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Bringing Up Life With Horses

by Stephen J. Smith

Abstract

A key phrase in working with horses, “bringing up life” is taken in its literal sense of moving expressively and energetically in order to animate the movements of the horses. The phrase also points to both what the radical phenomenologist Michel Henry referred to as the auto-affectivity of life and the vital powers of an essential hetero-affectivity. “Bringing up life” is the kinetic, kinaesthetic, affective expression of this fundamental impression that life is shared with other animate beings and that it is all the more powerfully felt for being so. Working with horses – in spite of all the human conceits that groundwork, liberty training, and the riding disciplines hold – can thus reveal what it means to “bring up life” as more than a topic of very practical interest and specific phenomenological description. Through the impressional investigation of this expression we may well begin to feel our way toward more life-affirming, life-enhancing interactions with others of our own and many other animal kinds.

Introduction

Horses figure little in our high-tech, socially-mediatized lives, and, where they do appear, they seem to serve rather evident utilitarian purposes. Yet, occasionally, we catch glimpses, and even more visceral senses, of connecting with these creatures in life-sustaining ways. An initial example comes from the stars and founders of the Cirque du Soleil spectacle called *Cavalia*. Magali Delgado and Frédéric Pignon (2014) refer to the effect their horses’ performances have on audience members, singling out in particular an elderly, wheelchair-bound woman who had “begged her children to bring her back to see our show again. She said it revived her will to live” (p. 101). Delgado and Pignon go on to tell us that:

The beauty of the horse plays a part in all this but is not a sufficient explanation. There is something about the way in which this creature produces in us a burst of energy and vitality, a feeling of joy that exceeds the sum of his

own beauty, strength, and speed. In my opinion, he reaches something absolutely fundamental in us and he is capable of giving us new energy, bringing us into a more harmonious state with ourselves and with the world around us. (p. 102)

There is invariably some emotional measure of appreciation for the vitality of life that comes with watching horses perform. After all, that is both the point of the spectacle and the very *raison d’être* of a circus show such as Cirque du Soleil’s *Cavalia*. But Delgado and Pignon say much more than this. They draw attention to the animating qualities of human-horse interaction that sustain the daily practices of training horses. These vital, energetic, joyful interactions afford new and renewing leases on life for these trainers as well as for those who enjoy the fruits of their work.

Life phenomenology attempts to realize the relationally-affective, mutually-interactive and animatedly-intercorporeal possibilities of becoming attuned to other

sentient beings. It challenges the language games of presuming the muteness and bruteness of non-human creatures and, at best, of speaking for them. It would not dare to say “if a lion [or a horse] could speak, we could not understand him” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 223); rather, it would extend our own language capacities to the silent limits of that “whereof one cannot speak” (Wittgenstein, 1921/2010, p. 23) and to where we may well find ourselves already communicating wordlessly with other creatures with entirely different powers of animation, as if “in another world” of utterly silent utterances (Lawrence, 1994, p. 573).

Life phenomenology turns its intellectual resources on the very scholarly traditions that give it perceptual and conceptual acuity (Lloyd & Smith, 2015c; Smith, 2016). It critiques the capture of non-human species within the “disinhibiting ring” (Heidegger, 1983/1995, pp. 255-279) of human functions and forms to reveal feelings and flows of interspecies conviviality – and perhaps even of community (Smith, 2017, 2018). Life phenomenology brings to expression the experiences of being moved to act and speak with others who do not share the human tongue and yet have tongues and tails and ears of remarkable dexterity along with bodily capacities of movement expression that we of an upright stance have retained but a frontal, facial inkling of. While, in part, a critique of logocentric intentionality (Henry, 1990/2008, 2000/2015), life phenomenology is more positively a means of coming to terms with the “life-affirming dynamics” of our movement capacity for interspecies connectivity (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999; Smith, 2017).

