

Abstract

In this thesis I critique the concept of training as it is conventionally defined and then expand the potential for training by reimagining it through using concepts found in classical dressage. Dressage, an ancient art in which a horse and rider work together to execute a series of dance-like movements, is at its core a practice of training. I put dressage concepts in conversation with works of feminist, queer, and affect theory in order to consider the question, how is our understanding of training limited by normative conceptions of power, authority, and methods of knowledge production? Through reworking these dressage ideas I reimagine training as a practice that is embodied, affective, intimate, complex, and connective.

I start by acknowledging the harmful role of vision in the rising popularity of competitive dressage but also note the benefits of embodied, situated vision. I then argue that, as an affective and embodied art, classical dressage values bodily knowledge and requires the concept of “feel,” a rider’s ability to feel a horse’s movement and affect. In the following chapter, I discuss position as a principle that organizes bodies and hierarchies of authority, and through examining the concept of submission as defined by dressage trainers and as it is used in human butch/femme relationships, I open up the concept of training to more nuanced understandings of how power hierarchies are constructed. Finally, I consider the riders’ common desire to connect deeply with their horses and, through exploring the various strategies dressage riders use to transcend a mind/body, horse/human split, I reimagine training as an Apollonian, affective process of becoming with.

**Straight from the Horse's Body:
Reimagining Training through Classical Dressage**

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Introduction

What does it mean to train? What is good training? How should training work? These are all questions I pondered early on in my relationship with Raja, a beautiful mare I leased when I was ten. Though I had been riding horses for several years before I met her, Raja presented a new riding challenge because she had never been trained for riding. She was an old, gentle Arabian who had been used as a broodmare her entire life, churning out baby after baby until she was no longer useful in that capacity to her owner, who agreed to let me to take care of and train her under the supervision of my riding instructor. Before Raja, I had only ridden extremely experienced horses who had toted kids around on their back for years, but with Raja I was riding a horse who knew even less about riding than I did. I remember our first ride together: we moved around the arena at a walk and though I bumped her gently with my legs, opened the reins in one direction, and twisted my body, she drifted from one vaguely interesting point in the arena to another rather than where I wanted her to go. “Now you have to really ride,” my riding instructor told me. “You can’t just focus on what your body is doing—you have to really pay attention to how your body movement and position influence Raja. Remember: when you are riding, you are training.”

Over the next few years Raja and I made a lot of progress in our training journey. My human riding instructor directed the training process but Raja was my other teacher, constantly giving me subtle signals to let me know when I was unclear, asking for too much, or asking for something at the wrong time. We eventually got better at communicating with each other and understanding our own needs and desires for our partnership, and through that process we developed a deep, durable connection. In search of more ways to improve our connection and training relationship even further, I read a lot of books about horse training. Unfortunately, most

of the books emphasized the need to be the boss, to be dominant over a horse for the sake of the comparatively weak human's safety, but I realized that this type of dominance-based relationship did not reflect the way that Raja and I interacted in our relationship. We had certainly established our own boundaries, but Raja was incredibly willing and easygoing and I never felt that I had to assert my dominance to get her to listen to me. I wondered if Raja was an exception to the rule or if the popular rules were themselves exceptional.

Indeed, it seemed as if many of the books failed to recognize an important subject in their analyses: the horse. Sure, the horse training books were *about* horses, but it seemed to me that the privileging of objectivity too often led these trainers to force the process of training into a repeatable, measurable formula that is applicable to all horses. Through constructing these training formulas, trainers have constructed The Horse, a disembodied creature that is at once every horse and no horse. Devoid of context, history, and agency, The Horse is little more than a fable, a success story and ideal to which every new rider will hold up their own horse—and invariably find their horse lacking. It is in this way that many prescribed methods of horse training center horses without recognizing horses as the unique subjects they are. Although I could not articulate all of this to myself at the time, I recognized that these ideas were not compatible with the ideas in my head about what training could or should be.

While later working with Joey, an ex-racehorse I was retraining as a dressage horse, I again found fault with the dominance-focused training suggestions I read about. Even though Joey's personality was completely different from Raja's, I similarly found that I was most effective as a rider when I learned to respect and work with his boundaries rather than break through them—or, at least, that's how I conceived of our training relationship at the time. When I got to college and traded the sandy two-acre farm I was used to for a fancy, bustling equestrian

center with heavily structured lesson plans, I soon started to yearn for the space and time I once had to develop deeper relationships with the horses I rode. Riding lessons at Mount Holyoke were necessarily more about the physical act of riding than the powerful connection it can inspire, and I felt more like I was using the horses for my own gain without the ability to effectively respond to the needs and desires of the horses I worked with.

These early riding lessons at Mount Holyoke coincided chronologically with my growing consciousness of how power and oppression operate, and I recognized the need to think more critically about my own positionality with regard to gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and—especially in the context of riding horses—species. I was prompted to reflect on and interrogate my own position and responsibility in my past and then-current horse-human riding and training relationships. I asked myself, how was authority negotiated in these relationships? In training, what kinds of knowledges were my horse and I producing? What were the overall goals in my training relationships, and how did I endeavor to meet those goals? I then realized that I had a lot of the same questions about training beyond the context of working with horses. I recognized, for example, that as a college student I am training to become a more effective thinker, writer, and academic student, but the input from readings, professors, and discussions with peers makes this multi-directional process of learning less recognizable as a form of training.

It is that narrow view of training, in which training is only recognizable to me when there are limited parties involved and a clear hierarchy of authority, which I wish to critique and expand here. In this thesis, I confront normative constructions of training relationships and then reimagine training by putting important aspects of dressage in conversation with the work of feminist, queer, poststructuralist, and affect theorists. Here, “normative constructions of training” refers to my understanding of Western society’s conception of training, which is mainly

influenced by the books I have read about horse and dog training, as well as portrayals of human training (generally in the context of a job) in books, television, and movies. From these sources I have gained the following assumptions about how training normally functions: training occurs between a trainer, who holds a higher position of authority, and a trainee, who has considerably less agency or power, and knowledge is passed unidirectionally from the trainer to the trainee. I aim to explode and reimagine this construction of training by using classical dressage as a model of training that can be embodied, affective, intimate, complex, and connected.

As a practice of horse training, dressage is useful for crafting a nuanced and complex understanding of what training can and should be. Dressage is an equestrian art and sport in which a horse and rider execute a series of complex movements designed to improve the horse's balance, flexibility, strength, and power. Modern, competitive dressage is one of three Olympic equestrian sports. In it, a horse and rider enter the arena and perform a "test," an established series of movements that ostensibly demonstrate the horse's training. Higher levels also require a *kür*, or a musical freestyle, in which a horse and rider complete a self-designed test to music; some people liken the freestyle portion to "horse dancing" or "horse ballet." The growth of dressage as a competitive sport, however, has caused modern dressage to drift away from its classical roots in unfortunate ways, and I am thus more interested in the training potential found in classical dressage. Dating back to ancient Greece, the art of classical dressage comes from training horses to be good battle mounts for the military. In order to excel in battles, military horses had to be intelligent, confident, maneuverable, strong, balanced, and trusting, all qualities that classical dressage trainers still hope to develop in their horses today.

Classical dressage provides a great framework for renegotiating and reimagining the concept of training for several reasons. First, as its name suggests—"dressage" comes from the

French *dresser*, which translates as “training” (American Oxford English Dictionary)—dressage is the art of training. As such, dressage has a long literature of different theoretical perspectives on what training is and how it should be carried out. The first manual on horsemanship, for example, was Xenophon’s *On Horsemanship*, which was written over 2000 years ago (Knipp). Since then, numerous other works have detailed different dressage theories as they evolved in different countries and regions, and the divergences in these theories often point to the most debated ideas about what training is and should be.

Classical dressage is also useful because it is a form of training that occurs between a horse and a rider—or, notable in our anthropocentric society, between a human and nonhuman—but its emphasis on creating harmony and connection works to problematize common anthropocentric hierarchies of intelligence and power. Moreover, classical dressage invites us to dismantle and complicate the overly simplistic binary constructions, such as dominant/submissive and active/passive, that are normally attributed to horse-human relationships. Dressage also offers a way for horses and humans to share deep and powerful connections when the human learns to use new forms of communication and to utilize epistemological frameworks that humans undervalue, especially those that work through (the horse’s and rider’s) bodies. Using important concepts from the equestrian art of dressage thus allows us to reimagine training as a practice that is embodied, affective, connected, and has a multi-directional flow of communication and knowledge.

While I use concepts from dressage for this new imagining of training, I take them as points of departure rather than assume that they exist as perfect, stable frameworks. To that end, I put these concepts—such as feel, submission, and connection—in conversation with the work of feminist, queer, affect, and poststructuralist theorists with the hope that my work will serve to

help readers imagine the ways in which these ideas be can be applied to a variety of training contexts.

In addition, I weave personal narrative of my own experiences into my analysis in order to stay reflective and reflexive in my own work. I reject the notion that I can understand training, or even any training situation, fully; instead, I attempt to recognize my views as partial, embodied, and situated (Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”). Because this project is heavily influenced by my own experiences with dressage and training, to omit the memories that have shaped the way I think about these ideas would make my analysis disembodied and unaccountable. These personal narratives thus aim to ground my positionality and the context of my training experiences so that training can at no point become “about” The Horse and The Rider without responding to the lived experiences of horse or rider.

In the first chapter, I discuss the role of sight and vision in training. Because humans privilege sight over other senses, sight is used in training to judge and discipline subjects. First, I discuss the role vision has played in the evolution of dressage from a classical art to a competitive sport and the consequences of such a shift. I then suggest that humans make the dangerous assumption that sight can be completely objective and is thus a more reliable source of knowledge than other senses. Finally, I offer interventions in this desire for objectivity by using Sally Swift’s concept of “soft eyes” and Donna Haraway’s idea of “situated knowledge” in order to recast vision as a reflective, embodied practice.

The second chapter focuses on the role of bodies in training. I discuss Western neglect of bodily knowledge—that is, knowledge that is produced through the body—and how dressage relies on the body for communication and knowledge formation. I then go on to talk about horses’ use of affect and reliance on the transmission of affect. This leads me to argue that

humans should work towards developing a similar sensitivity to affect. I suggest that the key to doing so is developing “feel,” the dressage practice of using your body to sense what is happening in the horse’s body. I expand the concept of feel, however, by suggesting that the concept of feel should also include a sensitivity to affect.

In the third chapter, I discuss the relative roles of horse and rider in terms of physical and hierarchal positions. We typically understand training as a process with a unidirectional, downward flow of information and authority from the powerful trainer to the agentless trainee. Through examining different dressage trainers’ understandings of submission as well as narratives of queer femme sexual submission, I make space for the complex and nuanced ways that power operates within training relationships. I ultimately argue that training is a multidirectional process that allows all parties in a relationship to have agency despite their different roles in the partnership.

Finally, my fourth chapter centers the concept of connection, which in dressage is epitomized by complete harmony between the horse and rider. In some cases, this harmony is characterized as a feeling of “becoming one with” the horse, a connection so strong it seems to dissolve all boundaries between the horse and human. I thus explore the physical, affective, erotic, temporal, and material connections required to let a rider “become one with” a horse and end by exploring the pedagogical possibilities this connection produces through the process of becoming with.

I: Vision

In the early stages of planning this thesis, I made a long list of all of the questions I had about the topic of training. I had marked with a star the question, “What does good training look like?” and when I came across my question more recently I paused because it occurred to me that at the time I posed the question I probably meant, “What are the mechanics of good training?” Was I aware of all of the assumptions in that question when I wrote it? Did I notice, for example, that the question assumed that good training has visual markers? Was I aware that I considered sight to the best measurement of training “good”-ness? Was I perhaps influenced by the role of sight in dressage as a teaching tool and measurement of success?

Ultimately, that first question was interesting only through the better questions it provoked, but the topic of vision and the role it plays in training is also important to discuss. Dressage is so influenced by sight and vision that I would be remiss in not interrogating the role of vision in my own understanding of training, its role in classical and competitive dressage, and how sight influences our ability to connect with those we engage in the act of training with. A more apt question, then, is, how does vision influence training?



Above: Joey's right (blind) eye, partially shut against the bright morning light.

Seeing Is Believing?

People were always intrigued by Joey's blind eye, which looked like the sky on a cloudy day and, in the right light, was vaguely translucent. Though I too found his eye beautiful and interesting, I was more enamored with Joey's playful personality. My love for his personality is what reminded me to keep riding him long enough to confront my own fears and challenge my assumptions about sight and perspective.

A tall and muscular Thoroughbred gelding, Joey was a racehorse until the cataract in his right eye cut his running career short. By the time I leased him many years later, he had long since adjusted to his partial blindness and narrowed field of vision. He had even had some success as a show jumper. Nevertheless, for the first few months I rode him I got used to a frightening and painful routine in which Joey would sense something on his right (blind) side,

bolt to the other end of the arena, stop suddenly, and buck seven or eight times in a row until I was lying in the dirt, gasping for breath and shaking with adrenaline. I eventually learned how to ride his bucks and stay in the saddle, but it took me much longer to learn how to stop him from bolting in the first place. Joey's behavior was, though not ideal, not so much "naughty" behavior as a series of miscommunications. I did not stop falling off with regularity until I stopped to think about how Joey and I separately understood our shared world and how we explained—or failed to explain—what we knew to one another.

Humans value sight above other senses, partially because our eyesight is much keener than our other senses. For example, over 50% of the brain's cortex is used solely for visual processing (Hagen). Our superior eyesight, and our reliance on eyesight instead of other senses, has been cited as evidence that we are separate from, and more evolved than, nonhuman animals. Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, locates the origin of the human in the repression of organic matter, such as blood and feces, by walking upright to rise above such matter and therein starting a "cultural trend toward cleanliness" (Freud 51). This was "accompanied by a shift of privilege in the sensorium from smell to sight, the nose to the eye, whose relative separation from the physical environment thus paves the way for the ascendancy of sight as the sense associated with the aesthetic and with contemplative distance and sensibility" (Wolfe 2). In this way, Freud links human vision to cultural superiority, through cleanliness and aesthetics, as well as rationality. Today, scientific knowledge—a privileged type of knowledge, partially because it claims to be as objective as possible—relies on vision for measuring data. For most humans, "seeing is believing," as the popular idiom states. Vision is how we measure the reality of our world.

This is not true for all animals. In *Adam's Task*, Vicki Hearne describes the differences between human and dog knowledges that she identifies when she trains her dog to track scents. For Hearne, pointing to a spot on the ground with no visual marker and saying, “go find” can feel “foolish and uncertain,” for she has no way of knowing that there is something there to find (Hearne 80). Her dog, however, has a superior sense of smell and does not need a physical marker to sense a scent trail. For her dog, scenting—not seeing—is believing (Hearne 79). The challenge for Hearne, then, is not only to convince herself that there are things that she cannot easily know in her human body, but also to rely more on what she cannot see than what she can, deferring to her dog’s superior scenting abilities to fill in her own gaps of knowledge. Over time spent with her tracking dog, Hearne developed “sensitivity” to her dog’s “indications” and learns how to doubt her own eyes in order to believe her dog, therein producing “a kind of knowledge not possible in any other way” (99).

Similarly, I had to revise my own dependence on my eyes in order to believe Joey’s understanding of our shared world and produce new knowledge with him about it. When I first met Joey, his owner explained that I would need to work hard to get Joey to trust me. Developing a horse’s trust in is key to any strong horse-human relationship and such trust can easily be broken, but this was especially true with half-blind Joey. Every time I led him in a circle to the right, he would not be able to see what was ahead of him, and if I ever rode him too close to a fence or caused him to run into something, he would have no reason to believe that I would keep him from running into things in the future. While I was mindful of my own need to act as a dependable partner, however, I failed to recognize that I likewise would need to trust Joey enough to become sensitive to and value Joey’s contributions to our conversations.

I eventually realized that in order to trust Joey, I needed to attempt to understand his ways of knowing the world, how they differed from my own understandings of the world, how I knew what was in our shared spaces, and how we communicated what we each understood to the other. I knew that my vision was different from Joeys simply based on the mechanical differences in our eyesight, but I had not yet thought about how my eyesight influenced the way in which I experienced my surroundings. I am now remembering how my relationship with Joey frequently changed my perspective: when I sat on 16.2 hands high¹ Joey, I grew much taller; when he bucked me off, I would find myself staring up at the sky; I learned that, when maneuvering Joey around obstacles, I needed to think about what it was that he could see in his good eye. Most interestingly, when I rode Joey my imperfect vision supplemented his imperfect vision and this, combined with our other differences in vision, meant that together we saw our surroundings in a complex and perfectly unique way. I eventually realized that to trust Joey, I would have to destabilize my reliance on my own image of the surroundings and instead see our shared world through one half of a fragmented, oddly angled, complicated, partially-imagined collaborative horse-human vision, and further recognize that sight as simply one of the senses I could use to situate myself in the world.

Compared to humans, horses have a much more diverse set of senses. Horses rely on their sense of smell, which is almost as keen as a dog's (Heuschmann 44), their hearing, and more feel-based sensing. They are very sensitive to tactile touch and can easily detect a tiny fly on their flank and sift through hay with their flexible, perceptive lips. Horses also possess what Linda Kohanov calls strong sociosensual awareness, "an innovative state of awareness that detects, processes, and elaborates on extremely subtle nuances" from other beings around them,

¹ Horses are measured in hands, and one hand is four inches.

