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# Interspecies Haptic Sociality: the Interactional Constitution of the Horse's Esthesiologic Body in Equestrian Activities

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*Interspecies haptic sociality: the interactional constitution of the horse's esthesiologic body in equestrian activities.*

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**Abstract:** This article explores forms of haptic sociality in interspecies interaction. Data examined are taken from a corpus of equine assisted therapy sessions, in Finland and France. During these sessions, therapists invite clients to pay close attention to the horse's behavioral displays of comfort or discomfort and to react accordingly. In this way, the horse is regarded as a living, sentient creature, whose body has haptic and kinesthetic properties, resulting in socialization practices that cultivate forms of care. The study discusses Merleau-Ponty's concept of "esthesiologic body", in light of analytical instances. It draws on contemporary re-examinations of phenomenological notions (such as intersubjectivity and intercorporeality) by ethnomethodologists and analysts of social interaction, and proposes to respecify them in the particular context of human-animal interactions. The argument is inspired by a conversation analytic approach, sensitive to the orderly character of social actions. Two formats, displaying diverse ways in which participants interact with the horse as an *esthesiologic* body, are examined in detail. The analysis shows the fundamental role played by touch and haptic practices in the practical accomplishment of intercorporeality.

**Keywords :** human-animal interaction; haptic sociality; phenomenology; esthesiology; horses

## 1. Introduction

This article enlists phenomenological concepts to describe the interactional constitution of horses' bodies as *esthesiologic* bodies. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's latest work (in particular his lectures at the Collège de France), it shows how horses are regarded as sentient beings, having haptic and kinesthetic characteristics. Empirically inspired by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, the study provides a detailed analysis of the practices by which the animal comfort and well-being is ensured, and made publicly perceptible for all practical purposes. The argument contributes to a line of research concerned with haptic sociality, and explores it in interspecies human-horse tactile interactions. The aim of the contribution is thus to show how the recognition of animals' sentience and sensitivity (i.e., their constitution as "esthesiologic bodies") is interactionally and collectively accomplished.

To examine this phenomenon, the analysis draws on a corpus of video-recorded interactions of equine-assisted therapy sessions in Finland and France. It focuses on a recurrent interactional format, in which (i) the therapist orients to a display of the animal's potential discomfort, and informs the client of this through an instruction to readjust or recalibrate his/her actions. This format is expanded with (ii) the therapist subsequently soothing the horse with a stroke to repair potential discomfort being caused. These two formats are explored through the use of multimodal analysis of social interaction - with somewhat amended analytical tools in order to best capture the relevance and meaningful dimension of animal's actions. The analysis also looks at how paying attention to the horse's well-being is not just the therapist's concern, but a practice to which clients are socialized. In that respect, taking into account the horse's esthesiology is also a crucial part of the therapeutic process.

As this study extensively draws on ethnomethodological and phenomenological insights, the first section outlines the recent reappropriations of phenomenological conceptual tools by social interaction analysts inspired by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EM/CA), which aim to account for embodied and sensorial communication practices (1.1). Since equine-assisted therapy rests on the assumption that the horse involved in the activity is a “significant other” (Haraway, 2003) we discuss the literature that develops this idea, including within Symbolic Interactionism, and explain how the apprehension of the horse's body as an esthesiologic body contributes to perceiving it as a sensitive, hence significant, being (1.2). The final section of the introduction examines a typical instance of the investigated phenomenon, and prepares the ground for the analytical section by highlighting the existence of a recurrent interactional format (1.3).

### *1.1 Intercorporeality and haptic sociality: importing phenomenological concepts in and for the analysis of embodied conducts*

This study is grounded in two different - though close - epistemological traditions: phenomenology and the EM/CA approach to the analysis of social interaction. Theoretically speaking, their interconnection, and the assumed heritage of the latter in the former, have been well examined (Psathas, 1972; 1989). For example, Koschmann (2012) and Chazel (2008) have focused on the way Garfinkel, in his PhD thesis in particular, took up and revived the “Parsons-Schutz Debate”. Eberle (2012) has commented on the importance of schutzian's and phenomenological concepts in EM, such as *Lebenswelt* (see also Garfinkel & Liberman, 2007; or Wieder, 1980), and Fele (2008) has emphasized the links between Gurwitsch and the ethnomethodological approach. Though revisiting these links is beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to say that EM is sometimes considered a « phenomenological sociology » (Psathas, 1989)<sup>1</sup>. In view of this, relying on phenomenological notions to conduct an ethnomethodological study is not original (see, for instance, Fele's notion of the « phenomenal field » (2008) applied to the analysis of football players entering the pitch, or Lynch's elaboration on the « natural attitude » (1988) in a study on the treatment of laboratory animals for scientific inquiry).

More relevant to the topic at hand, phenomenology is one of the philosophical traditions that gives a prominent place to sensoriality and corporeality, establishing the body as an instrument of experience and knowledge. Empirically, recent attempts have been made to respecify phenomenological concepts related to embodiment and corporeality (Meyer et al., 2017; Cekaite & Goodwin, 2021), specifically including that of « intercorporeality », a concept borrowed from Merleau-Ponty and later developed by Streeck (2009), Tulbert & Goodwin (2011), Meyer (2017), Meyer & Wedelstaedt (2017), Nishizaka (2017), *inter alia*. On the basis of empirical materials, essentially video-recordings, the idea is, as Nishizaka states, to “provide this metaphorical notion with empirical substance” (Nishizaka, 2017: 126). Concepts such as “haptic sociality”, borrowed from the ecological tradition (Gibson, 1986), have also been examined, in particular in the place where the Life-world of ordinary affairs is essentially experienced: in family households (see Goodwin & Tulbert, 2011; Cekaite, 2016; Goodwin, 2017; Cekaite & Kvist Holm, 2017 on parents-child interactions; and Mondémé, 2020 ; Due, 2021 on human-animal interactions). Sensorial practices in general are becoming an increasing topic of investigation, and their empirical investigation aims to “expand the interactional analysis of multimodality into the interactional analysis of multisensoriality.” (Mondada, 2019, p. 51).

