Clear Round

Equestrian Embodiments – Race and Gender Matters

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Abstract

The object of this thesis is to explore the connections between race, gender and equestrianism. This aim stems from personal experiences of becoming a “horse girl” in a Swedish horseback-riding context, which indeed is lined with racialized and gendered norms. I am inclined to understand how equestrianism, i.e. horseback riding practices and communities, often comes to be considered as white and (un)obtainable for some and not others. Through interviews with nine equestrians located in the United States and observations in their stable environments, the thesis seek to investigate how gender and racial norms appear and materialize, and thus shape the interviewed participants lived experiences in horse-human environments. Through a theoretical framework of Sara Ahmed’s elaboration on phenomenology, Karen Barad’s term *intra-action* and Donna Haraway’s figuration *companion species*, the thesis discusses the multi-layered and complex ways in which race and gender is produced in *and* produces equestrian spaces and practices. The analysis shows that equestrianism is habitually oriented around whiteness, shaping the proximity between some (and not other) human and horse bodies in the regional landscape where the participants reside. Horses are both organized in and organize the contours of the city, entangled in the politics of racial segregation and the materialization of classed environments and neighborhoods. Equestrian communities, especially those that practice the disciplines of dressage and show jumping, repeatedly welcome and extend certain human (and non-human) bodies while stopping and questioning others. Further, different equestrian spaces materializes in differentiating and multi-sensoric ways, making certain color schemes, tactile sensations of textures and scents appear as racialized and gendered, and in turn forms the premises of belonging. The thesis then displays the political and affective connections between human and non-human bodies, objects and rooms in the specific context of equestrianism, and argues that such aspects must be understood as co-produced rather than separate entities. The discussion thus complicates binary dichotomies such as nature and culture, human and non-human and matter and discourse, showing how such aspects instead are entangled in the production of equestrianism and racialized and gendered “difference”.

*Keywords*: race, gender, whiteness, equestrianism, horses, orientations, intra-action, companion species
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Knowledge production is never an individual process or accomplishment.

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Part I: Introduction

Background

A “clear round” is “an instance of a horse and rider clearing all barriers without making any mistakes”¹. It is referring to an event in space and time in which an equestrian formation of horse and human are accomplishing the task of entering and leaving a show arena in the same state, whilst during the time in between conjuring the human-horse embodiment over the barrier obstacles in place. A clear round is an accomplishment, something to strive for in the competitive settings of equestrian sport. It is the notion of complete coherence between the rider and the horse, the achievement of not knocking down the poles, a refusal of the horse or accidentally riding down the wrong path. The round is clear without any disruptions of the orientation of the equestrian formation of horse and rider that becomes one in a seamless performance.

***

Since an early age, I have considered myself a horse-girl. I remember going to the stables for the weekly riding lesson while growing up. Traveling by the subway carts of Stockholm public transport in my fitted breeches (riding pants), knee high black boots and a velvet covered helmet and black stiff whip in my hand, I couldn’t wait to arrive to the riding school. It wasn’t just the anticipation of greeting my favorite pony or the freeing sensation of cantering around the paddock that produced this feeling. It was also the experience of the traveling itself, the “before” the arrival. Stepping off the subway cart, from which certain (white and middleclass) bodies already had made their exit several stations ago, I walked through a suburban setting marked by racialized and (working-) classed surroundings, such as the concrete high-rise buildings commonly imagined as inhabiting those considered as racially and classed Other. The riding gear and clothes that I was dressed up in did not fit in this environment. My body became apparent to me (and maybe to others). I felt off, looked at. It was something in the association between elitism and equestrian sport that manifested in this sensation, I almost experienced guilty feelings having to walk though an area known to be socio-economically marginalized in my fitted breeches and stiff boots in order to enable my

¹ https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/clear-round
arrival at the riding school, a leisure that is certainly costly. As the walk continued through the landscape, this bodily sensation began to change. It was by a crossroad where the concrete high-rises transformed to two-level houses with apple tree gardens and parked SUVS that my stride began to calm down. During the remaining two minutes walk through the villa neighborhood towards the facilities of the riding school and paddocks where horses where resting in the shade, I had forgotten that sensation of displacement. The line between my body and the spatiality around me faded, I was at home, in place.

My equestrian interest and the experience described above are lined with political dimensions. While the term “horse-girl”, often used as a substitute to “equestrian” in a Swedish context (pointing to riding schools’ general female domination) is regularly thought of as a strongly gendered position, other layers of the equestrian world are rarely up for discussion. It is for example frequently argued that stable girls “make good executive directors” and that the stable is a place of (female) empowerment. I see such accounts in many ways as a response to common sexist comments about “riding not being a sport”: a belittling of the connotation between riding schools, pony clubs and femininity. The sometimes-assumed correlation between horse girls and qualities made for the high status position of executive directing (such as leadership skills, thoroughness and toughness) does however implicitly bring the matter of socio-economic class into consideration. I experience that class is rarely a recognized explicit topic in general conversations about riding practices in Sweden, although it arguable carries significance in regards of who is able to enter (and who gets sorted out of) equestrian spaces, and the conceptions of gender that prevails there.

My memory of walking from the subway station to the riding school evokes dimensions of class, but it also speaks of the stable as a racialized sphere. I have in all the years of being invested in riding school communities continuously encountered the presence of white-passing bodies in stables, dusty haylofts, paddocks and leather infused tacks, a tendency noticeable unchallenged. If I pick up any equestrian travel magazine or flip through riding equipment and clothing advertising, there is a stunning homogeneity of bodies (blonde-haired, slender, able bodied, never in red lipstick) that are being presented next to the well-groomed

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2 http://www.dt.se/sport/ridsport/kronika-darfor-blir-ridtjejerna-chefer
3 In my Bachelor thesis “Häst tjejer, formationer av genus och klass i stallet” (2014), I explored the intersection between gender and class by interviewing teenage horse-girls in a riding school in Stockholm. I found that the participants whom I interviewed negotiated commonly disparaging associations to equestrianism in relation to their everyday practices and investments in the stable environment, to the exclusive class status of the sport. What was thought of as being possible (and impossible) to do and be (through aesthetics, behaviors and practices) in the context of the riding school was deeply intertwined with dominating Swedish imaginations of respectable classed femininity.
I have never experienced the equestrian community in Sweden discuss the white norms that permeates them. Instead, it passes as unmarked and given. The notion of the “horse girl” in the Swedish context is thus somewhat simplified, perhaps discussed in terms of gender and empowerment, but rarely in more multilayered regards which might offer a more complex understanding of horse-human spaces and the constructions of equestrianism.

In the fall of 2016, I spent an exchange semester at a (queer) women’s liberal arts college in Georgia, USA, as part of my Masters degree. There I came across a blog by an Atlanta resident, in which a discussion about “forgotten” African American equestrians takes place. The blog questions and challenges the notion that horse sports are solely performed by white Americans, by giving examples of black female equestrians in present and past time. The common association between horses, equestrianism and whiteness seemed thus to be significant both in Swedish and American contexts, albeit their imaginable regional differences. While thinking about the connection between race and equestrianism, I was reminded about the multiple associations to human/horse relationships beyond the Swedish horse-girl figuration: from the American myth of the free, white, Marlboro smoking cowboy to mounted police forces and the racialized violence associated with it. From the historical connection between horses and warfare and European imperialism to native American horsewo/men and black cowboys in sneakers and spurs in Beyoncé’s music video “Daddy Lessons”. While these associations may appear diverse and broad ranging, my point here is that relationships created between horses and humans carries different (but perhaps connected) racialized and gendered images and meanings.

In coherence with this play on imagination, I started to wonder, in what ways could the coming together of horse and human be understood in terms of racialization processes? How can my experiences of unmarked whiteness in Swedish riding school communities be connected to the forgotten stories told in a blog about African American equestrians, and the

4 https://bfequestrian.wordpress.com/
5 I understand the word “figuration” in line with Donna Haraway, who states that figurations are not “representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another” (Haraway, Donna When species meet, 2008, p 5). Cecilia Åsberg, Martin Hultman and Francis Lee further explains that a figuration is “not a metaphor, but it does embody and maps changeable subjectivity, meaning that a figuration is not a representation or universal, but rather positional (…) figurations, human and non-human thus index temporary domiciles, positionings, conditions and power differences that makes the appearance of the figuration possible” (Posthumanistiska nyckeltexter, 2012, p. 205f) (my translation). Thus, I use the term figuration as a way of underscoring the “becoming” and the imaginable in order to avoid formulations that evokes the idea of solidity or determinism, as well as pointing to the “coming together” of the agential forces of both horses and humans.
coming together of black equestrians in assorted group forums online⁶? While contemplating these thoughts, I scrolled through the Swedish Instagram account @svartkvinna⁷, and read about how an black Swedish equestrian, while being mounted on her horse, encountered a woman on the street commenting “I have never seen a black person ride before, I didn’t think that *they could do that!*”⁸ And I wonder, curiously (and appalled), how is the horse constructed as racialized animal? In what ways can the assumption that certain bodies (and not others) should have a proximity to horses, be understood?

Aims and research questions

I am in this research project interested in the connection between racialization and gendering processes and human-animal relationships, specifically in spaces where horses and humans are joined. Thus, the wide-ranging purpose of the thesis is to attempt to understand how equestrianism and processes of racialization and gendering are tied to each other, and to problematize and destabilize the often-assumed link between whiteness and horseback riding practices. The objective of the thesis stems from intent to challenge and put into question “unmarked” aspects of horseback riding communities and to further investigate the notion of the terms equestrian and equestrianism. I aim, in conversation and meetings with persons invested in equine practices, to explore and discuss how gendered and racialized equestrian embodiments are made (im)possible, and it is the locality of Atlanta, Georgia, USA, that becomes the primary demarcation for the project. The research questions for the thesis are as follows. What racialized and gendered norms emerge in the equestrian experiences of the participants? How does such notions appear and materialize? How does horses become meaningful in relation to human embodiments of race and gender, and in relation to equestrian materializations?

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⁶ The term “black equestrian” is used in group-forum settings on social platforms such as Facebook, which are often constructed as spaces for “minorities” within the equestrian field to come together and for example share experiences of racism in their stables and ridings schools.
⁷ This Instagram account presents anonymous examples of gendered racism experienced by black Swedish women.
⁸ Instagram @svartkvinna (Italics added)
Positioning and reflexivity

As I head back to the city of Atlanta, located in the deep south of USA, that have become my new place of temporary residency, I am no longer an official student at the college I became a part of a few months ago. Rather, my returning after a short visit in Stockholm (the place I call my origin and home) has a slightly different purpose, as I am now in the midst of doing research for this particular thesis project. In what ways does the particularities of these circumstances constitute the fieldwork for the thesis and the research project itself?

In line with Donna Haraway, I understand knowledge production as situated, partial and embodied. In other words, I reject the notion of an all-seeing objective researcher, and the epistemological claim that “something pure” is “out there” for the researcher to be discovered. Rather, the aspects of proposing questions, seeing, feeling and analyzing must be understood as always embodied and produced through the contextual premises of the meetings between researcher and participants. This epistemological understanding is an important move against universalizing theorizing traditions, criticized by feminist and postcolonial thinkers for being, in actuality, andro- and Eurocentric. There is no such thing as an objective or neutral researching subject, since local and contextual settings continuously shape “the seeing” and therefore the knowing. My assumptions, pretexts, what my body is able to see and feel, are all in direct correlation to my lived experiences, how I identify myself and what knowledge horizons I so far have been taking part of. The prominence of this clarification lies in the ambition to discard universalizing knowledge claims that so often has been put to use for imperialistic purposes. Thus, to position oneself and practice self-reflexibility while conducting research holds vast importance. For Haraway this entails conscious and persistent actions of accountability, as she states “we need to learn in our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and not” and “positioning implies responsibility for

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9 Haraway, Donna Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (1991) p.188
10 I have chosen to use the term “participant” when speaking about the persons who have been interviewed for this project. In relation to the terms “informant” and “respondent”, I see this phrasing more accurate in correlation to how I view the persons interviewed: as participants in the knowledge production that is this research project. This does however not mean that I don’t recognize that there is a certain power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewed. For further discussion on this, see for example Ulrika Dahl’s discussion in “Femme on Femme: Reflections on Collaborative Methods and Queer Femme-inist Ethnography” (2011)
11 Haraway (1991) p. 191
12 Haraway (1991) p.183 ff
our enabling practices”.\textsuperscript{13} By acknowledging one’s never finished or whole partiality, Haraway argues that there is hope for a sort of objectivity, through the joining of (and conversing between) multiple, embodied, limited and unfinished visions and knowledge productions. But how do you go about positioning your self? Although Haraway underscores that “there is no way to ‘be’ simultaneously at all”\textsuperscript{14}, the usage and interpretation of her epistemological arguments often seem risk to culminate either in a mandatory “check list”, isolated to a paragraph in the introduction chapters, or in some fixating of identity categories. While I believe it to be important to be transparent in how the researchers situated position becomes meaningful in relation to the knowledge claims the person makes, I find it precarious to state that I “belong in this and that identity box”, since it may appear as you understand for example “whiteness” as something fixed and preexisting, rather than a relational construct in continual process.

The fieldwork for this project has been conducted in places geographically located in another continent, country and city than the place(s) I otherwise reside in and call my home. As I travel back from a grey and cold February Stockholm to Atlanta, where spring and blossoming pink cherry trees already has made their entrance, the new inaugurated president Trump have issued an executive order that becomes commonly known as the “Muslim ban”. Veiled in reassurances of the nation’s “safety”, the president’s administration orders heavy restrictions for refugees, green card holders, permanent residents and tourists (among others) with certain racialized passport information, to enter the US boarders.\textsuperscript{15} As my travel documents states that I am born in Sweden, have a name that doesn’t connotate Muslim beliefs and my body’s complexion and appearance to a wide extent correlates with hegemonic perceptions of “whiteness”, I am not in risk of being looked upon as “Other” in a racialized sense. I am not stopped, not questioned. The border security person looks though my documents and visa waiver, and while resting his eyes on my face he says “Oh, Swedish, how nice” and let me pass through. This is just one example of an instance that reflects on how I, by inhabiting a body (that is attached to certain historicity and symbols) am appointed certain associations and privileges. I reject the notion that race (or any other “category”) is something stable or essential, but that doesn’t mean that bodies are not in constant processes of racialization. Bodies matter, and the localities of my and the participants’ situated embodiments have meaning in relation to the discussions and outcomes of this project. Our

\textsuperscript{13} Haraway (1991) p.193
\textsuperscript{14} Haraway (1991) p. 193
\textsuperscript{15} http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38781302
possible differences (and similarities) in experiences and perspectives are not made to be brushed over, but rather to be seen as points of departure that can render conflict, discomfort and/or coalitions, and therefore in my view, knowledge productions of value. It is by reflecting on such instances of meetings that I intend to display the ways in which this research project is produced through its’ situated position(s).

I am a person who acknowledges that I inhabit a body that in the meetings with the world repeatedly passes as white and female, which is something that places me in in specific contexts in particular ways. I identify myself in solidarity with anti-racist feminisms that challenges multifaceted power systems and I locate myself and this research project in line with such a positioning. I acknowledge that I am doing research in a local context with different (and perhaps similar) historicity than my place of origin and residency, and that I (alongside with the respondents) embody a knowledge horizon that is not all seeing, but partial.

**Field of knowledge**

This research project is centered on questions about how gendered and racialized norms appear and are materialized in the specific contexts of equestrian spaces. I am interested in the theoretical positionings of postcolonial feminists, post-humanists and the field of critical animal theory. As the specific theme of the thesis is human/horse relationships and equestrian figurations, I have focused on prior research and knowledge fields that facilitate that premise. In conducting this research, I have not been able to find any research projects that specifically undertake the questions that I am posing, not in the particular context of the American South, or with this actual joining of theoretical positionings. However, there is research written about the meaning of horse-human relationships in relation to questions of power, such as gender and race. And there is theorizing done about understanding human and horse interfacing through post humanist perspectives that puts the animal/human binary into question and destabilizes the notion that the rider and the horse are distinct entities. It is my ambition and hope as I place this research project in correlation between these directions of research, to display how their respective outlooks can be joined and discussed together to further understand the relationship between processes of racialization, gendering and equestrian practices.
Equestrianism, gender and race

Some research that have been done about the meaning of horses in society and the connections between power, gender, race and equestrianism. Throughout history, horses have played important roles in societal settings and in hierarchal organizations of humans. In “Master–Horse–Slave: Mobility, Race and Power in the British West Indies, c.1780–1838”, David Lambert demonstrates the links between institutionalized slavery and the symbolic usage of horses. Through historical documents and images, Lambert argues that horses was commonly used as a way of exhibiting the racial, classed and gendered hierarchies and organization principles that prevailed in plantation settings. The white slave master would be commonly mounted on a horse, and by his side the plantation mistress seated in a side-saddle, while enslaved black footmen would accompany the mounted couple by walking behind and holding on to the horses tail. Lambert calls this occurrence a form of “co-mobility” arrangement that demonstrated and maintained contextual racialized and gendered power structures in slave societies. This particular arrangement entailed entangled concepts of enslaved peoples’ “animalism” and horses’ “nobility”. The horse functioned as a privileged and classed animal, mounted exclusively by the white slave holders as a display of power, whilst enslaved peoples contact with horse bodies was conditioned through the hard body labor necessary to keep such animals. Lambert consequently states, “Hence, master-horse-slave was not just a reflection of white power a privilege, but a means through which these were articulated and reinforced”. The discussion presented in Lambert’s article then points out that horses have been historically meaningful in creating and upholding power relations, and specifically so in a racialized and gendered sense.

