

Co-being and intra-action in horse–human relationships: a multi-species ethnography of be(com)ing human and be(com)ing horse

A multi-species perspective identifies and offers ethnographic insight into a variety of everyday, practical experiences and the roles they may play in shaping human–horse relationships. Analysis of narrative data from 60 open-ended interviews with a wide variety of riders in Norway and the Midwestern USA identifies three central themes of co-being. These are expressed, felt and voiced as embodied moments of mutuality, engagements of two agentive individuals and as a kind of anthropo-zoo-genetic practice, where species domesticate each other through being together. Co-being as intra-acting describes how horse and human meet and change as a result of their meeting.

Key words multispecies ethnography, horse–human relationships, companion species, mutual becoming, natureculture

Introduction

When riders talk about their relationships with horses, a shared sense of co-being and becoming between horse and rider emerges in their narratives. For example, Bella, an experienced dressage rider, formulates it this way: ‘I actually feel part of the animal, reacting to his body and my body. It's that connection that you start craving. Once you have it, you need more. It's almost an addiction’ (interview Bella 2011). Another rider states she rides: ‘mainly for the feeling for when you and your horse are in sync and everything that is communicated is fluid and it just, everything works out like, like you're one, you know?’ (interview Rebecca 2011). These quotes are drawn from a study on horse–human relationships with a wide variety of US Midwestern and north Norwegian horse people, who participate in different equestrian sports and ride within a variety of local settings. Expanding on the growing, but still fairly scarce ethnographic literature on ethnographies of horse–human relationships, this relationship may be explored as a co-creation of behaviour (Birke *et al.* 2004) with complex modes of attention and attachment, involving somatic modes of attention (Csordas 1994, 2002), as well as cognition and affect (Despret 2004). Horses are soul mates, but also body mates to many humans, and the relationship is one that affects and defines both parties.

A recently renewed interest in multi-species ethnography has been recognised and reinvigorated as a significant area of theoretical and methodological innovation in sociocultural anthropology (Hamilton and Placas 2011; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). Multi-species ethnographers seek new ways to explore and understand the complex kinds of relationships that humans form with other animals. These ethnographies allow for a

radical rethinking of natural and cultural categories for analysis. Writing extensively about the relationship with human and other animals, Haraway contends that we are companion species, participants in on-going processes of 'becoming with' (2003: 16) each other in naturalcultural practices. The concept 'natureculture' denotes a shift in thinking in Western cultural tradition from viewing nature and culture in opposition to each other to seeing them as mutually interactive. Rethinking naturalcultural categories new analytical concepts are called for, and putting Barad's term 'intra-acting' to use (Barad 2007: 33) focuses attention to explicating how naturalcultural practices matter to human and horse being, co-being and well-being. According to Barad every ontological unit is a phenomenon, becoming through actions and events taking place in contexts where objects are entangled with humans and various other measuring agencies. Thus, the concept 'intra-acting' speaks better for focusing on how parties meet and change as a result from their meeting, as opposed to 'interacting', which refers to parties meeting and leaving each other unchanged. While Barad refers to electrons and quantum physics, the term can be successfully applied to activities that engage humans and other animals, as Haraway (2003: 17) does, to stress that 'partners do not precede their relating'. Companion species are becoming together, and riders, as partners to the horse and vice versa, are relational categories arising from engagements in a range of intra-acting practices that form both riders and their horses. Also Birke *et al.* (2004) use Barad's concept of intra-action in analysing human and animal becoming as material and discursive products that are produced and reproduced in specific contexts.

Previously, we have used these performative perspectives in analysing how horse and human are paired together, defined, distinguished and identified by the environments they work within (Davis *et al.* 2013). Here we pursue this analytical focus in discussing more practices that engage horses and humans; practices or intra-activities that shed light on how horse and human are relational categories becoming through their engagements. The study is based on narrative data collected in over 60 interviews in an open-ended interview format, grounding riders' own reflections of how they relationally portray and enact themselves and horses. Riders participate in a range of equestrian activities: Gaited horse riding, endurance, eventing, dressage riders and hunter-jumpers.¹ Interviewees were recruited at a variety of venues. In addition to competition events and clinics, we have interviewed riders in their homes, at local barns and riding facilities. We have also recruited participants among our common-interest friendship groups. Interviewees were approached by personal contact, by phone or face-to-face. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed.² Both men and women were interviewed, with ages ranging from 20 to 70 years old. The authors

