

# **Humanizing Animals: Talking About Police, Prisoners, and Horses**

by

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## Abstract

Despite the horse's central role in the conquest of America and its ongoing importance as a symbol of freedom and independence in the national imagination, innumerable horses—no longer of use—are sold at kill lots every year. However, in recent decades rescues have repurposed these horses for work in law enforcement and in equine therapy programs. Equine therapy programs have been gaining support in America; at the same time, the disproportionate arrests and incarceration of black men has continued to rise. Equine prison programs produces an evocative situation: two disregarded populations—ex-race horses no longer able to race or mustangs with nowhere to go, and convicts exiled from society—are brought together to “rehabilitate” each other.

The trope of the wild and dangerous black man is ever present, as current events—such as Ferguson, and Black Lives Matter—remind us. Thus this pairing the broken (ex-race horse) or untamed (mustang) non-human animal with that of the transgressive human (prisoner) that is undeniably political. Over the last several years, as tensions between law enforcement and communities of color rose, there has been a call for a re-evaluation of policing strategies. There has been a call for community policing. Horses may be part of bridging the gap between police and civilians.

This essay seeks to unpack the complicated implications of equine prison programs and the role of horses in mounted police units. By focusing on the New-ark Mounted Police Unit and the Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility, this dissertation illuminates the ideological underpinnings of attitudes about humans and other animals in the racialized and classed culture in which we live. Finally, this dissertation assesses the impact of these programs and contexts on horses themselves, offering new ways to think about and relate to horses.

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## **Prelude. On Pain**

Several summers ago, I got kicked in the face by a horse. Coming to—amid the stutter of voices, rising dust and sunlight—I didn't know what had happened. Years later, those last seconds still elude me. A memory safely tucked away. A memory I tried tracking: bruising hip to chin mapped the hoof's travel. One broken rib. Dark nicks, the small nails, cut a curved line across my cheek and mouth—a horse shoe stamp.

Luck and nothing else brought clean test results. Results my mother seriously questioned when I expressed my desire to get back to the ranch the following day. But could she really be surprised? Dedication (or stubbornness depending on perspective) has long been one of my characteristics. As a young girl—and if I am honest, even now—the sure fire way to get me to do something is to tell me I can't. Or even that I shouldn't will do the trick. As a point guard in high school, I played through basketball games with an incessantly dislocating right shoulder, ignoring the impact I was warned it might have on me later in life. As the shortest rower on my university's crew team, I accepted that pain was part of every sunrise on the lake. I have been horseback riding since I was a child. In my mid-twenties, an apprenticing horse trainer, ignoring—or mastering—pain remained a central part of my life.

Horse people have a saying. *It's not if you'll get hurt. It's when, and how bad.* Of course being careful helps, but the saying rings true. Strangely enough it wasn't during the time I spent gentling mustangs at a rescue or re-habilitating ex-race horses that I began collecting injuries. It was later on, when a piece of fly

sheeting flew off the top of a barn, startling the nervous horse I was grooming, sending him skittering sideways, knocking me over, further frightening him into a kick that sent me flying. It was later on, when a sweet thoroughbred stumbled and took off bucking as my thighs gripped the saddle tighter, pressing on his ribs which I would later learn were out of place, tossing me cartoon style—catapulted over the edge of the grand canyon—landing on my shoulder and head.

Wile E. Coyote style, I sat up in the dirt. *If you ride, you better be ready to fall. If you want to keep riding, you better get right back on.* I tried shoving my shoulder back in a few times—something I had been doing for years—before seeing clearly that the humerus was too twisted for me to angle it back into the socket. This was the first of two times that I would be tied down to a table as my shoulder was put back in place. Gritted teeth and grunts, there was pride in the lack of tears, in the good humor I showed during these moments—a grimace, or a sly hoof-printed smile in the back of an ambulance.

It took me almost a decade after the first shoulder dislocation to use the word pain. Through my teens and mid-twenties, from basketball in high school to rowing in college, when asked how painful something was on a scale of 1 to 10, I refused a straight response. *It's not painful, it's uncomfortable.*

In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975), Bakhtin explains that there is no separation between form and content in discourse. He writes that language is not “a system of abstract grammatical categories”; language is “ideologically saturated,”; language is a world view, “is a concrete opinion” (271). Language does not

have a truth—no pure meaning. Context creates meaning. Meaning is always in process.

My twenties were spent developing a cowgirl's mettle. Stepping back to study this equestrian discourse, it's clear that there was no place for the word pain on the table I was strapped to as the medics shoved my arm back into the socket. *How painful is it on a scale of 1 to 10?*

A shoulder, a rib. It could be uncomfortable. Discomfort was an acceptable confession. But to admit pain was something else. To admit pain would be to name it, to give it power. To admit a lack of mastery, the mastery that re-names pain as discomfort.

Discourse is dynamic—and so has been my sense of self in this last decade. Words cannot be unhinged from context; words cannot be neutral. After my second shoulder surgery, my language shifted my subjectivity. Bakhtin argues: language is “taken over, shot through with intentions and accents (293)”. Somewhere after anesthesia new language formed.

As I worked through the physical therapy following my second shoulder surgery that came soon after my cartoon catapult, as I continued to teach the freshman composition course that was part of my graduate studies in English in my gunslinger styled sling, I began to use the word pain for the new sensations that ran from the base of my skull to my shoulder's edges and fell like electric bolts into my elbows. This is maturation right? To speak of pain. To get the help my body called for. A daughter who learned to play hockey alongside her brother at age five, who learned to get back in the saddle immediately following a fall, I



am unsure. I would be lying if I claimed I didn't feel I lost something when I added this word to my vocabulary.

A few years later, this word is both subject and background. My field work puts me in downtown Newark, observing the mounted police; it puts me in prison pastures at the Wallkill Correctional Facility, observing prisoners rehabilitate ex-race horses. Entering these contemporary sites of men with horses, my research stretches back to the figure of the cowboy, of masculinity in America—where pain is silent, yet ever present.

In *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at the Wild and the Tame* (1984), Veterinarian and anthropologist Elizabeth Atwood-Lawrence describes the demanding nature of rodeo, the risks of injury and death that entice men who must be strong, but also must be “anxious to prove their physical prowess.” The prime requisite is stoicism. Complaining is uncommon. She writes, “It is not an infrequent occurrence for [a cowboy] to break an ankle in the chute and go on to finish his ride. Many compete with broken limbs in casts or their entire chest taped because of fractured ribs... When a contestant is hurt, he tries to walk out of the arena by himself, and usually waves away any offered assistance” (87-88).

This bygone figure quickly becomes relevant in a turn to popular culture. Robert Redford brought the gentle cowboy into living rooms across America in the film *The Horse Whisperer* (1998). Today, cowboys and horse trainers still “go down the road,” nomadic as rodeo contestants, giving equestrian clinics in small and big towns alike—one such cowboy, a horse trainer named Buck Brannaman

(star of the documentary *Buck*, 2010) is credited as an essential contributor to Redford's horse whispering performance.

The power of these discourses, these stereotypes and clichés, are not limited to equestrian audiences. You can't watch a football or baseball game without seeing commercials fueled by stereotypes of masculinity. See the commercial of the denim clad man, whose truck gets stuck in the mud: he opens the back of the trailer, leads out two enormous draft horses to pull his truck out of trouble, we see him wend his way home as the sun goes down, a home with lights in the windows, his woman surely waits inside—*Viagra*.<sup>1</sup>

Zoom out. The ethos of the cowboy—of stoicism in the face of pain or injury—is alive and well in contemporary America. Despite the current concussion controversy in the NFL, playing through pain remains a struggle to be admired.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps what is as troublesome as articulately theorizing the construction of masculinities at play in these cultural texts is the undeniable resonance of these performances with my own identity. And this is why I return to the fields in the summer months, seeking the moment when mastery of pain brings me into being—mouth tasting of dirt, or metallic and sweet with blood, where there isn't room for the word *pain*?

The strength of this four letter word, silenced or spoken, structures part of my social practice. As it does with so many. In *Social Linguistics and Literacies*:

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<sup>1</sup> This 2011 commercial for Viagra can be seen on Youtube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4I4xBCq\\_cpw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4I4xBCq_cpw).

<sup>2</sup> See Schwarz, Alan et al. "N.F.L.'s Flawed Concussion Research and Ties to Tobacco Industry."

*Ideology in Discourse* (1996), Sociolinguist, James Paul Gee explains, “Discourse communities” (Big “D” discourse) constitute society, they create and reproduce structures of power and social relations—“Discourses” are constructed in practice, through dress and habit, through ideology and language.

Thus to transgress this vernacular, is to transition from one identity to another. To speak the sensation of pain transforms me: horse trainer becomes academic. These days, as I sit down to write—bereft of a more substantial physical task to quiet my spine—pain sits under my tongue, splitting my sense of self as I strive to set down the words.

While I struggle still, feeling the loss this word engenders, perhaps there is opportunity in this unsettling. Strange as it seems, sitting down to write, this quietness that pronounces pain is also that which brings me into my body more than ever before—more than basketball, a broken rib, a horse saddled with the promise of a challenge. What is possible in such a process? Where the task is not physical, where the task is a stillness, where the task is a painfulness that may bring the body and the mind into synthesis—a being anew.

## Chapter 1. Introduction: Talking about Horses

### Opening

Late winter, outside Seattle, low lying lands succumb to rain. Grassy fields drown in mud, as pasture animals make squelching sounds, treading across the watery expanse. Standing too long in water can ruin a horse's hooves. Several of the mustangs from the horse sanctuary (home to some 70 horses) were living in flooded fields. The trailer stood open on the road, hitched to the owner's enormous truck. It was morning, but with the heavy cloud cover, it felt like afternoon. These mustangs, rescued from slaughter in Canada, had been gentled once—but left alone a spring and summer, they shied from our hands as we tried to halter them. Finally, Pontouf allowed herself to be haltered and led to the gravel road. A Nakota mustang, she was painted in browns and whites, colors weaving through her thick mane and tail. I stepped up into the trailer, dark inside. I gave a gentle tug. Pontouf didn't budge. The sanctuary owner moved onto the road, putting pressure on her hind end to move her forward. Pontouf put one hoof on the ramp, lifted the other leg slowly, then stepped back again. This took time. She stepped forward, testing the ramp, the inside of the trailer, then scrambled backward. She had been inside a trailer once, huddled against other young mustangs being rescued from slaughter. The small, dark, confined space was antithetical to her species's instincts to be in the open, where they could see predators coming.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As Stephen Budiansky reflects, "We ask horses to do many things that build upon their instincts—especially their well-developed social instincts, their acute sensitivity to social hierarchy and to subtle cues of dominance and submission. But we also expect them to do many things that are not instinctive at all, or actually counter to their instincts—to walk

Pontouf was a byproduct. The urine of pregnant mare's is required to manufacture the hormone drug, Premarin. The baby horses are a side effect waiting for slaughter, unless rescued by sanctuaries like this one.<sup>2</sup> Pontouf strained backward against the lead rope, and I went with her. We went back and forth: one step in, one step out. Finally, she stepped all four hooves inside. Then something happened: a break in the sky, a reflection of light at the back of the trailer, a sound from the shifting weight, something my human senses could not see, hear, or feel? She spooked. She jumped and pinned me to the side of the trailer with her torso. My arm got caught, twisted at her shoulder. She knocked the wind out of me. Panicked, she stood stock-still. The other person with me spoke softly to her, walking slowly around and up into the trailer, slowly coming to her head, gently asking her to move off me, to back up. She did. I regained my breath. And then we asked again. After she'd loaded quietly and stood just a moment inside, I scratched her praisingly behind the ear before we trailered her to higher ground, where she galloped frenzied to the herd.

I walked away only bruised—bruised badly, but not broken. Pontouf galloped away. But what was bruised in her? Horses must be able to be trailered in

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into a dark horse trailer or, for that matter, to carry 175 pounds of weight on their backs. The latter they do through learning; and of course an ability to learn *is* part of their nature, too" (2).

<sup>2</sup> See "Premarin: A Prescription for Cruelty" (<http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-experimentation/animals-used-experimentation-factsheets/premarin-prescription-cruelty/>), and The North American Equine Ranching Information Council's history of Premarin (<http://www.naeric.org/about.asp?strNav=11>).

case of flooding, fires, and other unpredictable hazards. Is this an act of love?<sup>3</sup> I have certainly loved the horses I have cared for, been bruised and broken for. Pontouf, with her painted mane, always made me think of the final lines of James Wright's poem *A Blessing* (1990), "She is black and white,/Her mane falls wild on her forehead,/And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear/That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist./Suddenly I realize/That if I stepped out of my body I would break/Into blossom." Of course, as a hardly gentled mustang, Pontouf wanted nothing of my hands on her ears. There is romance in my love of horses. Anthropomorphism. And there are also the tasks. There is the sweat and strain of quotidian care taking—the struggle for fluency.<sup>4</sup> I have felt lucky to do

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<sup>3</sup> I had the pleasure of corresponding in 2015 with historian, Nigel Rothfels, about the various situations of large nonhuman animals such as elephants and horses—and the strange things we sometimes do as we care for them. Strange things like asking a horse to move into a metal box. Strange things like asking an elephant to lift his leg for cleaning. Are these acts of love? Recently published *Elephant House* (2015) by Rothfels and photographer Dick Blau captures the acts of love between “keeper” and elephant at the Portland Zoo. The history—the changes, many positive, in the care of elephants, and the transparency of the zoo—opens the book, with beautiful photographs to follow. Yet these photographs were not taken to convince the public of a cheery vision of elephants in captivity. Publishers weekly reviews *Elephant House*, stating “the sense of sadness one has after gazing upon these images certainly leaves a lasting impression.” This is a reductive view of the labor of love that is *Elephant House*. David Luhrssen of the online journal *Shepard Express* understands *Elephant House* in the complexity of the content it covers. He notes that Rothfels and Blau noticed the great care, and enjoyment, between elephant and human. It is not simple. Assessing the situations of these animals, and the relationships that grow between human and elephant in various contexts of captivity is what Rothfels and Blau leave open. An opening, I would imagine, they hope readers will enter into with care for both the humans and elephants captured on those pages. Thumbnails of the many elephants with their names give the animals their individuality, and the text and photos the feel of a yearbook. Whatever else *Elephant House* may be, it is an act of love by the author and photographer.

<sup>4</sup> Here, I draw on Frances Bartkowski's idea of a fluency of care, the trial and error process of caring for another, involved in the relationships with those we believe are worthy of “caring obligations” (159).

these tasks. To be the hired help means to learn the alien shapes of the frogs of each horse's hoof.<sup>5</sup> Was asking Pontouf into that trailer—that strange metal box—among other things, an act of care, of love? We moved slowly. We considered her species' instincts and senses. Still, it was frightening. Why this story of Pontouf? This simple task?

### **Introduction**

The relationship between horse and human has been a fraught one. First hunted for their meat, kept for their milk, and then saddled for their strength and swiftness—horses have long had immeasurable influence on the lives of humans and the earth. They carried humans across continents, heightening the impact of war and connecting cultures.<sup>6</sup> Horses were integral to the westward expansion of America, used in both white imperialist warring and indigenous resistance. Horses were forced to plow fields and build cities. Horses, to their benefit and detriment, are placed high in the complicated hierarchal ordering of nonhuman (and human) animals.<sup>7</sup> As scholar Claire Jean Kim explains in *Dangerous Crossings: Race,*

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<sup>5</sup> The frog, located on the bottom of the horse's hoof, is soft and v-shaped with variation.

<sup>6</sup> See Pita Kelenka's *The Horse in Human History* (2009) for a sweeping history of how horses changed the course of human existence.

<sup>7</sup> In her groundbreaking work, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*, Harriet Ritvo explains that the human/animal species dualism is false (1989). All animals, human and otherwise are bound up in a complex hierarchal ordering, or taxonomy. As this project will demonstrate, humans are not always ordered above horses; certain horses can rise above certain humans in America's taxonomy of species. Further, certain horses ("pure breeds" for example) are ordered above others.

Many animal studies scholars, such as Donna Haraway and Jane Desmond, have discussed the trouble with language in talking about humans and animals, humans and other animals, human animals and nonhuman animals. While the use of human and nonhuman

*Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (2015), it matters very much where nonhuman animals fall in the American imagination:

In the United States at the start of the twenty-first century, we see dogs and cats as possessing special qualities that make them ideal for domestication; elephants and whales as “charismatic mega-fauna” who should be admired and protected out there in the wild (although they may be kept in circuses and aquariums precisely because their grandeur is so entertaining and educational); cows, pigs, and chickens as unremarkable and thus suitable for being farmed and eaten; rodents, coyotes, wolves and insects as threatening and suitable for extermination. Animal kinds matter differently to us, and some matter much more than others (18).

Some nonhuman animals, like the camel and horse, are of a size and social organization that fit the needs of human animals.<sup>8</sup> Domestication of the horse, or co-domestication some argue, was made possible by the herd instincts and desire for social bonds of both horse and human.<sup>9</sup> The horse-human relationship is ever-changing, characterized by negotiation, domination, and intimacy.<sup>10</sup>

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animal may set up human as the norm, I use it here for its possibility to encourage readers to consider our human animality. Perhaps it feels important to state the animalness of humans because I do not want to argue for the betterment of some humans to be treated “humanely,” but rather that we consider the lives of all animals, human and otherwise.

<sup>8</sup> See *The Camel and the Wheel* by Richard Bulliet (1975).

<sup>9</sup> Donna Haraway writes of the problem of seeing domestication as a unidirectional process. She writes that when people are the only actors, flattening all other beings to tools, “the domestication of animals is, with this analysis, a kind of original sin separating human beings from nature...one being comes means to the purposes of the other, and the human assumes rights in the instrument that the animal never has in ‘it’ self. One can be somebody only if someone else is something. To be animal is exactly not to be human and vice versa (206). She encourages us to think differently about domestication. Budiansky explains, “Recent archaeological and animal behavior studies strongly support the idea that domestication was not the human invention it was long supposed to have been, but rather a long, slow process of mutual adaptation, of ‘coevolution,’ in which those animals that began to hand around the first permanent human settlements gained more than they lost” (11).

<sup>10</sup> Relatively new evidence has been found that indicates humans may first have domesticated horses for their milk. See “The Earliest Horse Harnessing and Milking” by Alan K.



Horses in America join the ranks of cat and dog as companion animals, yet they are also valued by many as wild nonhuman animals.<sup>11</sup> The beauty of horses—muscled bodies, long manes and tails, and large eyes—secure them a place in the complex category of “charismatic mega-fauna.” While this is a term usually reserved for un-domesticated nonhuman animals in the wild, such as whales or moose—I suggest that while horses are domesticated, they are also viewed as wild by Americans. They are also “mega” in the American imagination: commercials and films project visions of endless herds of wild horses, flowing as a single entity embodying national values of *power*, *beauty*, and *freedom*. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees the protection of wild horses on federal lands, primarily in the western states. Its webpage promotes the adoption of the wild horses, quoting from The Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971:

Congress finds and declares that wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West; (and) that they contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, herds have grown beyond what federal lands can handle. Tens of thousands of wild horses, “are at the center of a passionate, politicized dispute” taking place

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Outram, et.al. in *Science* 3/6/2009, Vol. 323, Issue 5919, p. 1332-1335. For more on domestication, co-domestication, and the human animal-nonhuman animal relationship, see *Evolutionary History: Uniting History and Biology to Understand Life on Earth* (2011) by Edmund Russell and *The Covenant of the Wild: Why Animals Chose Domestication* (1999) by Stephen Budiansky.

<sup>11</sup> Donna Haraway notes in *When Species Meet* (2008), that dogs began being referred to as “companion animals” in the late 1970’s, when science began experimenting on the impact of non-human animals on human animal well-being; subsequent social science has revealed the positive impact of being near horses, thus the proliferation of hippo therapy and physical therapy programs for humans involving horses (134).

<sup>12</sup> See the BLM’s adoption webpage, <https://www.blm.gov/adoptahorse/index.php>.

in courts, Congress, and within tribes whose reservations border the federal lands where these horses roam free. The elevated nonhuman animal status of wild horses—over that of the interest of specific group of human animals—by mainstream America is made visible in the conflict over how to solve the problem of expensive damage by wild horses to reservations, between Navajo people and celebrity Robert Redford. While Redford shines his star power on banning the slaughter of wild horses, Navajo President, Ben Shelly, argues “there is a gap between reality and romance” for outsiders like Redford, who do not understand the challenges of reservation life.<sup>13</sup> One wild horse grazes 18 pounds of forage a day and drinks 5 gallons of water: “water and food a family had bought for itself and its cattle.”<sup>14</sup>

The slaughter of wild horses is not banned in the U.S., but federal budget cuts have made inspections impossible, and slaughter therefore illegal. Activist groups, like the Humane Society do not want horses to become a food staple; yet to others, slaughtering horses seems to be an ecologically sound choice. A choice that won’t be made as long as horses retain their status as symbols of “The American West.” So, to address overpopulation and issues of property damage, the BLM rounds up hundreds of horses each year. These horses sit in pens, awaiting auction. The BLM and National Organization for Wild American Horses partnered with prisons in the 1970’s, to create programs where prisoners learned to gentle and work with mustangs, hopefully increasing the desirability of the horses

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<sup>13</sup> See Fernanda Santos’s “On Fate of Wild Horses, Stars and Indians Spar” (2013) in the *New York Times*.

<sup>14</sup> See Santos.

at auction.<sup>15</sup> While mainstream America accepts the slaughter of cows, the slaughter of horses is unacceptable, and the government continues to fund efforts to keep wild horses a part of the American landscape. While the roles of horses have shifted over time, horses remain important symbols and actors of myth and meaning-making in America.

Study of horse-human relationships, as well as human animals and non-human animals generally, has increased since the establishment of animal studies.<sup>16</sup> Kari Weil's *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012) provides an introduction to animal studies as a destabilizing force in academia. Employing the work of French feminists, Derrida, and Deleuze, Weil analyzes the literature of Kafka, Woolf, and Coetzee, and offers up fresh readings that engage the false

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<sup>15</sup> See the Silver State Industries' (a division of the Nevada Department of Corrections) website, [http://www.ssi.nv.gov/Horse\\_Program/About\\_Horse\\_Program.php](http://www.ssi.nv.gov/Horse_Program/About_Horse_Program.php). There are currently nine partnerships with correctional facilities across the United States: Depend-ent Ranch in California, Vandalia Correctional Facility in Illinois, Putnamville in Indiana, Blackburn Correctional Facility in Kentucky, Lowell Correctional Facility in Florida, Wateree River Correctional Facility in South Carolina, Plymouth Correctional Facility in Massachusetts, Central Maryland Correctional in Maryland, and Wallkill Correctional Facility in New York. See also the documentary *Wild Horse, Wild Ride* (2011), that tracks several participants of the "Mustang Makeover," an organization that challenges riders to train a wild horse in 100 days, to compete in show that culminates in the auctioning of these horses to raise money for the care of wild horses.

<sup>16</sup> In "Animal Studies Cross Campus to Lecture Hall," James Gorman reports on the growing field of animal studies, "Art, literature, sociology, anthropology, film, theater, philosophy, religion — there are animals in all of them. The field builds partly on a long history of scientific research that has blurred the once-sharp distinction between humans and other animals. Other species have been shown to have aspects of language, tool use, even the roots of morality. It also grows out of a field called cultural studies, in which the academy has turned its attention over the years to ignored and marginalized humans. Some scholars now ask: Why stop there? Why honor the uncertain boundary that separates one species from all others? Is it time for a Shakespearean stage direction: Exit the humanities, pursued by a bear? Not quite yet, although some scholars have suggested it is time to move on to the post-humanities" (*New York Times*, 2012).

notion that the human animal is completely separated and above the non-human animal. Honing in more narrowly upon the theme of relations, Frances Bartkowski's interdisciplinary text, *Kissing Cousins: A New Kinship Bestiary* (2008) ruminates upon the long taken-for-granted notions of kinship. She illuminates the constructed nature of kinship, providing analysis across a variety of texts, from contemporary literature and film, to current news coverage—engaging with anthropology, genetics, and primatology. Like Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto", which imagined a new consciousness informed by relations and communications with technology, Bartkowski furthers visions of new ways of thinking through her consideration of other animal kin. She posits not only a remapping, but a retooling of our very notions of relationships—ultimately challenging readers to reconsider the seemingly stark lines of kinship among species. Coming to the fore in these works—whether in Weil's engagement with the anthropomorphization of the cocker spaniel in Woolf's *Flush* (70-74), or Bartkowski's consideration of the Brooklyn family, the Flikshteins, who considered Cookie (a monkey) a part of their family, despite her categorization as a primate designated as an endangered species (15)—is the complex relationship between humans and other animals. As my observations and examination of the way horse trainers, police, and prisoners talk about horses will show, our interspecies relationships are not as simple as traditional notions of kinship would have us believe. This project intends to contribute to the growing field of Animal Studies, also expanding the analysis of human and non-human animals in American Studies—which recently took up species as an important category of analysis in understanding relations of

power.<sup>17</sup> This dissertation does not simply look at humans and horses as two categories representing the experience of all humans and all horses. It undertakes an intersectional analysis of various humans and horses within the complex taxonomy of species in America.