² Additionally, each country has its own distinct dressage tradition. For example, clear

such as other members of a herd (170). Further, horses have large eyes on the sides of their heads that are designed to quickly spot movement on nearly all sides of their bodies rather than focus on something in front of them and with great detail. Joey thus came to know his environment in a variety of ways—with his nose, with his ears, with his body, and with his good eye—and knew about many of the things in our shared environment that I, with my comparatively poor ears, insensitive body, and even weaker nose, was oblivious to.

Joey's half-blindness was thus not as totalizing as it would be for me. Though certainly his blind eye shifted the way he interprets his environment, he does not suffer from a lack of information. When Joey spooked and bolted for "no reason," I misinterpreted the situation as Joey hearing sounds and imagining nonexistent monsters. I thought that Joey had a crucial lack of knowledge due to his eyesight and that he was overreacting to potential threats as a result. It is more likely, however, that he was responding to a number of real stimuli, including my apparent ignorance of these potential threats, and when I tensed in reaction to his alertness he felt justified in putting a safe distance between us and the stimuli as quickly as possible. I assumed that Joey has a lack of information only because my own impaired vision can leave me feeling blind and out of control.

I have a mild case of Duane's syndrome, a congenital disorder that keeps my left eye from moving outwards to the left. To correct my field of vision I keep my head turned slightly to outward. It also means that looking left requires me to turn my head significantly more than the average person, something a dressage instructor noticed once and told me to stop doing immediately. When I cannot look left to see the arena I get anxious because sight is the main sense I rely on to understand my surroundings. For me, my looking-to-the-left "blindness" is more significant than for Joey, however, who simply relied more on his other senses to gain

information. He was visually blind to the world on his right, but still receiving and interpreting other aspects of the environment that I could not and thus very capable of reacting to his environment in a way that he thought was appropriate.

Hearne says, “one way of understanding training is as a discipline in which one learns more and more about a certain steadiness of gaze, a willingness to keep looking, that dismantles the false figures, grammars, logic, and syntax of Outsiderness, or Otherness, in order to build true ones” (79). It was not our different ways of understanding our shared environment that caused Joey to bolt and buck me off so much as my unwillingness to interrogate my own reliance on sight as a method of knowing my environment. Because I rely on my sight for knowledge, I did not trust Joey because he largely lacked that source of knowledge. I grew afraid of his reactions, so when he sensed things that he knew I did not know of, and I responded with fear to his alarm, he had no reason to believe that he was safe. What I actually needed was a “steadiness of gaze, a willingness to keep looking”—in this case, not an actual gaze, or an act of looking with my eyes, but instead a way of interpreting my environment with my other senses and with a capacity to believe in things that I cannot sense with my limited human body.

I am not sure if he would have stopped bucking sooner if I had figured that out earlier—there were other issues having to do with physical strength, balance, and trust that Joey and I also needed to improve upon. Nevertheless, I knew that I had to stop my suspicious way of looking, my habit of anticipating the monsters that I imagined lurked in the corner of Joey’s sight. Once I gave Joey more authority to interpret our shared space without feeling a need to make decisions based solely on what I saw, I encountered a way of “seeing” that made me confront my own flawed reliance on visual sight.

Vision in Competitive Dressage

Like most sports, competitive dressage relies heavily on vision. Indeed, it is easy to trace the influence of vision in the evolution of dressage in ways that are both captivating and dangerous. The questions of sight in dressage are numerous and important: What is seen in dressage? Who sees it? What is missed? And what lessons can we learn about vision through dressage and its evolution over time?

The origins of dressage are rooted in training horses for military battle. In order for a horse and the horse's rider to survive, the horse had to be strong, flexible, healthy, and obedient. Training a horse to its utmost potential was considered an art. Following World War I, horses were no longer needed for the military and so they were increasingly used for pleasure and sport. Today, there are two main types of dressage, with some overlap: classical dressage, which has followed the tradition of training as an art, and competitive dressage, which is more goal-oriented and has strayed from the classical dressage principles. In both cases, ideals of beauty, judging, and spectatorship have shaped the evolution of dressage and it is important to understand the roles that they have played if we dare to ask, what should the role of vision be in training?

First, it is useful to think about how art was seen classically, before it became a sport. What, for example, does it mean for dressage to be an art? Moreover, what does it mean for dressage to be a classical art? It is useful to compare dressage with the ideals we expect from art in order to see how, later in history, competitive dressage deviates from classical principles. According to rider and philosopher Sherry Ackerman, classical dressage is characterized by "harmony...between horse and rider in which neither partner is consumed by the other... At this point, dressage renounces any association with sport and assumes its rightful place among the

arts” (Ackerman 11). Indeed, balance, harmony, and unity are all important aspects of classical art, and dressage is no exception. Apparently in agreement with Ackerman, Udo Bürger notes that “complete harmony is the whole essence of dressage” (29), again suggesting that dressage is a classical art because of its commitment to harmony.

Classical dressage differs significantly from, say, romantic art, which privileges emotions and the terror of beauty. Competitive dressage, however, aligns much more closely with a romantic view of art. Rather than attempting to balance horses so that they are capable of handling explosive emotion, competitive dressage riders now provoke horses’ emotional explosions and then use dominance to harness and use their horses’ beautiful yet threatening power.

Beauty, it turns out, is a key aspect of dressage. Ancient Greek philosopher Xenophon, considered by some to be the forefather of dressage (Gibbon), once expressed that “what a horse does under compulsion...is done without understanding; and there is no beauty in either, any more than if one should whip and spur a dancer” (Xenophon 62). Simply put, Xenophon argued that training through compulsion fails to be beautiful. He also implied that beauty, such as that demonstrated by a human dancer, is a goal of proper training. Colonel Podhajsky, a chief of the classical dressage Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria, had similar sentiments about beauty. Podhajsky argued that “if the horse becomes more beautiful in the course of his work, it is a sign that the training principles are correct” (quoted in Hearne, 123-4), meaning that beauty was not just a desirable outcome but also viewable evidence that a horse has been trained correctly. However, this beauty is again beauty in a classical sense: it is balanced and harmonious rather than ostentatious yet asymmetrical. Udo Bürger, like Xenophon, sees beauty as a goal of dressage that can only be achieved through relaxation: “The first thing a rider must

learn, if he aims to become an artist, is the art of relaxation. This means detachment, serenity, enjoyment of work for the sake of beauty, unconcern with success or failure, praise or criticism, in this sense, the power of the total concentration of the mind on the senses” (20). In dressage, horse and rider are both the artists and the art.

In a new era of competitive dressage, however, the criterion for beauty in a horse has changed. Much to the displeasure of classical dressage riders, horses with more flashy movements have been receiving high scores even if the movements are not technically correct (Heuschmann 30). In this way, horses with exaggerated movements—the new standard of beauty—are more successful than horses with less showy movement, even if the more exaggerated movements were obtained through questionable training methods. Note that classical trainer Podhajsky states that an individual horse becomes more beautiful through training and that the emphasis is on transforming the horse in a way that makes the horse more beautiful rather than simply having a beautiful horse and training it. The bend toward showy movement at the expense of correctness evidences competitive dressage’s turn away from classical dressage values. Which gazes have pursued these new horse beauty ideals?

Competition judges have undoubtedly played a part in the shift away from classical dressage ideals. Originally, the purpose of dressage was to see how well a horse has been trained according to the training principles. The training principles, which are to be followed in order, are designed to allow a horse to be trained safely over a long period of time so that horses are not pushed beyond their physical and mental abilities. What the judges are looking for depends on the level at which the horse and rider are riding, but in all cases the judges’ grades are based on the horse’s performance during the competition with no reference to how the horse is regularly trained, how the horse was warmed up prior to the test, or how the horse feels (physically) to the

rider. The goal for the judge, then, is to visually ascertain how well the horse demonstrates the classical training principles through the horse's execution of the required movements. In order to do so, judges need to "educate their 'eyes' so they are able to judge the difference between movements that are natural and ones that are artificially forced" (Heuschmann 29). Are judges failing, as Hueschmann seems to suggest, to train themselves to see the differences in movement between a horse that has been trained according to classical principles and a horse that has been "artificially forced"? Or have judges started to value excitement and flashiness over balanced, harmonious correctness?

The constant evolution of judging in dressage competitions alludes to how subjective and contested judges' gazes are. There have always been critiques of the subjective nature of dressage judging, especially in international competitions, in which judges may give higher scores to riders from their own country² (Braddick). Although judges have specific guidelines to follow for judging, the variation in scores between judges for the same test suggest that judges both see movements differently and have different ideas about how various aspects of these movements should be judged. Currently, the solution to subjective judging is to have multiple judges viewing each test from different parts of the arena. Depending on level of tests and number of judges available, judges sit at the end of the arena, near a corner of the arena, and in the middle of a long side in order to view each movement from multiple angles. In this way, judging is supposed to be more objective, and yet judges' gazes still fail to see the quality of the horse's workout or the underlying pain and damage a horse may have suffered in order to reach

² Additionally, each country has its own distinct dressage tradition. For example, clear differences can be seen between French dressage, which emphasizes lightness, and German classical dressage, which focuses on containing explosive forward movement. A judge may thus value the evidence of the dressage tradition they are more used to over than one that is more popular in another country and give horses from other countries different scores accordingly.

that level of competition. The judges' "objective" gaze may thus level the playing field for riders but it does not address the larger problem of subjecting horses to situations in which winning is more important than the healthy and safety of horses.

It should be noted, however, that judges are not the only actors with authority in the horse scene. Like most sports, competitive dressage has competitors, spectators, and governing bodies, and they all play a role in shaping the sport as a whole. Because the sport is less popular than eventing and show jumping—the two other equestrian Olympic sports—however, governing boards have often tried to think of ways to make dressage more popular to spectators. In 1985, for example, the dressage freestyle was added to international competitions, starting with the Dressage World Cup. In a freestyle, a horse and rider ride a self-designed test set to music. According to an FEI³ judge Anne Gribbon, "Musical freestyle is the crown jewel of dressage because it is entertaining and draws the biggest audience" (Steiner). Even with the addition of freestyle, however, the FEI is worried that dressage does not attract a wide enough audience. There was even a proposal to shorten the length of grand prix tests so that spectators would be more likely to watch dressage on TV. It is thus clear that governing bodies are willing to make significant changes in favor of popularity, and governing bodies are actively trying to identify which parts of dressage are most palatable to outsiders. A 2014 survey of dressage spectators found that "86% are attracted to dressage by its beauty, the relationship between horse and rider, the horse itself, and the sport's grace, elegance, aesthetics and fun, with only 24% interested because of concepts including discipline, control and training" (Mathieson). The conclusion is clear: spectators value the potential for visual entertainment more than the training itself. In other words, most spectators want the performance, the liveliness and emotion. So what is it that

³ The Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) is the international governing body for Olympic equestrian disciplines.

spectators see, and what do they want to see? How might spectators' visual pleasures and preferences shape dressage in the future?

Dressage riders, of course, also play a major role in crafting dressage as a sport through how they ride in show arenas, how they train in private, and how they copy or influence other riders. Returning to the observation that dressage judges have started to give higher marks to horses that appear powerful and flashy yet move incorrectly, riders have unsurprisingly responded by training for extension over balance and exuberance over relaxation to attain the same high marks. Other riders have attempted to speed up the training process with young horses by riding horses in a frame that is too advanced for the horse's muscular and mental development (Heuschmann 25).

One well-known and highly controversial technique is hyperflexion, formerly known as Rollkur, in which a rider uses the reins to pull a horse's head down and backward towards the horse's chest. Hyperflexion is often defended as a useful temporary warm up, the purpose of which is to get the horse focused and to get the horse to raise its back and 'swing' it" (Heuschmann 88). Unfortunately, this position, while giving the appearance of a relaxed horse, actually overstretches the back and has adverse effects on a horse's health (Heuschmann; von Borstel qtd. in Pascoe). The use of Long, Deep, and Round (LDR), which is nearly identical to hyperflexion, is also used in warm ups and even occasionally in dressage tests. While the FEI has banned hyperflexion, it is considered "acceptable" to use LDR because LDR "achieves flexion without undue force" as long as it is maintained for no longer than ten minutes at a time (fei.org). Many argue, however, that hyperflexion and LDR are the same and that these rules are not sufficient for combatting the negative effects of keeping a horse's head and neck in such a position. How does one visually determine, for example, if another rider's force becomes

“undue”? Why is ten minutes the chosen length of acceptable time? And if a rider keeps a horse in LDR for ten minutes, takes a thirty-second break, and then returns to LDR, did the horse have a sufficient time to recover? Regardless, many riders who use hyperflexion or LDR go on to win Olympic medals, further validating riders’ uses of dangerous riding techniques in pursuit of sought-after submission and flashy movement.

There is also a capitalist imperative to create horses designed to fit the beauty mold. As Heuschmann notes, “an entire industry has been built up—not only around breeding and riding associations but also around breeding facilities themselves—that looks at the horse predominantly as a potentially very lucrative asset, an economic ‘material’ or a ‘breeding investment’” (41). In this case, breeders can make a profit by producing horses that naturally have long bodies and nice gaits that will appear to riders as though less work will be required to train them. In addition to having the ideal looks, some of these horses have “such good conformation and submissiveness and ‘readiness to suffer,’ that forceful training methods are frequently tolerated by the horse without major resistance” (Heuschmann 75). These horses are appealing to some riders because they can progress the horse’s training rather more rapidly than they would need to with a horse that has a different conformation. Of course, these horses suffer as a result; many of the horses are started too early, ridden in frames that they do not have enough strength or balance to maintain, and are forced to have a “a ‘showy,’ leg-throwing, toe-flicking trot” which quickly wears down a young horse’s body and often causes leg injuries in young horses (Heuschmann 83). Unlike the horses that “get more beautiful” as their training progresses, horses that are bred to be perfect dressage horses are often born beautiful but slowly break down physically and mentally at an early age due to improper training.

What, then, should the role of vision and beauty be in dressage? There has also been a long tradition of celebrating and enhancing the beauty of the horse through training in dressage, but as dressage has evolved into a competitive sport, understandings of beauty, what beauty should be, and how it should be produced have also shifted. In response to the various and often colluding gazes of spectators, riders, breeders, and dressage's governing bodies, competitive dressage has changed dramatically in the last century. Unfortunately, it appears that horses have suffered for these changes that privilege performance over correctness, though there has been, from many classical riders, a strong response. What should that response look like?

Looking Back

How do we see horses now? By “we,” I do not mean the collective sum of humans on the planet. Rather, I mean *how* do we see horses, in all of our various contexts and identities and seeing horses in all of their various contexts. The way that breeders have actually engineered horses in the pursuit of dressage perfection, for example, suggest that they see horses as opportunities for economic gain and as objects to be improved through human ingenuity—are horses, in that context, still horses? When we train horses, then, who or what are we training? When we look at horses, what do we see? Certainly, the way that various humans have viewed horses has shifted throughout history. Some horses have always been used for pleasure or a marker of wealth, for example. Others were used for livelihoods, for transportation and farm work. The breeding and training of elite dressage horses and other sport horses is still a common practice among horse enthusiasts who have the financial means to do so. Increasingly, however, many humans see horses as pets, partners, and companions—but what does it mean to see a

horse as one of these things? And so again I ask, when we look at horses, what do we see, and how do we see them?

First, the how: we see horses with our eyes, of course, but we see horses through eyes and visions that have been shaped by our cultural and historical pasts. We see horses in a variety of contexts. In common cultural imaginaries and literary traditions, for example, we see horses as the willing partners of cowboys, as wild giants to be tamed and conquered as one would a mountain, as companions for a little girl, as carriers of a king, as sure bets on a racetrack. Human visions of horses are colored and structured by other horses we have seen, real or imaginary, inside and outside of their contexts. How humans see horses, in other words, is a process that involves far more than the biological mechanics of meeting a gaze.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned Freud's belief that humans' privileging of vision separates us from nonhuman animals—both because of our eyes' distance from the (feces-laden) ground and because our eyes allow us to engage with aesthetics and rationality. It is thus worth thinking about how we see, especially in comparison to how horses see. While horses cannot see as many colors as we can and have small blind spots directly in front of and behind them, horses also have an expansive, 200-degree field of vision. Humans, comparatively, have only a 150-degree field of vision and we have very poor night vision whereas horses can see quite well in the dark once their eyes have time to adjust (Hayes). Horses, in short, have the vision of a prey animal and are always prepared to detect, locate, and run away from a predator if necessary. Humans, on the other hand, have a vision that can provide a more detailed analysis; the human vision can more easily scrutinize something rather than simply scan for it. This sight is helpful for pursuing and conquering, if we so choose. That is not to say that humans have a biological imperative to engage in such activities; rather, this is a way that we can (and often do) see

ourselves as humans, just as we might see horses as fundamentally prey animals, and just as horses might—or might not—see us as predators. When I enter into a horse’s space and endeavor to train it, do I think about how the horse is seeing me? Do I look back?

Looking back, as Haraway describes it, involves more than simply the returning of a gaze. To explain, Haraway discusses an intimate encounter between Derrida and his cat. She praises Derrida for understanding that, in such exchanges, “actual animals look back at actual human beings” (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 19)—that, in short, they are both present and engaging in a real exchange. Derrida also asks if his cat can respond to him, and, further, whether we can know what a response is and how it differs from a reaction. He fails to push this question any farther, however, for he dwells on the fact that in this exchange he had been naked and vulnerable in front of his cat, and in his preoccupation with his own self he fails to engage further with his cat. Here, Haraway critiques Derrida for “not seriously consider[ing] an alternative form of engagement either, one that risked knowing something more about cats and *how to look back*” (emphasis Haraway, *When Species Meet* 20). When he fails to “become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps actually making available to him in looking back at him,” Derrida does not “look back” at his cat and thus is unable to fulfill his obligation as part of a pair of companion species (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 20). Looking back, then, requires a curiosity about and acknowledgment of the other’s responsibility as Haraway frames it—literally response-ability, or “the capacity to respond” (*When Species Meet* 71). How would Derrida’s interaction have changed if he had accepted his cat’s response-ability as a companion species?

