

# Appreciating and Evaluating the Performances of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna.

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Una Hebden Ph.D Thesis May 2017

# **Evaluating and Appreciating the Performances of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna.**

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy.**

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## **Abstract**

The Spanish Riding School of Vienna has been selectively breeding and training horses for 450 years and is famous today for the presentation of classical equitation in its public performances.

This thesis examines the performances of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna (SRS) and addresses the question of how these distinctive equestrian performances might be appreciated and evaluated. This question reveals the existence of two further threads of inquiry; firstly, a thread relating to performance aspects, such as, beauty and its experience, namely aesthetic inquiry, and secondly, one relating to the many ways in which we view and treat animals, and our moral responsibility to them, namely ethical inquiry.

Ideals of beauty and our moral responsibilities toward animals are closely related to the political, social, cultural and religious values of a given time and as such are subject to change. Therefore a further line of inquiry is required to assist in our understanding the performances of the SRS and this is closely related to the historical traditions and values that underpin them. Therefore, I begin this investigation by exploring the historical background of classical equitation as practised at the SRS, to shed some light not only on how this type of equitation developed, but also on how the relationship between the horse and human has also developed from the initial use of the horse as a vehicle in battle, to the presentation of the horse in the performances that we see in Vienna today. In so doing, I argue that the historical practices and traditions in this case are both ethically, and aesthetically relevant.

## Introduction



Figure 1 The Morning Training Session. Picture Courtesy of the SRS

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Since its foundation in the sixteenth century, The Spanish Riding School (so named because of the origin of its breed of horses) has become an almost legendary link between the antique culture which is its real cradle, and the modern world which has more than once threatened to uproot and destroy it, along with so many of our inherited traditions and great works of art (Windisch-Graetz, 1958, p. vii).

To my knowledge this thesis provides the first academic investigation into the Spanish Riding School of Vienna (SRS), although a PhD thesis does exist exploring the contribution made by classical equitation to discussions of aesthetic concepts (Berrier, 2011). However, the SRS itself has escaped philosophical scrutiny thus far. As a frequent visitor to the SRS performances both in Vienna and when the school performs in London, I often wondered how I might combine my interest in this institution with my academic interests. My attendance at these performances has often left me wondering how they might be evaluated and appreciated, and this question forms the main topic of this thesis. Addressing this question has not always been easy as very little has been written about the SRS, apart from a small number of books written by former riders on the subject of horsemanship. There are no theoretical perspectives, nor academic accounts available from which one might draw inspiration. It would appear that academia, thus far, has failed to find this institution worthy of exploration. Yet, closer scrutiny reveals that for the historian, the sociologist, the psychologist, scholars interested in human-animal interactions, and the philosopher concerned with animal ethics or aesthetics, the Spanish Riding School provides fertile ground from which to investigate a variety of topics of academic interest.

The paucity of literature available has proven to be at times a hindrance, and at other times a blessing, in that it has left me free to develop my own theoretical account. Whilst liberating, this also means that I have had to rely on a variety of sources for my research; some of which are peer-reviewed, and others which are not. In the course of my research I have interviewed a chief rider at the school and various other members of staff from the school's stud at Piber in order to clarify certain points that are not to be found in any literature. I have watched countless hours of DVD footage of the performances and attempted to analyse their content and merit, but, wherever possible, I have used peer reviewed academic literature that I deemed to be relevant and which has helped me to place the SRS into an academic framework. I have no doubt that exhaustive though I felt my literature search to be I will have inadvertently missed some valuable sources.

Throughout the thesis, I have endeavoured to illustrate certain points with the assistance of photographs, most of which have been kindly supplied to me by the SRS. I am also acutely aware that due to the nature of the topic, and for the benefit of the reader who may have no knowledge of the SRS, sections of my text may be overly descriptive; I have endeavoured to keep these to a minimum.

## The Spanish Riding School

In 2015 the Spanish Riding School of Vienna was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status under the category of 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' a category, which deals with arts and traditions of the world. This riding school is one of the oldest in the world, and has been responsible for preserving and practising the 'art' of classical riding in the Renaissance tradition for 450 years. Here, the knowledge and traditions of classical equitation are transmitted orally, passed down between generations of riders and presented to the public in national and international performances.

