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SUBJECTIVITY OF HORSES AND POSTMODERN ANTHROPOLOGY: A CRITICAL ESSAY

Atların Öznelliği ve Postmodern Antropoloji: Eleştirel Bir Deneme

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a reflexive discussion on findings from my 2022–2023 field research at an equestrian club in Ankara, using a postmodern anthropological approach. I examine how anthropocentric perspectives obscure nonhuman roles in social life, analyzing horses' positioning through spatial and linguistic arrangements. Drawing on postmodern anthropology and multispecies ethnography, I assess how knowledge production is shaped by ethical and species-based standpoints. My refusal to ride -rooted in veganism and animal liberation activism- limited my interactions with club members, challenging the "neutral observer" ideal in classical ethnography. Through participatory observation and interviews, I explore spatial organization, linguistic codes, and horse subjectivity. Findings reveal that horses' needs are often neglected, while labels like "obedient" or "troublesome" reinforce human-centered instrumentalization. Despite multispecies ethnography's potential, anthropocentric methodological legacies constrain its effectiveness. By reflecting on horse agency and my researcher position, I highlight anthropology's limitations in engaging with nonhuman beings and advocate for a more inclusive ethnographic perspective.

Keywords: postmodern anthropology, multispecies ethnography, reflexivity, anthropocentrism, horse.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, 2022–2023 yıllarında Ankara'daki bir binicilik kulübünde gerçekleştirdiğim saha araştırmasının bulgularını postmodern antropoloji çerçevesinde düşünümsel bir yaklaşımla ele almaktadır. Antroposentrik bakış açılarının insan olmayan varlıkların toplumsal yaşamdaki rollerini nasıl görünmez kıldığını inceliyor, atların mekânsal ve dilsel düzenlemeler yoluyla nasıl konumlandırıldığını analiz ediyorum. Postmodern antropoloji ve çok türlü etnografi kuramsal çerçevesinde, bilgi üretiminin etik ve tür temelli duruşlar tarafından nasıl şekillendiğini değerlendiriyorum. Vegan ve hayvan özgürlüğü aktivisti olmam nedeniyle ata binmeyi reddetmiş ol-

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mam kulüp üyeleriyle etkileşimimi sınırlandırdı ve klasik etnografideki "tarafsız gözlemci" idealine meydan okumama yol açtı. Katılımcı gözlem ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla mekânsal örgütlenme, dilsel kodlar ve atların öznelliği gibi konuları ele alıyorum. Bulgular, atların fiziksel ve duygusal ihtiyaçlarının sıklıkla göz ardı edildiğini, "itaatkâr" veya "sorunlu" gibi etiketlerle insanmerkezli araçsallaştırmanın pekiştirildiğini gösteriyor. Çoktürlü etnografinin sunduğu olanaklara rağmen antropolojinin insanmerkezli yöntemsel miraslar bu yaklaşımın etkisini kısıtlamaktadır. Atların öznelliği ve araştırmacı olarak konumum arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanarak, antropolojinin insan olmayan varlıklarla nasıl ilişkilendiğini sorguluyor ve daha kapsayıcı bir etnografik perspektif öneriyorum.

Anahtar Sözcükler: postmodern antropoloji, çoktürlü etnografi, düşünümsellik, insanmerkezlilik, at.

Introduction

Ethnography is an interdisciplinary method that aims to understand societies' structure, cultural patterns, and social practices. Derived from the Greek words "ethnos" (society) and "graphia" (writing), ethnography holds a unique position as both a scientific inquiry and an artistic expression. The scientific aspect involves the rigorous analysis of collected data to generate theoretical insights. In contrast, the artistic aspect transforms this analytical knowledge into a compelling narrative that engages readers emotionally and intellectually. In this sense, ethnography resembles a novel written by an author deeply connected to reality, a process involving both data collection and meaning-making. Ethnographers do more than gather information; they integrate it with cultural patterns and social structures to craft a text that fosters emotional connection and deep cognitive understanding. This dual function places ethnography at the intersection of science and art, raising fundamental philosophical and methodological questions about knowledge production. By presenting field data through an artistic lens, ethnography offers a multifaceted experience that engages readers effectively and intellectually while criticizing the notion of "reality." This critique is part of a broader debate questioning whether knowledge can be produced solely through observation and logic. Such inquiries challenge positivism, an approach inspired by natural sciences, which became systematized in the 19th century and gained widespread acceptance in social sciences due to its emphasis on pure objectivity. Ethnography, by contrast, opens space for critical engagement with these epistemological assumptions.

