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RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

Agency as Interspecies, Collective and Embedded Endeavour: Ponies and People in Northern England 1916–1950

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Abstract

Animals are increasingly acknowledged as historical agents. There are calls for more critical approaches that explore how this agency—often shared with humans—is embedded within wider relations of power. This paper responds by employing Critical Theory, particularly the ideas of Jurgen Habermas, to explore how interspecies agency is shaped and constrained by its broader socioeconomic context. Empirical illustrations are drawn from the experiences of Dales ponies and people in the early twentieth century, who found themselves navigating the growing commodification of their shared lifeworld. The findings suggest the outcome of this process of "colonisation" was not inevitable. Rather, just as the demise of the ponies seemed unstoppable, their shared communicative relations re-emerged powerfully during the harsh winter of 1947. The paper asks what this means for our understanding of the apparently irrevocable decline of horsepower and how we might better understand horses' own experiences of such events and processes.

INTRODUCTION

> It is not human society with a few animals in it. Rather, society is human with and indeed through domestic animals (Porcher, 2014, p. 1).

There is growing recognition that a full understanding of society—past and present—requires us to look beyond the human (Carter & Charles, 2018; Tovey, 2003). Our entangled relationships with domestic animals are especially revealing, from Cortez's dogs terrorising the Aztecs to the medieval cats keeping rodent populations at

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bay. Similarly, Fudge (2013) suggests that that a history of England without cows would be akin to a history of global capitalism without the Internet, such was their significance in providing power, food and fertiliser. Having co-evolved with us, then, such animals have always been partners in the making of our world (Haraway, 2008). However, precisely because of their ubiquity, we do not always notice them. For historians, then, animals—like poor people, women or ethnic minorities—represent a marginalised group (Ingram, 2019) or "the latest sub-altern" (Shaw, 2013, p. 146). It is not enough to simply insert animals into our existing analyses of history and society. To do so would be to continue to objectify and silence them (Hribal, 2012; Meijer, 2013). Rather—as the "history-from-below" movement has done for the other groups mentioned—we should recognise them as active agents in shaping the world around them (Montgomery & Kalof, 2010; Thompson, 1963). This represents not an esoteric preoccupation but an opportunity to expand our academic concerns across species lines (Gunderson, 2014; Stuart et al., 2013). This paper opens with this claim. That is, a focus on animal agency challenges our understanding of our relations with animals, of historical agency and—perhaps—of history more broadly. Specifically, I am interested in how including animals in our analysis raises questions about what agency is, how it is exercised, and—in particular—how it is constrained by the wider forces to which human and animal actors alike are subject. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to build on existing research into the shared and embodied "interspecies" agency of people and animals by considering how it is in turn embedded within wider economic and social relations.

Inseparable from human history and culture, horses in particular provide a starting point that is both familiar and provocative (Schuurman & Nyman, 2014). The act of riding opens up distinctive forms of interspecies communication and partnership, enabling people and horses to connect physically and share spatial, geographical and emotional trajectories (Dashper, 2016). This idea that there is no such thing as pure horse or pure human is embodied in the concept of the centaur (Game, 2001). A mythological creature with the upper body of a human and the lower body of a horse, the centaur dates back to Babylonia in 2000 BC (Lawrence, 1994). For Game (2001), the centaur suggests the possibility of "oneness" between human and horse. However, from a more critical perspective, it is a human-centred figure: The body of the horse is controlled by the head of the human (Nosworthy, 2013). Acknowledging the centrality of power to horse-human relations, Latimer (2013) advances the status of "being alongside" in order to sustain regard for the divisions as well as the connections between them. This contrasts with the more totalising process of "being with," suggested by Haraway (2008) and others.

From a historical perspective, Shaw (2013) suggests this temporary fusing of horse and human—such as on the battlefield at Waterloo—enabled a given partnership to take on qualities distinct from the individual participants themselves. The horse-and-rider at war thereby become a "clear, powerful unity... [that] could affect the sort of war that could be prosecuted and the sort of outcomes that battles might have" (Shaw, 2013, p. 165). Horses thus help us to see agency—now and in the past—as a shared experience; the capacity not only to do things but to incite, inspire, or ask others to do so (Despret, 2013).

There are calls for more critical approaches that consider why and how this shared interspecies agency is embedded within (and constrained by) wider socioeconomic processes (e.g., Coulter, 2016; Dashper & Brymer, 2019; Lindgren & Ohman, 2019). In order to address these calls, I turn to Critical Theory. Now somewhat neglected, the so-called Frankfurt School pioneered the theorisation of human-animal relations (Gunderson, 2014). Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno highlighted the shared marginalisation of particular groups of people and animals (Gunderson, 2014; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969). However, I draw specifically on the work of Jurgen Habermas. He shared his predecessors' preoccupation with the contradictions and alienation of contemporary industrial life, suggesting that the everyday "lifeworld" is gradually "colonised" by the systemworld of money and power. But, in contrast to the first generation, Habermas posits a way out. His "communicative turn" suggests that open and transparent communication between social actors can build our mutual understanding of the issues we face and will ultimately enable us to overcome them. Habermas therefore provides a macro-level theoretical framework within which to consider our shared historical and contemporary relations (Gunderson, 2017; Wadham, 2020).

The contribution of the paper is thus primarily theoretical in nature. However, in order to explore the structural conditions that alternatively enable and inhibit individual action, Lindgren and Ohman (2019) advise us to examine the agency of animals within situated settings rather than from general principles (see also Adelman & Thompson, 2017; Carter and Charles, 2018). Our relationship with horses in particular reveals successive societal transformations, having helped inspire the arts, revolutionise warfare and reshape economies (Notzke, 2013). Consequently, for illustrations to extend the analysis, the article draws on the rise of the Dales pony in northern England and its accompanying commodification. Two vignettes—from 1916 and 1947—show how shared horse-human relations reflect and illuminate the wider systemic processes within which they were embedded.

Regarded as compact, tough and hardworking, Dales ponies (and people) were at the heart of the agricultural and industrial revolutions of the north of England. The ponies carried goods to and from the coastal ports, ploughed hard-to-reach fields, and drove the family to market (Snowdon, 2010). After coming belatedly to the attention of the outside world in 1916, many ponies were conscripted as "gunners" into the British Army. Still more were drafted as "vanners" to the Home Front, where they pulled tradesmen's carts in towns across the north. Between the wars, they continued to play an important role on farms and in urban areas alike but the end of petrol rationing in 1950 rendered them redundant almost overnight. By 1958 the UK horse population as a whole fell to just 10 percent of its 1921 peak, leading the Ministry of Agriculture to conclude that their numbers were "no longer significant enough to collect in the agricultural census" (McWilliams, 2020, p. 11). Initially threatened with extinction, the Dales gradually gained wider popularity. Today, the ponies are engaged in leisure rather than productive activities, but they remain significant economic, cultural and symbolic actors within their native Pennine communities and beyond (Fitzgerald, 2000). The history of the region can therefore be fully understood only if we recognise the active role that Dales ponies played in its development (Figure 1).