Further, what does it mean to see a horse as a companion species? In describing companion species, Haraway does not limit companion species to those species—like dogs, cats,

and horses—who are likely to be considered companions for humans. Nor does Haraway suggest that companionship is the defining characteristic of companion species. Instead, Haraway offers the term “companion species” as “less a category than a pointer to an ongoing ‘becoming with’” (*When Species Meet* 16). Indeed, partners in companion species become partners through their intra-actions, that is, the “partners do not precede their relating” (17). Furthermore, these companionships are created through intra-actions of a specific type, ones that require response and respect. “Species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect. That is the play of companion species learning to pay attention” (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 19). I am especially drawn to Haraway’s characterization of these responsive, respectful interactions as play, for though I am less sure that I looked back at the horses I have known, I am sure that I engaged in play that made me pay attention.

While Joey and I were first getting to know each other, we both engaged in a lot of curious play. I would run around the arena and sometimes he would follow me. When I cleaned his stall, he would grab the handle of the manure fork from my hands, wait until I put my hands on my hips in mock annoyance, and then give it back to me. Sometimes when I was standing next to him on his left side, he would reach his neck down low and then twisted his head to the right. I assumed his neck gymnastics was another type of game, one that I had not figured out the proper response to yet. After a while, I realized that he was probably trying to look at me with the part of his good eye that best sees detail—the upper parts of horses eyes are better at seeing movement at a distance while the lower halves of horses’ eyes can better discern details (Hayes). I obviously cannot know what Joey was thinking when he did this, but looking back I think it is likely that he did this to get a good look at me, and the proper response would have been to look

back at him. Instead I laughed and scratched his shoulder. I did not seriously ask, what is he doing and why? Nor was I very curious about what Joey was thinking or feeling when he was looking at me, or what he was offering to me through this seemingly bizarre exercise. I did not look back with respect and curiosity and so I did not respond the way I ought to have as his companion.

I wish I could go back in time and respond differently, perhaps twist my own head to look back at him with my own eye. What would it have meant to look back at Joey in a responsible, companionable way? How would he have responded to a more intentional looking back? And although I interpret his quirky head twisting as intentionally asking me to look back at him, I think I often did look back at other times. I had a lot to learn from his gaze, which was inquisitive and playful, and had I looked back, I would have produced a gaze of my own that would have been curious and open rather than tight, focused, and always set on the next task at hand. Looking back is not necessarily with the eyes, a meeting of gazes, but instead about a whole body response and sharing. Looking back thus offers tremendous potential for training: if we think shift our framework for vision and sight to entail a connective looking rather than a pointed, goal-oriented conquering, I imagine that what we would be able to engage in training in a much more responsible way.

Seeking an Intervention

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the tendency for humans' reliance on to have adverse effects on training and on the participants in a training relationship. To reiterate, my own reliance on sight has at times impaired my ability to seek out alternative methods of knowledge formation. Additionally, competitive dressage has sacrificed horse health and classical training

ideals in pursuit of a new equine body and movement ideal. Finally, despite the narcissistic assumption that humans are exceptional because of our privileging of sight over other senses, we fail to recognize horses' gazes and, further, fail to look back at those gazes. The proper response, however, is not to do away with sight altogether in the pursuit of knowledge and training.

Instead, I suggest that we humans need to train ourselves to see in a different way—a way that is situated, embodied, and more open to collaboration with other senses—in order to recognize our own positions and develop the ability to better connect to others in our shared world.

An intervention into this assumed infallibility of the human gaze and the dangerous ideals it sometimes provokes requires us to develop a way of looking that is embodied, situated, and always partial. In “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” Donna Haraway suggests that we cultivate a feminist objectivity that denies both sides of the relativity/objectivity dichotomy. Haraway explains that relativism “is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally,” which is problematic because one is not capable of responding without being specifically locatable (584). Objectivity, on the other hand, claims a transcendent and comprehensive perspective and is equally dangerous. Both relativity and objectivity, then, “deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective, making it impossible to see well” (584). In order to see well, we must acknowledge the partiality and the particular, embodied locations of our perspectives. This “partial, locatable, critical knowledge” is responsible and accountable. In this way, partial, locatable knowledge is capable of “sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (584).

How exactly should we go about cultivating a “partial, locatable, critical” gaze and knowledge? In an encounter with a horse, for example, how could a human ensure that their gaze

was not totalizing, that they remain specifically locatable, and that their gaze is self-reflexive and critical? For this I offer a simple, though perhaps unorthodox, framework for cultivating such a gaze: Sally Swift's concept of "soft eyes."

In her book *Centered Riding*, famed riding instructor Sally Swift trains riders by having them think of specific mental images in order to help them become aware of, and more easily control, their bodies. Her "centered riding" approach focuses on four basics: breathing; centering, which involves imagining the body's center and therein "lower[s] our center of control" (17); building blocks, which requires the "stacking" of body parts in a way that a straight line could be drawn through a rider's ear, shoulder, hip, and heel in order to ensure proper balance; and eyes. Though Swift's discussion of eyes, specifically what she calls "soft eyes," is most relevant to cultivating a gaze that is partial, locatable, and responsible, it is important to note that these four basics are intimately connected. Using soft eyes, for example, makes it easier for a rider to breathe properly, which allows the rider to be more aware of their own body.

Swift begins her explanation of "soft eyes" by leading the reader in an exercise in which the reader must first stare intently at an object and then relax their eyes so that the object remains in the center of the vision but more of the world around it can also be seen. "Sit comfortably with open eyes and have the feeling of going within yourself as your eyes encompass everything that comes into your field of vision," (10) Swift directs, at once calling for a gaze that is partial (limited by the human field of vision) and simultaneously embodied and connected to the surrounding world, allowing for a specific positionality. According to Swift, using soft eyes is not simply a way of looking. Rather,

using soft eyes is like a new philosophy. It is a method of becoming distinctly aware of what is going on around you, beneath you, inside of you. It includes feeling and hearing as well as seeing. You are aware of the whole, not just separate parts. (11)

In this way, the use of soft eyes and the bodily awareness it encourages can be seen as a tremendous strategy for cultivating the kind of connections and responsibility Haraway privileges.

How can we use these new concepts of vision to reimagine what training can and should look like? Modern dressage certainly provides examples for what it should not look like. A return to the classical basics, however, still offers inspiration—as long as the ideal of beauty is not prioritized until it eclipses other training considerations, in the same way that the human reliance on sight eclipses the potential for using other senses in training. Nonetheless, the role of vision in training is not wholly bad, and I find hope and possibilities in the prospect of training my own gaze to be soft, responsible, and connected.

II: Developing Feel

In the early twentieth century, a German horse named Clever Hans delighted the world with his shows of human-like intelligence. His owner, Wilhelm von Osten, would make requests of Hans—to add numbers, to determine days of the week, to spell words—and Hans would answer by tapping his hoof the appropriate number of times. Crowds flocked to see Clever Hans and eventually the horse caught the attention of curious and skeptical journalists and psychologists across the globe (Williams 62). All wanted to know: was the horse really that smart, or was it all trick? In 1904 Carl Stumpf determined that Hans's displays were not a matter of trickery, but a few years later Stumpf's student, Oskar Pfungst, posited that though Clever Hans and his owner were not intentionally deceiving audiences, the horse was not actually adding or spelling either. Through a series of tests in which the humans who asked Hans the questions were either out of sight or did not themselves know the answer to the question, Pfungst found that Clever Hans was paying close attention to the questioner and reacting when the questioner reached the correct result rather than answering the questions on his own. The situation of a human handler inadvertently influencing a nonhuman test subject's behavior came to be referred to as the "Clever Hans effect" (Despret 77).

The story of Clever Hans highlights humans' overreliance on an anthropocentric view of training and intelligence. It should be noted that Hans developed a reputation for cleverness as a result of his ability to demonstrate aspects of logic and reasoning seldom attributed to nonhuman animals. The reason for this is perhaps well demonstrated by thinkers such as Charles Darwin, whose work was highly popular at the time. In *Descent of Man*, Darwin noted that "the difference between the mind of the lowest man and that of the highest animal is immense," as evidenced by animals' inability to accomplish tasks such as solving mathematical problems

(87). In training Clever Hans to spell words and solve math problems, Wilhelm von Osten presented to the world an animal that was either exceptional because he could do what other animals could not, or an animal that threatened normative assumptions about animal intelligence. Pfungst's denouncement of Clever Hans' displays was simply a reaction to human intelligence thus repositioned Clever Hans and other "clever" animals as intellectually inferior to humans.

And yet, Clever Hans had learned to respond to signals his human counterparts were not even aware that they were giving. What then, does this say about training? On the one hand, if Clever Hans was merely reacting to bodily signals, it could be said that von Osten did not teach his horse what he meant to; on the other hand, if we frame it differently, von Osten taught Clever Hans to respond to a human questioner when the human questioner requested that he do so with the most minute shifts of the body. Though Clever Hans was potentially unable to recognize numbers and solve mathematical problems, he still managed to answer correctly most of the time. It is likely that the numbers and words he was trained to recognize had little meaning or significance for him—why would they?—compared to his rewards for answering them correctly. Hans thus learned to answer the questions without having to, so to speak, read the material. Because Hans failed to prove his human-like intelligence, humans assumed he was not intelligent at all.

Leaving nonhuman intelligence unacknowledged has long been a strategy for establishing and maintaining the human/nonhuman divide and elevating the status of humans above other animals. Aristotle's move to distinguish between "rational beings" (humans) and other beings, for example, was enormously influential in Western culture (Arbel 202). Logic-based hierarchies, such as that expressed in the Aristotelian *scala naturae*, evidence human's desire to establish hierarchies of intelligence. The Church further reinforced this hierarchical division by

proclaiming that only humans have immortal souls and it is therefore heretical to attribute rationality to nonhuman animals (Arbel 203). In the eighteenth century, the notion that human intelligence is the “essence of human identity” (Cribb et al. 30) prevailed, inspiring a need to defend rationality from the nonhuman realm. These ideas have set a long precedent for valuing rational, lingual, and logical intelligence over other forms of intelligence that humans do not possess. Unfortunately, these ideas are still quite popular today, and I have often heard people citing nonhuman animals’ apparent lack of intelligence to justify their mishandling and abuse.

The construction of human intelligence in contrast with nonhuman animal intelligence provides important context for understanding the threat that a horse like Clever Hans could pose if he were to demonstrate human-like intelligence. In the rush to disprove the horse’s intelligence and the resulting conclusion that Clever Hans was not clever after all, psychologists failed to recognize more important lessons to be learned about the horse that I will now point out. To tell the same story differently, there was once a horse called Clever Hans who engaged in play with his owner. He learned how to paw at the ground with his hoof until his owner would tense; at this point, Clever Hans would pause or lower his head and be praised. For months Clever Hans and his owner continued to play this game, now in front of crowds. Some humans wondered about the extent to which Clever Hans could actually do arithmetic, but they could not prove anything. In the end, Clever Hans caused people to believe that he could do arithmetic and spell out words without cues from his owner. Von Osten, meanwhile, had no idea that he was not teaching his horse how to spell and add. Furthermore, Von Osten had no idea that his own body was prompting Clever Hans to respond in particular ways. Nor could the investigatory commission, sent to determine whether the horse was clever or not, find any evidence to suggest that the horse

was not as clever as his name suggested. In the end, Hans was very clever. His trainer, it could be argued, was significantly less so.

The story of Clever Hans allows us to ask some very important questions about training. If von Osten was trying to train Hans to recognize numbers, and Hans failed to learn these numbers, did von Osten fail to train Hans? Or, perhaps von Osten did teach Hans a number of things, though von Osten himself was unaware of what exactly he was training Hans to do. There is the question too of how Hans learned whatever it was he learned. If Hans learned to recognize von Osten's "tells," perhaps it was not von Osten training Clever Hans but rather Hans who trained von Osten, for Hans recognized that he could get von Osten to reward him as long as he responded correctly to von Osten's subtle body signals. It is likely that Clever Hans and von Osten were training each other, even though von Osten, due to his lack of awareness of the communicative effects of his own body, was oblivious to how he was training his horse.

In the project of colonizing new intellectual horizons, humans have, in some ways, failed to remember the intelligent potential of our bodies beyond the ways in which they keep us alive. Our social and historical divorcing from knowing, recognizing, and responding to our bodies and the bodies of others makes us to fail to think about our bodies beyond the pain they give us, the pleasure we receive from them, or their potential for reproductive or capitalist productivity. As such, we fail to recognize our bodies and touch as sources of knowledge production. Horses, on the other hand, are sensorial geniuses. They can not only feel the lightest touch of a fly on their leg but also feel other horses' awareness of potentially interesting or frightening aspects of their environment. In this way, horses are in constant communication with other beings and with their environments through their bodies.

In this chapter, I discuss humans' general failure to recognize and value the affective training power of bodies. As a practice that relies on feeling a horse's movements, dressage offers a potential intervention in human body escapism by requiring humans to reclaim bodily feeling. Dressage also allows us to think about what our bodies do and can do by providing the concept of "feel." I argue, however, that because humans have normalized mind/body dualism, or the separation of the body from the mind, that the dressage concept of "feel" is wrongly limited to motion and tension. By incorporating a reading of affect into the term I can offer a better understanding of how bodies can train and how we can learn through our bodies.

Training Bodies

I have often heard the saying, "you are always training your horse." Every time you enter their stall, pick out a hoof, or merely exchange a glance, you are training. I find the framing of this saying slightly problematic because it suggests that in a human-horse relationship knowledge always flows from the human to the horse, as if horses cannot and do not also train humans. However, I appreciate and agree with the saying's notion that training is a constant, ongoing process. This means that training is always happening because every interaction you have with a horse, regardless of what you are doing or where this interaction occurs, sets a precedent for future interactions. Too often, this training wisdom is misused and brought up only in the context of a horse that is considered "too dominant." For example, I have heard riders say that it is important to "assert your dominance" over horses in daily interactions so that they do not think they can "take advantage of you" when you ride them. I take issue with this dominance

narrative⁴, but the underlying logic of the phrase is important: it is necessary to be consistent in your interactions with a horse in order to set the tone and boundaries of your relationship.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for many riders to consistently make their intentions clear to a horse because of humans' general lack of bodily awareness. Ideally, horses and humans communicate through body language, or what Brandt calls "embodied communication" (301). This can be dangerous for people who are unaware of their own bodies or lack knowledge about horses' bodily cues simply because horses are generally so much larger and stronger than humans. Further, as far as embodied communication goes we humans are at a distinct disadvantage. While humans certainly pay attention to other humans' body language, we primarily rely on verbal communication, a form of communication that is considerably less reliable when communicating with horses. For this reason, humans use a wide range of material objects—such as bridles, halters, lead ropes, and whips—to reinforce the signals we send with our bodies (or to override the signals we don't know we are sending). Horses, on the other hand, are much more adept at communicating with each other with their bodies in subtle ways (Wilsie and Vogel 56).

Nonverbal communication studies can be narrowed down into three categories, all of which can help us understand the particular ways in which human and horse bodies speak. First, as Gala Argent explains, kinesics is the study of movement and expressions, including facial expressions (114). Second, haptics is the study of touch—where and how what is touched and why (Argent 114). Touch is especially important for horses because they use certain forms of touch, such as mutual grooming, as a bonding activity. Finally, proxemics is the study of space

⁴ This narrative implies that horses are inherently bullies trying to constantly assume authority over humans, which is certainly not the case with most horses. I talk more about dominance-related misconceptions in the following chapter.

and suggests that the distance between is a kind of communication in of itself. In putting haptics, kinesics, and proxemics together we can gain a clearer picture of the different ways that horses and humans communicate nonverbally (Argent 115).

In summary, horses use touch, distance, and movement to communicate with each other—and with humans. They are thus very attentive to what we say with our bodies, whether our communications are intentional or not. When Clever Hans picked up on faint bodily signals of his owner and other familiar humans, he was engaging in two-way nonverbal communication with his owner. As Sharon Wilsie and Gretchen Vogel put it, horses like Clever Hans are “asking us questions all the time” (55) through their active attention. This is also true in the reverse—humans are also communicating with horses all the time with our bodies, though often with less active attention. Nevertheless, there is constant two-way communication between horses and humans and, whether humans realize it or not, we are always saying something through our bodies just as horses do.

Through this constant communication, we set expectations, routines, and boundaries, and training is thus always happening through horses’ and human’s bodies. Our bodies regularly do things—our bodies move, slouch, jump, stare, fall down, look away—and as horses come to know and understand us as individuals, they develop regular expectations for and responses to the things our bodies do. Horses’ bodies train us in the same way. A horse who regularly drops his shoulder, for example, might prompt a rider who is not aware of the horse’s asymmetry to let her own body follow and, over time, the rider’s shoulders may learn to feel correct in this tilted position because she has developed bad “muscle memory” for it. This muscle memory is bad because her body is responding to the horse’s bad position by following rather than correcting the problem, therein exacerbating the unbalanced situation. Like humans, horses inherently have

asymmetrical bodies and one of the most important aspects of dressage is getting horses to use their own bodies more correctly and evenly in order to stay balanced and minimize joint pain later on. This is why it is important for a rider to be able to feel how a horse is moving, if the movement feels off, or if the horse is compensating for soreness or weakness somewhere in his body, the rider should be able to sense this difference and react appropriately.