Positivism is a framework developed by Auguste Comte in the 19th century, asserting that empirical observation and logical analysis are the only valid means of acquiring scientific knowledge. Comte (2001) argued that knowledge should be based solely on observable phenomena and that this approach became possible as the human mind matured. His theory opposed religious authorities' reliance on transcendent or divine sources of knowledge, proposing that science evolved through theological and metaphysical stages to reach the "positive stage", a phase-based exclusively on observation and experience. According to Comte, this process represents the human mind's historical evolution from a primitive to a mature and rational state. However, this perspective has been criticized for oversimplifying social realities and overlooking the complexity of individual experiences. For instance, Comte's "law of three stages" assumes a linear progression of scientific thought, failing to account for the influence of social dynamics and cultural diversity on knowledge production. These critiques gained prominence in the 20th century, mainly through the works of postmodern anthropologists such as James Clifford and George Marcus. In *Writing Culture* (1986), Clifford and Marcus argue that ethnographic writing does not merely represent social realities but actively constructs them. While ethnography aims for objectivity, it must also engage with social realities' multi-layered and subjective nature. They emphasize that ethnographers should acknowledge their role in shaping narratives, as ethnography is not just a tool for knowledge production but also a form of storytelling. Their discussions extend beyond anthropological writing, prompting more profound questions about ethnographic knowledge's epistemological and ethical foundations.

In Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977), the researcher's presence in the field not only shapes social contexts but also transforms the process of knowledge production. Challenging positivist claims of neutrality, Rabinow argues that ignoring a researcher's subjectivity and their interaction with the field is impossible. Therefore, reflexive ethnography must focus on understanding personal experiences and the broader social context. Ethnography, in this sense, rejects positivism's mechanistic approach to knowledge production, advocating for an understanding of social dynamics through empathy and meaning. This perspective fosters a deeper methodological inquiry that goes beyond rigid objectivity. Similarly, Carolyn Ellis's (2014) autoethnography method highlights the critical dimension of ethnography by interpreting social transformations

through personal narratives. Ellis's approach demonstrates that personal experiences are not merely individual accounts but offer profound insights into social processes and power dynamics. Accordingly, a researcher analyses social structures and invites readers to grasp their impact through empathy. The storytelling process engages readers both emotionally and analytically, facilitating a more human-centered understanding of social realities. By moving beyond a sterile presentation of data, Ellis's method allows readers to experience cultural and individual dynamics in a deeply immersive way.[1]

From Modern to Postmodern Anthropology: Reflexivity and the Crisis of Representation

Universalist and European and American-centered theoretical frameworks have shaped the anthropology discipline. Classical/modern anthropology tended to position societies along a linear trajectory of progress, yet this approach failed to account for cultural particularities and social dynamics. In the second half of the 20th century, particularly with the rise of postmodern anthropology, critiques of classical paradigms intensified. Concepts such as the crisis of representation and reflexivity became central concerns, challenging anthropology's foundational assumptions and methodological approaches.

As discussed in the introduction, one of the core assumptions of classical anthropology was that a researcher could study societies as an objective observer. Evolutionist anthropologists, such as Lewis Henry Morgan and Edward Burnett Tylor, positioned societies along a progressive continuum from "primitive" to "civilized," portraying their societies as the pinnacle of this trajectory. These hierarchical frameworks reinforced claims of scientific objectivity and colonial ideologies. Historical particularists like Franz Boas and his student Alfred Kroeber rejected evolutionary generalizations, arguing that each society must be understood within its historical context. However, this approach was later criticized for failing to account for cultural dynamism and power relations fully. While historical particularism avoided

[1] It is important to highlight the key differences between Rabinow's reflexive ethnography and Ellis's autoethnography. While Clifford, Marcus, and Rabinow view a researcher's subjectivity and field experience as just one element within the ethnographic process, Ellis's autoethnography places the researcher at the center, emphasizing how personal narratives acquire meaning within a broader social analysis. Despite these differences, both approaches converge in their critique of positivism, challenging the notion that a researcher is a neutral authority solely responsible for producing objective knowledge.

broad evolutionary narratives, it tended to depict cultures as isolated, homogeneous, and self-contained systems. This perspective risked overlooking the interactions between societies and the power structures these exchanges produced. Critics argue that historical particularism insufficiently addressed the impacts of macro-historical forces such as colonialism, globalization, and capitalism on societies (Stocking, 1982).[2]

Functionalism emerged in the early 20th century through the works of anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, conceptualizing societies as systems. This approach assumes that each cultural element serves a specific "function" within the social system. Malinowski's fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands focused on how cultural elements meet individuals' biological and psychological needs (Malinowski, 1992; Özbudun, Şafak, Altuntek, 2007: 99-128). For instance, he argued that the Kula exchange system was not merely economic but also served to strengthen social bonds. On the other hand, in The Andaman Islanders (1922), Radcliffe-Brown underscores how rituals and norms collectively maintain social cohesion, reflecting a structural-functionalist perspective. This emphasis on social order illustrates the idea that each part of culture works to support the stability of the whole (Radcliffe-Brown, 1922; Özbudun, Şafak, Altuntek, 2007: 99-128). However, like historical particularism, functionalism has been criticized for portraying cultures as static structures. Prioritizing harmony and stability overlook the fluid and conflict-ridden nature of social dynamics. This perspective struggles to account for colonial resistance movements or cultural transformations by assuming that colonized societies adapted to imposed structures. Similarly, capitalism's impact on societies and class struggles remains unaddressed mainly due to functionalism's equilibrium-centered approach. Although functionalism provided a valuable methodological framework, postmodern anthropology has increasingly exposed its limitations, particularly in explaining historical change, power relations, and structural inequalities.

