportunity as well. David compared the social dynamic to his experiences with humans, and suggested that Shiva (the more hesitant participant, who was cautious of the double bass) may need some encouragement from Stuie to explore this new context and should not be left out because of her hesitation. In his first session, he worked with Stuie and Shiva, and in his second session with Po and Katrina. Because of playing the double bass David was fairly stationary in his offers, often set up in the middle of the arena, or off to one side, relying on the horses to choose their proximity to him. In his session with Stuie and Shiva, David met the horses initially in an outdoor area and then moved into the attached indoor arena, leaving the horses outside and the door joining the two spaces open, allowing the horses to choose if and when they would enter the interior space where David had set up to play.

All of the sessions of Playing in Silence took place in this space, the indoor arena, but the initial interactions with the horses often took place outside, either in the joining outdoor arena, in
the fields where the horses live, or in the barn. All of the horses were very familiar with each of the spaces. Most of these horses do the majority of their work outside, and only Taco is on a focused training schedule, as he is a competitive barrel racer and pole bender. With the exception of David’s session with Stuie and Shiva the horses and humans were contained to the one space of the indoor arena and could not leave without asking. This arrangement of containing the horses can be questioned for how it influences the horses’ agency and ability to choose to engage, and while this is an important consideration and something that should always be contemplated, overly focusing on these external factors often does more to further limit the agency of the horses. If the horses had demonstrated distress with the situation, more than mild confusion or concern, or were indicating that they had had enough, then the sessions would have been ended. At all times I, as a facilitator, highly experienced in equine communication and with significant experience working with each of these horses, was always in the arena with the players, and prepared to step in at any issues. The horses were monitored for levels of stress, but never exhibited any level of concern beyond what would be seen in standard training scenarios that involved new stimuli. The horses were never forced to engage in any way, but were rather free within the confines of the space to move and respond as they deemed fit. While the horses did not get to fully choose to be in this situation, with the parameters fully explained to them, the way that the musicians did, they did still have the agency to express any discomfort and to stay away from the musicians if they chose. All of the horses engaged in an ebb and flow of spatial dynamics, at times right up next to the musicians and at other times meters away. Horses, such as Katrina and Shiva, often chose to engage from a distance. But both also decided at other times to share intimate space with their partners. All of the sessions took place when the barn was relatively quiet and there were few visitors. Only in the case of Dong-Won did the session have an external audience member, as his wife accompanied him to his session and watched from a viewing room above the arena (out of sight of the horses).

In many ways, this arrangement was skewed to favour the horses and designed for their comforts more than for the humans. The horses were familiar with the space, and though not familiar with live music prior to their first sessions, were very experienced engaging with humans. There are a variety of ways that horses can express their agency, and if humans only looking at the aspects that are stacked against them (horse), or at the elements that are beyond
their control, we (humans) further diminish their agency, and all the ways that they affect change and make their perspectives known within their given circumstances. We tend to over-ascribe agency to the humans and undervalue the agency of the horses. The musicians did not get to choose the space, and they had to play by the rules that I established for the project, which were intended to level the playing field as much as possible and remove any temptation to contain or control the horses. They had to work with the dusty conditions of the arena, and the occasional interference with their musical performances from other noises around the farm (aspects that the horses are familiar with). The musicians, like the horses, had to work within the established parameters and exert their will within that construct.

Both Dong-Won and Jesse each engaged in a single session and each chose to work with Katrina, yet their sessions contrasted significantly. Dong-Won is a Korean percussionist, who also works elements of song and dance into many of his performances. He is a member of Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road Ensemble and at the time of the project was the Improviser-in-Residence for the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI). Jesse is also a percussionist, a Juno award winning musician, a professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, and a researcher with IICSI (Stewart, “Personal”). Though both are percussionists, Jesse and Dong-Wong’s performances were markedly different. Where Dong-Won’s included a lot of movement and singing, in addition to drumming, in his session with Katrina, Jesse’s focused on subtle movements and engaging from a distance, being less comfortable in the presence of Katrina. Jesse played a hand drum, and the waterphone, which is a metal instrument that can be played in a percussive manner, or with a bow, and either filled with water or empty. Each brought their own comforts and interests to their sessions and Katrina responded in kind, bringing out different sides of her personality and different levels of engagement in response.

Katrina is a formidable black, Percheron-Hackney mare, and the largest horse employed in this project. She is my primary equine partner, and did sessions with David (and Po), Dong-Won, and Jesse. Katrina can be both very lazy and intense/focused, at times intimidating humans with her size and presence. Though Katrina is not particularly tall (15.2 h), she is very solid in build due to her draft bloodlines, and is a very confident horse who leads any herd that she is part of. Katrina has ample experience as both a riding horse and engaging in ground games/training, and will only “work” in an arena if it comes from the standpoint of play, and provided that the
activity is intriguing enough to engage her. Katrina tends to be hesitant of new stimuli and worked up slowly to exploring the instruments (if ever), preferring to analyze them when they were resting on their own, and not in the hands of a human. It takes a lot of work, or a high energy performance, to generally get her up and moving (as seen in Dong-Won’s session), rather than meandering around the space or contemplating what is occurring (as seen in Jesse’s session).

Shiva is a sensitive and slightly standoffish paint mare with similar tendencies to Katrina in that she is more hesitant about engaging with new objects. But unlike Katrina, she prefers to follow another’s lead, and will do so with both horses and humans. Because of her more reserved meetings with the musicians Shiva only participated in one session, which was with David and Stuie. She met with many of the other musicians, but the musicians chose other horses to work with whom they felt were more interested in them and offered more of a connection.

The final musician involved in this project was Michael. Michael is a local Guelph musician, and though he has no technical ties to IICSI he is an active member in many of IICSI’s events and came to be in this project after hearing me present on Playing in Silence early on in the project at IICSI’s Guelph Jazz Festival Colloquium. Michael is the only participant who had some brief knowledge about the other sessions before he came to do his own, but still had relatively little expectations in terms of what to envisage or how a horse might respond to his musical offerings (Kosir). Michael did one session on his guitar with Stuie.

The final horse engaged in the project is Taco. Taco is a chestnut quarter horse gelding who is a competitive barrel racer and pole bender. Taco was only invited into one session as he is a highly sensitive and reactive individual. Taco worked with Lauren after she had done two sessions with Po, and was getting comfortable reading Po’s offers and interactions, and only after Lauren had proven to be sensitive enough to recognize the ways her subtle actions were influencing the exchange. Taco is easily excited, and as per his profession, likes to run and is very fast when he does, which can be intimidating to some.

Talking through Feel

Certain aspects of resonance and body language are easily defined and isolated in a communicative act, while others are hard to divorce from other aspects of the act, as they are
highly intertwined and reliant on one another. In sonic terms, and in reference to music, resonance is a commonly understood concept, especially when discussing the sonic contributions of instruments at the lower end of the scale of human auditory awareness, such as those created by the double bass. When a double bass is played low and slow, the sound is felt as much, or more, than it is heard. You can physically recognize the vibrations moving through your body, tangibly engage with the communication, and perceive how it is interacting with your form and affecting your disposition. But sonic resonance is only one form of resonance; there is also emotional resonance, which occurs when two beings have shared a similar experience, and can identify, or feel, a connection because of this. As Kohanov writes, it makes the two beings “like two strings tuned to the same note” (“Riding Between” xvi), and they affect each other through their own experiences and emotional repertoire—their experiences resonate with one another. This emotional resonance is a combination of affect, emotion, and empathy, and is an important aspect of nonverbal communication. According to James Price Dillard in The Handbook of Communication and Emotion, affect (and emotion) are “essential aspects of the communication process” (xvii). According to Dillard, “the primary function of affect is to guide behaviour […] but whether we are talking about moods, emotions, or other feeling states, the function is the same. Affect advises behaviour” (xix). This communication can still be accessed when sight is removed from the equation, but other forms of resonance, such as emotions that are not vocally articulated, are often best understood through a combination of the feel for another’s state and through visual cues. The emotions in another’s voice can be recognized over great distances (such as with a horse’s whinny, or in a phone conversation), but when these vocal communications are not employed or when the messages are subtler, then visual and feeling-based cues are generally both required to gain an understanding or to hear the messages being conveyed. If only sonic cues are recognized as valid communication, then it would seem horses have very little to say by human standards, but if movement, body language, gesture, feel, emotion, and affect are recognized as communication, and used to create meaning in equine/human contexts, then the opposite becomes clear: horses are constantly speaking.

*Stuie, David & Shiva*

When David, came into the arena to play as part of Playing in Silence, he came with the intention in to perform, to perform *for* the horses he was working with, placing them in the
position of audience (rather than as collaborators). His initial preconception of the experience was that the horses would not want anything to do with him, so he saw this as an opportunity to practice if nothing else (Lee, “Personal”). Initially Stuie and Shiva were keenly interested in David, as they came up to explore him as soon as he pulled up in his car outside the outdoor arena. But as soon as things began formally, when David brought out his double bass and began to prepare to perform, the horses moved away and refused to return. Even when David was not near his instrument they would not respond to his offers or presence. The horses moved to the far side of the arena and could not be coaxed back, while barely giving David an ear flick of attention. David, wanting to get them back, tried to bribe them with grass, but something had changed in his communication, and they were no longer interested in what he was offering. An aspect had shifted, some invisible message, as David moved into performance mode, causing the horses to decide to keep their distance. In response, David opted for leaving the horses where they were, in an outside ring adjoined to the indoor arena, while he went inside and began to play. The door between the two spaces was left open, inviting the horses to come in and participate (or not) as they chose to.