In summary, this article responds to calls for more critical approaches that consider why and how shared interspecies agency is embedded within and constrained by wider relations of power. In particular, it develops a theoretical understanding of agency as both an embodied and embedded endeavour between people and animals. I therefore open with a review of existing research on animal agency, along with a consideration of how Habermas' work might extend this knowledge. Second, I present two vignettes that illustrate this embedded and constrained agency in practice. Specifically, these stories extend the theoretical analysis by suggesting how Dales ponies and people—together—helped shaped rural and later urban society in northern England. In following this shared history from pit-head to hay meadow and onto congested city streets, the findings reveal that the outcome of their collective struggle with the world outside was not inevitable. Third, in the light of the theoretical analysis and empirical reflections, the conclusion considers how we might begin to better recognise and integrate the shared struggles of people and (domestic) animals within our work on animal agency and within history more broadly.

Animals as historical agents

Across the social sciences, there has been growing recognition and acknowledgment that agency extends beyond the human world. Latour's (2007) Actor Network Theory (ANT) is particularly influential, but so too are the ideas of Barad (2007), Ingold (2000) and Whatmore (2002) among others. Emerging from within Science and Technology Studies in the early 1980s, ANT denies any "*a priori* ontological assumption of human superiority" and promises to rethink the social world and the place of people, animals and other actors within it (Taylor, 2011, p. 212). The "social" does not exist prior to interaction, but rather emerges through interactions between diverse "actants" including humans, animals, objects, ideas and technology. According to ANT and other "new materialist" approaches, agency is therefore understood not as a property of individual entities, but as an affective relationship between them (Despret, 2013; Devellennes & Dillet, 2018). In shifting our attention from individual actors and

FIGURE 1 Cherry Kearton and unnamed pony making windrows, Swaledale 1950s. (Source: Hartley and Ingilby, 1968)

entities to the relationships between them, they allow us to explore how everything from politicians (Latour, 2007) to trees (Jones, 2014) to mushrooms (Tsing, 2015) play an active and meaningful role in the making of our world. Our entangled affective relationships with animals—particularly domestic animals—are especially revealing. This wider shift away from those doing the relating (i.e. the human subject who has the capacity to act intentionally) towards the relational webs and practices that connect human and other actors has therefore been enthusiastically embraced by human-animal scholars.

"There has never been any purely human space in world history" (Nance, 2013, p. 21). Yet history remains stubbornly anthropocentric (Domanska, 2017; Swart, 2010). In continuing to prioritise the human perspective, we limit both the scope of the past and our understanding of it. As Fudge (2013, p. 21) asks, "if the peasant labourers and smallholders of early modern England worried about their livestock – which they did – shouldn't we, as historians, be concerned about them too?" Historians have therefore begun to "worry" about domestic animals in particular. For example, Shipman (2011) considers how human evolution depended upon our growing interdependence with particular animals. Similarly, Cassidy (2007) describes domestication as an ongoing interspecies relationship, at once mutually constituted and unruly. This growing "animal turn" in history leads Swart (2010) to reflect on what we might learn from the way in which the discipline has gradually taken greater account of women. She suggests that the first step is to demonstrate that animals had a history at all, which has led to studies of famous animal protagonists like the racehorse Red Rum (Crawford, 2007) or Wellington's horse Copenhagen (Shaw, 2013). The second step is to extend our focus to ordinary animals. For example, Armstrong's (2016) compelling study of sheep shows us how both animals and our perceptions of them have changed over time. Swart's third wave invites us to acknowledge that, even in constrained circumstances, animals could have a wider historical influence. Focusing on the South African War, she explains how the horse-human relationship changed people's understanding of physical distance and chronological time for example (Swart, 2010).

All these studies illustrate the viability and usefulness of giving greater prominence to domestic animals in our histories. But they also show the difficulty of balancing micro and macro perspectives. That is, stories tend to focus on specific cases like Crawford's (2007) equine celebrities, or alternatively on generic populations like Armstrong's sympathetic but nameless sheep. The next step in our understanding of animal agency, then, requires that we move beyond "meta-animals" in our analysis (Nason, 2019), bringing together an appreciation of animals as active individuals, with an acknowledgement of the wider constraints to which they are subject.

Acknowledging animal agency as an empirical historical reality has consequences. First, it enables us to develop more complete histories (Hribal, 2012; Stuart et al., 2013). For example, Fudge's (2013) study on "milking other men's beasts" shows how focusing on domestic animals can expand what we know about the past. Her seventeenth century sources reveal domestic animals as actors with their own sense of being, rendering milk theft a crime against people and cows alike. Secondly, an interspecies approach expands our understanding of agency itself. According to the classical humanist model, agency is rational and premeditated, and requires intentional action (Despret, 2013; Shaw, 2013). Incorporating nonhuman actors potentially redefines the very essence of agency: That is, it lies less in deliberate action than the close coupling of bodily movement and perception (Ingold, 2000). Rather than an attribute, then, agency becomes a series of ongoing reconfigurings of the world (Barad, 2007). Agents are not autonomous but represent potential combinations (Shaw, 2013). A focus on animals thus encourages us towards this more relational understanding of agency, in which the various actors "do not precede their relating" (Haraway, 2008, p. 17). This leads Despret (2013) to suggest there is no agency that is not interagency. Rather, "agenting...is a relational verb," which connects different narratives, beings, things and contexts (Despret, 2013, p. 44). Shaw (2013) suggests this opens up a continuum, on which highly rational forms of agency coexist with other, less articulate, manifestations. Thus, at Waterloo, for example, a handful of human leaders exercised a self-reflective form of agency, thereby pursuing particular goals or intentions. But most human and equine participants shared a more sensory, emotional and visceral engagement, which was nonetheless highly significant to the individuals themselves and the outcome of the battle.

Animal agency and relations of power

As they extend our understanding of history and agency, animals may also be saddled with unasked-for obligations (Von Essen & Allen, 2016). As Shaw (2013, p. 151) suggests:

> Agency might be the last thing we'd want to foist on an unsuspecting being because so many sorrows
> of responsibility and culpability seem to start there and so much domination flows from the confident,
> yet myopic acting centre.

We cannot study the history of animals, therefore, without also addressing the wider relations within which these processes are enacted. For example, Haraway (2008) highlights the problematic consequences of human exceptionalism in her work on human-dog relations. Others focus on cows and the constraints to which they are subject in the dairy industry. Porcher and Schmitt (2012) explore how cows invest intelligence and affect in their work, showing autonomous behaviours but also respecting the rules laid down by the farmer. Similarly, Driessen (2014) and Holloway and Bear (2017) consider the balance of power between farmers and cows in the context of emergent technologies. But there is much more to be done in acknowledging the macro-framework in which these kinds of interspecies relations unfold:

> Viewing nonhuman animals as subjects with their own perspective on life asks not only for rethinking
> nonhuman animal agency [itself] but also for rethinking the structures and relations in which it is
> shaped, on different levels (Meijer, 2017, p. 206).