Unfortunately, humans often reinforce incorrect positions or behaviors unintentionally with our bodies because we fail to notice the subtle signals of our own bodies. Developing a keen awareness of our bodies is thus an important, yet difficult part of understanding how we train horses. If we pay attention and take into account how horses—who are more sensitive than we are—react to our movements and body language, it can help us to develop better awareness of our own bodies through a sort of mirroring process. Although this process of developing what is called “feel” in the equestrian world is generally described as a rider’s ability to be able to ascertain with their body a horse’s position, movement, and contact, I suggest this term as it is popularly used stands short of its potential and argue that one often-overlooked aspect of embodied communication is the feeling and sharing of affect.

Embodied Affect

In her account of retraining a traumatized stallion, horse trainer Linda Kohanov illustrates the importance of understanding and working with affect. As Kohanov notes, Merlin, a stallion who had been abused to the point that he could no longer regulate his own nervous system, was prone to suddenly snapping and either lunging angrily at her or galloping around in panic. In order to work with Merlin, Kohanov realized that she had to pay extremely close attention to her own body. Any physiological shifts on her part would lead to a mirrored yet amplified reaction

in Merlin: “If I held my breath or tensed my body in any way, Merlin would do the same, which meant he would either move away or attack” (Kohanov, “Taming the Angry Stallion” 18). In this way, Merlin provides an extreme example of how our unintended mental and bodily shifts can become visible and thus more understandable with help from sensitive horses.

I am not just suggesting that our bodies move and position themselves in ways that we are unaware of and therein produce unintended consequences, though this is usually true. Instead, I am suggesting that there is an aspect of embodied, nonverbal communication other than movement, touch, and distance: affect. It is clear from Kohanov’s interaction with the stallion that Kohanov went beyond minimizing subtle movements and positions. Instead, she endeavored to gain total control of her body, including regulating her affect, in order to avoid sending Merlin into a rage or panic. Kohanov’s need to control her body suggests to me that affect is an essential aspect of embodied training.

Though there are many definitions of affect, I find Ruth Ley’s summary of Brian Massumi’s definition especially clear and useful. For Massumi, affect is “a nonsignifying, nonconscious ‘intensity’ disconnected from the subjective, signifying, functional-meaning axis to which the more familiar categories of emotion belong” (Leys 441). Affect, then, is a sort of felt, transmittable intensity. Emotion, on the other hand, is the consciousness of affect (Massumi 53). Too often we say that we must regulate our emotions around horses because they can sense our fear (Brandt 309). It is more likely, however, that horses are not sensing the emotional category of fear so much as our affect, the intensity within our bodies that may be so subtle that we don’t even notice it. When working with Merlin, Kohanov eventually learns to use her mind to control her breath and tension. Merlin is thus responding to her intensity—her affect.

The role of boundaries here is key; both Kohanov and her horse have their own affect, and this affect crosses the physical boundaries of their bodies. Teresa Brennan critiques the Western assumption that individuals are “energetically self-contained” (24) and suggests instead that experiencing “the affects of others is both the ordinary and in some way natural state: the transmission of energy and affects is the norm rather than an aberration at the beginning of psychological life” (24). On this, Spinoza agrees, understanding bodies themselves to be associative or even “social” because “each is, by its very nature as a body, continuously affecting and being affected by other bodies” (Bennett 3). Brennan further suggests that young humans are initially far more attuned to others’ affects, though this often changes as we get older. Our inability to sense other’s affect, then, is at least partially a function of socialization.

Accordingly, given horses’ extreme sensitivity to affect and our comparative inability to understand our own affect, working with horses requires humans to develop more bodily and affective awareness. In her series of interviews about horse-human communication, Keri Brandt found that many riders commented on body awareness. For example, one interviewee remarked that when she works with horses she is always “hyperaware of what [she] is saying with [her] body and what it is saying and the impact” (305) so as to not affect her horses in unintentional ways. The word “hyperaware” is interesting here because it suggests that, in order to communicate with horses effectively, we must be not just aware but hyper-aware—as in over-aware—of our own bodies. However, I think it is more likely that we humans are under-aware of our bodies and must develop this awareness in order to communicate effectively.

Working with horses thus requires humans to confront the fact that we are always communicating with and training other beings through our bodies, even without the intention of doing so. We engage in this affective interaction with all beings, of course, but horses are

particularly adept at sensing and reacting to affect in more obvious ways. Humans, by comparison, lack the capacity to sense and use affect in a more informed way. As Keri Brandt quotes novelist Jane Smiley, “if humans have smarter brains, then horses have smarter bodies” (qtd. in Brandt 198). Though this quote runs the danger of disconnecting minds and bodies, it does offer an intervention in the dangerous assumption that intelligence is only brain-based. What horses like Clever Hans and Merlin teach us is that there is knowledge to be gained through and from bodies.

Unfortunately, Western human society values ideas and ways of knowing that separate humans from other animals through the process of producing what Wolfe calls the “discourse of species” (2). We can see this too in the way that Freud values sight above other senses. As he writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, humans in the origin stage began to repress organic matter as a beginning of a “cultural trend towards cleanliness” and a simultaneous privileging of sight over smell (51). But as Cary Wolfe notes, “the look purchases transcendence of the human only at the expense of repressing other senses (and more broadly the material and the bodily with which they are traditionally associated)” (Wolfe 3). Clearly, human capabilities are valorized and used as evidence that we are superior to all other animals, but in the process of giving in to this constructed hierarchy we miss opportunities to indulge in other pleasures of the body.

Descartes’ Enlightenment-era thesis of mind-body dualism is still a relevant discussion topic today. He saw a person as a composite wherein the body, “a corporeal substance,” is completely separate from the rational (incorporeal substance) soul (Baker and Morris 60). Viewing the mind and body as essentially separate is dangerous for several reasons, the first of which being that the mind is already privileged above the body. Even in dressage discourse, we can imagine separation of mind and body between the horse and rider—the rider has the mind

and gives the command, while the horse uses its productive body to respond. This is dangerous because it makes the assumption that there is nothing to be learned through the human body, not even about the horse. It also leaves horses in the realm of the body, separate from the mind and thus incapable of contributing to the production of knowledge. In order to intervene in the privileging of scientific knowledge and the type of body mind dualism Descartes introduced, we need to reframe our understanding of possibilities that bodies—human bodies and horse bodies—hold as sites of knowledge production and agency. In order to do this, I suggest a turn to and expansion of the concept called “feel.”

Developing Feel

In the horse world, “feel” is related to but separate from touch. It’s seen as an awareness of the horse through the rider’s body. Riding involves constant bodily negotiations, a series of asks and corrections, and it is imperative that a rider can feel the way that a horse is moving beneath them in order to ensure that the horse is moving correctly. For example, in an explication of the dressage movement “turn on the haunches,” Olympian Hilda Gurney states that the movement is “a test of the rider’s feel” and that the rider must learn to feel to execute the movement correctly (Gurney, “Turn on Haunches” 26). In this example, the rider is supposed to use her seat bones to feel the movement of the horse’s hind legs. Feel can also refer to a rider’s perception of their own body. Dressage rider Mary Wanless and anatomist Thomas Myers define feel as “kinesthetic body sense” (Wanless and Myers 54) that is developed through training ourselves to become aware of lines of connecting muscles and learning to control them (61). Doing so, they argue, stabilizes a rider’s body so that the horse can distinguish random,

unintended movement from purposeful bodily cues. Feel, in short, is a noun used to describe the awareness and perception of the body.

Feel is important, but the way that it is used in riding circles misses some of the potential of feel. As it is used now, it refers only to the physical movements of either the horse or rider, but the concept of feel, I argue, should also include affect. If horses and riders are constantly training one another through a transmission of affect, we cannot have much control over our training if we cannot have true feel—feel for movement but also for affect. In the process of retraining Merlin, for example, Linda Kohanov developed what I would call true feel. Standing at a distance of five feet from the stallion, she learned to watch for and react not to movement—any movement on either of their parts led to an explosion of frantic or dangerous movement on Merlin’s part anyway—but to his affect, which required that she control her own affect. This obligated Kohanov to be mentally aware of her body’s intensity and to control it with her mind and her breath. Thus, without physically touching Merlin, she trained herself to “assess when fear, anger, and/or agitation were present in the horse-human system” (Kohanov, “Taming the Angry Stallion” 18). Through feel, or, as Kohanov called it, “mind-body awareness...elevated beyond anything [she] knew was possible” (19), she could stabilize Merlin’s tempestuous affect.

I would now like to propose a visit back to Clever Hans and his sensitive ways. Though Pfungst ultimately decided that Clever Hans was picking up on his human questioners’ body cues, there were several instances in his notes where, when separated by sight from questioners, Hans would answer a question at the same time that the questioner came to know the answer to the question himself. In his article, “Who Made Clever Hans Stupid?” Despret suggests that the horse was not so much picking up a physical cue from the humans as being attuned or connected to his questioner:

We no longer know which, horse or human, induced his movements in the other; we do not know, in these agencements, how the anticipations of one actualize the anticipations of the other. Independent intelligence makes a decidedly poor figure relative to the capabilities that are deployed: a dual intelligence, involving bodies, attentions to the other, desires and wills, consciousnesses capable of splitting, of being relocated, edges of consciousness that bring about more effective actions (83).

This maps feel as a possible access point to the complex world of attunement. I wonder if Clever Hans and his owner experienced true attunement in their trials. Clever Hans probably had a well-developed feel and it is certainly possible that the human who he was most bonded to, von Orten, did too. If both Clever Hans and von Orten had feel, they could certainly reach a level of attunement.

Through von Orten' and Clever Hans' example, we can imagine a type of training that is intimate, bidirectional, and open to softness and pleasure. And, as Kohanov with her stallion and von Orten with Clever Hans suggest, the privileging of a deeply affective and shared feel can lead to spectacular horse-human connection. In this way, the privileging of bodily knowledge and developing of an affective feel can establish access to a new world of training possibilities.

III: Position

As a young ten-year-old I was obsessed with Lauren Brooke's young adult fiction series called *Heartland*. The books' main character is a teenager named Amy who, using gentle methods and natural herbs, rehabilitates traumatized horses. I was especially fascinated by her use of "join-up," a technique Amy uses to get the horses to trust her. Later, I learned that the techniques used in the books are based on non-fictional horse trainers, and I became determined to try "Join-up," a well-known horse training method designed by Monty Roberts.

As told in Roberts' autobiography, *Monty Roberts: The Man Who Listens to Horses*, join-up was inspired by his time spent watching the interactions of feral mustangs. As a young man, he had watched, fascinated, as a mare in the group punished a misbehaving colt by temporarily casting him out of the herd (3). The colt would circle the rest of herd, hoping to be let back in, and again and again the mare would chase him away. Not until he had performed the expected behaviors that demonstrated that he accepted her authority, such as keeping his head low and licking and chewing, did she let him come back to mingle with the rest of the herd. Roberts came to see the process as rooted in language: "As I watched the mare's training procedures with this adolescent and others, I began to understand the language she used, and it was exciting to recognize the exact sequence of signals that would pass between her and the younger horses. It really was a language—predictable, discernable, and effective" (Roberts 22). He then started to use a similar process to train horses by standing in the center of a round pen and having a horse run along the outside until the horse chose to come into the middle of the circle with Roberts, therein joining Robert's "herd."

As a teenager I got to try Monty Robert's join-up method with a six-month-old filly named Saoirse who had been handled by humans daily since her birth but had not had any round pen training. I was startled and pleased that I was able to convey, with only the movement and positioning of my body, the directions and speed at which I wanted her to move. When I moved toward her body quickly and stared at her back end, she trotted forward. When I looked at her face, she stopped. When I faced her and cut her off, she changed direction. Most excitingly, when I turned away from her, she quickly joined me in the middle of the circle and lipped gently at my sleeve. I remember feeling like I had uncovered a new source of power in myself, one that had caused Saoirse to recognize me as the one with authority.

Looking back now, I can see how much I learned from the experience as well as how much I was ignorant of in that moment. I was pleased to see the effects of my bodily position on her bodily position. Until that point, I had thought of embodied communication between horses and humans as being primarily composed of human-designed tricks, mostly employed in the saddle. Working with Saoirse in the round pen allowed me to see the smallest shifts in my body position influencing Saoirse's own movement, and after a few minutes of working with her I got better at using my own body to react to Saoirse's body. That was when I learned to pay more attention to my own body, its bodily affect and also the more minute positional shifts I allow my body to fall into.

However, I thought significantly less about my position in relation to Saoirse's. Like Monty Roberts, I saw Saoirse's decision to join me in the circle as proof that I was "speaking horse." I thought this horse language was universal (among horses) and context independent, as proved by Saoirse's willingness despite her lack of human training. I did not pause to consider that I had been grooming, petting, and interacting with Saoirse for several hours per week since

the day of her birth. I did not ask myself, how would this experience have been different in another context? What if I had worked with a nervous, feral, or unfamiliar horse? And what exactly was I saying to Saoirse when I placed myself in a position of authority in that round pen? How would it have been different if I were working with a dominant mare or stallion instead; how long would I have had to make a grown, stubborn horse trot in a circle around me until they relented? I did not, in other words, think critically about my position of authority in the context of the round pen.

Rereading an account of join-up, written by Lawrence Scanlan in the introduction of Robert's autobiography, is useful for interrogating Robert's method:

Monty is alone in the round pen (about the size of a small pond) with the unbroken horse—a powerful, potentially dangerous animal. When the horse enters the pen, clearly nervous, Monty flicks a light cotton line at him—but never actually touches him with it—to send him round and round the perimeter. ‘Don’t go away a little,’ he invariably tells the horse, ‘go away a lot.’... The alternative to being ‘pushed away,’ the horse will come to realize, is first a conversation—then a contact—with this man. The key ‘signs’ then come, one after the other: the horse, still trotting in a circle, eventually locks one ear onto Monty, later sticks out his tongue and makes chewing motions, and, finally, lowers his head until it is inches from the ground. ‘I want to talk,’ says the horse, a herd animal now solitary and therefore fearful, for to be alone is to be exposed to predators. His powerful instinct, the herd instinct, is to join another herd. Maybe Monty’s herd (xix).

This account tells me a lot about Scanlan's, and probably Robert's, understanding of training. First, horsepower is defined in terms of the horse's potential to cause harm. Additionally, the emphasis on the fact the "light cotton line" does not make contact with the horse suggests that, for Scanlan, harm can only be done to the horse through physically hurting or restraining the horse. The horse's fearful, solitary state is attributed to a horse's prey and herd animal instincts rather than to the fact that a human is chasing the horse away. And yet, the horse is still confined to the round pen and thus has no place to go, no real choice in the matter. The join up method relies on the notion that when the human takes the authoritative position, the horse will seek out the human as a leader and protector. Neither Scanlan nor Roberts seem to consider the option that the horse simply hopes to appease the human in order to get a moment of rest.

An Australian horseman, Clinton Anderson, uses a similar method. Instead of pretending that horses will choose to "join your herd" after making them run around, Anderson uses less romantic phrasing and suggests that horses simply want to take the path of least resistance. The key to getting a horse to do what you want, according to Anderson, is "directing the movement of [the horse's feet]" (66) like a "boss mare" (67) would. This is an oversimplification of how and why horses move other horses, for usually the movement is in a particular direction to establish boundaries, not tyrannical authority. Anderson's logic is that by making undesirable behaviors difficult through moving a horse's feet and making desired behaviors easy by letting them rest, the horse eventually stops resisting the human's authority and directions. In this way, both Anderson' and Roberts' methods require that the human puts pressure on a horse until the horse does what the human wants, at which point the human rewards the horse by removing the pressure.

The point of discussing Monty Roberts and Clinton Anderson is not to label these methods as cruel—at least, not inherently. Rather, I wish to point out the naturalized assumptions and logics in Monty Robert's famed "natural" horse training methods: they frame the human as the protective "leader" rather than as, say, an authoritative boss; they suggest a horse's choices are freely made as long as the horse is not physical forced, thus posing no physical or mental harm; and they claim that training this way works because all horses speak the language "horse"—and, with some work, humans can master horse language too. When I was younger, I did not question any of these assumptions. They fit into the narrative I grew up hearing: humans must always be kind to horses but assume the dominant position in a horse-human relationship because horses are larger and more powerful than humans. I believed this narrative without asking what it meant.

Over the years, however, I have learned to think more about my position in relation to horses. Dressage especially has made me think not only about the position of my body and the position of the horse's body but also our bodies' positions in a certain space at a certain time—in our shared time-space. Additionally, in competitive dressage, the judging is based both on the positions of horses' bodies (the horse's frames) and time-space positions in the arena. Such bodily notions of position are imperative to the physical workings of dressage.

I am also concerned with the positional structures of power, dominance, submission, and authority that are so prevalent and yet so murky in discussions of dressage. For years I followed and reinforced these constructions without pausing to question what they really meant. Once I got to college and started learning about new ways of thinking about power, I wanted to think about and understand my own position and participation in enforcing normative structures and paradigms of power, authority, dominance, and submission in the context of dressage. I have

learned that some people see all riding as a form of abuse while others believe that horses derive immense enjoyment from being ridden. What possibilities lie between and beyond these varying moral conceptions of riding? How do I determine which lines I am comfortable crossing? I believe I can move closer to answering these questions by understanding how these concepts—dominance, authority, and submission—operate.

I recognize that the majority of my thoughts about dominance, authority, and positions of power were rooted in normative understandings of training. Though a standard definition of training is fairly broad, there are still certain assumptions to be made about training with regard to positions and direction. As defined by the New Oxford American Dictionary, training is "the action of teaching a person or animal a particular skill or type of behavior." This definition makes it clear that the action of training is unidirectional; it flows from the trainer to the trainee. Moreover, this would generally be diagramed as a top to bottom flow; that is, the trainer, who has more knowledge and a higher position of authority, trains the trainee, who lacks the desired skill or behavior. The trainer is active, and the trainee is passive.