Initially Stuie and Shiva stayed outside preoccupied with grazing the edges of the ring, apparently indifferent to what was occurring inside. They could hear, or feel, what David was playing but were not inspired to give it their full attention, or even much attention at all. This disconnected performance went on for a while, twelve minutes, until abruptly something changed. David had begun to play high and fast, for the sparrows in the ceiling. The change was clear and precise, and the horses noticed the difference. Stuie’s head shot up from his grass, and he cut across the ring, headed straight inside with Shiva in tow. The notes may not have been so different (to my ear), but the feel, energy, and message had clearly changed, motivating Stuie and Shiva to explore. Still, David found that the birds chattering in the ceiling were more connected to the sounds that he was producing than the horses that he was meant to be

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59 A horse’s hearing ranges approximately from 55-35,000 Hz (Heffner 302), with a double bass ranging from 41-98 Hz (“Double Bass”), meaning that the lower end of the double bass’s range is not heard so much as it is felt for horses. The range of equine hearing might not go down quite as low as humans, but the range of high frequencies greatly exceeds human abilities. (Saslow 218).
performing with. It was only when David was challenged to play for how the music felt, rather than how it sounded, that this dynamic changed. David reflected that it was the feeling of the sounds that the double bass produces that initially drew him to the instrument, so when he went back to playing he focused on this approach, playing low and slow, where the double bass vibrates most tangibly (Lee “Personal”).

On the double bass, as I’ve noted above, the notes are often felt as much or more than they are heard – the sound vibrates through our fleshy bodies in its lower frequencies. When the bass was played high, sharp, and fast (for the birds) Stuie and Shiva perked up and trotted around the perimeter of the arena, intrigued and energized, but keeping David at a distance. However, when David switched to playing for feel – to playing low and slow – the horses settled down and moved into an intimate proximity with David and his double bass (though Shiva had previously been wary of the instrument) and took on a meditative quality, appearing to be entranced by the instrument’s vibrations. Shiva followed the bow with her muzzle mere inches from the strings, and Stuie nuzzled up to David with his nose resting on his back – perhaps feeling the sound through him, but at the very least wanting to be as close as he could get to the experience that David was producing, and the soothing messages that this playing seemed to communicate.

The equine sound that most closely resembles the frequencies and texture of the double bass is the nicker, a low throaty sound that is used in intimate circumstances, such as between a mare and foal. Stephen Budiansky, drawing on Eugene Morton’s research on the vocal communication of animals, suggests that the nicker communicates through being felt rather than being heard, as a “tactile sound” (136). It is meant to travel through the skin, by vibrating at a low frequency, and producing a soothing, nurturing quality. The double bass, potentially, takes this nurturing communication to a deeper level, by vibrating more noticeably at an even lower frequency, and increasing the tactile quality of the sound. Shiva and Stuie’s responses to David’s playing for feel appear to reinforce this notion. The resonances that David produced by playing in this way, both through dropping the performance of performing, and focusing on the texture of the music, invited an intimate relationship between him and each of the horses. As

60 The frequency of the nicker is around 100Hz (Budiansky 129), whereas a double base is around 41-98 Hz (“Double Bass”).
David put it, “I think I’ve found some horse music there” (Lee, “Personal”). By refocusing his intent, David was able to find a moment of connection created out of common ground. This shared interest in the texture of the sound created a space in which a relationship could begin.

*Katrina, David & Po*

However, in David’s next session he found that all that he had discovered working with Stuie and Shiva did not have the same effect when offered to Katrina and Po. David’s horse music, his low, slow bowing, did not create the same meditative effect on his new partners. Perhaps this was due to a different relationship dynamic, in that the route that led David to discover this horse music with Stuie and Shiva was different from the path that he was on with Katrina and Po. Or perhaps it was David’s preconceived notion that he had found something that horses like, that led him to think of Katrina and Po less as individuals, and more as a type, which diminished the connections between himself and them. Lauren also found in her second session with Po that the connection that she had found quite easily in the first session was missing, and as she pondered, this difference may well have been due to the influence of how she had felt the first session went, and her desire to recreate that, which was distracting her from being present in the moment (Levesque). For David, he never did manage to find a moment of connection with Katrina and Po, like he had with Stuie and Shiva. Katrina and Po tended to watch David intently, but with less movement, and more distance than Stuie and Shiva. And while all parties were clearly intrigued by the process, their collaborations stayed more detached than in David’s first session.

*Michael & Stuie*

In Stuie’s second session of music play with Michael, a local musician, resonance and the dynamics of the performance relationship also came to be prominently featured. However, in this exchange, and perhaps influenced by Stuie’s experiences with David, Stuie quickly claimed a position of active listener, attentively following Michael’s performance. In this session, Stuie was immediately intrigued by Michael’s guitar play, in which he had a tendency to affect the resonance produced by the guitar by moving the body of the guitar around in wave-like patterns after strumming the strings, changing the feeling and flow of the produced sound. Michael’s playing was more active than David’s final low bowing of his encounter, but had a soothing
quality to the way it was he melodically played and how Michael and the notes moved fluidly around the space. Stuie was immediately put at ease by Michael’s music and inviting demeanour. Though Michael took on a fairly clear performance stance, in that he continuously played throughout the exchange, with his posture and focus clearly directing everything towards Stuie, making it obvious that his music was for Stuie, he also experimented with different techniques to see what Stuie may like. This approach had a markedly different quality from David’s initial performance, which was to perform for the sake of performing, leaving it open for the horses (or birds) to respond (or not), but not initially approaching the performance from a position of a relationship, as he expected the horses to have no interest in him. Michael on the other hand, though he had “no idea what to expect” (Kosir), was very clearly focused on his relationship with Stuie, and its potential. Stuie positively responded to this approach and was very relaxed but clearly intrigued and concentrated on Michael throughout their session. When Stuie’s interest seemed to wane at one point, and he went off to explore the rest of the space, Michael casually changed tactics in his playing in order to see if Stuie would regain interest in what he was offering. Michael tried incorporating whistling, but Stuie did not seem to find that as interesting as the guitar, and did not give Michael his attention with the whistling. It was when Michael upped the intensity of his playing and moved on to strumming in a more rhythmic manner that Stuie moved back into close proximity to Michael. Stuie seemed to be the most interested in what Michael was doing if there was a clear rhythm and direction to his music, becoming more distracted when the experimentation became more disjointed and piecemeal.

For much of the session Stuie chose to be close to Michael, while listening to the ways the sounds moved all around him (shown by his changes of ear position, which were both pricked forward and listening to the sides and behind him, scanning the room). When Michael would strum off a soft chord, leaving the resonance of that sound to roll around the space, and give Stuie a scratch, Stuie would move his nose in closer to Michael and to the guitar, seeming to bask in the feelings of both the sound and the touch. At many times throughout the exchange Stuie would move in closer and put his muzzle right up to the strings and the hole of the guitar. If Michael was playing a soft resonant chord, then Stuie was more likely to have his ears focused on Michael and be in close proximity. However, while standing in this intimate space, if Michael
played a louder edgier chord, then Stuie’s ear-focus was more likely to move to the sides or behind him, potentially registering the way that the sound played throughout the space.

But it is not only the sounds that animals listen to, they listen to everything you offer, from your body language and posture, to your emotions and affect, and any sounds or utterances you make. So, while Stuie was offering different responses to Michael’s playing he was also paying attention to the way he moved and his demeanour. Although Michael’s playing style differed throughout his session with Stuie, his embodied approach was consistent, offering a relaxed and meandering exploration of spending time with Stuie, and Stuie’s demeanour echoed this throughout. Though Stuie’s interest wavered from time to time in response to the musical offerings, he was always very relaxed in Michael’s presence, offering low energy movements and small gestures, sometimes clearly focused on Michael and his guitar and other times ambling around the space.

**Quiet Agency**

Understanding that horses are constantly listening and recognizing a variety of levels of communication is not all that is needed in order to collaborate. Often equine contributions are overlooked because of preconceived human notions, or skewed understandings of agency, which only acknowledge large gestures as affective. In order for communication to mean to another, that other must be able to recognize when a contribution is being made, and understand the specific ways that agency and speaking may manifest in that other. Demonstrating agency does not need to be loud or aggressive; it can also be silent, still, and subtle, but these non-dominant demonstrations of empowerment often go ignored and unrecognized, a failing that is especially present in human/animal interactions. Humans often overlook the contributions of horses (and other animals) due to a lack of awareness of the other animal’s agency, assuming (often subtextually) that only humans can create change and intentionally influence the course of action in an interspecies engagement; if a horse is not acting out dramatically, then they are assumed to be complacent, giving over their will to the human. But in fact, stillness affects as much as motion, and feeling as much as sound. As theatre scholar Lourdes Orozco writes, the presence of animals “demands a relocation of agency in which animals are not just objects in performance, but also its active agents” (38). In order to reach a place where interspecies communication and
collaboration is truly present and possible, animals need to be recognized in all their complexities; non-dominant forms of speaking need to be known; and nuanced understandings of agency need to be realized.