Just as for human animals, horses lives are greatly determined by who their parents are, and the circumstances into which they are born. While some horses in contemporary America are considered work animals (as in the tourism industry, where the carriage horses in Central Park are a prime example), or performance animals (as in the varied entertainment industries of horse racing, or circus shows such as *Cavalia*), many Americans today consider their horses pets, best friends, and “companion animals.” As a barn manager and trainer of horses, I have experienced the interspecies intimacy that comes with feeding, bathing, stretching, exercising, and clothing four-legged companions.<sup>18</sup> Within this work, owners have charged me with evaluating the mental and emotional states of horses. At play in this evaluating—where horses are enclosed by humans as kin, as worthy of “caring obligations”—is always a striving for a fluency of care; fluency, Bartkowski writes, “is always acquired through trial and error. Who decides

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<sup>17</sup> *American Quarterly* demonstrated the importance of scholarly attention to non-human animals in a special issue on Species/Race/Sex (2013), edited by Claire Jean Kim and Carla Freccero.

<sup>18</sup> I am not a professional horse trainer, rather I have benefited from a wide range of experiences working and being with horses in, and for, a myriad of disciplines and purposes: as a young leisure rider, as a competitor on the University of Washington’s Intercollegiate Equestrian team, as an assistant trainer at a mustang rescue, as an exercise rider working with ex-race horses, as a handler at Breed Shows, as an apprentice to a Dressage Trainer, as a ranch hand rehabilitating injured horses, as a participant-observer, conducting an ethnography with the Newark Mounted Police, and as an equine specialist developing curricula for trauma-informed equine experiential work with children.

for example, when the infant we hold must be let go so that she or he may learn to walk? And what is the affective and cognitive medium of this apprenticeship” (154). This trial and error, this striving for fluency is collaborative, multimodal, and imaginative.<sup>19</sup> Fluency of care is at play in all, but primarily the second and third chapters of this project, which center on the interspecies ethnography I undertook with the Newark Mounted Police Unit and the Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility. I do not claim to offer objective analysis. I am embedded in this work. This work is both more insightful and more problematic because it is made up of interspecies ethnography by a person who has studied ethology and worked intimately with horses. Like interspecies ethnographers, Jane Desmond, Agustín Fuentes, and Jake Kosek, I track human animal and nonhuman animal bodies and their relationships to larger social structures. As Desmond explains, this method highlights change and interspecies interactions and collaborations. It is dynamic (21).<sup>20</sup> These studies focus on the structures that make certain interspecies relationships possible, and how those interspecies relationships might impact these structures.

This dissertation is occupied with language, with the categories of race and species, and with how the horse (real and figural) impacts the lives of two

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<sup>19</sup> Here, I draw on Bartkowski’s discussion of a fluency of care, Weil’s discussions of knowability across species, and Erica Fudge’s considerations of knowing, compassion, and the leap of imagination of empathy within and beyond species in her book *Pets* (2014).

<sup>20</sup> Differing from interspecies ethnography, S. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich explain that multi species ethnography focuses on how multiple organisms are affected and affect, generating mutual ecologies in “The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography” (2010).

groups of men in the rural and urban east coast: police in the Newark Mounted Police Unit and prisoners in the Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility. To contextualize these contemporary sites of human-horse relationships, I first tell the story of the horse training discipline, Natural Horsemanship, that arose in the 1980's, powerfully changing the ways that equestrians related to their equine partners. The emergence of this popular horse training method that places the well-being of the horse as a central focus happened around the same time as the publication of Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation* (1977).<sup>21</sup> Singer posited that instead of considering whether non-human animals have rights, we should instead consider if they experience feelings—and more precisely, if they experience suffering. Coining the term “speciesism,” Singer argues against discrimination based upon membership in a certain species. While practitioners and followers of Natural Horsemanship are certainly not calling for the liberation of horses, they aim to develop relationships with horses not based on domination. They are striving for partnerships where power is present, but with a measure of mutuality. Within the context of this powerful shift in thinking about and working with horses, I examine the stories of officers in the Newark Mounted Police Unit in New Jersey, and of prisoners in the Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility in New York. This dissertation focuses on horse-human relationships within the larger framework of a racist, classist society—revealing the pitfalls and possibilities of narratives that at first

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<sup>21</sup> While some may argue that Jane Goodall's work is the true foundation of the field of Animal Studies, or even the literary text *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell, many see Singer's book as a founding philosophical text.

glance seem simply positive. Moving from the impact of these discourses on humans, in my conclusion, I turn to the horses themselves, examining how these discourses affect equines. In closing, I seek to offer new ways of thinking about, and being with horses.

### **Overview of Natural Horsemanship**

Through visual and textual analysis, this chapter examines the production of what I call “prey-identified masculinity”—a discourse of masculinity where the performer identifies with prey as a means to explain his empathy and sensitivity while remaining in a dominant subject position. Drawing on the work of philosophers Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, I evaluate the ideologies and discourse being produced through two cultural texts concerning Natural Horsemanship practitioners Monty Roberts and Buck Brannaman—the autobiography, *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (1996), and the biographic documentary *Buck* (2010). This analysis seeks to add to the developing field of horse-human relations, specifically the scholarship on Natural Horsemanship by Lynda Birke, Keri Brandt, and Joanna Latimer. Furthermore, this chapter focuses on the cultural production of Natural Horsemanship, not the *practice* of the discipline.<sup>22</sup> Thus it contributes to literature on, “the representation of equestrian sports in the me-

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<sup>22</sup> I refer to the analysis of these texts (documentaries, commercials, biographies) as making up the cultural production of Natural Horsemanship, drawing on the concept of cultural production as the process of how people take part in and are shaped by the creation of various text and social practices. “Culture is a dynamic process in which agents create meaning by drawing on cultural forms as they act in material contexts, and in so doing produce themselves as certain kind of culturally located persons while at the same time reproducing and transforming the cultural formations in which they act” (O’Conner 61).



dia” of which there is, “a striking dearth of research specifically on gendered representations of equestrians in media coverage” (Adelman and Knijnik 207).<sup>23</sup> Positing that “prey-identified masculinity” offers a new identity that may provide a sense of agency to a specific population, I also consider the pitfalls of a discourse that is grounded in sexist ideology. This analysis is concerned with the social power relations of performativity, how narratives structure identities, and what is at stake in the production of prey-identified masculinity.<sup>24</sup>

Natural Horsemanship is a discipline and a term that, in and of itself, causes passionate debate across varied communities of equestrians.<sup>25</sup> Referred to as a “revolution” by some in the equine world, horsewomen and horsemen argue for and against the so-called natural methods employed by these practitioners.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Miriam Adelman and Jorge Knijnik’s edited collection *Gender and Equestrian Sport: Riding Around the World*. While some might wonder if focusing on cultural productions concerning Natural Horsemanship constitutes study of an equestrian sport, the growth and spread of Natural Horsemanship practitioners work across equestrian sports, including with Dressage riders and in the racing industry—as demonstrated in the two cultural productions this dissertation analyzes—is ample proof of its importance, and therefore is worthy of scholarly attention. For the scope of this dissertation and due to Natural Horsemanship’s origins in the U.S., in addition to the fact that these texts are produced within the U.S., this dissertation focuses on gender performance in America. However, work looking at how Natural Horsemanship has been disseminated beyond the U.S. is important. Lynda Birke and Nikki Savvides’ work has focused on equestrian communities in the UK and Australia, respectively. Comparative world-wide analysis of the discipline of Natural Horsemanship may further enhance our understanding of this discipline and its implications for horses and humans.

<sup>24</sup> Chris Weedon’s book *Identity and Culture* (2004) has been essential in developing my theoretical approach to Natural Horsemanship and the cultural artifacts examined in this dissertation.

<sup>25</sup> The term Natural Horsemanship is of course sexist in that it that it uses “man” to refer to all people, however I use it here for consistency and because it is the language used in this subculture.

<sup>26</sup> In their book *The Revolution in Horsemanship and What it Means to Mankind*, Rick Lamb and Robert M. Miller claim that in the last few decades of the twentieth century the

While some horse trainers claim status as Natural Horsemanship experts, others who may be widely included in the category decry the falsehood of the phrase itself. Tom Dorrance, who is thought to be the founder of Natural Horsemanship, authored *True Unity: Willing Communication Between Horse and Human* (1987); young trainers refer to Dorrance as “the patron saint of horses”.<sup>27</sup> Ray Hunt, a student of Dorrance, famously opened all his clinics with the assertion, “I’m here for the horse—to help him get a better deal” (Miller and Lamb 32). Dorrance and Hunt are well respected for their philosophies of working *for* the horse.<sup>28</sup>

I originally became interested in understanding Natural Horsemanship while I was working at a non-profit mustang rescue in 2007. Our primary responsibility was to acclimate the yearlings to human contact, and to start the three-year-olds under saddle (to be ridden). The director of the program organized a few visits from a Natural Horsemanship practitioner. While I drew on some elements of the trainer’s work, I did not become a follower of Natural Horsemanship. What I may have taken for granted as a young equestrian was the idea that horsemanship was about engendering a harmonious relationship between horse and rider; I

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discipline of Natural Horsemanship, with the core tenet “that horses can be controlled more effectively *without* the use of force” remarkably improved the relationship between humans and horses (3). Lynda Birke, in her essay, “‘Learning to Speak Horse’: The Culture of Natural Horsemanship” notes the controversies within and beyond the culture. She writes, “Not surprisingly, there are a myriad of different methods used, while groups of enthusiasts and trainers form and reform, split, and create counter-groups” (221).

<sup>27</sup> See “Broncobusters Try New Tack: Tenderness” by Dirk Johnson in *The New York Times* (October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> While it is widely thought that current Natural Horsemanship practitioners are drawing on the philosophies of Dorrance and Hunt, as stated in Miller and Lamb’s popular book *The Revolution in Horsemanship and What it Means for Mankind*, there is contention within the equestrian world over what exactly Natural Horsemanship is, and if these “founders” would be pleased with it.

assumed this was what all equestrians desired to achieve with their equine partners. However, despite the Ancient Greek treatise *On Horsemanship* (1516) by Xenophon, which encourages equestrians to be gentle and understanding with their steeds, violent domination of horses has continued over time. The publication of Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1887), recognized as the first fictional work on animal rights, demonstrated the need for reform in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, and current debates over the cruel use of horse tack in dressage reveal that domination of horses still exists. Certainly, the efforts of horse trainers such as Dorrance and Hunt to move the conversation from domination to concepts of connection, or control, have been important.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding the “better deal” horses may be getting, it's evident that equines remain at the mercy of humans. Many Natural Horsemanship methods of gaining the cooperation of the horse employ psychological coercion over physical force; resonant with the way in which Foucault theorizes “docile bodies” are produced in modern society through surveillance, domesticated horses become docile not by beatings, but through the non-physical force of the human embodying surveillance within an enclosed space (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* 1975). Though the focus of this chapter is the discourse and not the training methods, a brief description of Natural Horsemanship outside of its historical development is useful here.

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<sup>29</sup> I am grateful to scholar Gala Argent for her critique of an early presentation of this project, during a panel at the 2013 Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts Conference, and to Nigel Rothfels for organizing such a generative group of horse-centric thinkers.

Methods and approaches of Natural Horsemanship vary widely depending on the trainer and specific equestrian subculture—there are nonetheless some basic tenets and practices. Natural Horsemanship practitioners believe in harmony between horse and rider, gained through communication and trust rather than physical violence. They base their paralinguistic practices on ethology. Many trainers, including Roberts, describe learning about horse communication by watching wild herds; these trainers then translate this equine language into a set of communicative practices for humans to employ in horse training. One popular method of training is to work with the horse in a pen, arena, or pasture without the use of a halter, lunge line, or any other piece of tack—the human acts like the dominant horse, controlling the horse by embodying dominant horse behavior.<sup>30</sup> The goal is to get the horse to accept the human as the leader. Roberts’ version of this practice is called “Join Up”, and has received some criticism, mainly that it is psychologically stressful to the horse. Roberts has addressed critics by conducting stress tests on horses he works with to argue that the horses do not experience psychological distress due to his methods.<sup>31</sup> There are many other versions of this method; another popular approach is “Liberty Work.”<sup>32</sup> Although the controversy

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<sup>30</sup> See “Pasture Pedagogy: Reflections from the Field on Embodied Learning” by Erica Tom and Mira-Lisa Katz, in Katz’s edited collection *Moving Ideas: Multimodality and Embodied Learning in Communities and Schools* (2013), for an in-depth description of this method.

<sup>31</sup> See “A Comparison of the Monty Roberts Technique with a Conventional UK technique for initial training of riding horses” (2012) by Veronica Fowler, Mark Kennedy, and David Marlin.

<sup>32</sup> A search for “Horse Liberty Work” on the search engine Google, or on Youtube reveals innumerable website and videos of humans doing work “at liberty” with horses.

over the methods of this “revolution” and the impact on horses warrant further investigation, it is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Debates over the philosophical approaches to working and being with horses, and empirical research on human-horse relations are important. However, as sociolinguist Cheris Kramare argues, because language is a powerful tool of “shaping—and distorting—our perceptions of individuals” (21) and the world in which we live. Thus it is likewise essential to understand what current media productions emerging from and about the equine world reveal about culture. The language of the cultural production of Natural Horsemanship is important because, “language is not a substitute for action, but is itself action” (22). That is, as Althusser theorizes in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” discourses serve to mediate relations of power in society. Thus, all language is political. In this chapter, I seek to illuminate the function of the discourse of prey-identified masculinity created in texts concerning Natural Horsemanship. Birke has demonstrated how the discourse of Natural Horsemanship functions to create a sense of community for equestrians who participate in the discipline, through starkly contrasting how they think of and treat their horses against those who practice “traditional horsemanship.”<sup>33</sup> This project is likewise concerned with the discourse of Natural Horsemanship, but moves from focusing on how it works for the followers to those who are at the forefront, the practitioners. It is important to note that

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<sup>33</sup> Lynda Birke’s articles “‘Learning to Speak Horse’: The Culture of ‘Natural Horsemanship’” and “Talking about Horses: Control and Freedom in the World of ‘Natural Horsemanship’” examine the rise of Natural Horsemanship and the cultural shift within the equestrian world, and explore how horses are represented within the discourses of Natural Horsemanship respectively.

despite the fact that women make up the majority of equestrians worldwide—over 80% in the US—the leaders of Natural Horsemanship are overwhelmingly men.<sup>34</sup>

Through analysis of two texts concerning Natural Horsemanship practitioners Roberts and Brannaman, I demonstrate how their performance of prey-identified masculinity serves to bolster their leadership positions in the culture of the horse industry, and at the head of primarily female followings.

### **Natural Horsemanship in Popular Culture**

Roberts and Brannaman are not only horse trainers, but are the main figures of texts with cross-over appeal to non-equestrians.<sup>35</sup> Each was involved in film and television as children; Roberts was a stunt rider for various films, and Brannaman and his brother were the “Kellogg’s Sugar Pops kids”—shoving their cherubic smiling faces with Pops, the sweet corn cereal in television commercials (Roberts, Meehl 11:23-12:51). *The Man Who Listens to Horses* (1996), a bio-

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<sup>34</sup> See Lynda Birke and Keri Brandt’s “Mutual Corporeality: Gender and human/horse relationship.” See also, Adelman and Knijnik, who provide world-wide statistics on the growth of women’s participation in the horse industry (4).

<sup>35</sup> While I examine the similarities produced in *The Man Who Listens to Horses* and *Buck*, I am not examining these real life men—nor do I posit that these men are necessarily similar beyond what I illuminate in the productions, or that they would align themselves. Further, while Roberts is involved in the production of his biography, it is important to note that Brannaman is the subject and not the creator of the film.

graphical sketch of how Roberts developed his training methods, spent weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, in addition to being an international bestseller. The recent biographical film *Buck* (2010) centers on Brannaman's life on the road conducting horse training clinics, and it earned various awards from independent film festivals, including Sundance. Researching his book *The Horse Whisperer*, Nicholas Evans interviewed both Roberts and Brannaman. Robert Redford credits Brannaman as an essential contributor to the film adaptation—particularly inspiring the “humanity and gentleness of spirit” which Redford enacted in his portrayal of the main character, Tom Booker, bringing a gentle cowboy to the big screen, and into living rooms across America (Meehl 25:38-30:07).<sup>36</sup>

In the film *The Horse Whisperer*, Booker is a horseman with emotional scars. His damage differs from that of Roberts' and Brannaman's: Booker's emotional scars are left by a woman who chose city life over a life with him. The audience comes upon Tom at his family's ranch, seemingly recovered from his lost love through his continued dedication to a pastoral existence. But trouble comes in the form of a cold and successful city woman, Annie Maclean, who brings him the challenge of a broken-spirited daughter, Grace, and her damaged horse, Pilgrim. Annie brings the challenge of romance as well. Developed in consultation

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<sup>36</sup> For a contradiction to the stereotype of the cowboy in mainstream media see Gretel Erlich's *The Solace of Open Spaces*. In her chapter *On Men*, Erlich describes the complexity of the men she has come to know living in Wyoming. She explains that these men are “an odd mixture of physical vigor and maternalism” (50). She argues that, “Because these men work with animals, not machines or numbers, because they live outside in landscapes of torrential beauty, because they are confined to a place and a routine embellished with awesome variables, because calves die in the arms that pulled others into life, because they go to the mountains as if on a pilgrimage to find out what makes a herd of elk tick, their strength is also a softness, their toughness, a rare delicacy” (52-53).

with Brannaman, Redford employs a gentle masculinity for Tom. He rarely lifts his voice or speaks at all, his eyes shift from downcast to searching; he often simply stands, waiting for both the horse and the daughter to come to him, quiet and docile. Employing many of the western genre's tropes, the cowboy's silence is potent. In *West of Everything*, Jane Tompkins draws on Octavio Paz's definition of the *macho* as a being who is closed up—to speak is to become vulnerable, to speak is to become feminized, and therefore not to speak is to control one's ability to be known, is to enact masculinity (56). The camera spans the distances between Tom and Pilgrim, capturing the horse's voluntary movement toward him, evoking the almost mystical power that Tom embodies. Annie too is drawn to his seemingly immutable strength and sensitivity (despite the numerous times Tom simply ignores her presence and questions), for as Tompkins reminds us, women are inevitably drawn to these men. Tom and Annie's romance stops short when her husband, Robert, joins them at the ranch. And in the end, Tom is left hurt once more, as Annie returns to New York to be with her daughter and stay in her marriage. Though the plot is fueled by a forbidden romance, the magical power of Tom to draw beings toward him is central.

The mystical quality of Tom is in part constructed through Annie's research on horse training. In a montage of Annie poring over books, magazines, and websites, her voice-over gives a brief history of the relationship of horse and human: having once captured the horse for its meat, humans would always have a difficult relationship with the animal. After this gloss of the tension between horse and man, Annie comes across an article on Tom, who is framed as a special man,



of magnetic powers. The spread of Natural Horsemanship through the media in *The Horse Whisperer* mimics the course of the discipline in real life. In October of 1993, *The New York Times* told the story of the emergence of a “new” style of gentling horses in Dirk Johnson’s article entitled, “Broncobusters Try New Tack: Tenderness.” Whether Redford did so purposefully or not in his film, he brought forth Natural Horsemanship in the same manner it was being presented in print and by word of mouth—as something *new* and *magical*, as something beautiful embodied by a certain kind of man.<sup>37</sup>

In “Broncobusters,” Johnson reports from Greybull, Wyoming, with an opening worth quoting at length:

At high noon in a crook of the Bighorn Mountains, the sorrel danced nervously inside the corral, as a lanky cowboy moved in to start breaking the colt, a practice as old as the Old West. But this cowboy wore no spurs on his boots. He did not bark at the horse to show who was boss. He did not sneak around to throw a saddle on its back to climb aboard until it stopped bucking. Instead, he offered an outstretched hand, let the horse sniff it, and then gently stroked its neck and back. “It’s O.K. son,” the blue-eyed cowboy, Tim Flitner, whispered to the bronc (A13).

The blue-eyed cowboy describes the tension between the old ways of most Wyoming horsemen and a new generation that prefers methods of gentling rather than breaking horses. He tells his friends that he gave himself a “macho-ectomy.” This article illustrates how methods perceived as new are taking hold, even in commu-

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<sup>37</sup> While some equestrians find this framing as “new” problematic, due to previous horsemen’s contribution to gentle methods—from Xenophon to Dorrance and Hunt—this analysis is focused on the significance of cultural productions, not the factual genealogy of horse training. For trainers of the past whose work claims to offer something new, see also Willis J. Powell and J.S. Rarey’s manuscript, *Tachyhippodamia; or, The New Secret of Taming Horses*.

nities where loyalty to tradition is strong. Flitner's sensitive masculinity is produced as much by his current methods of gentling horses as it is by speaking of his past use of coarser methods. Such an admission heightens his cowboy authenticity—and through reflection and the change to kinder methods, his sensitivity as well. The admission is essential to the gentle cowboy identity, as the sensitive nature of his current masculine performance is situated against past coarser performances; as Butler states in *Gender Trouble*, "Identity is performativity constituted by the everyday 'expressions' that are said to be its results", and the everyday expressions here are both current actions and reflective narration that create context, impacting how his performances are read (24-25). Just a few years after "Bronco-busters Try New Tack," Evans began writing *The Horse Whisperer* and Redford began employing the gentle methods of Brannaman for the film production. In this film and the two texts featuring Roberts and Brannaman analyzed in this chapter, I argue that a particular kind of masculinity is being culturally produced.

### **"Prey-Identified" Production Patterns**

To analyze the narratives of these two Natural Horsemanship trainers, I will first demonstrate how the discourse of Natural Horsemanship is built upon a

Human (Predator)  
Horse (Prey)

binary, hierarchy, and division. I do not posit that all males act as predators, nor do I believe that females cannot in fact be predatory. However, the numerous illustrations of female as preyed upon—in statistics of rape by men of women—reveal how the discursive binaries of

Male (Predator)  
Female (Prey)

are put into practice. Man (as predator) over female (as prey), serves as the foundation from which the equine training discipline, Natural Horsemanship, builds its philosophy; and it is most evident in the narratives of two leading horse trainers of this field, Roberts and Brannaman.