I investigate these kinetic, kinaesthetic and affective dynamics through reference to the equestrian arts of training and riding horses. My particular focus is on the practices of groundwork and liberty training (Smith, 2011, 2015a) that involve building a communicative rapport with horses as preparation for riding and as practices in themselves. A key expression is that of *bringing up life*, which is indicative of “vitality affects” (Stern, 1983, 2002, 2004, 2010) that operate kinaesthetically in response to, and as influencing, the moment-to-moment kinetics of the human-horse dyad. The feeling of bringing up life is, in effect, the affective register of these moment-to-moment modulations of movement responsiveness. Such feeling infuses the postures, positions, gestures and expressions of observable human movement and connects through breathing, balancing, timing and touching to the manifest motions of equine movement. This phrase, *bringing up life*, points to what Michel Henry (1990/2008, 2000/2015) referred to as the “auto-affectivity of life”, which is the immanent, self-revelatory affectivity of what is, at the same time, in the same breath, and with similar intensity of feeling, an essential “hetero-affectivity”. Bringing up life is the actional-reactional, energetic exchange we can feel with other moving, sentient beings.

I describe within my practices of bringing up life with particular horses instances of *enlivened interaction* and *focused energy*. In the first instance, my interest is to enliven the motions of a fifteen-year-old Lusitano gelding who, by disposition and earlier life neglect, is inclined to phlegmatic indifference. Spartacus de Plata, or Sparky as we call him, is a national-level Show Hack and Best Movement champion who now takes solace in the creature comforts of barn life. Training Sparky requires special attention in bringing up the requisite life to animate his gaits and for him to perform the tricks he has been taught. In the second instance, my initial concern is to harness, if you will, the sheer exuberance of an Andalusian stallion whose testosterone-fuelled energy comes readily over the top. Lucente is also a show horse, dressage trained, and barn kept as an eventual breeding sire. His pent-up energy comes in bursts, rushes, gushes, and flashes. It is not a case of bringing his energy down, but a matter of focusing that energy on, or bringing life to, the tasks at hand. Groundworking and liberty training these horses reveals the relational dynamics of enlivened interaction and focused energy with potentially all horses we might encounter.

My overarching intention is to show that, whether working with horses on the ground, playing with them at liberty, training them for equestrian disciplines, or just hanging out with them in their pastures, bringing up life with horses, in spite of all the constraints imposed as a result of our human desires and conceits, affords telling feelings, concentrated dealings and compelling connections with and within a wider, wilder sense of moving in concert with others of all kinds (cf. Sheets-Johnstone, 2014, pp. 259-262; Smith 2014a). With the assistance of scholarship that lends fuller credence to the impressions we have of moving concertedly with other animate beings, I want to highlight the important insights that life phenomenology offers us in fostering greater appreciation of, responsiveness to, and connection with other animals, in the process indicating the qualitative dynamics of relating with more nuanced animate consciousness to one another of our own animal kind.