Animals are active participants embedded within uneven processes and diverse forms of power (Hobson, 2007). A more critical approach to animal agency is therefore a question of solidarity: They are part of a shared and active history of expropriation, exploitation and resistance (Hribal, 2012). However, in exploring this bigger picture we encounter two challenges. First, animals—like humans—are complex characters. For example, Scott (2009) describes how racehorses like Seabiscuit and Smarty Jones became central characters in our historical sporting narratives. However, at the same time, we reduced them to mere personalities rather than recognising them as individuals whose actions we cannot fully comprehend. Second, agency often becomes unmistakeably visible only when things go wrong. For example, in her study of the nineteenth century American circus, Nance (2013) discusses how elephants were typically compliant but sometimes tried to escape or attacked circus staff who had beaten them. Hribal (2010) explores how other animals throughout history have gone to extraordinary lengths to thwart their human overseers. However, these acts of resistance are noteworthy precisely because they are comparatively unusual:

> When animals do what they know is expected of them, everything begins to look like a machine that is functioning, and their obedience looks 'mechanical' (Despret, 2013, p. 43).

Thus, as well as focusing on agency-as-resistance, there is a need for critical analysis of less dramatic human-animal encounters that might be characterised in terms of cooperation and/or co-optation.

To summarise the discussion so far, for moral and empirical reasons, there is growing interest in recognising the presence and participation of animals in our present and our past. Particularly helpful is a more relational understanding of agency, which enables us to integrate domestic animals in particular into our analyses. However, there is a gap in our understanding of the full range of ways in which that agency manifests itself. A second challenge is how we might more effectively recognise the efforts of individual actors while also placing them in a wider socio-economic perspective. I now consider how Critical Theory, particularly the work of Jurgen Habermas, might help address these gaps.

Bringing Critical Theory to bear on our relations with (domestic) animals

Bentham was the first Western philosopher to extend social theory beyond the human world. An early advocate of animal rights, he famously suggested that what matters in our dealings with animals is not whether they can reason or talk, but whether they can suffer (Bentham 2007/1789). But despite developing a systematic philosophical framework that gave equal moral consideration to all species, Bentham also suggested that nearly all uses of animals could be justified with the exception of wanton cruelty (Kniess, 2019). Thus, his position was somewhat less radical than often supposed.

By contrast, Gunderson (2014) suggests the Frankfurt School pioneered a fundamentally distinctive theorisation of human-animal relations. These relations lay at the very heart of their analysis of industrial society:

> The solidarity of human beings...is part of the solidarity of life in general... The traits of human beings have a certain imprint, but the relationship of their happiness and misery with the life of animals is manifest (Horkheimer, 1933, p. 36).

The domination of animals was therefore intimately linked to the domination of specific groups of people. Horkheimer describes how working elephants are alienated themselves but also mediate the alienation of forestry workers and circus audiences (Gunderson, 2014; Horkheimer, 1978). For the so-called first generation, them, the problem with society lay not in its relations of production (as asserted by Marx) but in the way it relentlessly championed the principles of reason and scientific method at the expense of "nature" (Whitworth, 2000). Thus, the

key to understanding industrial society lay less in the class struggle than the "dialectic" between human and nonhuman. Critical Theory is thus potentially well-suited to supersizing our study of animal agency.

Believing that our interest in nature and its inhabitants is purely instrumental, Horkheimer and Adorno could see no way to resolve the dialectic between the human and nonhuman. The so-called second generation dismissed the pessimism of this position. For Jurgen Habermas in particular, the issue is that we require not less rationalisation but more. Only through rational dialogue—or what he calls "communicative action"—can participants reach an understanding about the world and our place in it (Habermas, 1981, 1987). This understanding in turn binds society's members together within a "shared lifeworld." This more emancipated society would in turn extend the "circle of [our] neighbours" beyond the human (Habermas, 1982, p. 248). However, his narrowly defined focus on (human) language means Habermas' ideas have not been widely employed by human-animal scholars (Wadham, 2020).

Habermas' later work focuses on scaling up individual communicative encounters into collective deliberation. That is, as a society, we should be asking ourselves what kind of world we want to live in. Here Habermas belatedly acknowledges the animals among us: "Once we involve them in our social interactions, in however asymmetrical a fashion" then we communicate with them "in a different way" and should take their interests into account accordingly (Habermas, 1993, p. 109). This raises the possibility of more animal-centric models of political deliberation. For example, Driessen (2014) considers how cows and farmers together negotiate how to site and use milking robots. Meijer (2017) takes a more systemic perspective, exploring how such examples of interspecies engagement might be integrated into existing democratic structures. Our conscience is thus "particularly insistent" concerning those species with whom we communicate more easily:

> To the extent that animals participate in our interactions, we enter into a form of contact that... is *of the same kind* as an intersubjective relation (Habermas, 1993, p. 110).

This acknowledgment suggests a re-examination of Habermas' earlier, more anthropocentric work may be warranted (Gunderson, 2017). Habermas' communicative framework as a whole can potentially provide the elusive theoretical link between the micro and macro levels in our analysis of human-animal relations. Particularly useful to a more critical understanding of animal agency are three recurring ideas; namely rationality, the lifeworld, and the process of communicative action through which both are reproduced.

The first generation was concerned with how the seemingly inexorable trend to a "rationalised, automated, totally managed world" tends to eliminate autonomy (Horkheimer, 1972, p. vii). An example of this process can be found in Nimmo's (2008) study of the rationalisation of early twentieth century British dairy farming, in which the growing emphasis on milk yield recording simultaneously engendered the disciplinary reshaping of the relations between people and animals. While acknowledging these totalising tendencies, Habermas develops a contrasting notion of *"communicative"* rationality that brings, instead, the potential for emancipation. Where instrumental reason discovers how to do things, communicative reason asks what should be done (Craib, 1992). Rationality thereby becomes a route to authentic collaboration, as social actors encounter and shape their shared social world. These messy, socially embedded encounters effectively transform participants on both sides. Crucially for our focus on agency, who we are effectively emerges from our interactions with others (Wadham, 2020).

While Habermas is primarily concerned with people, he acknowledges that "such interactions take on a measure of continuity in our association with domestic animals" (1993, p. 109). Rather than making them speak, however, if we listen to what they already have to say, they might reveal new or overlooked abilities and desires (Dobson, 2010; Driessen, 2014). In bringing Habermas' notion of rationality to bear on interspecies encounters, then, we effectively redirect our attention from intentional actions to the way participants knowingly and unknowingly pursue mutual arrangements of truth, consensus and cohabitation. For example, Driessen (2014, p. 150) suggests that dairy farms are managed by farmers and cows alike but these interspecies encounters are not aimed at making decisions so much as a facilitating a collective mode of "truth-making." Thus, merely by paying more

attention to animals, it becomes clear that experience and knowledge are not the preserve of humans. This in turn requires that we pay greater attention to shared and dramatic experiences on the battlefield or during periods of upheaval, but also to more mundane and unexpected encounters in less exotic locations (Driessen, 2014).

The second key idea is the lifeworld. A longstanding notion within sociology, it constitutes the taken-for-granted background knowledge and values through which we belong to the world (Grathoff, 1978). Habermas argues that "we find ourselves in the lifeworld in a pre-theoretical sense" (1992, p. 21), both experiencing and actively shaping it through our social relations. However, the social integration this sustains and reproduces would break down without the accompanying and binding force of institutional norms. This parallel "systemworld," then, secures the cohesiveness of society. It includes the state, the economy and the judiciary, which themselves emerged from within the lifeworld. For example, the marketplace originated in face-to-face meetings where the exchange value of goods would be negotiated by participants. But, as societies develop, the growing complexity of the market and other subsystems means they evolve their own "irresistible inner dynamics" (Habermas, 1987, p. 331). Economics and politics increasingly become disconnected from the norms and values of the lifeworld and cohesion is instead achieved "over the heads of the actors involved" via the steering media of money and power (Habermas, 1987, p. 256). The subsystems of business and the state thereby increasingly commodify and regulate—or "colonise"—everyday life (Habermas, 1987, p. 355).