Gender essentialism is central to this philosophical framework. Females are *gentle* and males are *rough*. Women are understood as having a natural connection to horses; as in essentialist discourse they are conflated with earth and non-human animals. Nikki Savvides demonstrates the dangers of such ideas in her essay, “‘Loving-knowing’ women and horses: Symbolic connections, real life conflicts and ‘natural horsemanship.’” Explaining why the idea that women are naturally connected to, and in harmony with horses is problematic, Savvides argues that the abundant literary production of narratives that perpetuate such beliefs create dangerous situations for both women and horses. For example, a novice rider may attempt an advanced jump with her horse because she believes she has a natural connection that will allow her to succeed without adequate training and practice. Alternatively, within this discourse of gender essentialism there is also a danger for men—bereft of belief in men’s empathetic capacity, what options do men have for seeking connection and harmony? Men are conceived of as having a natural desire to dominate; this is manifested by the utilization of equestrian tools such as ropes, whips, spurs and chains to subjugate the horse. Steeped in the essentialist binary construction,

Man

### Woman-Earth-Animal

the discourse of Natural Horsemanship, as produced in *The Man Who Listens to Horses* and *Buck*, relies on gender essentialism to produce the alterior masculinity of the gentle cowboy—a *prey-identified masculinity*. Prey-identified masculinity is a discourse of masculinity in which the performer identifies with prey as a means to explain his empathy and sensitivity while remaining in a dominant position. Important to the construction of this identity performance is the assumed violence of mainstream conceptions of men and a narrow view of all traditional horse training as violent. As Birke illustrates in her article, “Learning to Speak Horse” this discipline’s followers, “establish an oppositional discourse, roundly rejecting anything they [see] as belonging to the conventional world of equestrian culture” (222). This oppositional discourse in terms of training methods is central in the narratives of Roberts and Brannaman, but further, the oppositional constructions of gender (particularly with Roberts, and less so with Brannaman) and species is imperative as well.<sup>38</sup>

In *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, Roberts describes his father’s violent methods of “breaking” horses. He elaborates upon a traditional breaking technique where the horse is tied to a thick pole and left to stand for hours, sometimes hobbled (one leg tied up, suspending it from the ground). The horse is later “sacked out”: a saddle blanket, or other item, is thrown over and against the horse’s entire body and a saddle is then strapped on. Quick movements around

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<sup>38</sup> The work of Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory* (2009), has been central in my working through the gendered structures within Natural Horsemanship.

and against the horse with unknown objects can be frightening and result in extreme stress and agitation. Roberts writes that his father does all of these things and much worse. He chronicles the use of whips, spurs, and even chains. Roberts describes the pain he felt in witnessing this treatment. He writes about his relationship to one of his first horses, Brownie, and how he tried to make up for past wrongs with kindness.<sup>39</sup> Developing his own training method, he calls it “starting” as opposed to breaking. Roberts’s empathy is constructed against—constitutive with—the belligerent masculinity of his father, a man who readers are seemingly supposed to accept as a stand in for widely accepted notions of masculinity as fraught with physicality and violence.

Roberts explains that his gentleness with horses further incited his father’s violence. His father believed that horses only understood fear, “If you did not hurt them first, they would hurt you” (11). Once, after demonstrating some of his own nonviolent horse training methods, Roberts was beaten for deviating from his father’s instructions. Roberts remembers, “the iron grip of his [father’s] left hand on [his] upper arms as he used his right hand to wield the chain” (55 - 56). This incident instilled in Roberts the knowledge that if he were to show his own will, his father would beat the spirit out of him in the same fashion he did the horses he broke. Roberts reflects, “I felt the same anger and sense of failure that the horse must have felt. A lesson in how *not* to win respect and allegiance, it only enforced a reluctant obedience, instilled by fear, and left me with a lifelong sense of re-

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<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Roberts often names and speaks of the horses he has lived and worked with in his book, while in the film about Brannaman the only horse the audience comes to know for any length of time is the stud colt, Cal, who will supposedly be euthanized.

sentment” (55 -56). It should be noted here that the veracity of Roberts’ story has been challenged by his sister and aunt, who put together a collection of evidence that contradicts the violence of his father as well as his experience with horses in *Whispers and Lies*. They frame Roberts as a man who chose fame over truth. However, by writing his popular autobiography, Roberts wields considerable control over the construction of his life’s narrative—the story of how he came to train horses through performances of prey-identified masculinity. While it is important to acknowledge the contradiction put forth by Roberts’ family members, the purpose of this project is not to determine the veracity of the narratives of Roberts and Brannaman, but rather to examine how their stories function as texts, and as part of cultural production.

A similar narrative—of abuse that engenders empathy—is produced in the film *Buck*, that follows Brannaman to various horse training clinics across America. Early on in the film, Brannaman speaks about the foundation of his career as a trainer. The audience hears his voice, low and gruff. The audience sees Brannaman moving deliberately. He grooms and then leads a horse across a green open field,

Horses are my life...and because of some of the things I went through as a kid I found some safety and some companionship in the horses. And uh, I was just looking for a peaceful place to be, where I wasn’t threatened, or my life wasn’t threatened. So. I have an empathy for horses that...when something is scared for their life I understand that (2:38-3:11).

The “things” Brannaman went through as a kid were beatings and emotional abuse by his father. Meehl, the director, edits in Brannaman’s narration of a cold snowy evening when he had reached his limit for abuse (13:36-15:03). His father

was drunk and before he could beat him, Brannaman fled the house, out into the freezing weather. As his voice leads the viewer, the film moves slowly through black and white photographs: the darkened windows of a house, light on the porch creating a chiaroscuro of grey and black and white across a snow-covered yard, and then the face of the family dog, white flakes on his snout, eyes peering into the camera. That night, Brannaman slept outside beside his canine companion, curled inside the doghouse to guard against the freezing temperatures—a real and symbolic alignment with creatures dominated by men.

Because Roberts's and Brannaman's narratives of victimization ostensibly allow them to understand the position of subordinates, they align themselves with "animals of prey"—women, and horses. Their victimization echoes strongly throughout the two main texts examined here; Roberts overtly utilizes the narrative to align his work, and himself, with women. Declaring that women are generally more accepting of non-violent methods and because women and horses are both vulnerable creatures, Roberts states that the horse, "is a flight animal who feels vulnerability twenty-four hours a day. It's the same vulnerability that a woman may feel when she's alone in an elevator and a burly man gets on"(xxvii). Brannaman's alignment with women is less explicit. He situates himself with horses explaining, "I have an empathy for horses that...when something is scared for their life I understand that" (2:38-3:11). Pairing this understanding with metaphors of the horse as child, and as woman, Brannaman's discourse likewise becomes based in gender essentialism. These biographical productions produce the discourse of prey-identified masculinity, embodied in narratives constructed of

language and visuals—which I will further demonstrate are made effective through power relations of race, gender, physicality, and sexual prowess. While these men are able to embody prey-identified masculinity to effectively gain a sense of agency, as Chris Weedon explains, “the wide range of identities available in a society and the modes of subjectivity that go with them are not open to all people at all times...non-recognition and non-identification leaves the individual in an abject state of non-subjectivity and lack of agency.” Thus, I will also examine the limitations of this discourse (7).<sup>40</sup>

### **Cowboy Race, Gender, and Sexual Prowess**

The fabrication of the American cowboy is a powerful construction constituted by a particular brand of masculinity, which is important to the construction of prey-identified masculinity. As James W. Chesebro suggests, “masculinity is profoundly and ultimately a communication concept, a socially and symbolically constructed notion, that every culture and every era revisits and redefines in different ways” (36).<sup>41</sup> The symbolic importance of the cowboy goes beyond the U.S.; as Atwood-Lawrence has argued, the cowboy is “A complex figure who partakes of both the reality of the rugged life he lived on the frontier and of the myth that has grown up around it, it is he who has captured the imagination of the

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<sup>40</sup> See Chris Weedon’s book *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging* (2004).

<sup>41</sup> See James W. Chesebro “Gender, Masculinities, Identities, and Interpersonal Relationship Systems: Men in General and Gay Men in Particular” in Borisoff, D. and Arliss, L. (eds.) (2001). *Women and Men Communicating: Challenges and Changes*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland.



world” (4). Tracey Owens Patton and Sally M. Schedlock explain in *Gender, Whiteness, and Power in Rodeo: Breaking Away from the Ties of Sexism and Racism* (2012) the cowboy, as part of the myth of the West, “has lived in the minds of Americans and across the ocean in Europe for generations” (4). They contest that cultural productions, like Owen Wister’s novel *The Virginian* (1902)—the quintessential western novel, depicting the life and character of a cowboy on a ranch in Wyoming—contribute to the construction of the white cowboy. The gender and racial diversity that was present in Westward expansion was written out of *The Virginian*, and instead non-whites and women are erased, and a simplified version becomes myth, in which the white cowboy rides alone—a rugged and revered individual. The identities of Roberts and Brannaman are produced with, and build upon, such mythologies.

Roberts and Brannaman are able to wield a sensitive masculinity without engendering critiques of their manliness due to their alignment with the cowboy myth, which includes their race and traditionally masculine bodies. As one of Brannaman’s friends professes, “He’s built to fit a horse. God had him in mind when he made a cowboy” (Meehl 25:08-25:25). Such language naturalizes the image of the white cowboy—a figure that was constructed and fixed through Wister’s “literary creation of the archetypal horseman of the Plains, Frederick Remington with his painstaking artistic depictions of ranger life, and Theodore Roosevelt with his characterization of ranching as an invigorating and adventure-some life” (Atwood-Lawrence 25). Standing tall and broad shouldered, Brannaman and Roberts are phenotypically classic American cowboys. In line with this

classic visual, they read as white, which further solidifies their American manliness. As Reeser posits, white masculinity's power is upheld in its contrast to the construction of other racial masculinities.<sup>42</sup> Asian masculinity is viewed as weak and unthreatening, whereas black masculinity is viewed as excessive and dangerous—white masculinity is the ideal masculinity. Roberts refers to his Native American grandmother, however in this instance, this non-white heritage bolsters his connection with horses, due to the stereotype of Native Americans as naturally in tune with the earth and animals.

The importance of Roberts' and Brannaman's bodies are evident in a turn to the visuals of the book and film. The film poster shows Brannaman against a background of horses. The individuality of the horses are absent; rather, as a flow of flesh, mane and tail, they are rendered a landscape against which the cowboy is foregrounded.<sup>43</sup> Brannaman's eyes are hidden by his downturned cowboy hat, invoking the mystery of the western wrangler. His hat and shoulders are the most prominent elements. One of Roberts' book covers parallels this film poster—the mysterious man amid a flow of horse flesh— but two other covers deviate from this formula. In one Roberts stands beside a prized horse, and in the other beside Queen Elizabeth II (who has been a great supporter of Roberts). However, in the-

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<sup>42</sup> See Reeser.

<sup>43</sup> An example of horses as mega-fauna. In her chapter "Horses," in *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*, Tompkins explains just what horses are doing in Westerns. She argues that, "Besides doing all the work in a literal sense, getting the characters from place to place, pulling wagons, plowing fields, and such, [horses] do double, triple, quadruple work in a symbolic sense" (90). They do a lot of work, but that work, Tompkins argues, is quite simple. The horse represents a connection to nature by their very presence, "Their dynamic material presence, their energy and corporeality call out to the bodies of the viewers, to our bodies" (93-94).

se visuals that deviate from the traditional formula, Roberts' body is central, reminding the viewer that he is a tall, strong man. Further, beyond Roberts' and Brannaman's build and race, I posit that their physicality is made central through the discussion of physical acts—despite *Natural Horsemanship's* emphasis on embodied communication over physical force—specifically, their participation in rodeo and other traditional western displays of physical prowess and mastery over nonhuman animals.

Atwood-Lawrence argues that “rodeo embodies the frontier spirit as manifested through the aggressive and exploitative conquest of the West...it supports the value of subjugating nature, and reenacts the ‘taming’ process whereby the wild is brought under control” (7). This perpetuation of the frontier spirit expresses how Americans interpret the past, as well as the present (10). Rodeo perpetuates the values of the rugged and stoic cowboy (apart from women) and the importance of the challenge to continually bring that which is uncivilized under control, whether it be women, nonhuman animals, or land. Patton and Schedlock state that, “No other sport, other than baseball, is so closely linked to the ideals, myth and traditions of the West as rodeo” (4). The constructed identities of Roberts and Brannaman each draw on the symbolism of rodeo. Roberts was a bulldogger, and Brannaman participates in rodeo styled events such as the *Californios*, a competition featuring events based on working activities of real cowboys and ranch hands.

Roberts describes the cruelty of steer wrestling, also referred to as bulldogging—but not before he describes his mastery as a bulldogger.<sup>44</sup> Like the cowboy Johnson interviews in “Broncobusters Try New Tack: Tenderness,” men who perform a sensitive masculinity must confess their past of coarse or brutal acts as proof of their current contemplative natures. Atwood-Lawrence explains the event, “A bulldogger enters the arena mounted, must leap from his horse at top speed, grab one horn and the jaw of the running steer, stop him, and then throw the animal flat on its side or its back with all four feet and head straight. Time is called at the moment when this is accomplished, and a score of ten seconds or better is ordinarily needed to win” (Atwood-Lawrence 34). Not only do the human participants risk injury and even death, but both horse and steer are put in danger with the high impact of the sport. Roberts elaborates upon his excellence and mastery of the sport, listing his awards, while also expressing regret for his participation and rebuking the activity for the injuries and even deaths of both steer and men. These contests are physically demanding and extremely dangerous, attracting men who must not only be strong but also have a desire to “prove their

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<sup>44</sup> Steer wrestling is also called bulldogging. Atwood-Lawrence explains the origins of the event, “The contest was invented by the celebrated black cowboy, Bill Pickett, who, as a youth on a Texas ranch in 1881, watched bulldogs being used to catch and hold cattle by the upper lip until a cowhand could rope them (Hanes 1977:25). Impressed by the fact that such a dog could keep a captive animal submissive by this tooth-hold on its sensitive membranes, Pickett determined to try the procedure himself. He succeeded in perfecting it and gained fame for his remarkable ability to throw a steer by sinking his teeth into its upper lip. Eventually he ‘turned pro’, exhibiting his spectacular and highly acclaimed feat as part of the famed 101 Ranch Wild West Show throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. The procedure has changed now, and a dogger no longer bites his quarry, but the contest is similar in its essence—that is, in pitting one man who must stay in superb physical shape in order to wrestle steers that may weight up to 700 pounds” (34).

physical prowess” (Atwood-Lawrence 87). It’s not surprising perhaps that a man whose masculinity was perpetually questioned by his father, through censure and beatings, would find a sense of self by excelling in an activity where “stoicism is a prime requisite” (Atwood-Lawrence 87). Roberts’ description of being a bulldogger solidifies his traditional masculinity—and his later censure of bulldogging serves to construct him as thoughtful and sensitive enough to recognize his past wrongs. This narrative cements his manliness; it heightens his authenticity as a cowboy.

Brannaman’s career as a trick roper and wrangler is less obviously coarse or violent than that of a steer wrestler, however it functions toward the same end. Beyond his solo performances of trick roping mastery, he participates in traditional roping and herding events where treatment of cattle is controversial. Amid urgings for the horse to be treated with empathy and respect in the film, rough treatment of cattle (in which cattle are shown frantically attempting to rejoin their herd while the horse and rider keep it segregated), which some may call abuse, is nonchalantly accepted (53:00-54:41). Brannaman’s roping is less about the kind of physicality Roberts’ event enacts, yet it is linked with other issues related to masculinity in the film. One scene shows Brannaman doing rope tricks amidst a circle of admirers. Jokingly, Brannaman smiles—”this is the move I did for Mary when I was trying to trap her” (47:35-48:49). His cowboy skills becomes a masculine move to “trap” a woman, playful yet adding to the common conflation of women with animals of prey. At another moment in the film, while Brannaman is overseeing the starting of a colt, his masculine knowledge concerning women emerges

as part of his equine advice. When the rider and colt appear to be moving harmoniously in the round pen, Brannaman tells the rider how to end the day's session:

Where you end up your ride on a horse is so important....it's a little bit like you guys, when you were young and you were dating. That last two minutes of the dates can be a real deal breaker. [A man astride a horse bends over at the waist astride his horse, smiling and laughing] With these horses it's the same thing. You gotta end on a good note (46:37-47:19).

As Brannaman finishes this comparison between horses and women, the camera pans to a shot of Mary (Brannaman's wife) and Reata (their youngest daughter). Blonde and beautiful, their smiling images are placed perfectly as proof of Brannaman's male prowess. Similarly, Roberts' own masculinity is marked by his ability to "trap" an attractive woman.

He tells the story of meeting Pat, and how they eventually married, having several children. Telling the story of their romance, Roberts details his work on the film *East of Eden*. He describes how the director paired him with James Dean, so that Dean could learn to be a real cowboy from Roberts. He describes how he helped Dean buy the right kind of clothes, the right kind of boots, and narrates what seems to be a keen friendship between the two. Further, Roberts states, "[Dean] fell in love with Pat and followed her around like a puppy" (122). Such a claim positions Pat as a desirable woman, and highlights Roberts' masculine competence in retaining her love in the face of the heartthrob's affection. These references to Roberts' and Brannaman's masculine prowess in romantic and sexual terms, their traditionally masculine physiques by American standards, and the stories of their childhood paternal abuse work together to create narratives that

serve to position the two men as having morally earned positions of authority from which to speak about the power dynamics of people and horses.

### **Conclusion**

Through these stories, prey-identified masculinity is produced—a visual and discursive move that transforms Roberts’s and Brannaman’s past abuses into sources of agency—positioning them as knowledgeable leaders of “prey animals”: horses, and the women that make up the majority of equestrians. Though this performance empowers these two men, it is, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, specifically linked to the gender, race, and sexuality. As Weedon explains, all identities are not available to all people (7). Prey-identified masculinity is not available to the primarily female following of Natural Horsemanship because of its very hierarchical logic. A person must be identified first as a predator (male, and often white) for a performance of prey to engender empathy; women performing as prey merely re-inscribes the gender binary that appears inescapable—a binary demonstrated in Savvides’ work, which analyzes the impact of the myth of horse and woman as naturally connected and similar. I illuminate the function of prey-identified masculinity as one of the ways in which men continue to be positioned as authorities in the horse industry—despite the fact that equestrians are primarily women—so that we might consider how discursive practices in Natural Horsemanship not only reflect but create culture. This chapter encourages readers to imagine discursive practices that empower women not only to connect with horses, but also to be positioned as leaders in the horse industry. Im-

agine a landscape beyond the gender essentialist myths of women and horses. Imagine what kinds of stories we might tell. Imagine a *cowgirl* riding off into the sunset.



## **Chapter 2. Talking about (Dis)connection, Horses, and Police**

### **Opening**

When I relocated from rural California to the urban east coast to enter the American Studies Program in Newark in 2012, I accepted that I would no longer be intimately exploring the lives of horses and their relationships with humans. I would leave behind the pastures and paralinguistic exchanges of human and non-human animals. I was ready, even eager, to return to more traditional texts. Yet, on one of my first days in Newark, as I walked from Penn Station to campus to take a tour of the city with Professor Clement Price, I heard the familiar clip-clop of horses behind me.<sup>1</sup> I turned to see two tall, bay geldings, their brown coats shining like pennies in the afternoon sun. Equally polished, the two officers brought the horses to a halt outside a small cafe on Bleeker Street. A man came out of the cafe, tip-toeing up to hand each officer a cup of coffee. The three men chatted awhile, each horse relaxed, a hind leg cocked. Moments after I expressed my interest, Professor Price was on the phone to a friend who knew where I should start if I wanted to begin a project on the mounted police in Newark. A couple of months later, I began an ethnography with the Newark Mounted Police Unit.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Clement Price (1945-2012) was a well-known historian, and champion of Newark. Professor Price's generosity and encouragement helped start my research.

## **Introduction**

On Labor Day weekend in 1974, a young Latina girl was trampled by a horse at Las Fiestas Patronales, a celebration held in Newark's Branch Brook Park. An officer spun his horse—possibly to frighten people or to simply put distance between himself and the growing crowd.<sup>2</sup> A large gathering of Puerto Ricans had come together in the park for a festival. Games and picnics scattered the lawns until an officer tried to break up an illegal dice game. A crowd gathered, and one of the officer's horses—whether because they were clumsy, or because they were directed by the officer—trampled a young girl. The eruption of violence that followed led to a demonstration in downtown Newark. Mayor Kenneth Gibson led the march to City Hall in an effort to give voice to the Puerto Rican community.<sup>3</sup> But the violence continued. A motorcycle and two police cars went up in flames, as Butchie Nieves, a resident of Newark, held a Puerto Rican flag atop one of the burning cars. Stories of the Puerto Rican riot of 1974 differ, yet all place a horse at the center. Horses have long been central actors in human confrontations, clashes, and conquests. Whether as figures of fear, humanizing non-human animals, or docile bodies, horses continue to be a part of the breaking and making of human relationships in contemporary America.

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to the archivist of the Puerto Rican Community Archives Project at the Newark Public Library, Yesenia Lopez, for her time and expertise on the myriad stories of this moment, as well as to the research of Olga Jimenez de Washington.

<sup>3</sup> See Carter, Barry. "Newark Archivist Revives Lost History of Puerto Rican Riots." *Star Ledger*. 1 March. 2016, [http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2016/03/newark\\_archivist\\_revives\\_lost\\_history\\_of\\_puerto\\_ri.html](http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2016/03/newark_archivist_revives_lost_history_of_puerto_ri.html).

When I first began my field observations of the Newark Mounted Police Unit, Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon was ever present in my mind—*the police are the ever-present eyes of the state*. Often referred to as ten-foot cops, mounted police surveil the cityscape from above. Yet, as I listened closely to the officers of the mounted unit, I began to learn that while I (and many others) may see them as actors and symbols of a powerful, single vantage point looking down upon civilians—the officers expressed their feeling of being surveilled as much, if not more than they talked of their ability to watch the city. Policing strategy, in fact, calls on mounted police not just for their ability to see, but for their ability to be seen. This chapter seeks to move beyond the simplistic view of all police as simply parts of the Panopticon, and to acknowledge multidirectional surveillance. I seek to employ Kim's call to a multi-optic way of seeing, "seeing *from within* various perspectives, moving from one vantage point to another, inhabiting them in turn, holding them in the mind's eye at once" (20). Looking beyond "the seductive simplicity of a single-optic storyline," this analysis engages with the interconnectedness of the police, civilian, and equine experiences (20). Horses reside at the center of this multi optic inquiry, allowing a particular pathway into understanding the positions of various groups of people, as well as them. In this chapter, I move from the idea of "prey-identified" masculinity to the discourse of the horse as (dis)connection. As in the discourses of Natural Horsemanship, horses are viewed as subordinated nonhuman animals, however, they do not function as mirrors of their surroundings. In the narratives of the police officers in the Newark

Police Department's mounted unit, horses simultaneously figure as symbols of comfort and connection, and figures of fear and disconnection.

### **Horses in Law Enforcement**

The horses in the NPD mounted unit must be adaptable to the urban environment. They live next to train tracks; locomotion, lights, and loud whistles are part of their home. The horses must be able to work long days, carrying officers calmly and safely through a city that is not always calm or safe. And perhaps just as importantly, they must be friendly.

The NMPU used Thoroughbred ex-race horses, before switching to Standardbred ex-race horses in 2005. While Thoroughbred racing now prevails as the more popular racing sport, trotting races, with Standardbred horses were more popular though the 1800s and early 1900s. The Thoroughbred was created in England, and the preoccupation with bloodlines may be a reason that middle and lower class Americans in the 1800s were not as enamored with Thoroughbred racing. Trotting was seen as a sport of the people. Trotting races involve a horse pulling a person in a small cart. The horse used in trotting racing, the Standardbred, was created in America and horses were chosen based on ability. To be bred, the horse must have been able to trot a mile in 2.5 minutes. Trotting racing was seen as a more useful activity than Thoroughbred racing. A horse at work on a farm or in a city had to be able to pull weight. Whether pulling a wagon filled with goods or a stagecoach filled with people, a horse that could do this work was important. Race horses, Thoroughbreds and Standardbreds, are bred for agility and speed. They

are fast, lithe, and high-spirited horses. The spirit and speed desired for Thoroughbred racing did not translate well onto the streets of Newark. Accidents are part of working with horses bred for heightened prey instincts. The ideas from the early 1900s, that the Standardbred was a practical work horse of the people, seems to hold true for the NPD mounted unit. Since they switched to using Standardbreds off the track in 2005, accidents have been infrequent.<sup>4</sup> Perceived as more rugged and robust than the Thoroughbred, Standardbreds seemed to fit the challenges of urban work. Standardbreds are also seen as friendly horses—more likely to stand calmly waiting for children to pet them, more likely to respond positively to people passing around them at intersections.

The NPD mounted unit does not own horses. While some cities buy and then retire horses, others like Newark cannot afford such an expense. The NMPU draws their horses from The Standardbred Retirement Foundation, a non-profit organization located in Millstone, New Jersey.<sup>5</sup> Founded in 1989, many of the horses who come through the SRF are coming off the race track and heading to slaughter in Canada or Mexico.<sup>6</sup> The SRF focuses on finding lifetime adoptions for these horses, but there are always more horses than homes. Officer Louie Camacho explains that it is a “win-win” for the SRF and the NMPU. When the SRF has a horse they think might adapt well to city life, they call Louie and he goes to meet the horse.

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<sup>4</sup> From author’s field notes.