Po & Lauren

With Lauren and Po sound proved to be one of the lesser elements engaged in their exploration of relationship in their Playing in Silence sessions. The resonance and intent of movement became the focus of their exchange, exploring how one gesture can hold many different meanings depending on the feel, and how this feel communicates the intent. Lauren approached her sessions from a very different position from David, in that she had a vision of connection, a dream of a human and horse coming together to form a partnership. Lauren hoped to experience a small piece of that but was very conscious of not wanting to exert her desires on Po, at the expense of Po’s needs and interests. It was these two conflicting notions – a desire for connection and not wanting to unintentionally force this outcome – that caused Lauren to misread and overlook Po’s offers of collaboration. Lauren assumed that if Po was standing in close proximity to her it was because she was imposing her vision on the exchange, and overlooked the fact that Po was quite relaxed in this configuration and kept moving closer to Lauren of her own accord. If they had been sharing intimate space for more than a few minutes Lauren would walk away, disengaging the moment, and forcing space between them in an attempt to be considerate of Po’s perspective. But this idea, though based in a notion of interspecies consideration, was still steeped in human ideas regarding animal/human dynamics, rather than being grounded in a reading of the experience in the moment. Any movement, or moment, can mean many things and have many interpretations, so in order to get to a place of mutual understanding, the evidence informing a reading needs to align on all of the levels of communication (resonance, gesture, feel, emotion, expression, demeanour, reaction, and so on). As Linda Kohanov writes, there are three levels of interaction: emotional, mental, and physical (Riding Between xxii). If the understanding is that Po is being encroached upon in the engagement, then there should be signs of discomfort, attempts to create space, tension in her body, or more aggressive acts if she does not feel able to take action, such as pushing, pawing, fidgeting, or other ways of attempting to move Lauren away from her or show displeasure, and feelings or affective understandings that reflect her discontent. As Stephan Budiansky writes, the
wringling of the nose (or muzzle) can indicate irritation, or the “laying back the ears” (also known as “pinning”) is a signal of aggression (140-141). Or as Jennifer Williams lays out in an article on equine body language for *Equus* (an online magazine), each part of the horse’s body communicates: the position of the ears says something, along with the carriage of their head, the positioning of both the forelegs and back legs, the tension of the muzzle, and what their eyes and tails are doing. It is the ability to gather all of these levels of information that allows humans to critically engage with nonverbal communication and analyze whether or not there is enough evidence present for the given reading they are claiming.

Although Lauren’s version of an unbalanced interspecies dynamic was to err on the side of being overly considerate, for fear of being an imposing human, she was still overlooking what Po was telling her – Po liked sharing space with Lauren (was very relaxed when she was near), and was also seeking a connection (she would actively move into Lauren’s space, but not in an aggressive or domineering manner). The moments when Po would walk away from Lauren reinforced in Lauren’s mind that she was imposing the connection, and that Po was moving because she was trying to get away from her. But what if Po actually wanted Lauren to go with her? What would that look like? The action would likely be very similar, but the intention would be very different. In an attempt to get a genuine interspecies dialogue going, and to get past the preconceived human notions, I challenged Lauren to figure out where Po wanted her and proposed some of the alternative readings that such a movement could have.

In her work on horse-human communication, Keri Brandt shares the view that body language and nonverbal communication are the key aspects employed in co-creating an interspecies language in human/equine relationships, arguing that by challenging the privileged status of verbal language, the nuances and complexities of nonverbal communication and body language gain room to maneuver, offering “new possibilities to understand the subjective and intersubjective world of nonverbal language using beings – human and nonhuman alike” (“A Language of” 299). But in order for this co-creation to occur, the humans need to become fluent in these languages, and have a strong understanding of the components that come together to create a broad range of communicative messages for “nonverbal language using beings,” such as horses. Body language is fairly understood in the equestrian world, as it is the focus of many prominent clinicians known for training humans to speak horse (as discussed in chapter two), but
focusing on the visual cues of this communication (such as ear position, direction and speed of
travel, and gesture) does not create a complete or complex understanding of the elements of
nonverbal communication. Body language is merely the most easily demarcated aspect of
nonverbal communication, as the other elements are invisible and elusive. Yet, these hidden
aspects of nonverbal communication are crucial to understanding; without an understanding of
resonance, or emotional intelligence, the meaning behind the movement is often lost. Frequently
these resonance-based messages are being used and recognized on a subconscious or peripheral
level, as it is can difficult to explain a feeling, and much easier to demonstrate a gesture, but this
places emphasis on the body language, and downplays the importance of the feel or resonance
being employed, which is equally significant.

When Lauren began to focus on the feel of her exchange with Po, despite having very
little formal knowledge of equine communication, she was able to start to unpack the dialogue of
the exchange. Lauren inched around Po, adjusting her proximity as she sensed both her body and
Po’s, seeking a place of mutual comfort and connection. Lauren landed on a spot about a foot or
two away from Po’s shoulder, facing the same direction – not touching but clearly linked. This
change in Lauren’s focus created an opportunity for connection, and for a genuine collaboration.
In Monty Roberts’ parlance, Po had “joined-up” with Lauren. As Roberts explains, “Join-Up is a
process based on communication in a shared language to create a bond rooted in trust […] To
gain Join-Up with your horse, it is necessary to step into his [sic] world, observe his needs,
conditions and the rules that govern his social order” (“From My Hands” 38). It was through
engaging with Po on Po’s own terms that Lauren created this moment of connection. Lauren
was still not entirely comfortable standing still, and would shift slightly every few minutes,
moving a bit away from Po, acknowledging her own need to move, but not allowing herself to
move so far that she was stepping out of the connection or shutting down the exchange. As a
result, Po began to follow Lauren’s need to move with her own desire to be close. The two of
them stood together, and moved in small gestures, creating a lovely little stepping
improvisational performance. They would stand and breathe, focused on each other. Then
Lauren would step to the side and Po would move with her in tandem. Again, they would stand
together until Lauren moved once more. Po stomped her foot and Lauren followed suit. This
connection held them and continued on until Lauren, so ecstatic by this new experience of
connection, broke from the performance and turned to me. Could I see what had just occurred? They had found a shared moment that they co-created. And that moment grew out of feel and a focus on two bodies together, two individuals trying to talk to each other in silence.

**Anthropomorphism & Experiencing with Another**

We can only see the world through our own eyes, through our human lens of experience, and yet the notion of connecting with another species from our own perspective is often criticized. As discussed in chapter one, anthropomorphism may not actually be the sin that it is claimed to be, but may rather be our best way of connecting, and recognizing another’s experience through relating it with our own, and as such, it is an important aspect of interspecies performance and making meaning in interspecies contexts. As Erika Fudge writes, “if I cannot say that a dog is sad, what can I say that it is? In a sense, without anthropomorphism we are unable to comprehend and represent the presence of an animal” (76). Our ability to connect and anthropomorphize positively is an important component of recognizing animal perspectives. In their study of how anthropomorphism informs understandings of others, Paul Morris, Margaret Fidler, and Alan Costall found that there is “something [emphasis added] in the structure of human actions and postures specific to different intentions and emotions,” and, as they argue, this is also true for animal behaviour (162). Their study demonstrates the consistency of what they call “anthropomorphic descriptions” in ascribing meaning to interactions between humans and dogs, but the study makes no attempt to break down what this “something” might be, or how these performances communicate consistently across spectators. The uniformity of interpretation may be clear, but how is one to critically understand these articulations of self and relationship if the elements involved in coming to that understanding are left vague and elusive? Breaking down these acts into action-based units is a first step, as Kenneth Shapiro does in his study of kinesthetic empathy, but if one does not have an intuitive understanding of these elements, then how can they be explained in way that may help one discover, or hone one’s abilities to understand another in these ways? Shapiro’s study focuses on sensing the motor intentions of another but does not thoroughly break down how that is achieved; rather his arguments center on empathetic or comparative understandings of posture. But how does one come to empathize with another’s posture? And how relevant is that understanding when the other holds a radically
different worldview from your own, as a distinctly different species? How much does an understanding of that other as an individual inform your empathy? And if it does inform your understanding, how have you come to know this other?

As meaning is co-created, as discussed in chapter one, and collaboration is based on mutual benefit and respect, then some form of connection is needed for meaning to be created or for collaboration to occur, and nonverbal improvised performance offers a way into relationship building across species lines that draws on both animals’ ways of knowing. But this performance cannot rely merely on understandings of gesture (as discussed in reference to Monty Roberts and speaking horse in chapter two), but must also engage the emotional intelligence that Linda Kohanov and Equine-Facilitated Learning employs (also discussed in chapter two), along with broader understandings of performance and how meaning is made in specific intercultural (human/animal) contexts. It may be second nature for many to read the performance of a dog, or other familiar animal, but how do we move towards getting to know another that is completely foreign to our own experience, and with whom we have had limited contact? And how do we move past the human created narratives of “dogness” or “horseness” and recognize the distinctions of the individual?

As Lauren discovered it is very easy for one’s reading of an interaction to fall into negative anthropomorphism, where the human is projecting their own experiences on to the acts of the horse that they are working with. This is where encouraging the participants to critically engage with their own analysis of the exchange, and challenge them to find evidence to back up their understanding, or to explore how they may have come to a conclusion, are key aspects to encouraging all perspectives to be recognized. In these moments, some alternative readings or redirects are often needed (as I did with Lauren, by challenging her to explore what spatial dynamic Po preferred) to create space for the horse’s perspective. So, in the case of Playing in Silence, where I am the only one involved in the sessions with extensive knowledge of equine communication, social structures, and perception (other than the horses themselves), I offer little bits of insight, curating the improvisation as needed, to encourage the humans to step outside of their own perspectives and try to see, as much as they can, through the eyes of their equine partners, leading to a more positive and inclusive anthropomorphism.
For this positive anthropomorphism to occur when collaborating with an individual, there is often a constant negotiation between what one may know of a species (either from the cultural animal unconscious or through studying the species), and what is perceived and received in the moment through a specific individual’s performance. Knowing that a horse is a flight animal will only get you so far in getting to know that individual horse, and being able to build something together through a joining of perspectives. As David found, his discovery of horse music only got him so far in his attempts to connect and collaborate. The majority of horses may appreciate the low resonant tones of the double bass, but that is only one aspect of the exchange, the other aspects are based on specifics of the shared moment and the connections (or lack thereof) between participants. If the general details of a species are all that are recognized then one horse may stand for all, but when these broad notions are understood and also explored in the context of how they manifest in a specific individual, then a more in-depth understanding is possible. Recognizing species distinctions only scratches the surface of getting to know another. It is when all of the elements of a performance come together that complex meaning may be made and recognized. Lauren may have had little understanding of equine herd dynamics, but through tuning into the specifics of Po’s performance she was still able to learn something about Po and her preferences in that moment. It is in being able to identify not only the movements and gesture of another, but also the resonances (the emotions, affect, and energies) that accompany and incite those expressive actions that another’s perspective may (begin) to be seen. Some of this may be done intuitively, as demonstrated through this project and the musicians’ lack of horse knowledge, and some of it may rely on having a solid understanding of the other’s culture and ways of being in the world. For example, equine social dynamics and perception are quite different from humans’, but that does not mean that nothing can be understood without the knowledge that horses can see almost 360 degrees (Budiansky 11), that they perceive sounds differently—they have a greater range, but are less able to locate the source of the sound at high pitches (Saslow 218)—or that they live in matriarchically societies in the wild (Roberts 18). Horses perceive the world in a way that is very different from humans. They are less visually based, with a heightened sense of hearing, which reaches over 33,000Hz (where humans have a limit of 20,000Hz) (Saslow 218). Drawing on Carol A. Saslow’s research, we know that horses experience the world largely through their senses of sound and feel; as demonstrated through
Natural Horsemanship and Equine-Facilitated Learning, we know that they communicate predominantly through body language, movement and resonance. This information can be useful for increasing understandings of horses—that is, offering an explanation as to why a horse may spook even though “nothing” happened, which may reflect our limited range of hearing and our duller sensitivity to resonance in comparison to a horse—there is still much to be seen and discovered through engaging in intuitive understandings in the moment and recognizing the gestures and feelings behind act.