The process of colonisation becomes visible as it reaches downwards into particular communities and the "seam" between lifeworld and system becomes a site for negotiation and conflict. The domestic animals (in particular) who share our lives also engage with and shape this day-to-day lifeworld, and resist incursions from outside (Driessen, 2014). By directing our attention to this process, Habermas offers us a practical framework through which to make manifest the individual and collective interspecies agency at play within those communities.

Habermas' third key idea is the distinction between communicative and strategic action. In contrast to strategic action aimed at influencing specific outcomes, communicative action is an inherently consensual form of social interaction. Participants coordinate their pursuit of goals on the basis of shared understanding, building their mutual understanding of the issues they face through rational dialogue (Bohman & Rehg, 2017; Habermas, 1987). This focuses attention on the process and results of communication, rather than the subjects themselves. Relationality, then, is not just a characteristic of the lifeworld but rather constitutes its very structure: That is, reality is relationality (Jurgens, 2017). Habermas concedes that animals—precisely by virtue of their ability to relate back to us—are part of that reality:

> We should not confront animals in the objectifying attitude of a third person, nor just communicate about animals but with them. We must be able to ascribe characteristics of agents to animals, among others the ability to initiate utterances and to address them to us (Habermas, 1993, p. 110).

In summary, by starting from the premise that action is a collective not an individual matter, Habermas enables us to explore how human-animal relations are in turn embedded within wider (macro-level) practices, structures and institutions (Meijer, 2017). The remainder of the article will thus use this theoretical framework to extend existing work via two research questions. First, how might recognising and recentring the agency of (domestic) animals help us understand history as an interspecies endeavour? Second, how does this collective interspecies agency intersect with wider relations of power?

The backdoor pony: horse-human relations in the upper Dales

> [The Dales pony] is a native of the North of England...in which localities he is much appreciated on account of his endurance, robustness of constitution, and adaptability for hard work...There is a wear

and tear look about the breed which cannot fail to recommend itself...it should be accepted as a fact that 'handsome is as handsome does' (Lord Arthur Cecil, 1897, quoted in Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 9).

The Dales' ancestors were indigenous ponies who migrated to and from mainland Europe, first with Bronze Age Iberians, then - much later - with the Roman Army. They transported fighting men and their equipment and pulled lead ore from the region's mines. It became a recognised breed in the mid-nineteenth century, as part of wider efforts to document and "improve" native ponies (Derry, 2003): Known locally as "galloways," they were crossed with trotters from eastern England and Ireland who were renowned for their speed. Transporting lead and consumer goods to and from the coastal ports, the ponies needed to be strong. They were also surefooted, in order to cope with the "mountainous and rotten" roads (Hunt, 1970, p. 158). As the mines closed and the railways arrived, many miners and drovers left the district in search of work while the pack ponies were auctioned off. For those left behind, family smallholdings offered "some sort of protection against economic hazards," with people and ponies alike often working multiple plots (Hunt, 1970, p. 158). This is the moment at which our narrative begins.

In summary, this is a compelling story through which to study how animal agency is nested within wider relations of power. The impact of individual Dales ponies and the breed as a whole is traceable through historical documents, poems, photographs and folklore. Fieldwork—carried out over 12 months in 2019-20 – also drew on interviews with key people within the Dales community, some of whose families have lived with ponies for generations. The Dales Pony Society provided background material. In addition, particular use is made of Iona Fitzgerald's book "Dales Ponies" (2000), which explores how the Dales emerged as a separate breed and provides extensive data on its lineages. The recording of pedigrees was disrupted during the Second World War, meaning Mrs. Fitzgerald's book is regarded as a surrogate collective chronicle of both the breed as a whole and individual ponies and breeders. Nonetheless, historical records perhaps inevitably present the human point of view (Taylor, 2018). Human-animal researchers are committed to decentring human actions, but we often struggle to do so in practice (Coulter, 2018; Dashper & Brymer, 2019). I have therefore tried to place animals at the centre of the narrative by referring to the specific experiences of particular ponies as captured in words and images. The remainder of this section will centre on two vignettes of people and ponies, which provide the theorised story with its trajectory.

"We have the very animal the army wants!" Conflicts on the seam of lifeworld and system (1916)

At the outbreak of the First World War, the British Army had 19,000 horses in its ranks. They remained the most reliable and versatile way of transporting "every conceivable item too heavy or cumbersome to be moved by man alone" (Flynn, 2020, p. 33). By August 1915, the number of conscripted horses had risen to 540,000 but the army was still desperate for more (Winton, 2013). The Remount Service despatched a delegation to France the following year to inspect and acquire draught horses. The charismatic army recruiter Lord Lonsdale took delivery of the grey Percheron stallion Nonius, planning to run him with native pony mares to produce light draught horses, who were in particular demand. On learning of the initiative, well-known Dales breeder Roy Charlton sensed an opportunity, declaring "we have the very animal the army wants, and they don't know it!" (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 81). A government-subsidised breeding programme would require an official breed society and stud book. So, at a packed meeting in Hexham in December 1916, the Dales Pony Improvement Society was formed (Figure 2). Its aim was to create a register of foundation mares and enter into negotiations with the government to secure premiums for approved Dales stallions to travel the region (Fitzgerald, 2000).

Keen to press ahead, Charlton and other well-to-do members of the fledgling society guaranteed the premiums themselves, to be awarded at the first ever Breed Show at Weardale in April 1917. The successful stallions—Silver
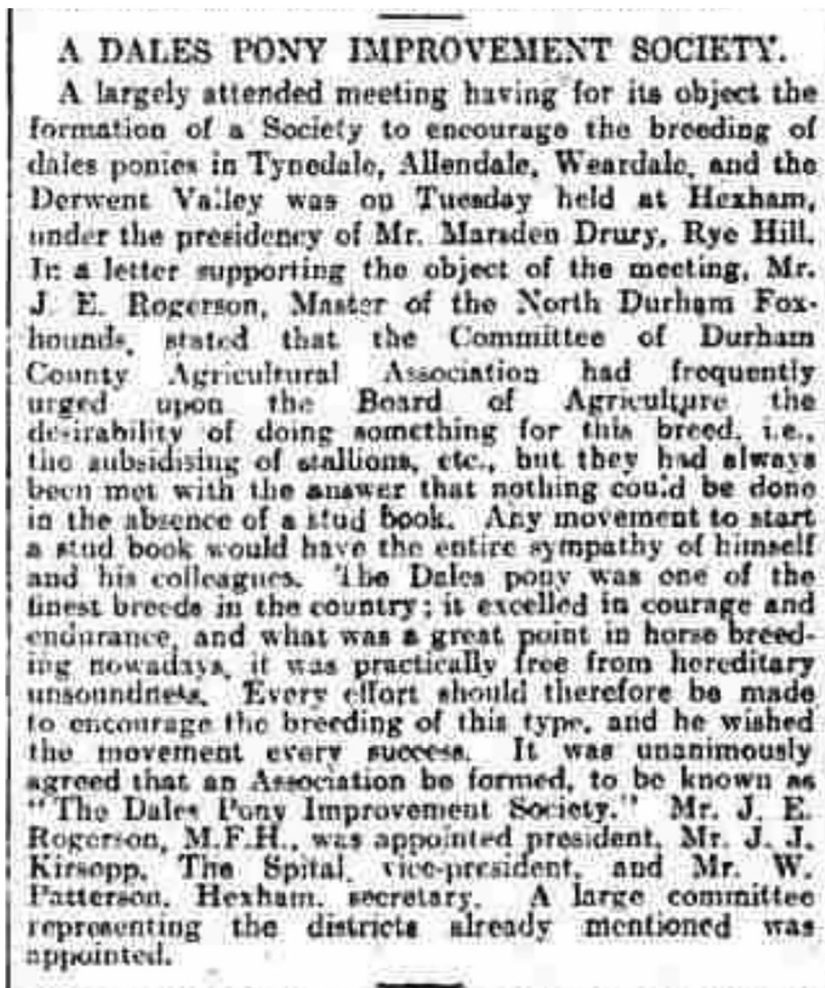
A DALES PONY IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY.