<sup>5</sup> See the Standardbred Retirement [www.adoptahorse.org](http://www.adoptahorse.org)

<sup>6</sup> See the Standardbred Foundation website, <https://www.adoptahorse.org>.

For horses at the end of their racing careers, the ability to be re-trained determines their fate. An ex-race horse with a mellow personality and friendly with children might become a schooling horse for a training stable. An ex-race horse with good conformation and coordination might become a jumper, a well-cared for competition horse. When Camacho looks for a horse for the NMPU, he not only looks for bay geldings (as are uniform in the unit), but also looks for a “kind eye.” The Newark Mounted Police Unit doesn’t use mares or stallions. Stallions, with the drive to reproduce and more testosterone than geldings, are generally considered more dangerous to work with and difficult to train. Camacho explained that they had a mare once, but *only once*. “They climb the walls,” his eyes widening as he described geldings in the presence of a mare in season (ready to mate). The ideal horse for the NPD mounted unit reflects the similar ideal human for police work: a male willing to work within a certain set of rules.<sup>7</sup> The NMPU is a collection of about 10 horses (fluctuating due to retirements and new horses), all bay geldings. When a horse needs to be retired from police work, the horse goes back to the Standardbred Foundation. Camacho says, “It’s great. Everyone wants a police horse, after all we do with them. C’mon.”

### **The Newark Mounted Police Unit**

During my field observations (2012-2016) of the NPD mounted unit, the unit was almost entirely composed of Puerto Rican men. One woman, also Puerto Rican, entered and left the unit. Early on, I asked why the unit was so heavily

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<sup>7</sup> While women make up a portion of the police force, men still dominate this occupation.

Puerto Rican. Some of the officers shrugged, others jocularly expressed Puerto Rican pride, and some thought it might be because of Puerto Ricans roots to country life with animals on the island. The head officer and horse trainer of the unit, Camacho, explained that being in the mounted unit was different. To be a mounted police officer one has to be a people-person. You can't hide in a car, or appear intimidating on the motorcycle. On the horse you are there, open to everyone. Camacho's description of the kind of person an officer must be in the NPD mounted unit echoes the qualities required to become a horse in the NMPU: congenial, even-tempered, and sociable.

At a time when the Newark Police Department has come under fire for using excessive force and condoning racist practices, the need for congenial, even-tempered, and sociable police officers is high. When I first began my ethnography with the NPD mounted unit in late 2012, George Zimmerman was on trial for the murder of Trayvon Martin, the seventeen year old African American boy whom he shot and killed, who was only walking through a neighborhood with Skittles candy and Arizona iced tea in the pockets of his hoodie. Since I first began observing the NMPU, tensions between police and communities of color has intensified, the Black Lives Matter movement has risen, and the U.S. Department of Justice published a 2014 report on a civil rights investigation, providing evidence of excessive force and the police department's failure to investigate complaints.<sup>8</sup> The report concluded that there was a pattern of constitutional violations, that there

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<sup>8</sup> See report, ["https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/07/22/newark\\_findings\\_7-22-14.pdf."](https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/07/22/newark_findings_7-22-14.pdf)

was a lack of trust between the public and the NPD and that the Newark Police Department's practices disparately affected minorities.<sup>9</sup>

In 2015, Mayor Ras Baraka signed an executive order to create an independent civilian complaint review board to handle allegations of police misconduct.<sup>10</sup> The Department of Justice reached a settlement with the city in 2017. The concept decree outlines reforms in 12 areas, securing that:

NPD will improve officer training to ensure that officers develop the necessary technical and practical skills required to carry out NPD directives consistently. NPD will revise search and seizure policies, training and supervision to ensure that all stops, searches and arrests are conducted in accordance with the Constitution and in a manner that takes into account community priorities. NPD will integrate bias-free policing principles into all levels of the organization, including training of officers and supervisors. NPD will reform use of force policies, including requirements for using de-escalations techniques whenever possible and appropriate, prohibit retaliatory force and ensuring mandatory reporting and investigation standards following use of force. NPD will deploy in-car and body-worn cameras to promote accountability, instill community confidence and improve law enforcement records. NPD will implement measures to prevent theft of property by officers, including robust reporting and complete accounting of property or evidenced seized. Office of Professional Standards investigators will be appropriately qualified and trained. Investigations of civilian complaints will be conducted in an objective, thorough and timely manner. Newark will create a civilian oversight entity to give voice to and pursue concerns of its residents. NPD will develop protocols for conducting compliance reviews and integrity audits. NPD will implement steps to ensure that the disciplinary process is fair and consistent. NPD will improve records management and early inter-

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<sup>9</sup> See "Justice Department Reaches Agreement with City of Newark, New Jersey, to Reform Police Department's Unconstitutional Practices." The United State Department of Justice. 28 February. 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-reaches-agreement-city-newark-new-jersey-reform-police-department-s>.

<sup>10</sup> Rashawn Davis, of the ACLU of New Jersey, celebrated Baraka's action in "Newark's New Cop Watch Board Should Be a National Model for Police Accountability." ACLU. 28, February. 2017, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/speak-freely/newarks-new-cop-watch-board-should-be-national-model-police-accountability>.



vention systems and collect data on all uses of force and investigatory stops, searches and arrests, and develop a protocol for the comprehensive analysis of the data. The information will be publicly reported. NPD will strengthen its public information programs to ensure that members of the public are informed of NPD's progress toward reform.<sup>11</sup>

The top provision of the settlement agreement ensures that formal and informal mechanisms will be put in place to secure increased engagement between the community and the NPD.<sup>12</sup> As analysis of my field work will suggest, an increase of mounted officers may be one way to foster greater community engagement.

### **Symbolic Work**

Horses carry a heavy symbolic load in America. They represent power, beauty, and freedom. Horses—our partners in destruction and in connection—represent the best and worst of the human animal.<sup>13</sup> Depending on perspective and time period, horses have been, and in many cases continue to be, our transportation, our entertainment, our comrades, our slaves, our children, our best friends, our therapists, and soulmates. As demonstrated in the recent rise of the discourse of “prey-identified” masculinity in Natural Horsemanship and discourses of empathy concerning prison horse programs (which I will discuss in my next chapter), horses are also “mirrors.” Horses are pure. Horses are clear reflections

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<sup>11</sup> See “Justice Department Reaches Agreement with City of Newark, New Jersey, to Reform Police Department’s Unconstitutional Practices.” The United States Department of Justice. 28 February. 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-reaches-agreement-city-newark-new-jersey-reform-police-department-s>.

<sup>12</sup> See “Fact Sheet” 28, February. 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/836891/download>.

<sup>13</sup> See Peta Kelenka’s *The Horse in Human History* (2009) and Stephen Budiansky’s *The Nature of Horses: Exploring Equine Evolution, Intelligence, and Behavior* (1997).

of the environment. Yet, horses in law enforcement are not so simple. They are still companions, children, and best friends. But horses are also frightening figures. During my observation of the NPD mounted unit, officers' feelings about horses shifted quickly, representing comfort and connection, as well as fear and disconnection. This examination of the figural work of horses in communities of color begins to fill a gap in Animal Studies and American studies; Colleen Glenney Boggs likewise contributes to this areas of study, offering an examination of how non-human animals function in the construction of biopolitical subjectivity (2013).<sup>14</sup> Boggs asks, "What is the cultural and political work of animal representations?" (3). In this chapter, I further this question within the context of the horse in the city: *What is the cultural and political work of equine representations in Newark?*

### **Horses as Comfort and Connection**

His brown eyes widen, ears alert, head lifted high over me. He whinnies softly. And we all turn. The man approaching smiles, stepping close to the horse, patting his neck, caressing his face. *Hey, hey*. He speaks softly to the horse, smiling and responding to the jocular conversation of the other officers, welcoming him back from vacation. The horse, Bullet, is standing in cross ties. I had been watching one of the officers trim his whiskers. He stood quietly, head lowered until suddenly he swiveled when he saw the approaching man, the officer who usu-

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<sup>14</sup> See *Animalia Americana: Animal Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity* (2013). Boggs's work also contributes to gender and sexuality studies.

ally cared for and rode him. Officer Manny Sproul had been away two weeks. As Sproul stroked his neck, Bullet's eyes softened. His mouth was slack as Sproul playfully grabbed at his lips. Bullet wiggled them vigorously, nosing Sproul's shoulder in a motion akin to poking when his mouth was free again. Watching Bullet react to Sproul and Sproul react to Bullet, the relationship between the two was apparent. There was sweetness and playfulness in their interactions. There was recognition. There was comfort and connection for the horse and human animal.

Officers and horses do not stay together forever. Camacho explains that the easiest and most well-behaved horses are always paired with new officers. Officers tend to ride one horse most of the time, but their pairing can be changed at any time. Camacho tells officers not to take it personally, "We all go through it. It's for the best of the unit." He claims that they learn to not get attached, but soon after he spoke about the "pain and heartbreak" of letting go of their horses when the unit was briefly disbanded. To the joy of mounted officers, the unit was restored after just seven months. Since cars replaced most horses, mounted unit have been the ones to go when budgets get cut. Responding to the 2011 disbandment, Lieutenant Robert Marelli shared, "My heart's been cut out...The unit's been decimated. This is what I've known. They're putting me out to pasture, too."<sup>15</sup> Some of the officers are completely new to horses when they arrive in the unit, while others, like Marelli, have loved horses their whole life. Officer Virgil

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<sup>15</sup> See "Newark to give Philadelphia four police horses after budget cuts close mounted police unit" The Associated Press. 10 January. 2011, [http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/01/newark\\_to\\_give\\_philadelphia\\_fo.html](http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/01/newark_to_give_philadelphia_fo.html).

Cardona says simply, “You bond quickly. You can’t help it.” And it appears that humans benefit from this interspecies bond.

Many researchers and scholars argue that human-animal bonds can transform people; dogs and horses show non-judgmental affection that can allow people to develop a more positive sense of self.<sup>16</sup> Merely the presence of animals can positively affect humans. This research has primarily been conducted in hospital settings. My research did not involve taking people’s heart rate, recording cortisol levels, or doing other such research, but I did closely observe the officers and horses. As with Sproul and Bullet, officers and horses often shared affection. They rub, nose to hand and nose to shoulder. The rest, side by side and forehead to forehead. They watch one another, moving through the aisles of the stable. Horses stand quietly in cross-ties, while officers groom them closely—picking hooves and painting them with polish, combing their mane free of tangles, currying and brushing their brown bodies until they shine. Justice, a small horse with big personality, flips his lips playfully as he is groomed. Posted at a street corner, officers reach down to pat their horse’s shoulder.

Several times during my ethnography with the Newark Mounted Police Unit, officers described the following scenario: “If there’s a foot cop, a squad car,

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<sup>16</sup> See K, Allen, Shykoff BE and Izzo JL Jr. “Pet ownership, but not ace inhibitor therapy, blunts home blood pressure responses to mental stress.” *Hypertension*. Oct;38(4):815-20. 2011.; Hodgson, K., L Barton, Darling, M., Antao, V., Kim, F. A., and Monavvari, A. “Pets’ Impact on Your Patients’ Health: Leveraging Benefits and Mitigating Risk”. *The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*, 28(4), 526-534. 2015.; Nagengast SL, Baun MM, Megel M, and JM Leibowitz. “The effects of the presence of a companion animal on physiological arousal and behavioral distress in children during a physical examination.” *Pediatric Nursing*. Dec;12(6):323-30. 1997.

even a motorcycle cop around, but there's one of us, someone will always approach us first. I dunno. It's something about the horse...that we must be different, or something.”<sup>17</sup> Many officers of the NPD mounted unit shared the feeling that their unit was different. Camacho explained that mounted officers have to be social, personable, open to interacting with the public. Because “you can't hide on the horse.” The mounted unit is part of the NPD traffic division, giving tickets, making arrests, and being deployed across the city, especially for important public events. The NPD sends mounted officers to deter crime by visibility: to see and to be seen.

For some officers, it isn't until they ride a horse down the street that they first experience civilians smiling at them. Camacho shared that people walk up to him. They ask if they can pet his horse. “There is a comfort there.” Officer Al Vega agreed, “People hate you in a car...but, they love you when you're on a horse. If looks could kill, the looks we get in the car”. These officers convey that they are seen and felt differently on the streets when they are astride one of the horses. People smile at them. People come up just to say hello. People pet their horses. All kinds of people. Cardona shares, “Everyone comes up to us, teenagers, drug dealers...they just want to know about the horse and ask questions. Even bad guys...but they're not doing bad stuff then, so you know, we treat'em like everyone else, like a human.” Here it is the presence of the horse that allows for an officer to perceive and act “humanely” toward a person they suspect of criminal activity. And it seems, the horse allows for a different kind of perception—if only

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<sup>17</sup> From author's field notes.

momentarily—on the part of the civilian/suspect. Perhaps this seems insignificant. Yet at moments, positive experiences of each other impact our ways of thinking and feeling about one another.

Officer Ralph Rosa is thought well of by his fellow officers, by his superiors, and by many civilians. Like Camacho and Cardona, Rosa is a mounted police officer because he loves it. “I do it for the love of the horses and the work.” He is Puerto Rican. His father remembers the Puerto Rican riots, but Rosa doesn’t seem to have inherited any bad feelings about law enforcement. He speaks evenly when I ask him about the PBS documentary *Policing the Police*, which delved into the racist and sexist practices of the Newark Police Department (2016). He acknowledges some officers have bad practices, but he also points out that the documentary only covers units that are specifically looking for crime, units focusing on gang related activities and drugs, and who may daily experience potentially dangerous situations. These officers are trained to see transgressions.

Officers in the NPD mounted unit also handle dangerous situations.<sup>18</sup> In November 2014, officer Erich Shroeder and Bullet chased an armed suspect outside NJPAC center in downtown, where someone had already been shot. There was a marked difference in how Shroeder described the events to reporters and to me during my field work. Schroeder’s speech to the press is formal, characterized

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<sup>18</sup> In November 2016, mounted officers stopped a “shootout” near Lyons Avenue and Clinton Place. See Noah Cohen’s on NJ.com, “Police Horse Unit Officers Interrupt Shootout” 28, February. 2017, [http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2016/11/police\\_horse\\_unit\\_officers\\_interrupt\\_shootout\\_arre.html](http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2016/11/police_horse_unit_officers_interrupt_shootout_arre.html).

by control.<sup>19</sup> As he described the events to me in the stable office, he praised Bullet for not hesitating. He turned him toward the gunshots, toward people running. Bullet was “brave” and went right in. The risk these horses in the NPD face when they bravely run toward gunshots was recognized by Governor Chris Christie in 2013, when he passed a bill known as “Dano’s Law.” This bill ensures that anyone who, “makes a threat against the life of a law enforcement animal a fourth-degree indictable offense. Convictions of such a crime is now punishable by up to 18 months imprisonment, a fine of up to \$10,000, or both.” Governor Christie stated, “As [animals] selflessly protect their partner and the public we must ensure threats against these brave animals are taken seriously” (O’Brien). The suspected shooter had a hostage. Schroeder explained, “I pulled my gun and *used my outside voice*, told him to drop it” (*italics mine*). He spoke a colloquial phrase, one often associated with children: he “used [his] outside voice” instead of “I yelled.”<sup>20</sup> In this retelling, Schroeder foregrounded the bravery of Bullet, and used vernacular from outside police culture. Beyond analyzing the significance of their ways of talking, one of the most powerful aspects of my observation with the NPD mounted unit was experiencing the officers in their nuanced ways of being; seeing them as complex human animals within the structure of law enforcement.

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<sup>19</sup> Dan Ivers reports on the event on NJ.com, quoting Schroeder: “I was on my mount Bullet when I heard gunshots. I responded to the location when I observed a suspect pointing a weapon at a victim”. Schroeder describes, “My police training immediately kicked in as I drew my service weapon and I ordered the suspect to drop his weapon. He complied as backup units arrived.” See “Suspect chased down by officer on horseback after shooting near NJPAC” 28 February. 2017, [http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2014/11/suspect\\_chased\\_down\\_by\\_officer\\_on\\_horseback\\_after\\_shooting\\_near\\_njpac.html](http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2014/11/suspect_chased_down_by_officer_on_horseback_after_shooting_near_njpac.html).

<sup>20</sup> From author’s field notes.

Seen from across the street, Rosa is an imposing figure. Broad shouldered, and flat backed, astride Sharp Shooter—the darkest horse in the unit, he looks crow black against the cement backdrop. Crossing the street, Rosa's full mustache appears above a white toothed smile. He is light skinned and average height, but on horseback, he stands yards above the ground. Rosa is smiling. He smiles a lot. Pedestrians mostly smile back as they cross the street. Sharpie stands quietly for me as I stroke his neck. It is late spring 2016, and we are talking about the public event, *Horses of Newark*, I put on in Military Park as part of the year long celebration of the city's 350th anniversary. All the officers in the NPD mounted unit seem supportive of the event, but Rosa is enthusiastic. Rosa earned his B.A. and M.A., both in history, from Rutgers University-Newark, and is currently working toward his Ph.D. in History at Drew University in New Jersey. He loved his classes and professors at Rutgers, especially former the director of the American Studies Program, Rob Snyder. Along with my knowledge of horses—and that according to him and the officers, I look Latina, like a niece or a cousin—this gives me insider status, and creates a connection. Rosa is excited that my studies have focused on the mounted unit, and that *Horses of Newark* would bring their history to the public, and provide an opportunity for interacting with the community. I have photos of Rosa and Sharpie, but I want a photo of them interacting with people. A photo for the event poster. Rosa and Sharpie are never lonely standing in Military Park, and as we are talking, a family of six walks by. The small children run right to Sharpie, reaching up with their tiny hands, unable to reach his whiskered muzzle. Well-experienced in his job, Sharpie remains calm and unsurprised



by the attention. He stands patiently as the children pet where they can reach his strong silky black shoulder. Rosa just smiles. I snap photos and talk to the children's mother.

That same day, a lanky white man, who Rosa notes had physical markers of an drug addict, comes up to pet Sharpie. A little later, a light skinned black man in ragged clothing wanted to stroke Sharpie's shoulder. Rosa motions yes, smiles and waits. As the man reaches out, a hospital wrist band appears. Sharpie stands quietly. The man runs his hand along the horse's neck. Reflecting on these two men, and his years of riding through Newark, Rosa explains that people who are struggling, particularly the mentally ill, seem especially drawn to Sharpie. "It's something about the horse."<sup>21</sup> Some officers also described women as loving horses, and enjoying how many women would come up to pet the horses while they were on duty. Long time farrier of the mounted unit, Mario Nodari echoes the officers, "Women, they crazy for horses. Crazy."<sup>22</sup> During my observation of the NPD mounted unit, I did not see any incidences where the public showed fear of the horses. However, several officers described horses as figures of fear.

### **Horse as Figure of Fear and Disconnection**

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<sup>21</sup> From author's field notes.

<sup>22</sup> From author's field notes. Mario Nodari (1930-2016) was part of the NPD mounted unit's family. Horseshoeing was a family tradition; he learned blacksmithing from his father, in his hometown Montecchio, Maggiore, Italy.

“Never lose your fear.” Cardona sits across from me in the stable office. He is telling me about his perspective on the film *Buck*. We are discussing the stallion, Cal, who was presented as a violent and damaged horse, having been deprived of oxygen as a foal. After Brannaman works with Cal, with assistance from a ranch hand, the ranch hand works alone with the stallion. Virgil explains that the man who went into the corral with the stallion was fearful, and that the horse knew it. After the man tried several times to place a saddle pad on the horse, the horse attacked him, biting into his head through his thick cowboy hat. Cardona says that the man was afraid and shouldn’t have been in there with the horse. But, he isn’t criticizing him. Cardona shares,

Because you need some fear there. Because you know it’s a 1,200 1,500 pound animal. It could hurt you. So you gotta have a little bit of fear, a lot of respect. Because when you lose that respect to the animal, fugetaboutit. You’re not gonna beat’em. You’re not stronger than that animal...he’s gonna getch you. Sooner or later he’s gonna get you. Even your own horse. A horse I have been riding for two years. He sits there for five day and when I go out on the street with’em he tries a little something here and there “oh, let’s see what we can do today?” It’s an animal, it’s got a brain.

Cardona speaks about horses as a species (large and potentially dangerous), as individuals (with shifting moods), and as beings with agency (impacting his daily experience on the job).

In contrast to other comments, about how the horse allows people to connect with police, Camacho also shared that, “most people are afraid of horses here in the city, so they don’t run.” Camacho described how he would “side the horse,” to pin a suspect against a wall or car so he could put hand cuffs on them. He now calls for squad cars to make arrests, but he still uses the body of the horse to main-

tain control over suspects. Here the horse is a figure of fear, and a tool of control. Most of the officers agreed, people get out of the way when they are called in to clear crowds—people in the city are fearful of horses. Officers appear to hold contradicting beliefs about the impact of horses in their police work. Horses create connection. Horses create disconnection.

At the heart of this contradiction may be the fact that horses in law enforcement are not being utilized for their ability to mirror their environment. A horse must learn to react and operate in contradiction to her instincts. A horse must learn not to react to stimuli outside of his rider's aides.<sup>23</sup> Trains shoot by, screaming on metal tracks along the backside of the stables (a large green warehouse on Orange Street). Camacho begins horses inside, acclimating them to saddles on their backs in the aisle, where the new horse can be surrounded by the herd in their stalls. He takes them to the inside arena, and then the outside arena next—where the winds whip up dust from the arena and inverted chip bags from the street, metallic tumble weeds. At the track the horses knew crowds, cheering, booing, announcer's voices and bells, but the urban soundscape is different. Camacho rides new horses in the parking lot between the stable and tracks where the firefighters from the station next door run drills. He has horses step sideways next to cars and street signs, asking them to move off the pressure of his leg. Astride, he fiddles with the mirrors of cars, acclimating them to the sound. When officers ride in the city, especially on horses new to the work, they must not only

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<sup>23</sup> The various positioning and movements of the rider are called aids.

be attuned to their environment, but they must also be connected to their horse and how he may react to his new environment.<sup>24</sup>

During my observations, several new horses came into the unit. These horses learned to walk and trot along busy thoroughfares, stand quietly at busy intersections, and accept the hands of strangers on their necks and faces. They must also be able to overcome their flight instincts to flee danger. Instead of running away, alongside the humans who fled the sound of gunshots, Bullet followed the instruction of his rider and ran against the flow of fear to arrive at the feet of a suspect wielding a gun. It's impossible to know what Bullet was thinking or feeling. It's easy to imagine. Scientists tell us that thousands of years of evolution would have a horse gallop at top speed from a panicked crowd.<sup>25</sup> Horses in the NPD mounted unit must relinquish their natural reactions. It is not the horses' potential as pure reflection or mirror that is desired in law enforcement. Horse as transportation, as figure of fear is important. An aspect of what made horses amenable to domestication, their willingness to cooperate (or submit to) human will, is a key reason they remain part of law enforcement. Yet, not all horses that came into the unit stayed.

Cardona believes that just like humans, every horse is different. When I ask him if mounted officers have similarities not shared by officers in other NPD

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<sup>24</sup> New noises and new objects are not the only dangers of urban riding. Pot holes are the perfect size to catch a horse's hoof. This has happened to officers in the NPD's mounted unit. When a horse catches a hoof in pothole, he panics, most often resulting in injury to himself and his rider. Camacho has taken his own time to fill in potholes in the city.

<sup>25</sup> See Stephen Budiansky's *The Nature of the Horse: Exploring Equine Evolution, Intelligence, and Behavior* (1997).

units, he says he can't speak for the group. "I know how I feel. And I know...nobody feels the same way I do here. You know, we're all different. We're all here for different...feelings, or whatever. But, I can say we're all here because we care for, we like the animal. Because if you didn't like'm you're not gonna be here."<sup>26</sup>

### **Conclusion**

On Friday, October 7th, 2016 children gathered around two mounted police officers and their horses in Military Park, in downtown Newark for a public event, *Horses of Newark*. Sharpie blew through his nostrils, snorting and spraying moisture into the air. The children shrieked, laughing, and jumping.<sup>27</sup> The children lined up, taking turns petting the horses, Sharpie and Commander. Rosa held the reins to Sharpie's bridle. A veteran of the NPD mounted unit, Sharpie seemed almost to nap as the children took their turns petting his neck and shoulder. Orlando held the reins to Commander's bridle. A younger horse, Commander stood relaxed but inquisitive about the onlookers. Commander gently nosed the pens in Orlando's shirt. His lips like fingers. Orlando watched him, then looked up smiling. Like Commander, Orlando is young. Puerto Rican like Rosa, he is average height, with arms covered in tattoos. He smiles like Rosa, warm and broad, but not as often. This Friday, he seemed to smile all day long.

