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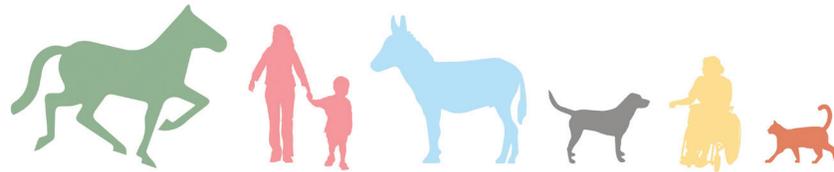
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Bearing Witness to the Beauty of Enactive Kinesthetic Empathy across Species in Canine-Human and Equine-Human Interactions: Participant-Observation Ethnographies

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Keywords: canine-human interactions, equine-human interactions, enactive kinesthetic empathy, multispecies well-being, visual ethnography

Abstract: Through observations from ethnographic fieldwork the authors seek to highlight the significance of equine-human and canine-human communication to the fields of both human-animal studies and eudaimonia theories of human well-being. As we shared our insights through academic conversations about our respective research findings, we realized that both studies explore the enigmatic and significant concept of kinesthetic empathy in communication and relationship building between horses and young people and between dogs and young children. The canine-child setting (**Study A**) is a primary school and classroom in which the children voted to share their environment with a school dog, and the equine-adolescent setting (**Study B**) is an intervention program for young people experiencing social and emotional challenges because of being excluded from the mainstream education system. Observations revealed that the notion of kinesthetic empathy is apparent across species and plays a key role in the well-being of both animal and human. These observations are described and animated through rich descriptions from field notes and photographs taken from both settings. Both studies bring to light the significance of touch, movement, and attunement in human-animal communication to further add to this emerging field. Marrying these concepts together, as we have attempted here, could prove a major step forward in strengthening this field, as the need for robust methodologies is purported. This paper will be of interest to professionals across disciplines such as education, social work, health care, sociology, and human-animal studies.

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Introduction

Animal Intimacies and Becoming Bodies

The field of developmental psychology has rich insights to draw upon when considering the finer nuances of interaction and communication. The “psychologist’s gaze” is a useful place to begin to unpack the processes and mechanisms of complex chains of interactions in humans in terms of cognition and behavior; however, this could be considered a narrow lens with which to view the whole entirety of our relationships in the world (Burman, 2007; Rose, 1999). A paradigm shift, one that encompasses the nonhuman in our encounters, is called for in the shape of more pluralistic, hybrid, and multidisciplinary approaches such as human and animal geographies and the affective methodologies they endorse (Lorimer, 2010; Whatmore, 1997). In a time when human-animal entanglements are becoming more ethically and politically considered, the relationships we share with them are important to understand to add to the discourses around “blurring the species line” (Rice & Rud, 2016). Implications around power and human-centric perspectives must be balanced against the redemptive qualities animals afford society. Human interference in nature, also termed the “Anthropocene,” is considered alongside Colebrook’s suggestion for a return to the prehuman (Colebrook, 2015). In this paper, we endeavor to show our inquiry into human-animal interactions through real-life examples of children and young people living and learning together. We begin as indicated by exploring affect attunement and forms of vitality—key concepts described by Stern (2010) in his perceptive insights drawn from infant-parent observations. Stern draws our attention to the primacy of movement and its fundamental function in our thinking and experiences. He richly describes the internal choreography that infants and parents embody during their interactions together. This internal choreography is one in which they anticipate each other’s movements. In response to each other, they gesture and mirror each other’s movements and hence emotional tenor, entering what is termed an intersubjective field. This intersubjective field is a

sense of knowing the other’s emotional states and attuning to them. Through matching, mirroring, and parental acknowledgment of these states the infant gains a stronger sense of self, seeing its own gestures, movements, and vocalizations reflected back. This is considered a crucial stage in the infant’s emotional development, having been reflected back through the parent’s eyes. What this fundamental process informs us is that we come to know ourselves through another and the surrounding environment (von Uexkull, 1992).