Structuralism, pioneered by Claude Lévi-Strauss, draws inspiration from linguistics and argues that underlying structures shape cultures. Lévi-Strauss maintained that cultural elements such as myths, rituals, and kinship systems reveal insights into the universal workings of the human mind

[2] Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* (1982) critiques the limitations of historical particularism -and, as we will see in the next section, functionalism- by demonstrating that communities are shaped not only by their internal dynamics but also by their position within global power structures.

(Lévi-Strauss, 2012; Özbudun, Şafak, Altuntek, 2007: 181-205). For example, his studies on myths suggest that similarities across different mythologies stem from how human thought is structured around binary oppositions (e.g., good-bad, nature-culture). While this approach provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding cross-cultural similarities, it has been criticized for overlooking local dynamics and historical processes in its search for universal mental structures. Scholars like Talal Asad (1973: 16) argue that structuralism ignores historical forces such as colonialism and idealizes Western thinking as representative of universal human cognition. Similarly, postcolonial theorists critique structuralism for reinforcing Eurocentric knowledge production, limiting their ability to grasp cross-cultural differences fully.

Feminist anthropologists have challenged structuralism's gendered assumptions. Gayle Rubin (1975: 173-174), for instance, highlights how Lévi-Strauss's analysis of kinship systems reduces women to mere "objects of exchange", overlooking their daily life experiences. Such critiques emphasize that structuralist analyses provide a reductive framework for understanding women's social roles.[3] With the rise of postmodern anthropology, structuralism's universalist and hierarchical nature has come under even greater scrutiny. Postmodern approaches assert that cultural structures are not fixed but dynamic and context-specific, challenging structuralism's assumption of a homogeneous human nature and emphasizing the importance of local contexts in shaping cultural realities.

In the second half of the 20th century, anthropology underwent a significant transformation, moving beyond classical paradigms to adopt a more critical perspective. This shift was not merely methodological but also involved a fundamental reassessment of knowledge production and its ethical-political implications. Referred to as postmodern anthropology, this approach challenged the tendency of researchers to produce knowledge by centering their societies, as well as the universalist and hierarchical structures of classical anthropology. It questioned both the role of a researcher as the subject of the discipline and how "other" cultures were represented.

[3] The history of anthropological theory could include perspectives such as processualism, neo-evolutionism, Marxist and feminist anthropology, and symbolic/interpretive approaches, bridging the gap between evolutionism, functionalism, structuralism, and postmodern anthropology. However, given the focus of this article, I have chosen to discuss only the foundational early theories to contextualize the dominant paradigms of their time before moving directly to postmodern anthropology.

In classical anthropology, a researcher's social context and subjectivity were ignored mainly, reinforcing the illusion of objectivity. However, postmodern anthropology critically interrogated these assumptions, leading to a fundamental reconsideration of objectivity and representation. Key concepts such as the crisis of representation and reflexivity pushed anthropologists to ask: "Who produces knowledge? In what context? With what motivations?" These concerns reshaped the discipline's foundational assumptions, emphasizing methodological shifts in fieldwork and the political and ethical dimensions of knowledge production.

Postmodernist critiques of anthropology center on the belief that "true objectivity" is unattainable, making the complete application of the scientific method impossible. Isaac Reed (2010) conceptualizes this challenge as a deep skepticism toward integrating the "context of research" with the "context of explanation." While the former refers to a researcher's social identity, beliefs, and personal experiences, the latter focuses on the realities being studied, particularly social actions and their contexts. Postmodern critiques question whether these two contexts can be reconciled, asserting that knowledge is inherently subjective. By the late 1970s and 1980s, anthropologists like Vincent Crapanzano and Paul Rabinow engaged in intense self-criticism regarding the validity of fieldwork, forming the basis of what Reed calls the "postmodern turn" that is an epistemic crisis driven by skepticism about whether researchers could effectively and honestly integrate their positionality into their explanations. This shift raised critical questions about how culture is written, emphasizing that anthropological texts are not just representations but also constructions. As James Clifford and George Marcus argue in *Writing Culture* (1986), knowledge is produced through authoritative narratives rather than merely discovered. It led to the crisis of representation, prompting a fundamental question: Who produces knowledge, in what context, and through what motivations? Even interpretive approaches like Clifford Geertz's "thick description" aimed to deepen the understanding of local contexts, yet postmodern critiques demanded a further step: making a researcher's subjectivity explicitly visible. As discussed earlier, Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977) illustrates this shift by positioning an anthropologist not as a detached observer but an active participant in research. Rabinow argues that a researcher's social position and engagement with power structures shape knowledge production.