The Spanish Riding School therefore, is defined by three main elements: its long history and traditions of equitation; its high standards of management in relation to the breeding and training of the Lipizzaner horses in its care, and the preservation of and presentation of classical equitation in the form of public performances staged to music. Rather than existing as separate elements, these aspects of the SRS exist inter-dependently and serve to set it apart from other riding institutions of a similar kind. Furthermore, these performances and the trappings that accompany them, lend themselves to a distinct kind of evaluation and appreciation.

The central focus of this thesis is concerned not with the question of whether these performances can be described as artworks *per se*, but rather with the question of how we might appreciate and evaluate them. One way in which they might be appreciated is from an aesthetic point of view. Though not considered to be 'artworks' in the traditional evaluative sense of the word, the performances of this institution do call for a kind of appreciation similar to the kind of appreciation which is normally reserved for artworks such as classical ballet performances. What is more, they are indeed staged and presented with this kind of appreciation in mind. The boundaries between the appreciation of the artistic and the merely aesthetic become decidedly blurred in this instance. This important distinction is perhaps best exemplified in the following quote from Graham McFee:

It makes a difference whether we see the object before us under concepts appropriate to art (that is, make an artistic judgment about it) or under concepts appropriate to the merely aesthetic. The clearest way to articulate this distinction sharply is to consider a case where a spectator confronts a work of art but, through lack of knowledge or understanding, brings to bear on it merely aesthetic concepts. And this means that the spectator is not able to bring to bear on that object the concepts appropriate to the appreciation of art;

concepts such as form, style, meaning... By contrast, our appreciation of birdsong is simply 'aesthetic appreciation (McFee, 1992, p. 92).

Might we aesthetically appreciate the performances of the SRS as artistic performances such as dance, imbued with the meaning that McFee proposes? Or might they be appreciated as we might aesthetically appreciate birdsong or some other non-artistic phenomenon? I shall argue that the performances of the SRS provide an example of a distinctive kind of appreciation; one which straddles both the artistic, and the 'merely' aesthetic. These performances feature the staging, artistry, style and form that can be found in some artworks, and, simultaneously, they both encompass and invite the appreciation of aspects of the 'merely' aesthetic.

On the one hand, these performances, as I will argue, share many similarities with classical ballet performances, However one important difference that distinguishes these performances from ballet and from many other performance artworks is the fact that they feature animals, and this inevitably raises questions about their moral acceptability.

Furthermore, the fact that animals live and experience the world raises important moral questions in relation to what we do to them and with them. Animals in the service of humans are sometimes treated badly; they are exploited, objectified and subjected to cruel and inhumane management, none of which is morally acceptable. Schopenhauer informs us that the Christian morality that allows the acceptance of animals as 'mere things,' there for us to do with as the wish arises, is a stance which,

fails to recognise the eternal essence that exists in every living thing, and shines forth with inscrutable insignificance from all eyes that see the sun!' But that morality, he continues 'knows and respects only its own worthy species, whose characteristic reason is the condition on which a being can be an object of moral consideration and respect' (Payne, 1995, p. 96).

Christianity of course does not hold the monopoly on the poor treatment of animals, something which is tolerated in many faiths, but Schopenhauer is correct when he asserts that Christian morality does leave animals out of its account.

However, the treatment and management of animals by humans need not always be detrimental to their well-being. Aside from the horror stories that exist, reports also exist of the mutually beneficial and meaningful relationships that can and do exist in our encounters with non-human animals. Such relationships are based on trust and co-operation, coupled with a desire to provide the best life possible for the animals involved, and I will argue that this is the kind of relationship which prevails at the Spanish Riding School.

The main issue relates to the question of whether it is morally acceptable to use any animal in performances for the purposes of human entertainment or education. The response to this question will depend upon many factors, the most significant of which is whether the animals used in these performances suffer any consequent physical or psychological harm. A further consideration arises from the question of whether the animal's dignity as a living being, or the life that they are required to live, is in some way compromised by performing. If it is the case that the animal involved is well cared for, and the life that they live can be enhanced and not harmed by what they are required to do, then such performances can be justified. This, I will argue, is the case with the SRS horses.

When considered through the lens of philosophical enquiry an examination of these performances of classical equitation proves enlightening. It can both inform and assist in the expansion of existing theories that have, thus far, failed to address the issue of aesthetic spectacles that feature domesticated animals. A study of classical equitation further reveals the existence of serious inconsistencies and incompatibilities that arise in relation to the application of theories of art to events outside the limiting realm of artworks. This leads to the inevitable position that aesthetic theory, as it stands, is ill equipped to deal with the aesthetic appreciation of the performances of the SRS, or indeed to the aesthetic appreciation of animals generally. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive theory of how we might aesthetically appreciate animals *per se*, but I hope at least to highlight some areas for future research and to initiate a discussion about what might be required in the development of such a theory.