¹Dressage riders perform a series of prescribed movements, including gait transitions in a fenced arena. Highly valued is the appearance of an effort-free rider with a horse willingly performing the requested movements. In eventing, horse and rider perform with stamina and toughness in three disciplines: dressage, show-jumping and cross country, the latter being the segment that defines the sport. The cross-country course consists of solidly built fences looking like natural objects that appear in the countryside, which is also the arena that the tests are performed within. Endurance riding is long-distance trekking over diverse terrains. Enduring distance, terrain and weather is what defines both horse and rider. Gaited riding is a particular sport for Icelandic horses and their riders. In addition to the walk, trot and canter, the Icelandic horse also does tolt and pace. Rhythm, cadence, speed and action are what define the praised horse-and-rider pairs. Hunter-jumpers jump fences in an enclosed arena.

²Anticipating that our data would bubble from the ground up and reflect culture in talk (Quinn 2005), we have all asked the same general questions. They are: (1) Why do you ride? (2) Tell me about your life as a rider. (3) How does this relate to the kind of person you are? (4) How does riding relate to other aspects of your life? and (5) How is your experience the same or different from the experiences of other people? Transcribed interviews are from 5 to 20 pages long, single-spaced. Data were collected from summer 2011 to spring 2012.

of this article are similarly different in age, geography and sport, as our informants. We also keep horses and have done so for a number of years, affording us an insider knowledge and familiarity with the field (Brandt 2004).

Multispecies ethnography is, to an even larger extent than other ethnographies, faced with the problem of representation. No horses were interviewed in our study; it is their humans that speak on their behalf. The common-sense experiential worlds revealed in informants' narratives, however, in what Quinn (2005: 2) calls 'culture in talk', show how dualisms of nature–culture, control–mutuality and object–subject are transgressed and rejected as radical separations in kind. When speaking about observations, experiences and daily practices, riders reveal a variety of practices with horses that offer new insights into naturalcultural becoming as a kind of intra-active practice and process. The local environments that riders belong to are small. In order to not jeopardise anonymity, we have chosen to leave out contextual information about who the interviewees are. Still, valid multispecies ethnographic data come through in the narratives and will be thoroughly referred to in the following text. Riders chose their own fictional names, which are used within these quotes. Dates for interviews are in parentheses.

Demonstrating the intra-activities that engage and entangle horses and humans, three points of relational co-being are highlighted. The first point details what riders say about co-being as being in sync, as intercorporeal moments of mutuality. This includes riders' reflections on deeply felt intercorporeal moments of mutuality or co-being between species, moments where two bodies become in sync with each other (Argent 2012; Evans and Franklin 2010). Second is an examination of co-being as a kind of engagement between two agential individuals. Examples, here, include situations of being with the horse, handling one's own body in engagements, and meeting the horse as subject and individual. Riders elaborate on several situations where horse and human meet as subjects, even as self-aware partners. This is a theme that Birke (2009) says is lacking in human–animal studies. Action and response, depictions of episodes or situations where human and horse appear to entangle as agential individuals, as subjects, rather than subject and object, are central to portrayals of how communication takes place in the formation of horse–human relationships. Finally, a third point addresses issues of co-being as becoming horse and human; how learning and adapting to being with each other is a form of co-shaping and co-domesticating each other.

The performativity focus that grounds our analysis will also summarise our findings – horses and humans are co-beings, becoming in the practices they are engaged in, practices where sensations and emotions, as well as attention, cognition and affect, are crucial ingredients and need to be better understood. Given the rich variety of types of riders and horses in this project, this article contributes to the emerging field of multi-species ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010) by eliciting taken-for-granted notions of both the nature and the sociality of human and horse, as well as exploring, articulating and challenging taken-for-granted categories that inform who we are and how we perform across the nature–culture divide.

Co-being as bodies being in sync

Describing her relationship with a dog named Ms. Cayenne Pepper, Haraway (2003) provides a deeply textured account of the practices involved as she and her dog

participate in canine agility sports. This is a sport where dog and human perform certain exercises and are judged by criteria such as accuracy and speed. It is a sport that requires good communication between the two species. Between human and dog, Haraway offers that love is often part of the equation, but she also states that the love that bonds Haraway and Ms. Pepper is not an innocent, unconditional love, but a ‘naturalcultural practice that has redone us molecule by molecule’ (2003: 228), and these training practices consist of lots of physical and mental work – for both species. The dog is trained, but the practices put high demands on the human, too. Haraway must be physically fit to follow the dog through the exercises, but more important, she must be mentally open and available to the dog, making herself comprehensible by seeing and trusting Cayenne. Training is about figuring out the other; training therefore constitutes practices where the parties engaged become comprehensible to each other.