A largely attended meeting having for its object the formation of a Society to encourage the breeding of dales ponies in Tynedale, Allendale, Weardale, and the Derwent Valley was on Tuesday held at Hexham, under the presidency of Mr. Marsden Drury, Rye Hill. In a letter supporting the object of the meeting, Mr. J. E. Rogerson, Master of the North Durham Foxhounds, stated that the Committee of Durham County Agricultural Association had frequently urged upon the Board of Agriculture the desirability of doing something for this breed, i.e., the subsidising of stallions, etc., but they had always been met with the answer that nothing could be done in the absence of a stud book. Any movement to start a stud book would have the entire sympathy of himself and his colleagues. The Dales pony was one of the finest breeds in the country; it excelled in courage and endurance, and what was a great point in horse breeding nowadays, it was practically free from hereditary unsoundness. Every effort should therefore be made to encourage the breeding of this type, and he wished the movement every success. It was unanimously agreed that an Association be formed, to be known as "The Dales Pony Improvement Society." Mr. J. E. Rogerson, M.F.H., was appointed president, Mr. J. J. Kirsopp, The Spital, vice-president, and Mr. W. Patterson, Hexham, secretary. A large committee representing the districts already mentioned was appointed.

FIGURE 2 Report of the inaugural meeting of the Dales Pony Improvement Society, December 1916

Top, Black Blooming Heather and Highland Laddie—were afterwards inspected by a representative of the Board of Agriculture, Capt. Alexander Campbell. In a letter to the society published in the Livestock Journal, he professed that the breed had "the most perfect foot in the British Isles." He added "I cannot conceive why your ponies have not come into prominence, which they are bound to do." During the twenties and thirties, the market indeed expanded apace. Ponies were bought up by the army but also by butchers, milkmen and other tradesmen from towns and cities across northern England, as well as by interested parties from overseas (Figure 3). By 1939, as war was declared—and petrol rationed—this juncture represented at once the pinnacle of the breed's popularity and the beginning of its decline.

This story shows how the Dales pony became increasingly commodified after 1916. The shared lifeworld of people and ponies became increasingly coordinated through the systemworld of money and power (Habermas, 1987). Habermas discusses this process in terms of colonisation, in which the outside system encroaches on shared traditions and culture. We can see evidence of this process in the changing language used to discuss ponies in the press. For example, the Livestock Journal (May 1925) notes that the army had purchased almost all the

FIGURE 3 Dales mare Nancy XIV pulls an ice cream cart at Evenwood, Teesdale, 1930s. (Source: Beamish Collection)

"suitable material" it could lay its hands upon. A later article in March 1927 suggested that "whatever is of commercial value should be sedulously cultivated."

Dales breeders themselves were quick to reimagine the ponies as potentially useful and profitable resources. As one participant, whose family are long-time breeders, observed:

> Obviously nobody ever had much money up in the Dales and it was a good way of earning a bit extra by breeding a foal and knowing that there would be a market for them.

Like anywhere else, the dales had been impacted by wider socioeconomic changes, such as the rise and fall of the lead mines, and the arrival of the railways (Hunt, 1970). However, throughout these developments, shared cultural systems of meaning had persisted, including the centrality of horse-human relations within communities. However, these now increasingly gave way to the power of the market and its intermediaries (Habermas, 1987). Neighbours became competitors. On a larger scale, according to correspondence in The Livestock Journal throughout 1925, an acrimonious rivalry erupted between the Dales breeders and those to the west who produced the similar but smaller Fell ponies. The Fell breeders had been quicker to take advantage of government premiums and their associated marketing opportunities, establishing a stud book back in 1898. But as the Dales' popularity grew, so demand for Fell ponies—seen as arguably less powerful and therefore less versatile—diminished (Fitzgerald, 2000). A handful of canny breeders who had registered their Dales ponies in the Fell stud book now hastily rebranded their animals as Dales once more (Figure 4). They became valuable commodities, increasingly safeguarded by means of strategic rather than communicative action. That is, who or what constituted a "good" Dales pony was no longer a matter of consensus but decided objectively with reference to bloodlines as recorded in the stud book.

The more powerful members of the community turned their herds into profitable businesses. For example, success at the National Pony Society shows in London brought Roy Charlton and J.W. Dalton to the attention of a delegation from the Spanish government, who were looking to reinforce their military breeding programme. In 1928, they bought Charlton's Linnel Midnight and Dalton's celebrated stallion Snowhope Fashion. J.H. Johnstone also accepted a "long price" for two of his ponies, Ouston Model and What's Wanted (Penrith Observer, August 1928). The ponies were sent to run with native mares in the hills above San Sebastian. In this way, the embodied relations between particular people and ponies were effectively monetised and relentlessly adapted to the functional requirements of the system (Habermas, 1987). Dissolving social relations, colonisation instead reconstituted them as imperatives of the wider economy. We can see that by turning the pony into a commodity—isolated from their community, interchangeable with any other, and appreciated primarily for their economic value—the system effectively desiccated traditions, manipulated worldviews and forced social change (Habermas, 1987).

But what difference did this make to the lived experience of the ponies themselves? Arguably, their increased commodification sat well with the preference that many Dales have for a varied and demanding workload. For example, one participant whose ponies are still in demand for forestry and farm work says:

> They do every job there is to do. They pull the wood, they can be ridden, they can be driven, and they've been hunting in winter. They can do all those jobs in one week…You never get them just doing one job, that's how you keep them fresh and sweet.

From the pony's point of view then, we might say that their increased commodification only became a problem when they ended up in the hands of people who did not necessarily understand their need for hard work, variety and a certain level of independence. For example, Roy Charlton describes the degradations inflicted on the ponies he sent to an aristocratic customer each deer-hunting season. The ponies would spend a few months ferrying their

FIGURE 4 Middleton in Teesdale Fair, 1913 Heather Boy, Mountain Ranger and Highland Laddie taking part in the Fell Pony Premium Class. Highland Laddie was later re-registered as a Dales pony, winning one of the first Dales premiums in 1917 (Source: Dalesponyhistory Facebook site)

master's unskilled and often unsympathetic guests up into the hills, whereupon Charlton would receive a polite letter from the estate:

> I regret to trouble you again, but His Lordship has spoilt another of your delightful ponies. I did think it perfect when it arrived here. I am returning it to you overnight on Thursday. Please replace without delay.