Another assumption about training is that the trainee suffers a lack of agency. Certainly in dressage there is an emphasis on submission, which appears very similar to an agency-free, total obedience. In actuality, submission and obedience are not synonymous. There is a misconception that in dressage requires a rider who demands total obedience from his horse and renders the horse powerless. While there are certainly many riders who have this mentality and aim to follow that model, most dressage riders seek to increase rather than diminish a horse's power through training. A more nuanced and ethical model of training is useful for undoing the oversimplified dichotomies that people too often attribute to horse-human training relationships.

In order to imagine a better model of training, it is necessary to interrogate the common myths and assumptions about training that have pervaded the equestrian world. It is equally important to study the roots of classical dressage training ideas which, though they have long been stretched, twisted, or passed over in favor of more enticing methods, offer a more embodied understanding of training that allows us to break down assumptions about hierarchy and authority. Here, I find it useful to look at other works that renegotiate the relationship between submission and agency. Though it may seem out of the blue, an account of agency within lesbian relationships with clear dominant and submissive roles allows us to critique the active/passive, dominant/submissive, and agentive/agentless dichotomous constructions. We can then reimagine training as a dynamic, embodied action and ask better questions about how to create room for this type of training.

Dressage and Position

Position is a crucial to every facet of dressage training. From tack to rider position to horse position to horse location within the arena to metaphorical language, a concentration on position is part of what makes dressage an art. After tacking up a horse (is the saddle placed on the right part of the horse's back? Is the bridle straight, all straps in their keepers?) a rider could ask, is my hand, ankle, shoulder, wrist, knee, leg, neck, pelvis, in the right position for doing what I want to do here in this moment? Is the horse's head and neck position appropriate? Am I offering my horse enough support with this leg? Am I blocking my horse's movement with this hand? Is the horse in the right position in the arena to follow the prescribed sequence of movements? The different aspects of position are all required in tandem, however, as one type of position determines the position of other things. For example, a rider may ask, if I need to canter

in that corner of the arena, what do I need to do with my body at this location in the arena at what time in order to make sure that my horse's body is positioned in a balanced way that can allow him to canter when we reach that corner?

Often, it helps to think about and hold these various positions at once by using more abstract but holistic phrases or mental images. For instance, when I am riding and preparing for a transition—a change in speed, gait, direction, or movement—I gather and prepare myself and the horse I am riding, physically and mentally, for what is to come next. My first riding instructor called this pre-transition moment a “body check,” which at first was a reminder to make sure that my eyes were up, my heels were down, and my shoulders were back—in short, that I was balanced. As my riding evolved and matured, body checks became a practice of not only checking my own balance but also using feel to check in with my horse and to respond with my body accordingly in order to position my horse for the next transition. My current dressage instructor calls this “getting organized,” and only through executing this “bodily/spatial/temporal organization”—a phrase I borrow, out of context, from Haraway (*The Haraway Reader* 241)—can I ensure that we are in the proper position to execute whatever movement comes next.

The physical process of asking a horse for a transition makes it clear that position in dressage cannot be separated from its embodied, temporal-spatial context. Take the process of halting at X, the middle of the dressage arena, for example: simply put, the horse is supposed to enter the arena at a certain gait and then come to a square halt in the center of the arena before moving again in a different gait. The horse is expected to embody a particular position at a particular spatial location in the arena at a particular time. Haraway's term “space-time” (*When Species Meet* 17) can be easily applied to dressage here because it suggests that each temporal moment also has a spatial context. The term space-time is useful because the temporal moment at

which a horse and rider are supposed to execute a movement is dependent on the horse's location and time. For example, a horse is not expected to halt at X, say, 10 seconds after the test has started. Instead, the moment, the "when," a horse is expected to halt is reached at the moment a horse travels to the correct spot in the arena. If the horse stops a few steps beyond X, the transition is considered "late;" if the rider asks for the halt before the horse reaches X, the transition is too "early." "When" a horse halts, then, is not just a measurement of time but also location. The use of temporal language to describe location makes it clear that, in dressage, time and space are entangled. At each moment, it is the rider's responsibility to make sure that the horse is occupying the appropriate space-time with the correct movement and in the correct frame.

The rider's task of organizing both the horse and rider's body in a way that they can embody the correct space-time, movement, and frame in every moment is very difficult. However, there are additional, and more abstract, aspects that organize a dressage horse's training. Perhaps the most common set of guidelines for training a horse correctly is the training scale, the first version of which was found in *The Training of the Recruit in Horseback Riding*, written by Siegfried von Haugk and published in 1940 (Greber). Also depicted as a pyramid, the basic premise is that a horse must exhibit one aspect of correct movement before being able to add another degree of difficulty to it.

The bottom, foundational level is typically labeled as rhythm, which refers to the rhythm of the horse's hoof beats at each gait. The walk, for example, is a four-beat gait, the trot is a two-beat gait, and the canter is a three-beat gait. If a horse demonstrates improper rhythm, such as the wrong number of hoof beats per stride or incorrect sequence of footfalls, the horse's rhythm is incorrect and suggests that the horse is not properly relaxed. The second level of the scale, which

builds on the first level, is either balance or suppleness (some riders argue that balance is implicit in rhythm and prefer suppleness as the second level over balance). Cara Whitham defines suppleness as lateral suppleness, “the even bending to the right and left” (Robinson 45) as well as longitudinal suppleness, which refers to the flexibility of the horse’s back and topline. Suppleness is followed by contact, which has to do with the connection between the rider’s hands and the horse’s mouth. The next level, impulsion, can be defined as “contained energy” (Joni Lynn Peters in Robinson 46). Impulsion is followed by straightness, which refers to the horse’s even development of lateral suppleness on both sides in order to move in a straight line within a straight frame or outline. The top level of the pyramid is collection. The goal of collection is to enable the horse to engage her hind end and carry herself in an uphill frame so that she is lighter in the front (Barnett and Arkison 39).

The logic of the scale is that the aspects at the top of the pyramid can only be accomplished if the horse is also exhibiting the aspects of the other levels below it. For example, if a horse is truly straight at the walk but loses her rhythm in the process, the rider is supposed to go back and ensure that the horse regains a correct rhythm before asking for straightness again. It should also be noted that horses can demonstrate all of these training principles at any level, though the degree to which each principle is performed is limited by each horse’s strength and training. For example, a young horse is expected to have collection sometimes, but should only be expected to stay in a collected frame for a few steps at a time. However, a common critique of the pyramid is that higher training principles must be used somewhat in order to accomplish the lower levels. As Robinson notes, the training scale’s “individual levels are as inseparable as the knitted strands of wool in a sweater” (45). Just as rhythm is essential to getting a horse to collect, a horse can also lose its rhythm if the horse does not have some amount of collection. In some

ways, the training scale sets up an arbitrary, false hierarchy of training principles that masks the interconnectedness of all of these principles. Nevertheless, the training pyramid, as well as phrases connected to certain levels of the training pyramid, demonstrates that dressage training relies on many position-based phrases.

While some of these positional phrases refer more specifically to a physical position, such as a horse being “on the bit,” other phrases, such as “behind the leg,” are more abstract. And yet, positional phrases abound in dressage training concepts. Why does dressage utilize so much positional language? Why do some phrases use position-based language even when they do not refer to a physical position? What is the usefulness of position as metaphor for dressage? A closer examination of some of these phrases suggests that these abstract, positional phrases can be used to capture more complicated dressage concepts. More relevant to my purposes, I have found that these positional phrases offer a framework for conceptualizing more nuanced understandings of other positional concepts, such as flows of power and authority, the positional aspects of which are otherwise rarely questioned.

One common positional phrase in the world of dressage describes the need for a rider’s horse to be “in front of the leg.” This phrase does not mean that horse should physically be positioned in front of the rider’s legs. In fact, a horse can be “behind the leg” when the rider’s legs are in exactly the same position as they were when the horse was in front of the leg (though if the horse is behind the leg, it indicates that the rider needs to bring their legs back to squeeze the horse “in front of the leg” again). What this means is that “the leg” does not just refer specifically to the location of the rider’s legs; instead, the leg represents what the legs do and the role they play in asking a horse to have more energy. “In front of the leg” is both a mental and physical concept that has less to do with the physical position of the rider relative to the horse

than it does with how the horse and rider can use their bodies. For dressage instructor Heidi Chote, the phrase “in front of the leg” means “two things: 1) the horse responds quickly to the use of the leg, and 2) the horse responds with the appropriate amount of energy. ‘Energy’ used in this context may also be called impulsion or activity” (Chote).

In the first part of Chote’s definition, the horse’s being in front of the leg seems akin to obedience—when the leg is used to ask for something, the horse quickly responds. The horse must also respond with “the appropriate amount of energy” (Chote). In this sense, the phrase “in front of the leg” refers to more than a physical position. It also requires responsiveness to the rider through attunement and mutual feel between the horse and rider. The phrase is useful, then, exactly because the “in front of” part of the phrase refers to responsiveness and energy as a position relative to the rider. The rider, in this case, is the depersonalized “the leg,” which has the specific role of asking the horse for action. In this way, the phrase uses positional language to refer not only to a physical relative position between the horse and rider but also to demonstrate relative authority and responsiveness. It is also notable that the motivation for activity comes from behind the horse rather than above because it breaks down the vertical hierarchy of authority. In other words, because the horse is placed “in front of” or “behind” the leg, the designated positions of activity and passivity are now horizontal instead of vertical.

Classical dressage thus calls for a revision of positional structures. As critiques of the training pyramid demonstrate, proper dressage training cannot progress linearly, progressively; instead, as new principles are learned, the others need to be renegotiated based on the context of the horse’s position in its space-time. Further, as phrases such as “behind the leg” show, position refers not only to physical frames or a hierarchy of principles but also concepts of authority, energy, and the directions in which energy flows: not only from top to bottom but also sideways,

forward, and backwards. If we reexamine the cultural assumptions we make about the position of horses relative to humans, we can open ourselves up to the many possible positional connections—physical, temporal, and affective—that can exist between a horse and a human.

Horse and Human Positions

Humans have used horses in various, ever-shifting ways for thousands of years, and though horses are increasingly used for sport and humans' pleasure, humans still risk horses' physical and emotional wellbeing in the pursuit of human enjoyment. There is a sort of dissonance between many western cultures' imaginaries of horses—the way we see them as representations of beauty, spirit, grace, power—and the way that humans usually treat them. What is the place of the horse in relation to humans? Why, for example, do humans in the United States balk at the idea of slaughtering horses for human consumption but not cows, creating a division between companion animals and livestock? And why do some of those same people consider horses that can't be ridden to be a waste of money and space? What is the position of horses in human society?

Mel Chen's explanation of a sentience- or liveness-based hierarchy, called a hierarchy of animacy, is a useful tool of analysis here because it provides a framework for identifying and critiquing the relative positioning of different animate and inanimate subjects. As Chen explains, linguists consider animacy to be "the quality of liveness, sentience, or human-ness of a noun or noun phrase that has grammatical, often syntactic, consequences" (Chen 24). A hierarchy of such animacy, then, positions subjects relative to their assumed agentive capacities. This hierarchy of animacy was originally proposed by Michael Silverstein, who observed in various languages that "less animate subjects were *more* likely to receive special ergative marking, in a kind of

communicative reassurance that such types of subjects could indeed possess the agentive or controlling capacities required to do the action provided by the verb” (Chen 25). Subjects that are automatically assumed to have more agentive capacities, such as humans, for example, are unmarked.

Through noting the grammatical markings of subjects in a cross-lingual study, John Cherry produced a detailed summary of animacy hierarchy:

Humans:

adult > nonadult; male/MASC gender > female/FEM gender; free > enslaved;
 able-bodied > disabled; linguistically intact > pre-linguistic/linguistically
 impaired; familiar (kin/named) > unfamiliar (nonkin/unnamed); proximate (1p &
 2p pronouns) > remote (3p pronouns).

Animals:

higher/larger animals > lower/smaller animals > insects; whole animal > body
 part;

Inanimates:

motile/active > nonmotile/nonactive; natural > manmade; count > mass;

Incorporeals:

abstract concepts, natural forces, states of affairs, states of being, emotions,
 qualities, activities, events, time periods, institutions, regions, diverse intellectual
 objects.” (Cherry in Chen, 26-7)

Unsurprisingly, humans hold the top of this hierarchy. More specifically, the adult human male—able-bodied, free, linguistic, familiar, and close in location—is at the top of the hierarchy. Nonhuman animals, meanwhile, are “typologically situated elsewhere from humans (Chen 89) in

a completely separate (and lower) category (though due to horses' size we can consider horses to be among the most animate non-human animals in their category). This hierarchy is predictable because it follows systems of oppression. Sexism, for example, is apparent in the way that male humans are considered more animate than women: "adult > nonadult; male/MASC gender > female/FEM gender." Chen is thus correct in stating that "animacy is political" (30).

Indeed, Chen's discussion of animacy is useful because it points to the normative assumptions about power at play in constructing such a hierarchy. Crucial to this is Chen's reading of this hierarchy as "naturally also an ontology of affect: for animacy hierarchies are precisely about which things can or cannot affect—or be affected by—which other things within a specific scheme of possible action" (Chen 30). Chen's use of affect differs from how Massumi defines it, and in this case I understand Chen as using "affect" as a verb that describes the act of having an effect on someone or something. In this construction it is "natural" for beings in higher positions of the hierarchy to act on or affect those in lower positions of hierarchy, but it is not natural for beings or things in lower positions to affect beings higher up in the hierarchy (26).

This model of animacy as an ontology of affect, which is organized by cultural assumptions about directional flows of affect, is useful because it suggests that affect moves in only one direction. Chen challenges the cultural belief that affect moves unidirectionally from hierarchically higher beings to lower ones through arguing that "animality, the 'stuff' of animal nature that sometimes sticks to animals, sometimes bleeds back onto textures of humanness" (89). I also think it is clear that nonhuman animals have the ability to deeply affect humans physically, emotionally, and otherwise. In this way, affect can move in an upward direction from lower positions of the hierarchy to subjects in higher positions. I suggest that the same could be said for authority: authority, like affect, can in some contexts move in directions other than

downward between groups in this animacy hierarchy. The multidirectional movement of affect and authority calls into question the structure of this hierarchy: clearly such a structure is not complicated enough to account for upward movement of affect nor the nuanced realities of how power operates between and within the groups of subjects it classifies.

We encounter the same problem in the normative constructions of relative power between horses and humans, especially in the act of riding. We tend to think of the rider as positioned above the horse, a positional image that reflects and reinforces the cultural imagining of humans being above horses within an imagined hierarchy of power or affect. This horse-above-rider image is flawed for several reasons: first, it fails to recognize the potential for affect to work in different directions, and not just downward, in these over-simplified hierarchies. Additionally, thinking of riders as “above” horses fails to acknowledge the close physical connection between a horse and rider, which ideally is so close that the rider is sitting into the horse’s back and movement rather than on top. Thirdly, this hierarchical oversimplification of horse-human power is flawed because it fails to acknowledge different types of power.

Generally speaking, horses have more physical power than humans do. Humans can guess this simply by looking at horses, especially large horses, and the way that horses move their own bodies. Humans who have been forcibly removed from the back of horse know this as well. For example, I once asked Joey to canter from a walk but Joey, who was not balanced enough in that moment to execute the transition, instead launched me out of the saddle so quickly and with so much force that I was sitting on the ground before I had a chance to realize he had bucked. I was in awe of Joey's physical power and shamefully recognized that I had failed my responsibility as a rider to ensure that his 1300-pound body was balanced enough to do what I had asked of him. Unfortunately, it is often the case that riders misinterpret horses’ outward

expressions of their incapability to do what their riders ask as an outward sign of “insubordinate resistance” (Heuschmann 74), and the rider will often try to reassert their authority by using more harsh tools. In other words, in order to compensate for our lack of physical power, humans who work with horses often use a variety of devices to maintain control of or exert authority over their horses.

In this way, it can be reductive to talk about whether humans have power over horses or horses have power over humans because there are different types of power at play. The power horses are assumed to have—a sort of physically affective power, which I will call horsepower—and the type humans are expected to have in a horse-human relationship, authority, are both important. For the most part, horses are large and strong and thus their power is generally thought purely in terms of their physical strength. I call this power horsepower, referring to the unit now used to describe a car’s power, though horses and even humans also have horsepower⁵. As demonstrated by the elevated position of humans in Cherry’s animacy hierarchy, however, humans are expected (by other humans) to have more affective power than horses and other nonhuman animals. I call this type of power “authority,” “the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience” (Oxford American Dictionary). These two types of power, authority and horsepower, are not mutually exclusive, however, and a human does not necessarily need to weaken or even control a horse’s horsepower in order to have authority. In fact, good riders use their authority to help horses increase their embodied horsepower and thus allow the horse to become more powerful. Through helping a horse stay physically and mentally balanced, a rider can help a horse gain the confidence to access and develop this power without it becoming too intense and all-consuming.

⁵ One unit of horsepower is the amount of weight—550 pounds—a horse can raise by a foot in one second, according to Dictionary.com.