Reflexivity emphasizes that knowledge is not merely a "representation of reality" but a product of social contexts and a researcher's subjectivity. Meanwhile, the crisis of representation highlights the constructive role anthropologists play in shaping cultural narratives. These approaches aim to make anthropological knowledge production more transparent, inclusive, and ethically grounded. However, postmodern anthropology has also faced significant critiques. Roy D'Andrade (1995, as cited in Salberg et al., n.d.) challenges postmodernism's rejection of objectivity and subjectivity as distinct categories. While acknowledging that absolute objectivity is unattainable, he argues that anthropologists should still strive toward it as much as possible. According to Roy D'Andrade, moral and objective models must remain separate; otherwise, they may interfere with our ability to understand how the world functions. Similarly, Patricia Greenfield (2005, as cited in Salberg et al., n.d.) contends that postmodernism's rejection of objectivity and its emphasis on political agendas make it nearly unusable for scientific research. While anthropology can benefit from psychology's insight into cultural relativism, it must be objective. Melford Spiro (1996, as cited in Salberg et al., n.d.) is also unconvinced by postmodern anthropology's rejection of positivist scientific methods. He warns that if social sciences focus solely on interpreting meaning rather than investigating causal mechanisms, they risk reducing their capacity to explain what it means to be human. Spiro further argues that objectivity should be understood as the ability to evaluate knowledge independently of a researcher's cultural, gendered, or personal biases, reinforcing the significance of scientific methodologies. These critiques expose both the strengths and limitations of postmodern anthropology. While it successfully uncovers power imbalances and ideological biases within knowledge production, it faces challenges regarding methodological consistency and claims about the impossibility of objectivity. Nonetheless, postmodern anthropology has initiated a fundamental shift by challenging classical paradigms' universalist, hierarchical, and researcher-centered assumptions. Demonstrating that knowledge is shaped not only by social realities but also by a researcher's subjectivity, power dynamics, and contextual factors has reshaped the discipline's ethical and methodological foundations. However, one significant gap in postmodern anthropology remains its limited engagement with human-nonhuman relationships. Its representation, power, and subjectivity critiques have primarily focused on human social structures, leaving the role of nonhuman species in cultural systems underexplored.

At the Limits of Postmodern Anthropology: Encountering the Other Species

With the evolution of postmodern anthropology, some anthropologists have sought to broaden the discipline's scope by incorporating human communities and relationships between humans and nonhuman species. This expansion is particularly evident in the multispecies ethnography approach that examines how humans, nonhuman animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms shape and are shaped by social, economic, and political factors (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). Multispecies ethnography challenges the traditional human-centered focus of anthropology by emphasizing the interconnectedness of species and the co-construction between ecological niches. Like Eduardo Kohn's "anthropology of life" (2007), this approach recognizes that relationships are formed not only among humans but also between humans and other living beings. "Symbiosis" and "becoming with" are Donna Haraway's important concepts that form the theoretical basis of multispecies ethnography. They reject anthropocentrism and highlight interspecies encounters' ethical and relational dimensions (Haraway, 2008). According to Haraway, nonhuman beings are "good to live with" and "good to think and act with," which reframes their roles beyond symbolic representations. By destabilizing the nature-culture dichotomy, multispecies ethnography challenges traditional human-centered representations and raises critical ethical and political questions. Ethnographers in this field analyze how species intersect with human worlds, for example, with fungi (Tsing, 2009, 2023), microorganisms (Paxson, 2008), or companion animals such as dogs (Kohn, 2007). More than just subjects of study, these species are recognized as agents whose lives and actions shape multispecies networks. In the context of the Anthropocene, the responsibility of "living together" extends beyond human communities to the broader webs of life. Multispecies ethnography thus serves as a methodological tool and a framework for interrogating contemporary crises, including environmental degradation and social inequalities. It urges a shift from species hierarchy to interdependence, recognizing that human survival is deeply entangled with the well-being of other species.

Postmodern anthropology, while offering a critical framework against the authoritarian knowledge production of classical paradigms and emphasizing the contextual and subjective nature of knowledge, brings its limitations in understanding relationships with nonhuman beings. Reflexivity and the crisis of representation have challenged the foundational as-

sumptions of anthropology by questioning how knowledge is produced and who gets to represent whom. However, despite these critiques, anthropology has primarily maintained an anthropocentric perspective, often overlooking the roles of nonhuman beings in social life. As Arjun Appadurai (1988: 17; cited in Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010: 554) points out, discussions around "speaking from" and "speaking for" in anthropology highlight the issue of researchers representing other communities through their voices. Appadurai refers to this as "ventriloquism", arguing that such claims to representation must be subjected to constant self-criticism. However, while this critique has been applied extensively to human communities, a similar inquiry into the representation of nonhuman species remains underdeveloped in anthropology.