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<sup>1</sup> The journal *Human Studies* being described by Lynch as “[its] most consistent outlet” (2002, p. 485).

As a contribution to this emerging field, this study also aims to employ a phenomenological concept – namely Merleau-Ponty's concept of “esthesiologic body” – in the examination of empirical data of naturally occurring interspecies interactions.

The argument is rooted in a general discussion on « touching and being touched », a standard topic of phenomenological inquiry (also referred to as *Doppelempfindung* in Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's writings, among others). In the empirical material analyzed below, one could object that only the horse is touched by the human participant, and that the horse itself does not “touch” the human participant in a literal sense. However, we argue that the touching gesture is conceived and designed as a tactile form of communication, and its reception by the horse is either projected, commented upon or adjusted to by the human participant (‘does it make him feel good’, ‘is it comfortable’, as discussed in the cases below). By doing so, the human participants constitute the horse's body having the capacity of tactile feeling, in some way similar to a human: in other words, as an “esthesiologic body” (Merleau-Ponty, 1995). The sameness is a distinctive property of intercorporeality. This is the ground on which discourse can be elaborated on the animal-other as a Self.

However, this raises certain difficulties, as this sameness cannot be taken for granted in human-animal interaction. As intercorporeality has been conceptualized as “a pre-reflective intertwining of lived and living bodies, in which my own is affected by the other's body as much as his by mine, leading to embodied communication” (Fuchs, 2017, p. 9), the nature of this “other's” body is not specified. Indeed, it is generally assumed that this refers to *human* bodies, sharing and interacting on the basis of their similarity. In section four of the second part of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, entitled “Other selves and the human world”, Merleau-Ponty develops the idea that the body of the Other is not only a fragment of the world (for me) but a place where a certain view of the world is elaborated. But what allows the perceiver to identify this other body as another self is precisely a physical resemblance:

“I say it is another, a second self, and this I know in the first place because this living body *has the same structure as mine*” (1981, p. 353, emphasis added)

He goes on to say that “dialogue,” i.e. language, is a condition for sharing a common world, which raises the question of whether an animal, with its unique corporeal structure, can be considered “a second self.”

Yet, in Merleau-Ponty's later work, including *Notes de Cours au Collège de France* (1955-1959 and 1960-1961) he draws on Husserl's notion of *Ineinander* to examine the consubstantial connection between humans and nature, as an extension of the intertwining of the animate body and consciousness (*l'entrelacs*). Since the logic of the *Ineinander* is part of a general architectonics of the living (Boccali, 2017, p. 45), it follows that intersubjectivity, and intercorporeality, can be extended to animals (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 89). More than corporeal structure, it is the animated character and the sensation (in other words, more than morphology, it is kinetics; more than form, it is movement) that matter when considering the commonalities<sup>2</sup> between humans and animals. Enkinesthesia (Stuart, 2017) and esthesiology<sup>3</sup> are relevant entry points to approach interspecific intercorporeality as they rely on the living and moving body (*Leib*), not just on an analogy on the features of human corporeal structure – i.e. quite literally, on *anthropomorphism*.

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<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty also mentions a relation of « kinship » (*parenté*) between humans and animals (1996: 89). On this point, see also Daly (2022).

<sup>3</sup> See also Shapiro (1990), who argues for « kinesthetic empathy » in order to understand dogs.

## 1.2 *The esthesiologic body: an intersubjective link in interspecies interaction?*

In one of his very last edited lectures, *La Nature. Cours au Collège de France*, Merleau-Ponty made an in-depth examination of the concept of “nature,” questioning the connections between humans and animals and their common origin. On a section devoted to Husserl’s work, he briefly mentions that the perception of the other as an esthesiologic body, i.e. a body that feels and senses, precedes a perception of it as a thinking creature (1996, p.109). Taking that idea further, Boccali argues that, in Merleau-Ponty’s writings, “the esthesiologic body is in relation of intercorporeity with the animal life” (2019, p 49)<sup>4</sup>. This closeness, anchored in a shared capacity of feeling, has important consequences in terms of relationships or interactions. As Bischur (2011) claims in the context of scientific experimentation: “the bodiliness of both the [human participants] and the animals is discovered as a medium of relationship” (2011, p. 408), so that “it is the perception of the living Body of animals which actually raises empathetic feelings” (Bischur, 2011, 425). By using a capital B, here Bischur’s English translation reflects Husserl’s notion of *Leib*, the *animated* body. Although few researchers have drawn on the notion of “esthesiology”, a similar idea seems to arise whenever analysts of social interaction look at embodied practices, especially in human-animal context. Perceiving a body as living and animated, because it implies agency, contingency and adjustment, allows a possible relationship to take place (Blattner, Donaldson and Wilcox, 2020).

In contrast to laboratory animals whose bodies are objectified and transformed into “analytic objects” (Lynch, 1988), in animal-assisted activities, the animal’s body is taken as a resource, granting our corporeal similarities. Companion animals in such activities are “holistic living creatures” (Lynch, 1988, p. 266) pertaining to the “the world of everyday life” (Lynch, 1988, p. 267).