I begin my investigation into this topic in Chapter 1 by exploring the history of classical equitation and the specific history of the Spanish Riding School. This chapter is intended not only to provide a background into this institution and the activities that it pursues, but also to set the scene for what is to follow, namely, an investigation into the relationship that exists between the treatment of the horses and the role that this plays in the appreciation of the public performances presented by the school.

Classical equitation, aside from being an activity with a specific purpose or function – be it in terms of training horses for warfare or for display – has always been, and indeed continues to be, an activity that has an aesthetic aim: to improve upon, in the case of the ridden horse, the beauty that has been bestowed upon it by nature. This chapter examines this thread from the early writings of Xenophon, through the Renaissance, an era which witnessed a resurgence of interest in equitation as an artistic endeavour, to the present day. I then discuss the specific history of the SRS, an institution that emerged during the

Renaissance with the intention of training horses and riders for war and for art, and which today serves to protect, preserve and also to present this specific kind of equitation in its public performances. These public presentations, steeped in history and tradition, are similar in many ways to balletic productions, and they raise the question of how might these specific kinds of performances be evaluated and appreciated? One way of appreciating and evaluating them, might be from an historical perspective, and this is certainly a valuable way of doing so. However, given that animals feature in these performances, it would also seem appropriate to examine them from an ethical point of view, and this notion is the subject of the subsequent chapter.

In Chapter 2 I explore some of the numerous moral problems surrounding the use of animals in performances. I begin by examining three views which inform how we in the West might view animals in relation to rationality, dignity and justice, namely, the views of Kant, Schopenhauer and Nussbaum. I propose that Nussbaum's theoretical perspective provides a superior account in that it does not – like Utilitarianism for example – rely upon rationality as a justification for justice, it incorporates the needs of the individual animal as well as the needs of the group and the species involved, and it further proposes that not only do animals have entitlements, but should these entitlements be denied them, then questions of justice are raised. Furthermore, Nussbaum's account provides a useful theoretical framework within which notions of quality of life and the ability to lead a dignified existence can be assessed.

I then go on to outline Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach in relation to non-human animals and discuss each of the ten capabilities that she cites in relation to the lives of many domesticated horses, and argue that these animals frequently fail to flourish as a consequence of their species-specific and individual needs not being met.

I then discuss the problems posed by the use of 'wild' species such as large cats and bears in performances, for example circus performances. I argue that the very fact that these animals are non-domesticated species, often presented in ways that are counter to their species-specific behaviours constitutes an infringement of their dignity. This coupled with the fact that they are frequently required to live in conditions in which their capabilities cannot be met, means that they are suffering from an injustice.

Whilst domesticated species such as the horse can indeed suffer from injustice caused by performing in some circuses, it is perfectly possible to present horses in performances in which their dignity is maintained, and for them to lead lives where their capabilities are met

up to the threshold level proposed by Nussbaum. One example of how this is achieved is evident in the management of the horses at the SRS.

In Chapter 3, I outline all the aspects of the care and management of the stallions at the SRS in relation to Nussbaum's ten capabilities, and her idea of the requirements necessary for a dignified existence. I explore these animals' entire lives from their birth at the school's stud until their return to the stud at the end of their working lives. This institution, I propose, is one in which the animals are afforded every opportunity to engage in meaningful relationships with the grooms and riders who care for them, they are respected as individual animals, with specific likes, dislikes, and capabilities, and that their management and training is adapted to accommodate these differences. This institution, I assert, is one in which everything is done to ensure that the animals flourish in terms of their species-specific and individual capabilities, and, as a consequence, their dignity is maintained.

That the SRS provides an opportunity for the stallions to flourish provides not only an ethical perspective from which to evaluate and appreciate their performances but as I argue it also contributes to our aesthetic appreciation of them. These performances serve to provide an example of an instance in which the moral treatment of the animals present is aesthetically relevant. In what follows, I propose that the ability to engage fully with the beauty present in the performances of the SRS is closely associated with an awareness that the animals are not abused in any way, and that their quality of life is not compromised as a result of what they are required to do.