In relation to Lambert’s article, Gina Marlene Dorré argues in “Black Beauty: Dress reform and the Fashioning of the Victorian Woman” that the relationship between the usages of horses and processes of gendering have been historically blatant. Dorré draws a connection between the (classed and racialized) feminine sartorial practices of the Victorian era and the ways in which horses during the time were harnessed. The desired feminine tight-laced form, constructed through the shaping processes of corsets and other technological garments, had certain similarities to the particular ways that horses were harnessed in order to perform the preferred movements that connotated (white) beauty and class status. It can be argued that the similarity harnessing techniques of both horses and women reflects on a materialization of

17 Lambert (2015) p. 626
control by shaping the ability to move and take up space in particular ways, a way of “domesticizing” the considered “uncultivated” Other. As such, Dorré displays how concepts of beauty practices and performance of gender goes beyond binaries such as “nature/culture” and “animal/human” and instead ties such categorizations together.\(^\text{18}\)

In the book Race, Horse, Men: How Slavery and Freedom were made at the Racetrack, Katherine C. Mooney explores the forgotten histories of black jockeys at Southern American horse racetracks in the nineteenth-century. Mooney captures the intertwining of power, race and masculinity in the particular relationships between enslaved black jockeys and horse groomers and white male slave owners with an interest for the racetrack. In line with Lambert’s article, the argumentation of Mooney conveys that the societal prestige of horse owners fully depended on the labor of black “others” in the stables and on the horseback while racing. However exploited through the premises of enslavement, black (male) jockeys could climb a hierarchical ladder through the proximity to the high value horses that the white elite community bet their money on. By being trusted with the responsibility of the racetrack horses, it became thinkable for enslaved people to gain somewhat recognition as knowledgeable handlers of these high value animals.\(^\text{19}\) Such “freedoms”, states Mooney, must however be considered in relation to the realities of enslavement, circumstances that in the first place produced the line between white slave owner, their racetrack horses and enslaved black horse-handlers. The emancipation of chattel slavery led to the becoming of a number of black horsemen as sport celebrities, but where soon to be forced in to the shadows of history as the establishment of Jim Crow laws re-institutionalized black subordination and white patriarchal domination, which forced black bodies away from positions of power in white equestrian spheres.\(^\text{20}\)

In conclusion, Mooney’s research shows that horse spheres and the construction of equestrianism indeed has carried (and still does) vast importance when looking in to matters of power, gender and race. As figured in the historical context of Mooney’s work, horses has seemingly carried symbolic as well as practical significance in relation to such power dynamics.

The anthology Gender and Equestrian Sport: Riding Around the World is also worth mentioning here. Focusing on the question of gender and riding sports, the anthology covers research about changing gender patterns in equestrian spheres, constructions of femininity in


\(^{19}\) Mooney, Katherine C. Race Horse Men. How slavery and freedom were made at the race tracks (2014) p. 6ff

\(^{20}\) Mooney, (2014) p.213f
juvenile equine fiction, and masculinities in Spanish bullfighting on horseback. While the content of the different chapters range in context and theme, the common thread throughout the analyses is the recognition that equestrian spheres and discourses can both reinforce gender stereotypes as well as open up to overturning and destabilizing gender binary and power relations, as the editors state “within the context of equestrian sport, women and men find and deliberately locate themselves in positions from which gender stereotypes are renegotiable and renegotiated. Be they male or female, polo player, fiction reader or bullfighter, riders contribute to and experience gender through their resources and personal desires and skills – regardless of how differentially these may be allocated”.\(^{21}\) As such they argue that horse practices may transform into emancipatory potentials.\(^{22}\)

**Horse-human embodiments - posthumanist outlooks**

A part of the research field of equestrianism and the meaning of horses in society is posthumanist perspectives and the field of critical animal theory. Lynda Birke, a feminist researcher in the intersection of critical animal theory and gender studies with an interest in equestrian themes, states “the performance of gender, of femininities and masculinities, takes different forms in different ‘horsey’ worlds”, exemplifying the differences in associations between the cattle driving cowboy and show ring “dressage queen”.\(^{23}\) What Birke underscores that these particular gender performances (speaking with Judith Butler) cannot be understood solely in terms of human “intention” or caption, since that would be to “omit a significant actor (…), the participation of the horse”. In Birkes view, horse practices are indeed gendered (in many different ways), and horses play a significant part in such processes, for example in the way they are able to move in the dressage ring or the desired qualities of meres versus


\(^{22}\) For further research on the topic of equestrianism and gender, see for example Lena Forsbergs licentiate thesis ”Att utveckla handlingskraft, om flickors identitetsskapande processer i stallet” (2007), which investigates how gender is performed and negotiated in a Swedish riding school context. The study shows that particular traits were fostered in the stables, such as leadership skills and caring practices, and that the female domination that prevailed in the stable spaces in relation to the many different practices of horse handling enabled a flexibility of gender performance that were considered not available elsewhere. Worth mentioning is also the article “Dressage is full of queens! Masculinity, sexuality and equestrian sport” (2012) in which Katherine Dashper discuss how dressage, a particular form of riding style, can be understood as a space where masculinity and femininity norms are being negotiated. While Dashper finds that equestrianism constructs a sport sphere where different types of gender performances can take place (in contrast to other hyper masculine sport arenas), it is also underscored that equestrian sports cannot be considered as standing outside the hegemonic gender hierarchies and norms, but rather in constant negotiation with it.

\(^{23}\) Birke, Lynda & Brandt, Keri, ”Mutual corporeality: Gender and human/horse relationships” (2009) p. 190
stallions in horse breeding practices. Horses can then not be understood as passive props that humans take part in, but rather as companions or actors in the construction of gender in equine worlds.24

Ann Game problematizes, in similar fashion, the animal/human binary in the article “Riding: Embodying the Centaur” by displaying how equestrian figurations can be understood as transformative, a becoming of “one” rather than two separate entities of horse and rider. Game questions dichotomy divisions of animal and human by discussing the sensoric experience of riding: to be “one” with the horse, to “fly” and exceed one’s own bodily boarders by extending though (and with) the horse. As such, she argues, “there is no such thing as pure horse or pure human”, instead we are already “mixed” in the collaborate processes of equine practices.25 These examples displays how one can think about the coming together of human and non-human bodies beyond rigid conceptions of what a human/animal perception and action is/can be. However, I want to problematize and put in to question these post-humanist theorizations, by correlating the bodily experiences of “being one” with a horse to processes of racialization and gendering. If horses and equestrian activities are “made white” and indeed gendered (as I have experienced it), is it actually so that this sensation of exceeding one’s own “bodily boundaries” is equally possible for all bodies?

Theory

This research project aims to investigate experiences of gender and race in horse-human spaces. To do so, the theoretical framework for the thesis is placed in correspondence with the field of phenomenology and post humanist theorizing on non-human animal and human relations and materiality. As such, I am through the specific topic of equestrianism attempting a theoretical conversation between somewhat diverse ontological positionings (which will further be explained in the following pages). I do so because I believe that there are potential analytical proficiencies in allowing these outlooks to be tried along side each other, in conversation and perhaps in conflict. Thus, the thesis seeks out to formulate a knowledge production in linkage with multiple theoretical standings, in the anticipation of building correlations between them.

24 Birke (2009) p.189
**Phenomenology**

In this research project, I am interested in the relationship between racialization and gendering processes and equestrianism. I am asking questions about how norms are produced, materialized and experienced in spaces where horses and humans come together. In order to examine such questions, I turn to phenomenology, and it is particularly Sara Ahmed’s elaboration of this theoretic field that will be useful for my analysis. Ahmed position herself in dialog with phenomenology theorist such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose discussions revolves around the human consciousness and the lived experience of inhabiting a body, and places this theoretical perspective in correspondence with the fields of queer theory and critical race studies.\(^{26}\) Thus, Ahmed offers an important critical perspective towards the phenomenology discussions that have displayed how the body is intentional and always directed towards something. The intentionality of the individual is further incident to ones’ familiarity and habitual knowledge about the “order of things”, and enables the possibility to act and therefore extend in the world.\(^{27}\) Ahmed (in conversation with Franz Fanon) points out that *certain* bodies are able to experience such extensions while others tend to meet the world through friction, meaning that they are stopped, questioned and noticed. Ahmed argues that processes of racialization and gendering/sexualization generate such frictions.\(^{28}\) What bodies “can do” is thus dependent on how the world receives them, an inherited world that is already shaped through certain habits and histories.

An important term in Ahmed’s discussion is *orientation*. She states “Orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from here (…) the starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling”.\(^{29}\) Orientations thus revolve around how we direct our attention, how spaces appear to bodies and in turn, how bodies are able to inhabit spaces. Orientations can be said to be the background conditions that give shape to our perceptions and our un/easiness to do things. To be oriented is thus to be faced in a certain direction in the world, a direction that shapes our ability to act in it.

Ahmed suggests that *whiteness* can be understood as an orientation, meaning it functions as an inherited background for the experience of inhabiting a body. The historicity

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\(^{27}\) Ahmed (2006) p. 557

\(^{28}\) Ahmed (2007) p. 161f

\(^{29}\) Ahmed (2007) p.151
of colonization shapes the world by making it inherently white (consider for example institutional whiteness), and a white world receives different bodies in different ways.\textsuperscript{30} Ahmed states, “Whiteness is invisible and unmarked, as the absent center against which others appear only as deviants, or points of deviation”.\textsuperscript{31} In other words, bodies that are able to “inhabit” whiteness (which indeed is a question of contextual ideas about what can be considered white) will be able to feel at home in a world that is habitually made white and thus navigate in it with a certain ease. “To be oriented, or to be at home in the world, is also to feel a certain comfort (…) white bodies are comfortable as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape”.\textsuperscript{32} What Ahmed thus is pointing out is the connection between the embodied experience of racialization and the ability to become one with the world, or becoming worldly. Those bodies that in contrast do not pass as inhabiting whiteness instead experience a disruption, or in other words, a disorientation of spatial extension. It can be a matter of being physically blocked, noticed or questioned in public spheres (“why are you here? Where did you come from?”), instances that puts you out of place and in a sensation of discomfort. The experience of being disoriented, to loose ones way (for an instant, but repeated moment) have consequences for how one can move and are moved through life.\textsuperscript{33} Other normative structures, such as hetero- and cisnormativity can in similar fashion be thought of as orientations, where queer and trans bodies becomes “failed orientations”, a slant out of line; a disorientation.\textsuperscript{34} Whiteness (or other normative doctrines in place) as an orientation can in conclusion be understood as an already inherited but also constantly reproduced condition that fundamentally shapes the ways in which different bodies are able to be and act in the world, but also how spaces are produced as white and heteronormative by the proximity of certain bodies. To think with Ahmed’s phenomenology is useful for the discussions in this thesis, as I am inclined to analyze how equine worlds produce certain racial and gendered orientations, and how such orientations comes to be experienced and matter.

\textit{Materiality and post humanism}

This thesis explores materializations of gender and race in spaces where humans and horses come together. Accordingly, I am interested in how norms are materialized and lived in every

\textsuperscript{30} Ahmed (2007) p.153f
\textsuperscript{31} Ahmed (2007) p.157
\textsuperscript{32} Ahmed (2007) p.158
\textsuperscript{33} Ahmed (2007) p.161
\textsuperscript{34} Ahmed (2006) p.560f
day occurrences in equestrian contexts. While I am using Ahmed’s writings on phenomenology to understand how racial and gendered norms become *worldly*, meaning how normativity comes to shape (equestrian) spaces, making them ready to be inhabited by certain bodies, I am further inclined to elaborate this theoretical perspective in correspondence with a post humanist approach on materiality. This combination of theoretical approaches is elaborated on in Michell Göransson’s dissertation *Materialiserade Sexualiteter*, where Göransson states that “human bodies inhabit time and space, but it is equally important that time and space inhabit human bodies”.35 What is underscored here is the significance of the *mutual* intertwining of bodies and spatiality, and thus puts agency as a “human exception” in to question. While a phenomenology approach displays how material objects and spaces becomes transformative as extension of human bodies, a post humanist perspective could argue that materiality similarly becomes interlaced with human bodies, which in turn shapes the production of everyday life and human experience. Such a perspective questions the assumption that matter and physicality are something static, passive and unambiguous, and that *discourse* is the “thing” that can be considered performative and ever-changing. Instead, post humanist theorists have argued that matter should be similarly understood as process-oriented and transformative.36 This perception destabilizes a humanist centered ontology and offers a more comprehensive understanding of how different materialities (including non-human animal bodies and objects), play an intimate part in shaping of human condition.37 Matter and discourse are in this perspective understood as *co-produced* in ongoing processes of the becoming(s) of the world.38

Feminist physic theorist Karen Barad uses the term *intra-action* to pinpoint precisely this outlook. In relation to *interaction*, “which presumes the prior existence of independent entities” *intra-action* emphasizes how different agential forces co-creates the becoming of a phenomena.39 Intra-action challenges the conception that (active) humans inter-act with a (passive) world, and instead points to how materiality in different ways contributes to the shaping of social relations and meaning. Matter is not mere passive, waiting for representation, but instead always an ongoing process in meaning making apparatuses of


38 Åsberg, Cecilia, Hultman, Martin & Lee, Francis *Posthumanistiska Nyckeltexter* (2012) p.31f
39 Barad, Karen "Nature’s Queer Performativity" (2011) p.125
social life. It should however not be read as if matter, objects and things are ascribed agency in terms of subjectivity or intention, but rather that such aspects becomes meaningful in co-constitutions of the premises of human (and non-human) embodiments. I want to understand the term intra-action as a way of locating the transformative processes of materializations that constitute social life, in this thesis the aspects of gender and race in particular.

Further, equestrian spaces entail the specific coming together of humans and horses which leads me to converse with Donna Haraway’s elaborate writings that questions and destabilizes binary assumptions such as nature/culture, subject/object and human/animal. Haraway argues that such categories have never existed as solid and separate entities, by displaying how the (imagined) boundaries between human and non-human bodies, technology and biology are certainly not clear (or perhaps even there?), but instead very much entangled. In *When Species Meet* and *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Haraway suggests that the figuration *companion species* can be useful when thinking beyond binary and hierarchical categorizations that humanism and anthropocentrism offers. This figuration emphasizes the mutuality and multilayered dimensions of the co-produced relationships of humans and non-human animals. Thinking of for example laboratory rats’ involvement in medical research, dog breeding businesses and the usage of horses for therapeutic purposes, the distinction between what is human and what is animal becomes rather diffuse. Nevertheless, such rigid categorizations have been used to systematically construct and materialize certain power hierarchies between different lives amongst both human and non-human animals. Behind such set divisions lies politics of (amongst other things) gender and race. When talking about her dog and herself, Haraway states, “One of us, product of a vast genetic mixture, is called ‘purebred’. One of us, equally a product of a vast mixture, is called ‘white’. Each of these names designated a different racial discourse, and we both inherit their consequences in our flesh”. As such, Haraway displays the racial entanglements of the so-called “cultured human” and the “natural animal”, showing that such clear divisions cannot easily be made.

As numerous feminist thinkers have argued, the concept of human subjectivity and exceptionality has never been innocent or inclusive, but instead constructed through (amongst

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41 Göransson (2012) p.28
42 Haraway, Donna *When Species Meet* (2008) p. 4f
44 Haraway (2008) p.15
others) andro- and Eurocentric norms that consequently have constructed “Others”; the biologically determined, the colonized, the monstrous non-subjects. Cecilia Åsberg sums up Haraway’s argumentation by stating “cultural history and bio science makes it painfully obvious; we have never been especially human – neither in a humanitarian sense or with regards to our biological constitution”. I understand Haraway’s works as an elaboration on this kind of critique, but instead of pledging for an inclusion in the humanist logic (although it should be said that Haraway is careful in fully rejecting humanism as a doctrine), the suggestion here is that we can start to look in to the ways in which “we” are all entangled in constellations beyond such binary divisions, and how such entanglements are produced.

Methodology

Qualitative interviews

The material for this thesis is produced in part through the method of qualitative interviews with nine different persons who (to some extent) identify with the term “equestrian”. The methodological choice of conducting qualitative interviews is correlated to the research questions posed for the thesis, as I am interested in conversing with people about how conceptions and understandings about horse-human practices are intertwined with the embodiments and materialization of equestrianism. In relation to quantitative methods, the word qualitative points to the ambition to create a material built on descriptive, in-debt and explorative conversations with individuals about the questions that the thesis aims to investigate. The method of interviewing has enabled me to ask questions (and follow-up questions) about the participants’ experiences of riding communities, and discuss matters such as gender and race. These multilayered aspects of meeting participants in person are a vast reason for my methodological preferences.

The interviews for this research has been semi-structured, meaning that I in forehand have written an interview guide prepared with questions, categorized under roughly outlined research themes. The questions have been formed in correlation to the overall research theme of the thesis and in relation to the theoretical framework chosen. For example, as I have

45 Haraway (2008) p.18
46 Åsberg, Cecilia (2012) p.51 (my translation)
47 Kvale, Steinar & Brinkmann, Svend Den Kvalitativa Forskningsintervjun (2009) p.7f
48 Taylor, Steven J & Bogdan, Robert Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods (1988) p.7f
49 Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) p.22ff
been interested in how racialized and gendered norms are *materialized* in stable environments, I have asked questions about how the participants dress (and don’t) for the stable, what equipment they use (and don’t) for their horse, how they view different equestrian regions in Atlanta etc. I have approached the prewritten question guide with flexibility in the meetings with participants. I have not followed the guide strictly, but instead used it as a general outline of questions that I want to cover with each participant.  

Through the various meetings with the persons, the interview guide was modified as I noticed that certain questions needed to be further elaborated, while others didn’t acquire the space I initially thought. I became aware that I occasionally had to be more precise in my questioning, and sometimes inquire in more open and inexplicit ways, depending on how I interpreted the response of the participant. The flexibility of the interview method thus created vigorous meetings and dialogs, never in total similarity or complete diversity.  

The interviews have been recorded and subsequently transcribed by me. I have asked the participants for their permission to record the interview, and presented them with some of the benefits of doing so. The obtaining of recordings makes it for example easier for me not to misquote the participants’ answers word-by-word, and it allows me to listen to the interview again and detect nuances and details of the conversations that otherwise might have been hard to recall by memory.  

When transcribing the recorded material, I have not only written down the actual spoken words, but also silences and pauses which are marked by three period marks. Sounds like sighs and laughter is similarly integrated in the transcription, and accentuated words are underlined.  

Inspired by Michell Göransson’s dissertation, I have conducted some of the interviews in movement. In line with Göransson, I am exploring how norms and discourses are materialized through temporal and spatial settings. By placing the interviews in motion by walking through city landscapes, Göransson is able to converse about how gendered (and other) norms appear, take different shapes and changes as the interview moves through the city.  