All of these elements of performance come together in the moment and inform one another as they build layers of meaning on a given interaction and communicate to those who know how to recognize them and critically engage with the information that they present. Leslie Irvine references Shapiro’s experiences with his dog Sabaka, in which Sabaka hides under a couch in his games with Shapiro, and states that Sabaka does this not because he knows Shapiro cannot fit under the couch, which Irvine suggests Sabaka cannot know, but because he feels safe, and cites the embodied experience that she, and presumably others, have had of feeling physical safety in enclosed spaces, suggesting that this experience is not exclusively human (71). While I agree that this experience is not exclusively human, I also do not see enough evidence in the specifics of this exchange to thoroughly argue that this is Sabaka’s motivation. Why do we assume Sabaka cannot know that Shapiro does not fit under the couch? How do we know that Sabaka’s feelings in this situation are of safety and not of outthinking a playmate? There must be information in Sabaka’s performance that suggests these further readings. There are many like experiences that a human and an animal may share as to why being under the couch at a given moment is desirable, and as such, we must look for further information to argue with confidence why it is one understanding and not another, and this information needs to come from the specifics of the performance, and not merely from personal experiences in like situations. Is Sabaka tense, or wagging his tail? Is Sabaka posed to move again at a moment’s notice, or settled in and content? How does Sabaka’s demeanour, posture, and energy change if Shapiro adjusts his proximity to him? What feel, energy, and emotion do Sabaka’s actions have, and how do those of this playmate influence them? All of these aspects come together to present information needed to critically engage with this nonverbal conversation and learn something about these individuals and their relationship. Our anthropomorphism must go beyond projection
and engage with the specifics of the performance in order to articulate how an understanding has been reached. It is not enough merely to grasp that there is something that allows us to differentiate intentions and emotions of another individual (human or animal); we must become proficient (at least) at breaking down how we have come to a given understanding so that we may be able to actively engage in these conversations; understand how we, ourselves, communicate in these ways; understand what we are saying to others (humans and animals); and understand what they are saying to us in return.

Many humans have been taught that horses buck because, well, that is what horses do. But there are many ways to buck, and many messages that a single buck may communicate, such as exuberance or fear, frustration or pain. Or as Bekoff indicates, “a growl is not a growl is not a growl” (Forward viii). And to write off this act (a buck or growl) as merely typical behaviour is to ignore the rich messages embedded in the act, and to overlook an opportunity to get to know a little bit more about a radically different other—to get to know a uniquely individual horse (or dog, or other animal), and understand why that specific individual is bucking today, in this moment, in this space, in this place, with you.

Perhaps we can never truly know another, but that does not mean that we cannot get closer; that we cannot find a frequency of shared experience; that we cannot appreciate (at least) a small piece of another’s perspective, and enrich both of our lives in the attempt. If we (humans) do not recognize that we can connect, in some manner, then we will continue to marginalize, push away, and destroy the diverse individuals who share this world with us.

“Anthropomorphism might actually serve an ethical function,” Erika Fudge argues, “if we don't believe that in some way we can communicate with and understand animals, what is to make us stop and think as we experiment upon them, eat them, put them in cages?” (144). Learning to connect, to acknowledge another’s perspective, experience, and way of being—rather than merely projecting our own perspective and desires on to the other—is contingent on being able to recognize their contributions, offers, and agency.

To make this recognition possible, humans, as I have been suggesting throughout this dissertation, need the ability to identify and understand resonances (emotion, the energy of intent, and affect) as key components of communication, along with the more overt communication of body language and gesture. Physical and emotional resonances produce
frequencies that affect those sharing space, which creates meaning through the nuances of vibrations, affective energies, and other sensory connections. As Susan Leigh Foster writes in reference to dance, “the resonance that connects bodies does not function according to a logic of cause and effect. Mirror neural processing does not entail seeing something and then responding to it. Rather, the tuning of self and world sets the precondition for a variety of possible responses” (166). Resonances speak in ways that are often overlooked, or over simplified, ignoring the communication potential, and the opportunity to inch closer (when invited) to knowing another. Focusing on action and body language is only one part of the nonverbal puzzle of communication.

The invisible aspects of performance—the resonances—are far more difficult to break down and demarcate in comparison to the visual cues of posture and gesture. Understandings of performance, and discussions about “feel,” “attitude,” “tensions,” and “intent,” add crucial elements to the conversation about how meaning is made without words. It is these types of descriptive details that provide the needed information about whether a horse is bucking out of surprise, fear, anger, or aggression. All a buck on its own communicates is that something has happened, something has changed that the horse is responding to, or commenting on. This change can be physical, in terms of something causing pain/discomfort, or it can be mental/emotional, in that the horse is feeling playful and/or that some unexpected occurrence has surprised them. Perceiving the energy behind the act (the feel, the resonance), the subtle communications of the body (tension and flow), and the messages of the environment (sounds, movements, objects, people) are what come together to create a complex understanding of a shared moment. Being able to consciously recognize all of the elements involved, and articulating how an understanding of an act has been met through such analysis, is crucial to being able to critically engage with these performance-based messages in order to avoid negative anthropomorphism (the ungrounded project of human interests), and for being able to share these rich conversations with other humans, so that they too may learn to recognize this speaking.

Lauren & Taco

With Taco, and having learned from her experiences with Po, Lauren took a very different approach, and started with the spatial dynamics and the affective responses that she had in reference to Taco’s presence. Lauren’s decision to focus more on space and movement, and
less on sound may have also been influenced by the torrential rain storm that was occurring during this session. The rain pounding off the metal roof of the arena created a very different sonic environment from the other sessions that occurred on sunny days. Taco also upped the ante of their session in the first moments, by dramatically displaying how different his presence and use of space were from Po. As we were setting up in the arena, Taco was wandering around the space and went over to a crack in the door. While Taco explored the door, he managed to startle himself and took off in an impressive act of bucking and running, surprising Lauren and causing her to move closer to me for reassurance. Taco had very quickly established his sensitivity and dramatic demeanour, which got Lauren’s adrenaline up, and made her more cautious of her approach. But soon Lauren relaxed again, and Taco followed suit, as they wandered the arena together—at times staring off into space intently and at other times facing each other as Lauren droned various notes or sang little melodies over and with the rain.

Part way through the session Lauren felt that Taco wanted to run (Levesque). Where Po had a relaxed demeanour, ambling in and out of contact, in a fairly low-key manner, Taco seemed primed to move. When Lauren articulated her feelings about Taco, I told her that she was welcome to try, but to keep her distance while presenting the idea to him to allow for plenty of room for Taco’s reaction. Lauren took up a position across the arena, while Taco watched her, and she took off running. Taco kept watching her, but did not respond in kind. Lauren’s hesitation around overly stimulating Taco meant that her attempts to add more movement to their exchange left her running and Taco watching. Despite Lauren’s quick movements, her actions were not connecting with the desire to run that she perceived in Taco. Her actions were not all that was required to communicate what she was aiming for. Lauren moved quickly, and did run, but there was an element to her actions that suggested she was not entirely committed to achieving the result of co-running. She was unsure of how her actions would influence Taco, and needed a demonstration of what this may look like to approach her own exploration.

Taco has a very expansive personal space, meaning that he can be easily affected by small movements, even at a distance, but these movements need to have a certain energy to connect. To demonstrate this affective response, I simply jumped in Taco’s direction, landing a few feet away from him. Taco responded immediately by bucking huge into the air and running around. This is a very different sociosensual awareness than what Po offers, as the same gesture
directed at Po would produce, perhaps, a startle head lift, and, maybe, a bit of a side step or small jump, and probably not much else. In Taco, it created a dramatic response that had a more lasting effect as he ran around for a few minutes before settling again. Next, after Taco had come back to a relaxed state after his run, I demonstrated for Lauren how I could encourage Taco to run with me while being meters away from him. I took up a position about half way across the arena, and took off. Taco immediately broke into a gallop following my direction, and quickly surpassing me (all while on the other side of the arena). I quickly changed direction, as if in a game of tag, and ran back the other way. Taco followed. If I ran, he would run, often loosely following my track and any changes of direction that I made.