Our informants do not participate in horse agility, but they do a lot of work in contact zones similar to those referred to by Haraway (2003). These are naturalcultural practices where mental and bodily performances matter in the species communication. Riders seem to think and act in naturalcultural terms. Aurora, who speaks about her practices aimed at becoming comprehensible to the horse, focuses the need to understand this particular horse, both its nature and its socio-cultural experiences: ‘I understood that this horse has had some experiences, which no one knows about. And I have realized that he is a horse you do not shout at, one you behave calmly around, and he has probably experienced that with me as positive’ (interview Aurora 2011).

The mental understanding that Aurora expresses has its body component. Aurora adds and explains that behaving calmly is for instance about not waving with her arms. She talks about herself as having a nature that is somewhat whimsical, something she controls when being around the horse: ‘I think he bonded and thought that “I can trust her.” That is how I felt he saw me as, I did not wave with my arms’ (interview Aurora 2011). Controlling arms are small bodily gestures, but as we will see more in the following, they are important gestures in order to become a good partner to the horse. Emerita, while talking about riding, refers to other naturalcultural practices that engage rider and horse bodies:

Riding is, if I am to sit and ride a horse I want to do it in the right way so that I do not destroy the horse. ... You are to train it so that it can last a whole life with me on his back. ... This is why we are sitting straight, head resting on the body; we are not leaning to the side and doing those silly things, we try to make it easy for the horse to carry us – so that we do not destroy it. (interview Emerita 2011)

In addition to these physical aspects, Emerita says that training involves mental work. The horse needs to be relaxed, to find his balance with the rider before exercises are rehearsed, she says. Training must be performed with attention and care involving body and mind: ‘When I decide to do a thing I first think it, then I start to do something with my body, and then I must let the horse have a chance to get it into his brain. Not rush, be patient, give him a chance to get it, to solve that task’ (interview Emerita 2011).

These explanations about particular horse–human relationships indicate how control of the body is viewed as essential to intelligible communication between horse

and human. Riding is a practice where horse and human bodies communicate through a set of cues and signs. Emerita describes some of it – sitting straight, head resting on the body, being balanced and Aurora refers to behaving calmly, exemplified by controlling arm movements. Brandt (2004) analyses this communication as learning a ‘third language’ and says that horse and human are co-creating this language. Horses are partners that ‘communicate their subjectivity to their human partners’ throughout the process of establishing the language (2004: 307). The concept ‘partner’ begs further comment, since many would object that, first, it is the human who has decided that the language shall be spoken in the first place and, second, the one who decides what signals and signs to speak with. The signals are based on ethological ideas about what is natural to the horse, but they need to be learned; they are new material-semiotic practices (Birke *et al.* 2004). And they do not work unless the horse is cooperating. Brandt’s concept of partner explains the need for bodily responses between the two species. Neither one can have a communication without the other responding. Body weight and position on horse, and slight pressures from reins and legs are basic tools to signal a rider’s wish. Iterative training is needed for the human to learn how to signal correctly to the horse and when both horse and human are well trained they attend to the feel of each other and respond appropriately. Evans and Franklin (2010: 180) ascribe the feeling of being in sync to practices of embodied rhythmic work; horse and rider practices are rhythmic harmonisations ‘which takes them beyond their individual selves’.

Riding, then, is about bodily sensations and what Csordas (2002: 7–8) calls ‘somatic modes of attention’, defined as ‘culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others’. Csordas refers to bodies as lived practices, as actors in the world; bodies have histories and are as much cultural phenomena as they are biological (Csordas 1994: 4). These perspectives are relevant for analysing engagements that affect both horse and human bodies. Riding is a situation where bodies are closely involved, and horses have sensitive bodies. As Hearne points out: ‘Every muscle twitch of the rider will be like a loud symphony to the horse’ (1986: 108). Humans learn to play softer symphonies as they develop skills. They are balancing according to a feel of the other, the horse, attuning their bodies to sensations of the horse bodies. Action and response between the species bring about riding as a collaborative practice, where bodies become in sync. And sync is a product of intra-action in that both are changed through a process of training from the meeting between the two – literally flesh to flesh. Argent (2012) holds that horses play an important role here. They are social creatures with characteristics similar to humans in that they form cooperative alliances. Furthermore, she discusses that it is not only humans that value synchronised corporeal behaviour, but that horses, too, take pleasure from these intra-activities.