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50 Taylor & Bogdan (1988) p. 105  
51 Taylor & Bogdan (1988) p.83  
53 As Barbro Klein writes in the article “Transkribering är en analytisk akt” (1990), to transcribe spoken word to writing is always analytical. The act of transcribing is not a matter of “capturing what really happened” in the spoken conversation, but rather marked by selective choices. To include laughter, pauses and emphasis on certain words (which in it self can be done in a number of ways) in the transformation to written text carries shapes the ways in which quotes is analyzed, or rather: is already an analytical move (Klein p.51f). Speaking with Klein, taking note of such nuances of communication reflects a certain dramaturgy of the conversation that might be valuable and proficient to take in to consideration when analyzing quotes or the situated interview situation it self.
spatial places in question. The theoretical interest in materialization processes is thus here mirrored in the specific way the interviews were being conducted. To the extent possible, I have conducted the interviews in the equestrian environment that the participants are active in. This has meant that I have been able to walk along with the participants as they proceed with their daily tasks and practices in the stables, arenas and paddocks. As we have talked about their perceptions and experiences of equestrian practices, we have also been directly involved with such routines. The interviews proceeded in this way have then placed the participants and me in closeness to the material matters that we are discussing.

To further cultivate the method described and applied by Göransson, I have in some interview situations been able to ride with the participants. This methodological approach serves to comprise the horse-human formation that occurs in the activities of riding. It has been important to me in this research project to engage in the contextual riding activities that occupy the participants’ time, in order to get closer to their (and mine) equestrian engagements. This methodological approach has introduced me to types of human-horse movements and styles that I until now never had attempted before, such as Western riding. As such, the activities between horse and human through the acts of riding have been closely interlinked with the conducting of interviews. In similarity with the interviews set in motion through stable work, this type of methodological approach mirrors the theoretical interests of the thesis: horse-human equestrian embodiments in relation to processes of racialization and gendering.

**Observation**

The material for this thesis is in part produced through the method of observation. As I have (mainly) met the person I am interviewing in the stable environment that they spend their time, I have had the opportunity to walk around these spaces before and after the recorded conversation. During such occasions I have been attentive to how the spaces in question are organized, how people move around and talk about horses, what sartorial practices and aesthetics that seems to be prevalent, what instructional signs that are present etc. I have, after being in the environment for some time, written down field notes that have contained happenings, feelings and interpretations about the places in question. The proficiency of this method is the ability to create a material that not only mirrors the dialog between the

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54 Göransson, Michell (2012) p. 37ff
55 Taylor & Bogdan (1988) p. 72f
participants and me, but also captures the material aspects of the environments that we are engaging in conversation about.\textsuperscript{56} I have for example produced field notes to describe the environments I have visited beyond the sense of sight, by for example describe other types of bodily sensations, such as scents and the feel of textures.\textsuperscript{57} It became clear to me that the fumy scent of a newly painted white picket fence around a horse paddock, or the texture of a synthetic leather saddle carried vast significance in the differentiating gendered, classed and racialized equestrian spaces I visited. The stable is indeed a place of multi sensoric experiences that I am inclined to incorporate in my analyses, for which the question of materiality and materialization is central.

Observations and interviews that have taken place in this fieldwork should not be considered as completely separate approaches, but rather as intertwined with each other. No face-to-face interview was conducted without me (consciously and unconsciously) observing the ways I interpreted that the participant interacted in relation to the settings where we were located. The observations have moreover functioned as a way to continually reflect on self-reflexibility; how I became involved in the places that the fieldwork has taken place. Observation is thus not solely about observing \textit{others} but also about observing \textit{your self} (my thoughts, feelings, hesitations, acts etc.), and how these meetings have produced such “positionings”. The mere construction of self and others became apparent through the method of observation (intertwined with interview sessions), and was something I found important to include as empirical material for the analysis, especially in relation to my own investments in equestrian practices and my positioning in the research field that I am critically examining.

\textbf{Participants and courses of action}

The material for the thesis is produced through in-debt interviews (that took place in February and March 2017 and ranged from 45 min to 1,5 hours each) and observations with and around nine persons currently situated in the United States, who in different ways are invested in equestrian practices. As I initially formulated the research topic around the different forms of web based forum groups that sought out to connect black female equestrians, I had the idea

\textsuperscript{56} Taylor & Bogdan (1988) p. 45
\textsuperscript{57} Oscar Pripp & Magnus Öhlander states that the term “observation” can risk of being misleading by the association to the seeing. To observe, they point out, is a multi sensoric experience, and the inclinations that can arise when observing or interviewing carries significant meaning in the ways in which the researcher further asks questions or intergrade with the surroundings (Pripp, Oscar & Öhlander, Magnus in Kaijser, Lars & Öhlander, Magnus red. Etnografiskt fältarbete 2011 p.127f)
that the selection of participants would be done around such notions. As time went on, I decided that these “identity markers” needed not to be so rigorously obeyed. “Equestrian” could instead function as a gathering term, through which differentiating gendered and racialized experiences and narratives takes place. The participants share amongst each other (and me) an interest in equestrian sports and activities, but their ages, racial identities and regional location vary.

I proceeded through a couple of reaching-out strategies to get in contact with people who could be interesting and interested in participating in this project. I made inquiries in different forum groups online, I emailed numerous stables and riding schools around and outside of Atlanta, and I contacted people directly through Facebook. At the beginning stages of this search for participants, I had some difficulties getting in touch with people. Many of the stables that I sent a description of my research project (i.e. to try to understand what I see as a common connection between equestrianism and whiteness and elitism) did not reply at all. In a later conversation with one of the participants, I realized that these particular equestrian centers were located north of the city, and therefore (according to the participant) associated with elite white communities that “like to stick to themselves”. She explained to me that it was probably my explicit formulation of race of the thesis idea that didn’t sit well with these particular equestrians, while persons from her stable (which was understood as quite diverse and located in a “black area” in the south parts of the city) were more enthusiastic to participate. Although I do not know if this was a fair explanation, I realized that my formulation of the inquiries perhaps needed to be formulated in more sensitive manners regarding matters of race, in order for me to not come off as too distinct and “critical”. It was a difficult balance to be both transparent about my research purposes and at the same time not “scare people off” as I re-formulated the inquiries for participation.\footnote{Taylor & Bogdan (1988) p. 93} As I got in contact with persons to interview, I proceeded to find more participants through the so-called snowballing method.\footnote{Taylor & Bogdan (1988) p. 95 f} The persons who I interviewed proposed other possible participants that I could get in contact with, and they were also active in “spreading the word” in their communities. As such, the participants’ contact network and their willingness to assist me shaped the research project in significant ways.

All of the interviews except for three happened face to face. One interview was done over Skype with a person located in the state of California. Although I have placed this
research (and the questions attached to it) in the context of Atlanta, Georgia, I wanted to include a dialog with this particular person as well. The person contacted me after I posted an inquiry in a Facebook group for “Black Female Equestrians”, and was interested in discussing the topic. As one of the few African American persons (that I got in contact with) who is invested in so-called “English” styles of riding (such as show jumping and dressage), my interest for her experiences surpassed the initial regional contextualization posed for this project. This person’s locality differs from the other participants’, but then again so does the localities of each individual participant in the Atlanta area. The topic of contextual settings and understandings was always a vivid part of the dialog with every participant of this project. The general delimitation regarding the selection of the majority of the participants (by their Atlanta localities) should then be understood largely as a practical matter, while it is also a question of contextualizing the research questions and analysis (albeit the local differences within the context of Atlanta). Two of the other participants were also interviewed over the Internet. Both of these persons live in the Atlanta area, but for various reasons could not meet me in person. I interviewed one of them via Skype, and the other by sending a shorter version of the interview guide for her to send me back written answers. As we couldn’t meet in person, these interviews became more restricted in the way that I didn’t have the opportunity to physically engage in their equestrian spaces. Regardless, the conversations that took place in this manner became rich in their own right.

I informed all participants that they were going be anonymous in the project, and I have consequently given them new names and reformulated any mentioning of certain places and persons that might tie the interview material to the participants in an obvious way. The brief descriptions of the participants presented in appendix 1 are based on their own accounts of how they identify themselves. The participants were also informed about my general ideas about the aims of the research project, and how their accounts would come to function as the material for my analyses. Further, I informed the individuals who I interviewed that their participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any point if needed.60

As a part of the theoretical framework for this thesis is a post-humanist theoretical ambition, it is also important to discuss how I understand and include the non-human animals that have been a part of the fieldwork. In “Ethnography in Evolution: Adapting the Animal ‘Other’ in Organizations” Lindsay Hamilton and Nik Taylor argues that animals do play significant parts in the construction of animal-human settings that may be of interest for

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60 Pripp, Oscar in Kaijser & Kvale, red. (2011) p.80f
ethnographic research such as farms, laboratories or abattoirs (spaces where concepts of identity, gender, class and race are composed). If non-human animals are meaningful in the ways in which humans organize certain spaces, they cannot merely be thought of in terms of passive bystanders, but then again not in the same manner as humans considering the difference in interaction and communication.\(^{61}\) Hamilton and Taylor concludes that it is crucial to break away from the concept of “pure” categories, such as “animal” and “human” and instead investigate how such categories are constructed as power relations, but also importantly not stable but fragile. A way of doing so is then to question and challenge methodological and epistemological approaches, and reconsider the hierarchical order of who and what can be considered as agential actors in both the symbolic and practical creation of social life.\(^{62}\) I understand the non-human animals that have composed the fieldwork as important actors and co-producers of the equestrian contexts that the thesis aims to investigate. Horses (and other animals) have for example participated in the dialogs between me and the interviewed persons, they have been noisy, curious or uninterested, and positioned and moved their bodies in certain ways that have changed or stabilized particular ideas about gender, class and race that surfaced in the conversations in the stables. This should not however be read as I see non-human animals as agential forces in the same manner as the interviewed persons in this project. While horses indeed have intention by a will of their own (however “different from human intention”, and shaped in the context of domestication) and play important parts in the materialization of equestrian spaces, their participation in this project is of course not the same as the interviewed individuals who have shared and discussed their experiences with me. The point here is rather to be observant to the ways in which different types of actors become meaningful in the spaces that the thesis seek to investigate, and thus put in to question the often assumed dichotomy of “human active agents” and “passive non-human others”.\(^{63}\)

After two months of fieldwork in Atlanta, I reunited with Stockholm. I continued to conduct a thematic analysis of the material, consisting of transcribed interviews and fieldwork notes to generate a structure of the material and my interpretations of it. By re-reading the quotes of the different participants, along side the scrabbled-down observations, I began to

\(^{61}\) Hamilton, Lindsay & Taylor, Nik ”Ethnography in evolution: adapting to the animal ‘other’ in organizations” (2012) p. 44f
\(^{62}\) Hamilton & Taylor (2012) p.47ff
\(^{63}\) Göransson (2012) p.28
organize the material thematically and in relation to the posed research aim and questions. Certain themes, for example the significance of location and different riding styles, reoccurred in the transcribed interviews and observation notes, and within such themes I could indicate various knots of information that could be tied to other types of themes in the dialogues between me and the participants. It has been important to me to value observation notes and transcribed interviews equally to the degree possible, meaning that the process of choosing analytical themes and forming analyses have been done so with a consciousness not to solely rely on the transcribed words or observations by seeing, but to take in to account the multifaceted and sensoric experiences of being “in the field”. This approach is thought out to mirror the theoretical framework of the thesis, in which the matter of matter and materialization is significant.

Part II: Analysis

Equestrian geographies

I am sitting in a friend’s car that I have borrowed in order to get to the destination of the first interview meeting (public transport in Atlanta is virtually nonexistent). The spring sun is scorching through the car window and I am sweating, trying to figure out how to work the air conditioning. The wool and acrylic mix of my jumper is becoming blatantly prominent by the minute as it is gluing to my lower back. I type in the location on the map function on the phone, hoping that the data that my American sim card consists of is sufficient for directing me to the right spot. Even though I have come to call Atlanta my temporary home for a college semester, it becomes apparent that my geographical knowledge of the region is limited; I have yet to become altogether familiar with the organizations and rhythms of the city. The technological assistance of the phone directs me towards the destination, but I am still unacquainted of what kind of place I will arrive to; who moves around in this area? What kind of stable environment will I encounter? Will I feel at home as an experienced rider, or

64 The course of interviewing, thematically organizing the material and writing and analyzing should not however be considered fully as a linear process. While certain actions may have happened in a particular time order, the process of analyzing and choosing themes and connections have continuously been shaped by my theoretical framework and the questions I initially have been interested in asking in this project. The thematic approach of analyzing the material should then be understood as already in correlation to the initial and continuous approaches to the project as a whole; an ongoing procedure.
65 Öhlander, Magnus in Kaijser & Kvale, red. (2011) p.271ff
displaced as an outsider, a temporary visitor? While being oriented in the riding schools of Stockholm through the sticky associations (of for example socio-economic class) attached to certain terrains and localities, I have yet to discover a clear idea about each region of and around Atlanta.

Atlanta, often thought of as the liberal capital of the otherwise southern conservative state of Georgia, populates about 5.7 million inhabitants when counting attached suburbs. The skyscraper skyline of downtown and midtown Atlanta, frequently described as the geographical, business and leisure center of the city, rises up from a far distance, contrasting the otherwise flat and tree dense landscape of the region. The neighborhoods that are spread around the city vary in size and demographical execution. Atlanta comprises areas where I was told by my (white and queer) college sisters to “not go alone, not even during daytime”, as well as middle class townhouse neighborhoods and swanky streets with assemblies of huge white houses executed in typical Southern manner; white column adorned porches surrounded by Spanish moss covered oak trees, architecture that recalls the historicity of plantation slavery. While the inheritance of “old cotton money” (as the participant Deborah described it) has established white wealth in many parts of the city, Atlanta (which the nation’s 4th largest African American majority city) is also known for being the “black mecca” of America; a center for black prosperity and cultural and political influence, notable the birthplace of civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

During the interviews with the participants, the conversations often revolved around questions of region and location in relation to their equestrian investments. As a way of trying to orient myself in the context that I am placing this particular research project, I asked them to figuratively sketch out a geographical understanding of how they viewed the equestrian world(s) of the city. Where could horses be found? What kind of specific riding disciplines

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66 For example, in the 2016 presidential election, a majority of the Atlanta inhabitants voted for the democrat candidate Hillary Clinton, whereas most of the remaining counties in the state voted for the republican nominee Donald Trump. Atlanta (alongside a few other exception areas) is thus a rare “blue” spot in another wise “red” state (https://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/georgia). This kind of division of politics by blue and red color is of course an over simplified way of trying to assess regional conceptions and ideals, and is certainly different from the political associations to red and blue in Sweden, where blue generally connotate conservative or liberal values (which in it self differentiates from American understandings of such labels), whereas red is associated with social democrat or left wing politics. As shown in the 2016 election and the aftermath, Donald Trumps populist and fascist politics and rhetoric might not even be considered as typical “red” in a traditional sense, perhaps more of a messy entanglement of “brown” and “white”.
67 https://www.forbes.com/places/ga/atlanta/
68 https://atlantadailyworld.com/2013/10/07/the-black-mecca-50-years-later-did-black-atlanta-get-to-the-promise-land/
were understood as typical in Atlanta? In what ways does localities matter in relation to equestrian activity in this particular region?

Frida: Oh, equestrianism in Atlanta is definitely thought of as a northern thing. I think of Buckhead, Marietta and…Alpharetta as prominent places for riding. The stables are scattered all over here in the northern suburbs. I guess…south of the city is…trail rides and maybe Western styles. More country (exaggerated southern accent) I guess. But that’s also common north of the northern suburbs, like way up north. (…) I think it has to do a lot with…rural and urban areas. I mean the “horsey” northern suburbs are not urban in the same sense as…the inner parts of Atlanta. It’s more…large acres of land and big houses…white picket fences. But not rural as the northern north or the south. That’s more the country style of Georgia. More so farmland and milk production than dressage or show stables.

When talking to Frida, a white woman in her late twenties who rides dressage in a riding stable located a thirty minute car ride north from the city center, it became clear that horse-human spaces and activities were habitually through of in geographical terms, making directions such as north and south logical markers of where horses are assumed to be found, or where certain riding activities and styles are commonly reoccurring and familiar. Frida’s understanding of the localities of equestrian activity around Atlanta was also reoccurring in the other participants’ descriptions. Horses were firstly expected to be densely gathered in suburbs north of the brown-beige skyscrapers of the city center, but were also (after some thought) considered to be found in other geographical locations and constellations. It appeared as if the equestrian communities in general were numerous and various in execution. From so-called English riding (meaning the disciplines of dressage and show jumping) to western barns that offers trail rides and barrel racing competitions, as well as horse polo amenities; a person enthusiastic about horses could apparently find various spaces to facilitate that interest in and around the city. The concentration of horses and equestrian activities in the northern suburbs was however a reoccurring theme in many of the participants’ accounts, often referred to as the “horsey” region of Atlanta.

Kiara: Just north of the city is usually associated with show stables for dressage and jumping. South and West are normally seen as mainly western riding, and so are also the places further north of the city.

As stated by Kiara, a 28-year-old African American woman, the association between the northern suburbs and equestrian density also carries a connotation to the particular riding
practices of dressage and hunter jumping\textsuperscript{69}. Other localities were rather thought of as connected to western disciplines, such as rodeo facilities and long trail rides on the countryside.\textsuperscript{70} As this geographical imagery began to take shape during the conversations with the participants, I recalled the initial stages of the fieldwork research when trying to figure out where I could direct my attention for possible interviews. As I had little knowledge of the whereabouts of riding facilities, I had typed in “Atlanta riding stables” to the search engine to get an overview of the places I could potentially visit. After discussing the connection between certain localities and equestrian practices in the interviews, I returned to the online search. Doing so, I noticed how the organization of riding facilities on the map in many ways resembled the geographical imaginations reflected in the interviews, as the search result firstly presented a zoomed in view of the suburban areas north of the city center. In order to become acquainted with other regions, I was required to take further action and move the mouse around the screen to make new red dots appear, informing me of alternative equestrian routes.