These demonstrations gave Lauren an understanding of Taco’s sensitivity so that she would be prepared, and could ease into her offers gently, and work up as she was comfortable. Lauren tried again, but once more it became clear that the movements are not all that are required to make Taco respond; the energy must match the desired outcome. After years of working with horses it is quite natural for me to combine a needed energy with a certain movement to elicit a specific response in the horses that I work with. This is often articulated as a presence, or a certain focus, or a feel. Monty Roberts tries to break this down through body posture and gaze direction, suggesting that if you angle your body to square your shoulders to the horse, and focus your gaze on their horse’s eyes, then they will move away from you (“From My Hands” 63). But as Lauren discovered, just mimicking body language is not all that is required to get a horse moving. Lauren’s motions were very similar to mine, but the energy and the way that energy was directed were not the same, and therefore created a different response. There is a certain way of projecting a specific energy that communicates “move,” that is needed to clearly articulate the message. Finding the correct energy, the energy that communicates the desired message, is often found through intuition, and trial and error, and differs with each individual. Often people have the most overt understanding of this form of resonance in reference to those emotions that have been coded as “negative,” such as anger. According to Kohanov, “So-called negative emotions tend to carry a bigger charge because they often must be acted upon quickly to ensure survival” (Riding Between xiv). In these cases, you can often feel the anger emanating off a person and are affected by its messages. But this type of resonance-based communication is not only present in displays of negative emotions, it is present in many forms of nonverbal communication. For
Lauren to be successful at communicating her desire for Taco to run with her, she needed to make the projection of her intent clear and to make her moments and resonances line up in a clear message. Though Lauren tried to harness her resonances in this way, the message continued to be unclear, leaving Taco at a standstill. Learning to clearly communicate, to harness one’s energy, in this way as an intentional communicative act, is a significant aspect that equestrians must develop in order to be effective with the horses they work with, and it often takes time and practice to be effective.

Katrina & Jesse

With Jesse and Katrina, the movements were minimal, and they never came within a few feet of each other, but rather connected from a distance. Jesse found that he was quite nervous in Katrina’s presence, and was happy that their connection was clear, but that he was able to maintain a wide personal space throughout (Stewart, “Personal”). Did Jesse’s discomfort with the idea of Katrina being near to him communicate to her a desire for space? In each of Katrina’s other sessions (with David and Dong-Won) she had had moments of closeness and touch, in addition to observing, ears pricked in their direction, from afar. But with Jesse she constantly kept a few meters between them, and never attempted to approach. Jesse and Katrina often stayed the exact distance apart, as Jesse responded to Katrina’s weaving movements throughout the space, and mimicked her pattern of pacing on his side of the arena. Kohanov has found that different horses have different concepts of personal space (like humans), and that these individual boundaries need to be respected, especially when building a relationship. As Kohanov writes, “As nonterritorial beings, horses illustrate that healthy boundaries have nothing to do with material ownership. To gain their cooperation, you must protect your personal space without violating theirs” (Riding Between 79). Eponaquest teaches a method of exploring personal boundaries while building relationship, which I first experienced in February 2015 while attending a workshop at their property in Arizona (Vette et al.).

In this exercise, initially done between human participants before exploring the technique with a horse, one person approaches another while watching and feeling for signs of discomfort. When a sign is perceived, the one approaching is coached to stop advancing, rock back on their heels (to remove the posture of encroaching further) and sigh, and then stand there focusing on settling and breathing until they feel that their partner has relaxed, and they can begin forward
again. Some pairs end up inches away from each other, and others never get within a few feet, as
their partner immediately displays signs of discomfort when they try to inch forward past a
certain point. The exercise is about recognizing personal boundaries through reading subtle
nonverbal cues. There are often minute fidgeting cues that the one being advanced upon displays
without realizing it, which connects to their comfort level in the exchange. This assignment is
then used as a way of positively building relationships, through allowing the one being advanced
upon to set the boundaries that they are comfortable (a key aspect of the Eponaquest method). If
these subtle cues are ignored, and the one advancing does not respect their partner’s boundaries,
then the result is often hostility or resentment which detract from the possibilities of connection
and collaboration.

I have employed this method with many horses (and other wild animals, such as deer),
and it is remarkable how close these others will allow me to get through this simple display of
respect. Whereas if I were to advance in one fluid approach, especially with deer, then the other
would be far more likely to flee before I got remotely close, triggering the flight response,
through my predatory-style actions. With horses that I have a relationship with I can approach
them far more fluidly, due to pre-established understandings, but when building a new
relationship demonstrating a respect for boundaries is often key, as Eponaquest highlights. Some
individuals will be more comfortable with quick, close contact, and others need to be approached
more slowly, and perhaps even addressed from a distance. This may be what was seen in Jesse
and Katrina’s interaction, where there was a mutual respect for boundaries, and a clear desire on
Jesse’s part for a significant breadth of personal space, which Katrina recognized and worked
with due to Jesse’s clear nonverbal messaging. Interestingly, Katrina is often not particularly
respectful of another’s personal space, as it is a way that she, as a lead horse, gages how much
consideration a new individual deserves (human or horse). Katrina will intentionally walk into
the personal space of a new human, and watch for their response: do they hold their ground and
recognize her encroachment, or do they move out of her way? Gaining and maintaining Katrina’s
respect, and her willingness to work with you, is contingent on your being able to hold your own
space, while also being respectful of hers.

This dance between Jesse and Katrina reminds me of contact improvisation, though
without the contact. According to dance scholar Cynthia J. Novak,
Contact improvisation is most frequently performed as duet, in silence, with dancers supporting each other’s weight while in motion. Unlike wrestlers, who exert their strength to control a partner, contact improvisers use momentum to move in concert with a partner’s weight, rolling, suspending, lurching together. They often yield rather than resist, using their arms to assist and support but seldom to manipulate. Interest lies in the ongoing flow of energy rather than on producing still pictures, as in ballet […] Contact improvisers have seen the body as a sensuous, intelligent, natural part of each person, requiring acknowledgement and promising insight. (8, 11)

While Jesse and Katrina never touched, the flowing of energies and attention to each other’s bodies and nonverbal offerings kept them connected and moving together (at least at times). They were not relying on touch for contact, but rather on a connection created through attunement and deep listening, sharing in the auditory and spatial environments, and reading each other’s bodies. This type of contact, connecting without touch, creates more room for a dance to emerge between humans and horses, as humans often use touch, even touch that seems benign or favourable, as a form of control. For this reason, Equine-Facilitated Learning often removes touch from the equation and asks humans to, at least initially, engage with the horses through observation and connection from a distance, as Eponaquest does in their introductory sessions (Vette et al.). Like contact improvisation, in these dances without contact the “emphasis has been placed […] on the physical dialogue of the two dancers,” rather than on explicit expression of some preconceived notion or emotion (as often seen in choreography) (Novak 11). This form of dance has no leader, but an ebb and flow of receiving and presenting offers in a co-created experience, which makes it an especially useful model for engaging with horses. But it is most beneficial if there is little-to-no contact between improvisers, as the horses (having worked extensively with humans) are conditioned to understand that their full range of responses are not generally acceptable when in close quarters with another human. It is connecting in this dance from a distance that creates space for a full range of equine articulations, and increases the likelihood of the human being able to recognize the horse’s contribution, as it can be difficult to see everything that a horse is doing when you are right next to them.
Starting with Resonance

As discussed in chapter two, Linda Kohanov’s programs at Eponaquest Worldwide focus on the “sociosensual awareness” and “emotional intelligence” side of nonverbal communication in order to teach humans about “leadership, assertiveness, personal empowerment, relationship, intuition, and emotional fitness” through working with horses as teachers (“About”). Kohanov recognizes emotion as a form of communication that provides information that allows us to know others and ourselves better. This form of communication is not the privilege of humans, or contained to one’s own species, but rather works as Kenneth Shapiro suggests in his theory and practice of kinesthetic empathy: it is “the bodily experiencing that we have in common […] that is the basis of our access to each other” (Shapiro 184). While Shapiro focuses on his personal relationship with his dog, Sabaka, and starts from a place of body language, similar to many equestrian clinicians, his definition of kinesthetic empathy references the interconnections between body language and resonance, or posture and attitude as Shapiro names them (186). Susan Leigh Foster calls this connection in dance, “a kinesthesia, a designated way of experiencing physicality and movement that, in turn, summons other bodies into a specific way of feeling towards it” (2). Experienced equestrians learn to read and feel the bodies of the horses they work with, and the horses likewise learn to interpret and understand the bodies and messages of their humans (Brandt, “Intelligent Bodies” 145). Where Shapiro, Foster, and Natural Horsemanship” clinicians such as Monty Roberts, start with kinesthetic awareness, Kohanov starts with a complex understanding of emotion, empathy, and intuition, focusing on how these aspects come into play in relationship as communication. Kohanov reverses the construct of how understandings are met in relationship, by starting with an understanding of resonance (in both human/human and human/equine contexts), working from a position that suggests that movement and posture follow emotion, rather than emotion following movement.

Whether an understanding of nonverbal communication starts with posture and gesture or emotion and resonance the important feature is that both aspects are being represented and considered. Typically, humans have largely overlooked the emotional resonance component of communication, leaving a significant hole in their ability to understand another animal’s

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61 Both of these terms are used throughout Kohanov’s works (see the individual books’ indexes).
conversational contributions (as discussed in chapter two). As I have argued throughout this dissertation, these invisible forms of communication – feel, energy, and empathy – are vital aspects needed to create a fuller understanding of nonverbal communication in order to have a hope of getting to know another animal. When Kohanov’s understandings of resonance and emotional intelligence are combined with the more common equestrian understandings of body language and gesture, human/equine comprehension begins to form a multidimensional understanding that moves closer towards recognizing the balance of communicative inputs employed in this interspecies exchange, honouring the preferences, interests, and knowings on both sides of the exchange. Rather than a horse learning human, or a human learning horse, the two are co-creating a language, “a third language that enables the two to create a world of shared meaning and foster a deeper understanding of each other” (Brandt, “A Language of” 313).