After a fortnight of regular work and hard feeding, the same pony would be despatched to a more knowledgeable purchaser, who would report back in due course that "the pony was simply grand."

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the consequences of commercialisation troubled even those who benefitted the most. In the foreword to his book, Charlton reflected uneasily that:

> Every saleable pony has been bought up, prices are higher than ever, and so tempting that even the younger breeding mares have been taken away from the moorlands... and sold to do town work...They are lost forever (Charlton, 1948, p. 13).

He thereby recognises that their successful integration into the wider economic and political system represented a potentially existential threat both to the ponies and the communities of which they were part, who were in danger of pricing themselves out of the market.

However, the increased commodification of the ponies, which lay at the heart of this particular struggle, was alternately embraced and repelled by the people involved. For example, one story tells of a farmer who was surprised at home by an army recruiter during the First World War. The visitor was deposited in the living room with a cup of tea, while the farmer hid his pony in the kitchen. Participants concurred with the moral of the story:

You had to wrestle them off people...Even now, breeders don't part with them easily. They don't like selling them on to people who wouldn't understand them.

For breeders and ponies alike, then, the "moment" of commodification represented perhaps a brief interruption within a life otherwise shaped by relationships better characterised as transformational than transactional. The fact of having been purchased tells us little about the subsequent lives of the ponies involved: Perhaps those who went off to war, or were shipped off to run with mares in Spain, or found themselves pulling carts on rainy city streets deserve their own separate stories.

It is also interesting to note that while ponies were removed from one lifeworld and effectively deposited into another, the system that made this possible did not sever the underlying relationships involved. Dales ponies—like other native breeds—are named after their stud of origin, so they remain inalienably attached to the people and places of their birth even as they are bought and sold across their lifetime (see Hurn, 2008 on Welsh cobs for another example). Every pony has a "prefix" that immediately identifies them with a particular place and family. For example, ponies bred by J.W. Dalton carried the prefix "Snowhope" (e.g., Snowhope Heather Belle) while the celebrated Emerson family's ponies carried the prefix "Wheatside" (e.g., Wheatside Perfection). This inalienability had consequences for the ponies themselves as breeders retained a sense of responsibility for "their" ponies throughout their lifetime. For example, one contemporary breeder bought back a gelding he had sold several years before. The family had planned to put the pony to work on their farm, but he ended up languishing in a field, bored and lonely. "They just didn't do enough with him," the breeder says. He describes bringing the gelding "back home," before selling him on again. "He's just a riding pony now," he adds. "That's disappointing like, when they don't fulfil what they set out to do." Of course, we can't know how the pony feels about this change in his circumstances but, as indicated above, the Dales' reputation as "the great all-rounder" is likely not just a marketing ploy but stems from the horses' own inclination for variety.

This story has taken up Meijer's (2017) invitation to rethink the structures and relations that shape and constrain animal agency, shifting our historical focus to the structure of the system itself rather than single episodes (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Specifically, Habermas' ideas help us explore how these wider economic and social forces effectively "colonised" the lifeworld of the upper dales around the time of the First World War. The most immediate and dramatic impact was that thousands of men and ponies were sent off to fight. People and ponies were thus thrown together in what Hribal (2012) describes more widely as a shared and active history of expropriation and exploitation. As the war dragged on, those left behind became a key part of efforts to ensure continued food security. Thus, these twin processes enabled the system to expand its grip over the lifeworld of the ponies and the people who worked with them. Dales breeders realised that there was a potentially unlimited and lucrative market for their ponies, but this could only be accessed by fashioning the ponies into recognisable and marketable commodities (Derry, 2003). However, for the ponies themselves, the move from the farms of the upper dales down into the city or a village far from home, could just as easily represent an improvement in in their day-to-day lived experience.

Although the commodification and bureaucratisation of the ponies had now begun in earnest, Habermas (1987) reminds us that the outcome of this kind of struggle between lifeworld and system is not inevitable. Breeders responded enthusiastically to the newfound interest in their ponies, registering them in large numbers in the new stud book. But they would refuse to part with them when a home was deemed unworthy of their animals. Interestingly, even smaller breeders benefited from the move towards greater bureaucratisation: The founding of the breed society enabled them to have a voice in the way the ponies were being promoted, while the introduction of premiums ensured clarity, transparency and accessibility in breeding arrangements.

However, while people were able to resist and/or capitalise on these developments, the ponies themselves were largely rendered powerless in the face of their increased objectification. Thus, the process of colonisation disproportionately impacted upon animals compared to people. The common cause between them, as identified by Hribal (2012), began to break apart. This comes into particularly sharp relief when we consider how people began to breed ponies specifically to be sent off to war: Those who were not killed on the battlefield were left behind to

face an uncertain future as it was deemed uneconomical to ship them back from mainland Europe. Regardless of the spaces we try and create for it, the limits of domestic animal agency are largely set by humans: The ponies in question could not "choose to leave the situation [or] ...set up a different life for [themselves]" (Meijer, 2017, p. 204). Rather, they depended on humans to protect them from the excesses of the system of commodification and bureaucratisation from which many of those same people were benefitting. By focusing simultaneously on both individual stories and the bigger picture, the analysis of this particular episode reveals both the "shared suffering" (Porcher, 2011) and the competing interests of people and domestic animals.

In summary, for the ponies themselves, whether being sent overseas in the early twentieth century or "down country" today, there is little or no opportunity to resist or reshape the encroachment of the system into their day-to-day lifeworld. Their commodification increased the likelihood of their being sent to war, for example. On the other hand, it was also possible that a given transaction might be the gateway to a varied and enjoyable working life in comparatively comfortable surroundings. That is, commodification raised the possibility of a harder life but did not make it unavoidable. After 1916 ponies (and people) were increasingly constrained by the forces of the systemworld, but they nonetheless continued to exercise often considerable agency within the lifeworlds in which they found themselves. It is to an example of one such lifeworld that we now turn.

The snowiest winter: The persistence of close collaboration between people and ponies (1947)

Across the UK, the brutal winter of 1947 was tardy but relentless. The snow arrived in late January, making roads and railways impassable, disrupting fragile post-war supplies of food and fuel. With petrol rationing still in force, there were few vehicles in the dales and even the army could not break through, instead using helicopters to drop hay onto the hillsides. Cut off from the world beyond, farms sustained heavy losses. One family recently arrived in the village of Grisedale lost most of the sheep they had brought with them, along with several cows and both their Clydesdale horses. In her autobiography, farmer Hannah Hauxwell (1989) recalls how the blizzards went on day after day, buffeting the hapless sheep until they came to rest in the lee of the drystone walls where many froze to the ground under several feet of snow.