Bruno Latour's critique of the typical "nature-culture" dichotomy offers a significant perspective for rethinking relationships between humans and nonhuman beings. Latour draws a parallel between politicians speaking on behalf of human communities and biologists speaking on behalf of nonhuman entities, emphasizing how both practices contribute to a crisis of representation (Latour, 2004) cited in (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). His critique of representation paves the way for discussions within anthropology on questions such as "How can nature be included in democracy?" and "How can nonhumans oversee their representatives?" These debates move beyond anthropocentric epistemologies, intersecting with approaches like multispecies ethnography, which examines how different beings construct their ontologies and interactions. Multispecies ethnography seeks to explore various forms of coexistence with other species. Donna Haraway (2003) conceptualizes this as a "companion species," while some researchers propose that nonhuman beings can also act as observers, like human researchers. For instance, nonhuman animals may interpret and make sense of the behaviors of those who feed, train, or house them within their social contexts (Paxson, 2010); cited in (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). This idea aligns with Haraway's notion of "living together," which may sometimes involve deep interaction and bonding with specific nonhuman animals and, at other times, require maintaining a degree of mutual distance. Matei Candea (2010; cited in Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010) illustrates this through the relationship between humans and mongooses, suggesting that this type of distance can be understood as a form of "reciprocal patience." A relevant example is the ability of primates in captivity recognize

and navigate the personalities and social hierarchies among their fellow primates and their human caretakers.

In some cases, human caregivers and nonhuman animals even reach a level of interdependence where they share the same medications to manage stress and anxiety (Braitman, 2013). These examples illustrate how nonhuman animals transcend the nature-culture division, forming complex networks of relationships with humans and other beings. Inspired by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (2023) question, "Can the subaltern speak?" one might ask, "Can the nonhuman speak?" In a world where categorical distinctions like nature and culture are becoming increasingly blurred, and genetic material crosses species boundaries, anthropology must account for these evolving relationalities.

To summarize, postmodern anthropology's discussions on reflexivity and the crisis of representation have significantly contributed to the discipline's critical transformation by emphasizing how knowledge is shaped by context and subjectivity. However, this transformation remains limited in understanding the role of nonhuman beings in social contexts, as it continues to center subjectivity exclusively on humans. While multispecies ethnography aims to address these gaps, anthropology as a discipline still struggles to break away from anthropocentric epistemology fully. In terms of representation and relational subjectivity, it often falls short of recognizing the agency of the nonhuman. These ongoing debates compel researchers to reassess their position and critically reflect on their methodological choices. Within this context, my fieldwork at an equestrian club between 2022 and 2023 aimed to examine the relationships between humans and horses using the theoretical frameworks of postmodern anthropology and multispecies ethnography. However, I encountered methodological, ethical, and practical challenges during my fieldwork. In the next section, "The Disclosure of Inability: What Did I Do Wrong?" I discuss the possibilities and limitations of this research, reflect on my position as a researcher, and explore how we might make sense of failures within the research process.

The Disclosure of Inability: What Did I Do Wrong?

In this study, I explored how people in an equestrian club define horses, how anthropocentrism is constructed through spatial arrangements and linguistic codes, and to what extent equine agency is acknowledged or overlooked from a human perspective. Additionally, following a multispecies ethnography approach, I aimed to examine horses as tools for hu-

man use and as active subjects shaping social interactions through their experiences and behaviors. The equestrian club in Ankara stood out due to its members' diverse socio-economic profiles. It was a microcosm of social and economic relations between humans and horses. The club's members included grooms, trainers, riders, students, and visitor families. Grooms were responsible for horses' daily care and maintenance, while trainers, as authority figures, directly interacted with both horses and humans. Riders formed the core user base, engaging with horses more regularly and meaningfully. Their motivations varied -some trained for competitions, while others pursued riding as a serious hobby. Spanning all age groups, they viewed equestrianism as a physical activity and an escape from daily stress. Riders also prioritized accessing club resources, such as training spaces and horse selection, strengthening their sense of belonging. On the other hand, visitors were primarily weekend guests, attending short-term activities with children or special events like birthdays. Their interactions with horses were more superficial -watching, brief riding experiences, or observing their children's activities. Economically, these two groups contributed differently: experienced riders ensured long-term financial sustainability through lessons, equipment purchases, and competition training, while visitors provided short-term revenue through day events, casual rides, and additional services like cafés and souvenir sales.

In my research, I adopted the principle of reflexivity from postmodern anthropology, combining traditional participatory observation and semi-structured interviews with a reflexive perspective. During participatory observations, I observed horses' behaviors in riding areas, stables, and waiting zones while documenting human interactions with horses, linguistic codes, and daily engagements. Through semi-structured interviews with grooms, trainers, riders, and visitors, I sought to understand human-horse relationships' emotional, ethical, and practical dimensions. Additionally, I chose not to ride horses due to ethical concerns, documenting positive and challenging experiences in field journals. I also analyzed the club's spatial layout to assess how physical arrangements shaped human-horse interactions.