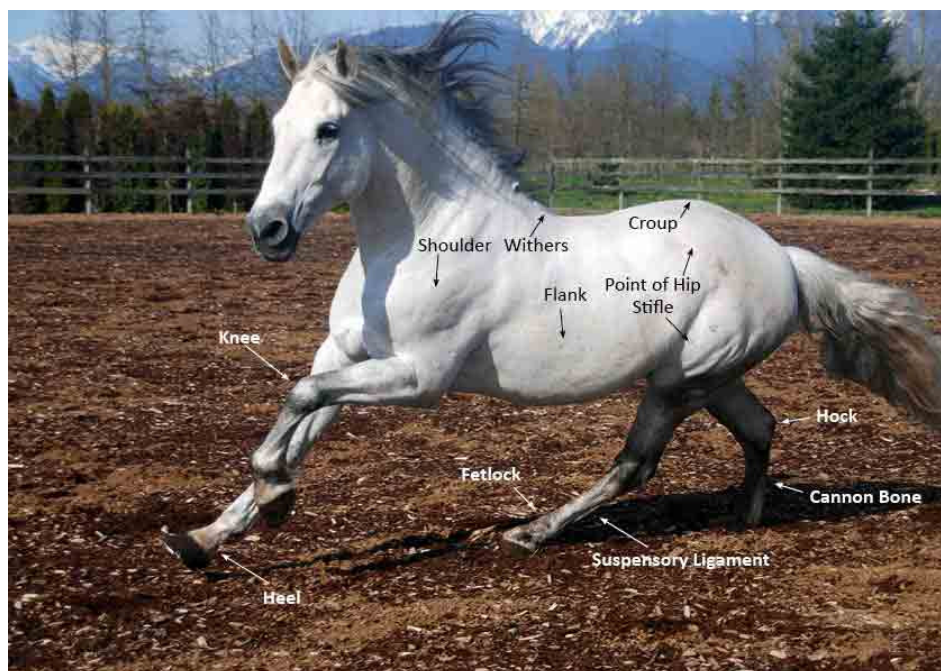
Enlivened Interaction

Spartacus is an aging Lusitano horse who was gelded as a ten-year-old, which was more than enough time spent as a breeding stallion to know the heights of animated movement. He can trot on the spot in *piaffe*, move forward with up and down piston legs in *passage*, *Spanish walk* with his front legs flicking straight to the front, *side pass* to the left or right by crossing his fore and hind legs, *pirouette* in a canter on the spot, *rear up* and hold his position balanced only on his hind legs in *levade* and *pesade*. Sparky can perform on cue all these motions that he practised so well when displaying his former stallion attributes and which he took into the competition show ring. Added to this

repertoire are back-ups, bows, balances, and lay-downs. But the rigours of *dressage* competition have become tiresome for Sparky. He much prefers, if the initial sluggishness of his movements under saddle is not a clear enough statement in itself, a saddleless, unbridled riding and, better still, the open interaction of groundwork and liberty training.

We come to these practices through the very movements one of us prompts and which become openings to the fuller repertoire of movements that are possible at this time, in this moment, and for a certain determinate duration. This particular evening I bring Sparky into the indoor arena on a twenty-foot longe line, with the aim only to give him some after-dinner exercise to compensate for a day spent standing stiffly in a rain-soaked paddock. I send him trotting in a circle through the simple signals of jiggling the rope and sweeping my right arm in the clockwise direction that I want him to travel. Sparky responds to my cues, but does so while scuffing his toes in the dusty footing of the arena and letting his hind end drag behind him. It is a lazy, flat trot that puts load on his front shoulders, the torpid heaviness of which I can feel as I observe his knees propping and high-set shoulders sagging with each foot-fall. Sparky is going through the motions rather than being enlivened, let alone relaxed, cadenced, impulsed and collected in the trot (cf. Smith, 2015b, p. 51). I want to bring him to life.

I circle Sparky to the far wall of the arena. I close in on him, compressing the space between us. He feels the squeeze and rushes through with hurried steps. He circles round a second time and anticipates the compression. This time he reaches underneath himself, digging deeper and lunging forward. The next time, and just before Sparky comes to the narrowed space, I step almost in front of him. Sparky pulls up abruptly, flexing his hocks and lowering his hindquarters so as to bring the power of his rear end right underneath himself. He sinks down even lower on his hocks, tensioning the suspensory ligaments that run down the cannon bones to the fetlocks. Recoiling, he bounces forwards then backwards a few times in what looks like a decent *terre à terre* from Classical dressage, then rocks even further back on his heels, spins to the inside and then, following a full one-eighty-degree pivot, leaps forward into a spirited canter in the opposite direction. Sparky has performed a perfect Western Rollback with the correct lead change. I draw him back into a trot by wiggling the rope and relaxing my posture; yet, just as he transitions down, I press into his hindquarters, breathe in deeply, raise my chest, and focus intently on his inside hind leg. This leg now reaches across and almost diagonally to the outside fore leg to both lift and extend the trot to almost the limit of Sparky's impressive range of motion. I take off the pressure and let him settle into a rhythmical trot on a circle before moving again toward the arena wall.



Sparky on a Circle (Photo Credit: Michele Black)

We continue for a while longer, with almost cat and mouse gestures of blocking and turning, approaching and fleeing, attacking and retreating, culminating in Sparky rearing up and striking phantom quarry in the air. He goes up in the air a few times, each time flexing his hocks more and more, with the last *air above the ground* looking much like a *levade* that the masters of classical dressage trained their horses to perform using pillars, cross-ties and side reins. Sparky bounces on the spot until I lower my stance, contract my posture, run backwards a few steps, and, in so doing, have him run right up to me, filling the space I have just conceded. The space held between us a moment ago fills with a newfound life to the extent that I must rise taller and with fully confident bearing to avoid being knocked over. Sparky pulls up in a dead stop. I soften my posture to have him come in closer, shoulder to shoulder, and settle there, resting.