Drawing on Mead’s idea that the Self emerges from relationships, most studies in Symbolic Interactionism explore the idea of animals as Selves (Alger & Alger, 2003, in their study on cats; Irvine, 2004, in her ethnography on an animal shelter) or as “Significant Others” (see also Haraway, 2003; 2008). But such a claim requires refuting Mead’s argument on the a priori exclusion of animals from the world of signification (Alger & Alger, 1997; Wilkie & Mckinnon, 2013). In these works, this even results in establishing human-animal relationship as a true “model of the self that does not depend on spoken language” (Irvine, 2004, p. 3). Jerolmack (2005; 2009) takes up the standard theme symbolic interactionist tenets - at least of those who have dealt with human-animal relationships (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Sanders, 2003 - see Cerulo (2009) for a review). He argues that although we cannot assume that participants share intersubjectivity (in fact, this assumption is not a requirement to account for cooperative action, even between humans), “what is more relevant to sociologists—and more verifiable—is that humans often act toward animals as if they have selves, and in ways that overlap with how they act toward humans”. (Jerolmack, 2009, p. 380). Jerolmack uses Goode’s extensive study of his play with his dog Katie (2007) to claim that in fact, animal’s intentions - as long as they are not the objects of scientific inquiry - are “naturally available” to the participants (2007, p. 2). This echoes other ethnomethodological approaches to human-animal interaction, including that of Wieder (1980)<sup>5</sup>, who shows that while reciprocity and mutual intelligibility are always presupposed in the everyday interactions of the lab, they are rarely acknowledged

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<sup>4</sup> The complete quotation is: “This *Ineinander* between sentient beings and the different forms of corporeality accounts for the reciprocal participation between human perceptive life and animality, revealing, ipso facto, that the esthesiologic body is in a relationship of intercorporeity with animal life, through a model of projection, introjection and reinvestment, which expresses the strange kinship revealed by the morphogenetic configuration of life.”

<sup>5</sup> But see also Laurier et al., 2006, or Mondémé, 2022a for an exhaustive review of the EMCA literature on human/animal interaction – a body of work that will not be discussed in details here.

when it comes to the production of scientific knowledge (whereby scientists then adopt a “behavioristic operationalism”).

In sum, ethnomethodological arguments address, or add nuance to, the numerous studies in Symbolic Interactionism which tend to regard Selfhood attribution and intersubjective connection as a *social construction* (Arluke & Sander, 1996 – see Goode, 2007 for a discussion on the non-necessity to postulate that animals are “*minded* social actors”). In line with ethnomethodologically inspired studies, this paper examines the interactional constitution of the horse’s body as a Body (*Leib*).

### 1.3 The phenomenon under investigation

The first excerpt gives a sense of the phenomenon we will focus on. Sonia (SON), in blue in the drawings below, is the therapist. Her client Matthew (MAT), in a black shirt, is in the riding ring with Quicko (QUI), a pony. Matthew would like Quicko to follow him, without being guided by a rope. Sonia supervises the scene and advises him to first try to “get [the horse’s] interest”, by scratching and petting him a bit before asking the horse to follow him. This is what Matthew is attempting at the beginning of the excerpt:

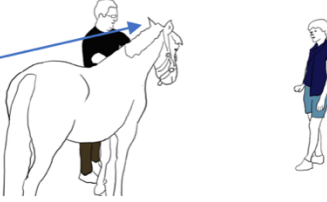
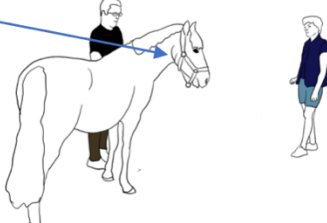
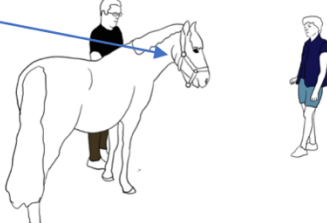
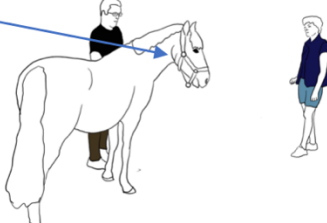
*Nota Bene: transcriptions follow Mondada’s conventions (2018) with minimal accommodations that are mentioned in the “Data and methodology” section.*

#### Excerpt 1\_where you feel that makes him feel good

```
1  SON      et intéresse le (.) déjà tu peux le gratouiller::  
      get his interest  first you can scratch him  
2  MAT      +°hein mon pèpère° +  
      eh my buddy  
      +gets closer to QUI+  
3  MAT      +(3.8)          *(0.2)          +*  
      +strokes head with left hand+  
QUI      *ears back *  
4  QUI      *(0.3)  
      *moves head to the right ->6  
5  SON      là où il aime bien\ tu vois là où il-  
      where he likes it  you see where he  
6  QUI      tu sens: que ça lui *fait du bien  
      you feel that makes him feel good  
      ---->*looks SON
```

Sonia enjoins Matthew to get the horse’s attention. Matthew complies, approaching Quicko, while directly addressing him with an affectionate address term (line 2). He immediately engages in a short sequence of strokes, that he performs on the horse’s neck with his right hand, and the horse’s head with his left hand, as seen in line 3 of the transcript. The therapist further specifies her instruction by advising Matthew to rather scratch him “where he likes it” (line 5). A close-up on lines 3-6, allows us to pay a specific attention to the horse’s reactions, that immediately precede the therapist’s suggestion:

### Excerpt 1bis\_focus

3	<p><b>MAT</b>    +(3.8)</p> <p><b>QUI</b>    +strokes head with left hand+ *ears back *</p>	<p>*(0.2)    +*</p>	
4	<p><b>QUI</b>    *(0.3)</p> <p>*moves head to the right -&gt;6</p>		
5	<p><b>BAR</b>    là où il aime bien\ tu vois là où il-</p> <p style="color: green;">where he likes it    you see where he</p>		
6	<p><b>QUI</b>    tu sens: que ça lui *fait du bien</p> <p style="color: green;">you feel that makes him feel good</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-&gt;*looks SON</p>		

In line 3, while Matthew is petting him, Quicko moves his ears back (image 1.1) and his head to the right. By turning his head in the opposite direction, he avoids Matthew's hand on the bridge of his nose (image 1.2). As Sonia orients to these movements as displays of potential discomfort, she clarifies her previous advice: “where he likes it”, and immediately self-repairs “where *you feel* that makes him feel good” (lines 5-6). Matthew is invited to be sensitive to the horse's body parts that are most likely to be pleasing. The (re)formulation is interesting in that it is delivered as an invitation to *feel*, in the horse's place, what feels good, what is enjoyable. Later in the interaction, the therapist will give cues to orient the client to specific body parts (in this case, the withers) and to specific ways of doing the scratching (scraping with the nails). The aim is that the client can feel by himself how to please the horse, and is aware of his possible manifestations of trouble.

This format, where the therapist formulates an instruction that visibly orients to the horse's display of discomfort and engages the client to take it into account, presents some recurrence in the data. In the analytical section, I describe the multimodal resources on which participants draw in order to constitute the horse's body as an esthesiologic body, by exploring this simple format (3.1) and its expanded version (3.2).

## 2. Data and methodology

The data for this study was drawn from 30 hours of video-recordings gathered by the author and Kimmo Svinhufhud, as part of a collective project entitled “Moving with Horses”, that analyzed interspecies forms of communication in equine-assisted therapy. The first data set was recorded in Finland, and the other two in France. The data includes different types of settings and activities (a psychotherapy session and training courses for equine-assisted coaching), but all involving a horse as facilitator.

The purpose of the study is not to assess the effectiveness of Animal-Assisted Activities or Animal-Assisted Therapies (as is the case of most of the literature that focuses on these activities), but rather to use these settings to gain insight into embodied forms of interspecific sociality, in a context where issues of care and socialization are fundamental. Indeed, as emphasized by Arluke (2010), in a paper entitled “Animal assisted activity as a social experience”, one of the specificities of these programs is the prominence they give to “close relationship” between animals and human participants (Sanders, 2003). Of interest for us in particular is the fact that this closeness is embodied in touching practices: “Many participants

touch or are touched by animals very quickly and very often, compared to their experiences with humans where touch is awkward, rare, or unwelcomed” (Arluke, 2010, p. 405).

Accounting for human-animal social interaction raises some difficulties when it comes to methodological considerations, for it relies on diverse analytical tools originally forged to account for human affairs (Mondada, 2018; Mondémé, 2019). Important terminology issues (i.e. should we assume some form of methodological anthropomorphism) have been addressed, for example, by Crist (1999). This paper adopts her approach on the use of vernacular human language to “render the animal world immanently meaningful” (1999, p. 6). Ordinary vocabulary of action allows the technical (and sometimes mechanomorphic) vocabulary of ethology and animal behavior research to be avoided<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the phenomenologically inspired approach undertaken in this study has at least one critical consequence in regards to methodology: namely, the avoidance of any form of “behaviorization” of animal conduct (Wieder, 1980, who elaborates on Garfinkel’s 1967, p. 102) which tends to result in treating animals as automatons rather than as sentient creatures, transforming them into “biological dopes”, as Goode (2007, p. 89) puts it.

Following Eileen Crist and Mike Lynch (2022 [1990]), our assumption is to treat the animals’ “reactions” as “actions” - which also implies treating the latter as being consequentially relevant to the other participants’ turns and actions. An animal’s actions can thus be regarded as “turns”, at least as a methodological proviso, as long as they are oriented to and understood by human participants as meaningful behavior inserted into a relevant sequence of actions (see Mondémé 2022 for a theoretical development and Mondémé 2019 for an empirical illustration). For the purpose of this study, relying on a Conversation Analytic framework is the most adequate way to make these phenomena visible.

The study adopts multimodal conventions for the transcription of non-verbal actions (Mondada, 2018), slightly modifying these as necessary (Mondémé, 2019; 2020). Relevant moments of embodied action are reproduced in drawings from the recordings. These are inserted in the transcript at the precise moment of their occurrence (indicated by squares and arrows) in order to highlight the relations of dependency between embodied actions and verbal turns, or vice versa, regardless of the speaking or non-speaking status of the participants.

Including the animal in the transcript in the same manner as a human participant is not (only) an ethical commitment, it is mainly an analytical requirement: having their action transcribed is the only way to empirically show how these (in the cases analyzed, somatic manifestations of potential discomfort) are treated as resources by human participants and attuned to in an emergent fashion.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 Simple format: the therapist incites the client to pay attention to the horse’s display of discomfort

This section considers grooming practices as typical instances of interspecies haptic sociality. Grooming a horse is an ordinary activity, usually taking place at the beginning of a riding session, and involving cleaning and combing the horse before saddling. Strictly speaking, only the horse is touched, by a material artefact (a brush or a currycomb) manipulated by a human participant. However, human participants orient to the reception of their haptic actions by the

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<sup>6</sup> This is the reason why this study does not draw on the now abundant literature on horse’s behavior, stemming from ethology or animal behavior research. For an overview on human-horse relationships, see Hausberger et al. 2008, and on horse’s social structure and sociality, see Krueger, 2008.




horse, considering its reaction to being touched – and adjusting or reorienting their gestures accordingly. This concern for the horse as a sentient being is the result of a process of socialization.