Throughout the research process, the club's spatial arrangements and participants' approaches to horses revealed a distinctly anthropocentric perspective. The club's layout positioned horses primarily as tools serving human needs. Riding arenas and stables were designed to severely restrict the horses' movement, lacking spaces where they could rest or socialize

naturally. The confined areas, barely allowing them to turn around, led to stress-induced behaviors such as persistent neighing, kicking doors, or attempting to bite humans. Beyond spatial constraints, human interactions with horses also reinforced their instrumentalization. As one trainer stated, "Horses need to be run regularly, or they will get sick," suggesting that even their basic needs were framed in terms of human utility. This practice often involved forcing horses to run in electric-driven circles without being ridden by a human. While ostensibly for their health, the method overlooked individual needs and potential stressors. The spatial organization further reinforced social hierarchies. While humans had access to spacious social areas like restaurants, tennis courts, and yoga spaces, horses were kept in isolated and background locations. Such a division extended beyond physical space to the nature of human-horse interactions, which were mostly limited to preparing horses for human use. Their value was thus primarily defined by their functionality for humans. The club's design also limited natural horse-to-horse interactions, reducing their social engagements to mere visual or auditory contact rather than physical companionship. The stark spatial separation between humans and horses exemplified how anthropocentric spatial planning shaped interspecies relationships, limiting the horses' autonomy and natural social dynamics.

Linguistic codes played a crucial role in shaping human-horse interactions at the club. Expressions like "good horse" and "stubborn horse" revealed that equine behavior was interpreted solely through human needs and expectations. Trainers and grooms categorize horses as "obedient," "hardworking," or "difficult," redefining their individuality in functional terms. Rather than understanding horses' unique behaviors, these classifications prioritized their effects on humans. This linguistic framing also reflected an attempt to regulate horse behaviors through an anthropocentric value system. A horse labeled as "stubborn" often resisted human commands, whereas a "good horse" was seen as calm, compliant, and "trouble-free." Such labels reinforced an instrumental view of horses, limiting deeper insights into their experiences and social dynamics. However, specific behavioral responses provided clear indications of their agency. For instance, a horse frequently nickering or shaking its head -signs of stress, boredom, or discomfort- was often dismissed as "stubbornness". Trainers and riders expected horses to perform tasks predictably, overlooking their natural rhythms, emotional responses, and physical needs. Resistance to training or unexpected reactions were typically viewed as "problematic"

rather than as potential indicators of fatigue, fear, or health issues. These expectations rendered horses even more invisible as sentient beings, reducing them to standardized performance tools. Moreover, riders and staff harbored strong assumptions about what they expected from horses and what horses supposedly expected from them. Many believed horses sought food, affection, riding, and protection, reinforcing a utilitarian framework. Horses' responses were often perceived as part of a "natural" dynamic, preventing a deeper exploration of their emotional and social needs. While humans assumed a reciprocal relationship, this perception was ultimately constructed within an anthropocentric framework. These findings demonstrated how linguistic codes and spatial arrangements were key in reinforcing human-centered approaches to equine management.

The research process revealed significant ethical, methodological, and practical challenges that shaped the limitations. As a vegan animal rights activist, I consistently refused offers to ride horses, which was met with surprise and criticism in the field. The trainers questioned the sincerity and validity of my research due to my refusal, making it difficult to establish mutual trust with club members. By choosing not to ride, I implicitly rejected the legitimacy of horseback riding, a stance that some informants perceived as an implicit critique of their practices. It led to tension and distance between us, as my inactivity indirectly questioned their actions. Some saw my stance as an ideological critique and challenged my position with questions like, "How do you plan to understand horse behavior without riding them?" Others viewed it as an expression of deep empathy and sensitivity toward horses. This challenge underscored how, unlike the classical ethnographic ideal of a "neutral observer," a researcher's ethical and species-related stance directly influenced field dynamics. I should have followed Malinowski's approach -staying in the field longer and silently recording my thoughts in a diary. However, given Malinowski's condescending remarks about local communities revealed later despite his outwardly "neutral" and "empathetic" fieldwork, the ethical validity of such an approach remains debatable. Instead of harboring concealed biases in my notes, I made my ethical position explicit, a decision that profoundly shaped this study's methodological and relational boundaries.