As such, horse–human communication crosses the species divide through somatic attunements and attentions that are partly about uncovering and discovering what bodies do, and partly about taking control of them, creating and making sense of body kinetics. The complexities in these practices are not clear to the human at first meeting with the horse. Learning to communicate takes time. It starts with learning about the basic cues about riding. Pressure from legs while sitting on the horse means move forward, or to the side, dependently. Occupied with learning the basics, humans also learn about other bodily practices that matter to horses, for instance how horses also read humans on the ground. Communication takes place in all horse–human-related

activities, not only in riding. Humans become more sensitive, gain a more advanced body awareness of their non-verbal communication as their relationships with horses unfold. This is also something riders elaborate on, like Urdur, who says it is a skill you need to exercise: ‘it is a real demand on a sort of self-upbringing to succeed’ (interview Urdur 2011).

During their lifetimes, then, most horses get better humans. Learning to communicate is a highly esteemed quality among the riders in our study. And, when skilled, the character of mutually embedded practices can be experienced as real sensations, as expressed by the riders quoted in the introduction. Moreover, Morgan describes what she calls an ‘a-ha’ moment in her riding: ‘suddenly like, I wasn’t there, she wasn’t there; it was like we were working independently but we were just doing things as a unit’ (interview Morgan 2011). With Morgan expressing a deeply felt sensation of mutuality as a sudden moment, another aspect of the horse–human communication can be noted. 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. 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. It holds both mutual and partial connections. Similarly, when Urdur states that her reasons for riding are ‘the feelings of becoming one with the large animal in nature’ (interview Urdur 2011), there is both mutuality and partiality in her sensations. Asked to elaborate on what ‘becoming one’ means, Urdur on the one hand reflects as a real centaur, both on the physical and the mental part of riding. She says she ‘feels every movement in the horse’, including sensing if the horse is scared, or feeling good. On the other, when she is assuring the horse that the moose and the birds are not scary, and are not there to eat horses, it is Urdur the human individual who is acting with a horse that sees the environment differently to herself.

Co-being as bodies being subjects

Riders in this study see horses as subjects with minds and agency of their own (Irvine 2004; Bekoff 2002; Hearne 1986). They act upon both generic ideas about horses as being species with certain instincts, as for instance a flight reaction to potential danger, as well as horses with subject qualities (Birke 2008). As shown in the quotes from the interviews so far, riders deal with horses as he or she, rarely as it. Referring to horses by this third personal pronoun, informants elaborate on individual character, like Agnes does when she tells that all horses are different; you must deal with them on an individual basis.

You have to know their behaviour, or their personality or how can I say it, or how they are, before you. To some you can say ‘behave’ if they do not, and to others you cannot be other than calm. One of the horses can be very agitated and one cannot say to her: ‘Hey, behave!’ She just gets worse. (interview Agnes 2011)

Agnes continues explaining that she has another horse that is the same, and yet another horse that she ‘can talk to’. Concerning horses’ different individualities, Chisum elaborates: ‘They all have different speeds, and physical and mental

development, just like people. You have to take this into account when you train them, cannot rush, must see every horse for what it is' (interview Chisum 2011). Seeing and understanding this other – the horse – riders adapt and use their body language and mental attitude individually. We have already pointed to the use of body in engaging with horses, but here we want to draw attention to the individualities that engage with each other. Morgan explains by referring to a careful attendance to her body language in individually adapted face-to-face intra-actions:

I've also learned that if a horse has a personality, then you learn to work with that personality. You don't try to change the horse to work with your personality, because it's crazy. So I use the same when I deal with humans. You know, if someone has an angry personality you don't do things to develop the angry personality, you relate to them in ways that are going to be calm. You do that with horses, if you have a nervous horse, you don't want to go in there all shaky and jittery and hyper, you want to go into their area kind of droopy and laid back (interview Morgan 2011)