In Chapter 4 I begin by introducing and subsequently exploring the concepts of aesthetics and beauty in relation to animals. I then go on to suggest that our aesthetic engagement with animals differs considerably from our engagement with artworks, using the influential notion of aesthetic 'disinterestedness' as analysed by Kant in the *Critique of Judgement*. I argue that this is a concept that is inappropriate in the case of judgements made in relation to the aesthetic appreciation of animals. Experiencing beauty in animals is, I propose, unlike experiencing beauty in objects, encompassing issues of emotional engagement, moral responsibility and dignity.

Given that we might respond to animal beauty differently to the beauty found in certain objects, I question what kind of beauty it might be that animals possess. I identify three levels of appreciation in relation to animals, the first relates to the idea that our aesthetic preferences for certain animals is guided by evolutionary mechanisms, the second relates to the idea that formal properties such as the configuration of certain lines or shapes

impacts on our aesthetic appreciation of animals, and the third, which is closely tied to formal properties, is concerned with the role that 'being fit for function' plays in our aesthetic assessments of animals.

Finally, I discuss the aesthetic merits of the performances of the SRS, and analyse how these performances are to be appreciated. One possible way, given their similarity to classical ballet, might be to appreciate them as we do dance; a theme that I return to in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the performative elements of the SRS and explores and expands upon the similarities and differences that exist between classical ballet and the performances given by the SRS. I begin this chapter with an exploration of the origins of ballet, and outline the many similarities shared by the two disciplines. I then explore the role of movement, expression and the agency of the dancer in ballet as examples of the significant differences that divide the two disciplines.

Following this, I explore the aesthetic elements present in the SRS performances and discuss these in relation to riding to music, the role of sacred geometry in the figures of the manège and features such as the characteristics of the setting and staging of the performances that contribute to the experience of the spectator.

I conclude that the SRS performances are appreciated and evaluated in a way that is determined by the three elements that define them. They are historically informed, morally determined and aesthetically appreciated. We may regard these elements as being separate, but we perceive them as a whole. In this case, morality informs and determines their aesthetic appreciation. Some philosophers, such as Kant, did not view any art form as a moral liberator although he did take the beautiful to be a symbol of morality. As Iris Murdoch points out, Kantian aesthetics "separates art from practical rationality and from the (in effect rational) 'moral emotions'. Kant, like Plato, she continues, "wants to keep morality safe from art" (Murdoch, 2003, p. 9). Morality after all, is seen to operate at a higher level of consciousness than aesthetic pleasure. Nevertheless, as I suggest in what follows, morality is felt and experienced emotionally and it can thus hinder or enhance other kinds of experience including the experience of beauty, by impacting on the ability to 'see' it. How the performers are treated matters in the case of performances that feature both humans and animals, because how they are treated impacts upon their ability to perform in a way that provides a pleasing spectacle. This was observed thousands of years ago by Xenophon in the case of the horse. Xenophon knew that an emaciated horse, a

beaten horse or a horse driven by the pain of the spur could never present an aesthetically pleasing spectacle, any more than a dancer who was beaten or spurred could. One reason for this is that the act of being beaten or spurred ultimately destroys the spirit of the animal and the corresponding fear and anxiety that are produced by being so treated, renders it incapable of showing off its beauty to the best effect. Sensitive human beings can feel that; they sense it and respond to it in a way that overshadows their ability to perceive beauty. An example of this is provided by the experiences of the author Suzanne Laba Cataldi on visiting a Russian circus and seeing the performing bears to which I refer throughout the thesis.

The Spanish Riding School thus provides a platform from which to further explore and discuss issues surrounding the relationships that exist between humans and animals, it provides an example of an aesthetic spectacle that challenges many of the pre-existing notions that exist about the link between morality and aesthetics, and it also raises the question about the impact of authenticity which arises from having a distinctive historical background and traditions, on aesthetic appreciation and moral evaluation.

## Chapter One

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### **A History of Equitation and the Spanish Riding School of Vienna**

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#### **Introduction**

Our ancestors looked to the horse to fulfil many different roles. Horses are distinguished by their speed and agility and, if properly trained, they become an extremely potent asset in warfare. A soldier on a horse was infinitely more effective than the foot soldier on the ground. Second, with its strength and endurance the horse revolutionised agricultural practices and commerce due to its ability to move loads, and to pull machinery. A person with a horse was able to accomplish many times more work than one without. Third, when sitting astride a beautiful horse, kings, noblemen, generals and politicians were both literally and metaphorically elevated above the masses. The horse seemed to transfer something of its essence to the rider, as well as enhancing his visual presence. The person on the horse was perceived to be more imposing than when he was on the ground. People throughout history have looked at and marvelled at the beauty inherent in the action and movement of the horse at liberty and have yearned to reproduce that beauty in the ridden horse. The person looking at or riding the horse often felt enriched in spirit.