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<sup>26</sup> From author's field notes.

<sup>27</sup> *Horses of Newark* was a free public event, created by the author, with assistance from fellow graduate students at Rutgers, Amy Lucker, Keishla Rivera-Lopez, Addie Mahamassani, and Animal History scholar, Daniel Vandersommers. *Horses of Newark* involved partnerships with Newark Celebration 350, Military Park, Schools That Can - Newark, and American Studies Program and Latin@ Studies Working Group at Rutgers University-Newark. See video of the event at <http://www.ericatom.com/horsesofnewark>.

Children ranging from second grade to sixth grade attended *Horses of Newark*. They learned about the role horses played in the city's past through a "History Walk" made up of posters along a walkway. Each poster featured a horse from the carousel, newly installed at Military Park. Children learned that the invention of trains and the railroad did not reduce horses's work—it increased it. They learned that in the early 20th century, Irish immigrants and African Americans were viewed as naturally good with horses. They learned that without horses, the world would be a very different place.<sup>28</sup> Children played crossword puzzles and educational games to learn about mustangs in America. They met the horses of the NPD's mounted unit, and they shared their thoughts with a guided post-it note display called *Voices of Newark*.

During my time with the NPD mounted unit, many officers claimed that given a choice between an officer on foot, on a motorcycle, in a car, or on a horse, a civilian will always choose to approach an officer on horseback. I included *Voices of Newark* as part of the public event to let the children on field trips, and the public passing through, respond to this very situation. On a glass building in the park, I taped posters with three questions: *what are the first three words that you think of when you read the word "horse?"*; *what are the first three words that you think of when you read the word "police officer?"*; *there is a police officer on foot, on a motorcycle, in a car, and on horseback, which one are you most likely to talk to?* While children placed post-it notes with mostly positive or neutral

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<sup>28</sup> See *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (2007) by Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr and *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (2008) by Anne Norton Greene.

words about horses, their words about police ranged from positive to neutral to negative.

Below are the words the children listed in response first to the word “horse” and then the word “police.” I first list the words that appeared multiple times, followed by the rest of the words alphabetically, finally including any phrases the children wrote on the post-it notes.

#### Horse:

Cowboy (10 times), Fast (8 times), Farm (6 times), Kind (5 times), Beautiful (4 times), Cool (4 times), Hay (4 times), Strong (4 times), Big (3 times), Hairy (3 times), Nice (3 times), Race (3 times), Stables (3 times), Transportation (3 times), Animal (2 times), Awesome (2 times), Cute (2 times), Car (2 times), Food (2 times), Fun (2 times), Police (2 times), Polo (2 times), Run (2 times), Saddle (2 times), Unicorn (2 times), Adorable, Amazing, Bag, Bite, Carousel, Clever, Communicate, Crazy, Dig, Equine, Farmer, Freedom, Generous, Gentle, Good, Grass, Helpful, House, Insane, Legs, Love, Lose, Magical, Majestic, Pretty, Poop, Pony Ride, Racing, Respectful, Richard, Rider, Runned, Runnin, Sand, Strength, Super, Tall, Weird, West, Westerns, Wide Spaces. Children also wrote the phrases: “horses are awesome,” “a horse tail,” “is a horse of course,” “a friendly creature,” “horses moved coal,” “a friend,” and “basketball of course.”

#### Police:

Jail (9), Gun (6 times), Cars (5 times), Horse (5 times), Handcuffs (3 times), Cuffs (3 times), Popo (3 times), Arrest (2 times), Badge (2 times), Cool (2 times), Killers (2 times), Fear (3 times), Siren (2 times), Arresting, Armed, Bad, Bad Guys, Bad People, Brutal, Brutality, Black Lives Matter, Chains, Cops, Fair, Fascist, Football, Game bell, Goon, Government, Heroic, Hate, Job, Justice, Kind, Race, Racist, Racist (some), Respectful, Robber, Security, Serving, Strong, Stupid, Solo, Tickets, Tight, Lead, Locked Up, Loco, Mean, Move, Nice, Not good, Officer, Patrolling, Protect, Protection, Pull, Uniform.” Children also wrote down the phrases: “Never be scared,” “Responsibility in rules,” “police not good,” “Mortal Kombat and other games,” “I like poleise,” “Protectors of us,” “Force it,” “Keep watch,” “Never lose never win.”

Overwhelmingly, children indicated that an officer on horse back was the one they were most likely to approach. 25 children wrote down “horse.” 12 children wrote down “on foot.” 7 wrote down “car.” And 3 wrote down “motorcycle.”

Children also wrote down the following phrases in response to the question: “cop on horse, cause horse is love,” “on a horse more approachable,” and “they seem more approachable and engaging when they’re on their horses.” While the responses of local school children to these questions at *Horses of Newark* support the positive impact of horses on the perception of police officers, further research studies including wider sample sizes, and a breakdown of demographics would be useful for assessing the effects of horses, concerning civilians and law enforcement, in communities.

Two horses struggle—ears pinned, mouth agape—amid the humans in the War of Americas statue in Military Park.<sup>29</sup> Intended to honor the deceased, this sculpture also reminds viewers of the centrality of horses in breaking down and building communities of people. The history of horses’ roles in the NPD mounted police unit is both negative and positive. Current discourse around horses in Newark illuminates the complex function of the horse. Officers believe horses both frighten and calm civilians. Horses help move civilians; horses help officers communicate with civilians. Responses from children and people at *Horses of Newark* indicate officers with horses are more approachable than other officers. Law enforcement in Newark, and across the United States, is in dire need of retraining and reframing its role in society. At the core of many reforms is community engagement. As my analysis of observations, interviews, and responses to *Voices of Newark* demonstrate, horses change the city. Horses change how the public feels when seeing police officers. Horses change how police officers feel

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<sup>29</sup> The War of Americas statue created by Gutzon Borglum, was erected in 1926.



about their work. Mounted officers feel the pressure of writing tickets, of maintaining crowd control at events, and deterring crime—but they also feel they are ambassadors of law enforcement. Officer Rosa explains, “The police horse is the bridge that connects the officer to the public. It is no surprise that a normal day for an officer on horseback involves continuous interactions with children and community members. This trustful symbiotic relationships is more pivotal today than at any other time in police history.”<sup>30</sup> This chapter suggests that police departments reassess the importance of mounted units. If horses create more opportunity for curiosity, mounted units should not exist at the discretion of shifting budgets. If horses create more opportunity for connection, cities should be rescuing more ex-race horses headed for slaughter, training more officers to work with horses—and provide support for mounted officers and horses to ride through our city streets.

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<sup>30</sup> From an article posted on the board in the barn of the NPD’s mounted police unit, observed by the author during her field work. Officer Rosa’s article “The Utility of Mounted Patrol in a Globalized World” was published in December 2014, in the law enforcement magazine NJ Blue Now.

### **Chapter Three. Humanizing Animals: Talking About Horses and Prisoners**

#### **Opening**

The horse stood still. The prisoner gently pulled at the lead rope, encouraging the horse forward. Stubbornly, his four legs slightly splayed, the horse ignored the man's clucking and tugging on his halter. The day was hot. September in the Hudson Valley had begun hotter than usual, the skies clear and blue for miles. The occasional breeze was warm, offering no respite from the heat.

Warned by so many that I should "cover up" so as not to incite licentiousness, I was sweating in an ankle-length cotton dress, boots, and a long-sleeved cardigan buttoned to my collarbones. Small billows of dust were the only clouds that day at the Wallkill Correctional Facility, located eighty miles north of New York City. Several prisoners walked about the farm, heading to the far pasture to fill a water trough, retrieving tools from the shed to mend a fence. Some of the men looked my way, returned my smile, while others avoided my eyes. The sound of weed whackers and farm machinery whirred and chugged. A prisoner, a stocky Caucasian man who grinned at a joke before he started the tractor, was angling near a fence line, shearing down the tall grass. The clipped pastures, parched, seemed almost to crunch underfoot. We stood in the shade of an oak tree, the instructor and myself, watching the men groom the horses, chatting with other prisoners resting on overturned buckets. The Corrections Officer would arrive soon to return the men to the prison, so we waited, staying cool in the last moments of the day.

The horse stood still. He was a chestnut thoroughbred, a gelding with streaks of fly spray beneath his eyes, gleaming where the man had wiped his face. The prisoner, a Latino man with black curly hair, gave a light tug on the lead rope. He paused, as if flipping back through mental notes on his horsemanship lessons (he was new to the Second Chances Horse Program). He moved to the other side of the horse and asked him to move forward again, but the gelding wouldn't budge. The instructor was turned away, watching the man on the tractor dismount and unlatch a gate, drive through, and latch it behind him as he continued mowing the 84 acres of farmland. I watched the prisoner and the chestnut gelding. The man kept looking into the horse's eyes, searching for an answer. *Why wouldn't he go back to the pasture? Did the horse not understand what he was asking?* An experienced horsewoman, I looked the length of the horse thinking perhaps he was favoring a hoof, or injured in some way. Then I looked down. I smiled, and spoke sideways to the instructor.

"He's *reeelaxed*."

"Hm?" He turned. "Oh." He paused. "*Ha*, yeah."

The horse's penis was dropped, erect, and he was whacking it against his stomach. Engorged, it made only the slightest noise under the rustle of leaves and the tractor in the distance. *Thwack, thwack, thwack*. The horse started ejaculating, his penis wobbling up and down, from side to side, spraying, as he finally began to walk. The prisoner hadn't seemed to notice (it often takes time to learn how to read the equine body beyond just the face). He walked the gelding down the road, taking off his halter, and securing the pasture gate. He patted the him softly on the

cheek. The horse nuzzled briefly into the man's hand before flipping his head at the flies, turning to join the herd.

Sweating from too many layers on a hot summer day, I pulled at the damp armpits of my cardigan and I couldn't help but smile to myself. So many well-meaning folks had warned me to cover up, for fear that the sight of a young woman's skin might spark a frenzy of sexual deviance in the incarcerated men I was to interview. They were *after all* prisoners. They were inmates, men (so many black and brown) locked up ostensibly because of their deviance, their “animality.” The men I met at the Second Chances Horse Program were kind to me. They were generous with their time, their knowledge, and their stories. It took a horse to bring forth sexuality—a basic aspect of human animal and non-human animals. A symbol of strength, freedom, and beauty in the United States, equines are often elevated above humans to spiritual heights; their animality, their full animalness is often left out of stories about horses saving humans. This sexual release during my visit, this masturbating chestnut gelding, disrupted prisoner stereotypes and reinforced a basic element of what it means to be an animal—human and otherwise.

## **Introduction**

Home from college for the summer of 2004, my old horse trainer introduced me to a lawyer who rescued horses off the track—those too slow, too old, or too injured to continue racing careers. Without the time to care for so many horses, the lawyer offered me my first gig in the horse industry: \$10 a horse, per

day. I groomed and exercised the horses, doctored their injuries, grazed them in fields speckled with star thistle. I re-trained the horses fresh off the track, acclimating them to heavier saddles, convincing them that an easy trot under the oak trees and a slowing response to *whoa* was all I was going to ask of them. The lawyer loved these horses for simply being; she provided for them because she believed that to be cared for was their right. That they might become nice trail horses to ride on weekends was only a bonus. They had, after all, not asked to be born into the racing industry. For a horse, survival is about function—or luck. These horses were lucky. The Standardbred ex-race horses of the Newark Mounted Unit are also lucky; if they don't fit, or they are retired from service, they go back to the Standardbred Retirement Foundation. Yet many horses are not so lucky. An ex-race horse that finds itself in the hands of a rescue organization like the SRF might live out her years with no more asked of her than pasture ornamentation, accepting carrots from small children and allowing the human hands on her body—but an ex-race horse with too many injuries, too many psychological issues from the rigors of the racing industry<sup>1</sup>, might go to the kill lot. To be *of use* is a horse's best chance at living.

To be of use is a cross-species issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite increased regulations, the racing industry continues to be dangerous, and even deadly to horse and human alike. Horses who survive years of racing are often left with physical and emotional issues that manifest in lameness and stereotypies. See Stereotypic Animal Behavior (<http://www.aps.uoguelph.ca/~gmason/StereotypicAnimalBehaviour/library.shtml>). Stereotypes are repetitive movements and behaviors that are repeated to try to deal with a problem. These behaviors have been compared to humans that are autistic or struggle with OCD.

The usefulness of prison has shifted over time. Depending on who you ask: the prison is for punishment, production, safety, slavery, or rehabilitation. And while the meaning of “rehabilitation” is widely debated within the fields of criminology, penology, and public discourse, current prison programs aim to make prisoners *of use*. Very often, this means useful in manufacturing, in production, in economy—yet, this has also come to mean a prisoner’s sense of usefulness, sense of use to others, sense of self.<sup>2</sup> Odd as it may seem, in some circumstances, it means to be of use to horses.

Those categorized as unfit for, not of use to, society are locked up. Prisoners, especially men of color, are viewed as deviant and lacking desire to be of use in mainstream America. Those prisoners who do not “redeem” themselves and develop “usefulness” while incarcerated may face longer prison terms, and increased difficulty when or if they are released from prison. Ex-race horses, no longer able to run, no longer able to earn income for their owners, are all too often thrown away; left to starve, or sold at kill lots. In 1982, these two disregarded populations were brought together for the first time. The Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF), partnered with the Wallkill Correctional Facility (WCF)

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<sup>2</sup> On rehabilitation and desistance, Shadd Maruna’s *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives* (American Psychological Association: 2013) is exceptional. Maruna’s premise is that for ex-offenders to refrain from offending, to “make good,” they must “*make sense* of their lives.” And this “sense-making commonly takes the form of a life story or self-narrative”(7). Offering evidence from the Liverpool Desistance Study, Maruna demonstrates how ex-offenders who abstain from crime craft self-narratives that explain their criminal pasts as well as why they, and/or their circumstances, are now different. A key element in some of the subjects’ narratives was a sense of usefulness.

in upstate New York, and established the Second Chances Horse Program (SCHP), where prisoners would learn how to take care of horses.

The horse-human relationship has been, and continues to be an interspecies negotiation of power, understanding, and relationship. Humans' own intra-species struggle of dominion over one another have long been bound up in their categorization of other species. Likened to apes, black people were denied membership in the human species, and despite three centuries of racial struggle, black and brown bodied people's fight for full humanity continues.<sup>3</sup> This language, "fight for humanity" is used because black- and brown-bodied people have been relegated to subhuman status; however, it seemingly necessitates a devaluation of nonhuman animals: a division of species by worth. The category of humanity, and the concept of humaneness, requires problematizing. How can we talk about equality, about the valuation of the lives of all human beings alongside the valuation of the lives of nonhuman animals?

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<sup>3</sup> During Jim Crow, men of color were defined negatively by animality. Constructed as aggressive and menacing, they were labeled criminals and rapists. The trope of the dangerous black man continues today. This is the excuse employed when police officers gun down unarmed black teenagers and young men: they were monstrous, demonic, something other than human. Writing about the Grand Jury decision not to indict Officer Darren Wilson in the death of unarmed victim, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri—reporter Sabrina Siddiqui notes the contrast in descriptions of the victim from his friends and family who referred to him as a "gentle giant" and Officer Wilson, who said that Brown looked "like a demon." Rutgers Law Professor David Dante Troutt argues that the version of events reported by Wilson "only squares if you buy into a stereotype of wildly aggressive black men, one minute walking down the middle of the street with a friend, the next risking life to take on an armed cop." While access to opportunity is systematically withheld from black and brown people, their bodies are routinely made accessible to those in power through police practices that target minorities and the poor. New York's stop-and-frisk policy allowed officers to routinely detain and harass black and brown men.

### **Theoretical Framework: Constitutive Categories and Mutual Avowal**

As an educator working in the equine industry, I have long explored the ways that working with horses has positive effects for humans. I have discussed how training horses can encourage a more expansive understanding of the body in the classroom, for teachers and students—and I continue to be interested in the empowering possibilities of horse-human interactions, specifically how the articulation of this cross-species relationship is entangled in both bolstering and breaking down categories of race and species.<sup>4</sup> While the work of many scholars across Animal Studies, American Studies, and Women and Gender Studies has influenced me, this project is directly informed by and in response to Claire Jean Kim's book, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (2015).<sup>5</sup> Employing an intersectional approach, Kim argues for a multi-optic vision, a "reorientation toward an ethics of mutual avowal, or open and active acknowledgment of connection with other struggles"(20). Examining an "ethics of disavowal," Kim demonstrates how prioritizing the interests of oppressed human

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<sup>4</sup> In a co-authored article, with Mira-Lisa Katz, "Pasture Pedagogy: Reflections from the Field on Embodied Learning," concerning the impact horse training had on my embodied and multimodal approaches to teaching college composition, we showed how working with horses engendered social growth for a young woman I mentored at a mustang rescue (Peter Lang, 2013). Discussing the expanded communicative repertoire of this young woman, we demonstrated how she broke out of repressive embodied gender norms when she commanded the fuller range of communicative modalities necessary to successfully communicate with horses.

<sup>5</sup> Kari Weil and Natalie Corrinne Hansen's work has been particularly influential in my thinking concerning race, sex, and species. See Weil's *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012) and Hansen's "Humans, Horses, and Hormones: (Trans) Gendering Cross-Species Relationships" in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3/4 (Fall - Winter, 2008), pp. 87-105.



or nonhuman animals is a “false choice,” one which disavows the struggle of one group in order to bolster the situation of the other. This approach is blind to the intricate ways in which power “traverses and binds the taxonomies of race and species”(283). Unpacking the intricacies of the debates concerning the dog-fighting scandal with NFL-star Michael Vick, Kim explains how two sides developed: anti-racists horrified by the demonizing of a black man and animal advocates enraged by dog-fighting. Kim denounces this binary approach to understanding the Vick saga. Instead, she advocates for an ethics of avowal where those on both sides of the argument would deeply consider the variety of issues, acknowledging the connectedness of the exploitation and oppression of human animals and non-human animals.

Kim analyzes how the Vick saga "produced, contested, and reproduced" categories of race, species and nature.<sup>6</sup> Dogfighting, condemned by mainstream America, was not debated; rather, at play was the level of punishment Vick deserved, and "whether or not race was *a factor* in his prosecution and public exco-riation" (277). Animal rights' advocates highlighted the violence of dogfighting, foregrounding “the optic of cruelty,” while defenders of Vick countered by focusing on the violence of racism still present in the criminal justice system, mass in-

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<sup>6</sup> In the spring of 2007, Michael Vick—an NFL star of great talent, with enormous endorsement contracts, and the first African American player to be picked first in the NFL draft—was charged with felonies concerning dogfighting. While he initially denied the charges, he eventually pled guilty (as the co-defendants, friends of Vick in the dog-fighting operations agreed to testify against him) and was sentenced to 23 months of incarceration.

carceration, and America at large.<sup>7</sup> Kim denounces this approach to understanding the Vick saga. She explains, “antiracism does not logically require reinscribing the subordination of animals,” yet defenders of Vick worked from the basis that Blacks are above non-human animals and therefore non-human animals are not worthy of moral consideration (277). Kim’s project demonstrates how avowal does not foreclose critique. She encourages animal advocates not only to avow the pain and mistreatment of the Pit Bulls used in the Vick dog-fighting scandal, but to acknowledge, “that white people clamoring for a Black man’s (violent) punishment *can never, ever be a race-neutral narrative*” (278). She likewise encourages an ethics of avowal for race advocates: to resist the “reflexive moves of asserting human superiority and reducing animal advocacy to anti-Black racism” (278). An ethics of avowal means that those on both sides of the argument would deeply consider the variety of issues, acknowledging the connectedness of the exploitation and oppression of human animals and non-human animals.

I also engage Lisa Guenther’s call for a “political and ethical phenomenology of constitutive relationality”.<sup>8</sup> Guenther argues that we need to respond to the care and consideration of “prisoners as human animals and not as humans ra-

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<sup>7</sup> Kim notes Michael Eric Dyson’s suggestion, that Blacks have a great investment in confirming the human-animal divide, as they have been, and continue to be placed into the “human-animal borderlands.” However, Kim counters that because taxonomies of power are constitutive, people of color should be invested in “redefining a borderlands wherein human and animals are reimagined and human-animal continuities (cognitive, social, emotional, moral) are avowed in ways that diminish neither humans nor animals” (277-278). Race and species have been historically “sutured” and opposition between race advocates and non-human animal advocates only further solidifies antagonism and oppression.

<sup>8</sup> See Guenther’s *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and its Afterlives* (2013).

ther than animals.” Her framework addresses how “animality” is employed to demean human animals, and how “humane treatment” is about treating all species as fully animal (128). In this chapter, I employ an intersectional approach with visual and rhetorical analysis, taking up Kim’s call for a multi-optic vision.<sup>9</sup> However, unlike Kim’s analysis in *Dangerous Crossings*, my examination does not center on hotly contested debates, with one side arguing for the rights of a group of racialized humans and the other side arguing for the rights of a specific nonhuman animal. Rather, I turn to a situation that is seemingly an avowal of the interests of vulnerable humans *and* the interests of nonhuman animals: prison horse programs.

### **Rehabilitation and Animals in Prison**

The very notion of rehabilitation has been a fractious topic within the fields of criminology and penology, as well as in public discourse in America. Preceding this question is perhaps, what is the purpose of prison? To punish; to isolate; to rehabilitate. Broadly, rehabilitation means to assist a person in “fixing” non-normative social or cultural behavior in order to secure that person’s successful re-entry into society. Rehabilitation made possible through punishment was first manifested in penitentiaries in the nineteenth century. It was believed that kept in solitude, prisoners would reflect on their sins and be transformed. The

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<sup>9</sup> I am indebted not only to Claire Jean Kim’s furthering of the concept of intersectionality, thinking in terms of taxonomies, but also to those whose earlier work on intersectionality has made a great impact on the way we think within and beyond the academy, including Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, and Angela Davis.

Pennsylvania system, which stressed solitary confinement with Bible study and quiet time to reflect, was later changed to the Auburn system, focusing on labor and physical and mental discipline. Though contemporary prisons often offer educational opportunities, including various vocational training and some rehabilitation programs (often centered on re-entry), there remains a need for consideration of prisoner needs, and an understanding of how the prison environment limits potential for change (“Rehabilitation Theory” 843). Environment not only has an impact on how one feels, it also often affects how one is able to see oneself. It shapes not only our current sense of self, but extends into our imaginary—and how others may be able to see us. Animal programs inside prisons, or equine facilities bordering prisons, create new environments, and thus present a new area of rehabilitation requiring study.

While research has been conducted on the positive impact of activities with horses for people with cognitive and physical disabilities, few have considered the impact of working with horses on incarcerated people in America. Some initial work has been conducted on animal programs inside prisons, with positive results. The first successful animal therapy program in an American prison was at the Oakwood Forensic Center in Lima, Ohio, in 1975. David Lee began this program after some incarcerated men tried to save a bird that had been injured, and they displayed improvements in attitude and cooperation as they worked together to care for the bird. His study of a 90-day period, of inmates who cared for animals and inmates who did not, revealed stark differences in their well-being. This included a total lack of suicide attempts by those with animals and eight attempts

by inmates who did not have the company of animals.<sup>10</sup> Other programs have demonstrated decreased recidivism, lowered costs, and even boast a marketable product in trained dogs. At the Washington Correction Center for Women in Gig Harbor, Washington, Tacoma Community College has helped to create a dog training program, with canines rescued from the Tacoma-Pierce County Humane Society. Some programs, such as this one, offer prisoners training to develop work skills, college credits, and an opportunity for “increased self-esteem” in an environment positively impacted by the presence of animals.<sup>11</sup>

Advocates of more effective rehabilitation and treatment of prisoners often speak to the need to see prisoners as fully human.<sup>12</sup> Guenther clarifies this call for holistic measures. Her analysis of solitary confinement reveals the ways in which prisons do not take into account the basic animal needs of living human beings, such as access to space, exposure to light, and contact with other animals (human or non-human). She argues that we must come to think of prisoners not just as humans, but as *human animals*—as whole beings. This shift may also move society toward Kim’s ethics of avowal (if only linguistically at first) as we break down the binary of human and animal, and begin to think of *human animals* and *non-human animals*. Animal programs inside prisons attend to the basic need for contact and connection with other living beings. Many researchers and scholars argue

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<sup>10</sup> See “Humanizing Prisons with Animals: A Closer Look at ‘Cell Dogs’ and Horse Programs in Correctional Institutions” by Christian Deaton (Journal of Correctional Education, 56(1) 2005 March) 46-62.