The longe line is unclasped, his halter taken off and dropped on the ground. We now use the patterns and forms of longing for liberty training. Sparky stays on my right shoulder. I breathe deeply, lift my chest and shoulders and stride forward. He remains right beside me in a brisk walk. I bring increasing life into my steps and break into a run. We are now moving on a large counter-clockwise arc with Sparky's jog mirroring step for step my half-paced run. Three quarters of a circle later, I turn into him, preparing myself as if to tackle him by the neck and shoulders. Sparky wheels off to the right and, in so doing, keeps the cushion of connection between us. I turn back to my left after we have run the length of the arena, confident Sparky will stay with me, still shoulder-to-shoulder, even as I pivot on the spot so that he must trace a tightening track around me. I halt. Sparky props. I take off. He springs forward. Stop. Start. Stop. I scurry backwards. Sparky backs up. We move forwards, backwards, to and fro, until we are just rocking over hooves and feet with only the slightest shifts of body weight. I take off again, this time with a left-leading hippity-hop. Sparky follows suit into a springy canter on a left lead. I run flat out. He gallops, while I make sure to keep his tensioned, torsioned body in my peripheral vision, ever vigilant lest he kick up his heels with too much exuberance. I wheel away and draw him onto a circle he remembers well from the end of the longe line. He runs circles around me, keeping a steady pace while holding the radial line between us.

There is, in this interplay between us, a tending to the mimetic powers of movement (cf. Smith & LaRochelle, 2019) as rooted in what Sheets-Johnstone (1999) has described as “the sheer experience of aliveness, the sheer nonverbal, kinetic experience of ourselves and others as animate forms” (p. 225). Such experience revels in the actual motions of animate consciousness that constitute mimetic attunements between otherwise distinguishable and separable animate beings. These mimetic, motional

dynamics are felt, specifically, as rushes, bursts, surges, swells, risings, undulations, waves and flows (Smith, 2007). They are felt, initially, not as generalised feelings, emotions and moods, but as “vitality affects” (Stern, 1983, 2002, 2004, 2010) that are indicative of not just the quality of movement but of the very manner in which one is moving conjointly, concurrently, in concert with an other animate being (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, pp. 143-160, 256, 257).

Sheets-Johnstone (2014) points out that: “because we perceive the kinetic qualitative dynamics of other persons [and, by implication, also other creatures] and kinaesthetically feel the qualitative dynamics of our own movement, we are able to move in concert with others” (p. 262). Through groundwork and liberty training with Sparky I certainly discover, moment-to-moment, the postural, positional, gestural and expressive means of creating mimetic, motional, affective connection with another animate being who could so easily overpower me but opts to move in concert with me. I also discover something even more telling – that “the moment [that] I put an ‘I’ or an ‘ownership’ into the experience, I am perceiving the movement, not feeling its dynamics pure and simple” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2014, p. 259). And when I do feel the “dynamics pure and simple”, I become more and more immersed in “movement that is a piece with the nature of life itself” (p. 253).

I decrease the space between us while Sparky keeps turning on a circle. I then push his hindquarters to the outside by focusing my attention midway between his stifle and croup. He turns his head and shoulders to the inside of the circle. I take a few steps back and, keeping the pressure on his hindquarters, push him into a committed turn to the centre and directly past me before reclaiming the central spot. A further directional switch follows, then another, and yet another, as I draw Sparky closer and closer until we are brushing shoulder to shoulder in his sweeping passes. Sparky is on a figure-of-eight pattern, tracing infinity symbols the length and breadth of the arena.

These geometric figures and forms make readily apparent the “kinetic-kinaesthetic-affective dynamics” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011) that operate within groundwork and liberty training (Smith, 2011, p. 22). Lines, arcs, circles and figures-of-eight are the visible spatial expressions of the lines of force, the valencies and vectors of combinatory pressures, pulls, draws and releases of my and Sparky's interactions. These figures and forms trace out movements coupled together in patterns and sequences of energetic exchange. Beneath appearances, then, the art of liberty training is a feeling for the dynamics of moving in concert with another highly, visibly, powerfully motile being and feeling one's way toward a larger, all-encompassing awareness of the life that animates us both.