The organization of riding facilities on the map also indicated (in line with Kiara’s understanding) differences in what kinds of horse accommodations can be found in what places. Whereas the riding facilities in the northern suburbs had words like “stable”, “club” and “equestrian” in their titles, the stables south of the city were often named “barn” or “farm”. The words attached to the stable names presented on the online map reinforces Kiara’s and Frida’s (along side many other of the participants) understanding of the geographies of the riding styles that occur in Atlanta. In relation to Frida’s association between southern directions and “rural countryside” and northern suburban dressage communities, words like “equestrian club” in relation to “barn” attaches certain images to named places. A prominent feature in these associations is the distinction between English and Western riding disciplines, a distinction that seemingly has geographical and classed significance.

\textsuperscript{69} Dressage can be said to be the “mother seat” of all equine riding styles, and refers to a practice of performing and perfecting a number of required movements in an arena. It is a highly skilled form of riding, often considered as an art form besides the competitive aspect (for example the Spanish riding school in Vienna, Austria). Dressage is a competitive sport and makes up one of the branches of equine sports in the Olympic games, alongside other “English” styles of riding. Show jumping is another form of “English” riding style that also is featured in the Olympic Games, and refers to the practice of jumping a number of obstacles of certain heights in a particular order in an arena without tearing any barriers down in an allotted timeframe. (Fédération Équestre Internationale http://www.fei.org/)

\textsuperscript{70} Western riding disciplines are often thought of as an evolvement from cattle-driving and ranch work from horseback, which in present day have transformed to different forms of competitive sports, such as racing around barrels in specific constellations under a certain time frame, reining calf with a lasso on horseback, and managing to stay in the saddle on a bucking horse in the rodeo ring.
Thinking with Sara Ahmed, one might suggest that the participants’ accounts regarding geographical understandings of equestrian activities can be perceived as a particular and local orientation that involves implicit knowledge about demographical organization of the city.\textsuperscript{71} It seemed in the interviews as if there was a commonality in how riding facilities where thought to be systematized, in what direction one have to turn in order to encounter horses and horse people. Many of the participants explained the instant association between equestrian communities and the northern suburbs as a matter of socio-economic demographics. Tanesha, an African American western riding woman in her forties, explained that most people in Atlanta think of horse activities as an elite pursuit, something that requires a certain income and that takes place in particular types of neighborhoods. According to her, there is an association between elitism and equestrianism, which in turn is much connected to the specific styles of dressage and hunter jumping; disciplines that were thought of as more costly and exclusive than western riding. The northern suburbs of Alpharetta and Buckhead (places that were mentioned in many of the interviews), characterized by their large acre properties with well-trimmed gardens, gated communities and extravagant shopping malls, could according to Tanesha acquire such exorbitant stable environments. Titles like “Dressage clubs” and “hunter jumper associations” does then not only enunciate certain riding disciplines (or riding in general), but also particular classed spatialities; exclusive and expensive ones.

Even though the instant connection between equestrian communities and northern well-off suburbia life was prevalent in many of the participants’ accounts, a majority of them resided outside such geographical settings. When I interviewed Tanesha in the stable barn where she boards her three horses, about twenty minutes south west of downtown Atlanta, she stated, “It surprises a lot of people, that we have so many horses here! In a place so close to the city, so urban and populated by African Americans”. While she had previously stated that there is a correlation between riding and upper class marked localities, the surprised reaction described by Tanesha explicitly carries racial dimensions.\textsuperscript{72} The assumption that horses could

\textsuperscript{71} Ahmed (2007) p. 154ff
\textsuperscript{72} The intersection of class and race (and gender) in relation to social status, flows of economy and demographic organization has been discussed by numerous thinkers and theorists, and the connection between “black areas” and socio-economic class should not by any means be considered as something “new”. Post colonial theorists like bell hooks (2000), Chandra Mohanty (2003), Patricia Hill Collins (2016) and many more have done extensive works on how race, class and gender cannot be understood as separate power structures, but instead always intertwined and co-produced. It then hardly surprising that the participants draw connections between elite, upper-class marked areas and whiteness, given how racial and class oppression arguably goes hand in hand.
be found in certain places and not others seemed to be strongly connected to racial navigations of the city. Deborah, who identifies herself as a Jewish woman in her mid fifties, owns and runs a stable with focus on dressage lessons and summer camps south of the city center. As one of the few dressage stables not located in the “horsey” northern suburbs, she has often experienced a sensation of racial otherness when socializing with other persons in the larger dressage community of the city.

Deborah: We support the shows, and we are just a big part of the dressage community…but we are treated like…totally like shit (low voice), like the black…(laughs) like literary the red head step child, or the black sheep. They don’t get us. I promise you it’s a racial thing. We are on the south side of town, which means we are on the black side of town. If you go further south it’s not…it gets to be more white. So the further south barns aren’t treated that way. But they don’t get us, they can’t wrap their mind around us, so I think they rather ignore us. “There is Deborah with her motley crew of rag-tag city kids” and, you know “oh my god there is a bunch of black people”. (…) Cause white people don’t understand…”how can you live there? It’s all black”, well…it’s not like I am living in the ghetto. Like, black people can have money too! (laughs)

Deborah describes, in line with Tanesha, how localities south of the city are racially and class-marked. While the geographical direction of “Southerness” here seems to function as a mechanism producing “black” areas, Deborah also points out that such a distinction transforms when travelling further south of “the south side of town”. The connection between “rag-tag city kids”, the proximity to certain areas and racial otherness (literally described as the “black sheep” by Deborah) can be linked to Frida’s statement about rural and urban areas in relation to what places are considered to be “horsey”. Although the riding school that Deborah facilitates does provided the specific style of riding (dressage) that many of the participants connected to assumed and high status equine practices, the specific locality of her riding school interrupts such a implication. Although it should be said, as Deborah also points out, that there are evidently various kinds of “black” neighborhoods with broad-ranging income standards, the stereotypical perception that “blackness” equals generic urbanism, poverty and “ghetto” is clearly forthcoming in the experience of “not being get” as equestrians.73 While expressing a critical stance against these structures and attitudes, Deborah explained that she and “her” riders depended on the general dressage community in Atlanta to further their possibilities of “moving up” in the equestrian world. The prospects of financial funding, awareness of upcoming riding cliniques (a form of training session where one observes another rider on horse from the ground) and accessibility to membership

73 The participants alternated between using the terms ”African-American” and ”black”, both when it came to self-identifying descriptions and discussing aspects of demographics and racial issues.
discounts in tack and riding gear stores, stood in direct dependency to the general dressage community that resided in specific parts of the city and functioned as a center that “others” had to relate to.

Ahmed suggests that spaces are formed by the proximity to certain bodies, and bodies are in turn formed by the proximity to certain places and things. As explained by the participants, there is a rigorous connection between equine practices and certain people and places, making them understandable as “horsey”. In line with Ahmed, I interpret the participants’ geographical understandings of equestrian spheres as a way of navigating whiteness as an orientation, an orientation that produces equestrianism as white. Whiteness as an orientation shapes the “order of things”, in this case the ways in which certain localities, and not others, are considered as non-white and therefore not anticipated as places where horses can be found. Ahmed states, “when we describe institutions as ‘being white’ we are pointing to how institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others: white bodies gather, and cohere to form the edges of such spaces”. 74 Equestrian spaces (in Atlanta and other regions), specifically those that facilitate dressage and show jumping training, can be understood as an example of institutionalized whiteness; it becomes given in a specific way as an effect of certain repetitions. 75 In relation to the participants’ accounts, the ongoing enrollment of white bodies in areas of wealth and certain types of stable environments can be thought of as such repetitions.

**Hoof beaten paths**

But how, more specifically does equestrian spaces and practices become racialized and produced as white? It is, of course, not true that only white people are involved in or make up horse-human practices and communities. While many of the participants who identifies themselves as African American, black or non-white and engage in the riding style of dressage, consider themselves as minorities within their specific field of riding, other kinds of riding communities exists in and around Atlanta. In Tanesha’s stable I got to learn that there is quite an extensive black western community around the city, her stable making up one such space. During our interview, Tanesha introduced me to the group of horses and people that makes up the stable where she resides. She told me that in similarity to her stables, which is predominantly occupied by African Americans, she was familiar with other black cowboy

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communities around the Atlanta area. “We have horses, and there are so many of us”, she said while showing me a video on her phone of a massive gathering of riders on horses, riding after one another on a trail seated in western saddles or bareback, wearing cowboy hats or baseball caps, in jeans and sneakers or short western boots. Tanesha informed me that she considered it to be more common for black riders to be invested in western practices, such as barrel racing, and trail rides (both in the streets and in the woods), rather than the English disciplines of dressage and jumping. At the same time she pointed out that the existence of these black western communities are not widely known or recognized.

Riding seems maybe unobtainable for other groups of other [than white] cultures, and a lot of people are not familiar with the history of cowboys like Bill Pickett, and the black cowboys of Oklahoma, and the mid-west. They are not familiar with the history. They [black people] broke horses, they led trail rides, and driving of cattle. Those types of things. And we were on rodeo’s, back then as well. Participating and winning rodeos. But people don’t know that history. Cause, you know a lot of times history is whitewashed.

Tanesha understood the assumed connection between whiteness and equestrianism as an effect of the unawareness or ignorance of black equestrian history in the US. She is describing a general unfamiliarity with events that conflicts with the idea that horse handling and riding always have been reserved for persons who embodies whiteness. One can draw the connection that the unfamiliarity produces the idea that horses and riding is unobtainable for Othered racialized bodies, constructing the assumption of the equivalence between whiteness and equestrianism. While the histories of black riders and cowboys in the United States are according to Tanesha systematically forgotten or whitewashed, other historicizes surfaced in the participants’ accounts as an explanation of the association between equestrianism and whiteness. Jada, an African American woman in her thirties, who unlike the other participants lives in mid-coastal California, told me under our Skype meeting that equestrian sport certainly carries a strong association to whiteness. She has been riding for numerous years and is specifically involved in the discipline of show jumping, in which she trains and competes with her own thoroughbred horse, in an area that she considers to be of general high income. While she underscored that she has not experienced explicit racism or exclusion in the equestrian community where she is active, she pointed out that she is the only African American in her stable and that non-white persons are minorities (“you can count them on one hand”) in the dressage and show jumping communities in her local region.

76 A thoroughbred (“Engelskt fullblod” in Swedish) is a horse breed, known for their agility and speed, are often seen in the activities of horse racing and show jumping.
**Jada:** I guess if you take it back, historically back to England. The aristocrats…[riding] that’s how they got around, and then turning in to a sport. It maybe tended to stay within white communities. And maybe…and this goes back to socio-economics too, that minorities maybe didn’t have those advantages. So that would be considered a luxury. So maybe that’s why it tended to stay within typically white, Caucasian culture.

Jada draws a connection between certain historical aspects of the horse in society in relation to race and class, when discussing how equine environments tend to stay white. In similarity with many of the other participants, the image of English aristocracy, monarchy and imperialism prevailed as a reference when explaining the lacking of other-than-white bodies in many present equestrian spaces. The reoccurring argument was that riding (especially in the forms of the English styles of riding) often is considered to be a white thing to do because that is the way it “always has been”, producing an instant connection between the resemblance of (white) elitism and riding activities. This connection can be understood through the phenomenology perspective of Ahmed, as she argues that whiteness is habitual and inherited, meaning that certain repetitions over time produces orientations, or conditions that we all have to navigate.\(^{77}\) Whiteness is an orientation that puts certain objects, aspirations, techniques and habits within reach, which in turn affect different bodies in different ways depending on their ability to inhabit whiteness. Objects (which we for a moment can consider horses to be) “are familiar, for sure, but familiarity is also about our capacity to use objects, how they are within reach as objects we can do things with”.\(^{78}\) In other words, the image of the white English aristocrat mounted on a horse (or the often reproduced and romanticized imagery of the lone white American cowboy), which in Jada’s account transforms to a luxury sport that minorities rarely have had access to, is a specific historicity that is produced as familiar, and shapes the very order of things. It speaks of a certain inheritance that becomes meaningful in regards of the proximity of white bodies and horses, an implicit knowledge that “restricts as well as enables human action”.\(^{79}\) In other words, white bodies can be said to have assumed proximity to equestrianism as a habit or aspiration because of these “family lines”. The heritage of particular historicity makes riding and closeness to horses (which indeed requires closeness to other objects and habits, such as economic capital, ability to facilitate horses’ needs etc.) appear to us in a certain way (made

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\(^{77}\) Ahmed (2007) p. 150

\(^{78}\) Ahmed (2007) p. 155

\(^{79}\) Ahmed (2007) p. 155
for some and not others, elite, white etc.), and can be thought of as an already (hoof) beaten path.\footnote{Ahmed (2006) p.554f}

But it is, as Tanesha clearly points out, not accurate that horses only have historically been in proximity to white human bodies (given the examples of the African American rodeo master Bill Pickett, and the black jockeys in Katherine Mooney’s research\footnote{See “Field of Knowledge” in chapter 1}). The “whitewashing” or the forgetting of such histories that she describes can in the words of Ahmed be understood as a mechanism of whiteness as an orientation. It functions as a way of putting things in their place and straightening the “slant” of the line that navigates the orientation of whiteness.\footnote{Ahmed (2006) p. 560ff} Horsey paths (the ways in which particular equestrian figurations already have had imprint on the organization of equine gatherings) are a matter of repetitions that orients the participants (and others) in specific ways regarding equestrian practices. They can through Ahmed’s perspective be considered as familiar lines, or paths inherited by specific a historicity, producing directions for the order of things (in this case the assumed correlation between whiteness and equestrian sport) and how we are faced in a certain direction regarding the particularity of equestrianism. The general unfamiliarity with trails (meaning the specific histories of black equestrianism) that has deviated from the “(hoof) beaten path” (that is, the correlation between whiteness and equestrianism) produces the sentiment of unobtainability to horses for non-white persons. The unfamiliarity of such stories becomes unfamiliar because of their very inability to resemble what is already inherited as repeatedly familiar.\footnote{Ahmed (2007) p.155}

So, the “whiteness” of equestrianism can be thought of in terms of inherited paths or habits shaped by certain repeated histories. Such repetitions produces a proximity between riding activities and white human bodies, a proximity that reflects what is familiar and already put in place. Whiteness “trails behind” and makes up a background of certain already beaten paths.\footnote{Ahmed (2007) p.155} I here want to suggest that materiality plays an important part in the production of “horsey paths” and “horsey localities” that surfaced in the introduction discussions of this chapter. While I was driving towards the meeting with Frida in the northern suburbs of the city that was considered as typically “horsey” or “equine” by a majority of the participants I noticed how “horsiness” became more and more spatially obvious as I left the densely

\footnote{Ahmed (2006) p.554f}
\footnote{See “Field of Knowledge” in chapter 1}
\footnote{Ahmed (2006) p. 560ff}
\footnote{Ahmed (2007) p.155}
\footnote{Ahmed (2007) p.152f}
gathered high-rise buildings and asphaltered streets of the central parts of the city. Half an hour even before arriving to the Frida’s stables by car, I was met by several large horse paddocks, bright yellow road signs with either a black contour of a mounted rider on horse or “Slow down! Horse crossing” written on it, as well as commercial images and signs of stores that facilitates riding gear and tack. Horsey region indeed. While doing the interview with Frida, she showed me around the premises of the rather dressage stable where she activates her riding interests. “As you can see, here is one of the many trails that are reserved for riding”, she said and pointed to the numerous hoof prints sunken in the mixture of sand, fine gravel and sawdust that made up the appointed path that seemed to stretch into infinity, lined with oak trees and newly painted white picket fences. “Even people who doesn’t ride often come here just to be in the environment. Like looking out on the paddocks with horses eating grass, open acres and butterflies…I think people who live in this area enjoys that a lot. Like it is part of the whole atmosphere here, and I guess it can be perceived as a very ‘elite’ or ‘white’ atmosphere”, Frida explained.

Thinking with Ahmed, one might suggest that horses are in place in some places more than others. Certain spatialities extend their shape (their ability to take up space), for example in the notifications in form of road signs or the proximity to the devises needed (such as saddles in a saddle store) in order to perform riding activities. Horses are enrolled in places through those kinds of navigation devices, and almost seems as if they are “sinking in” their environment. Likewise, horses also extend certain spaces, their arrival and ability to stay in place produces specific milieus shaped by their bodies. While previously discussing (hoof) beaten paths as a metaphor for how equestrianism is repeatedly oriented around whiteness, the instance at Frida’s stable also shows that materialized hoof beaten paths in the fine gravel and sawdust is producing equestrianism as spatial, and certain spaces as equestrian. Such sunken in markings in the ground requires repetitions of specific activities, and creates (actual material) paths that navigate future actions (“you should ride here”). In Ahmed’s words, it becomes easy to recognize the very shape of a place, by how it is habitably shaped.

If I turn to Karen Barad’s term intra-action, it is possible to further complicate Ahmed’s phenomenological approach. Barad points to the mutual constitution of agential forces in the performativity of phenomena. In other words, Barad argues that there are no preexisting isolated bodies, things or meanings that “meet each other”. Rather, a phenomenon, in this

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85 Ahmed (2007) p.158
86 Ahmed (2006) p.553f
instance “equestrianism”, should be understood as formed within the co-constitute entanglements of human and non-human bodies, matter and discourse. Matter is then, according to Barad, not an end product, but instead an “active factor in further materializations”. In relation to the analysis how certain areas extend horsiness (and thus those considered as equestrians), I want to argue that the specific materiality of the fine gravel that truckle under pressure of a hoof, the flapping wings of butterflies that gather in floral dense large acre paddocks (that indeed requires economic capital and legal approval to uphold) and the steadiness of the metallic road signs that are marked institutionalized orders, can be considered as such entanglements that produce equestrianism as spatial, and certain spaces as “horsey”. Horses (and their riders) are subsequently “in place”, or in other words mutually constituted through of these particularities, these specific intra-actions. Barad’s theoretical approach then complicates Ahmed’s phenomenology further, by pointing to how matter “itself” becomes meaningful in the becoming “of something”.

While horses and equestrianism seemed to “sink in” (speaking with Ahmed) or being mutually constituted and materialized through multiple intra-actions (in Barad’s words) in the northern suburbs, it became apparent by the participants’ accounts that other places did not provide the same effect. In the opposite side of town from where Frida engages in her equine practices, Deborah asked me if I was familiar with the buggy drivers of downtown Atlanta. While the memory of the large horses attached to carriages filled with tourists resurfaced in my mind, I remembered the sensation of surprise and confliction when seeing (and hearing the hoof clatter from) them treading the concrete streets between the beige skyscrapers. My sensation of confliction came to make sense when discussing with Deborah, who expressed an irritation over what she considered as a general disliking or annoyance towards the buggy drivers and their horses.