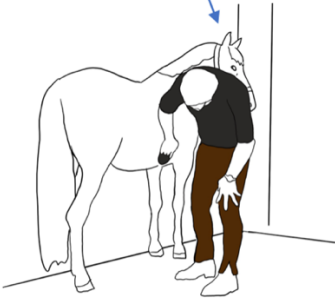

Excerpt 2 below shows Matthew again, this time engaged in grooming. He brushes and prepares Quicko, before going to the riding ring. Sonia, the therapist, is talking but is out of the camera angle. On this day at the riding school, there is a training course for horse farriers and many people and horses are passing by. This causes slight agitation in Quicko.

### Excerpt 2 softer brush

1            §(9.0) #im 2.1            §  
MAT        §brushes QUI's right posterior limb§



2            §\*(1.0) #im2.2            \*(2.0) #im2.3  
MAT        §brushes the belly near the stifle->6  
QUI        \*shudder of the right side\*turns head to right->4



At the beginning of the excerpt, Matthew vigorously brushes Quicko's croup with a currycomb, as visible in image 2.1. He then moves on to another body part, that is, close to the croup: just beside the stifle. This generates a quick skin reaction: Quicko's flank shudders (image 2.2). The horse is clearly agitated and suddenly turns his head to the right, in Matthew's direction (image 2.3), just before producing a loud neigh (line 4). Although this may be the result of the overall busyness nearby, Sonia explicitly reports on what could be interpreted as a display of uneasiness (line 2, Quicko's shudder of the stifle and head turning to the right) and immediately advises Matthew in order to develop his sensitivity to this kind of phenomena. Her turn (lines 3 to 8), although configured as a conditional sentence ("if you feel he reacts with his skin or.."), clearly acknowledges the horse's reaction that has just occurred. More than the localization of the grooming gesture – as the flank and stifle are very sensitive - it is also a matter of the type of brush that should be used. She thus formulates "you can also leave some parts out and do them later with a softer brush", implying softer than the current currycomb Matthew is using. The pattern identified in section 1.3 is also at play here: Sonia invites the client to take into account the horse's reactions as more than somatic movements, but as embodied meanings – as sheer displays of distress. Sonia's turns thus immediately follow what she might have perceived as unease in the horse's behavior. The question of whether the causal dimension is rightly or wrongly interpreted is in fact not the point (it could in fact be argued that the horse's behavior

is purely coincidental, or that the horse is turning his head toward the other horses, as might be indicated by his neighing, recipient design to conspecifics). What is important is that it is recaptured by Sonia as a resource to raise Matthew's awareness.

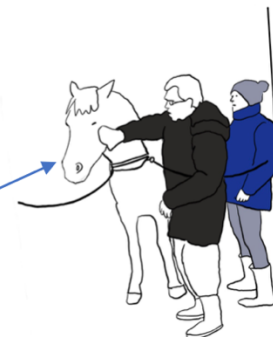
In that respect, the use of the verb "feel" ("if you feel", line 3) merits attention. The point is not Matthew literally *feels*, but the full polysemy of the term is engaged to evoke feeling as an embodied perception (the horse's reaction can be sensed) as well as an intellectual comprehension (the reaction is noticeable and interpretable).

The following case provides another example of an invitation to consider the horse as a sensitive and sentient being. It was recorded in Finland and involves the psychotherapist (Eliane, in blue, with the hat), and the client (Steve, in black), a teenager doing regular therapy sessions. They are engaged in the activity of grooming Tiitu, the horse.

At the beginning of the excerpt, they are having a conversation about the possibility of the horse leaving to eat some hay, and Eliane advises Steve not to forget to brush the horse's head and cheeks:

### Excerpt 3 gently

- 1 ELI mihis se menis  
where would she go
- STE >> brushes forelock->4  
(2.0) #im3.1
- 2 STE jaa en tiä  
well I dunno
- 3 ELI +(se) menis varmaa heinille=  
(she) would probably go to the hay
- 4 STE +turns around Tituu->9
- 5 STE =hh=
- 6 ELI =ota ihan tää pää ja [posket]  
take just this head and cheeks
- 7 STE [.hh hh] .nf hh
- 8 ELI ihan täältä niinku pää fja posketf  
just here like head and cheeks
- 9 STE +(1.8)\*(0.2) #im3.2 +  
+brushes cheeks energetically+  
TIT \*.....->10



Some features are similar to the previous excerpt, except that this time Steve wears a grooming glove, designed to brush sensitive areas such as the head. At the beginning of the excerpt, Steve is positioned on the horse's left side and is combing her mane and forelock (lines 1 to 4). As he moves around Tiitu, Eliane advises him to concentrate on the right side of the head, and especially on the cheeks (line 8). The client complies and starts to brush vigorously, in a rapid and sharp manner (line 9). At the same time, Tiitu closes her eyes and starts turning her head in the opposite direction (lines 9-10, image 3.2). This is instantaneously oriented to by the therapist as a display of displeasure. Eliane instructs Steve to brush softly, using two synonymous adverbs of manner: "carefully", "gently" (line 10). Here the potential discomfort is not occasioned by the inadequacy of the tool for the body parts being brushed, but rather by the manner and the pace in which it is done. As clients of psychotherapy sessions might have difficulty calibrating their strength and adjusting to their co-participants, these short sequences

reveal how socialization practices that cultivate care are visible in short and apparently insignificant, interactional moments.