Focused Energy

Lucente comes bursting out of his stall full of piss and vinegar. I lead him down the barn corridor on a short line, past the mares and geldings in their side-by-side, twelve-square stalls. It's a gauntlet of gazes, strained necks, startled banging and frenzied whinnying. Lucente crests his neck and elevates his steps. Click-clack, clickety-clack, click-click-click-click. He is now prancing down the final section of the concreted alleyway. We reach the exit and burst through the doorway to the courtyard outside.

Lucente snorts the crispness of this early Spring morning through flared nostrils. He exhales with lip-blubbering, flubbity-flubbity, fwooshing force, then curls his upper lip, raises his head higher and, in Flehmen Response, takes his fill of the pheromones wafting from the fresh piles of urine-soaked bark mulch and manure. I give a tug on the lead line and, in the next breath, we are heading off at a fast clip to the large arena of an acre or more of flat-harrowed, hog fuel expanse within which Lucente can romp to his heart's content and where I can throw my erstwhile caution and control to the wind.

I release the metal clip connecting the lead line to the halter and watch as Lucente erupts in pent-up energy. He bucks and kicks with unbridled delight, races some distance across the arena, and returns with equal vigour, bucking, rearing and kicking up his heels again. He darts off at an angle this time, tracing a flattened loop that extends almost to the perimeter of the arena. Ba-da-rump, ba-da-rump, ba-dump, ba-dump, b'dump, b'dump, b'dump. I feel the intensification of his movements as he accelerates away and holds a full gallop for three full laps of the arena. Around and around he goes. B'dump, b'dump, ba-da-rump, ba-da-rump, baa-daa-rump, baa-baa-baa-fwomp. Lucente comes to a standstill in front of me, his flanks heaving, gasping for air, his nostrils filled with sweat and mucus.

Lucente has shown in this passage of unfettered movement the building of his life force to a level we humans might call ecstatic. But he is not in any way out of his body; in fact, Lucente gives the appearance of being in full command of his balance, the cadence and rate of his motions, and their direction and amplitude. There appears to be an exemplary *I can* of movement agency to what I am observing.



Lucente Releasing Pent-Up Energy (Photo Credit: Michele Black)

And yet such appearance belies a deeper impression of affective resonance. There is what Henry (1990/2008) referred to as an immanent “auto-affectation” to the movements themselves; which is to say, there is a passage of “vitality affects” (Stern, 2010; Smith, 2007) which can be described simply as the bursts and rushes and gushes of energy activation, the surging, swelling and upwelling of movement powers and, inevitably, the fading, ebbing and waning of those very same powers. Auto-affectivity infuses the very motions themselves. It would be too easy to speak of catharsis, just as we must resist the inclination to project an ecstatic state onto Lucente, since these summary words gloss over the moment-to-moment energy activations and the coalescence of these activations in a primary motivation to move which “is experientially present and all that is experientially present” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, p. 259). Lucente is a horse-in-motion, recognizable, identifiable, and now trainable most assuredly through the life that has been brought up by him, in me, and now between us.

I take just a few steps toward Lucente as he stands panting in front of me, close enough that I can scratch his neck and then lean closer still to run my hand down his withers and backline. I feel the supple, striated alertness of what anatomists call his *Splenius*, *Trapezius* and *Latissimus Dorsi* musculature. I scratch him some more, building up what horse trainers call the “draw” that will hold a connection between us when I “send” him on a directional path around me. This affection is the expression of an impression I have just had of seeing more than a visible display of Lucente’s movement powers. As Henry (1990/2008, p. 81) put it:

There is only seeing if, in an unperceived way, seeing is more than itself. There always acts within it a power other than its own, a power in which it is auto-affected so that it feels its seeing and feels itself seeing. In this way we should not say that “we see” (*videmus*) but, like Descartes, “we feel our seeing” (*sentimus nos videre*). This auto-affectation is the original phenomenality, the original givenness, for example, the self-givenness of seeing to itself.

Feeling the horse in front of me, already I feel what I see and see, in the sense of realizing, what I am feeling. The movements that welled up before me from the auto-affectivity of life’s self generation now figure in the motions of hetero-affectation that are concentrated in these pats and rubs and strokes and caresses into which Lucente turns and presses his neck and shoulders.