*Dong-Won & Katrina*

When physical dynamics and resonance come together and work in tandem, the possibilities of interspecies communication expand, and moments of genuine collaboration become possible. The more versed the individuals (both human and horse) are in their partner’s modes of engagement, the longer these moments of coming together may last, and the more complex the messages exchanged may be. Within the session of play created by Dong-Won and Katrina movement and feel came together in the most dynamic improvisational performance of Playing in Silence. For Dong-Won it was not about working with a horse, but rather about how he can “respond to others” through his music and dance (Kim), and how this unique other would connect and experience his offers and responses. Although having a horse as a performing partner was new for Dong-Won, he jumped right into an exploration of the nuances of this collaboration in a lively and active manner. He started bold, surprising Katrina with his gleeful drumming as he danced around the arena following her movements. He trusted his ability to find common ground and connection, and was not taken aback by the distance between them, or chastened by her flight; he read the messages of her movements and was both respectful and challenging in his offers of play and performance. It was only after the session that he questioned his analysis of her movements. Was Katrina moving away because of dislike or concern? How could this movement be understood?
Some sounds invite movement and action, some invite settling and stillness; some sounds push away and are heard best at a distance; some sounds draw in and are experienced most clearly in close proximity. Often humans assume that any form of distancing between themselves and their partner is negative. But what if that distance allows for a better experience of one’s performance and offers? A performance that may be overwhelming in close confines can be pleasant if experienced with a bit more space. As mentioned before, each individual has their own sense of personal space and those concepts change with the dynamics of different relationships. Space between individuals is not inherently negative. If Katrina had kept Dong-Won at a distance even after he had settled his performance, or if she had tried to desperately get away from him at all moments, then the message behind her movements may have suggested a dislike or negative experience. However, while Katrina demonstrated concern or uncertainty at moments, with her head high, eyes wide (but not with the whites showing or her eyes rolling in fear), and ears following the movements and sounds of Dong-Won, these moments were brief, and she remained favourable to Dong-Won. She settled when he settled and was happy to be close to him when he was not making such loud noises. Dong-Won excelled at intuitively reading Katrina’s level of arousal and backing off or changing pace, and varying his offers in response to her actions. In their improvisation Dong-Won spontaneously responded to Katrina’s movements, matching her energy, as she matched his. Dong-Won was able to follow Katrina when he felt invited and back off when she seemed concerned or overwhelmed. Through Dong-Won’s ability to read the subtle movements and messages of his improvisational partner’s performance (an aspect that plays clearly in his human/human improvisations as well), Katrina never reached a level of concern in the space of his loud and lively gestures and offered her keen attention and movements in return. When Dong-Won turned to a subtler performance, Katrina matched pace and moved closer, allowing him to touch her face as he sang her a Korean lullaby. In their exchange Katrina and Dong-Won were constantly listening, ears pricked, eyes directed, and bodies tuned to exploring the other’s frequency. They moved together, even when distances apart, and they shared moments of connection, confusion, dissonance, and harmony – all of these aspects are part of creating a relationship as long as there is discourse and both partners are listening (or at least trying to). As Anita Maurstad, Dona David, and Sarah Cowles write, “The in-sync experiences are moments, highly appreciated when experienced, but they also tell of co-
being as a connection that both joins and separates” (327). Relationships are not about always agreeing or having a shared vision, but rather are about the conversation. They are about feeling heard, listening, and being able to voice your perspective in order to co-create a reality.

**Conclusion: Getting to Know Another**

In each of the sessions of Playing in Silence the individuals (musician and horse) came together and collaborated despite their differences. I cannot speak to how these sessions may have influenced the views of the horses, other than to say that they did not run away from me after their first experiences, and still willingly joined in their subsequent sessions, and seemed intrigued by the diversity of the musical offerings and the musicians’ approaches. For the humans, as indicated through their post play interviews, these sessions challenged and expanded their preconceived notions of horses (though this, of course, varied in degree and form with each musician). Michael had expected far more movement and high energy responsiveness and found a much quieter engagement with Stuie (Kosir). David found and lost a concept of “horse music,” and what a horse may appreciate in this regard, indicating that not all horses are the same, and preferences differ throughout the herd. As Lauren expressed at the end of her third session, her experiences with Taco and Po allowed her to begin to see horses as individuals (Levesque). On an analytical level, Lauren was always aware of this idea, but it was through experiencing how these differences could manifest in two distinct individuals of the same species that her understanding of these differences expanded. These changes may seem small, but they are an important step towards challenging preconceived notions of horses and increasing the number of stories associated with the species, offering a more complex view that highlights horses as individuals. As Lynda Birke and Jo Hockenhull write in reference to Nicola Taylor’s work, “part of the humanist heritage is not only to separate ourselves from other animals, but also to parody ‘the animal,’ as merely instinct and so not a mindful actor in the process of producing social lives” (19). Of course, like Lauren, people generally realize that horses are not all the same, but that understanding is often washed out by the conversations about species specifics and generalizations that make sellable training methods, and simple explanations. In reference to Bill Dorrance’s (one of the founders of natural horsemanship) training methods, Verlyn Klinkenborg writes, “You cannot sell modesty or undying curiosity. It is hard to put a price on accepting that
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everything you think you know about horses may change with the very next horse.” however, it is this approach that takes an expansive view of engaging with a markedly different other, as it places the focus on exploration, collaboration, and reaching beyond preconceived notions.

what if a genuinely interspecies performance is a performance without a script that focuses on learning about another, reaching beyond the established narratives that limit a species to a set understanding and exploring the nuances of an individual? what if it is about play and discovery, rather than reproduction and control? what if equestrian theatre were to use its platform to expand understandings of horses, and explore how far this collaboration can go, rather than to reinforce the dominant narratives that highlight human control? would an audience come? would this model be sustainable as a form of entertainment? or to be truly inter-species does this performance need to be kept to the training and relationship building of individual partnerships?

in all honesty, i do not know. i do not have an answer to all of these questions. i do not know if a live audience were to be present at a playing in silence style performance, would they find it as engaging and worthwhile as they do with other forms of popular equestrian theatre, and continue to support it? i do not know if the horses would continue to find these improvisational performances engaging and be willing to play night after night (as they are expected to in equestrian theatre). it is a tall task to attempt to devise a form of performance that is equally beneficial for both the human and the horse. in the dozen or so times that i have shared the trailer and short videos from playing in silence with audiences, the responses have been positive, but these videos, of course, highlight the most interesting parts, and do not make the audience sit through twelve minutes of david playing to see if the horses will come into the arena and engage. these videos do not show all of the moments of stagnation where nothing much happens, or similar things happen again and again. however, that does not mean that there is not a way of striking this balance between entertainment and an ethical engagement that reaches beyond merely adhering to basic animal welfare principles and seeks out mutual enjoyment/interest, and which highlights narratives that are beneficial for the horse, not only the human. to me, this notion of exploring the possibilities and ways of creating a performance that is truly interspecies is important, as it speaks to rebalancing the human/animal dynamics which have been skewed in favour of the human for far too long. it speaks to creating an inclusive
interspecies community and recognizing animals as inherently valuable individuals—individuals who are worth listening to and learning from, not merely training for our benefit.
CONCLUSION—Listening to Animals

How monotonous our speaking becomes when we speak only to ourselves! And how insulting to the other beings – to foraging black bears and twisted old cypresses – that no longer sense us talking to them, but only about them, as though they were not present in our world [...] Small wonder that rivers and forests no longer compel our focus or our fierce devotion. For we talk about such entities only behind their backs, as though they were not participant in our lives. Yet if we no longer call out to the moon slipping between the clouds, or whisper to the spider setting the silken struts of her web, well, then the numerous powers of this world will no longer address us – and if they still try, we will not likely hear them. (David Abram, *Becoming Animal* 175)

Listening to animals is not only about hearing the howls, chirps, snorts, mews, nickers, and other such vocal articulations; it is about hearing the conversations about preferences, perspectives, and relationships that are communicated through movement, gesture, feeling, and resonance. It is about hearing, through the (often) silent language of performance, how an individual perceives their world, and engages with those with whom they share space. By not recognizing, or diminishing the importance of, the silent talking of animals, or the animate world around us (as David Abram more broadly focuses on in the epigraph I have used for this conclusion), we are neglecting not only the more-than-human world, but also levels of engagement, experience, and communication within and amongst ourselves; the communication that is performed, but not articulated in words. To not speak fluently in silence limits us to only communicating with those that share our language, and those who have an invested interest in verbal abstractions, which does not even cover all of humanity. It limits us to discussing only that which can be fully translated into words, when there are rich worlds of intrigue and exchange that exist beyond verbal ways of meaning.

This is not to say that verbal articulations cannot also be important in our engagements with animals. In fact, I use a lot of language with both my dog, Gus, and my horse, Katrina, and other animals I interact with. I employ verbal language as a tool, but it is not the foundation of our relationships or of the meanings that we have co-created; generally, the words that we share have been learned through our performed interactions and embodied articulations. Gus, especially, has a very high understanding of English (for someone who cannot speak in kind), as
I can ask him an ever-expanding series of questions to deduce what he is requesting at a given time. Though he is a very chatty dog—he often uses vocal articulations to enhance his communication—he replies to my questions through performance. If I ask him if he wants to go to the barn, and he does not that day, for whatever reason, he replies by sitting in response to the question. If he does want to go, then he replies by getting excited or running to the door. For other questions, he makes his “no” clear by responding minimally, and continuing to ask (through staring at me, shifting his weight impatiently, and/or making small sounds, or occasionally barking), and makes his “yes” obvious by responding with enthusiasm. He has learned English through living with me, having a devoted interest in our relationship, and through recognizing that this is often a key mode of communication for humans—an important aspect of my communication. Gus may not speak in English (or any other verbal language), but he has learned enough of the language to serve him, and to ensure that we can communicate with each other (at least to a certain degree). Our communication is based on a variety of forms of engagement, some of which originated with his preferences and ways, and some with mine. It is through combining all of these aspects that we are able to most fully communicate. Though Gus could easily do away with verbal language, it is a mode that I find useful for creating succinct exchanges, and which offers a different level of information; I do not know how I would ask him if he wants a carrot (he is very fond of carrots) without language or the carrot to gesture to. However, if I were only to recognize verbal language in our exchanges I would miss a significant portion of what he has to say and how he experiences different situations.