Deborah: So the carriage industry also falls in to that…you know…I don’t want to use the word “ghetto”…but people say it is a ghetto industry…and “poor horses on the streets”…the horses are fine! (...) I mean the buggy drivers, who usually are black… are seen as a few steps above carnies, like carnival workers, like lazy and… and they are not!

87 Barad (2011) p.125
88 Barad (2003) p. 810
89 It should be pointed out here that the issue of horses’ “hominess” in urban landscapes must be understood as a contextual and temporal matter. One can for example argue that horses and carriages have had a given (and well-respected) place in “inner-city” spaces throughout different historical contexts. Horse-human figurations are also “in place” in “some places” in present day, thinking about for example the royal guard parade in Stockholm. One must however take in to consideration the contextual differences and meanings of such instances, given the institutionalized position of the monarchy in Sweden in relation to the “outdated” or “suspicious” buggy drivers in downtown Atlanta.
They are great guys! Kooky, funny guys. Are they PhD candidates? No. But so what? And I see the same thing with the black cowboys. Like our neighbor just around the corner rides a lot on the streets... just like “Yeehaw” trotting and cantering down the road, and people coming to our stables often seem bothered by this. They feel inclined to ask me if his horses are ok.

The experience that Deborah is describing is noticeably lined with racial dimensions and hierarchies within the larger equestrian community around Atlanta. She speaks of a general “bothersome” sentiment towards horse-human appearances in certain regions, leading to derogatory designations and acts of questioning. I want to consider the material aspects of “streetness” and “urbanism” as significant here, given previous discussions about materializations of horsey paths and localities. In contrast to how horses (and their riders) seemed to “extend” or be co-constituted through intra-active materializations in northern suburbia, Deborah’s reflections and my own reactions towards the downtown buggy drivers speaks of a difference; there is a friction that can be detected here. Horses, or equestrian figurations are not “sinking” in amongst the skyscrapers or in the pavement of the streets. Instead they become detectable, clattering hoofs against concrete and asphalt appear and causes concern, “should they really be there?”. There in no resilient scent of a newly painted white picket fence producing and marking the expansions (and control) of horse bodies (their ability to take up space), and in contrast to the specific material of gravel trails in the suburbs that literally co-produces hoof beaten paths, the packed and rigorous formation of concrete material does not bend and enclose the memory of horses bodies trailing.

Ahmed states “a path is made by repeatedly passing over ground (…) when people stop treading, the path may disappear”, pointing to repetitive production of normativity and how we become oriented. 90 Street riders and downtown buggy drivers and their horses keep treading, but don’t seem to produce clear paths; instead they cause concern or the sensation of surprise. They are not “at home” or “in place” in such environments. 91 Speaking with Barad, one can make the suggestion that the multiple intra-actions (the stiffness of the concrete, the closeness to beeping cars, the politics of racial segregation), that here materialize “urbanism”, disables such localities of being understood as horsey. In other words, materializations matter in the construction of equestrianism and equine spatiality, in this instance indeed racialized. Matter (the concrete, the cars, the metallic horseshoes that clatter loudly, the scent of a white

picket fence and the texture of fine gravel) is then not an end product, but rather, entangled agential forces that co-constitute the “right” and “wrong” ways for equine spaces to form.

“So you work here?” And it’s like “no…I own this place”

Equine practices have demographical significance in and around Atlanta. Geographical markings such as north, south, urban and rural functions as ways for the participants to navigating the equestrian communities and spaces of the city. I have so far discussed how equestrianism is oriented in specific ways, there is an “an order of things” when it comes to the assumed proximity between people, places and horses. “Proximities” refers to the (assumed) physical closeness to horses that some places inhabit (such as the density of stables and riding schools in the northern suburbs), but also to the sensation of closeness or distance to certain familiar lines, or the “beaten path”. In the interviews with the participants, we conversed about how they experience racialization of equestrianism and equine practices. In what instances did the correlation between whiteness and equestrianism become blatant? How does race shape the ways in which the participants incorporate themselves in equestrian spaces and activities?

Riley: often at times, when people show up to our property they are kind of shocked when they see who runs the place. They are shocked when they pull up and see this little black five-foot-one girl, handling the horses (...) I can always tell as soon as someone approaches me, that I wasn’t what they expected to find. A lot of times when I greet people in a positive and friendly way, I haven’t received the same energy. Sometimes people just look at me. And look around, “what is going on?” (...) Or asks how long I have been helping out here, “who owns the place?” and so on. And I always know where those kinds of questions stems from.

Riley, who identifies as an African American woman in her mid twenties, owns and runs a trail riding business with her sister and mom in a fairly rural area outside of Atlanta, surrounded by dairy farms and smaller country manors. While I helped out brushing and tacking up the horses for the next costumers that where coming to ride, Riley described how she has experienced race in the specific equestrian context. The reaction of shock and confusion (that she mentioned was most common to get from white folks, but also others) is

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92 A "trail ride" can be described as a riding activity where a number of riders mounted on horses, ride after or next to each other, walking, trotting or cantering in trails in forest environments or on streets. It is usually considered a very relaxed way of riding, not consisting of any competitive element, and makes for a good way of riding for those who have little experience. Trail rides are commonly commercialized, making it a probable option for “outsiders” without horses of their own or memberships in riding schools to partake in riding activities for an hour or two.
by Riley experienced as being connected to her race, gender and height (indeed the very intersection of them) and to the specific context of controlling and running a horse-human environment. Through Ahmed, the experience exemplified above can be understood as a consequence, or better yet as a production of the (equestrian) world as oriented around whiteness. Ahmed argues that whiteness as an orientation, meaning a familiar background of which all bodies are forced to navigate, holds its place by the comfortability of certain bodies and the discomfort of others. In other words, whiteness becomes habitual, given, unmarked and in place by allowing the extensions of white bodies, making them feel “at home”, and noticing others as deviant, making them seem to stand out from the place they arrive to. White bodies extend in a world that is habitually made white, meaning their presence will be perceived as worldly, given and “in place”, or maybe yet, not perceived at all. It becomes, as put by Ahmed, “hard to distinguish where the body ends and the world begins” for those that are able to inhabit whiteness. Ahmed states, “Bodies stand out when they are out of place. Such standing re-confirms the whiteness of the space”. In other words, white bodies extend in the world (becomes worldly, at home, unquestioned, comfortable) at the expense of other bodies, or rather, through the noticing and stopping of certain bodies and not others.

Riley describes how race profoundly outlines her equestrian environment. The reactions of shock, disbelief and confusion can through the lens of Ahmed be understood as an example of how equestrianism and equestrian space orients around whiteness and other normative habits, which then shapes Riley’s possibility to extend in the room. She explained that most people think of riding as either something that elite white women do, or if not white and upper class, in the form of black, male cowboys on rodeos or in the streets. The embodied intersection of her race, height and gender is not what is “expected to be found” in the role of control in an equestrian space, and becomes therefore a point of attention. Riley’s ability to “sink in” or extend in the room is disrupted by the very reaction of disorientation. She is not expected to be found in an equestrian space and therefore she becomes “found”, a pointed out body that is faced, and thus forced to face itself. When one is forced to face oneself, the contour of ones’ body becomes apparent; it becomes easy to detect the friction between yourself and your surroundings. This results in an uncomfortable feeling, an awkwardness that disrupts (even if just for a moment) the sense of knowing where you are going and doing.

94 Ahmed (2006) p.159
The questioning from people who come to ride can with the words of Ahmed be understood as a way to re-orient the setting. These kinds of instances does not only disrupt Riley’s navigation (she has to put energy in to reassure her own belonging in the place), but also the people visiting, as they “blink and look again”. Questions like “who is in charge?” and “how long have you been helping out here?” can therefore be read as ways of trying to navigate the disruption of the orientation in place. To put things back in order can in other words be interpreted as putting Riley “in her place”, in other words a disciplinary measure.

It is important to note that Riley doesn’t always experience this explicit sensation when being in the stables. It is by the instances of arrival by temporary visitors that she becomes put out of place, a point of disorientation. Or, better yet, it is possible to consider that it isn’t in fact the visitors that are arriving, but instead Riley. White costumers who come to trail ride do “arrive” in the sense that they physically travel in to Riley’s grounds, but it seems as if they are “already” in place when they notice Riley (and when Riley notices herself) in the way that they do. As discussed in previous chapters, equestrianism and equestrian space can be seen as habitually and inherently oriented around whiteness, it becomes in that manner institutionalized. There is already an order of things, an implicit knowledge of “where these questions stems from”, in which the “homeness” of Riley’s grounds gets jolted. Even though she is already there (in a place she considered as home), it can be interpreted as if she has to “arrive” over and over again. In similarity to Riley’s account, Sydney shared her experiences of how race comes to shape her investments in the equestrian world.

**Sydney:** We were at a [dressage] show once, and this lady just came up to me and said “why are you here?”…and…I understood, but my mom…she just taught me self-restrain, how to just brush things off like that you know “why are you here?”, “how did you get here?” that kind of thing. “why are you doing this?” and you just looked like…there were only two black girls in the show (laughs), and I don’t want to assume…but (laughs)

Sydney is eighteen, identifies as African American, and rides and competes in dressage at a stable south of the city. As we were recording the interview, she was mucking the stables, moving horses around and sweeping the stalls. She introduced me to the pony who she usually trains and compete with, talking warmly about their special relationship and his quirky personality that she have gotten to know. She said that she consider the dressage world to be very white, and definitely experience herself in that world as a racial

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96 Ahmed (2006) p.159
minority. While feeling comfortable in the stables located south of the city (because of it’s racial and class diversity) where she trains and helps out, traveling to other places for competitions was in the interview described as another story. Sydney told me that show venues are often located in the densely gatherings of dressage stables in the northern suburbs, where the embodied sensation of race comes to surface in more explicit ways. The quote displays, in similarity to the experiences of Riley, how some bodies comes to be received as strangers, while others as already in place. The instance described is, to say the least, very explicit and aggressive. The explicitly of race in equestrian settings was also expressed by Kiara who stated that she often had experienced being placed lower than her white opponents in jumping competitions, even if she had in fact had a better ride or a faster time. She distinctly remembered that her trainer more than once had to stand up and argue with the judges about her unfair low rankings.

Ahmed argues that bodies that can inhabit whiteness are enrolled, or extended through spaces by not being questioned. But those whose orientation to extend is interrupted by the very markings of their bodies are also enrolled (however in other manners) in institutions that are oriented around whiteness. Ahmed contends that these kinds of “stopping devices” both stops you, but also “requires you to stop”. In other words, those who are not “recruited” to extend in a space must still be “recruited” as deviants in order for the space to maintain its particular form.97 The un-comfortableness that is (understandable so) experienced by Sydney and Riley through these kind of stopping devices has, as Ahmed underscores, political and affective consequences. To repeatedly lose ones orientation requires extensive work in order to find the way again. One remembers such instances even if one forgets; it leaves imprinted marks on your body and forces you to find other ways to navigate. Riley has to “recover” from the questioning of her belonging and role in the stables. Sydney has to learn to acquire self-restrain, to be “ready” to “brush things off” in order to move forward from such disruptions, an inherited knowledge here described here as passed town from her mother. Kiara’s possibilities of doing well in competitions and thus “move up” in her equestrian community becomes a fighting matter of being judged fairly by those already established in the position of control. These embodied sensations of friction, pressure and un-

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comfortableness are, by using Ahmed’s words, “another way of describing the social and existential realities of racism”.  

**Deborah:** So we had two young black girls from our stable showing at a dressage competition in the north, and their moms were there… and we laughed (talking in softer lower voice) oh my God! Everyone wants to “nudge, nudge wink, wink”, “be your best friend”… that is interesting in itself… (sighs) it’s not a negative thing… of course… their hearts are in the right place… but it is definitely (draws breath quickly) “a black person!”, “some of my best friends are black”, they want to show “I am ok”.

In the quote by Deborah, I detect another form of how equestrian whiteness holds its place. Her experience can be read as a “less aggressive” instance of a stopping device. It rather speaks of a desire to approach certain bodies in order to portrait oneself in a specific way. The reassuring actions of “being ok” with black persons arriving to dressage competitions, is what Ahmed describes as an instance of when arrivals that disrupts the orientation of an institution is “used as an evidence that the whiteness of which we speak is no longer in place”. It can be interpreted as the familiarity of whiteness becomes all too familiar when some bodies appear in the wealthy dressage environments lined with massive properties in colonial style, reminiscing the local historicity of race. The insisting “ok” of arrivals that disrupt the orientation of whiteness might have “good intentions” as Deborah points out, but as Ahmed argues, holds whiteness in its place by the very facing of certain bodies and not others. Bodies that are received as “guests” doesn’t extend in the room, they might be invited in but on the premises that that they serve as “happy markers” of diversity, making whiteness “undetectable” again.

In contrast to Sydney and Riley’s experiences of whiteness and racism that makes out the equestrian worlds they move in, Jada said that while she recognized herself as a racial minority in the stable in mid-coastal California where she resides, she doesn’t feel as if that environment or other equestrians resents or points her out.

**Jada:** Once you start riding… once you have invested and have purchased a horse, you become one of them! Because by taking this on… everybody becomes common because you own a horse. You come to the same plane field because you own a horse. (…) Once you are in it. I don’t really feel that elitism anymore (…) I mean, I have never felt out of place like that. Once you own a horse, you become one of them. When you buy your horse, that’s your ticket. You are in, you know? I have never felt any elitism or racism or anything like that.

100 Ibid
Jada describes that she doesn’t feel explicitly out of place, she instead consider herself to “be in” in her equestrian community. Owning a horse is here understood as the ticket to be enrolled in such worlds, it becomes a way of “come to the same plane field”, of taking up room and being taken up by rooms. Owning a horse results in that Jada doesn’t feel that atmosphere of elitism anymore; it has disappeared as she has “sunken in” in the same plane field. It does however not mean that the implicit knowledges of “the order of things” (meaning the ways in which equestrianism is oriented around whiteness) are forgotten, but that the reminiscence of such knowledges is (at least temporary) less apparent. Jada experience a sensation of being in place, of being oriented because of the proximity to her horse, and in turn her horse’s proximity to the equestrian space. Through the perspective of phenomenology, I here want to reflect on the possibility to understand the horse “as a ticket in” as another way of saying that horses (under particular circumstances) stops being “just” a horse body and instead transforms as an extension of Jada, enabling her to be “in place”, to be oriented.101 One might suggest, with the reasoning of Ahmed, that horses transforms as “taking the shape of whiteness” in white places such as the stable environment where Jada spends her time, and that the “whiteness of the horse” can extend the human body, and thus function as a way of approximating its “style”.102 If so can Jada’s experience be understood as an instance of when human bodies are able to extend in space through the proximity to the horse body; the closeness to the horse generates a feeling of comfortability of non-friction within herself.

I have so far discussed how equestrianism comes to manifest as geographically (and demographically) significant, and that certain localities and not others materializes as “horsey”, or as right ways of performing equine spaces and activities. Familiar hoof beaten paths can be seen as inherited orientations that the participants navigate through their equestrian investments. The whiteness of equestrian sport, and maybe horses themselves, produces and maintain its form, or hegemony, through the repeated attention directed towards some (and not other) bodies’ arrival. Such instances are exemplified in the participants’ accounts as experiences of disorientation or disruption, by being questioned, looked at or in other ways marked out as deviant. Whiteness can also hold its place by pointing to the insistence of “welcoming” those who deviates, which again turns the attention away from

itself. But, as shown in the quote by Jada, white spaces can also become accessible by investing in certain “objects”, in this instance a horse that carries a potential to extend your belonging. In the following chapter, I want to further investigate more specifically how the participants’ equestrian spaces take particular shapes and styles and become thus comes to materialize in certain ways. How do objects, bodies and meanings become entangled in these becomings? What importance does sartorial practices, textures, and color schemes come to have in the production of horse-human spaces as racialized and gendered?

**In the stables**

The beige, muted red and sage green tones in the check-patterned scarf suddenly seemed to have a firm grip around my neck. I became aware that the fibers of the cheap acrylic material created friction in form of humidity. The pores in the back of my neck pushed out little beads of sweat, and transformed my skin and the scarf into a sticky entanglement. It was after Tanesha had shown me her stables that she took me out for a car ride in her typically southern huge pickup truck, that the sensation of my scarf almost choking me appeared. Tanesha wanted to introduce me to one of her friends, “a real black cowboy, who is very knowledgeable about horsemanship”, so we travelled from her stables to the house and backyard on which “Mr. Cowboy” lives and keeps his horses. It had been raining, so I was glad that I wore my old weathered stable boots when we walked up the muddy trail leading to the porch. Tanesha introduced me, saying I am from Sweden and doing research about black riders in Atlanta. “Oh so you are from Europe? And you ride?” Mr. Cowboy asked and I nodded and replied, “Yes, I do, since the age of seven”. He looked at me in silence for a moment more and then said, “Well then… you ride dressage do you? Yeah you have the style for it, dressage girl” chuckling and pointing on the long corner ends of the tied up scarf.

In the meeting my scarf became a point of attention. I felt a little exposed, as I had put much thought in to dressing the part as a cowgirl in Tanesha’s western barn, wearing blue unwashed jeans and a black and white button down loose fitted shirt. My attempt to fit in, perhaps as a desire to feel the comfortability of “belonging”, failed. I felt a flush of concern, “do they consider me an imposer, a dressage snob, a white gaze”? While having left my usual riding outfit at home in Stockholm (a beige quilted fitted jacket, brown-beige breeches and knee-high tight black leather boots, an outfit I often jokingly refer to as my absolute “most upper class”) the subdued colored checked scarf with long and dangling end corners from the neatly tied knot became a marking of sticky associations to “Europeness” and “dressage style”. The tied knot around my neck (despite its cheap synthetic behavior) seemed to be tied in with other significant knots, specifically classed, racialized and gendered ones.103

**Ghetto pink and elite neutrals – the question of color**

Sartorial practices and aesthetics in the stable came to surface when talking with the participants about how they experience their horse-human spheres. Color schemes were one aspect that seemed to become important in the ways in which specific equestrians gatherings

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103 Field diary, February 2017
tended to look. Again, the differentiation between English discipline (meaning dressage and jumping) and Western (meaning barrel racing, rodeo and trail rides) appeared in the conversation when trying to distinguish how the stable and the persons in it came to look and feel. Deborah said that she could sometimes feel frustrated in dressage settings, as she experienced them to be molded in a particular and solid shape that was not easily shaken, and stated that she was very particular in trying not to reinstall such norms at her own riding school in the attempt to provide a more open space for people from different backgrounds and aesthetics. “You should be able to come here and not care about what you wear or how much it cost, as long as you wear a helmet and solid shoes for safety”, she said. However, as the girls in her riding school often aspired to partake in regional and state competitions, they were in that respect faced with the sartorial codes and practices of the general dressage community as a whole.