I step back, cueing Lucente to turn outwards and to my left while, with the ball-tipped crop I’ve carried with me and now hold in my right hand, sweep an elongated arm in a wide arc from behind my back toward Lucente’s hindquarters. He moves off, quickly gathering forward

momentum, trotting evenly on diagonal limbs, and tracking up from the hind end with his rear hooves falling precisely in the impressions left by the fore hooves. Fluidly moving his weight from back to front with each stride, Lucente stretches his neck, formerly fountained, long and low and, with a raised back, holds himself collected in a springy well-cadenced trot. He circles around me as I hold my centred, central position.

And yet, no sooner have I settled into this motional melody than his head comes up abruptly, his back tightens and hollows, and his neck inverts and twists to afford him a glimpse of some horses being led out of the barn. My response is immediate. Before Lucente can take in a fuller sighting, I step closer toward him to absorb this rising, lifting, tensing activation, not so much to dull it as to re-focus it on the motions we are training and within the motional terms of our ongoing affective exchange. I amplify my own walk in a circle inside the larger one he is drawing around me, raising my stature, increasing the muscular tension in my core, and expressing this energized bearing assertively. In this way, I feel a re-binding of the invisible cord between us. Through mimetic motions and kiss-sounding cues, I effect an upward gait transition for Lucente. Synchronously, or better still, kinaesthetically and affectively, he shifts his weight back, lowers his hindquarters and strikes off from the outside hind leg into an elevated canter.

More than seeing my postural cues and expressive aids as focusing Lucente’s wayward energies, I realize, with Henry (2000/2015), that “the bodies of the universe are given originally only to the immanent powers of our corporeity” (p. 149). Other organic bodies can be perceived as separate from us, and we human beings from them, only by an intentionality that denies the immanence of life awareness, its auto-affectivity, its hetero-affectivity and thus its auto-revelation in the manifold life forms and modes of life encounter. Each moment of liberty training with Lucente, when at any moment he might break away, and where I have no means of holding him other than through mimetic, kinetic, kinaesthetic, affective resonance, is an opening to the life we share in common. Each unfolding, enfolding action and reaction felt in its intensifying as well as detumescing effects does not necessarily point to “the theme of radical immanence as transcendental affectivity” (Henry, 1990/2008, p. 81) but to bringing up life, moment-to-moment, in an unfolding, enfolding process of “inter-affectivity” (De Jaegher, 2015).

Vital Powers

Bringing up life may well involve wilful and wanton actions, while seemingly absolving us of accusations of animal control and domination. The saving grace comes as we ourselves, too, gain feelings and impressions of being enlivened, animated, and inspired by another.

This common upwelling of life that enlivens interaction and focuses the energy of another animate being offers us the impression of synergistic “intra-action” (Barad, 2007). More than just thinking of “withness” (Shotter, 2006) in terms of two beings interacting with one another in certain places and at certain times and afterwards going their essentially separate ways, there remains the impression that the human trainer and the horse have somehow been changed by the very manner of their mutually enlivening, energizing, focusing exchanges. The “intra-acting practices” of groundwork and liberty training illustrate expressively “how learning and adapting to being with each other is a form of co-shaping and co-domesticating of each other” (Maurstad, Davis, & Cowles, 2013, p. 324). I am changed as a consequence of the almost daily groundwork and liberty training with Spartacus and Lucente. These horses are not just muscled up and kept fit; they become increasingly attuned to my own postures, positions, gestures and expressions as features of our mimetic communication and as incorporated in their very way of becoming “pleasure” horses.