The snowstorms exposed the interdependence of the people and ponies living on these inhospitable hills. A few miles south in Swaledale, farmer J.R. Longstaff and Dales colt Lummas Comet—then just two years old—are pictured in a now-lost photograph gingerly stepping over the wires atop a telegraph pole, as they carry hay to flocks stranded in outlying fields (Fitzgerald, 2000). Right down into the Peak District, similar scenes unfolded. Free-headed and heavily laden ponies would plough their way steadily uphill, then wait patiently while the hay was spread around. As they turned downhill for home, they would often skid headlong in their eagerness to start the same operation all over again (Hauxwell, 1989). Lummas Comet worked hard all winter. He went on to a successful breeding and showing career and his descendants are still there, living on the same hillsides where his herd remained throughout the worst of the weather in '47. In mid-March the snow finally melted. The infamous winter was over. People and ponies had kept the farms going together, with the result that—even today—the ponies are held in "jealous esteem by older dalesmen, who know their true worth" (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 46; Figure 5).

The bitter winter of 1947 lays bare the agency of both people and ponies in the face of extraordinary physical hardship. Together people and ponies delivered hay to thousands of stranded sheep, keeping animals and farms themselves alive. In howling blizzards, people and ponies engaged with each other via touch and body language. This was not strategic action, in which people pursued a predetermined goal and ponies simply followed instructions. Rather, it reveals the extraordinary work accomplished through communicative action (Habermas, 1987; Parkin, 1996). People and ponies were committed to a higher task and negotiated the best way to accomplish it, while remaining sensitive to their companions. For example, the farmers deferred to the ponies as to the safest way through the snow. Likewise, the ponies frequently floundered on the way up to the flocks, but even when they fell
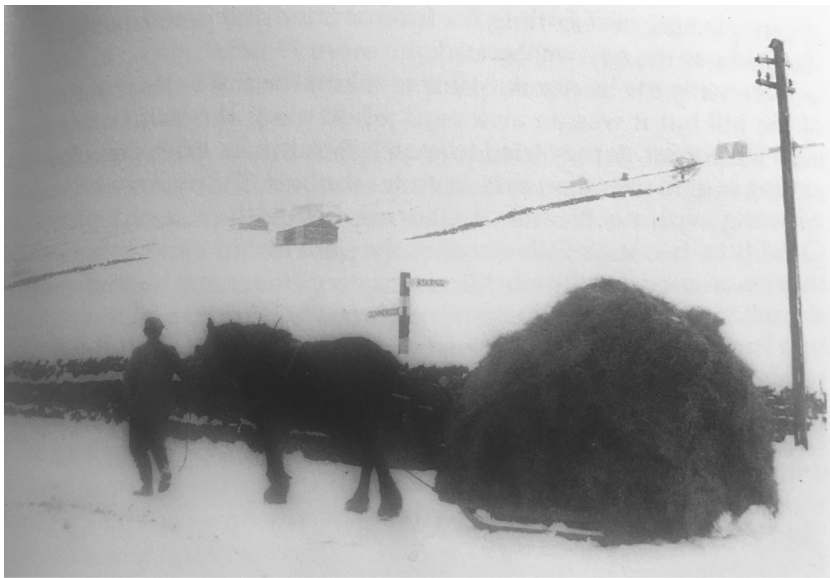
FIGURE 5 Dales pony hauling hay on a sledge, Swaledale, 1940 (Source: Fitzgerald, 2000)

thrashing onto their sides, they would wait for the farmer to extricate himself before heaving themselves upright (Fitzgerald, 2000).

Habermas suggests that these kinds of interactions transform participants on both sides, effectively reshaping us and making us who we are (Habermas, 1987). For example, Roy Charlton reflected that after coming together with people across generations, the ponies have lost some of the alertness that lives on in other moorland breeds (Charlton, 1948). That is, although horses are "by nature" prey animals who are primed for flight, Dales ponies are famously unflappable at least in part because they trust in "their" humans to keep them safe. In return, as one long-time breeder puts it, the ponies are held in "huge regard" not just by people whose forebears lived and worked with them, but within the wider community too. Thus, the ponies' contribution to rural life was both individual and collective. The story of 1947 provides a heightened example of the way in which ponies shaped and contributed to the lifeworld, or the so-called "storehouse of unquestioned cultural givens" shared across communities and generations (Habermas, 1990, p. 135).

From a wider perspective, this story also extends our understanding of why and how horses were still important to British farming almost 50 years after the arrival of tractors:

> That influence is to be found not in their own agricultural labour but in the manner in which farmers adopted, maintained and used the technology which eventually replaced them. Tractors were incorporated into an agricultural context shaped for and by horses (McWilliams, 2020, p. 45).

But across the high dales, the combination of inhospitable weather, rugged terrain and enduring interspecies relations meant that horses continued to play an active physical role too, even as their numbers dwindled elsewhere.

Their collective contribution to the lifeworld is captured neatly by one participant, who describes the Dales as a "backdoor pony." That is, the ponies were at once valuable traction units and well-loved family members (Fitzgerald, 2000; Graham, 2016). They were—of course—commodities that could be bought and sold, but they were also social actors of significance. One example of this is Linnel Comet, the influential Dales stallion immortalised on

FIGURE 6   Linnel Comet, 1939

a Players Cigarette card (Figure 6). He was bought by Roy Charlton as a foal, before being sold to Dales Pony Society President Norman Field in 1922. However, in describing how he "changed homes quite often, but always to good homes," one participant reframes these changes in ownership into a series of house moves. In so doing, she effectively de-emphasises Linnel Comet's status as a commodity to be traded, underlining instead the extent to which he also "belonged" to the wider community. This idea is captured in a contemporary news article, which describes how – "after four successful years in the Hexham Country" – Linnel Comet would be moving to Teesdale (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 108).

Ponies retained more agency than their commodity status alone might suggest. One participant who still works with ponies in his forestry business describes them as "part of the team." They not only drag lumber but teach new members—both human and equine—how to do the job. They know where to stand, which track to take, and what constitutes a reasonable load of lumber: If the pony refuses to move forwards, then the handler knows the "tush" is too heavy and they lop off a length of tree trunk. He explains how this active and skilful agency is perhaps more pronounced in Dales than some other breeds. For example, he questions the decision of some less experienced loggers to use non-native heavy horses, on the basis that they are seemingly less able to think for themselves in the same way. He locates this shared agency in the everyday work of people and ponies across generations:

> And all the old horsemen used to say your horse will tell you...If you're mowing grass your horse will tell you when to sharpen your blades.

He recalls haymaking with his old gelding, who let him know when the cut hay was fouling the wheels:

> He knew it was taking more pulling then it should've been. So he stopped. And it was just something that I hadn't noticed you see. So I pulled all this hay off...and then off we went again.

Ponies were thus relied upon to make good decisions in potentially difficult situations, whether negotiating inclement weather, uneven ground, or heavy traffic, for example. One participant made clear how this dynamic effectively shifts the balance in the horse-human relationship:

> They want to be able to risk assess. And if they've sussed it out then you know it's safe to go through it.

Here she is talking specifically about her experience of moving her ponies overseas:

> They instinctively seem to know to treat Florida water with more caution than Yorkshire water…It's like they seem to know that they need to have a good check…you just drop the rein to the buckle and you can see them looking, asking themselves 'are there snakes or alligators in there..?'