How was the horse to be trained to fulfil these roles? We shared no common language or culture with them so communicating our wishes to horses and understanding them in return was going to be problematic. Communication required both an awareness of and an understanding of the horse's nature. The horse evolved as a 'flight animal', so when startled or on encountering an unfamiliar situation, its first instinct was to flee. The horse was also an animal that during the course of its evolution was vulnerable to large predators. Before domestication, the presence of a large animal on the back of the horse was likely to have been that of a predator such as a mountain lion which therefore had to be removed by any means possible. Thus, the acceptance of a rider on its back works against the horse's most basic instincts for survival. The horse was and is also an animal with two distinct aspects to its nature. On the one hand, it could be predictable, gentle, and

trusting, whilst on the other hand, it could be unpredictable, suspicious and capable of acts of aggression; in the words of Claudio Corte written in 1562, the nature of the horse incorporates both the nature of the domesticated and gentle animal and that of a 'wild beast' (Tomassini, 2014). Such acts of aggression can be witnessed in fights between horses for dominance and also in the violence of their sexual encounters. Compared to the sheer size and strength of the horse, the human is frail in comparison, and can easily be grievously hurt by accident, if not by design.

The unpredictability and potential for aggression and violence in horses has been and remains a cause of fear for those who handle and ride them. Fear in this instance is an appropriate response which leads to caution and an awareness of safety. However, this fear has often also resulted in the perceived need to totally dominate, restrain and control the horse, to emotionally and physically strip him of his power and strength so that he becomes more malleable and servile. Throughout the history of equitation (the riding and training of the horse for riding), this has been achieved by the use of severe bits with powerful lever actions placed in his mouth, by the use of sharp spurs that prick the horse's sides, and by a variety of whips and other means of physically inflicting pain and psychologically imposing dominance. Whilst the use of very severe bits and spurs has largely been outlawed, the intention behind them still affects our concept of the horse today when control is partly achieved by the almost routine castrating of entire horses (stallions), which would have been rare practice for our ancestors who almost exclusively rode stallions.<sup>1</sup>

Fear of the unpredictability of the horse was not the only problem with humans' encounter with horses. The fear of physical harm from falling off the horse, or of being kicked or bitten, is often superseded in the rider by a fear of the horse not 'doing what he has been told' and as a result, the rider feeling humiliated or made to look foolish in front of his or her peers. Thus, in many instances the greatest threat to the horse lay not in the perceived fear of the horse's ability to inflict harm, but rather on his ability to undermine the often romanticised version of the human 'self'. The horse over time was to become a prop in the theatre that was, to use the more recent quote by Goffman, the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman, 1990).

The history of equitation has not only been coloured by the role that the horse was supposed to perform but also by what the horse was perceived to be. Since the

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<sup>1</sup> Because of this, all horses mentioned in this thesis are referred to in the appropriate gender pronoun

domestication of the horse and until fairly recently, the horse was not considered to be a sentient being and was thought of as merely a beast to be mastered and used; a view that was endorsed by prevailing Judao-Christian doctrines which held that 'man' held dominion over animals. Advances in equitation starting in ancient Greece, through Europe in the Middle-Ages to its flourishing during the Renaissance came about accompanied by an increased awareness and recognition of the horse's nature, plus a realisation that the natural beauty of the horse at liberty could never be reproduced when brutality and coercion were present in his training. The greatest challenge for the rider was to train the horse to be obedient and yet retain his spirit. This ultimately led to the search for alternative ways to train and handle the horse, the most successful of which were based on mutual trust and co-operation, deemed necessary to preserve the animal's beauty, his spirit and his gentleness. In order to achieve this trust, changes needed to be made in the ways in which people related to horses. Such changes demanded that the trainers acquired a level of humility, quietness and respect for the animal in their care, as well as the need to undergo many years of supervised practice. Today we can see this philosophy in action during performances at the famous Spanish Riding School of Vienna, where one can witness the unique partnership possible between human and horse, where trust and mutual co-operation exist without force, and where the beauty of the horse is presented for its own sake.