Riders are reading the particular horse for character, and dealing with it on its own terms. This relational engagement affects behaviour in ways that change over time, as one gets to know the individual. One learns about one's own actions; that is one's communicative skills and statements, as they become reflected in the other. Ola's experiences with horses were first of the generic kind: 'In the beginning it was just the riding, sputter through the forest on a horse, that was fun' (interview Ola 2012). Ola speaks of the horse as subject and of himself as being in an intersubjective relationship with the horse. Thus, Ola and the horse are subjects sharing experiences, reading the other and shaping actions by the result of the reading: 'It is to have the horse, try to understand the horse, try to have the horse do what I think he should do, and when that does not happen, well why does it not, and can try something different' (interview Ola 2012).

Ola is dealing with an individual, and is figuring the other out, and how to act with this particular individual. Such sensations of the other also include perceiving if the horse is having fun. Fefe is enjoying getting out in nature with the horse, particularly that there are four strong legs that carry him there. He also thinks the horse enjoys these trails: 'Yes, we both enjoy it, we enjoy being out, we enjoy being in the forest, we enjoy being one with nature, and see and observe and listen, and we do that together' (interview Fefe 2012). In speaking of horses' minds, riders may acknowledge, like Kane, that their intersubjective shared worlds are also partial. They have a sense of the horse as subject, but one they do not fully understand, and can acknowledge that reading the other can be guesswork. Kane picks the tour depending on what he thinks the horse will enjoy.

The horse is a big part of it, clearly. I choose the route, not for me but after the horse, what I think the horse will find fun, a bit banal put, but let the horse in on the adventure. ... I believe that he wants to run, the horse likes to run, so I think it is also an adventure for the horse, when we are on tours. It may be an excuse for me, but I really believe that. There is a kind of accordance here, I mean I can feel when the horse, not that he thrives, I think that is a wrong word, I know my natural science, right, and I know there are certain laws, but I am pretty occupied with this what do the horse really feel. (interview Kane 2011)

Perceiving of the other as an individual is instrumental in building these relationships. Irvine (2004: 119–20) compares human acting with their dogs and cats to those of human-to-human relations. She holds that good relationships, whether with people or with animals, arise as results from processes of interactional challenges and rewards. People may have good conversations with each other and find the relationship worth investing in and maintaining. Building relationships, be it with other humans or animals, is an ability we find rewarding, meaning something for the experience of selfhood. But Irvine also holds that there is much about good relationships that are pre-linguistic and pre-cognitive. Language is not a necessity for subjectivity, says Irvine, pointing to the times we feel that we ‘click’ with other people. Thus far we have commented on touch forms of kinetic communication between horse and rider, but there is also something more. Riders in our study also talk about ‘clicks’ with horses. They say that they connect with a particular horse, without being able to describe it verbally. There are other sorts of communication, intuited but beyond language. Like Katla, who finds that there are some horses she connects with, and others she does not:

I often meet horses that I have nothing in common with. ... It is like when you meet people, they are pretty insignificant. There is no, it is not a human that you want to sit down and talk with. You can very well sit and small-talk, I can very well ride a horse, but it gives me nothing. And then you meet those individuals, exactly like with people, the tone is just there, I have some horses like that at home, ... I have some horses who are just me and it, in a way. ... It is almost as when you have a good friend, it is not so much about whether you go to the movies, or in the theatre, or take a walk in the forest or ride, it is not so much about what we do together, but that we have a good dialogue, a good relation together. (interview Katla 2011)

And likewise, Katie says that bonds change with every horse. They are all different: ‘It’s sort of like relationships with people. It’s different from person to person. When I was younger, I loved any horse. As I got older, I got maybe wiser. Some horses are just easier to deal with and to love than other horses’ (interview Katie 2011). However, humans do engage with horses they do not click with. Black Bear speaks of the horse as misbehaving with her, not with her daughter. Hot Shoe Sue agrees.