Deborah: The bright colors are just seen as wacky and weird…(talks lower voice) just kind of ghetto I guess. (talks in normal tone) Not classy! They are just not seen as classy. (…) And that is such a typical white thing, you know? The neutral color scheme, like brown, beige, dark blue…maybe, maybe light pink. You try to fit in with that whole environment.

Deborah, who has experienced moving between different riding styles and communities (she was once a buggy driver in downtown Atlanta herself) argued that the aesthetic of the English disciplines is produced through certain color schemes, and through the resentment and exclusion of others. There is a hierarchy stated here where colors of certain saturation are understood as disrupting the “natural” environment, while others seem to extend it. Deborah also pointed out that while bold colors could be perceived as acceptable or even fashionable in other equestrian contexts, such as in a shiny silk dress worn in one of the many socializing events or galas produced by the dressage community, the particularity of the stable did not extend such hues. Some colors transformed as “wacky”, “wild” and “ghetto” when reaching the riding school, while others came to be seen as “classy” or “neutral” and thus “in place”.

Sydney and Hannah, who both train and compete in dressage, told similar stories. It was particularly when they traveled north from their southern riding school to the sites of the competitions that color (in many regards) became apparent, specifically so because competitions call for specific riding gear in order to be able to enter the arena. A form of “orthodox” uniform is both anticipated to be found and applied in the sites of dressage competitions.
Sydney: you wear black knee high boots, white breeches, white shirt and a dark blue jacket. It’s a very…strict dress code! (…) Black jackets, or maybe blue jacket…you know. Some people do a brown, really just…laid back colors, nothing bright and too much for show days. They want to keep it very neutral and traditional. I think it can definitely be the eliteness of the sport… you know the discipline, and just looking fancy…clean cut, you know? I do like it! I mean I don’t like getting my whites dirty (laughs) but it does look nice, it looks beautiful. Especially when you have the whole team all wearing our white outfits and our black boots…it looks really nice! Everything kind of comes together. I think if you would wear like a bright orange or pink you would not be considered as equally…professional. You wouldn’t blend in with the horse as much. Like it would distract from how you and the horse look together.

Hannah: You have to look right, and professional. So you have to look neat (…) like very neat colors. But we are at the same time dealing with horses, and it’s not going to look perfect or correct every time. We should be able to adapt. Like its very hot and humid in Georgia, so we should be able to wear a short sleeve polo shirt. The cut-off ones. And some people do that, but it’s not super common. It seems more important to keep the traditional look. To not stand out.

Sydney and Hannah where in line with Deborah considering the dress codes of dressage as strongly connected to class, which is seen in the describing words “elitism”, “tradition”, “fancy, clean cut” and “professional”, associating a rather conservative and calm appearance. They also speak of coherence between riders, a sort of forming of “team-ness”, perhaps a family resemblance (if speaking with Ahmed). But it is also apparent that the concept of familiarity is entangled with horses, riding performance and the environment in which it takes place. Through Ahmed, I interpret the sartorial practices and color co-ordination, in part, as navigation devices used to orient in the dressage world. When one is familiar with the order of things, one can become seen as part of the family by approximating its style. “Its style” should here be understood as marked as classed (elite) and racialized (not “ghetto” and “typically white”). Ahmed underscores the significance of intersectionality when speaking of institutionalized whiteness, saying, “how we inhabit a given category depends on how we inhabit others”. In other words, certain class privileges might give you the resources needed for inhabiting the style of the space you are approaching, making it somewhat easier to successfully blend in. To be understood as an (professional) equestrian (and not as wacky, out of line) in the dressage setting, you have to look unison with the horse you are riding, but also with other riders. The colors and cuts of the dressage clothing can function as “objects” that can extend you in the room, creating a sensation of belonging, of being “in place”.

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Hannah and Sydney’s proximity to certain sartorial knowledges and actual garments can enable their orientation in equestrian spaces, albeit their reoccurring experiences of being stopped and questioned. They explained their experiences of dressing up in the competition gear as a sensation of getting in a focused mindset, an important ritual in aiming for the gold the arena. To “achieve a focused mindset” can be seen as another way of saying that one is oriented, and thus able to act in the room in question, in this case to achieve a winning performance with the horse at a competition. To break away from the rigid color schemes and sartorial codes could not only exclude you from entering the competition (!), but also disrupt your ability to be seen as performing dressage in a harmonic, qualified and respectable way. Perhaps you would feel self-conscious, looked at and marked out, making the concentration of “becoming one” with the horse in the riding performance a bit more difficult.

Turning to Barad, I interpret the hegemonic color schemes of the “horsey” spaces as a part of the materialization of equestrianism as specifically classed and racialized. The traditional “neutral” colors of riding attire were said to blend in with the calm environment of white picket fences, dressage horses’ light brown manes and chestnut colored saddles, making it seem as if “everything comes together”. In Barad’s words, colors schemes can be seen as part of the intra-active materialization of equestrian spaces. It functions here as producing “belonging” and “professionalism” as well as boundaries, what is not “in place”, what is un-blendable. I understand Barad’s usage of the term intra-action as a pointing out of how matter matters, not an “end product” or a passive surface, but rather an active factor co-producing meaning.106 Dressage clothing gear is repeatedly manufactured and produced through certain color schemes that are entangled with other significant classed worlds, such as fashion labels that produce equestrian inspired clothing (for example Ralph Lauren and Hermès107), business suit attire and perhaps the imagery of upper class English country side residents on horses in brown tweed jackets. The production of equestrian color schemes is further enrolled in economic flows and commerce, where typically blonde, white slender bodies are assumed to model these riding gear styles. In Barad’s view, all of these aspects can be considered as intra-active co-constitutions of the production of equestrianism as racialized and classed. In other words, the materiality of equestrian clothing and its’ color schemes are then not a thing, but a doing.108 Matter, in this case specific clothing and colors are then not a result, or something static that “we” apply meaning to, but rather something that co-produces and constitutes

106 Barad (2003) p.821f
107 See Appendix 2
equestrian embodiments. The materialization of equestrianism, here seemingly thought of as white, proper, elite and traditional, should not however be understood as altogether given or determined. As Sydney and Hannah points out, the humid climate of the American south and the dusty dirt of the stable environment are matters in constant battle with the premises of the associations that is tried to be conveyed. It takes time and effort (washing the whites, applying perspiration control) to repeatedly maintain such appearances; the “neutrality” is seemingly not neutral or “natural” by any means, but should instead be considered as a constant production apparatus.109

In contrast to the beiges and dark blues that were central in the dressage and show jumping riders’ narratives, Tanesha stated that bright and vivid colors were very much welcomed in the western stable where she resides.

Tanesha: Our girls ride in hot pink and lime green, their tack is color coordinated, purples and turquoise. You can surely see us from a far when we come down the trail. (…) I think people in more… I guess…elite stables don’t find it classy, like we are taking away the classiness of their sport. But we wear whatever we like, we don’t care about what they would think because we make our own way (…) we want to be noticed!

The usage of certain colors and hues that Tanesha is speaking of can be understood as a form of resistance against the rigid and excluding structures of the English riding communities that repeatedly becomes considered as a “unmarked center” in equestrian Atlanta. Hot pink and lime green become noticed; they are literally “in your face” when the eye reacts to them from a far, riding down a trail or street. Usage of certain colors can here be understood as a way of forming ones’ own space, indeed as a part of the materialization of alternative forms of equestrian rooms. Ahmed states that disorientation doesn’t always have to feel negative, but also “gives us a different viewing point, [and] disorients how things are arranged”.110 In other words, to experience “becoming deviant” carries the potential of gaining a critical perspective, to become aware of how the “order of things” is arranged through certain repetitions. Whiteness as a background can then be detected, revealed as something that is not neutral or given, but repeatedly produced.111 In this instance, the usage of neon colors like hot pink and lime green can be perceived as a strategy to tackle the common connection between

109 Numerous theorists within the field of post colonial- feminist, and critical race theory have argued for the importance of decoding the “neutrality” or “invisibility” of whiteness, pointing to the many mechanisms that produce whiteness and maintain its’ unmarked centrality. See for example Ruth Frankenberg (1993), Richard Dyer (1993), Frantz Fanon (1952), Katarina Mattsson (2007), Maria Lönn (ongoing dissertation project, Södertörn Högskola)
whiteness, elitism, certain aesthetics and who can be considered as a serious and proper equestrian, and as a refusal to assimilate to such notions. Seemingly, “forbidden” wacky and “wild” (not proper) femininities are permitted to take place here. Tanesha experienced riding down a trail or a street with hundreds of other black riders in “unconventional” color schemes as a sensation of standing out and being looked at, but also claiming space through the notion of such disorientation, if only for a brief moment. To repeatedly standing out in this manner then carries the potential to produce other stories and alternative equestrian belongings.

**Rugged jeans and fitted breeches – gendered and racialized materializations**

When talking to the participants about material conditions of their equestrian experiences, it wasn’t only colors schemes that seemed to become meaningful in relation to questions of difference, inclusion and belonging. Gender and race were also understood to be constituted through certain *textures* and materials in different riding gear. I went into the interviews with the pre-conceived notion of the connection between assumed femininity and riding practices, an understanding formed through contextual Swedish discourses on riding school culture and so-called “horse-girls”\(^\text{112}\). It became apparent during the conversations with the participants that the specific imagery of the American cowboy and western riding culture deflected such an assumption in their contextual setting. Many of the participants pointed out to me that maybe it was the lacking of exposure to western riding and “cowboy culture” that made riding practices in Sweden appear as “feminine by default”.

\(^{112}\) See part I, Introduction
was through different forms of materials that constituted specific aesthetics and shaped the rider’s appearance. Fitted dressage breeches and stiff rugged jeans were examples of such materializations that were considered to establish (gender) difference. Through Barad, one might consider the specific material constructions of an unwashed jeans trouser and a stretchy fabric of a pair of breeches as examples of how gender norms comes to appear and materialize through intra-actions in the specific context of equestrian rooms. The connection between “rugged roughness” and masculinity is here seen as a matter of the specific texture of unwashed denim fibers, and how such fabrics come to make the body emerge in the equestrian setting. Such textile fibers should also be seen as activating local (and national) histories of cattle driving and rodeo riding cowboy masculinities, producing a sensation of American masculinity family lines that legitimizes male participation in equine practices.

The stretchy material (often a mixture between Lycra and cotton) of a dressage pant (breeches) were thought to be problematic in relation to appearing masculine, because of how the contours of the legs (of some bodies) comes to appear in them. The distinction between what is “rough” and what is “refined” can also be perceived as connected to previous discussions about specific forms of equestrianism as classed and racialized, recalling how certain color schemes intra-act in the constitution of English disciplines as “elite” and “professional”. Accordingly, the difference in a jean material and a snug dressage pant was by the participants thought to be connected to the specific movements assumed to be performed in the different disciplines of western and dressage. A fitted breech pants, lined with suede leather alongside the inner parts of the thighs, helps to hold the body in place in the narrow and flat dressage seat. This was considered important since a dressage rider aims to appear effortless in the saddle and in the contact with the horse. In the production of dressage as something calm, proper and respectable, the specific shape of the dressage pant became significant in generating riding as an “art form” (not wild or wacky), in many ways associated with ideals connected to the supposed white upper class. A rugged jean on the other hand, enabled the possibility to slide around in the much larger and broader western saddle, which became essential as the western discipline was in some measures assumed to be about speed and danger.

Carol added that while English riding discipline stables in many ways becomes places that enables (white) women and girls to take up space and further their equine interests

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113 Barad (2011) p. 125
114 Compare discussions in Thompson & Adelman (2013) about different riding practices and diverse constructions of masculinity.
because of the general association to femininity, higher competitions and shows always produced a more “gender-balanced” environment, and that a lot of (white) men do successfully compete in the higher classes of the discipline. She concluded that it was surely the upper class marking that made some male dressage performances (although commonly read as “gay”) under some premises possible. Perhaps one might assume that the “neutral” and “classy” color schemes of equestrian dressage wear that activates ideas about whiteness, elitism and professionalism in some ways could transform the immediate connection to “un-manliness” to an instance of gender negotiation.

Kiara told a similar story as Carol, saying that she knew of many male riders who would refuse the English riding discipline because of the assumed connection to femininity, and specifically so regarding the types of riding gear that is considered conventional for that style of riding. Western riding and its’ sartorial practices became in contrast repeatedly understood as masculine. While Kiara argued that such associations enabled a lot of black men to engage in riding activities through the establishment of black cowboy communities, she considered it to be generally more difficult for girls and women to be assumed to “naturally” belong in such environments. On the other hand, as a black woman, Kiara found that dressing up in dressage breeches and knee-high boots “often alienates me from many black people who automatically judge me to be a snob or accuse me of trying to not be black because I do not fit their narrative of what it means to be black”. While the stretchy material of dressage pants and the leg hugging embrace of knee-high riding boots in general were considered appearing feminine in the stables, Kiara’s reflection displays how such embodiments becomes troublesome due to her racial identity, not just through the repeated questioning from white equestrians. The types of sartorial practices that co-constitutes English riding activities needed to be invested in in order to have accessibility to, might cause difficulties in being recognized in other significant “spaces” or “belongings” that shapes Kiara’s life. To be “extended” in white rooms through certain materializations (as discussed in relation to Hannah and Sydney’s experiences) is then not a one-dimensional matter. Such materializations produce differentiating premises for different gendered and racialized bodies, making the experience of “belonging” a complex, changeable and contextual issue. The intersection of race and gender surface here in regards of the understanding of specific riding disciplines and styles as differently gendered and racialized, seemingly producing Kiara’s black female identity as not “quite fitting” in either equestrian spaces. Her experience can be seen in the light of Riley’s

account in previous chapters, where stated that it was her specific intersectional embodiment of blackness, gender and height that made people coming to her trail riding business react in disorientation and confusion. Riley wasn’t a “white upper class woman”, or a “black rugged” cowboy, which made it hard for visitors to make “sense” of her in the context of a horse-human space. The gendering of different stable environments is then seemingly racialized in specific ways, making English riding disciplines (especially dressage) habitually appear as white (and classed) but also to a large extent feminine, and Western riding as practices where black persons with an equestrian interest are able form “their own” coherence, while often understood as oriented around masculinity.

To further complicate the matter, Deborah pointed out that dressage clothing in form of formfitting breeches and neatly tailored riding jackets, are commonly produced with a certain (female) body type in mind that she considered as mirrored typically white and (middle or upper-) classed femininity ideals. The ranges of dressage clothing sizes were not seen to be very inclusive, but instead favoring slender legs (with a certain height), hips and stomachs. “Plus size” alternatives were hard to find in the materialized productions of dressage clothing, consequently making it harder for people of differentiating forms and sizes to be able to “invest” in such items, items that are said to enable an embodied “belonging” in these spheres. “I think it would be frowned upon if you are too voluptuous, like it would distract people. You are supposed to look light on the back of the horse”, Deborah concluded. As such, the “dressage equestrian” comes to be shaped and materialized by multiple intra-active factors in play, mirroring but also producing gendered body ideals through the specific production and commercialization of dressage garments, which both white and black prospective equestrian bodies are confronted to face and in some measure conform to, or find alternative paths. ¹¹⁶

**Box braids and hair nets – embodied equestrian femininities**

“If you want to compete in dressage or show jumping, you can’t have ‘black hair’. Or you would have to straighten it”, Riley said to me while we were riding out on a trail on a beautiful sunny afternoon. I had just commented on the fact that we were riding without helmets on, something that felt very strange for me (I could hear my dressage instructor back in Stockholm shrieking inside my head). I suddenly realized the potential dangers of

¹¹⁶ Barad (2003) p.804
mounting a half-a-ton “flight” animal, and while trying to look cool and relaxed in the broad western saddle with the reins in one hand, I kept a firm attention directed towards the horse I was riding. Riley was referring to that “black hair textures” have a harder time fitting under the rigid form of a riding helmet than “white women’s hair” does. In fact, she argued that certain hairstyles commonly worn by black women in Atlanta are impossible to combine with such a safety measure. “English riding helmets are really designed to go together with white, straight and smooth hair”, she said while reminding me that most English riding stables doesn’t let you get on a horse’s back unless you are up to such safety codes. She exemplified the particular female “black” hairstyle of “box braids”, which she explained are thick and often long extension braids sewn, or braided in the “natural” hair at the top of the scalp, stating that such hair materials will make the placement of the hard plastic helmet close to the head a difficult matter. Consequently, the helmet will not fit, move around or create uncomfortableness or even pain, pushing down the stiff material of the braids towards the scalp. She also argued that “natural” untouched black hair; meaning “Afro textured” (in some form curly and/or frizzy), was more at risk of being damaged than “white hair” under the pressure of a riding helmet due to its “specific” texture and inability to lie completely flat. Contemplating this, Riley concluded that it was in many ways easier for black women (with different forms of hairstyles other than straightened), to engage in western riding practices (however macho they could initially be seen), where also white women tended to ride with their hair not tied down but instead free-flying in the air. As western riding in many ways was habitually considered as masculine, speedy or rugged, “unleashed” long hair (in many different forms) could become a way of explicitly marking femininity when rushing down a barrel-racing arena, in other words a way of becoming a cowgirl.

Frida, who identifies as white and competes in dressage, explained that one of the few ways in which femininity is “explicitly” marked in the dressage arena and in stable environments in general is through the riders’ hair. Visible makeup appliances such as red lipstick (she was indeed surprised when I showed up at her stables with a thick bright red coating on my lips) was not considered to be “appropriate” when wanting to embody the

117 Compare with the discussion posed in Gina Marlene Dorré’s article (2002) about the connection between horse harnessing techniques and white, classed femininity produced through the usage of corseting.