The Spanish Riding School of Vienna has, for several hundred years, presented performances of classical equitation to audiences in its Winter Riding School, an annexe of the Hofburg Palace in the centre of Vienna. During the Renaissance, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, great changes occurred in Europe, with a revival of interest in the classical arts and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome. This revival also included a resurgence of interest in the classical 'art' of equitation, and led to the emergence of many schools of equitation in Italy, France and Austria-Hungary, within which the discipline of equitation as an 'art' was to blossom. However, neither the school in Italy nor the schools in France survived the turmoil of the many wars and revolutions that plagued Europe, the only school to emerge unscathed being Austria-Hungary's in Vienna, which (confusingly) became known as the Spanish Riding School (SRS) because the original horses were imported from Spain.

The Spanish Riding School, famous for its white Lipizzaner horses and its opulent riding hall, continues to practise this 'art' and presents to the public demonstrations of equitation that are of outstanding quality and which arose from principles first laid down in ancient Greece,

later re-established in 18th century Europe. These practices of training and riding horses are presented to audiences in the form of choreographed performances formerly known as *reprises*; these may be collective, as in the case of the quadrille involving four or more horses and their riders, or individual, involving only one horse and rider.

Investigations into this prestigious riding school and its performances inevitably give rise to many questions. What does this institution do? Who are their target audience? How are these performances of equitation to be appreciated and evaluated? Can such investigation shed any light on existing debates within philosophy? What might they reveal about the relationship that human beings have with the horse specifically and with animals generally? When we speak of the beauty of the horse what is it that we mean? What kind of beauty might this be?

Such questions reveal the existence of two distinct threads of inquiry, those concerned with issues relating to performance aspects, for example, beauty and its experience, namely aesthetic inquiry, and those relating to the many ways in which we view and treat animals and our moral responsibilities to them, namely ethical inquiry. Ideals of beauty and ideas relating to the ethical treatment of animals are closely related to the political, social and cultural values of a given time and as such are subject to change. An awareness of these changes and the forces which brought them about is essential in attempting to understand an historical institution. Therefore, I begin this investigation by exploring the historical background of classical equitation, in particular, the type of equitation practised at the SRS, in the attempt to try to shed some light not only on how this type of equitation developed, but also on how the relationship between the horse and human has evolved since the initial utilization of the horse as a vehicle in battle, to the presentation of the horse in performances with audience appeal that we see in Vienna today. This evolution involved many changes in attitude relating to the horse and what he was understood to be, initially being considered as a tool or as a mode of transport for war and an emblem for masculinity and its associated traits, and only much more recently as a friend and companion. Such attitudes toward the horse had (and continue to have), an impact on how he was to be treated and trained.

The Spanish Riding School as an institution is distinguished from other riding schools presenting equitation to the public by several features: the riding hall in which the riding, training and the performances take place; the presence of a selectively bred group of horses (bred by the school at its own stud); a group of individuals who, throughout its history, have been responsible for passing down principles of equitation from one

generation to the next largely by their teaching and by word of mouth; and the kind of performances they stage for the general public. In what follows, I will explore these features in more detail and especially in relation to their historical origins.

I begin with an investigation into the origins of classical equitation, from its early function on the battlefields of ancient Greece, through to its later development as an 'art form' during the Renaissance. I then explore the history of the Winter Riding Hall in Vienna in which the performances of classical equitation by the SRS take place. Following on from this, I will examine the origins of what I consider to be the main focus of interest in the performances; the Lipizzaner stallions, the horses that have for over four hundred and fifty years been selectively bred by the Spanish Riding School at its stud in Piber, for their beauty, strength, agility, temperament and trainability. Finally, I explore the historical background of the performances themselves, and describe the content within them.

## **Classical Equitation and the High School**



**Figure 2 Cavalry From the Parthenon Frieze. West 11, 2-3 British Museum**

The practice of training and riding horses for a variety of uses predates the Spanish Riding School by many thousands of years. Archaeological evidence suggests that the horse was

first domesticated in around 1700 B.C, when it appears probable that at least some basic rudimentary training was undertaken in order to handle the horse during this process (Chenevix Trench, 1970). However, for the purposes of this discussion, I will begin with the equitation of ancient Greece because this is where the story of ‘dressage’ or the training of the horse to perform certain movements, as we understand the term today, is thought to have begun.