With Katrina, she hardly ever uses vocal communication with humans, or even other horses, with the exception of the occasional nicker for attention, but she understands a certain amount of language. Like Gus, many of the words she recognizes come from my educating her to their meaning (my meaning for them) through performance. Both Katrina and Gus read body language and gesture in a highly nuanced way, with the verbal cues becoming a short-form for the gesture, not the other way around. I can say “up” to Katrina and she will pick up a faster gate, or “back” to ask her to move backwards. These requests come from extensive ground work, in which I use my posture, energy, touch, and at times a lead or a lung whip (which does not make contact with the animal), in order to explain my intentions behind the word “up” or “back.” These words can then be used in other contexts, such as in riding. Our co-created verbal
language comes from our shared performances, as some words mean more clearly to her than others (or my performance of them is more attuned with my intention), so I privilege those words more. Often the words used, especially with horses, carry an energy in their pronunciation, or are uttered in a sing-song way that encourages the desired response. Saying “up” in a soothing or lazy way, is unlikely to create the desired result, or clearly perform the meaning, unless the word has already been explained with the appropriate embodied description, and has come to mean independently of the performance. But none of these words mean anything to these animals without the meaning having first been established through performance, and both partners putting in the time and effort to deduce the other’s ways of meaning.

When working with animals, verbal language is often used to command, but not to communicate (if thinking of communication as a shared exchange that goes both ways). Because the animals generally do not speak in kind (though there are, of course, exceptions), the utterance becomes the end of the point, rather than an opening to an exchange. These articulations work in an “I say, you do” manner, which does not invite a complex exchange of views. It is through combining the various modes of exchange recognized by a pair of individuals, and working to learn our partner’s ways, that we can speak across difference. Communicating with animals does not mean that all of our dominant human ways need to be ignored, but it also means that they cannot be overly privileged (as discussed throughout this dissertation). Language often helps me clarify my performance, or make my points more clearly (once the words have been taught), but it does not make language the main focus of our interactions. The focus is always on the shared elements; the emphasis is on performance and how we teach each other and share aspects of ourselves and our perspectives through this mode. Gus listens to my verbal comments and speaks through his actions and energy; I often speak in English and listen to his embodied replies. If we did not have a clear interest in each other, then this exchange would likely be lost, as each are speaking in a (at least, somewhat) foreign tongue, which only gains meaning for the other through our relationship and our mutual efforts to learn the other’s ways. If I am working with an uneducated animal (meaning uneducated in human ways, with their own forms of knowledge), or
engaging in an exchange with a wild animal that has crossed my path, then performance becomes even more important, as it offers a starting point that comes from a shared form exchange—a common language (though with different species dialectics). At times, even here, I may use language, not because I expect them to understand me, but because it can help me perform my intentions more clearly. I am a human who is fully indoctrinated into verbal culture, and regularly think in language (though not always), so using language (perhaps out loud, but mostly for myself) can encourage the performance that I am after. I use language to make my intentions clearer to myself, which then often translates to my performance. Verbal language is a tool of my performance, but not an end in itself. However, if I concentrate too much on the language, then it can also distract from the performance, and decrease the effectiveness of my embodied articulation.

The more I engage in nuanced performance-based exchanges with other animals, the more I see the possibilities expanding for further conversations and deeper understandings. I notice the difference most starkly when working with unfamiliar horses who have backgrounds of negative experiences with humans. While these horses have had very little previous interaction with me, and act out adversely initially, the change in demeanour is all the more evident when they realize that I am listening to their commentary, and not just ploughing ahead with my own objectives. One such example is regarding trying a selection of saddles on a horse with an aversion to being tacked up and ridden. The horse had been used previously in a lesson program and had back pain that had been overlooked and ridden through in this previous life. The horse was used to being ignored and punished for her comments about her discomfort. So even with her new human, and more considerate environment, saddling and riding in an arena were deemed undesirable activities, which would produce angry comments from the horse.

62 I am in no way encouraging people to go out and try to force these interactions, or to track down animals in order to try to communicate with them. I am speaking here of the animals with whom we live in an interspecies community, and with whom we naturally cross our paths as we traverse through our daily lives. Rather than ignoring these animals, I aim to work with them: to share our spaces equitably, to cause them as little alarm as possible, and to allow them to engage with me how they please (as long as it is safe).
(pinning, tension, head tossing, etc.). Every time I lifted a saddle towards the horse’s back she would noticeably tense, hollow her back, and pin her ears, shaking her head in a threatening manner and clearly articulating her displeasure. She was used to humans just continuing on despite her protests, or being told to “smarten up” and stand quietly. So, when I stopped advancing, in reference to her clear statements about the approaching saddle, and began talking quietly to her, she noticeably settled down. I would bring the saddle closer to her until she demonstrated signs of distress, and then I would stall where I was, and wait for her to settle, before advancing a bit further again. Once this process had been established, which allowed her to control the speed of the process, set the boundaries of our relationship (as discussed in chapter two), and make comments along the way, then she was much happier to let me continue to try on a number of different saddles. Some of them clearly made her more uncomfortable, so they were discarded, and we chose the one that she felt most favourable towards. The whole process, though slower in the beginning, was completed more efficiently in the end because of her willingness to work with someone who listened to her. Once she recognized this exchange, she was much easier to deal with and to get the job done. This applied also to then getting on her. Based on what her human had told me about her, I did not think that I was likely to be invited to mount in our first session. I was told that she had issues at the mounting block and did not like to stand for a rider to get on. So, again I let her set the pace of our interaction. If she wanted to move, I would let her move, and if she stopped nicely in front of the mounting block, then I would message her withers and make the mounting block a happy place for her to be. Within a few casual circles of the mounting block she was entirely content to stand while I got on, and in fact she nickered soothingly to me through the whole process. I asked her human if this was a normal thing for her to do, but it was new. Nickering is a soothing and intimate sound that is made between horses, often mares and foals. Her choice to vocalize in this way with me seemed to be reinforcing her appreciation for a slow and thoughtful approach, based on listening, rather than commanding.

This is one small example of many I have experienced since beginning to more consciously practice performance-based interactions, grounded in listening and mutual exchange, in reference to my research. These types of examples are not new, and many of the best equestrians practice much of what I have discussed throughout this dissertation, but often people
are not conscious of what they are doing, or how they are doing it. I have aimed here to bring this conversation more clearly to the forefront and to attempt to find useful language to discuss all of the ways meaning may be made between animals, which is predominantly through performance.

All of my research goes back to my horse, Katrina, and what she taught me about listening to animals, and the depths that these exchanges can reach, while on our 2008 ride across Canada. For one hundred and sixty days, Katrina was my sole constant companion, and the foundation of every aspect of my life. I had always been a fairly open minded equestrian, constantly trying to understand why my horses did what they did, and how I could better work with them, but it was my time with Katrina that drastically altered my vision of the relationship. Katrina’s ability to communicate her needs and perspective, and to work with me in the intense conditions that this type of journey dictates, surpassed what I thought was possible.

Some of our communication I understand, and that is what I have broken down here in this work, and some of it may always remain a mystery to me, or may speak to the way that animal communicators claim to work, in which images with associated feelings are passed between individuals. Though I leave the door open to this possibility, and at times play with trying to employ this method, I have never consciously received a message from my animals in this way, but that also does not mean that some sort of exchange may not be occurring subconsciously. The parts I do understand are the ways that Katrina and I performed our perspectives to each other, and the ways that she made her ideas clear to me. The first, and most memorable moment, was early on in our journey while we were walking down a road in Nova Scotia, exhausted at the end of the day. The format of our journey meant that we (Katrina and I) had to look for places to stay each night. On this given day, the family we had stayed with the previous night had arranged accommodation for us 30km or so down the road. I knew that we had a place for the night, but Katrina did not. I was off and walking beside Kat as we trudged down the road, an hour or two left in that day’s journey, but physically and emotionally we were both done for the day. As we passed a farm on the other side of the road, Katrina nudged me with her muzzle. I did not pay much attention to it; I just gave her a pat and continued up the road. Then she nudged me again more forcefully. Again, I only paid it a glancing attention and continued on. Finally, she hit me hard with her nose, and when I looked up at her, she gestured with her head to the other side of the road. I looked up and saw a farm with horses. We had been
walking through rural Nova Scotia all day, but this was the first farm we had seen in a while with horses. It seemed that Katrina wanted to point this fact out to me and draw my attention to a farm that she seemed to find appealing.

I was so shocked by her actions, that I stopped in my tracks and stared at her. Finally, I got the message behind her actions, and acknowledged the farm and what she was saying. Normally, this would have been a good place to stop for the night, if they would have had us, but tonight we had people waiting for us, so we needed to continue on. Once I communicated to Katrina that I had seen the farm, and recognized her communication, she was fine to continue on. I told her, verbally, that we had somewhere to be. Perhaps, she grasped some of that comment in an animal communicator sort of way, or maybe she did not, but once I appreciated her point, and performed my listening (stopping, looking where she had gestured, and patting her in response), she was content to follow my lead once more. Since then, in the almost ten years that Kat and I have spent together, she has used this manoeuvre a number of times. Each time, there seems to be something that she wants me to notice, and she lightly punches me with her muzzle, and then gestures with her head in the direction of her interest. Now, I catch on much more quickly, so she does not have to hit me so hard, but if I fail to respond, then she will make her point with more and more force (which is still quite gentle). However, once I pay attention to her and try to deduce what she is asking or saying, she settles down and continues on. Throughout our decade together our communication (through performance) has become more and more nuanced and complex. The more I practice this way of interacting, the more I discover and the more I want to continue to explore the dynamics of these exchanges, and the more nuanced and subtle our interactions become. Now Katrina only needs to do subtle gestures, such as twitches of tension or relaxation, and small movements to make most of her points, and I have gotten better at recognizing my own comments and being more intentional about my performance, and how I am affecting her (and others around me).