<sup>11</sup> See “A History of Prison Inmate-Animal Interaction Programs” by Earl O. Strimple (*American Behavioral Scientist*, Volume 47 No. 1, September 2003) 70-78.

<sup>12</sup> See Deaton.

that human-animal bonds can transform people; dogs and horses show non-judgmental affection that can allow people to develop a more positive sense of self.<sup>13</sup> While the rescue of horses otherwise going to slaughter is easily accepted as positive, what does it mean that non-human animals (horses) are required for prisoners (predominantly the poor, the black, and/or non-citizen) to become “humanized”?

### **Prison Horse Programs: An Brief Overview**

Prison horse programs exist where correctional facilities partner with either the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation (TRF) to create vocational opportunities for prisoners, where they learn to care for and work with horses. The chestnut gelding from the introduction is a resident at the TRF’s Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility. This program, like others where correctional facilities partner with the TRF, focuses on the care of ex-race horses.<sup>14</sup> Some of the programs created in correctional facilities provide vocational training for the prisoners, where they might earn a certificate in the Groom Elite™ Vocational Program, or possibly learn how to shoe a horse.

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<sup>13</sup> See “The Human-Animal Bond and Self Psychology: Toward a New Understanding” by Sue-Ellen Brown for an overview of how companion animals can help humans (*Society & Animals* 12:1, 2004). See also Earl O. Strimple’s “A History of Prison Inmate-Animal Interaction” (*American Behavioral Scientist*, 47, 1 (2003)70-78, and Froma Walsh’s “Human-Animal Bonds I: The Relational Significance of Companion Animals” (*Family Process*, Volume 48, Issue 4, December 2009) 462-480.

<sup>14</sup> See the Thoroughbred Foundation’s website at <http://www.trfinc.org>.

The Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility began as the very first program of its kind in the U.S. when the TRF's first ex-race horse arrived at the property in 1984.<sup>15</sup> Since then

It has been the home for hundreds of TRF retirees over the years and continues to provide the dual benefit of helping horses and people. Not only have the retired Thoroughbreds found a safe and caring home, but the inmates who tend to them have reaped tremendous benefits. They learn a useful skill in horsemanship. The TRF developed a state-accredited vocational training course in horse care and management. This innovative approach has become the prototype for other TRF programs and a model for other organizations. Even more importantly, the inmates develop a bond with another being, the value of which is immeasurable. For many, it is a lesson in trust and compassion that has helped make them better citizens upon their release.<sup>16</sup>

SCHP was created for both horses and humans. Discipline, patience, and empathy are consistent themes across media covering this program. From newspaper articles to YouTube videos, the same sentiments are echoed: SCHP saves horses *and* prisoners.

#### **IV. The Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility**

Horses as healers, showing prisoners how to love, is a growing conversation. Articles in *The New York Times*' about the Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional facility (from 1984 to 2003) emphasize a central

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<sup>15</sup> There are currently nine partnerships with correctional facilities across the United States: Dependent Ranch in California, Vandalia Correctional Facility in Illinois, Putnamville in Indiana, Blackburn Correctional Facility in Kentucky, Lowell Correctional Facility in Florida, Wateree River Correctional Facility in South Carolina, Plymouth Correctional Facility in Massachusetts, Central Maryland Correctional in Maryland, and Wallkill Correctional Facility in New York.

<sup>16</sup> See the TRF's website, <http://www.trfinc.org/farms-and-facilities/new-york/wallkill-correctional-facility/>.

theme: horses as teachers. *What exactly are they teaching? And why are prisoners ideal students for these lessons?* Supporters and staff posit that ignored and discarded ex-race horses engender empathy in the prisoners who learn to take care of them. Prisoners are viewed as ideal students because of the stereotypes about prisoners as devoid of empathy. New York State's Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Correction Services stated in the first year of the program, "There's something to be said for giving a person responsibility for another living thing".<sup>17</sup> Yet, this responsibility is framed as more than simple care-taking; there is an alignment of ex-racehorse and prisoner. Robert Lipsyte reports, "there is a sweet synergy to the parallel lives of the prisoners...and the horses."<sup>18</sup> Some prisoners echo this alignment. Jay Schleifer is a former Wallkill inmate; now he's an alcohol and substance abuse counselor with the New York Department of Correctional Services. Schleifer claims, "Working with the horses saved my life." He explains,

Around them I could let my guard down. I could be myself. I could also learn from them...about love, trust and caring. And I also realized how much in common we had. We were all in pretty bad shape and we might have been beaten down, but we were definitely not out. Together, we could all make it.<sup>19</sup>

Schleifer isn't the only prisoner to convey this sense of connection. Other *New York Times* articles point to prisoners who have developed deep relationships

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<sup>17</sup> "Sports World Specials; Good Deal for horse" by Michael Katz, *The New York Times*, July 9, 1984. Web.

<sup>18</sup> "Backtalk; It's not a Winner's Circle By Any Means, But It'll Do", *The New York Times*, October 29, 1995. Web.

<sup>19</sup> See the state of Maryland's website, [http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/initiatives/psw/index\\_PSW\\_rj\\_SCF.shtml](http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/initiatives/psw/index_PSW_rj_SCF.shtml).



with horses. Reporter Robert Lipsyte describes prisoner Rafael Cepeda feeding an apple to a horse, saying he loves the horse, saying the horse understands him. Reporter Mike Wise writes that prisoner Efrain Silva “wept openly in front of his fellow inmates” when he was told his favorite horse, Creme de la Fete was euthanized. Silva said, “I fell in love with that horse... The day I met him, I looked into his eyes. I says: I’m going to take care of you, Creme. You watch.” Prisoner Tony Garner, shares, “I’m an ex-drug addict, I had low self-esteem. This makes you feel like someone. Taking care of an animal — they’re like children, dependent — brings out your empathy.” The sense that many prisoners convey feeling in these articles, that they are able to *be* themselves and *better* themselves with horses, is a phenomenon supported by research on human-animal bonds. This is the centerpiece of the growing field of equine assisted education and therapy practices. Across education and therapy associations the rhetoric is consistent: horses are *healers*, horses are *non-judgmental*, horses are *mirrors of their environments*, horses are *helping humans be better people*.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, these ideas are at the core of the horse training philosophy vocational instructor Jim Tremper utilizes.

Tremper—a tall white man with bright eyes and a warm, gruff voice—was both my research subject and chaperone, hardly leaving my side during my two-day visit. He shared that when a friend talked to him about the job over thirty years ago he was initially wary at working with prisoners. He came to love work-

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<sup>20</sup> There are numerous associations who center their education and therapy programs on the “nature of the horse”. The following are just a few: Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (<http://www.eagala.org>), Equine Experiential Education (<http://www.e3assoc.org>), Equine Guided Education Association (<https://egeassociation.wordpress.com/about/>).

ing with them. When I asked Tremper about his philosophy of working with horses and prisoners—during my visit to the program in September 2015, he told me about his own change of heart. Growing up in rural New York, Tremper explained that while the nature of working with horses wasn't cruel, when you wanted the horse to do something "there wasn't a question." A relationship (or at least a harmonious one) wasn't the central goal. But soon after Tremper became the vocational instructor at the newly-founded Second Chances Horse Program, he received a horse training video in the mail from Monty Roberts. Tremper was affected by the "prey-identified masculinity" presented in the video; he shifted his way of being with horses, starting from a place of empathy, seeking understanding. Tremper is an example of the positive impact of the "revolution in horsemanship." While no one was taming wild horses or even riding at SCHP, Tremper wanted all the men to approach horses with the ethology-based, paralinguistic techniques which trainers, like Roberts, have translated from the body language of horses.<sup>21</sup> The core belief, that humans should approach horses with the horse's best interest in mind, with compassion and patience, is important to the work at the Second Chances Horse Program. What does this approach do for the prisoners? What does this do for the horses?

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter One. Scholarship has only recently begun to look at the phenomenon of "Natural Horsemanship." See Lynda Birke's "'Learning to speak horse': the culture of 'natural horsemanship'" in *Society and Animals* (15 (2007): 217-239) and "Talking about Horses: Control and Freedom in the World of 'Natural Horsemanship.'" *Society and Animals* (16 (2008): 107-126)), and Erica Tom's "Gender and Power in Narratives of 'Natural Horsemanship': The Production of 'Prey-Identified Masculinity'" in *Humanimalia: a journal of human/animal interface studies* (Volume 7, Number 1 (Fall 2015)).

In her book, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012), Kari Weil investigates the question of knowability across species.<sup>22</sup> Poet, philosopher, and animal trainer, Vicki Hearne believes that training is a way to begin understanding another being, however, only insofar as we are willing to be understood. Humans have long pointed to language as that which separates human animals from non-human animals, that which separates *and* places non-human animals below human animals. Humans in this hierarchy are elevated above, and unknowable. However, Weil directs us to Hearne's interest in destabilizing hierarchies of knowledge in which, "horses stand as rebuke to our knowledge because they seem to know us better than we can ever know them" (11). Natural Horsemanship echoes Hearne in positing that horses *know* us. We cannot hide ourselves. Weil considers, "We may know animals in ways they cannot—we may know their breeds, their color, their weight, their names, their 'histories'—but they may also know us in ways that we cannot know because they know the world and us by other means" (Weil 11). This knowledge by other means (means beyond our human-animal language and systems of knowledge) is a crucial part of how horses help prisoners. At the Second Chances Horse Program, Tremper tells the men who come to learn about horsemanship, *the horses don't know what you did, they just know who you are today.*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A canonical book in a burgeoning field, Weil engages key philosophical questions that form the base of theoretical Animal Studies. Across literature and art, she considers how "animals are good to think with", speaking of thinkers from Jacques Derrida to Donna Haraway, from Vicki Hearne to Giorgio Agamben, and suggests new ways of thinking animals.

<sup>23</sup> From author's field notes.

Tremper introduced me to the prisoners and the horses, joking around with the men, and patting the horses. There was distinct pleasure in his voice when he described how prisoners learn to be patient as they work with the horses, how prisoners want to stay in the horse program even when there are other vocational programs where their income would be higher. They love the horses. One prisoner told me that he hadn't expected to fall in love with the horses; he was just excited to have “outside clearance.” Initially, he just wanted to be outside—“in the open.”

It's hard not to be swept up in the beauty of the place—acres of green pastureland, horses grazing, and men absorbed in the quiet accomplishment of quotidian tasks: cleaning troughs, fixing fences, administering medication. A big black and gray tabby named Ramon walked the grounds. He was the eldest cat, the rest a litter of kittens about a year old. I watched as a prisoner held one of the tiny felines against his chest, fur disappearing inside his interlocked forearms. Standing at the highest point of the property, listening to one of the prisoners tell me about his favorite horse, I almost forgot these men were incarcerated—until I looked into the distance, beyond the awning of oak leaves, spotting the watch tower of the maximum security prison that sits across from the Wallkill Correctional Facility.

### **Humanizing Animals: Talking About Race, Gender, and Redemption**

“The horses taught me how to love.”

Noël Jiménez is sitting across from me, underneath a black walnut tree. He sits up straight for a few moments, then leans forward, hands on his knees. The

chairs are office chairs made of metal with green cushions. It's so hot, we decide outside is better. Another prisoner brings the chairs out for us, setting them up under the tree—a solid ten feet apart (so far apart it was hard not to be embarrassed). I smile and ask if I can bring my chair closer (we would have had to shout at that distance). This is the first time I am alone with one of the prisoners. Well, mostly alone. We sit under the tree (now, about five feet apart), around the corner from the main office and tool shed, and along the dirt path where other prisoners come and go to the pastures. The vocational instructor, Jim Tremper and Corrections Officer Walsh aren't too far off, discussing schedules and other details of the Second Chances Horse Program. I begin by asking his name and where he is from: "Noël Jiménez. The Bronx. New York." I ask him how he came to work with the horses. I ask him how it has affected him. He smiles shyly at me, his teeth as white as the teardrop tattoo, under his left eye, is black.. He begins to share his story.

Noël Jiménez was being released from prison soon. Thirty-five years old, Noël spent more than half his life incarcerated. Finishing his third prison sentence, he feels like this time he has a chance of staying out. Noël grew up in the Bronx. His father wasn't around. His mother was a drug addict. He "grew up around a lot" that made him "want to get involved with the lifestyle."<sup>24</sup> Regardless of her addiction, Noël says that his mother took care of him. "She did her best, until she went to prison."<sup>25</sup> He was still a child when his mother went away,

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<sup>24</sup> From author's field notes.

<sup>25</sup> From author's field notes.

and his grandmother took care of him after that. Noël stressed to me that he made a choice, “I knew right from wrong. I chose the wrong path.” Yet, he also said, “I grew up in the lifestyle of the street, and I went right into it.” While speaking about circumstances that impacted him, Noël makes a point of telling me *he* made decisions, *he* was responsible for his actions.<sup>26</sup>

Since childhood, people had been telling Noël he needed to control his anger. His family. His friends. Counselors. Other prisoners. He couldn’t hear them. However, with the horses it was different. Without spoken language horses speak clearly, “[the horses] show me, they don’t tell me.” Noël explained that while people tried talking to him (he made a motion with one hand toward his ear, the other hand continuing the motion on the other side of his head) it never stuck. But the first day he came to the Second Chances Horse Program the horses *showed* him. He walked into a pasture: the horses walked away from him. Noël asked Tremper for help, or rather, he told the instructor that the horses must have a problem with him. Tremper asked Noël how he felt. He looked at me as he reflected, “I’m in prison, how do you think I feel?” Tremper told him if he wanted to be able to work with the horses he would need to at least start talking to the horses.

I asked him for help. I tried to approach the horses positive. I was going through a lot and I was bringing it out. Talking to them. Waiting for them to come to me. I knew I had to be sincere, they can hear it from the tone of your voice.

Tremper told him that the horses didn’t know what he did to be in prison, they only knew how he was being that moment, that day. This rhetoric constructs the

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<sup>26</sup> This discussion of his past, circumstances and responsibility follows with the “making sense” Maruna describes is central to ex-offenders desisting from further offending.

horses as mirrors. Located as instinctual, non-judgmental, transparent reflections of their environments, horses are unmediated manifestations of “truth.”<sup>27</sup> This is an important distinction for Noël’s story.

Noël believes the horses changed him for the better. While he knows he has anger problems, he claims that he has new ways to deal with them. I asked if he could give me an example of how his approach with the horses crossed over into other areas of his life. Noël smiled and told me that his sister couldn’t believe how he had changed; she couldn’t believe that horses had made his change possible. He explained, “My sister has had a lot of anger at me...for being locked up.” And for a long time, he shrugged it off, “you know...like, *she got issues*.” It wasn’t until he saw himself reflected in the horses that he could see what she had been telling him. When he came out to the fields angry, the horses walked away. This allowed him to assess himself, to accept that he needed to make some changes without the weighted judgement he felt from his sister. Though the horses may have been telling him the same thing as his sister, he could hear them clearly. Because horses are understood as instinctual being of nature, not embodying social issues kin, of class, race, and gender, horses’ reactions are read as objective—as trustworthy. As many practitioners of Natural Horsemanship and Equine Therapy

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter One. See also Miller and Lamb, and Erica Tom’s “Gender and Power in Narratives of ‘Natural Horsemanship’: The Production of ‘Prey-Identified Masculinity’” (*Humanimalia: a journal of human/animal interface studies* Volume 7, Number 1, Fall 2015).

claim, “Horses can’t lie.”<sup>28</sup> Over time Noël was able to change his body language, dropping aggressive stances for open ones.

One day, Chance, a social gelding, described by several prisoners as the lead horse, walked over to Noël. Noël waited patiently, and Chance reached out and touched him. After that, he fell in love with horses.<sup>29</sup>

Noël described a day when his sister was visiting him, and another visitor cut in front of her at the vending machine. Instead of “getting up in his face” as he would have done in the past, he approached him in a positive way (like the horses). He greeted the man and said he looked familiar, asked if he knew him from his neighborhood; they didn’t know one another (as Noël already knew) but after they had established communication, Noël motioned to his sister, “You probably didn’t see my sister waiting there, but she was waiting.” The man apologized in a friendly manner, and said he hadn’t seen her. Noël’s sister was shocked at her brother’s behavior, “*Who* are you?” He tried explaining it to her, but it wasn’t easy to put into words.

Noël described how much he came to love the horses, how they showed him how to love. How exactly they showed him this love he couldn’t articulate. This seems the case in other prisoner’s stories as well, yet it appears always very clearly connected to the acceptance and affection prisoners receive from the hors-

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter One. The notion that horses cannot lie is often cited by those working with horses in educational and equine therapy settings, as well as equestrians, but especially within the Natural Horsemanship community. Trainer Chris Irwin, with Bob Weber, titles his book, *Horses Don’t Lie: What Horses Teach Us About Our Natural Capacity for Awareness, Confidence, Courage, and Trust* (Marlowe and Company, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> From author’s field notes.



es. Discarded as dangerous or useless, prisoners are not valued by society. Yet, at the SCHP prisoners are discovering a sense of self-worth through their relationships to another living being. Without such programs, prisoners are relegated to disuse—viewed by society, and most likely by themselves, as valueless. Given the opportunity to “make good,” these men demonstrate their value to society, horses, and themselves.

Before I was allowed to enter the SCHP, an employee walked me through a long list of rules (many of which I had already gone over—this is how I knew to wear clothes that covered most of my body). Yet, arriving that morning, a question arose that I hadn’t thought of before; I asked if I could shake the hands of the prisoners when I met them. The employee wondered aloud why so many visitors to the prison asked this question; clearly there is anxiety about contact between prisoners and other people, at least on the part of visitors.<sup>30</sup> I was told that there were no strict rules about handshakes. If I wanted to shake hands, and if a prisoner offered theirs, it wasn’t a problem.

I was allowed to take photographs during my visit, only a few of which the prison employee asked me to delete. Above all else, these photographs capture the *physical contact* and *intimacy* between prisoners and horses. Prisoners lean against the thick torsos of the horses; they run their palms across their muzzles; they rub sleep from the eyes of the horses; they throw their arms around the horses’ necks, embracing them. And the horses return these touches. They stand pa-

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<sup>30</sup> This is perhaps unsurprising given how prisoners and prison are pictured in mainstream media; films centering in or about prison and prisoners are so great it constitutes an entire genre.

tiently leaning their necks into a hug, they nod their heads up and down against the palm on their forehead, they nudge the backs of the men for attention, they nose the pockets of prisoners (hoping for a starlight mint, which several men bring from commissary). Reading through articles, listening to videos, parsing interview notes, each time a prisoner says that the horses taught them how to love or made them feel loved, I think of my time observing the prisoners at the Second Chances Horse Program, taking these photographs, and what was captured: the *contact* and *intimacy* between horse and human.

### **Conclusions**

The instructor and prisoners at the Second Chances Horse Program watch over the health of the more than fifty retired race horses, preparing grain and supplements for the older horses, like Birthday Surprise—a thin bay gelding—who is standing strong at 35 years old. At the close of my two-day observation it seemed apparent: whether physically recovering from a racing injury, or emotionally and psychologically healing from abuse, Jim Tremper and the prisoners ensure the health of these horses. Instead of being stabled separately in barn stalls, the horses live in herds—an arrangement that allows for movement and socialization. Unlike other rescues that stress retraining and adoption, between the financial support of the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation and the cost saved by partnering with the Wallkill Correctional Facility, there isn't a push to repurpose the horses. Thoroughbreds retired from the track, rescued from abandonment, abuse, or starvation can live out their lives in peaceful pastures.

The prisoners walk these pastures in pairs; one man holds a bucket heavy with grain, the other scoops the grain into plastic bins spread about the pastures for the horses. Nutrition is just one of the realms about which prisoners gain knowledge as they learn to take care of the horses. Along with general handling skills, the neglect or injury some of the new horses have endured offer opportunities for the prisoners to practice patience as they try to win the trust of these horses. While this pairing of prisoner and horse initially appeared problematic to me, my visit to the SCHP revealed this pairing to be overwhelmingly positive.<sup>31</sup> As I observed the health and wellbeing of the horses, as I watched the men handle the horses with skill and care, as I listened to the stories of the prisoners, I saw the simple joy that emerged in the relationships between the horses and the prisoners. And I experienced my own joy in interactions with the prisoners, as I felt they shared genuinely and generously with me. Despite the good this program creates—prisoners whose existence is enhanced through access to being outdoors, through the development of relationships, through the contact and intimacy that comes with caring for the horses—there are dangers in this discourse of empathy. Dangers to both horses and humans.

The discourse of empathy that emerges in the media, as well as in my fieldwork, can be read as heartwarming stories of men “making good.” However, in the time of “New Jim Crow,” to speak of prisoners is to speak of black-

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<sup>31</sup> Initially, I was concerned that horses in need of care were being given to people without the experience needed; I was also concerned about the danger horses can pose to humans, especially to humans who do not know how to safely interact with them.

ness/race and of poverty/class.<sup>32</sup> These are not colorless stories. Michelle Alexander warns us that the “colorblind public consensus” makes “a new caste system” invisible (The New Press, 911-13). This caste system is created across areas from housing policies to legal actions, that function together to subjugate non-white people, specifically black men (The New Press, 13). The prison industrial complex *makes* race. As intersectional analysis has demonstrated, race is bound to class (just as it is bound to species). To be a black man means to be associated with the lower classes, to be associated with crime, to be seen as criminal. Alexander explains, “This process of being made a criminal is, to a large extent, the process of ‘becoming’ black” (200).

When people view the photos I took, when they hear the stories these men told me, they ask, “Do you think they were telling you the truth?” This impulse saddens me. Yet it is perhaps unsurprising. Mainstream America’s colorblind approach reinforces blackness as criminal. Prisoners, and those framed as law-breakers, are seen as people who are inherently lacking the qualities (empathy and the desire to contribute to society) that are required for decent treatment by society, and specifically law enforcement. Recent media coverage of the shooting deaths of unarmed black men and the subsequent Black Lives Matter movement make evident the false claims of a post-racial America.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (The New Press: 2012).

<sup>33</sup> In her book *Are Prisons Obsolete*, Angela Davis explains, “The term ‘prison industrial complex’ was introduced by activists and scholars to contest prevailing beliefs that increased levels of crime were the root cause of mounting prison populations” (Seven Stories Press, 2003) 84. Those who utilize the term prison industrial complex contest that the

Prisoners who claim horses teach them about love and patience are also claiming that they previously lacked love and patience, reproducing the stereotype that prisoners are incarcerated because they lack these qualities. Such narratives may blind us to debilitating legal, housing, and employment policies that put a disproportionate number of black men (and poor people) in prison and that makes it nearly impossible to gain employment and retain housing upon release, ultimately putting them on a fast track back to incarceration. Noël has one of these heartwarming stories. He explains how learning to be with the horses allowed him to be better with other humans. He explains that because of what he learned, when he leaves prison this time he has a real chance at staying out. Yet, Noël claims a prior “cold hearted[ness]” and lack of empathy—lack of humanity—in order to claim his redemption. This story of redemption is compelling, yet also reproduces stereotypes about prisoners, about the poor, about black and brown bodied men.

These stories may also be dangerous for horses if they lessen the importance of further work to better the lives of equines in America. While safety measures were implemented in the 2000’s after major deaths (of both horses and humans) in the racing industry, the frequency of accidents and injuries necessitate further changes. A safer racing industry will reduce the need for so many horse

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development of prisons and the push to keep them filled with people is ruled by “ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit” (84). Michelle Alexander undertakes an excoriating account of the War on Drugs and the prison industrial complex, framing incarceration and ideals of a “post-racial America” as an insidious re-inscription of systematic inequality in her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (The New Press, 2012). Alexander demonstrates that viewing the election of Barak Obama as an indication of the “nation’s ‘triumph’ over race” is not merely false, but dangerous.

rescue organizations. We must also consider, as horses continue to be utilized in therapy and educational programs, that the framing of the horse as a healer can sometimes de-animalize the horse. As noted in my prologue, we often elevate horses above those they are said to be helping; the horse becomes both representative of nature, and also ethereal in their goodness. The cooperative nature of the horse should not blind us to seeing the horse as a full animal being, with complexities, needs and desires. It is also important to acknowledge that this project does not call for the freedom of all horses, but rather accepts the subjugated status of the horse in American culture. Further work might call such normalized notions into question, considering current wild horses under the protection of the government and potential re-wilding.