## **Xenophon and the Greek Riding Horse**



**Figure 3 Early image of Xenophon on horseback**

The first text on horsemanship is believed to have been written by the Greek general and philosopher Xenophon, although in this book he mentions the existence of an even earlier text by Simon of Athens of which only fragments remain today. Xenophon’s book *The Art of Horsemanship* has been translated many times throughout its history, initially published in 1516, it continues to be published today (Worsely, 2004). It influenced, and continues to influence, the way in which horses are trained and ridden, encompassing what is

considered to be the correct way to sit on a horse (the seat) as well as setting the foundations for, and emphasising, the importance of fair and kind treatment when training the horse. This training of horses in ancient Greece was predominantly directed towards their use as war horses on the battlefield, and the aim was to train an animal that was obedient, light, supple and able to move quickly out of harm's way. One of the most frequent battle movements to be practised at the time was one where the horse was brought to an abrupt halt from a very fast gallop and turned quickly in either direction (Loch S. , 1990). The more gymnastic the horse, the more able he was to avoid danger, and the greater the chance that he and his rider would survive during the battle. It stands to reason therefore, that this early training of the horse would have required the development of certain movements to enhance or improve the ridden horses' suppleness and balance. It is often assumed that the weight and position of a rider do little to disturb the balance of a tall strong horse, but one only has to sit on a young horse who is not accustomed to being ridden to understand how far from the truth this is. The young horse is often fearful of moving forward when first ridden and can easily fall if pushed too quickly before he or she has grown used to the added weight and inconvenience generated by the rider. It is essential also that the rider can remain in balance with the horse whilst this progress occurs.

Although in Ancient Greece soldiers rode their horses bareback or sitting on a simple cloth, since saddles had yet to be invented, the position of the soldier on horseback that Xenophon advocated is one still applicable to this day, and for this reason is commonly referred to as the 'classical seat'. How one sits on a horse was, and is, of great importance because as stated previously, the position of the rider can assist with or hinder the horse's balance. Xenophon had proposed that, "when the rider takes his seat, whether bareback or on the cloth, I do not approve of a seat which is as though the man were on a chair, but rather as though he were standing upright with his legs apart" (Xenophon, 1962, p. 41). What is confusing about this statement, as anyone who has ridden a horse without a saddle will know, is that the anatomy of the human pelvis, plus the anatomy of the horse's back and sides, means that such a position on horseback is virtually impossible and a bending of the rider's knee as though sat on a chair is inevitable. Nevertheless, for the saddled horse, this is less problematic and Xenophon's views on the rider's position are echoed in many classical riding texts of today.<sup>2</sup> Xenophon continues,

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<sup>2</sup> see (Kottas-Helddenberg, 2013)

His foot and leg from the knee down should hang loosely, then too, the rider should accustom himself to keep his body above the hips as supple as possible; for this will give him greater power of action, and he would be less liable to a fall if somebody should try to pull or push him off (Xenophon, 1962, pp. 40-41).

It would appear from this account that it was not only the horse that required training in balance and suppleness: the rider too was to be trained in these skills.

Given that the main dangers that faced the mounted soldier would have been those of falling off the horse during some of these extreme battle movements, or being pulled off the horse by a foot soldier, it was essential that the soldier was secure on the horse, and this resulted in the search for a position when sitting on a horse where his balance was optimised. The position on horseback that Xenophon advocated fulfilled this requirement. This optimised balance and security when on horseback also prevented the rider from making sudden uncontrolled movements with his upper body or legs which would have the undesirable effect of disturbing the balance of his horse. Aside from this essential practical function, one gets a sense when reading Xenophon's book, that it also mattered at the time, how the soldier appeared to an observer when he was on horseback. It is likely that how one sat on, and controlled the horse, conveyed a great deal of information not only to one's subordinates but also to one's enemy. However, no matter how well one looked whilst sat on a horse, success on the battlefield could not be achieved by this alone and both horse and rider had to avoid attacks from the enemy. To do so, the horse had to be well trained in various gaits and movements, to be able to turn quickly and stop abruptly, and had to do so immediately the instruction was given by the rider. In other words the animal not only had to be aware of what these instructions meant, but he also had to respond to them immediately and obediently. Given that little would have been known about the psychology and physiology of the horse at the time, one wonders how this early obedience was achieved. The repeated emphasis on kindness when training the horse by Xenophon suggests that he might have been reacting to a system of training in which this quality was absent.