What I have presented here, in this dissertation, is perhaps only an initial recognition of the importance of performance in interspecies interactions to be built on. There is so much more to be learned from Equine-Facilitated Learning, and the on-going explorations of the invisible aspects of human/equine interactions presented by Linda Kohanov, and from trainers/performers
such as Fédéric Pignon and Magali Delgado, who engage in their equestrian activities from a position of co-creation and mutual exchange.

**Putting Play into Practice**

In the winter of 2017, I had the opportunity to design a first-year seminar course around this work, and (re)balancing human/animal dynamics through recognizing and listening to animal stories. The foundation of the course was observation assignments in which the students had to go out and observe an unfamiliar animal in a shared space. This could mean watching a squirrel in the park, or observing a sheep in a field, as long as the student had no previous relationship with that animal, or extensive understanding of the species. The animals had to be in their natural environment/community (so a sheep may be in a field, but not in a stall), and the human must be sharing space with them, in order to have a mutual foundation. The students were not allowed to interact with the animals in any way, and were to observe from a respectful distance, while still sharing space. The focus of the assignment was not a behavioural analysis of the chosen species, but rather on getting to know a specific individual through engaging with the individual’s own unique performance, and to work towards critically understanding these performances through breaking down the elements and exploring how the animal’s expressive actions were making meaning for them. The students then had to report back to the class on their experiences in order to learn from each other and work towards collectively finding language to speak about their observations, and challenge their own preconceived assumptions, through hearing about a range of experiences and interpretations.

The implications of this type of work, understanding how performance makes meaning in interspecies contexts, is especially relevant in the context of this class, where the majority of the students intend to go into animal-centered fields, such as veterinary medicine. These students have a passion for animals, but as they expressed in their reflections, understanding animals in this way was not something that they had previously explored in detail, and yet they want to spend their lives advocating for animals and working with them. How does one speak for animals, if they do not know how to listen to them, and consider their perspectives?

Through tasking my students with three rounds of observation, and sharing their experiences, I found that many in the class noticeably nuanced their understandings of animals
and increased their abilities to recognize animals as individuals (and not only companion species) and to break down how they were coming to these understandings. One student spent two hours traversing the forest with a deer, from a respectful distance, through engaging in the Equine-Facilitated Learning (EFL) practices of letting the animals set the boundaries, and not advancing if any sign of nervousness was recognized (the rocking back, sighing, and waiting outlined in chapter two). Her ability to attune herself to the experience of the deer that she met, and to not be a domineering human, meant that the deer allowed her to share a bit of their experience and stay with them as they wandered the park. This was an experience that this student did not think was possible previously, as she reported to the class. Through respecting the deer’s personal space, and being alert to the subtle communication of her own and the deer’s actions, she felt invited to watch the deer, as the deer watched her. She was allowed a glimpse of a life and experience that had previously been completely foreign to her, and, as she expressed, this began to expand her understanding of what was possible in an interspecies relationship with a wild animal, which also informed her domestic interspecies relationships. In his book on whales and music, David Rothenberg expresses an association between inspirational moments of connection with animals (in his case hearing the songs of whales), and the drive to protect them and the environments that sustain them (Thousand Mile Song 9). This speaks to what is potentially the most profound hope or possibility for this work, the eco-critical underlying intention, that through learning to recognize animal voices and perspectives through performance, humans may come to care more about those with whom we share our communities and planet, and improve our ways of engaging with them and our habitat.

Further exploring how animals make meaning through performance, and the dynamic interspecies interactions that are made possible through focusing on performance-based knowings and exchanges, holds the potential to inform so many aspects of our lives: from enriching our relationships with the animals we love and work with; to learning from other forms of knowledge and ways of being; to appreciating the interspecies community in which we live; and to increasing the reciprocity of our interspecies existence. As we learn to be more considerate of animals and their needs/interests, we also get to notice and explore aspects of the world that we may have overlooked and that have too often been under-considered. As Equine-
Facilitated Learning demonstrates, learning from animals can significantly impact our interactions with other humans, and our understandings of our/the world more broadly.

Recognizing animal perspectives offers so many rich areas for exploration and learning, which are applicable to both artistic and academic pursuits. An important aspect to be cognisant of, though, when approaching animals from this perspective is to constantly consider how the animal is fairing and benefiting from the exchange. When it comes to the more-than-human world, we (humans) have a tendency to take, without a balance of also giving. While I can see ways that this work could be highly valuable to realms of theatre and performance, outside of human/animal studies critical inquiries, I am hesitant to suggest this, as it could easily become (once again) a one-sided exchange. There is so much that can be learned about performing for the stage, and collaborating with others, through working with animals, and playing in a realm dominated by a variety of embodied understandings and little verbal language. However, the implications of engaging animals in the service of humans needs to be constantly considered. I can see these interactions play out in two possible ways: one in which animals are merely used to serve humans in their development, and one in which engaging with animals (even if the participants are not initially conscious of it) increases the consideration of animals. To address these potential pitfalls, I would say that any work that engages animals should include an ongoing discourse about how they are being employed, the power dynamics involved, and the ways that reciprocity may be incorporated—how may the animals also benefit from the interaction/research, both in the moment and in the learning/outcomes of projects, such as increasing the awareness of animal ways and the interconnections between humans and the more-than-human world. The participants do not necessarily need to be aware of the tensions of human/animal dynamics at the introduction to the work, but to keep the work in an area of ethical engagement, which goes beyond basic welfare and speaks to inclusiveness, the facilitators need to be aware of the linages of marginalization and be able to critically understand the contexts in which they are working (both human and animal), and invite others into the more expansive understandings of these interspecies relationships.

To a certain extent these relationships should not be comfortable but should have a quality of being continuously questioned and self-reflexively analyzed. Though I spend a considerable amount of time thinking about how I (and we humans more broadly) engage with
animals and working with animals themselves, it is still an on-going negotiation and exploration to find and maintain a symbiotic balance. At times, I fall into being overly considerate and my animals become more anxious due to a lack of clear leadership or communication, and at other times my human ways get the better of me and I become too demanding, and do not spend enough time listening, preferring them to merely do as I say. The type of relationship and interaction that I have advocated for throughout this dissertation is not easy, and one can go array on either side of equation. It is (perhaps) a life long journey to find, maintain, and reach new levels of symbiosis, with new insights and levels of understanding constantly being discovered.

In my conversation with Monty Roberts at his ranch in California in February 2015, he suggested that equestrians deserve multiple life times, as even though he has spent decades devoted to learning about horses from horses, he feels that he has only scratched the surface and longs for more time to build on his knowledge. In my experience, I am constantly going back to the drawing board and striving for that balance of engagement, which I may never reach, but strongly believe that the striving is important.

There is no road map to this type of performance (or perhaps any other), as the learning comes for doing, exploring, and critically engaging with one’s own experience, and one’s own partner(s). I have tried, throughout, to hint at some ways that these conversations may start, through breaking down the key aspects, and suggesting elements that are often overlooked. Yet, these components will differ with each individual, and their own strengths and abilities, but most will be able to begin a conversation through thinking about body language and resonance, and working to attune themselves to the nuances of each. The best way to learn is through working with someone who is already attentive to these knowledges, and who can point out aspects that may be missed and projections, such as those that occur in EFL workshops, and as I did in Playing in Silence. But even if that is not available, much can be learned from the simple question: Why do I think that? Why do I think my dog is nervous or happy? Why do I think my horse shakes their head when I do such and such? And then engaging in a lot of listening and observation, and a bit of exploration to test out different theories and collect evidence. I suggest that one start with the obvious, such as a dog being excited for a treat, and then work towards the more nuanced and complex moments. Here one can be reasonably certain that this is a positive experience for the dog, which can then be used to create a baseline understanding and applied to
other situations. How many signs are there in my dog’s embodied communication/performance that tell me he wants the treat? And then, at what other times do I see/feel these aspects? Are there any contradictory expressions? My dog, Gus, tends to wag his tail while growling, which suggests that tail wagging is not always the straightforward positive articulation that it is believed to be. He also wags his tail when in pain, or injured, suggesting that tail wagging (for him) is associated with intense experiences (excitement, aggression, pain). From collecting these observations, and their associated energies and resonances, I have been able to complicate my own understanding of tail wagging and apply the knowledge to all tail wagging situations in order to nuance my interpretations.

Understanding the range of communication that is possible between humans and animals can increase our devotion towards them (animals) and allow us to hear them when they speak to us. There are so many ways to begin these conversations; one can simply start with what one knows and what is familiar, and then begin to think critically about performance, and of the many elements involved, working towards a nuanced recognition of all of the aspects of both body language and resonance, through practice, critical engagement, and further studies. Increasing human knowledge and proficiency in this area of performed communication holds the potential to (re)connect humans to the more-than-human world, by recognizing other realms of experience beyond dominant word-based understandings. My hope is that once humans learn how to listen, it becomes difficult not to hear. If humans can be made aware of how to listen and recognize the contributions of those who do not speak in words, how to hear the (often silent) stories of animals, then they are more likely to become animal allies and support animals in claiming a position of voice and agency in their dealings with humans. Recognizing the perspectives of animals, and how they speak through performance, is an important step towards (re)balancing human/animal dynamics, which seems long overdue.
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63 Please note that Théâtre Zingaro redesigned their website in the spring of 2017. All citations previous to March 2017 are citing their older website and may no longer contain the referenced information.


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