While there are dangers in this discourse of empathy, there is also possibility in these prisoners' narratives of care, of interspecies relationships. Prisoners spoke of connection, of common experiences. As former prisoner Jay Schleifer shared, "I realized how much in common we had. We were all in pretty bad shape... Together, we could all make it."<sup>34</sup> Schleifer felt he could "let [his] guard down" and be himself. Likewise, Noël was able to drop problematic physical and emotional postures and behaviors when he learned from the horses. He trusted the horses. Despite his own situation, Noël worked for the horses. He helped prisoners new to the program learn how to care for them; he was protective of them, "If

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<sup>34</sup> See the state of Maryland's website, [http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/initiatives/psw/index\\_PSW\\_rj\\_SCF.shtml](http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/initiatives/psw/index_PSW_rj_SCF.shtml).

you're not here to be about the horses, then you shouldn't be here."<sup>35</sup> Another prisoner at SCHP, William Douglass, or "Billy" also took the care of the horses seriously. Billy is white, thin, fifty years old with a head of closely cut white hair. He grew up in the Adirondacks. He is incarcerated for using heroine. He gets out in less than two weeks. But he wants to come back—to visit Boodles.

Abandoned as a colt, Boodles almost starved to death before being rescued by the TRF. Boodles was very wary of people, but tasked with acclimating the horse to his new life, Billy fell in love with him. Working with Boodles helped him become very patient, "It was a slow process." Billy confessed that he never thought of the horses as individuals before coming to the program. He had been to the track before; he bet on races. But, he told me that he didn't see them as individuals until he came face-to-face with them. "There are 52 horses. I know every-one by name."

At the start of this chapter, I asked how we might talk about prisoners and horses, about humans and other animals, without placing one above the other. Kim's theoretical intervention in Animal Studies and American Studies encourages other ways of talking, ways of thinking that allow for the mutual avowal of all beings. She demonstrates an ethics of disavowal with the Michael Vick dog-fighting case, and offers how an "ethics of avowal" could unite race activists and animal rights advocates. Moving beyond this important book, I had trouble identifying an ethics of avowal in-practice. The academy, the government, the media, and mainstream America still need to find a language of mutuality—a way of

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<sup>35</sup> From author's field notes.

talking that can change culture and policies. Yet, as I turn to the stories of these prisoners, it seems that they are already talking about themselves and other animals through an ethics of avowal.

Billy, just weeks away from getting out, was already talking about coming back, coming back to check on his friend Boodles. Released from prison now, Billy hopes he can get his parole switched to Sarasota, where a farrier at SCHP has helped him set up a job at a horse farm. He made it out, but his journey to stability isn't over. Noël, also now released, is grateful to the horses—grateful to the change he feels they facilitated for him. Noël was a positive influence at SCHP, where he sought to instill pride in the other prisoners as they learned to take care of the horses. Hoping for a chance to stay out of prison, to “make good,” these prisoners also hope for the good of horses. Even as they struggle in a racist system designed to diminish their possibilities for health and happiness, in their stories, they avow the lives of their equine companions.



## **Chapter 4. Conclusion: Horses Beyond Talk**

### **Opening**

These young people, toddlers to teenagers, are all in transition. A girl rescued from sex slavery. A boy rejected from a foster home because he is touching a younger child, most likely reenacting what had been done to him. Sisters, each struggling, to move forward from the devastating rape of the youngest by a family member. Many of these children are shut down, many in flight or fight response to traumatic experiences; they are diagnosed with brain damage, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, bipolar syndrome, schizophrenia. They are all struggling with post traumatic stress syndrome. These children at the Valley of the Moon Children's Center participate in a partner program with the equine non-profit Belos Cavalos, a Trauma-Informed Equine Experiential Program (TEEP). As one of the TEEP leaders, I co-create curricula and co-facilitate art projects with counselors and researchers, all centering around the horses and nature.<sup>1</sup>

*Horses have been carrying humans, carrying our supplies and weapons, across continents and into wars for thousands of years. Here in the Valley of the Moon, a place where horses were made to participate in the destruction of the Mishewal Wappo people, we want to ask the horses to be with us in a different*

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<sup>1</sup> The Trauma-Informed Equine Experiential Program, a partnership between Belos Cavalos and the Valley of the Moon Children's Center is influenced by the work of Dr. Robert D. Macy (who is currently working with VMCC), the principles of Equine Experiential Education, and the work of Richard Louv. Dr. Macy was trained as a dance movement therapist (DMT), clinical psychologist, and traumatologist. He is a neuroscience researcher, and the President of the International Trauma Center. See Louv's *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* (2008), and *The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder* (2011).

way.<sup>2</sup> *We are going to ask Secreto to help us move forward with brightness into the new year. We are going to paint him with words and symbols representing qualities, people, or things that are important to us as we move into the new year.*

Secreto stood facing west, the wind blowing through his mane, the sun warming his white winter coat. Seven girls of varied ages and races gathered around him, paint brushes poised. *Hope* in blue and pink. *Joy* in purple. *Loyal* in red. *Family & Friends* in black. *Flowers* in multicolor. *Peace* in yellow. *Love* dripping pink. A red heart under his left eye. As the girls painted their words and symbols onto his thick short haired coat he stood quietly. Secreto wore a leather halter, another TEEP leader held his lead line. But it wasn't needed. The light strokes of the paint brushes and the touches of their tiny hands were like a massage. As the girls braided his mane his neck dropped lower. Secreto's body showed his enjoyment and relaxation. He licked and chewed. His bottom lip bobbed. He yawned, his eyes softening—lids fluttering like the green leaves on the oak tree above the arena.

Aligning TEEP with the work of the international trauma specialist, Dr. Robert H. Macy, we focus on several key areas of development with the children: empathy, resilience, self-regulation, and respectful relationships. Meditative breathing is one tool we try to give the children. When the girls were done painting, we took Secreto's halter off. He followed us as we came to the center of the

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<sup>2</sup> This simplistic narrativizing of the role of horses in white westward expansion, and the genocide of indigenous peoples, is used for the purpose of demonstrating a contrast of treatment of horses from then to this moment for the young people in the Trauma-Informed Equine Experiential Program. More on the complexities of domestications and animal agency will follow.

arena. We began our mediative breathing (inhale 3 counts, exhale 6 counts), we felt our toes in our shoes, and our feet on the ground. *We are going to bring our energy up together to send Secreto away, and around the arena. To ask him to move we do not want to make him feel he has done something wrong, we want him to know we are playing, that this is part of our activity together.* We began to cluck, *chk chk chk!* Raising our arms, smiling, we jumped. Secreto pivoted and sprang forward, trotting off to the edge of the arena. Some of the girls howled—*wwooowooo!*—laughed, smiled skipping. Secreto cantered, the rainbow of words dancing along his body. *And now let's bring our energy down together. Breathing.* We all began our deep breathing. Inhale, 3 counts. Exhale, 6 counts. Our bodies relaxing, our shoulders drooping: Secreto slowed to a trot. We took another breath: Secreto stopped, turning to face us. *Let's continue our breathing, and come closer together, backing up toward the middle of the arena.* We breathed together, slowly backing: Secreto began to follow us. We stopped; he stopped. The girls gathered around him, petting his face and his soft fur as he leaned down into their tiny hands.

One of the little girls—a survivor of repeated rape by a family member—left VMCC the next day for a foster home with her two older sisters. The oldest sister usually stood back while the young ones participated in the horse activities. On their last day at Belos Cavalos, after her youngest sister painted *Hope* in blue on Secreto's hind end, she joined. She painted *Esperanza* in orange, in perfectly spaced letters along Secreto's back. Before they left, they had exit interviews.

When the youngest girl was asked if she learned anything during this time of transition she responded, “I learned how to breathe.”

### **The Symbolic Work of Horses**

Throughout this dissertation horses pull more than their fair share of symbolic weight. Animals of the American dream, mustangs gallop across the media—power, beauty, and freedom reverberating with their thundering hooves. In chapter one, in the discourse of Natural Horsemanship, horses are animals of prey. They are aligned with small creatures, such as dogs and children. They are conflated with women through dating analogies. White, male Natural Horsemanship practitioners perform prey-identified masculinity, demonstrating their empathy and sensitivity while retaining power. Like children and women, horses are viewed as potential victims that are worthy of paternalistic care. Stallions represent America’s admiration of masculinity—as well as America’s tense preoccupation to contain female, non-white human male, and nonhuman animal displays of masculinity.

Police horses pin suspects to cars, until back up arrives on the scene. Police horses stand quietly, while the public—small children, “horse crazy” women, suspected drug dealers, and the mentally ill—pet their necks and hug their long faces. In chapter two, horses are figures of comfort and connection, as well as figures of fear and disconnection. Officers of the Newark mounted police unit tout the Standardbred, a breed of horse that can learn to live in contradiction to their instincts. Police horses are technology. Police horses, like Bullet, are brave com-

rades. Police horses, like Sharpie, are ambassadors of law enforcement. Horses are strong and dangerous animals. Horses are also friends and family to the officers. When the unit was disbanded, officers felt like they were losing their family. Officers know they are not supposed to get attached—but they do. The horses seem to show excitement when an officer returns from being away, as Bullet responded to Manny returning from vacation. And officers jokingly share how their wives get jealous of all the extra time they spend taking care of the horses on Orange Street. Horses impact the daily experience of police officers—and the public.

Viewed as parallel victims of failed systems, prisoners and ex-race horses come together to heal one another in chapter three. Thoroughbred ex-race horses are aligned with prisoners, with children—dependents in need of care or rehabilitation. Haraway engages another alignment of animal and prisoner in *When Species Meet* (2008). Discussing the Animal Planet show *Cell Dogs*, she demonstrates how the dogs inside prisons become “freedom-making technologies for each other. They are each other’s machine tools for making other selves” (64). As shown through the stories of Noël and Billy, the horses also allow new selves to develop in embodied, face-to-face, hands-on encounters, “is how those machines grind souls with new tolerance limits” (64). The dogs in this show, and the horses in the Second Chances Horse Program, “require and model nonviolent, nonoptional, and finally self-rewarding obedience to an authority that each must earn in

relation to the other other” (64).<sup>3</sup> This is the path to survival. Despite the problems of the discourse of these programs, “these projects hold potential for much more promising entanglements that question the terms of these tropes and the conditions of those who must live them” (65). As Noël’s story shows—these interspecies relationships are about more than physical survival: “They taught me how to love.”<sup>4</sup>

At the SCHP Thoroughbred ex-race horses are also referred to as instinctual, non-judgmental manifestations of their environments, unmediated reflections of truth. Unlike being trained by Natural Horsemanship practitioners Roberts and Brannaman, unlike working as part of the Newark mounted police unit, horses in the Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility live with few expectations. They are expected to allow themselves to be haltered and led, given medical and general care, but otherwise they are left to live in the herd of 52 horses—with prisoners and staff intermingling. The horses’s work is to be a prey animal. To react to stimuli. To be a thousand pound mirror reflecting the environment, from the rustle of wind in the trees to the release of tension in a person’s shoulders. They are also affectional laborers—whose expressions of care (walking up to a prisoner of their own volition, allowing a prisoner to hug their head, returning an embrace with a wiggling mouth on a prisoner’s arm) deeply impact the prisoners. Instructor Jim Tremper explains the horses don’t know what

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<sup>3</sup> Like horses, the role of dogs has expanded. Haraway writes, “In the United States, dogs became ‘companion animals,’ both in contrast and in addition to ‘pets’ and ‘working and sporting dogs,’ around the late 1970’s in the context of social scientific investigations into the relations of animals such as dogs to human health and well-being” (136).

<sup>4</sup> From author’s field notes.

the men did to become incarcerated, they only know who they are in the moment. Noël shares, “Talking to them. Waiting for them to come to me. I knew I had to be sincere, they can hear it from the tone of your voice.”<sup>5</sup> At Wallkill, horses are valued for their instincts—for simply being horses.

This deep appreciation of the horse as truth, as nature—*as horse*—exists beyond prison rehabilitation programs. In chapter four, a look at the rise of the horse as healer demonstrates new problems and possibilities for horse-human relationships of mutuality.

### **Horses: Healers, Teachers, and Ciphers**

During the “Revolution in Horsemanship” there were other shifts, if not revolutions, happening in prison rehabilitation (as demonstrated in chapter two), in therapeutic practices, and in education.<sup>6</sup> In the leisure riding horse industry, as people found new ways to train and spend time with their horses, horses became best friends, family, even soulmates. Humans began to see their horses as healers. Seen as naturally connected to nature, horses became conduits through which humans could reconnect to the natural world—and to themselves.

Fiction and non-fiction stories of horse healers are abundant: *Horse Healers - 50 True Stories of Courage & Hope* by A Brownwyn Llewellyn (2007), *The Horse Whisperer* by Nicholas Evans (2011), *Connecting with Horses: The Life Lessons We Can Learn from Horses* by Margrit Coates (2012), *The Horse Healer:*

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<sup>5</sup> From author’s field notes.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Revolution in Horsemanship and What it Means for Mankind* by Miller and Lamb (2014).

*A Novel* by Gonzalo Giner (2015), *Riding Out the Rough: The Story of a Wounded Horse Healer* by Hilary Walker (2016), *Riding Out the Tempest: The Story of a Wounded Horse Healer: Part Two* by Hilary Walker (2016).

Memoirs, especially centered around a woman and horse, increased steadily in the 2000's: *Sacred Horses: Memoirs of a Turkmen Cowboy* by Jonathan Maslow (1994), *Milk Horses: A Memoir* by Rebecca Newth (1998), *Chosen by a Horse: a Memoir* by Susan Richards (2006), *The Horse Boy: A Memoir of Healing* by Rupert Isaacson (2010), *The Horse Lover: A Cowboy's Quest to Save the Wild Mustangs* by H. Alan Day and Lynn Wiese Sneyd (2012), *Starlight (Horse Healer)* by Judy Waite and Jason Cockcroft (2012), *Horses Never Lie About Love: The Heartwarming Story of a Remarkable Horse* by Janna Harris (2012), *Soul Deep in Horses: Memoir of an Equestrian Vagabond* by Merri Melde (2014), *One Hundred and Four Horses: A Memoir of Farm and Family, Africa and Exile* by Mandy Uretzlaff (2014), *Horse Vet - Chronicles of a Mobile Veterinarian* by Courtney S. Diehl (2014), *Stable Relation: A memoir of horses, healing and country living* by Anna M Blake (2015), *Lead with Your Heart: Lessons from a Life with Horses* by Allan J. Hamilton (2016). There are also the memoirs that focus more on the horses themselves: *Horse Soldiers: The Extraordinary Story of a Band of US Soldiers Who Rode to Victory in Afghanistan* by Doug Stanton (2010), *The Perfect Horse: The Daring U.S. Mission to Rescue the Priceless Stallions* by Elizabeth Letts (2016), *The Tale of the Dancing Slaughter Horse: A Memoir* by Victoria Shade (2016).



Finally, there is the explosion of guide books on equine *guided*, equine *assisted*, and equine *experiential* educational models: *The Magic of Horses: Horses as Healer* by Sharon Janus (1997); *My Horses, My Healers* by Beck Andros (2006), *In Partnership with Horses: As Our Coaches, Healers, Messengers, and Teachers* by Anna Twinney, *Horse as Teacher: The Path to Relationship*, Linda-Ann Bowling (2009), *Horse Sense for the Leader Within: Expanded Edition: An Equine Guided Approach* by Ariana Strozzi and Karen Farnsworth (2011), *Soul Recovery: equine assisted activities for healing from abuse by others, loss of others & loss of self* by Joy Nussen (2012), *Horsepower Volume One: Christian Equine Assisted Learning Activities* by Vikki J. Paese and Cheryl Harris (2013), *Equine-Assisted Therapy and Learning with At-Risk Young People: Horses as Healers* by Hannah Burgon (2014), *Equine Guided Education: Horses Healing Humans Healing Earth* by Ariana Strozzi Mazzucchi (2015), *Riding Home: The Power of Horses to Heal* by Tim Hayes (2015), *The Art of Facilitation, with 28 Equine Assisted Activities* by Charisse Rudolph (2015), *One Time Only: Equine Assisted Learning Practices for the One Time Only Group* by Mary Ann Brewer (2016), *Beyond Words: the Healing Power of Horses: Bridging the Worlds of Equine* by Alita H. Buzel (2016), *The Horse Leads the Way: Honoring the True Role of the Horse in Equine Facilitated Practice* by Angela Dunning (2017), *Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling* by Cynthia K. Chandler (2017). The role of healer and teacher opened up a new area of work for horses.

The Standardbred Retirement Foundation has two purposes: “to care for, rehabilitate, and secure lifetime adoption of non-competitive racehorses, to ensure

their proper care with follow-up, and combine the needs of youth at risk with these horses in therapeutic equine programs to benefit both”<sup>7</sup>. Many of these healing and teaching programs use horses that might otherwise go to slaughter. These programs all center on the healing power of horses, but can look very different. A few models include Equine Guided Education, Equine Assisted Learning, Equine Facilitated Learning, and Equine Experiential Education. While models may differ, many equine-based healing and learning programs are centered on the symbolic powers of the horse.

The “Equine” part of Equine Guided Education, a model created by Ariana Strozzi in 1999, stands for “A horse representing the ancient archetypes of strength, courage, dignity, power, honor, beauty, endurance, resilience, mystery, integrity”. Guided stands for, “The magical ability of horses to take us into unknown or unexplored territory; a place where we can heal the past, re-imagine our future, and connect to our life purpose and share our natural wisdom”. Education stands for “Educational, coaching, and therapeutic models that encourage effective relationship, communication, coordination, and social interaction skills for individuals and/or groups”.<sup>8</sup> This description demonstrates both the deep appreciation of “the horse,” as well as how horses can become ciphers.

Tom Tyler explains, “When ciphers are involved, the focus is not on the animal but on the argument or the problem to be solved” (28). Tyler enlists Carol J. Adam’s examples of how animals are erased: by eating meat, through linguistics-

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.adoptahorse.org>.

<sup>8</sup> See Ariana Strozzi’s website for her equine based business Skyhorse Ranch, <http://casariranch.com/sky-horse-equine-guided-education/>.

tics, and by appropriation through metaphor for human experiences. Within many models of equine-based healing and learning, interactions with horses serve as metaphors for interactions with other humans. There is danger when the analogizing foregrounds the immediate experience. It is not *this human* and *this horse*, being in each other's presence, interacting in relationship. Rather, it becomes *this human* and *any horse*. "They are there, but not there not 'animals in their own rights' their individuality" (28). The frame of horse as mirror de-animalizes, de-personalizes, de-individualizes the horses that are part of these programs. Tyler makes plain how animals often serve as placeholders, "unwittingly serving some higher pedagogic purpose." And he calls for a de-ciphering of the ciphers (29).

### **Possibilities and Limitations of Ethology**

Ethology is the science of animal behavior. Ethology provides structure and vocabulary for Natural Horsemanship, "prey-identified masculinity," and equine-based healing and learning programs. Horses occupy a unique place in the American imagination and in ethological study: there are domesticated, feral, and wild horses. Discourses of Natural Horsemanship, many equine-centered memoirs, and equine-based healing and learning programs rely on ethology of horses in the wild. Natural Horsemanship practitioner, Monty Roberts, created his approach to horses based on his observations of wild horses; so did Liberty Horse Trainer, Carolyn Resnick. Resnick drew on her observations of wild horses to interact with and train horses without the aid of ropes and tack (though she is vide-

oed carrying a whip).<sup>9</sup> That horses are prey animals, reflecting their environments, and social, herd animals that exist in hierarchy, are widely accepted facts about horses. Despite widespread acceptance of these behavioral concepts and training based on these concepts, developed from studies of horses in wild, some question the logic of these studies.

Francesco De Giorgio is a biologist and ethologist specializing in animal cognition. He promotes a zooanthropologic model for improving understanding and relationships between humans and other animals. Francesco is also a member of the Ethics Committee of the International Society for Applied Ethology. José De Giorgio-Schoorl teaches applied zooanthropology, and consults in the animal-human relationship. De Giorgio and De Giorgio-Schoorl run Learning Animals, a company based in the Netherlands, which works internationally to create awareness for the animal-human relationship, taking the socio-cognitive abilities of both into account. In *Equus Lost: How We Misunderstand the Nature of the Horse-Human Relationship-Plus, Brave New Ideas for the Future* (2016), De Giorgio and De Giorgio-Schoorl highlight the anthropocentric basis of mainstream understandings of horses.<sup>10</sup>

The view (and misunderstanding) that the horse is a reactive animal is kept alive by the fact that nearly everything linked to the horse is based on the idea previously explained—that “he is a fight-or-flight animal.” It is the first phase that makes everything else difficult to unravel. Books, blogs, videos, training DVDs—the message is constant and insistent: “Why does a horse spook? He spooks because it is the most natural thing for him to do.” But it is

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<sup>9</sup> See Carolyn Resnick’s website (<https://www.carolynresnickblog.com>) and book *Naked Liberty* (2005).

<sup>10</sup> See <https://thecognitivehorse.com> and [www.learning-animals.com](http://www.learning-animals.com).

not. It is what humans think is the most natural thing for him to do. When a horse spooks, instead of asking, “Where did I go too far?” or, “What can I do differently?” the question usually asked is, “How can I make him stop spooking.” We start to desensitize and expose the horse, with pressure and food rewards, to other strange objects, hoping to train him until he no longer shows any flight reactions. Yet the problem remains. That horse has not actually been able to understand the context, and will spook again as circumstances change. And, once again, we will not be surprised by his behavior because we think it’s just the way horses are. However, a horse isn’t only evaluating everything from a black-and-white perspective, needing to decide whether something is dangerous or not. A horse can also just be intrigued, for the simple fact that gathering information is interesting. The outcome might not lead to a reaction, but information is stored as knowledge, processed somewhere to help in making a decisions, or simply kept for future applications—or not (27-28).

De Giorgio and De Giorgio-School indicate the anthropocentric point of view that leads to human’s striving to desensitize horses to objects of the human world, rather than considering how they might do something differently for the horse. They also bring up curiosity. While being curious and intrigued, horses may demonstrate behaviors not desired by humans. If this behavior is “corrected” the horse never has the chance to simply explore without necessarily storing fear as knowledge for future instances.

De Giorgio and De Giorgio-School encourage those of us who live and work with horses to release the Cartesian and performative approach that shadows much of animal cognition research. This research is undertaken with the aim to train horses, instead of focusing on understanding their needs and working with their socio-cognitive abilities (21-22). They contend that, “the more we study horse cognition from a human point of view, the less we know about his real emotional, social, and mental perception and understanding” (22). If De Giorgio and

De Giorgio-Schoorl are right, that horses *become fight-or-flight animals* through their interactions with humans—then we need to reevaluate the basic concepts that inform the majority of human-horse interactions, training disciplines, and learning and healing programs. This diverging path, “makes us question ourselves, our automatic and routine behavior when dealing with horses, but also our relationships in general. At the same time, it creates room for greater expression, inspiration, and new insight” (4).

The concept of honesty illuminates the trouble with currently accepted behavioral concepts of horses. *Horses never lie.*<sup>11</sup> This is an often repeated phrase by Natural Horsemanship practitioners and followers, as well as by facilitators in the equine-based learning and healing industry. Horses are made “honest” in this dissertation. As noted in Natural Horsemanship and in the Second Chances Horse Program at the Wallkill Correctional Facility, horses are elevated as “natural beings”, respected for their ability to reflect their environment. Without spoken language, without guile, horses never lie. Speaking to her world with baboons, Anthropologist and psychologist Barbara Smuts, agrees that spoken language allows us to lie. She contends that, “closely interacting bodies tend to tell the truth” (7).