She goes on to suggest that this strong, communicatively based relationship cements the commodity value of the ponies. American buyers, for example, are prepared to pay "incredible sums" for a confidence-giving pony.

Ponies are thus active agents in reproducing the lifeworld in terms of production and knowledge. However, they also do so with regards to culture, beliefs and status. This helps explain the durability of the horse-human bond across time and among people who have little first-hand experience of the ponies themselves. For example, when the Dales Pony Society celebrated its centenary in 2016, Barnard Castle came to a standstill as people lined the streets to watch the "president's ride" pass through (Figure 7). As one participant observed, "it's like they belong in that town." The connection between ponies and people has therefore withstood successive socio-economic transformations.

By bringing Habermas' ideas to bear on this particular story, the above analysis confirms the relational nature of animal agency (Despret, 2013). His notion of communicative action, for example, draws our attention to the intersubjective relations at play in negotiating what constitutes a reasonable load or how best to navigate a hayfield. Sometimes that agency manifests in the familiar form of resistance, as when the overloaded gelding refuses to move. But this is the exception rather than the rule. Most of the day, ponies toil steadily to and from the conversion vehicle, or up and down the windrows, impatient to be off after each turn. This intersubjective focus makes clear how ponies bring their own experience and knowledge to a given encounter, with the appropriate course of action decided collaboratively, albeit using silent and largely imperceptible communicative acts (Zetterqvist & Lundgren, 2017). This supports Shaw's (2013) idea that animal agency ranges from the highly rational to the less articulate. Animals are constantly attempting to express their agency, but we only notice and appreciate that agency when we actively listen to them (Dobson, 2010). Habermas' understanding of the lifeworld enables us to do so, seeing how the mutual transformation engendered through specific horse-human encounters fans out far beyond their communicative boundaries. Ponies were acknowledged and appreciated as part of the family and wider community. They contributed to the "reservoir of taken-for-granteds" that make shared everyday life possible (Habermas, 1987, p. 124).

Even as their commodification reached its zenith in 1947, then, ponies were not only valuable things but social actors in their own right. We have seen how ponies were being disconnected from the norms and values of their traditional lifeworld—sometimes physically as they were sold "down south" or overseas. Yet, at the very same time, we have witnessed the dogged persistence of that lifeworld, as people and ponies laboured together in the face of deep snow and dangerous cold. Thus, the increasing commodification of the Dales disrupted or complicated this shared lifeworld but the agency of individual ponies—and its recognition by the people working alongside—continued.

In summary, this second story adds to our understanding of agency by confirming its relational and interspecies character. Animals emerge as active participants, who not only influence the humans they live and work with, but the wider community within which they are embedded and beyond. Habermas' concepts of communicative action and the lifeworld enable us to make this journey back and forth between the individual and collective level (Habermas, 1987). In return, the analysis extends this theoretical framework by illustrating how it can effectively take account of animals as well as people. We also see how the mutual transformation at the heart of these intersubjective relations go beyond communication to take on a physical character. In the case of the ponies at

FIGURE 7 The "president's ride" passes through Barnard Castle to celebrate the centenary of the Dales Pony Society, July 2016 (Source: Roandale Stud)

least, their very bodies and dispositions evolved in response to the work in which they were engaged. Finally, as an example of how Swart's (2010) "third wave" might be implemented in practice, this story shows the viability and usefulness of focusing simultaneously on specific animal actors and the wider relations within which they are embedded. By returning ponies to the centre of events, the analysis thereby contributes to a more complete history of this particular part of the world (Fudge, 2002, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper was to extend our understanding of shared interspecies agency by considering how this is embedded within wider economic and social relations. I initially developed a theoretical framework that extends our existing conceptualisations of human-animal agency by drawing on Habermas' ideas about rationality, the lifeworld, and the process of communicative action. I then illustrated the value of this theoretical model with reference to the shared experiences of Dales ponies and people in northern England via two vignettes from 1916 and 1947, which capture the increasing commodification of the ponies.

Returning to the research questions outlined above, two theoretical contributions emerge. The first question was how might recognising and recentring the agency of (domestic) animals help us understand history as an interspecies endeavour? The paper shows why and how we might consider domestic animals as active members of a broader, more inclusive moral community (Buller, 2016). Despite Habermas' reluctance to take animals into account, his ideas about rationality, the lifeworld and communicative action enable us to recognise them as active agents within their native communities and beyond, contributing labour, experience and knowledge to their encounters with people. The two vignettes reveal their "shared suffering" (Porcher, 2011) but also how this was undermined as the systemworld began to encroach on their common lifeworld after 1916, with their commodification disproportionately impacting upon ponies compared to people. I have tried to keep the ponies at the centre of the analysis throughout, but this is surprisingly hard to do in practice (Coulter, 2018). Historians, in particular,

come up against a lack of direct evidence from the point of view of animals themselves (Taylor, 2018). As suggested earlier, perhaps those ponies who were shipped overseas or found themselves pulling carts on busy city streets deserve their own separate stories.

This suggests the need for future research that explicitly centres the horse's point of view. One possibility might be to adopt a life history approach (Lanford et al., 2019). This would effectively decentre the human perspective by providing a wide-ranging yet detailed portrayal of individual (animal) lives. Such an approach would potentially imbue a given historical moment in time with context and nuance, while also enabling us to critically examine social processes from a less anthropocentric perspective. A life history approach is particularly well-suited to the study of native ponies and other equine actors because both documented pedigrees and the strong ties between ponies/lines and particular places enable us to trace the wider networks of particular individuals. Another way to re-centre the animal perspective is to move away from "seeing" the past. As Swart (2010, p. 257) suggests "our biological constraints show us a very different world." What she calls "horsestory" would place more emphasis on how horses (and indeed other animals) would also hear, smell, touch and taste the world around them (Smith, 2007; Swart, 2010).

Our second question was how does collective interspecies agency intersect with wider relations of power? The paper extends our understanding of the notion of progress, which is so fundamental to our understanding of history. While our theoretical framework raised the possibility that the systemworld of money and power would inevitably colonise the shared lifeworld of people and ponies, our two vignettes suggest a more nuanced picture. They tell a story of how Dales ponies were increasingly commodified after 1916. Their close, communicatively structured relationships with people were eclipsed by their economic significance as the ponies moved into cities, down south and overseas. However, these shared relations re-emerged powerfully in 1947, just as the demise of the ponies seemed unstoppable. This suggests that the displacement of horses from the centre of relations of production was perhaps not inexorable after all. Rather, what Habermas (1987) calls the system's own "irresistible dynamics" themselves enabled the lifeworld to re-emerge at potentially anachronistic moments. Contemporary challenges might provoke us into at least considering whether this might happen again and under what conditions.

The underlying economic and social imperatives that drove the replacement of ponies by tractors and motorised delivery vehicles in the 1950s have since shifted. More urgently still, climate change demands that we reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and reconsider our impact on the natural environment. This brings the opportunity to re-evaluate past methods against more contemporary criteria. The paper has mentioned their role in small-scale forestry, but horses are also being re-employed on farms and in the tourist industry for example (European Horse Network (EHN), 2018). Future research might help us come up with sustainable, innovative and collaborative solutions to contemporary challenges (or reincarnations of older ones). In this way, we might more actively involve other animals in our visions of the future as well as the past.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

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