The animal world has offered much to our understanding about intimacy between bodies and the essential need for physical contact and touch (Bergman, 2014). Just as skin-to-skin contact and positive, empathic social interactions between humans have been reported to release oxytocin from the hypothalamus, inducing feelings of calm, connection, and pleasure and decreasing levels of stress, Unvnas-Moberg (2013), Olmert (2009), and Chandler (2012) suggest that all mammals have this capacity. This is enabled by affective states and processing along the neuroaxis that seek rewarding social contact and connections, including bonds with mammals from other species (Panksepp, 2005).

As Manning aligns with Stern’s dynamic forms of experience, she purports,

When the skin becomes not a container but a multi-dimensional topological surface that folds in, through and across spacetimes of experience, what emerges is not a self but the dynamic form of a worlding that refuses categorization. Beyond the human, beyond the sense of touch or vision, beyond the object, what emerges is relation. (Manning, 2009, p. 42)

Thus, the body is a flowing form in motion to which we can attach force, energy, power, and vigor. It is an “aliveness” and an “animistic” performance that emanates between bodies. Similarly, Sheets-Johnstone has explored dance and movement extensively, preferring to sidestep the notion of embodiment to focus attention on the understanding of animate life. This is an important distinction and a posthuman

one. She states, “Real-life body happenings resonate tactilely and kinesthetically . . . what feels and is moved to move is not a brain but a living organism” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, p. 214). As Sheets-Johnstone suggests, it is not fully acknowledged or appreciated that the mind is a function of the body (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009). This crucial point is one that resonates with and epitomizes the long-standing nature-nurture discourse and calls for a similar integration of concepts across disciplinary fields. In current educational policy, a “hands-off” approach to working with pupils is suggested, in line with what is considered “appropriate touch” and safeguarding principles. However, its strict interpretation can be viewed as equally risky to child well-being (Johnson, 2000). The disappearance of touch, a vital human need, is concerning as it can be key in the enhancement of human development and well-being (Hetu & Elmsater, 2010; Leboyer, 1997; Montagu, 1986; Whiddon & Montgomery, 2011).

In addition to the importance of paying attention to affects and our sensory dispositions, Hayles argues that feelings can be “unthought” (nonconscious) and therefore go unknown. Rendering these feelings visible through visual and affective methodologies, which we have employed in our respective ethnographic studies, is therefore fundamental in the production of knowledge, positioning the body as a significant site of this visceral knowledge (Hayles, 2017).

What Is Kinesthetic Empathy?

Kinesthetic empathy is a tricky and intricate concept. Sapir wrote about nonverbal communication some time ago: “We respond to gestures with an extreme alertness, and one might say, in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known to none and understood by all” (Sapir, 1928).

This suggests the primordial, ingrained nature of relating kinesthetically being deep within human beings. Malloch and Trevarthen point out this significance in how the infant moves its body, all four limbs, and vocalizes in time and rhythm with the parent in a “communicative musicality” that is very like notes being played in bars of music (Malloch &

Trevarthen, 2009). This animate performance transmits emotional states without language and words. It is a choreography encompassing “vitality affects.” We argue that the same communicative musicality is present in animal-human relationships. The body is thus a vector and site of knowledge and learning. As with human-to-human encounters, it strengthens and enhances the bond between human and animal. With animals, this is profoundly more so through kinesthetic empathy. Shapiro (1990) provided an example of how he encountered kinesthetic empathy with his own dog, Shabka, and in a touching account, he highlights its significance. For dogs, space can be defined and marked as territorial space. Humans have personal space. Shapiro combines these two ideas in what he terms “the space of place” (Shapiro, 1990, p. 190). In this place, a sense of being is experienced, a bodily sense. Shapiro is aware and thus kinesthetically empathic to Shabka’s bodily experience as an important site of their dwelling together. This is akin to the “contact zone,” which Haraway deems to be integral to companion species and how we connect in shared spaces of “becoming with” one another (Haraway, 2008). It is what Deleuze and Guattari term the “Zone of Proximity,” citing the classic tale of *Moby Dick* and how Captain Ahab “merges” in a “doubling” with the whale through a visceral and embodied internal fusion with it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013). We see that the idea of spatiality is fundamental in the classroom in Study A, where the children and Ted the dog’s “space of place” collide and expand, like the notion of Sloterdijk’s “bubbling” in an existential form (Sloterdijk, 2011). In a de-territorializing of the educational space both the children and Ted create a disruption of the classroom order and rules. They create a disruption of striation, producing a space of conviviality, a smooth space unregulated or controlled (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013).