The ethical and methodological challenges I encountered during the research not only defined the study's limitations but also hindered my ability to achieve specific objectives. The tension arising from my decision not to ride horses limited my access to specific data sources. I observed that

riding instructors and professional equestrians hesitated to dialogue with me openly and remained distant in sharing their experiences. As a result, gaining in-depth insights into riders' physical interactions with horses was often impossible due to these restricted relationships. The tension also prevented me from firsthand experiencing the bodily sensations involved in horseback riding. Without riding, I could not directly comprehend how a rider perceives a horse's movements or how a rider-horse bond is formed through embodied experience. Consequently, my understanding of this connection relied entirely on observations and verbal accounts. For instance, I could not personally feel what riders described as a sense of "becoming one" with a horse. Thus, my attempts to analyze the impact of this experience on horses were primarily based on riders' testimonies and my external observations. Ultimately, I realized my ethical stance as a researcher directly shaped my field relationships and knowledge production process. At the same time, this ethical position imposed significant limitations on certain aspects of fieldwork. The data I could not obtain is a compelling example of the subjectivity inherent in field research and the challenges to classical anthropology's claims of neutrality.

At the outset of this research, I aimed to focus on how humans relate to horses and how horses interact with both humans and their kind. As part of the multispecies ethnography approach, I intended to examine the dynamics of these interspecies from both perspectives equally. However, methodological constraints in the field and the dominance of an anthropocentric perspective significantly limited my understanding of horses' subjectivities and social bonds. These limitations were not solely due to the spatial arrangements that removed horses from their natural environments; they were also closely tied to my academic background in an anthropocentric anthropological and ethnographic tradition. Every research method and technique I had learned was fundamentally constructed around human-to-human interactions, leaving me feeling ill-equipped to comprehend horses' subjectivities and social relationships. It created a turning point in my fieldwork, where I felt both theoretically and methodologically "orphaned." As I attempted to grasp horses' relationships with humans and other horses, the inadequacy of my methodological tools served as a stark reminder of anthropology's historical focus on human-human interactions. This limitation was not merely a personal methodological challenge but also an epistemological boundary within the discipline itself. Every approach I employed to interpret horses' behaviors and subjectivities, con-

sciously or unconsciously, was framed through an anthropocentric lens. Consequently, my attempts to analyze their social dynamics remained confined to this perspective. Such awareness underscored the need to critically reassess horses' unseen agencies and reflect on my position as a researcher. The gap in understanding their social bonds was not solely due to the opacity of their agency but also a product of my epistemological and methodological background. The necessity for a non-anthropocentric framework to engage with nonhuman beings compelled me to reconsider how I should reposition myself in the field.

The primary focus of this study was to examine how humans relate to horses, how they define them, and what they expect from them. Findings such as human attitudes toward horses and the linguistic codes shaped by these attitudes led me to interpret equine-human interactions primarily from a human perspective. It prevented me from fully achieving one of the core principles of multispecies ethnography: an equitable interspecies analytical framework. This gap in the field relegated horses' agencies to the background, particularly in my efforts to analyze their influence on humans. For instance, horses' resistance during training or unexpected behaviors were typically evaluated through a human-centric lens. I could not gather sufficient data to understand the potential motivations, emotional states, or physical conditions underlying these behaviors. Beyond this, my study encountered an overwhelming silence regarding how horses might perceive humans, their kind, or their environment. This silence was not only due to observational limitations but was also deeply tied to ethical and methodological concerns surrounding the crisis of representation. Even if I had observed horses more closely, the question of how, as a human researcher, I could ethically and accurately represent their emotions and thoughts remained a core dilemma of the study. The attempt to "give voice" to horses carried the inherent risk of reproducing their experiences through an anthropocentric lens. This issue further complicated the pursuit of an equitable interspecies analysis, reflecting the critique of "representation" that postmodern anthropology has long emphasized. Given these ethical and epistemological risks, I deliberately refrained from making direct claims about horses' agency. Currently, any such representation would be highly contested in terms of its fairness and accuracy.

In conclusion, this study reveals how human-horse relationships are structured within an anthropocentric framework. It exposes the methodological and epistemological limitations of understanding horses' subjectivi-

ties and social dynamics. While I aimed to achieve a more equitable and comprehensive analysis of interspecies relationships through a multispecies ethnographic approach, both the limitations in the field and the historically anthropocentric legacy in anthropology prevented this goal from being fully realized. These constraints should not be seen merely as failures of the study but rather as a foundation for discussing key concepts emphasized by postmodern anthropology, such as reflexivity and the crisis of representation. They remind us that subjectivity and the challenges of representation are inherent vulnerabilities in knowledge production. These vulnerabilities extend beyond human contexts and are integral to anthropological inquiry. Thus, this study raises new questions about human-horse relationships and invites reflection on how anthropology might evolve in its efforts to engage with nonhuman subjectivities. The silence of the horses and my limitations in making sense of that silence underscores the need for critical reassessment -not only of their agency but also of my position as a researcher and the research methods I was instructed to use.

Instead of a Conclusion: Is This Possible, or Am I Just a Romantic Dreamer?