In this excerpt, the suggestion to take care has been taken into account. Not only because Steve directly addresses the horse (line 12 and 14) and engages in an extended sequence of cuddles (kissing her head, line 16, image 3.4), but also because he restarts the brushing more softly, commenting upon this, while recycling the previous adverb (line 18 : *hellasti*, “gently”).

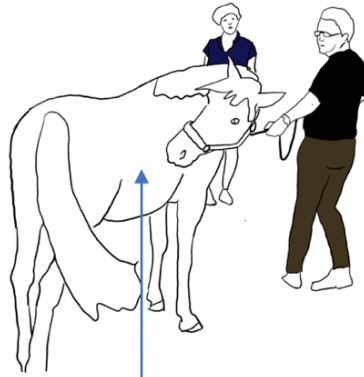
In the two previous excerpts, a somatic movement produced by the horse is noticed, and made noticeable, by the therapist. The client's attention is drawn to this almost inconspicuously: the therapist delivers advices to continue the activity while proposing alternatives (using a softer brush; being more delicate). Grammatically, the instruction is not in imperative but rather favors a mitigated form: “you can/you could” (*tu peux*). In both excerpts, the client self-corrects and complies by recalibrating the way he carries out the activity. In the two following excerpts, we find an identical pattern at the beginning (horse's somatic behavior / treated as a manifestation of discomfort by the therapist) but this time, the therapist closes the sequence with a gesture of reparation (Goffman, 1972) addressed to the horse.

### **3.2 Expanded format: the therapist's “embodied repair” addressed to the horse**

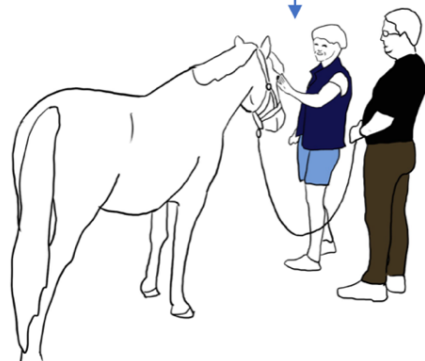
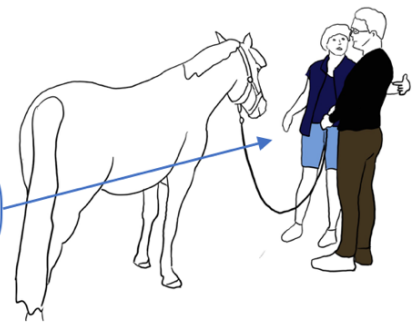
This section examines two similar cases, but this time, it is not the client who self-corrects and creates a one-to-one relationship with the horse. In these instances, the therapist encourages the client to project the sensations felt by the animal, sometimes as if they were his/her own. In the same way as in the previous cases, this rests on the assumption that a minimal form of interpretation of somatic movement can lead to a recognition of possible emotional states such as uneasiness, or discomfort (Mondémé, 2022b). The comprehension of movements or gestures, as Merleau-Ponty states “comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and the intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intentions inhabited my body and mine his.” (Merleau-Ponty 1981, p. 185).

In the next excerpt, we find Matthew, Sonia and Quicko, this time in the riding ring, as in the first excerpt. Matthew and Sonia are debriefing about an exercise that has just been executed. While they are talking, Quicko suddenly turns his head and scratches his flank with his teeth. Matthew resists, pulling on the rope.

#### **Excerpt 4\_it's like you when it itches**



1 QUI >> scratches and bites his flank #im4.1  
 2 SON s'il veut se gratter tu peux aussi  
 if he wants to scratch himself you can also  
 3 lâcher juste un instant la longe  
 release the rope just for a moment  
 4 et le lui permettre  
 and allow him to do it  
 5 MAT hm  
 hm  
 6 SON c'est comme toi quand ça te gratte #im4.2  
 it is just like you when it itches  
 points to his back  
 7 sur le dos tu aimes bien ((laughs))  
 on your back you appreciate  
 8 MAT c'est vrai oui #im4.3  
 yes it's true  
 SON fhand on QUI's bridge of the nose



Just before the excerpt, Sonia and Matthew have been talking about the previous exercise. Sonia interrupts what she is saying to attend to what is suddenly going on: according to her, Quicko wants to scratch his flank, but cannot do it completely because Matthew is holding the rope in his hand and maintaining some tension, as seen in image 4.1. Sonia intervenes to explain the situation. Mitigated forms of instructions are mobilized: the conditional “if” (“if he wants to scratch himself”, line 2), as in excerpt 3; and the “you can also + verb” format, as a way to suggest an alternative (more appropriate) way to behave. She suggests he releases the rope and allows the horse to scratch himself freely. To justify this instruction, she uses Matthew’s own experience (“it’s just like you, when your back itches”), and produces a soft laughter. While saying this, she points at the middle of Matthew’s back, between the shoulder blades, a place where it might be frustrating not to be able to scratch oneself. Sonia thus evokes a known phenomenon, based on Matthew’s personal experience, as a resource to help him grasp the horse’s needs. As argued by Symbolic Interactionism, in these contexts “of key importance is the ability of [the participants] to take the role of the other” (Sanders, 1999, p. 140). This

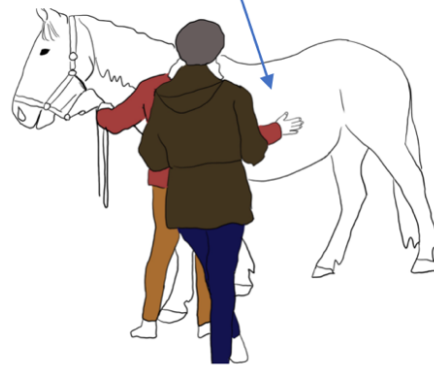
sequence concludes with Sonia smoothly stroking Quicko on the bridge of his nose, while Matthew agrees with Sonia's comment. This stroking gesture is of interest as it sequentially happens in a conclusive and transitioning position (Mondémé, 2020) but is also, one might argue, an embodied form of reparation addressed to the horse.