Likewise, something powerful occurred in Study B when young people with low self-esteem were paired up with horses in a safe space, meaning in conditions that did not represent or remotely compare to the outside lives of the young people, education settings or home, for example. This is a “doubling” and

“coupling,” a concept that offers a way to consider how we are affected and can affect one another as we move in space; it is a felt intensity, a vitality affect, a sensation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013; Masumi, 1996). This means that each becomes, in part, the other by picking up and assimilating aspects of the other, and through this process of intermixing and doubling of the senses both are transformed. This production of space allows for shared agency to emerge; it is enlivening and moves and animates us. Movement and play are essential to learning (Beriman & Mascheroni, 2019). As Parviainen asserts:

We may grasp another’s living, moving body as another center orientation of the world through our own kinaesthetic sense and body topography. Kinaesthetic empathy seems to have a partial capacity to make sense of others’ experiential movements and reciprocally our own body movements. It makes it possible to understand the non-verbal kinetic experiences through which we acquire knowledge of the other’s bodily movements on the basis of our own typography. (Parviainen, 2003, p. 151)

The very liveliness of animals opens the affectual capacities and experiences that children and young people have with them. This animate idea that animals have “something inside” has been explicitly highlighted by Hohti and Osgood (2020, p. 7), who argue that we are engaged in co-constitutive non-human (animal) families (Hohti & Osgood, 2020). This notion of the “liveliness” of a body and “having something inside” (Hohti & Osgood, 2020, p. 7) resonates well with the work of Sheets-Johnstone and why she uses the term “animate” as opposed to “embodied” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009). Lori Gruen’s notion of “entangled empathy” is also an ethics with which to consider relationships and animal welfare. She details how, by attending to our relationships with others (nonhuman), we activate a moral and what we consider a eudaimonia response. Thus, such interventions, as witnessed through the author’s ethnographies, can help children and young people on the road to well-being and to a life where they can

flourish. In addition, like Shapiro, she cautions us not to anthropomorphize these relationships. Gruen states, “By overlooking differences and solely focusing on similarities,” we can neglect “distinctively valuable aspects of the lives of others” (Gruen, 2015, p. 36).

As the celebrated primatologist Dr. Jane Goodall wonderfully emulates through her work with chimpanzees, it is crucial that we empathize with other species. Empathy could provide a deeper nurturance of eudaimonia and altruism. This links importantly to human flourishing and well-being. Our emotional and embodied social engagement with animals is emerging strongly as a key field of study (Bradshaw, 2018; Gee, 2018). Such research as we have undertaken and detailed herein can enable mutual multi-species flourishing that is bidirectional.

Materials and Methods

Both studies utilized ethnographic, participant observation, which involved field notes, photographs, and sketches in Study A and narrative accounts and photographs in Study B. The visual methods captured the essence of intimate connections and transformations.

Study A describes the case study of a school/classrooms in Year 6 (children aged 10–11) and in Year 4 (children aged 8–9) and a dog called Ted. Ted is a playful, gentle, and charismatic three-year-old springer spaniel. He has been part of school life since being a puppy. The ethnographic study was conducted in three phases over a period of a full academic year.

Study B describes an equine program that was designed for young people (aged 14–18) who had been excluded from the education system. Two identical mixed methods studies were conducted, one year apart, each over a three-month period.

In both cases, data collection also included the use of the researcher’s body and self as a data and research tool, in what can also be termed a “walking” ethnography (Edensor, 2010; O’Neill, 2001). Ethnography—becoming deeply immersed as a participant-observer—enabled thick descriptions of

the phenomena to emerge. Both studies were undertaken (separately) in the north of England, United Kingdom. The animals in both studies, school dog Ted and the horses, underwent training and preparation and were carefully and professionally managed with their welfare always at the forefront of our research. Both studies underwent robust ethical approval processes.

Through being bodily present in shared spaces both researchers' bodies became valuable instruments with which to engage sensory experiences of what we could see, hear, feel, and smell. "Umwelts" is an intriguing term coined by von Uexkull to explain how organisms experience their own environments in unique ways based upon their specific bodily senses, (von Uexkull, 1992). This idea enabled rich data in our attempts at attending to the different umwelts of both horse and dog. In doing so, we endeavored to gain a deeper understanding of more-than-human ways of knowing and communicating. We were both well placed (in sense of proximity and space) to bear witness and to the participants' accounts and visualization of the phenomena. This was achieved through three phases in Study A,

(1) the moment, (2) the "etude" (drawing), and (3) the reading/meaning (commentary of participants).