Some are never going to interact well. Some people and horses are never going to be a match. I guess it’s the personality of the horse and the personality of the person. That you don’t know where that comes from or where it’s going, but it’s there with a horse and rider that have been there for a while. (interview Hot Shoe Sue 2011)

A full list of situations that exemplify intersubjectivities in horse-human relationships will be very long. As Hearne (1986) pointed out, there is an odd discrepancy between how behaviourists speak of horses in generic terms, as instinct-driven animals, while trainers always speak to he and she and personality and character. Hearne’s point is that trainers know the animals from engaging with them. And it is on the basis of engagement that our informants speak. They talk from experiences that rise in face-to-face engagements, and, literally, also butt-to-back engagements, as the riders are

not only *with* their horses, but also *on* them, riding. And such engagements can affect the parties cognitively, in ways Despret (2004: 131) holds as new articulations of 'withness', situations where species domesticate each other, and create new articulations of both speaking and being. She speaks of these engagements as anthropo-zoo-genetic practices, and engaging in anthropo-zoo-genetic practices, 'human-with-animal', and 'animal-with-human', respectively, are better categories to describe how beings alter or transform as a result of relating to each other. The hyphenated 'human-with' and 'animal-with' are distinguishing categories that open for seeing the 'surprising and nuanced ways' that animals might influence us, as Hayward (2010: 584) suggests.

Co-being as species boundaries

The previous sections have referred to situations where humans see horses' different personalities and act with respect for or harmonious accommodation to these differences. These notions bring up an additional theme, situations where riders fear that the horse will resist or take too much control. Rider Ernst Bernt can feel tempted, he says, to let the horse canter when he feels she wants to, but he worries that in letting the horse have it her way, she might be picking up the canter in other situations, when it might be dangerous for her to do so, and he might lose control. Other riders speak to the same issue and these perspectives on the human-horse relationship show that there are limits to the centaur themes. The hyphenated 'co-' in 'co-being' connects but also separates. In the preceding sections we have touched upon this issue by referring to how moments of co-being may be fleeting and tenuous, experienced as mutual connections, albeit partial, as between individuals. We have also pointed out that two agents do not always work together or for common purpose. There are limits to domestications; horses do not always do what riders want them to. We will pursue this theme further here and address situations where species boundaries matter.

Isis, like Ernst Bernt, is also preoccupied with issues of control. She tells of a situation where she was out riding for the first time with a horse when the horse had decided that she would not cross a small creek, no way:

I stood half an hour, I tried to lure and dupe, I tried to threaten, I tried everything. I thought I cannot surrender. She must lose this fight, whatever time it takes. [...] And at the end it was just, well, I can go, and it was like all my fight was worthless, she thought well, ok, we can go then. And then I thought, you are quite something, and we continued riding as if nothing had happened. She splashed into the next creek and had marshland on her feet, so the problem was not that she was afraid of water. She was just trying me on. (interview Isis 2011)

Niki, on the other hand, lets the horse choose the way. Niki thinks she is better at it.

If we are walking along a stream bed, it is pretty shallow and rocky, usually I'll get off her and lead her and she'll kind of go where she thinks is the best path and I don't try to push her in a direction she doesn't want to go. I trust her judgment for her footing better than mine. (interview Niki 2011)

In these examples, horse and human are figuring the other out. Humans see their horses as subjects, but they also act out of generic ideas about the horse (Birke 2008). These often include ideas about the necessity for humans to be in control versus horses, ideas that imply certain acts and behaviour on the human part. There are, for instance, as also our riders express, ideas that relate the human need for absolute control to the fact that the horse is a species with the size and strength to kill you, should it decide to do so.

These ideas about horse natureculture can be seen as theories and practices that function to draw species boundaries. Practices vary among our informants as to where these boundaries are drawn. Practices also vary along dimensions as the individuality of horses and humans. From Barbara for instance, we learn that leadership issues are linked, both to human personalities and horse individualities. Some horses need a certain type of leader, and people are different leader types:

I've always been the natural leader, which helps with my horse that just teaches me to be a better leader. The horse plays with my skills but it goes back and forth. Yet, I'm not very good at being a dictator which is the personality that some horses need. I'm not as good with that sort of thing – saying this is where your left foot goes; this is where your right foot goes. I like them to figure it out. ... My mother is the soft-hearted one that will care for them forever. So we know the ones that need sanctuary type care can go to her. (interview Barbara 2011)

Humans are leaders, says Barbara implicitly; she is a natural one, but some horses may need a stronger lead than she is willing to offer. In her natural leadership play is involved, on the horse's part as well as hers. There is a dialogue: 'it goes back and forth', she says.