A comparable format is exhibited in the fifth excerpt. Monica (MON) is the equine-assisted coach and Isabel (ISA), the client, who wants to work on the management of her emotions. Monica builds an exercise in which Isabel has to put her hand on the horse's belly and breathe calmly, following the horse's breathing. While she is holding the horse, Monica first gives a demonstration of how to do the exercise, and then prompts Isabel to perform it:

### Excerpt 5 \_we must be extremely delicate

1 MON vous pouvez également (0.5) *fposer\ (0.4) la main\ (0.4)*  
 you can also put your hand  
*fhand on flank->6*

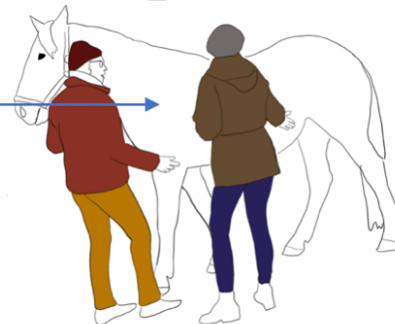
2 sur le flanc du cheval #im5.1  
 on the horse's flank  
 3 (1.6)



4 ISA là j` vois qu` ça bouge là  
 I see it moving there

5 MON fvous voyez/  
 you see  
*fsteps back and looks at ISA->*

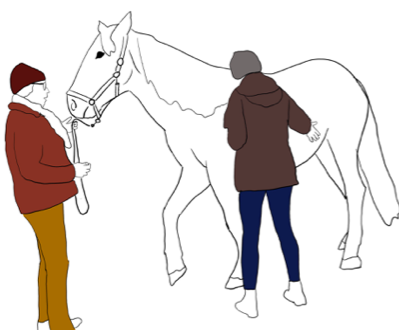
6 ISA +(1.0) #im5.2  
 +hand on flank ->9



7 MON voilà (.) \*et vous pouvez l` faire  
 there you go and you can do it  
 PER \*moves constantly back and forth-->11

8 (0.6)  
 9 MON yeux ouverts/ #im5.3  
 eyes open

10 (0.7) yeux fermés/ (0.8) *fmais d`abo:rd/ #im5.4 f*  
 eyes shut but first  
*fgrrips the reins f*



11 \* (1.6) \*

PER \*stiffens his neck\*

12 MON .h talors #im5.5 le ch\val est très sensi:blef  
 so the horse is a very sensitive animal  
 fraises index and looks at ISA f

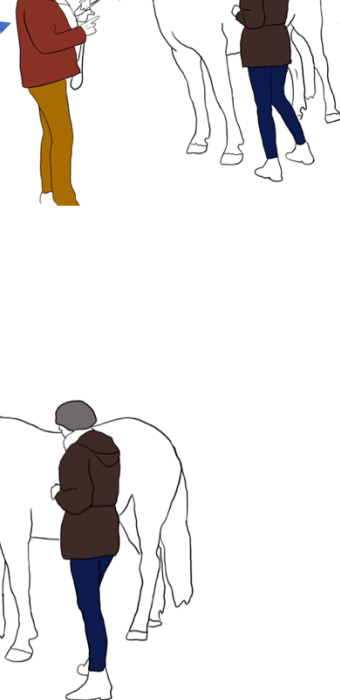
13 et faut pas appuyer parce que: (.)  
 and you must not press because

14 il sent une mouche qui se pose sur son poil\  
 he can feel a fly touching his coat

15 (1.3)

16 MON donc euh: voilà\ faut être  
 so eh that's why you must be

17 fextrêmement délicat #im5.6f  
 extremely delicate  
 fstrokes PER's neck f



The excerpt is a bit long, and is complex in that it is hard to account for the horse's small but numerous movements in the constrained format of a written transcript. Yet, the analysis focuses on the relationship between these displays (transcribed in lines 7-11) and the human participants' actions – in particular what occasions them, and the way they are oriented to.

At the beginning of the excerpt, Monica gives a series of instructions for the breathing exercise: “you can also put your hand on the horse's flank” (line 1). While uttering it, she performs the action herself, showing where to put the hand, as seen on image 5.1. She then steps back, and prompts Isabel to try. Isabel briefly comments on the fact that she saw the horse reacting to his flank being touched (“I see it moving there”, line 4). In turn, Isabel puts her hand at the exact location indicated by Monica. Monica assesses this (“there you go”, line 7) and elaborates on different possible ways of doing the exercise: eyes open or eyes shut.

Meanwhile, the horse starts moving back and forth, avoiding Isabel's touch. As inferable from images 5.3 and 5.4, in particular from the movements of his legs, Per is in motion, compromising the peaceful execution of the exercise. In line 10, Monica interrupts the breathing exercise to make some clarifications, prefaced by an adversative token (“but first...”), while she holds the reins firmly and stops the horse's movements. As the horse stiffens his neck and seems increasingly tense, she engages in a sequence of explanation, facing Isabel with her index finger raised. A general statement (“well the horse is a very sensitive animal”, line 12), is followed, as a consequence, by advice with a directive content “you must not press<sup>7</sup>”. With a prosodic emphasis on the verb (“he can feel a fly touching his coat”) she emphasizes the discrepancy between the hugeness of the animal and the refinement of its sensations. Per is a draft horse, but regardless, like every horse, he can feel minute tactile phenomena. Monica concludes with a general statement that one must be very careful when touching horses (“so uh, that's why you must be extremely delicate”), the French verb *il faut* (one must) keeping the sentence impersonal to relate this as a general rule as opposed to addressed to Isabel in particular.