In this study, I aimed to examine human-horse relationships within an equestrian club through multispecies ethnography, suggesting how anthropocentric perspectives permeate everyday interactions. Before beginning my research, I had already argued that conventional ethnographic methods primarily focus on "human-human" relationships, rendering the agency of nonhuman beings invisible. However, when I entered the field in search of a more inclusive approach, I experienced that gathering data on equine subjectivity was not only a theoretical challenge but also an ethical and practical one. During my observations at the equestrian club, I witnessed horses developing various responses to spatial and bodily constraints: constant neighing, kicking doors, and exhibiting behaviors often labeled defiant or aggressive at specific times. However, understanding the motivations behind such responses proved difficult within the anthropocentric conceptual framework of anthropology from which I originated. The prevailing perspective at the club interpreted equine experiences solely in terms of their adaptability to human use -classifying them as obedient, stubborn or unruly- thus reinforcing a dominant hegemonic discourse in the field. While multispecies ethnography offers the potential to investigate the active participation of nonhumans in social life, developing a genuinely egalitarian methodology was far from straightforward, as I found myself

negotiating not only conventional ethnographic traditions but also my own ethical and political commitments. For instance, as a vegan, my refusal to ride horses strained my relationships with people at the club and undermined the trust necessary for open dialogue, making access to certain data more difficult. However, this ethical stance also allowed me to recognize that I was already misaligned with the classical anthropological ideal of the "neutral observer." In this sense, as postmodern field researchers emphasize reflexivity, I understood more deeply that "the subjectivity of a researcher can never be entirely removed from the research process."

The data I collected in the field demonstrated that spatial organization and linguistic codes inherently excluded the subjectivity of nonhuman beings from the outset. The question of how an individual might interrogate their species' position presents both a methodological and ethical crisis. My inferences about what horses desired or expected always ran the risk of being merely assumptions shaped by an anthropocentric framework. This realization reminded me, once again, of the grand generalization that Derrida (2008) critiques when discussing the concept of "the animal": anthropocentric language reduces the complex subjectivities of nonhumans under a singular label ("animal"). Nevertheless, the small clues I encountered in my research -such as how differently novice riders described horses or how children asked direct questions like "Does riding on a horse's back hurt them?"- revealed that interspecies relationships always contain moments that resist fixed definitions. When filtered through the diverse backgrounds and experiences of humans, horses' responses demonstrated that human dominance is not always absolute. As Lefebvre (2014) suggests in his spatial analysis, the equestrian club can be read as a site where power relations are continuously reproduced but also where small fissures emerge, disrupting the established order.

The present data and discussions aimed to reveal how nonhuman beings are relegated to the background in social, spatial, and linguistic processes. However, my own field experience suggests that attempting to overturn anthropocentric practices ultimately may, at present, be considered an idealistic -perhaps even romantic- notion. In a world where an entrenched anthropocentric representation continues to dominate institutional, economic, and ideological spheres, developing a relationship that fully acknowledges the subjectivity of horses -and other nonhuman beings - without imposing unilateral human expectations is not an easy task. Nevertheless, this does not render such an ideal entirely utopian or impossible.

On the contrary, this seemingly romantic critical horizon can serve as a powerful motivation to expand the boundaries of scientific inquiry, to center the experiences of different species, and to rethink our species' position. Challenging the notion that only humans are positioned as agents in social sciences may be a step toward advancing the postmodern anthropological debate on the crisis of representation. Critical Animal Studies (CAS) (DeMello, 2012; Gruen, 2018) and multispecies approaches (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010) open new methodological avenues for making the roles of nonhuman beings in cultural processes more visible.

Throughout this endeavor, my position fluctuates between a "romantic idealist" and a "transformative researcher." I have willingly accepted the risks of exclusion from the field, the fear of lacking essential data, and the possibility of being perceived as "overly emotional" or "too ethically driven" by participants due to the interactions I formed -or failed to form- with horses. Despite these challenges, I am confident that my findings will contribute modestly to questioning anthropocentric legacy and exposing approaches that reduce horses to mere instruments. While my study highlights the difficulties of conducting multispecies ethnography, it also reinforces the idea that such an ideal is not an empty utopia. Thus, in response to the question, "Is this possible?" My answer is: "Difficult, but not impossible." Shifting anthropocentric codes, spatial arrangements, and linguistic classifications may still be considered a romantic endeavor for a long time. However, both my field experiences and critical literature suggest that this effort is not only academically and ethically significant but -given the profound consequences of speciesism- an increasingly urgent necessity. The prospect of a future in which scientific research embraces a more open-ended and responsive framework that acknowledges the mutual agency of human and nonhuman beings continues to excite me. Therefore, even if I am perceived as a romantic idealist, the pursuit of decentering anthropocentrism can broaden the horizons of anthropology and social sciences. Thus, what may be labeled as a romantic sensibility not only nurtures a researcher's critical capacity but also calls upon us to take ethical responsibility in interspecies relations? If this study has made even the most minor contribution to an ethnographic ideal that does more than merely describe nonhuman beings -that recognizes their experiences, suffering, and resistance- then my so-called romantic experiment has fulfilled its purpose.

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