But have I let the powers that are expressed in these interactions go to my head? Have the movement forces that I summon in these other beings and direct toward the production of pleasing appearances beguiled me into believing I have relinquished my power over these creatures? Patton (2003) raises much the same question in relation to the training of horses under saddle and concludes that “[a]though this nonverbal ‘language’ undoubtedly allows for communication in both directions between horse and human, the rhetoric of dialogue and partnership [to which we might now add the words interaction, intra-action, inter-affectivity] remains misleading so far as training is concerned” (p. 90). He goes on to state that “there remains a fundamental asymmetry at the heart of the relation between horse and rider” (p. 90):

Both training and riding involve the exercise of power over the animal and, contrary to the view of many philosophers and trainers, relations of communication are not external but immanent to relations of power. (p. 91)

It is not a matter, according to Patton, of sidestepping the power we have over the horses we use for our pleasures, but of considering the “differences between the more or less sophisticated techniques of exercising this power over other beings” (p. 92) which is to say, the differences

between an exercise of power that blindly seeks to capture some of the powers of the animal for human purposes, and an exercise of power that seeks to capture the powers of the animal in ways that enhance both those powers and the animal’s enjoyment of them. (p. 93)

Patton thereby comes to the conclusion that “good training” is that which “enables a form of interaction that enhances the power and the feeling of power of both horse and rider” (p. 97).

The problem with this conclusion is that it still begs the question of how power is enhanced for both parties and what senses of life welling up give vital, material substance to these mutually enhanced powers. The forms of interaction characteristic of groundwork and liberty training with Sparky and Lucente go some way to setting aside impositional bodily forms, controlling equipment, and techniques of coercive power. These interactional forms afford both a level playing field in groundwork and a freedom from tethered obligation in liberty training. They afford space and time for movement explorations that are not so far removed from “the training scale” of dressage development and the cultivation of the full range of a horse’s movements under saddle (Smith, 2014b). What distinguishes these interactional forms is perhaps that they give freer rein to the “brute” and “potent powers of animal agency” (Smith, 2017, pp. 77, 80). As such, they potentially give unbridled exercise to the powers of self-movement that, from my human vantage point, becomes my claim to agency. Yes, I can move, make a range of motions, and effect the movement of another. But to maintain the *I can* of fullest movement possibilities I have come, in the process of enlivening the interactions with Sparky and focusing Lucente’s energies, to appreciate that there needs to be a continual tending to the mimetic powers of movement as rooted in what Sheets-Johnstone (1999) describes as “the sheer experience of aliveness, the sheer nonverbal kinetic experience of ourselves and others as animate forms” (p. 225).

Henry’s radical phenomenology of life attests to such powers of self-movement. He stated that: “Movement can be felt in its own being, only when the world has lost its power” (Henry, 1988/2009, p. 43). By this he meant that movement sensibility is most vivid, most affectively imbued, when we become less fixated on what is being moved and more attentive to where, how and when there is movement. For then we are not concerned primarily with “power-over relations” (Riley-Taylor, 2002) with horses whose movements we still appear to be controlling, nor are we satisfied with ameliorative or shared “power-with” relations of “attentive openness to the surrounding physical and mental environment and alertness to our own and others’ responses” (Oxford & Lin, 2011, p. 355) where we appear to give up some of the more obvious means of control for the sake of allowing a certain liberty of movement for our horses. Instead, the most vital powers are intuited to be those that issue from an affectivity of surging, bursting, rushing, gushing movement impressions. We do not gain these impressions after the fact, which is to say, after acting, as if there were necessarily a power-to-do that is accompanied by affective resonances. On the



Sparky Rearing Up (Photo Credit: Michele Black)

contrary, we come to life and bring up the life in others as they do in us through movements that are the ecstatic expressions of immanent affective impressions. Henry (2000/2015) writes that: “‘I can’ does not signify that now I am in a position to make this [or that] movement. The reality of a movement is not exhausted in its singular phenomenological effectuation: It resides in the power to accomplish it” (p. 143). Such power of accomplishment, of motivational effect, is first an impulsion, a force, a drive, and a desire that is felt in its motional affectivity.

I feel more alive in doing groundwork and liberty training with Sparky and Lucente than I do in many other aspects of my life. The presence of vital powers that engender my movements and those of my horses are revealed in each of the sequences and combinations, patterns and forms of our practices. I come to appreciate, in these readily apparent ways, how “[m]ovement is internal to a power that is nothing other than its own exteriorization” (Barbaras, 2012, p. 56). Even when I am exhausted, when Lucente is panting and sweating, when Sparky no longer has energy to burn, it is the very exteriorization of the vital powers of movement that is being expressed in coming up against the inevitable resistance. We take a few breaths. Get a second wind. Soon enough there is enlivened interaction. There is the opportunity to channel these upwelling energies, these vital powers, into the lively expression of the figures and forms of groundwork and liberty training.