Being a personality is, however, not quite sufficient for handling horses. Sometimes one must work at it, says Urdur: 'If you are a person a bit indecisive, a bit soft in decisions, one will have these things reflected in the horse, so one has to sharpen up, to become more aware of body language' (interview Urdur 2011). And humans do that. They do control their own behaviour. Isis, who stood for half an hour to have her will with the horse, is controlling herself and disciplining the horse, yet she is also disciplining herself. She draws on patience. And she signals to the horse that she is in charge. The horse must obey. In this there is also trust. The leadership issue that informants refer to is also a reasoning around trust, as expressed by Agnes, who states that one must behave confidently towards the horse: 'You are the leader, you have to take responsibility. You [said to the horse] can relax, I can fix this' (interview Agnes 2011).

So, there are intra-actions that keep species boundaries between subjects. Humans are supposed to be in control, disciplining the horse, but also disciplining the self. As has been discussed, body language is essential, and humans must convey that they are on top of any dangerous situation through bodily signals. Brandt (2006) states this as exceptional in horse–human relationships – the human ability to shift subjectivity in communication with horses. Humans can let go of a feeling of stress and replace it with a feeling of mastering; they control bodies in times of stress. Hearne (1986) also stresses that this is a human responsibility. Different animals speak different languages, and they need to be understood on their own terms, says Hearne; this is the human responsibility, to understand the other species. But animals also have obligations. Rules for

behaviour exist between all species, whether human to other animals, or human to human, or even animal to animal. Obedience is an intrinsic part of the relationships that humans and other animals engage in (Patton 2003).

Co-being as becoming human and horse

Multispecies perspectives have reinvigorated the ethnographic investigation. Engaging with biotic materiality and process apprehended through everyday experiences, especially in the arenas of science and technology, a variety of biotic material has been studied. For examples, see the special issue of *Cultural Anthropology* (2010) in which Kirksey and Helmreich's introductory article references studies focusing on species of animals, plants, fungi, microbes, i.e. a range of species that humans are living with (Haraway 2003) but that have previously not been part of most ethnographic analyses. Horses, however, are well known for their participation in human lives. Moreover, cultural assumptions about why humans relate to horses are also widely held. It is love that binds the pairs. The card of love has been overplayed in the literature, says Savvides (2011), shading the fact that there is much more to the horse–human relationship than love. A multispecies ethnographic perspective focusing on those who have long-term daily and intimate or first-hand relations with this chosen species reveals the finer nuances that build the relationships (Hayward 2010). Putting the concept intra-acting to use and looking for effects of entanglements that matter (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), this study has pointed out how the relationships between human and horses are co-constructions of both parties. Parties intra-act, and as relations grow, horse and human, respectively, are changing, adapting and attuning to each other in order to communicate well and engage in their activities in meaningful ways. Horse–human practices are intra-actions with effects.

There are effects on bodies. Riders' bodies perform differently in society than non-riders' bodies do. Communicating with horses, body kinetics change to create bodies that are mindfully controlled in their talking. In addition to the obvious physical aspects, like growing new muscles in legs and butts and other parts of the body, riders learn to understand first that they have talking bodies, and later how to talk to horses through them. Through somatic attunements (Csordas 2002), communication develops in ways where action and response lead to understanding the other in more nuanced ways.

Horses are also affected in the engagements. Obviously, training is about growing physical muscles in horses. Many riders speak to the necessity of actually changing horses' physical bodies by strengthening their behinds, their back muscles, so that they can carry people. But horses in the relationships with humans are more than animals carrying people. They are parts of pairs and their mental well-being is something that humans care for. In situations of 'being with', where human behaviour is confident, the shy horse changes into a more confident being.

This points out how communication is about more than body kinetics. It is about sensations and emotions and affect. It goes beyond verbal language. Bodies are materially engaged in somatic attunements that are not always sensed consciously, at least not easily expressed verbally. These nuanced ways that characterise the relationships between horse and human are important and sensed by riders, and even though it is difficult to use words to express pre-linguistic sensations, Katla's eloquent reflections about being with horses express some of this fairly well:

Just that being together with the horses, it gives a kind of, I do not know what to say, it is like when one was small, it was so good inside oneself if one had the teddy bear in the arm. I just have a very good feeling when I am together with the horses. So going to the stable in the evening, feeding, mucking – they are so calm, the horses, they are so harmonious, they stand there chewing, they have no stress, they are just themselves. I think being together. (interview Katla 2011)

Katla is gaining a deeply felt satisfaction from being with her horses. She is also offering something to them. By 'being with', Katla offers trust to her horses. Concerning a particular shy horse, she sees the effect. Being in the stable slowly but surely changes the horse into becoming more confident. Both Katla and the horse are in a setting where new articulations of beings are created (Despret 2004). Human and horse attune to each other, add new definitions to what being is.