The use of embodiment in qualitative research methods is comprehensively endorsed by Ellingson as a way of understanding cultural discourses in which researcher and participant bodies are caught up together in mutual threads of entanglement. Thus corporeal approaches acknowledge how we are intermingled, reciprocal, and enmeshed in the world, in which our sameness but difference can be both be embraced (Ellingson, 2017).

Results

Animating Kinesthetic Empathy

Study A: In Study A, a sensory and visual ethnographic method was utilized, as Pink (2009/2015) endorses this approach when seeking to gain knowledge that is situated in a participatory as well as observational practice (Pink, 2009/2015). This allows the researcher to experience embodied processes, attend to other bodies, and attune to them to gain new insights. In doing so, the researcher's body



Study A (1). Pentimento drawing (layering technique) to depict researcher body "double-becoming" with Ted in a process of intimate synchrony, enactive kinesthetic empathy, and internal choreography.

became an important vector and tool in the ethnographic process. This is similar to “enactive anthrozoology” (Verheggen et al., 2017). However, it gives greater credence to the *enactive affective matching process of kinesthetic empathy* as aligned with Massumi’s and Hayles’s respective definitions of affect being a non-conscious enactment of the body (Hayles, 2017; Massumi, 1996). This emerged as a doubling-becoming, merging (interfusing) with Ted, “becoming-Ted” in an intimate communication that took nonlinguistic, noncognitized form (Massumi, 1996). The classroom became an expanded space, a space in which the researcher synchronized with Ted, becoming a nomadic explorer of a new sensory terrain. As physicist and philosopher Barad suggests, our *intra-action* is one in which we co-constitute one another—a coming together in an intimate way, mutually benefiting one another (Barad, 2007).

The following is an excerpt from Study A’s researcher fieldnotes, which illustrates the notion of doubling, coupling, and becoming-with Ted in the zone of proximity.

Fieldnote Observation 28 January 16th 2018:

In synergy with Ted, I felt the smooth coldness of the floor on my body in contrast to the squares of roughly textured laid carpet at the front and back of the class. It felt strangely animating and I seemed to float around unnoticed and free. I felt unobtrusive when observing the children, and like Ted I slowly walked up and down the side of their desks and tables. When the sound of the children’s voices became higher it felt like a vibration through my whole body, like a sensory stimulus overload and I wanted to jump up and shake! Equally Ted got aroused and grabbed a child’s jumper from the back of their chair. I understood his urge to frolic and play. I sensed his pleasure in the children chasing him to get the jumper back.

The synchronous patterns described in the fieldnote resonate well with Feldman’s notion of relationship-specific modes of matched-coordination (Feldman, 2007). In addition, it links well with a sense of self-efficacy, a key component of self-determination theory purported by Ryan and Deci, which plays a key role in eudaemonic (happiness) well-being (Ryan &

Deci, 2000). It acknowledges our growth of agency and autonomy in our feelings of wellness. Study A reaffirms previous studies in that dogs do indeed synchronize with and imitate humans (Range, Huber, & Heys, 2011). What is also revelatory in this study is how the researcher/ethnographer also synchronized with and imitated Ted the dog. This was apparent as a nonconscious matching in which appreciation of Ted’s particular *umwelt* could be considered, albeit in a limited capacity due to our similar, yet different physiology. This taking up of Ted’s bodily form (*internally* as a dance of animacy) enabled an enactment of his movement and animation around the class. The children as well as the researcher were often sitting together on the floor, in space of place.