Conclusion

It has been many years since a horse trainer spoke to me about bringing up life as the very essence of communication with horses. The expression resonated with me at the time, although I did not understand much more than intentionally varying the pace, vigour and amplitude of my movements so that I could raise or lower the energy level of the horse’s movements. In leading horses, I learned to exude energy in order to animate a lethargic horse, getting it to lift its feet and put some zip in its stride or, alternatively, to slow my movements, soften my posture, and breathe deliberately and with long exhalations in order to calm an anxious, flighty horse.

I now hear this expression of bringing up life as referring not simply to an intentional play with manifest energy levels but to the interplay, interaction and intra-action of an array of “vitality affects” (Stern, 1983, 2002, 2004, 2010) that wax and wane in intensity. I feel myself enlivened when Sparky comes to life in groundwork exercises to which I commit myself with enthusiasm. His bursts, surges, and rushes of energy appear right there, in front me; however, they register first of all as an interactional affectivity fuelling our connection in the arena. By enfolding myself kinaesthetically in the resonating feel of his motions, and unfolding myself kinetically in postures, positions, gestures and expressions of motional mimesis, I can intend figures and patterns, animate gaits, effect transi-

tions, and stimulate elevated motions or *airs* on and above the ground. Having enlivened interaction, a fuller repertoire of my horse's movement possibilities is now accessible to him and to me, on cue, right here-and-now. It is a matter, also, as Lucente demonstrates so clearly, of focusing this energy. The interplay, interaction and intra-action with him is even more evidently a matter of being affected by and effecting an emergent movement repertoire.

The practices of groundwork and liberty training, trick training and circus arts, and especially of dressage competition and the multitude of other riding disciplines, are exercises in power relations when seen through historical, socio-cultural and anthropological lenses. And yet, if we are really to challenge power relations that damage, constrain, harness, hobble, rein-in, shackle, sore and otherwise oppress horses, then we should do so within the very practices that can disclose liberatory possibilities. Groundwork can be playfully engaging for the human and the horse. Liberty training, itself an oxymoron, holds such possibilities of mutual pleasure. And so, too, does riding without constraining equipment such as saddles, bits and bridles. Trick training can be a practice of attuned responsiveness where there remain occasions for surprise. What is important is to describe such practices in their nuanced motions, affects and effects as revealing a *conduct* which is not so much a set of ethical rules or prescribed behaviours as a manner of being motionally attuned to another animate being and thus capable of guiding the very conduct of his or her motility. There is a deeply felt "ethical imperative" (cf. Lingis, 1998) to bringing

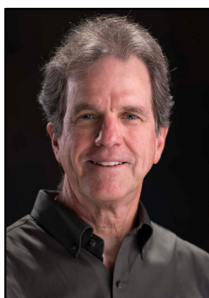
up life with horses that, in essence, has to do with challenging implicitly, in the daily practices of groundwork and liberty play, the taken-for-granted power relations that more contestable and detestable practices involving horses tend to sustain.

I seek to bring up life in my specific practices with particular horses. But I also mean to bring up life in a way that invites consideration by those who may have little interest in horses. Consider, for instance, what the foregoing analysis implies for interactivity and inter-affectivity of an exclusively human kind. There are general implications for how we motivate others, have them apply themselves, and draw upon their own powers of self-movement. But, specifically, there is a challenge to bring up life in the very relations that can be cast so readily within the oppressive dynamics of "disciplinary power" (Foucault, 1980) and "governmentality" (Foucault, 1991). We need not contrast power-over relations with those of an ameliorative and yet still coercive power-with kind to appreciate that bringing up life potentially changes everything. In fact, we may well find that the upwelling of vital powers in ourselves and in others with whom we interact is the very tonic, the elixir of life if you will, that guides the conduct of our respective professional and work endeavours. The relations we seek with others and others seek with us may essentially and potentially be of the most powerful kind when bringing up the immanent auto-affectivity and inherently ecstatic hetero-affectivity of enlivened interaction, focused energy, and our most vital powers of moving in concert with one another.

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