In this way, it is not the act of being on top of a horse that establishes a human's higher position of power. Certainly, this image is fetishized in popular culture, especially cowboy movies. How often is a cowboy's masculinity cemented by his ability to capture and successfully stay on a wild stallion—a symbol of wild, untamed nature—despite the stallion's best efforts to get free? It is easy to see that the cowboy gains authority not by sitting on the horse, however, but by remaining to do so even though the horse made it clear that, in no uncertain terms, he did not consent to such an act. Often, the cowboy dominates the horse through the use of a series of human devices—riding skills, ropes, spurs, and various acts intended to "break" the horse's spirit—and this is how he gains a position of authority above that of the horse. This is clearly different from the case of the classical dressage rider who uses his authority to help a horse safely develop her power. Nevertheless, while sitting on the back of a horse is seen as a symbol of authority, the process of establishing authority over a horse is separate from achieving the physical position of being on the horse's back. Conflating the two thus limits our understandings of types of power and how power operates directionally.

Obedience and Submission

If we look at horses and humans historically, humans have long used horses for our will. We have used horses to pull carriages, to till land, to hunt, to carry mail, and, in some places, many humans still use horses for these purposes. Even today, horses are not just companion animals; for many, horses are used for economic or social benefit. Thinking of a horse-human relationship hierarchically, then, humans have always held a higher position of authority than horses.

The same is true for dressage, as evidenced by a focus on submission. Many balk at the notion of submission, preferring instead to bypass language of power when discussing horse and human relationships. Others argue that horses need, and even enjoy, this submissive position relative to humans. It is clear, then, that the concept of submission and its efficacy is contentious. This mostly stems from the varying definitions of concepts like submission, obedience, discipline, dominance, power—not to mention differing notions of how these concepts can, and should, function in a horse human partnership and the moral implications of such structures.

Submission is a key concept in dressage. As such, classical dressage riders have many interesting understandings of what submission is and how it could or should function within a training relationship. Through examining these discussions of submission I can reframe ethical arguments about submission as issues of power rather than of morality. On one side of the spectrum, some humans regard all forms of riding as cruel and unethical. In some cases, they maintain that because horses are no longer needed in much of the industrialized world, humans only use them now for personal gratification, a practice they see as indefensible. They understand dressage and other acts of riding as simply "an exercise of power that blindly seeks to capture some of the powers of the animal for human purposes" (Patton 93). The solution, for them, is to treat horses like other companion animals, such as cats or dogs, and not ride them.

Of course, that idea offers a very narrow understanding of what companionship is. Whether horses are ridden or not, horses are used by humans for pleasure—that is, humans can gain pleasure both from the power a horse exerts under saddle or while nibbling on hay next to a human. Again, the physical act of sitting on a horse, of raising oneself physically above a horse, does not change the power dynamics of the relationship. Whether being ridden or living full-time in a pasture, horses have relatively little say in how they are kept or used. The difference lies in

which activities the horse is compelled to do, and how humans think the horse feels about that activity.

Another argument I have heard is that horses and humans can be perfectly equal partners and that, because horses and humans can communicate and negotiate, the power in the relationship is evenly distributed. This argument, however, poses 'power' as something that one possesses. That is, it takes power as object-like, something that can be separated from a self and taken by another or used to coerce another. Foucault offers a rather different understanding of power, suggesting instead that "Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 63). There are not quantities of it to be taken or possessed. Furthermore, power is embodied, present in all relations, and in constant flux (63). Power, then—fluid, fluctuating, and ever-present—cannot be equal between a horse and rider; nor can a horse and rider be equal in other ways, simply due to belonging to different species. A rider cannot make a relationship with a horse equal, then, and a rider should strive to make the relationship equitable instead.

The widespread reliance on equal partnership as a goal, and the unwillingness to think about the relationship between a horse and human in terms of power, points to both a desire to uphold liberal ideals of individual freedom and the misguided belief that power asymmetry and equity are mutually exclusive. As an example, Paul Patton notes, "[Vicki] Hearn objects strongly to the language of power on the grounds that it is inaccurate, inefficient, and, as we will see, ugly" (91). The ugliness is due to a misunderstanding that there is no moral obligation toward those who are not equal. As Paul Patton explains,

“The assumption here is that justice, fair treatment, and respect for others are possible only outside of or apart from relations of power. Power relations are

relations of inequality, whereas the presumption of contemporary political theory is the moral equality of all parties concerned. This leaves it open to suppose that moral equality does not extend to animals and that, as a result, we have no obligations toward them (Patton 95).

The underlying logic of this misguided assumption, as Patton alludes to, is a steadfast adherence to liberal sentiments of equality. A liberal understanding of equality proposes equality is possible when individuals have the same rights. An insistence that a horse is an equal partner thus suggests to others that the horse has freedom and agency. Unfortunately this idea casts agency as dependent on equality even though equality is not possible in a horse human-relationship due to the inevitable variety of differences between a horse and human. As Patton points out, however, we can still treat horses and nonhuman others with fairness and equity despite the difference in species.

A third argument I have heard is that horses willingly submit to riders because they look to humans as their caretakers. Philosopher and dressage clinician Sherry Ackerman, for example, explains that the “submissive horse is a ‘willing slave’ who performs her job happily because she knows that the rider will, in turn, reciprocate in a attending, as a ‘willing slave,’ to the horse’s day-to-day custodial needs” (Ackerman 67). It appears that Ackerman uses the oxymoronic phrase “willing slave” to suggest that horses are willing to work with perfect obedience for humans because they appreciate that humans take care of them (or perhaps fear that humans will cease to care for them if they do not perform their actions as their human caretakers wish them to). Sylvia Loch, too, uses the caretaking language, though she expands the argument to include more than “custodial needs:”

Just as the herd leader is the disciplinarian who makes the decision where his subordinates will graze, leads them to pastures new, protects them from danger and provides a safe haven, so the domestic owner will be expected to play out a similar role...Clearly it is not enough to provide a dry stable, food, and water. Emotionally and mentally, all horses need to feel they have their own space, a certain amount of physical freedom, as well as the security and continuity and knowing where they stand (Loch 35-6).

While Loch's argument adds that horses look to humans for protection and emotional consistency, it fails to provide an explanation for how horses come to such an understanding of caretaking symbiosis. This assumes that horse and human kinship structures are similar enough that the same logics carry over.

Unfortunately, this caretaker argument is a result of superimposing a normative, nuclear construction of human kinship onto that of a horse herd. In Loch's explanation, the stallion of a horse herd is the classic patriarch who can be depended upon to both provide for and protect his family. The mares in a herd likewise fulfill their wifely duties by providing and nurturing offspring. In a trans-species queering of this construction, a horse owner, by Loch' and Ackerman's view, is to take the position of the patriarch/stallion and provide discipline, safety, and survival to the horse to create proper nuclear kinship. This argument highlights a dangerous flaw of anthropomorphism, which is that it recklessly applies human social constructions to other species of animals. As Patton puts it, such an argument "inverts the values of the masters and projects a self-serving conception of human character onto those others in order to be able to condemn them in the name of supposedly shared values" and "misrepresents what,

anthropomorphically, we might call the ‘values’ of the animals involved and it projects onto them as natural aptitudes and airs that are valued by their human trainers (Patton 93).

Not only do most human kinship structures not fit into that normative paradigm, but also horse kinship structures operate, predictably, in a completely different manner. According to Wendy Williams, a horse’s “social world is the *raison d’être*” (18) and that the bonds they create are less group-oriented than individual-oriented. Though each band tends to have a core alliance of mares and offspring, the most essential relationships occur between individual mares and not a group. The role of the stallion, likewise, does not resemble the patriarch of a nuclear family. Rather, “mares frequently initiate the band’s activities” while the “stallions are quite often little more than hangers-on” (26). Williams recognizes the myth of stallion dominance and puts this down to “the blinder factor,” which she explains is the way that humans make anthropocentric assumptions about horse hierarchies and therein fail to see the complex structures of dominance and social lives within groups of horses (28). The most notable negotiations of authority happen between individual mares rather than within the group as a whole: “One mare may dominate a second mare, and the second mare may dominate a third mare—but the third mare may dominate the first mare” (28). Instead of mimicking what they understand horse herd interactions to be in their training, humans would do well to pay closer attention to how horse herds actually operate instead and then recognize that a horse-human training relationship will necessarily function differently.

It is also important to clarify what is meant by terms such as authority and submission because there are also varying understandings of what submission entails. Too often, submission is conflated with total obedience, a total giving up of agency. It is more clarifying to ask, who is submitting to what? Or, who is submitting to whom, and for what purpose? What if, say, a horse

is not asked to submit to a person, but to schooling by a person—how does this change the narrative and understanding of what the horse is being asked to do? Certainly, a horse submits for the rider's gain, but is there anything that the horse gains through this submission? By looking at how submission is variously defined, it becomes clear that these different understandings of submission are related to our previously discussed definitions of power and authority.

Paul Patton suggests, for example, that submission is a necessary avenue towards the ultimate goal, which is complete obedience. He writes, “Although good trainers allow considerable latitude in acceptable responses to a given command in the early stages, ultimately what they aim to achieve is absolute obedience from the trained animal.” Such obedience, however, “is only attained, if at all, in rare moments of sublime performance” (Patton 90). In this sense, the goal of obedience is not very attainable, or attainable only in fleeting moments, which suggests that a horse and rider constantly negotiate this submission. Thus, the horse is not a slave without agency, and certainly not so on a regular basis.

For Sylvia Loch, meanwhile, a horse is submissive when he can be relied upon to cooperate with the rider in executing whatever his rider asks of him. In order for this to happen, “the horse must be placed in a position of balance to enable him to react at a moment’s notice. He must be swift, supple, agile, stoppable, turnable, and above all, at the end of training, reliable. He must have the spirit and fire in his belly to cope with whatever was asked of him and this required his co-operation” (Loch 47). In her explanation, a horse's perfect submission is dependent on more than constant, uninhibited cooperation. First, the horse must be physically capable of doing what is asked of him—“swift, supple, agile, stoppable, turnable”—and the rider must ensure that the horse is balanced enough to execute the requested movements. This means that the horse is not solely responsible for his submission and obedience. Rather than always

expecting the horse to comply with a rider's asks, Loch acknowledges that it is the rider who is responsible for making sure that the horse can submit to the rider and carry out the rider's requests.

Ackerman similarly argues that submission takes time to develop and that it is built upon a foundation of trust. “As the horse begins to trust her rider, submission naturally follows. The rider can never demand or force this trust but must earn it. It will develop with the rider’s kindness, patience, understanding, reasonableness, and, above all, consistency” (Ackerman 68). If a horse cannot be forced into trust, it cannot be forced into submission. A classical submission is earned through the rider's kind, patient, and reasonable consistency, and thus, rather than forcing the submission, the rider creates a structure in which submission can happen. It is the horse who actively submits.

That is not to say that horses cannot be forced into submitting. Common modern practices such as using draw reins or holding the horse in a low, deep, and round position were created for the purpose of making a horse submit—or at least, submit to the bit—by not giving the horse a choice to do otherwise. However much this type of submission is evidenced in the show ring, it is not ethical and not the kind of submission classical riders hope to earn from horses.

Though these explanations of submission and obedience vary, we can glean that submission is not a constant state; rather, it occurs, over and over again, in small moments—when the horse chooses. Further, this submission is not automatic and it instead requires a long process of physical and mental conditioning, during which the rider must establish herself to the horse as consistent and dependable. In order to achieve these moments of submission, the rider

must ensure at all times that the horse is capable of doing what the rider asks of her. The result of such submission, when executed correctly, is an obedience in which "the rider, without effort, strength, or fuss," is "able to obtain from his horse any movement, any pace, any speed, anytime" (Henry Wynnmalen, qtd. in Patton 90). In the best moments, so closely attuned is the horse to the rider that it seems as though rider and horse merge "into one body, so light that it seems to have wings attached to its feet" (Bürger 24). In this way, submission is not gained through a rider's forcible, top-down structure of control. Instead, it develops by cultivating a physical and mental closeness that gradually allows a trusting bond and submission to emerge.

Constructions of Submission and Passivity

The related binaries of dominant/submissive, top/bottom, active/passive are often naturalized in popular imaginaries of both the horse riding world and sexual culture. The cowboy is perhaps the perfect cross-example: a stereotype of perfect masculinity, the cowboy dominates women, indigenous people, and wild horses. Unsurprisingly, horse riding-related words are used as euphemisms for sexual acts. "To mount," "to ride," "bareback," and "cowgirl" are just a few equestrian-influenced words or phrases that are used as euphemisms for sexual acts. The second most popular definition of "ride" on Urbandictionary.com, for example, is "sexual intercourse with the female on top of the male (who lies on his back). The position is akin to her riding a bucking bronco." Here, the similarities between normative sexual intercourse and horseback riding are made obvious—the position can be similar in that a rider straddles a horse and connects with the horse's body with the rider's seat and pelvic area, parts of the body that are highly sexualized. The use of such phrases, though, reinforces these positional binaries, and

being on top remains to be conflated with being active and dominant, while being on the bottom is conflated with being submissive and passive in both a sexual and equestrian context.

In order to renegotiate these binaries as they function between horses and rider in dressage, it is useful to interrogate the construction of active as dominant and passive as submissive as they exist in the normative expectations for human sexuality. Particularly, Ann Cvetkovitch's work on queer sex makes space for nuance and messiness with regard to activity, passivity, and agency in an embodied, sexual context. In "Trauma and Touch: Butch-Femme Sexualities," Cvetkovitch explores the connection between touch and trauma within the sexual interactions of butch-femme partners. Cvetkovitch explains,

Just as the connections between genders and bodies are both material and constructed, so too are those between trauma and touch. It is possible to ask how penetration comes to mean domination or trauma without presuming that these are natural connections, and how it can materialize not just gendered and sexualized forms of power but hierarchies of race and nation as well (51-2).

Through looking at butch-femme sexualities, Cvetkovitch interrogates the connections between concepts such as dominance and activity, submission and passivity and highlights their constructed, rather than inherent, nature. I argue that these same constructions inform hierarchies of species and species-based forms of power as well. Further, the way that Cvetkovitch uses Freud's expansive model of trauma to "depathologize the traumatic nature of penetration and being touched" (56) offers an approach for thinking about touch in a way that holds space for different reactions to touch. Finally, her reading of submission as empowering, active, and agentive suggests that submission and agency are not mutually exclusive in certain contexts.

Cvetkovitch's "Trauma and Touch" relies on Freud's definition of trauma as "the breach or penetration of a protective shield" (Cvetkovitch 49). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes "as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield...a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli" (Freud quoted in Cvetkovitch 53). Freud's model of trauma is thus more expansive than the conventional definition of the term, "a deeply distressing or disturbing experience" (New Oxford American Dictionary), for it requires only the breaching of bodily boundaries. In this way, any type of touch, even consensual touch, can be considered traumatic. Riding a horse, then, could also be cast as a type of trauma for the horse. Indeed, many people consider the act of sitting on a horse's back to be traumatic in a conventional sense—distressing—because it penetrates the horse's protective shield. But what if riding was seen as trauma in Freud's sense of the word? By using Freud's model, we can acknowledge that sitting on a horse breaks through boundaries and leaves open a space for all sorts of positive and negative affects and exchanges.

With Freud's model of trauma, Cvetkovitch is able to offer a more complex understanding of femme sexuality that does not preclude active desire. She writes, "Central to femme discourse about being the recipient of a lover's sexual attraction is the need to counter the notion that this position is a passive one—an assumption that also pervades the image of trauma as a violent breach of bodily boundaries" (57). Indeed, many femmes refuse to call themselves passive and instead recast their submissive positions and roles as "responsiveness," as Lyndall McCowan terms it (qtd. in Cvetkovitch 58), and this responsiveness is rooted in active desire for a lover's attraction and attention (58). Cvetkovitch traces this unwillingness to name submission as passive to the insufficiency of sexual power language: "So impoverished is the language of sexual power, especially the *loss* of sexual power, that it can only be translated into an

active/passive dichotomy, where passivity is always stigmatized. Furthermore, this association of giving up power with passivity inhabits understandings of trauma as a bodily violation that threatens the integrity of the self” (59). By including actions such as responding, desiring, and taking as part of submission, femme sexuality resists the conflation of submission and passivity. Furthermore, the “discourse of femmes undoes assumptions about any simple relation or analogy between binarisms such as ‘butch/femme,’ ‘top/ bottom,’ ‘fucking/being fucked,’ and ‘penetrating/being penetrated,’ and makes it difficult to reduce them to any single master binary, such as ‘masculine/feminine’ or ‘active/passive.’ (60).

Just as femme sexuality can be submissive without being passive, a horse can submit to a rider while still maintaining some agency. I find Cvetkovitch’s portrait of agentic submission useful because it may be complex enough to bridge the gap between those who say that horses who are ridden are traumatized (in the conventional sense) and riders who suggest that horses may even enjoy their submission. Femmes gain pleasure from “making oneself open to a lover” (Cvetkovitch 59), but do horses willingly make themselves open to riders, and can they also gain pleasure through this agentic opening of the self? In light of this complex reframing of submission, I wish to hold space open for the possibility that horses too can have active, agentic, even pleasurable submission.

IV: Connection

We turned around the corner at a medium trot and then I let out my breath. I sat down into the saddle just as Joey's back rose up to meet my body and I tried to sink into his movement. I closed my eyes to find my balance, missed it, bounced for a stride and felt my body tense, tried again. I filled myself with all of my breath, let my tension fall away as I exhaled, and there! I felt my hips move like a wheel in the waterfall of Joey's stride, felt his shoulders surging up and then outward, felt his neck stretch forward and soft as I gave him more rein, felt his back rise up to meet my softened hips. Using my whole body I could feel his whole body as we moved together across the arena diagonally. With each stride I felt a lifting, like that moment before a plane leaves the runway, a forward and upward surging.