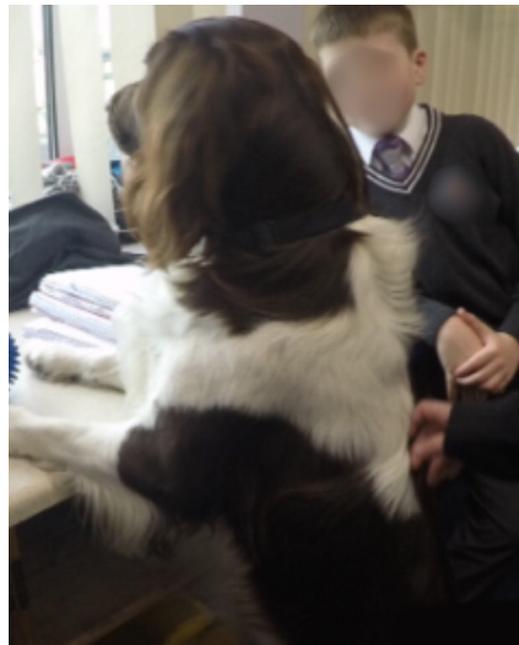
What is striking in Bethany’s drawing is how she and Ted are both smiling with outstretched limbs, depicting a matching and synchrony of each other (Stern, 1977/2002). When Bethany described her drawing, she said that Ted “gets inside your boots!” When asked to tell the researcher more she explained, “He knows what it’s like to be one of us.” This is perhaps the most precise and delightful reference to kinesthetic empathy at play in the classroom. Her perceptive insight is one that is clearly experienced at a kinesthetic level, without articulation and through matching and synchrony, with Ted (Stern, 1977/2002). We need to consider the primacy given



Study A (2). Haptic (tactile): kinesthetic empathy.



Study A (3). Shared visual curiosity and postural mirroring and matching: kinesthetic empathy.



Study A (5). Shared standing and gazing at the outside: kinesthetic empathy.



Study A (4). Shared floor space with body mimicry and matching: kinesthetic empathy.



Study A (6). Bethany's affective nonconscious matching and synchronizing with Ted—drawing of herself with classroom dog Ted: "He gets inside your boots!"

to language and quite literally move toward a kinetic way of understanding communication between and across species. This level of intimacy and deep sense of connection and synchrony is one that warrants further recognition. It can be argued that what we have lost sight of are the finer and more intricate nuances of how we communicate and synchronize with one another and across species. As Study A reveals, Ted affords greater opportunities for movement, touch, and intimacy—for both the children and their teacher. This is not just with Ted but also between one another, as close observations and recordings have revealed. If we gain a stronger sense of ourselves and our own agency and autonomy through others, as self-determination theory indicates, then this has great implications for flourishing and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Study B: In Study B, there are several accounts of how horses and young people felt empathy *with* as well as *for* one another as they participated in a relationship-building program that previous participants had named the “Horse Course.” This program is based on the premise that authentic interactions and relationships with horses can be of value for young people for whom life may have been chaotic and whose relationships have not been characterized by respect, trust, and problem-solving, all of which the researchers and authors have experienced to be essential ingredients of practice when scaffolding children and young people’s well-being and learning. An awareness of how the social constructions of both species (equine and human) had been shaped by their previous unique personal experiences, as well as by society, set the context for fascinating demonstrations of kinesthetic empathy in ways that avoided anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism (Shapiro, 1990). The horses’ naturally curious personalities often reflected and replicated young people’s behavior (Hallberg, 2008).

The ways in which horses and humans alike tuned in to nonverbal cues, the intentions of others, body language, expressions of emotion, and their mutual changes in oxytocin and cortisol levels clearly demonstrated how two different beings can be in a state

of attunement, sharing and matching their inner states or true selves (Winnicott, 1965/2018). Indeed, one of the mindfulness activities involved young people relaxing with their horse partners, breathing in synchrony, talking about how they were feeling prior to work on the ground or riding. All too often the horses tuned in to the young people’s emotional states and demonstrated through their body language that they were listening. This links to the concept of “entrainment” or the ways in which the human body responds to and synchronizes with external rhythms. The measurement of heart rate variability (HRV) during human-equine interactions has also highlighted the effect of human emotion on performance when training horses and reinforced the benefits of a positive emotional state when interacting with animals (Cartwright, 2013). Evans and Franklin (2010) describe in beautiful and dynamic language how horse and rider achieve “floating harmony” (Evans & Franklin, 2010, p. 176). They form a partnership or “kinesthetic unit” (*ibid.*, p. 194), acting “as one to produce acts neither would undertake on their own and in which: the drives, needs and desires of both partners matter” (Evans & Franklin, 2010, p. 173).