118 The relationship between race, hair and femininity is a question explored and discussed by many postcolonial feminist thinkers. See for example Ayana Byrd & Lori Tharps (2014), bell hooks (1992), Patricia Hill Collins (2004).
“neutral and professional” upper-class and white appearance discussed in previous chapter. Long, straight (blonde) hair was on the other hand thought of as highly ranked as a feminine attribute, but was to be kept in a neatly tucked smooth hair bun during competitions, protected by a jewel stone-embellished hair net (sometimes attached with a dark colored bow) in the back of the neck, underneath the solid edge of the helmet. This measure could be seen as a way of keeping the hairs’ “whiteness” in line, protecting or perhaps producing its’ smooth texture through the physically demanding activities of riding.

Hannah, who rides dressage and usually keeps her “black” hair straight, agreed that “white” straight hair ideals permeate dressage communities (no differently than in society as a whole) but didn’t consider her straightening practices necessary as a way of “becoming white” or resenting “blackness”. While she acknowledged that her hair straightening devices made it easier for her to embody the specific sartorial practices and aesthetics that prevailed in the dressage arena (by keeping it “tidy”), she pointed out that the white girls of her stable also involve themselves in different techniques to make their hair appear “neat” and “clean cut”, such as electronic straightening devices and hair spray products. She refused to see hair as something determined, or the straightness of a hair texture to “belong” to a certain race, stating, “my hair is straight, but guess what? I am still black. And the people in the dressage shows still see me as black”.

I interpret the issue of hair here as an instance of when racialized femininity comes to materialize in equestrian settings in differentiating ways. It should not be read as if I understand “blackness” or “whiteness” as something essentially and bodily determined (there is for example of course certainly a heterogeneity in hair textures amongst differently racialized women), but rather shown here as something that “becomes” through specific intra-active materializations. Through the perspective of Barad, I understand the participants’ account as experiences of materialized difference, referring to the ways in which bodies are co-constituted as “black” or white” through the “behavior” of different hair textures “in relation to” other materialities (the cowboy hat or the dressage helmet) that comes to have significance in each equestrian sphere. “Black” hair (or “white” hair for that matter) does not pre-exist as such, but here rather becomes “black” in the entanglement of the solidity of the

119 Beverly Skeggs (1997) and Ulrika Dahl (2014) amongst others have displayed how production and hierarchies of femininity expressions are deeply integrated with aspects of race and class. In order to become recognized as feminine in the “right” way, one has to follow the lines of what is considered to be respectable and proper, constructed within the realms of upper/middle-class and obligatory heterosexuality. While a red lipstick can be seen as a general investment in femininity, it is a risky object, as it might connotate “wrong” “out of line” and “dangerous” feminities.

120 Ahmed (2007) p.156f
plastic helmet (which is already habitually formed in a particular manner, entwined with racial historicizes and politics, transformed into ideas of what type of head is able to “effortlessly” wear it) and the sensation of incoherence, meaning the pain or instability of maintaining a closeness between the head and the head piece. “Matter” and “discourse” are then not separate entities, but must be (according to Barad) understood as co-produced, and co-producing significant difference and distinctions. In this circumstance such distinctions are about specifically racialized and gendered equestrian embodiments.¹²¹

**Saddled up**

In the following and last chapters of the analysis, I am further inclined to discuss how horses as beings become meaningful in equestrian spaces as racialized and gendered. I want to understand how horses more specifically come to be understood as high status animals, which in turn some human bodies more than others are assumed to have a specific proximity to. How, more specifically does horses as beings become thought of in terms of whiteness, (un)obtainability and elitism? It is specifically the embodied “meeting” in riding practices and the up-close coming-together-of-horses-and-humans that will be the primary focus for the following analysis chapters.

*Greased leather – companion species and commodity others*

“Isn’t this one of the best scents in the world?” Frida asked me when we walked in to the tack room filled with neatly hung saddles in rows on the walls and lines with bridles dangling with shiny metal bits strapped on. I had to agree that the aroma of newly greased leather in the small dark room right next to one of the stable aisles activated sensoric memories of hominess and comfort. We nodded towards each other in consensus, inhaling the rich, oily and sticky fumes. Remembering the interview done previously with Deborah, who had stated that “we are not that fancy you know, we do have a lot of synthetic saddles and rubber riding boots”, I came to consider the meaning of leather as a material in horse-human settings, as well as the notion of “animality” in relation to equestrianism and horsey materializations. Genuine leather goods (made mostly from the skin of cows) in form of riding boots, saddles, bridles and gloves were by the participants considered to be desirable and marked as high-end, professional and sophisticated. When contemplating this, it occurred to me just how much of

¹²¹ Barad (2003) p.810
non-human animal products and materialities comes to co-constitute equestrian spatiality and practices. How did this relate to the understanding of horses as generally unobtainable high-status creatures?

There was a consensus amongst the participants that horses were indeed special beings. Horses were thought of as “more exceptional” than house pets (such as cats and dogs), and differently valued than agricultural “livestock animals” (such as pigs, cows, sheep etc.). Deborah described horses as “majestic beings”, Carol called them extraordinary beautiful and that they carry an “air of sophistication”, and Jada stated that horses both have symbolic and practical high value in American society, given that horses “helped to build this country” before the expansion of other forms of transportation and industrial techniques. The participants agreed that a significant reason for the high status of horses was the specific relationship humans could have with them through the practices of riding. “I think the relationship we can have with horses is pretty unique, that we can communicate with them through riding, and really perform art in my opinion. It’s very cool that a half-a-ton animal trusts you and you trust them, you have to. It’s like learning a new language, both for you and the horse”, Hannah concluded when asked about her perception of the value of horses and how she saw herself being formed by her equestrian environment. Deborah concurred, “I think it has to do with how horses are build, what we can do with them. I mean we don’t ride cows, you know?”.

I here want to turn to Donna Haraway’s term *companion species* in order to further understand particularity of horse and human intra-action. Haraway suggest that the term companion species can be used to understand the complex and specific ways in which human and non-human animal life comes to be co-constituted. With companion species, Haraway points to the impossibility, and the hierarchical mechanisms, of binary division such as nature and culture and human and animal and offers another way of approaching the specific historicizes of human-animal relationships and the becomings of “naturecultures”, meaning the ways in which “biology”, bodies, “meaning production” (or discourse) never are separated aspects but instead always entangled.122 Companion species should here be considered as both including those who are called human and those who are called horses, since their relationship is a forming or materialization in mutuality. Horses become ridden, trained, “broken in”, “cultivated”, brushed, healed by veterinarians, that we know, but humans become equally

122 Haraway (2003) p.15
transformed as dressage riders, mounted polices or aristocrats, formed through the loving or violently forced knowledges of horses’ embodied behaviors.  

In the case of how the participants reasoned about horse as beings, it was seemingly the lived equestrian companionship through riding that produced the valuable importance of them. Riding was (as discussed in previous chapters) in general considered to be through of as a high status, a cultivated and valued art form. The participants shrugged at the idea of eating horsemeat, contesting that such an instance would be affectively difficult. I here what to suggest that the considered “cultivated” aspects of horses through their ability to become co-constituted an “equestrian figuration” (that is the mutual intertwining of human and horse in the activities of riding) can be read as connected to the aspect of whiteness that (as in previously discussed chapters) orients equestrianism around Atlanta. Horses were habitually considered as “privileged” animals with an assumed proximity to white human bodies and white privileged spaces. As such, horses can be perceived as being habitually made “white” (they are who we admire, put on a pedestal, don’t eat but instead consider as valuable living companions, friends, co-workers etc.), seemingly put in hierarchical relations to Othered stock animals (those who are animals, a myriad of herds, the non-subjects). I here want to turn back to how Frida, as shown in the first chapter of the analysis, made a distinction between “horsey” regions made up by dressage and jumping stables, and more “country” barns, surrounded by dairy- and pig farms. She connected the differences in environments both to specific riding disciplines (that in turn are valued in different ways) and to the ways such rooms appear as “elite” and “horsey” or more as “country”. I understand it as the proximity to Othered animals becomes meaningful in how horses in turn comes to be perceived through such specific rooms. Equestrian clubs (often thought of in terms of whiteness), in contrast to western barns, are often geographically secluded from those animals that are not entitled the status of “cultivation”. The aromas of hay, warm horse bodies and greased saddle leather activate different sensations, lined with racial and classed dimensions, than pigsties and cow manure. Such scented sensations must be understood in relation to the specific human relations to different non-human animal bodies, where horses often are

123 Haraway (2003) p.16f
124 Haraway argues that those animals that become seen as companions, team members, co-workers, family members or friends. are generally thought to be uneatable and “one has a hard time shaking colonialist, ethnocentric, ahistorical attitudes towards those who do” (2003 p.14) For a further discussion on how some animals (and not others) come to be transformed in to eatable matter, and why horse-meat in particular can cause emotions of disgust and discomfort, see Michell Göransson post-doc research Ätbara Andra (translated “Eateble Others”) (2017)
125 Haraway (2008) p.6f
considered as companions and cows as “commodity” others. Perhaps one can speak of scent orientations, when contemplating the geographical organizations and understandings of Atlanta equestrian life. If so must intra-actions, meaning the specific ways in which equestrianism come to manifest, be understood as multi-sensoric materializations, which in turn challenges a humanist centered ontology that premiers the vision of sight.126

“Othered” animal bodies became (ironically?) considered valuable commodities in their transformation to “equestrian goods” in form of saddles, boots and gloves. In contrast to synthetic materials, “genuine” leather was thought by the participants as good investments if one is to be considered as a “serious equestrian” (and in actuality being let in the competition arena). A pair of black leather dressage boots were considerable higher in price than a pair in rubber, making such equestrian investments a matter of financial status. Carol explained that “real leather” is the preferred material to use in the goods that enables the activities of riding (the saddle, the boots, the reins and bridles) because its’ specific ability to, over the coarse of time, form itself around the human and horse body. The texture of cow-leather (in contrast to synthetic alternatives) carries the ability to physically shape the performance of an equestrian figuration, as it will over repeated riding instances and trainings, materialize a seamlessness between the body of the horse and the rider. The inside of a dressage boot will come to form and be formed by the saddle and the riders’ leg and position in the saddle, consequently stabilizing one of the ways in which the rider and horse communicates with each other, which in turn enables certain movements expected to be performed in the dressage arena. It is arguable so that the correlation between Haraway’s understanding of companion species and Barad’s term intra-action here becomes seemingly clear, as binary divisions of “human/animal”, “nature/culture” and “matter/discourse” cannot easily be made, but are instead entangled with each other in specific hierarchical becomings.127 Perhaps it could be said that the whiteness of horses and riding practices in some form depends on the commodity of “animalized” others, and in turn that Othered animals might be said to become extended in white rooms through the transformation to commodity products, making them closer to horses and horse-human spaces and thus “made white”.128 As cow-bodies transform into leather goods (thorough different technologies), valued through commerce and economic flows, their “animality” transforms and materialize together with human bodies in new ways, which in turn, can produce a sensation of “eliteness” or whiteness if you will. At the same time, the

126 Barad (2003) p.808 See also Maria Lönn ongoing dissertation project, Södertörn Högskola
“cowness” lingers, in the specific “agency” of its’ material possibilities and in the fumy aromas that fill the tack room. It is in constant need of up keeping and greasing to not crack or appear dull and then risk loosing its’ “sophistication” (by looking poor). So, no, “we” don’t ride cows, but perhaps it can be said that cows “ride” with us, or makes “our” riding possible.

While the participants contested that riders within the field of English disciplines do indeed work hard with their bodies, both on the horse and in the stables, even though such equestrians like to display themselves as neat, in order and proper (see analysis chapter 2), Carol and Hannah enlightened me that it is “very common” for the most prestigious equestrian clubs to hire Hispanic male workers to take care of the “dirty work” in the stables. Hannah interpreted this as a way for the “fancy white women of the north” to maintain their prestigious, neat and professional appearance. Carol saw this as very ironic, since she knew that many of those northern equestrians in fact had voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. "It’s like, how can you vote for someone who is saying all those hateful things about the people who groom and feed your horses?”, she rhetorically asked me.

I want to argue that this can be understood as an instance of where the “animality” of the horse becomes detectable, meaning the dirt from a muddy paddock, the horse dung piling up in the stables and the messiness of feeding oats to dozens of eagerly smacking mules. It can be interpreted as if such “uncultivated” aspects of horses are in need to be handled by Othered others, in this case materialized in the presence of “Hispanic workers”. If so, one might suggest in line with Haraway, that there are connections between the racialization processes of human bodies, and the “animalization” of non-human animals.129 The proximity (and distance) to what becomes understood as “dirty”, bodily marked and sweaty can then be said to co-constitute race and gender. Carol’s question might then be alternatively read as “how can you want to throw out those who become significant parts in the understanding and materialization of your horses (and you) as white?”130

**Warm bloods - the racialization of horses and the sensation of pace**

* I was in Tanesha’s stable again, but this time around she has promised me to ride. I first got the impression that the two of us were going on a trail ride together while recording an interview, but instead I was told I could ride around the paddock with the teenage barrel-racing girls of the stable. The two young black girls had already tacked their horses, swinging up on them in the stable aisle while the horses were already walking, setting off in a wild canter towards the paddock. A cowboy around my age helped me out putting on the saddle on

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129 Haraway (2008) p.15
130 Compare to Lambert (2015)
my horse, since I was not familiar with how that a Western kind of equipment should be properly harnessed. The knowledge around the technologies of a dressage saddle had little use here. The cowboy asked me if I was used to riding horses, and I reassured him and Tanesha that I have been attending riding schools since the age of seven. I led the pale golden gelding outside and didn’t have the courage to ask for a helmet, none of the riders here wore one.

As I started riding the horse, everything felt off. He didn’t listen to my commands in the saddle, instead wildly swung his head, building up a bolting energy of frustration. The barrel-racers swooshed around the barrels and me; looking at me (did I imagine them a bit concerned? Or amused?). I couldn’t even hold a steady trot without the horse refusing to cooperate, and my hands that usually are protected through the cow leather of dressage gloves, now bare, were starting to ache from the abrasions caused by the reins digging in to my ring fingers. My hair escaped the neatly arranged hair bun in my neck and was sticking to my sweat-pearl-covered forehead. The cowboy, standing on the side, called me over and while stroking the geldings’ golden mane, and said “Y’all aren’t in sync. You can’t sit on him like a dressage rider. You have to get in to the Western feel, girl!”.

As we came to a halt to take a breathing pause, the cowboy asked me how it was going. He reassured me that this horse “is very easily ridden”, not complicated at all, but that I couldn’t ride it like I would a dressage horse. I felt flushed, embarrassed. “You cannot hold the reins so tight and the legs so close to her body. She doesn’t understand your communication”, he explained. “You have to sit differently, you are so upright and stiff. Just relax here, barely feel her mouth in your hands”. As I tried to work against the movements accrued for a dressage equestrian embodiment that were so imprinted in my bodily tactile memory, I could slowly feel a change in the movements and cooperation between me and the horse. We could after a while even canter together in a controllable state. Some justice at last.

While horses in general came to be understood and materialized as “cultured” animals, or maybe yet as companion species, such understandings came to be complicated further when the participants talked about how different horse breeds comes to be perceived differently.

Carol: When I was sixteen, I went to an invitation-only dressage-riding clinic. And it was a pretty big deal for me at the time. And I was the only person there who was not on a warm blood. So, there is definitely a classification of horses. I was on my rescue horse. So that already made me very self-conscious.

Carol, who many times underscored that she, in contrast to her black dressage riding equestrian friends, often passed as white and didn’t experience the stopping mechanisms that Sydney, Hannah and Riley witnessed about, pointed in this quote to how such a passing is a complex matter, and not “only” a question of how skin color comes to materialize as difference. As she describes, the aspect of “warm bloods” versus “rescue horses” is an example of how different horses comes to be classified and placed in “horsey hierarchies”.

Such hierarchies that determine the “value” of a horse is further connected to how Carol experienced her arriving to what seems to be a very exclusive equestrian context. In

131 Field diary, February 2017
comparison to Jada’s previous statement (see chapter 1) that her horse became a “ticket in”, an “object” that extended her in the white equestrian world, the instance of Carol’s rescue horse tells a different story, pointing to the complexities of race in the equine context. Here, the “classification” of her horse instead became a point of attention, something that in some regards stopped Carol from feeling extended in the room. This stopping mechanism wasn’t here a matter of the riders’ skin color, but instead the appearance and specific history of her horse and the values associated to it. Tanesha described in similar fashion, how aspects such as bloodlines, registration papers and “mixed” or “pure” breeding lines determines the price of a horse. “If they are not easy to ride, or not broken in, the price tends to be lower. Many people think that horses are always very expensive and unobtainable, but that is not always the case.”, she pointed out. The significance in the activity of riding, and riding in certain “legitimate” ways in relation to the general value of horses is here again emphasized.

**Deborah**: the black horse community is predominantly the fun “Yeehaw” cowboy folks…they can get their horses super, super cheap. They don’t require fancy horses to compete on. They can just pick up a horse at the auction. (…) When I joke about “fun riding”… I mean dressage…I love it and I ride and I have fun. It’s still, it’s not the…(laughs) it’s this anal white thing. It’s not like Yeehaw, letting go, galloping through fields kind of ride.

**Alice**: in what way do you connect that to whiteness?

**Deborah**: it’s such a white thing, to always…push for the classy way, can’t just Yeehaw have fun, which is typically…at least down south…is (giggles) southern rednecks, or the black cowboy community. They just have fun, there is no pretense. Just ride! In dressage…it’s all about the movements! And some of the joy is taken out of the pleasure of riding! “must achieve the movements” you know…it’s dressage! It’s supposed to be tense, and the horses get tense and…that’s such a damn white thing! Black people can’t be bothered with that shit. “I am not doing that, I just want to ride!”

**Sydney**: Some horses are better for certain things, if you think of dressage you think of a big fancy warm blood…like…the horses you use for different styles comes down to their physical ability. Especially if you are up in the higher levels of dressage, it becomes very important. The horses there look a certain way. Big, nice expensive and fancy horses (laughs). In the end, it comes down to what movements the horse can achieve. And that depends on the breeding, the body of the horse and the bloodline.