Too soon we reach the corner; my breath tightened, his shoulder dropped, and the feeling was gone. Still, I have replayed those moments over and over again in mind, knowing that this is what people mean when they say they feel one with the horse. That feeling, for me, is my goal in dressage. Certainly, our trot across the arena demonstrated training principles such as rhythm, contact, impulsion, and collection. The way it made me feel, though, could never be adequately described by a laundry list of necessary training attributes; that is, there was something deeply affective about our movement, a sort of embodied joyfulness cradled in those brief moments. I had never felt more connected to Joey, or indeed any other horse or being, for that matter, than I did in those moments.

I don't think I am alone in thinking this way. Certainly, many riders fail to think about connection beyond what is achieved physically when a horse is "on the bit." Other riders, however, believe that connection achieved through riding can involve much more than a physical connection. Rather, it can be an affective, embodied, and even erotic connection with the

potential to undo boundaries between the horse and rider. In this chapter I ask, what does it mean to become one with a horse? What is involved in the process of becoming? And ultimately, what knowledges can be produced through this process of becoming?

The Things that Connect Us

Also called “contact,” connection is a key concept in dressage. Most basically, contact refers to the physical connection between a horse and rider. As dressage judge Hilda Gurney notes, “establishing and maintaining a consistent, appropriate elastic contact allows riders to communicate with and balance their horses” (Gurney, “Contact Basics” 24). While each horse and rider pair will have different levels of connection, if the horse and rider have enough trust, strength, and balance, the result of establishing good contact is the ability for the horse to be “on the bit.”

There are different theoretical understandings of what it means for a horse to be on the bit. The German school of thought, which puts an emphasis on catching motion from behind in the rider’s hands, is more popular in modern competitive dressage. “In this approach, forwardness—driving the horse forward, sending the energy of the hind legs forward toward the bit,” is the most important quality to establish, meaning that “the horse might temporarily put more weight in the reins before balance and lightness” can be established (Cousyn 66). The effect of such an approach is like a “controlled explosion” (Ackerman 43) wherein the horse is capable of flashy, extravagant movement but relies more on the rider’s hands rather than the horse’s own self-carriage. For Ackerman, this is like “a hurricane of fresh air, a blend of power and responsibility’ (43) in that the horse provides a massive amount of energy while the rider is in charge of directing that power. In contrast, the French Baucher school of thought privileges

légèreté, or lightness, over forwardness. “Baucher wanted lightness in the bridle from the beginning, creating it first at the halt by using flexion exercises for the jaw and poll. Only then would he ride forward, never sacrificing lightness for forwardness, making sure the lightness in the bridle was maintained at all times” (Cousyn 66). Unlike the German method, the Baucher-influenced line of thought insists on a light connection wherein the horse is more responsible for its own power while the purpose of the bit is to facilitate subtle communication with the horse rather than carry the horse in any way. As these differing schools of thought demonstrate, the question of how the rider should maintain the connection with the horse is highly debated.

In any case, the term “on the bit” is used to refer to the physical, embodied and communicative connection between the horse and rider. Unfortunately, the term “‘contact’ is often reduced to the connection of the hands holding the reins and the horse’s mouth” (Heuschmann 38), when, in reality, connection is related to all of the mechanisms a rider communicates with a horse, and the rider’s leg aids and the way the rider uses her weight and seat in the saddle just as important to connection as the hand, rein, and bit system. In this way, the phrase “on the bit” is rather misleading. Indeed, many believe that the term “on the bit” is a “mistranslation of the original French expression for ‘on the aids’ or ‘in the hands,’ and that the dependence on the bit is misguided” (Sanchez 51). This act of reducing connection to purely the hands, reins, and bit, which has led to the popularity of methods such as hyperflexion, is likely perhaps partially a result of understanding the act of being on the bit visually. When a horse is on the bit, the horse’s poll (the point right behind a horse’s ears) is at the highest point and the horse’s nose is on or slightly in front of the vertical (the point at which you could draw a vertical line between the ground, the horse’s nose, and the horse’s forehead). Unfortunately, as I noted in the first chapter, looks can be deceiving: a horse may have a round, arched neck and be placing a

great deal of weight into the bit and one might assume that, given this heavy contact, there is a strong connection. In actuality, a horse's head and neck can be in this frame without the horse having a true connection to the rider, which requires a connection through the horse's entire body and not just through the neck, head, and bit.

There may actually be cases in which bits block rather than enhance connection. Because connection happens throughout the body, rather than just through the rider's hands and horse's mouth, if a horse dislikes the bit and tries to duck underneath or otherwise avoid it, the horse will tense and communication from other parts of the rider's body, such as from the legs and seat, will not go through either, as if the horse has developed a whole-body shield. At least, that is the impression I got recently while riding a new horse who, I quickly realized, desired an extremely light contact. For the first part of my lesson, I touched the reins as little as possible to avoid his violent head tossing, and though we moved around the arena well enough it felt as though he was avoiding not only my hands but also my seat and legs. When I shortened my reins in preparation for canter, he started to raise his head and twisted it so far to the left that I felt as though we would fall over. After I removed the reins from the bit and secured them to the noseband as an experimental fix, however, our ride transformed. Though I still needed to keep my hands extremely soft, for the first time he relaxed into my contact and I could feel his body; his back came up beneath my seat, he stretched his neck out into my hands, and he became extremely responsive to my lightest aids. I felt far more contact without the bit than with the bit and in that moment I was reminded that there is no formula for true contact—it cannot be forced and it must be felt.

This tendency to reduce “on the bit” to a neck position highlights humans' valuation of visual evidence over that which can be determined by feel. Is the human difficulty to “feel” the

reason that we so readily turn to other objects for communicative mediation? Even in dressage, which relies so heavily on developing feel in a rider, we use materials like bits with the argument that they allow for more subtle communication. According to Sherry Ackerman, a rider “must come to know dressage not just with the mind but also with the flesh. Intimate, uninhibited contact between horse and rider is a prerequisite” (34-5). In reality, however, dressage is not usually practiced with “uninhibited contact” between the rider’s flesh and that of the horse. We connect our hands to the horse’s mouth with the bit and reins, for example, and we use saddles to distribute and balance our weight. Though they materially separate the horse and rider, reins and saddles also serve connective functions. In this way, an analysis of the uses of embodied connection must also include a discussion of the material artifacts riders use to communicate with horses.

In her article “A Halter and a Lead Rope: Shifting Pedagogical Imaginaries of Becoming Within a Human–Horse Relationship,” Erica Hagström considers the use of a specific materiality, a halter and lead rope, as it connects a horse and rider. Hagström suggests that the “materiality of the halter constrains specific interactions of the human and of the horse, as it simultaneously renders specific interactions possible within the relation” (300). We use tools like lead ropes to help us communicate our desires more loudly and directly. Indeed, for Hagström the “halter and lead rope posit specific power relations through their materiality. The human and the horse are parts of a broader network, which is mediated through technology, such as saddles, bits and other apparatuses, and these technologies have the potentiality to help or hinder communication and interaction” (Hagström 307). What might be made possible by using these material training tools?

Hagström argues that because the material rope connects a horse and rider, it “therefore plays a central role in processes of becoming for both the horse and the human” (300). Chiefly concerned with becoming as a pedagogical process made possible between the interactions of a horse and rider, she uses the halter and lead rope as a “figuration” which, as an inanimate material, connects the horse and rider as they exist in a moment and space in time. Using the framework of figurations, Hagström is able to map the power relations within exchanges. As Hagström explains,

A figuration is not a metaphor, but rather a materialistic mapping. It is an embodied formation, situated between the imaginary and the actual, inhabiting both a vision of the future and critique of the past. It is not representational or universal; it posits and indexes a temporary abode rendering visible the location in space and time. The cartography of the figuration maps its restrictive and affirmative power relations in its location (Hagström 306).

The idea of figurations is useful here because it shows the connection between the horse and rider in a particular moment of time-space as well as the relative affective power the horse and human each has in that exchange. For Hagström, the concept of a figuration is useful because it demonstrates the ability for material technologies to create a “relation of domination” (307), wherein the human has dominance over the horse, for example; at the same time, technologies such as a halter and lead rope can facilitate new processes of becoming (307).

What Hagström misses in this analysis is the affective power of the halter and lead rope. While she acknowledges that these materials have the ability to alter the relationship between the horse and human, she sees them as technologies that are affective only when they are used by a human or animal. In thinking of the times that my horse has reacted to a brightly colored bucket

or a gust of wind, or even catching a stone in his hoof during a trail ride, I am reminded that non-living things can be just as effective in influencing the connection between a horse and human. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett suggests that we ignore the “vitality of manner” (vii), meaning “the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii). In other words, things we consider to be inanimate nevertheless have the power to affect great change, and not just as tools for humans or other living species. Indeed, this position goes beyond the human/non-human binary to dismantle the assumed animate/inanimate divide. Our anthropocentrism—or perhaps our sentience-centrism—prevents “us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies. These material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness, or even ‘respect’” (Bennett ix).

Unlike Bennett, I am less concerned with giving material things the respect that is owed them than with understanding their role in shaping, breaking, or otherwise affecting the potential connections between a horse and rider through shaping a shared world. Haraway already does a great job of disabusing us of the notion that a being can ever exist in isolation; rather, we are all always in “world-making entanglements” (*When Species Meet* 4). To give an example of such an entanglement, Haraway writes:

I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90% of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are

hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm... To be one is always to *become with* many (4).

As demonstrated, a horse and human pair is never just a horse and human; instead, the horse and human are an entanglement of a horse, a human, and a myriad of other non-human and non-horse life forms. Bennett's addition of vibrant matter to these world-making entanglements means that the connections between a horse and human are without exception shaped by an indeterminate number of other messy, subtle, human-animal-thing connections and forces.

In this way, even the physical connections between a horse and a human are not straightforward. The act of sharing physical contact does not automatically allow for the kind of connection that is asked for in classical dressage. Nor is this contact always negotiated directly between the horse and the rider; usually, this contact is mediated through material items such as saddles, bits, whips and reins. In addition, all manner of non-living things can influence horse-human interactions, even things that are not used as tools for bodily communication, because horses and humans are always entangled to compose a complex system of living and nonliving things. Training a horse, then, is not an act that can exist in a solitary, vacuum-like setting, and nor should it be treated as such: dressage is necessarily an act of building all sorts of messy, unexpected, and beautiful connections.

Connecting in Space-Time

The role that time plays in training cannot, I think, be overstated. Even a dictionary definition of "training" highlights the role that time plays in training: to "teach (person or animal) a particular skill or type of behavior through practice and instruction *over a period of*

time” (American Oxford English Dictionary, emphasis mine). This certainly applies to competitive dressage: not even the best trainer can turn a green-broke horse into a grand prix (Olympic level) dressage horse—though it seems competitive trainers will never stop trying to minimize the number of moments this process takes. Competitive dressage, then, relies heavily on a linear, capitalist understanding of time. The time and labor put into breeding or finding a horse with potential, and then the time and labor spent training that horse, ultimately has a product: a horse that wins competitions and can perhaps even be sold or bred to make the next equine champion. Criticizing this capitalist process, which encourages faster, harsher methods and therein reduces horses’ lifespans, Heuschmann notes that well-regarded trainers of the last century keep “pointing out the importance of time” (38). Too often, the advice to remain patient in our capitalist, product-driven society is neglected in the pursuit of winning and glory. Thankfully, various aspects of classical, artistic dressage prompt a more hopeful consideration of time.

While competitive dressage has the aim of creating a perfectly trained horse—one that can complete dressage tests with as few errors as possible—classical dressage shifts the discussion of what should be possible at the end of a time period by prioritizing the process of training rather than an end result. For example, Sherry Ackerman sees “dressage as an ongoing and endless journey that demands no finished product, a discipline whose ends are never more important than the means” (19). In focusing on “the means,” goals are often oriented toward other, less easily quantifiable measures of success, such as the strengthening of trust or harmony between a horse and rider. Both of these processes, of course, require a great deal of time.

As my critique of the dressage training pyramid in the previous chapter suggested, dressage is rarely—perhaps never—a linear process. Though perhaps some linear progress is

made in terms of a horse' and rider's ability to perform a movement better, for instance, the dynamic, animate qualities of horses, humans, and their shared surroundings prevent a linear process of perfectibility. In any given ride, countless different things may affect the way that a horse and human connect with one another: a bad mood, a sore muscle, a spooking wind, broken tack, too-high expectations. How many times have I set expectations for a ride, even a goal as simple as not falling off, only to have those expectations go unmet? (On three different occasions, I have silently begged a horse to not make me fall off during our ride, and in all three cases I ended up in the dirt. It is as if my act of setting intentions for the future removed me from the present and placed me into a more precarious future—one in which the horse responded negatively to my anxiety.) Rather than having strict expectations for the future, I have learned that it is better (and safer) to respond to the context of each moment.

In the end, it is not overall progress that feels the most gratifying to me in a ride; I unfortunately tend to dwell on the aspects of my riding that I could have executed better and want to improve upon. Rather, I find myself thinking again and again about individual moments in which the connection between the horse and me were especially strong. Such connected moments of shared, embodied time-space always seem to me to be filled with infinite potential, and they only happen when I am not thinking about the future. In this way, staying present is essential to connecting with a horse. Ackerman also suggests that staying present is crucial to horse-human connection because it allows the rider to see the horse holistically as the horse exists in that moment:

Cognizant of the grace in a reciprocal relationship, the perceptive rider allows a shared energy—a result of their partnership—to flow between himself or herself and the horse, staying in the moment, neither dwelling on the past nor anticipating

the future... We can only ride in this moment: now. Only through a series of 'now's' does the rider develop a horse's potential. In this context, the rider accepts the horse as she actually is, rather than as the rider wants her to be. The horse, then, is seen not as a conglomerate of individual qualities but as a whole (70).

I would also argue that staying present is what allows riders to stay connected to and use their bodies to feel what is needed in that instance of time-space. I am reminded of Linda Kohanov's practice of mindfulness in order to rehabilitate her fearful and dangerous stallion Merlin. Indeed, it was Kohanov's present, "relaxed yet heightened state of awareness" ("Taming the Angry Stallion" 18) that allowed her to sense Merlin's affective state well enough to help him control his nervous system so that he did not lash out at her. She could only train Merlin by staying connected to him in each moment.

As a practice of feeling and embodied connection, classical dressage requires that riders actively engage in the moments of time-space they encounter. Each moment has its own context, for as the horse and rider move the time and space changes. The horse and rider must thus actively stay connected to the present even as the present constantly moves away from the past and is projected into the future. This requires the rider to have an embodied, feeling awareness of what is coming into being. Through this mindful process, horse and rider can become so deeply connected that it feels as if they "become one."

Relational Becoming

In many accounts of riding, especially dressage, there are mentions of a connection so strong that it seems to change all boundaries between horse and rider. GaWaNi Pony Boy, for

example, suggests that it is important for riders to have “an understanding and oneness in action with a horse” (80). Similarly, Ackerman speaks of a humble rider’s need for “blending with the horse” (12). In a study by Sue-Ellen Brown, many people prized “having an intense, non-verbal communication with their animals which gave them a feeling of oneness” and “feeling so connected to their horses when riding that all they had to do was think about a command (such as turning) and the horse would do it” (336). Even with different phrasings, it is clear that riders often seek a strong connection with the horse that extends beyond a physical connection.

Why might this connection, which appears to be so common and yet difficult to articulate, be so desirable? Gala Argent, for one, theorizes that a horse-human relationship “can be dynamic, complex, mutual, co-created, bidirectionally cooperative, and perhaps transcendently pleasurable for both parties” (124). For Argent, this pleasure comes from entrainment, the “manner in which horse and rider become in sync with each other’s rhythms and co-create the act of riding” (120). Horses readily synchronize their movements with other horses and humans, and the act of riding correctly is also a form of synchrony. Argent suggests that “it is not only horses’ highly developed nonverbal skills but also their capacity to—and choice to—move together in synchrony with us, combined with a superior ability to assess intentionality, that allow riders at times to wonder if they merely *thought* a request, to which the horse telepathically responded, or actually *asked for it* non-verbally” (120). How does entrainment open up avenues of pleasure for humans and horses? For Argent, the pleasure can come from more than a feeling of accomplishment in training. “Not only is there an innate urge for humans to entrain with others; it is pleasurable” (Argent 121) because it “encourages emotional bonding and shared identity, facilitating a sense of boundary loss and feelings of oneness with something larger than oneself” (121). Entrainment is thus pleasurable because it allows our identities to

“expand outside of our boundaries” (121), to transcend and become something more.

I suspect that there are other reasons that this feeling of oneness is so desirable. I personally find this act of reaching toward oneness enjoyable because it requires that I use my body, without judging it, to feel a horse’s body. Developing feel requires us to cultivate an awareness of our own bodies in order to sense what is happening in a horse’s body, and this bodily awareness can be empowering. An early awareness of how society endlessly sexualizes and shames women’s bodies caused me to internalize these sexist messages at a young age. As a result, I have spent most of my life trying to ignore or even distance myself from my body. Dressage, for me, intervenes in that thought process because it grounds me in my embodiment and reminds me of my, as Audre Lorde might call it, “capacity for feeling” (Lorde 57).

Black, queer poet and essayist Audre Lorde argues that there is “a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (53). She calls this resource “the erotic,” and it is a type of “self-connection” (57) that brings awareness to and allows for one’s capacity for joy and deep feeling. She writes, “In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea” (56-7). As these examples suggest, though an erotic experience can be sexual, this is not always the case; Lorde is careful to emphasize that the erotic is not to be confused with the pornographic:

“The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the

pornographic. But pornography is a denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling” (54).