Kohanov (2003) alludes to the synchronicities of the human-equine world, and suggests that the human nervous system involuntarily broadcasts feelings “at a frequency horses are especially good at tuning in to” (Kohanov, 2003, p. 184). Horses’ ability to



Study B (1). Horse and rider in “floating harmony.”

“mirror the feeling behind the façade” is a key principle of Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy (Kohanov, 2003, p. 175). Tellington-Jones (2010) also describes how sensorimotor psychotherapy techniques can teach relaxation and self-soothing skills to the client and create connection between human and horse (Tellington-Jones, 2010). As Blakemore (2012), suggests, humans try to read each other’s mental and emotional states to work out what they are about to do or what they want, then modify their behavior accordingly (Blakemore, 2012). Horses function entirely and successfully through nonverbal communication and have neither time nor tolerance for incongruence. The horses in this study were certainly instinctual and sensitive to young people’s feelings as illustrated in the following quote from a participant: *“When you spend time with horses, what’s the word I’m looking for, you just let it all out and you don’t get angry.”*

These large and powerful, yet incredibly gentle creatures just seemed to know how to respond to the young people, their fears, their excitement, their affection. Each interaction and relationship were unique to each partnership. The levels of connection were mutually agreed between each horse and young person. There was a deep realm to their communication and relationship-building behaviors, once the naturally occurring yet unspoken ground rules of congruence and emotional resonance were understood and established. This more-than-human

encounter was a dance without words, a dance of kinesthetic empathy. Ingold refers to it as a “dance of animacy,” using the joy of flying a kite as an example (Ingold, 2016). What is notable is how this *internal* state of animacy (dancing with the kite as it soars through the sky) is a palpable kinesthetic and empathic, enactive internal process of the whole body.

The following excerpts are reflections from Study B’s researcher:

Reflection 1: “Rose” (17 years) initially presented as profoundly anxious around the horses, responding to any movement with extreme alarm and repeated expressions of fearfulness about their potential to hurt her. Her reluctance to be close to the horses persisted despite her observed experience of them as largely placid animals. She emphatically maintained that she liked horses, interestingly, “especially because they don’t stare at you like people do!” This suggests that Rose had recognized the bodily equine way of communicating empathy, and it felt different, less threatening than face-to-face communication with human strangers.

The process by which she was enabled to choose gave her a greater sense of personal security, helped her to develop her sense of autonomy, and strengthened her internal locus of control (having influence over one’s experiences) (Kotter, 2001) and a feeling of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). The pivotal



Study B (2). *“It’s a very good way to, like, not be so angry.”*



Study B (3). Key worker, Rose, Andy (pony), and coach walking in step: touch, symbiosis, and entrainment.



Study B (4). Touch is again a significant part of Rose's experience: proprioception and getting her body in tune with Milly the horse.

moment for Rose came toward the end of the fourth session when she decided she would get on a horse (Milly). This took 20 minutes of gentle and humorous coaxing, with Rose hovering between mounting and stepping away. Milly stood perfectly still throughout, clearly sensing in her body the need for complete calm. This undoubtedly was a critical element in Rose's ability eventually to mount. Having mounted, Rose then said she didn't want Milly to walk anywhere.

After a minute or two, during which Milly remained perfectly still, Rose suggested that she could move forward. Rose's reaction to Milly's first step forward looked remarkably like the startle (Moro) reflex. This is a primordial reflex that infants display when they are uncertain whether their body is secure and held. As Rose recovered and Milly continued to walk slowly away from the mounting block, Rose sat securely and seemed to be pleased with this major advance. Her "hand of reassurance" helping synchronize her and attune her body to Milly further gives credence to the bodily nature of our experiences, accentuating the vital role touch plays in sensory processing, sensory integration, and in our communication and well-being (Dunn, 2001). What Rose gained was an essential element of emotional regulation through her touch, a sense of deep muscle pressure and proprioception. Hence, touch as a pedagogical aspect of learning is key and a focus on movement and its affective,

rather than cognitive dominance in learning should be embraced.