Deborah expressed, in line with Tanesha, that a range of “different” kinds of horses are available for purchase in the Atlanta area, making it possible for all kinds of riding communities to obtain ownership of horses in some shape or form. However, as seen in her and Sydney’s account, there is a strong connection drawn between “cheap non-fancy” horses and specific and restricted ways of riding. The lower valued horses, defined by their messy or

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undefined bloodlines and generic setup, have a difficult time producing and embodying the required movements of dressage in the same manner as warm bloods and other “fancy big dressage horses”, as they in turn are repeatedly and intentionally bred to become a specific setup of muscle groups and temperament that (supposedly) become the best premise of embodying the dressage equestrian figuration. Being able to achieve “the anal white movements” as Deborah put it (the slow, tense, highly focused “dancing” with your horse) or embodying the figuration of “Yeehaw folks” (the speedy, the uninhabited, the “unbothered”), here associated to either the becoming of a “redneck” (that is, a “wrong”, deviant or “lesser” way of performing whiteness) or a “black cowboy”, is then a question of entanglements of naturecultures, that is, the emerging of human and non-human bodies, biology, technology and objects, financial flows and racial discourse. Not determined or embodied in an essentialize sense, but neither “only” a matter of discourse. Different forms of riding movements comes to materialize as racialized and gendered through the intra-activeness of racialized horse bodies (entangled in economic flows and breeding practices), what they are assumed to be able to “do” in the activity of riding and specific saddles that forms the appearance of the rider.

Looking back at my experience in the instance in the field described in the beginning of this chapter, I want to shed light to how race, gender and equestrianism becomes embodied through specific materializations over time. As I have spent nearly 22 years continuously riding the discipline of dressage, I have “become” a dressage rider, it is inscribed in my body, producing specific tactile memories that shapes the ways in which I am bodily oriented around horses and in the saddle. I have, due to my white middle-class and gendered body not been questioned in this quest (perhaps only when wearing a too bright red lipstick). Me becoming a dressage rider can also be understood as one way (of many) that I “become” white, middle-class and gendered. The “becoming” is then a “two-way street”, or a better yet a mutual complex intertwining. The failure of “becoming one” with Tanesha’s horse with the golden mane, should then not only be understood as a mere un-acquaintance with a specific riding style. I would rather (with Haraway and Barad on my side) emphasize the multiple and significant materialized aspects of such a failure; how my legs are unacquainted riding in slippery jeans in a broad western saddle and not breeches lined with suede leather to form a grip around the narrow dressage saddle, the way in which the horse, being an expert in barrel

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133 Haraway (2003) p. 26ff
racing can not respond correctly to my all too firm hand in his bit and the embarrassed
sensation of being perceived as embodying a “white” pretentious stiffness.

**Gaining wings**

I began this thesis by describing a “clear round”, a term used to describe such coherence
between rider and horse that it becomes hard to distinguish where one body ends and another
starts. A clear round also speaks of the ability to perform equestrianism in a seamless way, of
being oriented together with the horse and therefore able to extend, to move forward, or “up”
in the arena or the competition. This sensation of seamlessness became central when the
participants described the reason they loved to engage in human-horse activities such as riding.

**Kiara:** Riding is like gaining wings. You are able to let everything else fall away and it is
just you and the horse. You never feel freer. At first it can be awkward getting use to
moving with the horse and holding your body in the proper position to maintain balance
and not stress your horse at the same time. It quickly becomes second nature and it feels
like you and the horse more as one. There is nothing like the feeling of galloping through a
field with the wind on your face.

**Jada:** when you ride, it's like everything else goes away. You don’t have the time to think
about anything else than that relationship with the horse. So it’s very freeing of the mind.
It’s probably one of the only times when you are in control and not in control at the same
time.

These kinds of descriptions were reoccurring in all the participants’ accounts, the
commonality being the “sensation of flying”, of “gaining wings”, feeling free and at home. In
relation to previous discussions where I suggested that the specific intra-action of riding
practices were largely a reason for why horses where perceived as high status animals, I here
want to suggest that this precise feeling can be interpreted as the “up-close” affective reason.
What was described amongst the participants was a privileged feeling, a testimonial of the
embodied experience of becoming-something beyond the “realms of human flesh”, to be in
control and to hand over control at the same time. Riding was considered to be an experience
exceptional of any other, due to the specific entanglement with horses. Turning back to
Ahmed, such a sensation can be thought of as an extension of the body through the horse and
further through rooms, becoming worldly; in other word the embodied experience of being
oriented.\(^{134}\) Through the perspective on intra-action, materialization and companion species

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\(^{134}\) Ahmed (2007) p.156
posed by Haraway and Barad, the experience in question can instead be thought of as an instance of the height of the “becoming of” an equestrian figuration.\textsuperscript{135} However, as the analysis have shown, such a sensation is not a given at all cost. While all the participants do experience such “states”, there are habitual premises in place (thinking with Ahmed), or become co-constituted (thinking with Haraway and Barad) that also hinders and interrupts such sensations. Materializations of \textit{difference}; racialized, gendered and classed ones, is in this thesis exemplified as such instances. To “become one” with the horse is then not altogether an innocent matter of being a “skilled rider”, but instead entangled in the production of racial, gendered and classed premises; changeable but contextually marked. This analytical conclusion then complicates other post-humanist theoretical works that have emphasized the transcendent potential or promise of the “becoming-one”, or exceeding one’s bodily horizon in the activity of riding.\textsuperscript{136}

\section*{Concluding thoughts}

The aim of this thesis was to explore the connections between equestrianism, gender and race. I sought out to understand how racialized and gendered norms appear and materialize in equestrian spaces, how such norms comes to be experienced by the interviewed participants in relation to their equestrian embodiments, and how horses (and horse-human relations) becomes meaningful in such embodiments and materializations. What has been central to the research project is an analyzing mapping out of the linkages between spaces, objects, human and non-human bodies in the specific context of horse-human environments and riding activities. Orientations became the starting point for the analysis, both as a way to capture the specific contextualization of (equestrian) Atlanta that became the premier demarcation and framework for the fieldwork and analysis, \textit{and} in order to understand how the different participants (and myself) finds themselves in such a framework. The analysis have shown how horses and equine activities are habitually thought of as having geographical (and demographical) significance, making directions such as “South” and “North” mental and physical mappings and markings of where horses and horse activities are assumed to be found in and around the city. I have argued that this understanding should be considered a matter of

\textsuperscript{136} See for example Game (2001) & Birke & Brandt (2009)
equestrianism being habitually oriented around whiteness, which produces and maintains the association between (specific types of) horses, particular neighborhoods and white, classed and gendered human bodies. Through Ahmed’s elaboration of phenomenology I have displayed that whiteness functions as a background that habitually is produced through and produces certain (hoof) beatened paths and familiarities, that in turn forms the premises of the sensation of having proximity (and therefor entrance) to equestrian spheres. Bodies (both human and non-human) that can inhabit whiteness are continuously enrolled and extended in such spaces, whereas Others are marked out, stopped and questioned. Such stopping mechanisms disrupt some of the participants abilities to feel at home, meaning become extended in the rooms that inhabits their equestrian interest, which in turn forms the premises of their ability to act in such spaces. Habitual orientations and disciplinary measures are inherently political and affectively driven and produce political and affective consequences, creating inclusions and comfortability, exclusions and friction. By thinking with Ahmed’s phenomenology, I have been able to shed light on how certain bodies can take up space, and how equestrian spaces takes the shape of certain bodies.

By turning to Barad’s emphasis on materiality and intra-action, I have furthered the phenomenological approach of Ahmed that emphasizes the relationships of bodies and rooms, by pointing out how objects, textures, color schemes should be considered as significant matters in the becomings of horse-human-rooms as specifically gendered and raced. The embodiment of a dressage rider (which often came to be the assumed normative imagery of who is considered to be an equestrian, or at least the “more recognized”, valued or “white” equestrian, in contrast to the “redneck” or the “black western rider”) materializes for example through the stretchy and snug texture of a pair of dressage breeches pants. As seen in the accounts of the participants, such materials “hugs”, shapes, accentuates and disciplines different bodies in differentiating ways in coherence with general (and equestrian) classed and racialized femininity ideals and concepts. The selections (and classifications) of certain color schemes and hues and the rejection of others, and different practices of controlling and shaping hair in the meeting with (and ability to become-with) the rigid form of a dressage helmet and a jeweled-stoned hairnet, are arguable other instances of significant materialization processes of gender and race in the equestrian settings that the participants in some form are faced with. By being attentive to such “details”, the analysis offers a distinctive comprehension of the multiple and complex ways in which equestrian norms and embodiments emerges, and in turn how some bodies can “extend” in specific equestrian spheres while others are repeatedly stopped.
“Other” forms of riding communities and embodiments that doesn’t materialize as “white” or “elite” (through the expansion of acres of paddocks lined with well-kept white picket fences, noticeable allowed to take up space in the city) are indeed present in Atlanta, however often made “invisible” or “problematic” in the general view. While such communities and gatherings open up to horse-human intra-action “off the beaten path” (that otherwise is associated with unobtainability and financial premises), they are repeatedly stopped and questioned by concerned and opposing looks and comments. The suspicion against black riders in the streets (“can they really be good to the horses?”), or to the buggy drivers amongst the skyscrapers in downtown Atlanta (“what a ghetto industry!”) are examples of how certain equestrian figurations comes to be understood as specifically racialized. The trail riding and “cowgirlng” participants that I met do however speak of a certain freedom and subversial potential in their “own” black riding communities as they experience a distance or distinction from hegemonic equestrian (white) ideals, making other forms of equestrian embodiments possible, exemplified in the analysis in as the prospect of “having black hair” and reclaiming or embracing “wacky colors”. Such sensations of freedom should nevertheless be put in the context of western riding practices regularly being associated to concepts of masculinity, producing another layer of complexity regarding negotiations of belonging and “hominess”. The analysis thus displays how the intersection of race and gender becomes considerable momentous in the context of equestrian settings and in investments in horse-human activities.

I have further, through Haraway’s understanding of companion species, contemplated how horses (and other non-human animals) should be understood as meaningful agential forces in the racialization and gendering of equestrian activities and embodiments. Horses in general can be considered as becoming “white” or privileged beings that in some instances can function as a “ticket in”: enabling the sensation of belonging to, or be extended in white rooms. The “whiteness” of horses can also be seen as causing the sensation of unobtainability, by which black riders are questioned in their capacity to embody the position of “the equestrian”. I have also pointed out that horses become “white”, unobtainable and high-valued in relation to Othered stock animals that in turn comes to be perceived as commodity animals, non-subjects, often associated to rural lower income areas, “failed” whiteness or in other ways racialized and classed, that further materializes in specific “aromatic” orientations and localities around the city of Atlanta. The pointing to the significance of the fumy scents of painted white picket fences, well trimmed grass lawns, milk-production barns and pig farms when regarding matters of equestrianism, class and race illustrates the multi-sensoric
analytical sensibility that the thesis offers. Indeed, these analytical nuances propose broadened and complex ontological and epistemological dimensions, suggesting that the theoretical perspective of phenomenology and the analytical point of departure of bodily perception and orientation can be furthered through the attentiveness to such multiple sensoric measures. While scents connected to equestrian activities and spaces seemingly co-constitutes the regional landscape where the participants reside, and racial and class “difference”, such materializations should in no way be perceived as determined or essential, but rather in continuous and changeable processes, as seen in the discussion about the transformational courses of living cow bodies in to high valued (and desirable smelling) leather goods, that in turn enables specific riding performances.

By a closer look, I have displayed that horses themselves, depending on their specific breed, muscular constitution and economic histories, are also further classified in hierarchal measures, materialized in their (un)ability to embody and perform certain riding movements that in turn are connected to racialized, classed and gendered concepts. The thesis thus argues, in line with Haraway, that racialization and gendering permeates and materializes in “naturecultures”, meaning that the matter of race and gender should be understood as intertwined in, not separated, what becomes considered as “human” (the subject, the unmarked center, the cultures) and “non-human” (the non-subjects, the “Others”). The discussion then complicates “innocent” binary dichotomies such as nature and culture, human and non-human and matter and discourse, displaying how such aspects instead are messily entangled in the production of equestrianism and racialized and gendered “difference”. These analytical conclusions importantly challenges linear ways of thinking about bodies, embodiments, gender and racial performances, spatiality and sensations, offering instead a multifaceted viewpoint that opens up possibilities of understanding equestrian experiences as raced and gendered.

The thesis then contributes to the field of gender studies by many measures. In relation to previous research regarding the relationship between gender, race and equestrianism, my analysis displays a distinct, challenging and exploratory theoretical and conversation in relation to the specific subject matter and fieldwork context, enabling a unique viewpoint of the significances of horse-human embodiments and relationships. The thesis contributes a complex and multi-layered understanding of equestrian practices that moreover expands and challenges both the theoretical fields of phenomenology, critical race studies and post humanist and materiality approaches, by pointing to how they can complicate and further one-another in conversation. I have shown that the post humanist ambition in previous research
that aims to challenge assumptions about “human boundaries” or “human exception” by pointing to the “transcendent” experience of riding, must be understood in relation to contextual premises of power, in this thesis specified in the particular aspects of race and gender. I want to argue that my usage of phenomenology in relation to a post humanist approach have opened up a critical conversation about the potential “limits” of such an analysis. By incorporating the theoretical lens of orientations and disorientations in relation to riding activities, I have provided a crucial insight on how “flows” between human and non-human bodies, spaces and objects are matters of power. In similarity, I have displayed that the perspective of phenomenology and the ontological positioning that is placed in the human perception is not “enough” when contemplating the specific becomings of horse-human activities. The extensive dimensions of intra-action and companion species that the thesis offers provides a significant comprehension of multiple forms of agency and materializations that seemingly tells a more intricate story, importantly so in the specific context that the thesis seeks to investigate.

Further, the research project has enabled me to explore and put into action riding interviews that is, to my best knowledge, an innovative methodological contribution. While other researchers have done extensive work in the methodological practice of interviewing and observing in movement (for example walking interviews), my elaboration on such methods offers an additional dimension by incorporating the specific intra-action of horse-human becomings. The method has provided important analytical dimensions regarding matters of becoming materializations of race and gender, the intricate and changeable aspect of the “insider” and “outsider” researcher position (and thus situated knowledge production), and in a tangible way displays the importance of the multi-sensoric experience of both riding and researching. Lastly, I want to argue that the thesis demonstrates the political and affective significance of horse-human intra-active relationships and activities, both for those who finds themselves directly involved in such, and for those who has yet not stepped in to a stable. Horses and horse-human activities make up municipal geographies and “our” understandings and materializations of “each other”, they stretch out, are stopped (but might take different paths) claims room, and lets some bodies (and not others) take up space. The wondrous sensation of riding, the feeling of comfort, of extending oneself, the “beyond-human” communication of horse-human embodiments does then have political and affective significance, which should always be critically examined.
Summary

This thesis explores the relationship between gender, race and equestrianism, meaning different forms of horseback-riding activities and communities. The project poses questions about how riding practices often comes to be connected to “whiteness”, elitism and (in differentiating forms) gender, and aims to shed light on how such norms appear and become sustainable in different horse-riding stable environments. It is primarily the geographical region of Atlanta, Georgia, USA that becomes the demarcation for the fieldwork, a locality consisting of both black cowboy/girl communities and “upscale” dressage and show jumping stables, primarily occupied by white female equestrians. By doing interviews and observations with nine persons who are invested in different equestrian communities and disciplines, the project investigates how equestrian spaces and activities are experienced in relation to the aspects of race and gender, but also how equestrianism is produced as specifically (and differently) gendered and racialized. The participants experience that horses and equestrian activities are habitually thought of as something white, unobtainable and elite, which in turn forms the ways in which horses and equestrian spaces are thought to be (and not be) found in and around Atlanta. Equestrian spaces, especially those that practice the disciplines of dressage and show jumping, are experienced as more welcoming of some while stopping others from belonging, making the possibility to engage in high status riding disciplines and to be recognized as a “real equestrian” a matter of race. Different kinds of riding stables (and riding disciplines) are in turn permeated by specific gendered and racialized norms, which are exemplified in the ways one is expected to dress, look and act. Lastly, the analysis shows that horses comes to be understood as privileged animals in relation to other live-stock animals that, in turn, are transformed into commodity products (in forms of leather goods) which makes riding practices, and specifically the more “high status” disciplines possible. Horses themselves are in turn further racialized through breeding practices and ideas about “pure bloodlines”, making some horse breeds over others appear to be more refined, expensive and “white”. Such aspects come to matter in how some horses (and their riders) comes to be perceived and in “what they can do”. In conclusion, the thesis displays the complex and multiple ways in which the relationships of horses and humans come to materialize in equestrian settings. The analysis shed light on the multifaceted connections between human and non-human bodies, objects and rooms, and how such correlations are indeed affective and political.
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Cover picture source: https://www.stonehorses.com/
Appendix I

The participants have been given new names for their anonymity in this research project. The short presentation is based on their own self-descriptions.

Deborah – in her mid 50’s, Jewish, born in the north-east USA, but lives since many years south of the Atlanta city center where she runs a stable and riding school with around 25 horses.

Sydney – 17 years old, African-American, rides and competes in dressage, born and raised south of Atlanta.

Tanesha – in her late 40’s, African-American who rides Western style and trail rides around a stable southwest of the center of Atlanta.

Jada – in her 30’s, African-American, rides and competes in show jumping with her own horse in mid-coastal California.

Hannah – 18 years old from south Atlanta, African-American, rides and competes in dressage with horses owned by her riding school.

Carol – mid 30’s, white and Jewish, rides and competes in dressage and works as a riding instructor south of the Atlanta city center.

Frida – White, late 20’s, rides and competes in dressage in a stable in a north part of Atlanta. Consider her upbringing and current situation as upper-middleclass.

Riley – 25 years old, African-American who runs a trail ride business with her family south west of Atlanta.

Kiara - 28 year old, African American female who grew up in a middle-class community in Georgia. Lives now in her own horse farm and owns three horses. Has tried various styles of riding, but ended up taking a liking to the English saddle.
Appendix II

Source: http://www.ralphlauren.com/product/index.jsp?productId=3841431