For Lorde, embracing the erotic is about recognizing and expanding one’s ability to enjoy true feeling. Moreover, Lorde suggests that the erotic should be seen as a source of information and power.

Through reading Lorde’s understanding of the erotic, it is clear to me that my relationships with horses and the act of practicing dressage are erotic. Lorde writes that the erotic provides “the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference” (56). Dressage is a physical, intellectual, and emotional pursuit that is certainly shared deeply by the horse and rider. Further, “...the erotic is not a question of only what we can do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing” (54). Is this not what we as dressage riders seek to answer by developing feel? The only difference is that feel, as I define it, not only requires self-connection but also a connection with the horse, a connection that uses the body to also feel what lies outside of the body, such as the horse’s movements and intensity. When a rider has good feel and the horse and rider are intimately connected in their dressage practice together, their movement can be physically and affectively powerful, and it is likely that the rider—or, hopefully, the horse and rider—derive pleasure from recognizing and feeling this embodied power.

Necessary to this process is undoing the tendency to think of the body as separate from the mind. As I argued in chapter two, the fact that we consider horses’ bodies to be “hypersensitive” suggests to me that humans’ bodies are actually undersensitive. Additionally, in

a capitalist society we tend to value our bodies more for their physical abilities or attractiveness than for their capacity for feeling, and the objectification and commodification of bodies can, I think, make it easier to think of our bodies and minds as separate parts of the self. Horses, on the other hand, rely on their capacity to feel and interpret their own and others' affect for survival (Kohanov, *Tao of Equus* 132). When we work with horses, it is apparent to the horse that aspects of our mental states are represented in our bodies, even if this is not apparent to us or to other humans, and we often use horses are often used in therapy work for this very reason. This is perhaps one example of how “the rider cannot escape knowing that the horse knows the rider in ways the rider cannot fathom” (Hearne 109). It only took me a few fear-fueled rides to figure out that my mental worry is as present in my body as it in my head and that horses can certainly feel it. In order to ride well, humans must thus disrupt our tendency to deny the connection between our bodies and minds.

In other words, the act of riding necessitates a thorough critique of Cartesian dualism. Cartesian dualism is based on Rene Descartes' assertion that the mind and body are separate: “I recognize only two ultimate classes of things: first, intellectual or thinking things, i.e. those which pertain to mind or thinking substance; and secondly, material things, i.e. those which pertain to extended substance or body” (Descartes, Vol. I, 208). This theory proposes that there are two worlds—one for physical objects and one for mental objects—and that these physical and mental objects “interact casually within a human being; hence mind and body are externally or contingently related” (Baker and Morris 11). That the mind and body are only “contingently” related is the first argument that I propose. The second is that, for Descartes, the group of thinking things excludes nonhuman animals like horses:

Descartes' treatment of the human body and of animals is symmetrical, in so far as he thinks both are machines. His description of both as machines is intended to highlight...contrasts between them and human rational thinkers – viz., they are 'mechanical' in so far as they do not exhibit the intelligence and flexibility in behavior of rational humans and they also lack the free will (and thus the moral responsibility) of such rational humans (Wee 613).

Though I do not have the space here to speak expansively about the “intelligence and flexibility” of horses relative to humans, to refer to horses and other animals as “mechanical” ignores horses' obvious depth of affective intelligence. Dressage, which relies on a deep connection between the body and mind for both the horse and the human, and which thus enables the connection between the human and the horse, can serve to intervene in the Cartesian dualist argument that the relationship between mind and body is external and casual. It is likely that this dualism posits mind and body as separate because Descartes failed to recognize and value non-academically useful types of intelligence, such as bodily, affective intelligence. The art of classical dressage suggests that if, rather than keeping body and mind separate and casually acquainted, we allow for a deep, intentional connection between the two, our efforts can result in beauty and empowerment.

And yet, aspects of Cartesian dualism appear in some accounts of how to achieve harmony with a horse, therein relegating horses to the position of non-thinking machines. For example, Sherry Ackerman expresses, “Only in the absence of the conscious will can a master dressage artist enter a state of awareness in which the right physical movement takes place by itself” (Ackerman 21). What is exactly is that state of awareness? Rather than needing to let go of the conscious, I suspect that Ackerman aims for is a meditative-like state in which extraneous

thoughts are replaced by the intention to remain present in the body, for later she suggests, “every time we sit on a horse, we confront the need to integrate our physical and mental selves” (Ackerman 84). When I am trying to change aspects of my riding position, I have the most success when I mentally think of a figure that I want my body to imitate. Sally Swift’s book, *Centered Riding*, is full of such images that help riders correct the way we use our bodies. If I am gripping with my legs, for example, I imagine that my legs are so long that they reach the ground and, with very little effort on my part, my legs stretch down softly. When instead I tell myself to fix a body part’s position over and over, however, I feel as though I am fighting with my own body as though my mind and body are separate entities. In this sense, Swift’s methods help me stay engaged, whole, and connected so that I can concentrate on feeling my horse and establishing harmony and a sense of one-ness.

I am particularly struck by the notion of a rider having a “feeling of being one with” the horse. Being connected to a horse, however, involves a negotiation of different the boundaries—those that separate species, bodies, and individual subjects. What does it mean to break through or transcend the boundaries between a horse and rider, and what types of boundaries does this feeling of oneness renegotiate? If a horse and rider become one, what one thing do they become? Do they become an entirely new subject, a horse-human composite? As this chapter ends, I will try to offer possibilities for some of these questions by talking about the notion of becoming with, specifically Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming-animal,” Hagström’s use of becoming animal, and Haraway’s notion of “becoming with.” The kind of “becoming with” that I end with is decidedly different from Deleuze’ and Guattari’s “becoming animal;” nonetheless, it is useful to discuss the process of “becoming animal” in order to point out why it is not useful for my project and why Haraway’s “becoming with” opens so many more possibilities.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduce the famous concept of “Becoming-animal,” in a section of *A Thousand Plateaus* titled “Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming Imperceptible” (232). In their words,

"Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal you become. The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not; and the becoming-other of the animal is real, even if that something other it becomes is not. This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first" (238).

From this convoluted section we can glean that becoming does not produce a new, other subject and that becoming-animal is a real process even though there is no term for the animal that the subject becomes. Deleuze and Guattari further hint at what becoming is by stating that it is not “imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is verb with consistency all its own” (239). A subject that is becoming-animal thus does not become through reproduction, imitation, identification, or progression; instead, the subject becomes through the unique process that is becoming, and in this process the subject can transcend the barriers established by hierarchical, “patrilineal

thinking, which sees all the world as a tree of filiations ruled by genealogy and hierarchy” (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 28).

In her article “A Halter and a Lead Rope: Shifting Pedagogical Imaginaries of Becoming Within a Human-Horse Relationship,” Erica Hagström finds the concept of becoming-animal useful for “de-stabilising the axis of naturalised difference between human and animal” (300). In addition to Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-animal, Hagström uses Matthew Calarco’s more straightforward definition, which is “a matter of being transformed by an encounter with nonhuman perspectives” (Calarco 41, qtd. in Hagström 302). The nonhuman perspective she encounters and which allows for her becoming-animal is that of her horse, and I wonder what Deleuze and Guattari would think about her becoming-animal in relation to a horse. For Deleuze and Guattari, there are three types of animals: “individuated animals, the family pet, with its own little story; animals with attributes that are taken up into myths; and animals who travel in packs, inspiring tales” (Lawlor 171). Deleuze and Guattari value the animals that live in packs but, as Haraway notes, express “horror at the ‘individuated animals, family pets, sentimental Oedipal animals each with their own petty history’ who invite only regression” (Deleuze and Guattari qtd. in Haraway *When Species Meet* 29). Where might a horse, attached to a human through a halter and lead rope, be categorized? A feral mustang running free (for now) may be considered one such pack animal. At the same time, these mustangs are endlessly mythologized, turned into symbols of the American West’s past. Additionally, mustangs are increasingly being rounded up to meet the grazing demands of cattle ranchers and many of them are trained for various riding pursuits. The mustang, then, could be seen as fitting all three of the categories established by Deleuze and Guattari. Hagström’s horse may be part of a pack or herd, however Hagström is also likely a herd member, and Hagström’s human presence automatically relegates her horse to the

despised family-pet category (Haraway *When Species Meet* 29). If Hagström becomes-animal in relation to her horse, then, would this be an act of regression in the eyes of Deleuze and Guattari? Hagström finds that the act of becoming animal with her horse provides numerous possibilities for theorizing pedagogy. I find a need here for Haraway's scathing critique of Deleuze and Guattari on this subject: "I find little but the two writers' scorn for all that is mundane and ordinary and the profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with actual animals" (Haraway *When Species Meet* 27). How might we better navigate these horse-human boundaries in a way that maintains respect and curiosity for horses? And to what extent should horse-human boundaries be weakened?

In describing connected dressage, Sherry Ackerman values riding in a way that diverges significantly from Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of becoming animal, though this process does entail for her a dissolving of horse-human boundaries. Ackerman, who has the goal of "blending with the horse" (12), gives a much more literal interpretation of becoming animal: The "dressage rider must necessarily let go of the self to merge with the horse. The boundaries between horse and rider must dissolve if the two are to experience oneness" (31). It is important to note that Ackerman believes the rider should interfere with the horse as little as possible, even to the extent of letting go of the self, in order to become one with the horse. She goes on to explain that "the less [riders] move around, the less they interfere, the less they rely on the technical aids—the less they give credence to duality between horse and self—the better their mounts can perform" (Ackerman 31). In this way, Ackerman seems to construct one-ness as a state in which the horse and rider appear and feel as though they are the same being. One-ness, or a state as close to one-ness as possible, is desirable for Ackerman for reasons beyond the emotional closeness this contact brings, as her quote from Charles de Kunffy suggests: "The

reciprocity of power and energy ennobles both creatures beyond the character they project by themselves. The configuration of these vastly different creatures as a pair far surpasses the potential of their composite parts. They are more beautiful together than they could ever be separately” (Charles de Kunffy, qtd. in Ackermann 37). The connection of one-ness, or almost one-ness, is ennobling and it allows both beings to transcend their boundaries as individual selves.

Unlike Ackerman, some thinkers are careful to explain that it is important to maintain the individuality of each member of a training pair in order for them to connect. In her work training horses and dogs, Vicki Hearne resists the notion that a deep, harmonious connection requires a demolition of barriers between her and nonhuman animals. Referring to the work she does with her tracking dog, Belle, Hearne insists that while tracking, she does not lose herself and “become Belle” (Hearne 105). For Hearne, the same holds true when horses. I agree here with her maintenance of boundaries between horse and human because a feeling of one-ness actually requires that some boundaries hold steady. Horse and rider cannot maintain a state or feeling of oneness at all times; rather, it must be negotiated in each moment, and it is often not in the horse’ and rider’s best interest to feel one with one another. If a horse is moving crookedly, for example, it is important that the rider uses their individual body to help rebalance the horse’s body. If the rider were to instead follow the horse’s body with their body in pursuit of oneness, even though the horse was moving in an incorrect way, the rider could instead further unbalance the horse and put them both in danger. Paradoxically, it is actually through the appropriate maintenance of boundaries, which are essential for maintaining proper balance, that these moments of deep connection take place—at which point the connection allows the horse and rider to transcend their individual boundaries and feel as if they are one with each other.

In any case, it is clear that a deep connection between a horse and rider offer new possibilities for becoming and make the case that training should always be seen as practice of “becoming with.” For Haraway, “becoming with” is a practice of becoming worldly, of autremondialisation, which can occur through “retying some of the knots of ordinary multispecies living on earth” (*When Species Meet* 4). And indeed, we are all always becoming with, because “to be one is to *become with* many,” not only because our bodies harbor and rely on microscopic bacteria, but also because we become entangled with other beings, moments, things as we encounter and make contact with them. We come into contact in time-space moments, through material objects, through physical movement, through conversation, through touch. And when we attempt to deepen these connections, when we attempt to transcend boundaries and achieve fantastic closeness, we may gain access to new types and degrees of power and beauty. When acts of training strive to make material, spatial, temporal, erotic, and embodied connections, all sorts of possibilities for becoming, and becoming with, are possible.

V: Concluding Thoughts

When I watch video clips of French dressage rider Alizée Froment and her stallion Mistral du Coussoul move across the arena, I am mesmerized by the pair's demonstration of their training. The fact that Froment and Mistral are performing beautiful, high-level movements without a saddle or bridle is impressive enough—the technical correctness of their ride demonstrates the countless hours they have spent training together—but I am most inspired by the quality of their movement. Using only her body and a loose rope around Mistral's neck, Froment keeps Mistral in a frame that allows him to move in a way that seems free, comfortable, and joyful. Froment' and Mistral's riding touches me, makes me ache gently in the way that many great artistic performances do, because it reminds me of my capacity to feel deeply.

Horse and rider relationships such as Froment and Mistral exemplify what classical dressage has to offer as a framework for imagining training as embodied, affective, and connected. The ideal training relationship strives for a synchrony so complete that it allows for the horse' and rider's identities to expand outside of [their] boundaries" (Argent 121). Cultivating this feeling of mutual transcendence, of oneness, is not a sublime, Dionysian process of destruction; it is not the "feeling of ecstasy that accompanies the sense of loss of the individual self" (Sedgewick, Peter 60). For example, Froment does not break down her boundaries in order to become Mistral, and Mistral, likewise, is not broken down into a puppet without agency, existing only to do as his rider asks. Neither subject in the relationship must let go of their agency or sense of individuality in order to unleash a wild beauty.

Froment and Mistral demonstrate the exact opposite of what Deleuze and Guattari imagine in their concept of "becoming animal." At the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's

“becoming animal” is their romantic, Dionysian fascination with the sublime. For Deleuze and Guattari, the sublime creates a moment when “all forms come undone” (Deleuze and Guattari 14). Edmund Burke alternately describes the sublime as terrible and characterized by strong, dark emotion: “whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (Burke 133). A sublime “becoming animal” can thus be understood as Dionysian in nature. The Dionysian drive is “the primary component of Greek Tragedy that embodies the emotions, impulses, intuitions, feelings, experiences and character traits underlying the tragic character of human nature” (Kaplama 179). In this way, we can understand “becoming animal” as a fundamentally tragic and destructive process, fueled by the aesthetic appeal of immense, explosive emotion. This is antithetical to the type of becoming we hope to achieve in classical dressage.

The antithesis of this destructive, Dionysian ideal is Apollo, “the god of beauty and perfection” who “comes to be the ethical divinity that represents *ratio* or *measure* and demands one to know oneself” (Kaplama 179). Apollo seeks to “avert self-destruction” (Kaplama 180) inherent in Dionysian beauty. The beauty of classical dressage is thus Apollonian in nature; it is based on principles of order, harmony, and unity, and thus Froment works to balance, direct, and support Mistral so that together they can “co-create the act of riding” (Argent 120). Rather than the horse or rider destroying the self in order to become the other, the horse and rider work together so that they can produce art that neither is capable of producing alone. To use a musical metaphor, in order for multiple singers to build a chord, each singer must hold their own note so that the notes together create a chord more beautiful and powerful than any individual note is alone. It is the same way in dressage; the rider and the horse each play their own role in this

training relationship, and when they support each other through fulfilling their own role to the best of their abilities, the horse and rider can together cultivate a feeling of oneness strong enough that it affects those who witness this connection.

In this way, I consider classical dressage to be a performance in the way that it transforms affect into shared emotion. In dressage, a horse and rider perform both for each other and together for an implicit third party. I am not, however, referring to the spectators in the stands of a dressage competition. These spectators are certainly watching a performance, but for them the performance begins and ends with the dressage test in the dressage arena, the demonstration of all of the training that has occurred prior. Classical dressage, however, frames training as the artistic performance itself. To start with, each ride is a demonstration of skill and knowledge that the horse and rider each possess and how they share it with one another. Moreover, riding involves a sharing of feeling and of recognizing one another in the process of sharing this feeling. By sharing and recognizing their affect together, horse and rider produce an emotive and emotional performance.

I once turned Joey out to play before I rode him, hoping that if he got his excess energy out I would have an easier time getting him to focus during our ride. Joey immediately cantered to his favorite rolling spot and rolled over several times, back and forth, before standing back up, shaking, and then galloping away. After a few laps around the field he cantered back to me and stopped next to me. I rubbed his face, stepped back, and then leaped up and down and waggled my fingers at him. Joey responded to my silly movements by bucking several times and then started to trot back and forth in front of me. It was a beautiful trot, so light and elevated that he appeared to float above the ground. To mark the end of our performance, he rolled again and then returned to my side. In our ride later that day, I remembered how it had felt to play with

Joey, to respond to his silly antics and to feel delighted when he responded to mine, and knew that we were doing the same thing in our ride but because I was on his back, we could communicate more subtly with our bodies. I spent the rest of the ride focusing on how we responded to one another. Despite the fierce wind, Joey and I were both focused and relaxed and our movements felt soft, joyful, and beautiful.

Those are the kinds of moments I want to remember when imagining what training should look, feel, and be like. These are moments that remind me to locate my own perspective and, with a soft, responsible gaze, imagine new and different ways of thinking about training. Similarly, accounts of horses such as Clever Hans and Merlin inspire me to privilege bodily knowledge and to recognize the role of affect in learning and sharing ideas. Additionally, practicing dressage with different horses has expanded my understanding of what dominance, submission, and authority can mean and how they can function in training. Perhaps most importantly, dressage has taught me to create training relationships wherein both parties strive for a deep connection that allows for both beings to become with one another. I am thrilled that classical dressage has transformed my understanding of what training should be, and I am determined to use dressage to continue finding new ways to understand training as responsible, embodied, affective, intimate, complex, kind, and connected.

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