That riders change, that humans-with-horses are different from humans-without, is clearly expressed by many riders when they speak of how they use their new skills in engaging with other humans. Niki has grown a better understanding of 'being able to understand people even if it's not verbal' (interview Niki 2011). And Barbara states that horse experience translates into the kind of person she is in several ways. She has to be centred inside, confident, assertive, fair and 'all that translates into human relationships' (interview Barbara 2011). She has become 'more open to feeling, emotions, relationships now'. It is a real transition that riders learn more about being human, through being with horses, and Ajay sums it up: 'because you see things through a horse's eyes I think it just changes your view on the whole world' (interview Ajay 2011).

This notion of trust springs from the narratives as an intrinsic part of the relationship and seems to be a prerequisite for intra-acting well (Wipper 2000). Between horse and human, mutuality and trust are constituent elements, but moreover, trust must be established again and again, and constantly be cared for. Every new relationship between horse and human is a new meeting between species, where trust and rules of conduct must be established.

Looking at domestication and trust this way can explicate why humans deal with horses as individuals, while also talking of them generically as a different species. This is a thing that puzzles Birke (2008), who sees a contrast in people speaking in emotional tones about their relationships with individual horses, giving them nearly human characteristics, but also speaking about them in generic terms as having a specific nature. Our respondents do so too, and we like to suggest that this is a result of the domesticating practices that the two species are involved in, practices where affect and trust arise in the face-to-face interactions, as Despret (2004) also discusses. Individuality matters. Horses are a different species, with species characteristics. Getting to know one, through intra-activities, individual characteristics come forth, and so too do evaluations of individualities. Humans-with-horses compare engagements with their horses to engagements with humans, but this does not mean that horses are seen as human. This is not the point. They are seen as individuals, subjects that matter and are dealt with relationally as beings with identities.

Co-being in engagements, both horse and human learn new definitions of being and it should be stressed that, although their communication is built upon cues that the species understand, it is also about establishing something all new. It is a genuine naturalcultural exchange, a domesticating practice where horses' natureculture meets

with humans' natureculture, and the negotiated outcome, the new naturalcultural practices, work within frames of mutuality and trust. Horses control their natureculture. They speak differently through their bodies with humans than with other horses. Horses learn, for instance, that they should not bite the human. Horses use bites, or the threat of biting, when engaging with each other. They are, however, trained not to do that when intra-acting with humans. Getting in contact with humans, they learn to intra-act with other species, and they can put their new skills to use. Horses can have humans trust them, and follow their lead. As we have seen, they may suggest picking up a canter or choose the routes on tour. Humans too are learning from meeting with horses about their responsibilities versus this other species. They should not wave too much with their arms but be in a naturalculturally fixed control of body when talking to a horse. The more skilled the species are at being horse-with-human and human-with-horse, the better chance there is for understanding. Along with Despret (2004), we can say that the species intra-acting create 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. There are generic aspects that matter; intra-acting with a horse is different from intra-acting with a dog. But the with-ness with a particular horse leads to a co-creation of new beings, new articulations of being human as well as horse.

In summary, multispecies ethnography studies throw light on fine and important nuances in interspecies relating. If not disentangling all entanglements, this study has at least sorted out some of the strings. Riders have explored and spoken of their own experiential and practical worlds, and valid multispecies ethnographic data have come through in all narratives and found relatively easy expression there. Moreover, riders may vary as to how much they bond with their horses, what kind of sport they identify with, and how much of a leader they see themselves as versus horses, but concerning elements such as learning and practising a naturalcultural language where body and mind are intra-acting with effects, the elements that riders speak of seem to cut cross sports and geography; they seem intrinsic to being with horses.

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Anita Maurstad
 Department of Cultural Sciences, Tromsø Museum
 University of Tromsø
 Tromsø, N-9037
 Norway
 Anita.Maurstad@uit.no

Dona Davis and Sarah Cowles
 Department of Anthropology and Sociology
 University of South Dakota
 Vermillion, SD 57069
 USA
 ddavis@usd.edu; Sarah.Cowles@usd.edu

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