Excerpt 2: "Adam" (17 years) readily recognized a horse's capacity to appreciate and respond to a person's emotional state. He defined this communication as horses being able to "*understand . . . your feelings. It's like that little bond. . . . It's good, like having a good little friend.*" He was surprised and delighted that horses could assess a person's mood, and his acceptance and response to this awareness helped him to develop verbal and nonverbal communication pathways with the horses, which in turn helped him to feel more secure and confident around them. This further epitomizes the notion of "floating harmony" and how attuning to one another can be transformative in terms of meaningful connections. At a later stage in the program, Adam reflected more deeply about his understanding of "human-to-horse-to-human communication."

Adam's insights and willingness to believe in and act upon this concept deepened his experience of being with the horses and added another embodied and animated dimension to his achievements, because he attributed his successes in part to the horse's willingness to enter the partnership that underpinned each activity.



Study B (5). "They probably know more about you than you think. They know from how you're acting. And the same about us, we know more about them from how they're acting."

Discussion

The Spaces We Hold

As suggested by Alistair North Whitehead (1926), “we think in generalities, but we live in the detail.” Being in the moment and noticing the detail in these multispecies encounters, where normal social conventions do not apply, allows each individual to relax and reencounter the self through the other.

Kinesthetic empathy is a fundamental component of meaningful and reciprocal relationships. It has been comprehensively explored by Shapiro in progressing our understanding of the nature, process, and mechanisms at play in our relationships with animals (Shapiro, 1990). We reiterate the need to consider *enactive* kinesthetic empathy as an ongoing major area for consideration. We consider unpacking it further through future research, as new insights will continue to be gained in the field of animal-human studies and eudaemonism. Marrying the two concepts together, affect theory and synchrony, as we have attempted here in our respective studies, could prove a major step forward in strengthening this field, as the need for robust methodologies is purported (Gee, 2018).

Approaches like ours seek to endorse the body (and movement) as a site of knowledge production in shared spaces of mutual well-being and flourishing. In entering human-animal contact zones we create possibilities for becoming “more than human” and challenge the dangers to our planet of continued anthropocentrism.

Concluding Remarks and Directions for Further Research

It is of significance that our sense of connection to others and our intimate, material, embodied entanglements in the world matter. Through animacy we gain a sense of aliveness, a “floating harmony” that is prelinguistic and symbiotic. In turning to another we (re)turn to ourselves, becoming something more, something more than human. This validation increases self-efficacy as we engage more with a eudaemonia sense of well-being, a flourishing, and a

good and virtuous life through our interspecies connections. In sharing place and space we develop a kinesthetic empathy, an entangled enactive, bodily empathy that directs us toward a more “common world” understanding (Taylor & Giugni, 2012). This moral grounding is not just imagined, but a process of real-life enactive kinesthetic empathy in which we feel what another being feels. This has profound implications for future interventions to improve the mental health and well-being of children and young people as we increasingly become aware of this growing concern in society. What we advocate in our respective studies is not only radical, but fundamental to multispecies well-being and flourishing. As Kohanov reflects,

With any phenomenon that stretches the boundaries of consensual reality, people must see it to believe it, and sometimes even that isn’t good enough. Logical Western minds demand some theory to explain it, or at the very least, multiple independent observations to corroborate it, and ideally, some procedure for re-creating it at will. (Kohanov, 2003)

Kohanov has enabled a validation of our conceptual and theoretical framework, affect theory, and our methodology—ethnographic participant observations in the field. By using thick descriptions, becoming deeply immersed, and using visual materials we have endeavored to bear witness to the unfolding phenomena of kinesthetic empathy. This visual and photographic documented evidence helps seeing and believing through its material, multisensory performance, and process of the reader, as Hague suggests (Hague, 2014).

We reiterate the need to consider enactive kinesthetic empathy as an ongoing major area for consideration. We consider that by unpacking it further through future research, new insights will continue to be gained in the fields of human-animal interactions and eudaimonia theories of human well-being. We hope that by seeing our ethnographic moments of enactive kinesthetic empathy, believing in the beauty of these encounters will be deepened and enriched.

Witnessing and feeling the beauty of enactive kinesthetic empathy also warrants further exploration in the field of human-animal interaction. While we acknowledge the limitations of both studies in terms of replication of findings, we hope that we stimulate further qualitative inquiry as indicated by Serpell et al. (2017). We hope our ethnographic portraits evoke further wonder, awe, and curiosity such as ours in this fascinating and beautiful element of our interactions with animals.

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