<sup>7</sup> In French the turn is constructed with an impersonal pronoun (“il ne faut pas”, *one must not*), and carries a high normative charge.

This case has similarities with the previous excerpt, in that the client does not clearly react or correct her gesture. Here again, the therapist responds by making a stroking gesture, in line 17, sequentially designed as a form of reparation (and seen in image 5.6, showing a brief caress on the horse's neck). This last short sequence exhibits phenomena typical of interspecies interaction, whereby two regimes of participation are intertwined: a human participant verbally addressing another human, while maintaining embodied engagement with the animal participant.

In these last two cases, the participants display their orientation to the horse as a body with tactile and somatic feelings, moreover, as a body with a lived experience of sensation. This is interactionally constituted, not only to restore the horse's well-being, but to raise the client's awareness of the animal's needs, and to foster interest in its care.

### **Discussion. From movement to meaning.**

Data analyzed in this study show that there are several ways to orient to the horse as a sentient being, and therefore to create interspecies intercorporeality through haptic sociality. The first is by orienting to the animal's displays and somatic manifestations. In the excerpts examined, these manifestations always follow a client's action: brushing the horse too fast (Excerpt 3) or in an uncomfortable place (Excerpt 2), touching with too much pressure (Excerpt 5), holding the rope too tight (Excerpt 4), or not petting at the best spots (Excerpt 1). The therapist identifies these sequences and directs attention to them, sensitively, highlighting what is relevant to be careful of, or to know. The role of the therapist is thus not only to monitor the horse's reaction and ensure its well-being, but to raise the client's awareness to these embodied displays, which is subordinated to the client's ability to perceive and to sense. More precisely, the client is invited to "feel", thereby enhancing the socialization of how to "care".

The creation of an intersubjective relationship sometimes unfolds spontaneously in the course of the activity, including grooming. Proximate contact is common, and tactile intimacy is achieved. The intensification of the different layers of intimacy is visible, in terms of proxemics, when brushing gestures are followed by kisses (Excerpt 3) or strokes (Excerpts 4 and 5).

In order to try to access what this other body feels, one needs to grant a shared corporeality and put oneself in the horse's place. This shared corporeality is either inferred (Excerpt 5, despite its large size, the horse is much more sensitive than what one might spontaneously expect), or made explicit. This is the case in extract 4, "it's like you when it itches", which builds on an absolute proximity between human and equine sensations, in particular the frustration of not being able to relieve an itch. Sometimes, the horse's general behavioral specificities are also referred to ("the horse is a very sensitive animal", Excerpt 5), to better grasp the particularities of this sentient body. Yet, this does not require any particular ethological expertise, just the ability to observe and adjust. For example, in Excerpt 1 "where you feel it makes him feel good" implies putting oneself in the horse's place *as a horse* (i.e. with a horse's expectations): scratching hard with the nails is not necessarily an action a human would appreciate, but a horse might, and its observability can be appreciated if one pays attention to it.

In sum, somatic manifestations are picked up as expressions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and the therapists encourage the clients to "read" the animal (Mondémé, 2022b), to pay attention to the animal's body to infer meaning. These displays are publicly visible and accountable "expressions" of kinesthetic feelings (see also Shusterman, 2002, for developments in the field of aesthetics under the notion of *somaesthetics*; or Steiner, 2019, for an in-depth

discussion of the Wittgensteinian notion of “expression”). The sensitivity to movement in relation to meaning is a crucial part of the pedagogical (and perhaps therapeutic) purpose, especially in the case of autistic spectrum disorders (which involve difficulty in communicating and inferring others' mental and emotional states). The simple level of proprioception is enough to make the client aware of what the animal can feel.

## Conclusion

This study complements phenomenological and symbolic interactionists scholarship to provide an ethnomethodologically inspired detailed empirical analysis of interspecies forms of haptic sociality.

Methodologically, this paper pursues the investigation of animal's actions as being meaningful and consequential for human's conducts. It is because horses are full-fledged participants in the interaction that their behaviors are oriented to as significant conducts – and it is because the horse is a sentient *Body* that the human participants display care and consideration in the way they interact with him/her. Of course, considering animal actions in the same way as human actions raises certain analytical difficulties and quandaries, in particular related to the adoption of an “emic” perspective for the analysis of data involving haptics, in which we have only visual access to phenomena.

Conceptually, the study attempts to envision the concept of intercorporeality praxiologically, in line with an ethnomethodological approach: intercorporeality is considered as an *achievement* rather than a state, produced by raising awareness of the other (the animal) as a sensitive body, and as a sentient creature.

Empirically, the article focuses on interactions taking place within equestrian activities. In the observed cases, animals are regarded as sentient beings, deserving of respect and affection, and the article shows multiple ways by which clients of therapy sessions are socialized to practices of care. Animals are employed as crucial auxiliary in the therapeutic process –the effectiveness of which relies on treating them as significant others. Here, as in other socialization contexts, “the sense of the other [is] a practical accomplishment” (Galatolo & Caronia, 2017), and the diverse practices at the heart of sociality (adjustment, attention, moral expectations) are ordinary interactional achievements.

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