Haraway ruminates:

This is a very interesting definition of truth, one rooted in material-semiotic dancing. . . I suspect this is one of the things my fellow competitors and I in the dog-human sport called agility mean when we say our dogs are ‘honest.’ I am certain we are not referring to the tired philosophical and linguistic arguments about whether dogs can lie, and if so, lie about lying. The truth or honesty of

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<sup>11</sup> Also the title of a book, *Horses Never Lie: The Heart of Passive Leadership*, by well known horse trainer Mark Rashid (1993).

nonlinguistic embodied communication depends on looking back and treating significant others, again and again (27).

Haraway appreciates Derrida for his pausing, to see his cat. But he falls short. He does not engage in the looking, being seen and returning his cat's gaze. "From an ethological point of view, horses are socio-cognitive animals in their specific and individual patterns. Thinking of them merely in terms of prey or 'fight-or-flight' animals is clearly too simple and doesn't make it possible for us to see them as they truly are" (12).

Scholars Donna Haraway, Erica Fudge, Kari Weil, and Jane Desmond appreciate Derrida's critique of Western philosophy for its degradation of the animal. A degradation required to uphold the status of human as above all other species. Derrida pushes past the general "cat" to recognize *this* cat, his cat, in the singular. He writes of the creature before him, unknowable; "its illegible, enigmatic look signifies the secret of a unique, total Other whose proximity is unbearable"(19). Derrida urges us not to consider the cat, in the broad general notion, but to consider animals in their singularity. He seeks to complicate the border of human animals and non-human animals, and Erica Fudge takes up part of this examination, excavating the complications created by "the pet".

Considering compassion, Fudge draws on Philosopher Nancy E. Snow's ideas, and reminds us that "we can really only experience our own experience" and thus compassion functions through self-reference; "I feel for you because I understand myself and I imagine that you are like me" (66-67). Despite the *I-centeredness* of compassion, Fudge explains it need not be selfish. There is recognition of likeness and difference in the "imaginative leap" one takes to em-

pathize with another being's experience. Utilizing Snow's term "imaginative dwelling", Fudge contends that pet ownership is a kind of imaginative dwelling. And she asserts, "I can easily see a way in which such imagining in could be extended to read, however provisionally, the experience of an animal" (67). Fudge points out that humans are limited in understanding any consciousness outside the self, and thus she questions why humans insist upon the notion that a human must be able to fully know a non-human animal to know a pet.

Laurel Braitman puts it somewhat humorously discussing human dating, pointing to the fact that we often ask the person we are with what are you thinking or what are you feeling, and that sometimes, that person may not even know. So how are we to ascertain just what a pet might be thinking?<sup>12</sup> And after we consider Fudge's conception of pet ownership as an imaginative dwelling and Braitman's humor on dating, how might we re-conceptualize how we measure human-pet understanding and relationships? Fudge posits that "pet ownership, like compassion, requires imagination"; it requires educated guesses that rely on both empirical observation (watching how an animal responds) and imagination (67). Bartkowski explains this is not so different from a human mother and human child, as they struggle for fluency in their interactions. A thought that begins "If I was a cat..." could be relegated to the real of "mere" anthropomorphism, but it is also a productive—not to say compassionate—mode of cohabitation (68). Hara-

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<sup>12</sup> The proliferation of texts concerning pets continues; some are overviews of various species, while many have focused upon what is argued to be human's longest term companion, the canine. See Susan McHugh's *Dog*, and Alice A. Kuzniar's *Melancholia's Dog*.



way offers up the model of the trainer and dog as one way in which humans and non-humans animals can be joined in a common purpose, a common understanding, and even *desire*. Considering the evolution of the human-canine bond, Haraway argues this is a mutual adaptation rather than simply dominance of humans over dogs; dogs and humans are, “face-to-face, in the company of significant other, companion species to one another. That is not romantic or idealist but mundane and consequential in the little things that make our lives” (93). Yet, there is romance in the mud.<sup>13</sup>

Pontouf’s warm, thick torso pinned me to the side of the dark, metal trailer.<sup>14</sup> Pain shot through my chest. A fire in my elbow turned the wrong way. Her hoof kissing the edge of my boot. After what felt like hours, and must have been seconds, Pontouf released, scrambled back, and recovered. Her long delicate ears swiveling—to the herd, to me, to the trailer, to the trees. She was beautiful. She knocked the wind out of me. We stood there, panting, looking at each other. And I was thinking of Wright’s poem, transposing Minnesota onto Washington, and I was smelling thrush just worrying about it. In the wet pasture she was in, a bacte-

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<sup>13</sup> Here I draw inspiration from, and play with, Haraway: “I think we learn to be worldly from grappling with, rather than generalizing from, the ordinary. I am a creature of the mud, not the sky”(3).

<sup>14</sup> Wendy Williams writes of the differences in human and horse perception in *The Horse: The Epic History of Our Noble Companion* (2015): “We often put horses in situations where they cannot see very well. When we lead a horse from bright sunlight into a dark horse trailer, for example, our own vision improves immediately. But the horses vision will not be good for about thirty minutes. To him it may seem as though we are leading him into a dark, dangerous cave”(212).

rial infection like thrush could take hold in her frog.<sup>15</sup> Aggravate and destroy it. Expose sensitive tissues. Become painful.

Along the road—Pontouf, the trailer, and me—Derrida’s reminder “that humans and animals are real beings and not just abstract concepts” isn’t needed (87). Something more is needed. Derrida sees *this* cat. But he cannot respond. Haraway explains his response would have been a “risky project...asking what this cat on this morning cared about, what these bodily postures and visual entanglements might mean and might invite, as well as reading what people who study cats have to say and delving into the developing knowledges of both cat-cat and cat-human behavioral semiotics when species meet” (379). As Desmond has illustrated, through her relationship to Blueboy (a bird who lived with her family), Pontouf and many other horses have trained me to acknowledge “the co-constitution of intertwined lives, while acknowledging the conditions of possibility and the power of dynamics that underlie that meaning” (228). It is the looking back—the regard—that draws me to these scholars.

With regard in mind, I return to the *horses* that *never lie*. The “honesty of horses,” promoted and used as a basis of relating simplifies the horse into an always instinctual, reliable mirror. This is the false, “fantastic kind of natural authenticity that only animals can have while humans are defined by the happy fault of lying denotatively and knowing it,” that Haraway warns us away from (27).

She states that the truth she is talking about with her dog Cayenne—and the truth

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<sup>15</sup> Thrush is a bacterial infection in the soft part of the horse’s hoof, the frog, that is associated with damp conditions.

I would like to talk about with horses—“is about co-constitutive naturalcultural dancing, holding in esteem, and regard open to those who look back reciprocally. Always tripping, this kind of truth has a multi species future. *Respecere*” (27).

What does this look like on the ground? In the mud?

### **The Trust Technique: Regard in the Contact Zone**

I work with horses in a world not far away from, and in many ways a part of the world Haraway inhabits with Cayenne. And last summer, Northern California drew in an internationally acclaimed animal communicator, James French. His approach to working with animals is called Trust Technique. French works with all animals, tigers to toy poodles, and importantly, humans. An important note on the many videos of French working with nonhuman animals, especially wild animals, is that he does not proceed across the fence, or into their cages. He works with a Tiger across confines. These videos thus have a very different feel than the “animal tamer” type, who risks life to connect with a wild, and most likely dangerous nonhuman animal. He wears tee shirts, cargo pants, and hiking shoes. His frame is tall and broad, but he clearly drops his shoulders into a relaxed posture. An open stance. There is a notable absence of performative masculinity.

However, the videos of his work are not without problems. When I first saw his video “I have a dream,” I cringed at the use of the title of Martin Luther King’s iconic speech. This white man. These horses. As I watched the video again and again—French rises with a herd of horses who follow him in a graceful stam-pede through the woods, and he rides astride, no bridle, no saddle, all “free”—my

insides go twisting.<sup>16</sup> A horrific use of MLK's speech, equating the strife of horses with that of black people in the U.S.? A useful parallel, urging us to reconsider the status of the horse in society? Neither? Within an ethics of avowal—where one sees from various perspectives, empathizing across vantage points—comparative suffering isn't useful.<sup>17</sup> And though I cringed at the language of the video, I attended a day class with James and Shelley French (his wife and animal communicator partner), and tried to keep an open mind.

The purpose of the Trust Technique is to encourage people to interact with all animals with mindful regard. Trust Technique is intended to be healing for nonhuman *and* human animals. As a healing technique, it does not sit squarely within the horse training industry, like Natural Horsemanship. However, many of the people who follow the Trust Technique work with horses. When James and Shelley French came to the equine nonprofit I work at, they led me through the simple approach. *Begin in the present moment. Choose a blade of grass or a piece of gravel to focus on, release all thoughts, and feel the wind on your face, the sun wherever it is shining. Breathe. Be in the present moment. Wait for a change in the horse (a shift in body weight, licking and chewing, a yawn, even a nip). Step back and fully regard the horse—without expectation.* For horse trainers, or people who are accustomed to asking horses for (and expecting) specific behaviors, this way of interacting with horses is a drastic shift. Natural Horsemanship represents a shift as well—a change from approaches of domination to that of

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://trust-technique.com>.

<sup>17</sup> See Claire Jean Kim's *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (2015).

cooperation. Natural Horsemanship practitioners and followers seek the cooperation of horses. However, the Trust Technique is about teaching humans to cooperate with horses without a goal of training or riding. The Trust Technique is centered in curiosity. And I would argue, its priority is *regard* in the “contact zone.”<sup>18</sup>

Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of the “contact zone” is a space “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in the world today” (34). Borrowing the sociological term, Pratt uses it to situate differences within classrooms, encouraging teachers to engage and examine—rather than erase—linguistic and cultural differences. Pratt asks teachers to regard students. Haraway encourages us into the contact zone with other species. Desmond echoes the necessity of these spaces, “of interactive and mutually constitutive embodied relations” (237).<sup>19</sup>

The Trust Technique is based on cooperative engagement, on respect. Just as I struggle to locate examples of Kim’s ethics of avowal—finding it in the stories of the prisoners in this dissertation—I struggle to locate examples of Haraway’s *regard* for nonhuman animals in the equine industry. This regard is not politeness. This is a complex way of being and engaging with other beings. Haraway suggests that in training, she respects, regards, and breaks bread with her dogs.

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<sup>18</sup>Haraway employs “contact zone” in *When Species Meet* (2008), and Jane Desmond in *Displaying Death and Animating Life: Human-Animals in Art, Science, and Everyday Life* (2016).

<sup>19</sup>Desmond critiques Derrida and his ethical stance that we do not enter into the worlds of animals, or ask them to enter in our worlds and projects. She states, “ethics are articulated in enactment, and the production of knowledge depends on engagement” (237).

She explains how both she and Cayenne are affected in their agility work: they become together in a “mutually embodied relationship” (Desmond 237). How does this engagement happen? Let us return to regard. Haraway explores regard as “active looking at”:

regard (both as verb, *respecer*, and as *respectus*)...to have regard for, to see differently, to esteem, to look back, to hold in regard, to hold in seeing, to be touched by another's regard, to heed, to take care of. This kind of regard aims to release and be released in oxymoronic, necessary, autonomy-in-relation (164).

What are the conditions that allow such regard to occur?<sup>20</sup> Beyond the relationship between agility dog and owner/trainer, how does regard shift in affective enactment and effective results across species, across contexts? It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to delve into the muddy mess of relationships of regard in eating animals, but we need not go that far to consider the challenges of mutually embodied relationships.

As acknowledged in the introduction to this dissertation, a horse's best chance at survival, at a life free from pain or discomfort, is to be of use. Humans buy and breed horses for specific purposes. Yet not all horses cooperate. Some Thoroughbreds are not fast, or simply refuse to run for their owners. While horses

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<sup>20</sup> Haraway asks us to consider the conditions that allow for various relationships and experiences to occur. Writing about “Jim's Dog”, a growth of tree and moss in the shape of a dog, she explains, “this dog could not have come to me without the leisure time promenading practices of the early twenty-first century in a university town on the central California coast. The urban walking pleasures touch the labor practices of late nineteenth-century loggers who, without chainsaw, cut the tree whose burned stump took on post arboreal life....Visually fingering Jim's dog involves touching all the important ecological and political histories and struggles of ordinary small cities that have asked, Who should eat whom, and who should cohabit? The rich natural cultural contact zones multiply with each tactile look. Jim's dog is a provocation to curiosity, which I regard as one of the first obligations and deepest pleasures of worldly companion species” (5-6).

no longer widely serve as agricultural laborers, critical to the production of food, the performance of horses is still bound up in many people's economic situations, and therefore, overall well-being. A Thoroughbred that does not perform fails its owner, its trainer, its jockey, and those that would bet upon his performance. The Trust Technique, an approach that foregrounds human animal cooperation with nonhuman animals—rather than animal cooperation with human animals—has no place in the racing industry. Perhaps further regulation will cauterize the flow of “useless” horses to auction (where they are mostly likely sold to slaughter). Perhaps not. What are the conditions that allow for regard, for mutually embodied relationships?

### **Conclusion: Painful Openings**

Attending physical therapy following my last shoulder surgery, my first job back with horses was rehabilitating a big quarter horse gelding. Sherpa had been cranky and bucking. He had tightness in his neck, especially turning to the right. Learning acupressure and massage, I also learned there are similarities in our structures, our skeletons. Through the winter months, I placed warm towels along Sherpa's back, asking him to stretch his neck as gently as I stretched my own. I walked and trotted next to him, showing him to bend at the pole, tucking my own chin to straighten my vertebrae as I ran, a bending I brought into the saddle the first time Sherpa was cleared to be ridden. Before my own pain, I worked horses with the hope that they would have lives; after, I began to work with horses to know their lives. Pain and stillness seemed to bring me into a greater capacity for what Kari Weil calls “empathetic anthropomorphism.”

The experience of chronic pain, of empathizing with the pain of the horses I worked with, imagining myself into the bodies of horses, a different kind of being-with was made available. My own bodily experience of pain allowed and authorized a process of affect. As Vincianne Despret writes, “The world disposes us to feel, and our bodies make the world available” (127). Pain moved my interest to the pain of the horses; my interest in their pain manifested in my hands through acupressure. Perhaps in this attempt of “empathetic anthropomorphism” there is only a “squatting” in the horse. Yet, it feels like an opening.

This autumn, I threw out my neck getting out of bed after a late night on my computer working on my dissertation. Muscles in spasm. Nerves electric. For two days I could hardly move, but on the third I forced myself out to Belos Cavalos. I arrived at the farm walking gingerly, unable to turn my head, incapable of the strength to hold more than the slightest pressure on a rope. Being with horses has been a site of physicality, the place where my embodied self feels most at home. Yet this autumn, muscles in spasm—my neck locked straight in pain—I felt debilitated. My physical path to connection with the horses was blocked.

Secreto is the horse who stood quietly for the little girls, as they wrote on his white coat in a rainbow of paints. A Lusitano, he was used for bullfighting in Brazil until he was gored, gelded, and imported to California. Most of his training goes unused now as he participates in trauma-informed equine experiential programs. The acute sensitivity to his surroundings that challenged his place as a bullfighting horse makes him a brilliant partner working with the children. On the



ground, he feels easy to connect with, even in broken-language. Astride, he insists on communicative clarity.

I had first ridden Secreto several summers ago, before my second shoulder surgery, before being kicked by the horse. Reacting to almost imperceptible movements, and having an education that far exceeded my own, I couldn't quiet my body enough to speak his language. He often grew impatient with my exaggerated or clumsy physical cues. The trainer I worked with insisted on more pressure, more tension in our interactions. In the years that followed, I came to learn how to quiet myself with him. Yet it remained a struggle to be as clear with him as he was with me.

Two weeks ago, relegated to stillness I was made to give up the small physical force of my 135 pounds to Secreto's 1,300 pounds. His keen reactions to me, his insistence upon my stillness, upon ease, and his calm cooperation with my pain, was a cycle of affect. I stepped astride considering that without access to parts of my physicality, there was opportunity for clarity. I focused on breathing slowly. I visualized the softest contact, the softest canter, the softest connection. Pain brought me both into, and out of my body, as I felt into his body with the softness the pain required—with a softening his body responded to. The muscles in my body relaxed, so that my seat bones dropped down into his back, my lower back releasing into his motion, his hips pressing forward and releasing backward. The spasms in my upper body grew quiet. His body carried mine calmly, as he gently tucked his nose, and I gently tucked my chin. Moving in rhythm, Secreto allowed my debilitation to become communication, connection; he allowed me to

become in harmony. This word I had long silenced closed off ways of being. Spoken, felt, acknowledged, pain created an opening, a new experience of being-with, for me, and I believe for him.

This auto-ethnographic reflection, my struggle with pain, my interspecies relationship with horses, and my identity inspired and also is deeply interwoven in this project. At many moments during my field work with the police and with the prisoners, my sense of self, my very presence has impacted the narratives I recorded and here analyze. In this project, I have moved beyond myself to track masculinity and metaphors, categories of race and species, and illuminate the ways in which we make meaning with one of our most integral companion species, horses. Our systems need to change. We need to stop locking people up. We need to stop treating humans and horses as disposable. We need to resist the single vantage point and expand our way of seeing to a multi-optic vision. We need to nurture a culture of awareness so that we can acknowledge the history that continues to shape how we see one another—within and across the species divide. As we work to change this system, we must remain aware and attuned to the human and non-human animals who are part of it. This project grew out of my own grappling with pain, masculinity, and identity. The analysis, unpacking, and understanding of this project has come back to me—and I now speak the word pain. I understand pain as a cross-species experience. I see pain as an opportunity to relinquish control. I feel pain as an opening.

### **Coda. On Pleasure**

As an entry point into empathy, pain is a specific contact zone where the potential for co-embodiment may reside. Pain is also a bridge to pleasure. After my shoulder hung limp, dislocated and twisted for hours—when the doctor pulled and popped it back in, pleasure filled my body, lit up my brain. Through sunlight, we see shadows; through sweetness, we taste bitterness; through silence, we hear birdsong; through seasons we feel time—in blooming death, in hibernating life.

With this painful opening, first trapped in stillness, a stillness that brought me into being with Secreto astride, loosened into softness formed by regard. With this painful opening, I also began to play. I began to spend time with Secreto (and the other horses) in a different way. A way without goals. As a former college athlete and a skilled laborer in the equine industry, my movement has always been made to specific results. The play I began does not ask for tangible results. This play was not based in power—despite Natural Horsemanship’s intention for respectful relationships, these horse-human relationships are still often constructed, begun from understandings of power. This play is not necessarily devoid of power, but it grows from another place. This play is about pleasure.

Beginning to play requires effort. Consciously, I try to set aside the intentions and expectations layered into my movement. I try to engage with Secreto (and other horses) without the intentions of training, without halters or lead ropes, without Natural Horsemanship—without expectation that he *should* wish to play with me at all. It does begin with leading momentarily. I ask Secreto to come with me into the expansive arena, where we can see across the fields, and feel the wind

sweeping through the valley. Releasing him into the arena, he often runs and rolls. And returns. We stand near each other, noticing and acknowledging one another, and the environment around us. We stand on top of a large cache of the Mishewal Wappo people when we stand in the arena—a federally recognized archaeological site. We stand in what is now called the Valley of the Moon, where thousands of Mishewal Wappo once lived. Where genocide occurred, and white male landowners took hold. Where diverse agricultural practices gave way to monocultures. Where wineries and small boutique stores now abound. Where the horse industry thrives. Where the wealthy of Sonoma County live, and the affluent of San Francisco come to visit. Where philanthropy thrives, and the Valley of the Moon Children's Center serves children in need.

Throughout this dissertation, I do not write of the horses that die from abandonment, maltreatment, or slaughter. I write of the lucky horses. The horses whose owners are mindful enough that they are interested in a horse training discipline that focuses on understanding. The Thoroughbred ex-race horses rescued by the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation and the Second Chances Horse Program. The Standardbred ex-race horses rescued by the Standardbred Retirement Foundation and the Newark Mounted Police Unit. The horses whose work brings perhaps only minimal discomfort—whose work perhaps brings pleasure. These are the lucky. The horses at Belos Cavalos are also lucky. And so are the humans. At Belos Cavalos, horses participate in physically low-impact equine experiential

activities, almost all with humans on the ground.<sup>1</sup> The mission of the nonprofit is to honor and promote the bond between horses and humans. While riding horses is part of the horses's activities, both for their exercise and health and the perceived enjoyment by humans and the horses, it is second to the educational work. Founded by Dr. Charlyn Belluzzo, an global health leader and successful business woman, Belos Cavalos is a place where regard is possible.

Practicing the Trust Technique encourages humans to simply be. To simply be without extending, without pressing the traditional desires of “training” or hierarchal relating onto other beings. This approach asks useful questions as a starting point for play. *How do I feel in my body? How does it feel to share space with this being? How does this being seem to feel sharing space with me?* I feel calm. It feels good. He seems calm as well. After some time, just noticing—sun streaming along the sand, lizards scurrying on the rock pile, other horses graz-

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<sup>1</sup> Horses in this program are asked to cooperate with being led through open mazes, simply graze, allow grooming, and other low impact activities. While there is more research on the therapeutic effects of horses on humans, there is a growing area of research on the horses that serve in these programs. In the study, “Can horses distinguish between neurotypical and mentally traumatized humans?” Katrina Merkies, found that horses exhibited behavior that indicated they were more relaxed with a human than when they were alone in a round pen. Further, “When compared to control subjects, horses carried their heads higher ( $p < 0.0044$ ) when with PTSD subjects. Since two of the PTSD/control human pairs were experienced with horses and two were not, a post-hoc analysis showed that horses approached quicker ( $p < 0.006$ ), stood closer ( $p < 0.0025$ ), and oriented their ears ( $p < 0.0003$ ) more toward humans who were experienced with horses.” Interestingly, the horses's heart rates are lower with inexperienced humans, whose heart rates were higher than experienced humans. The higher heart rate of the horses when exposed to humans experienced with horses may indicate a higher level of attention, and possibly embodied expectations by the experienced person. See [http://www.horsesandhumans.org/HHRF\\_dec16\\_report\\_K\\_Merkies.pdf](http://www.horsesandhumans.org/HHRF_dec16_report_K_Merkies.pdf), and the Horse and Human Research Foundation's website for other studies on Equine Assisted Learning.

ing—we turn toward one another. We move nearer, each step significant in this “dance of relating.”<sup>2</sup>

We breathe into each other’s noses. We are both warm, calm bodies in the windy valley. We explore each other tactically: my fingers tracing the hard bones of his face; his mouth moving up my arm. We groom each other—a significant aspect of building social bonds for horses, and for humans.<sup>3</sup> Hand curled, I use my finger tips to dig into the skin along his mane. His mouth works my shoulder, rubbing my sweater vigorously. He uses his teeth. I pull back. I move away from his mouth, stepping closer until my stomach is resting against his shoulder. I continue to scratch. He steps to the right—but not away: he curls his head toward me, looking (pointing?): he wants his back scratched. My fingers work. His head lowers. We stand there, and I am happy.

When I am happy, I move. I walk, then I begin running. Slowly at first. Secreto joins me, trotting. As if drafting, he swivels from side to side behind, then he comes alongside me. I run faster, breathe harder, and feel the stretch in my legs. I run faster; he canters. I sprint to the end of the sand box; I jump, twisting in the air, stopping facing my friend. He jumps too, pivoting on his hind end and flipping his head. We both trot on down the center of the arena, kicking up our

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<sup>2</sup> Haraway writes of, “situated histories, situated naturecultures, in which all the actors become who they are *in the dance of relating*, not from scratch, not ex-nihilo, but full of the patterns of their sometimes-joined, sometimes-separate heritages both before and lateral to encounter. All the dancers are redone through the patterns they enact. The temporalities of companion species comprehend all the possibilities activated in becoming with, including the heterogenous scales of evolutionary time for everybody but also the many other rhythms of conjoined process” (25).

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 11, “Tactile Perception in the Horse” in *The Mind of the Horse: An Introduction to the Mind of the Horse* by Michel-Antoine Leblanc (2013).

hooves and feet, tossing our manes. I jump towards him; he jumps away. I tip toe away; he tip toes toward me. We dance, pushing and pulling the space between us. We come to a stop, looking at one another, looking at the horses in their paddocks, some looking back at us. Standing, an ache grows from the base of my neck. I bend at the waist, dropping my head down to my knees, feeling the release of tension on my spine. He licks and chews, his head dropping too. We are done playing, releasing and relaxed. The lizards sunbathe on the rocks, the sunshine warms our bodies, the wind makes the trees sing. And we stand together—in the pleasure of each other's company.

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