Xenophon's book contains five main themes in relation to the training of the war horse: first, the importance of tact or gentleness when dealing with horses during their handling and training; second, the requirement of self-discipline for the trainer; third, the desire to enhance or improve upon the beauty of the horse; fourth, the importance of freedom for the horse from excessive restraint; and fifth, the desire to produce a horse that is light or

responsive to the hand of the rider (Loch S. , 1990). Whilst the concern to have a horse that was trained for battle was paramount, Xenophon nonetheless also placed great emphasis on how the horse should appear to an observer. One of the most famous quotes from his book refers to beauty and states that,

... for what the horse does under compulsion, as Simon observes, is done without understanding; and there is no beauty in it either, any more than if one should whip and spur a dancer. There would be a great deal more un-gracefulness than beauty in either a horse or a man that was so treated (Morgan, 1999, p. 62).

In this quote we see the first link that is made between the desirability of presenting beauty in the ridden horse, and the importance of kindness as a component of training essential in achieving or maintaining this beauty. It implies that without kindness, beauty cannot occur. This theme of linking the ethical treatment of the horse with beauty is one which appears throughout the literature on equitation through the centuries and is one of great significance which will be explored in a later discussion of the Spanish Riding School.

The concern with beauty, grace and the spectacle provided by a magnificent horse is a recurring thread in Xenophon's text, accompanied by the suggestion that the horse "should show off all his finest and most brilliant performances willingly, and at a mere sign" (Morgan, 1999, p.63). Xenophon proposes subsequently, that the sight of a horse rearing (standing on its hind legs), "is such a thing of wonder as to fix the eyes of all beholders, young or old. Nobody, I assure you, either leaves him or gets tired of watching him, as long as he presents the brilliant spectacle" (Morgan, 1999, p.63). Rearing, Xenophon argues, ...is the attitude in which the horses of gods and heroes are always depicted, and men who can handle a horse gracefully in it are a magnificent sight (Morgan, 1999, p. 63).

Rearing forms part of the horse's natural repertoire of movements and can be observed in the horse during fighting, courtship, mating and play. When rearing, the horse becomes much greater in height and thus much more formidable, so it is understandable that this is a movement which would be of value to the mounted soldier. First because it lifts him out of reach of the foot soldier, and second because of the threat it poses to those on the ground from the front hooves of the horse.

In rearing we see not only an example of the natural movement of the horse being utilised by the soldiers in battle, and the value placed by Xenophon on the spectacle of the movement itself, but also on the appearance of the men who by their skill can handle the horse gracefully whilst performing it. It is understandable, therefore, why the rearing horse

has been depicted in many paintings and sculptures devoted to representations of great soldiers and statesmen from antiquity. However, the magnificence that Xenophon refers to reveals much more about human ideals and culture than it does about the horse.



**Figure 4 Rearing Horse depicted on the Parthenon Frieze**

Aside from the aim of producing a well-trained horse for the battle field which was capable of performing these movements requiring great strength and agility, Xenophon also aimed to produce a horse that had a high stepping action and a 'noble' head carriage upon which a commander could display himself to advantage at the head of his troops during the parades. He seemed particularly fond of a movement known as the curvet which involved the horse lifting his head high and flexing his neck, as if he were presenting himself to a mare, whilst at the same time moving at a slow and cadenced elevated trot. Such a curvetting horse, Xenophon proposed, is so admirable that it cannot fail to capture the eyes of all who looked upon it.<sup>3</sup> The need to capture the eyes of the onlooker was probably as much of a social statement as a functional need. Those on horseback would have been the wealthy or those of a higher social standing than the foot soldier or mere onlooker. Sitting on a prancing, powerful horse thus reflected the differing social hierarchy of the time.

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<sup>3</sup> The description of the curvet resembles a movement used in modern dressage called the 'passage'

Though the importance of kindness, beauty, skill, scientific study and art in equitation are also underscored in this ancient text, it must be remembered that the Greek war horse was probably considered to be little more than a mere 'tool' to be used in battle. There is very little evidence provided throughout Xenophon's text to suggest that the horse was considered in any way as a companion or friend to the soldier, nor is there any evidence that people at the time kept horses as pets or rode horses for pleasure. An entry in the Oxford Classical Dictionary describes the Athenian horse as being a poor creature, which was prone to being both lazy and vicious, so perhaps this lack of pleasure in riding is understandable (Felton, 1962). Whilst there is no mention of the Greeks loving their horses, or treating them with any real affection or gratitude, Xenophon does suggest that the horse, as a result of kind treatment, should not only love men "but even long for them" (Felton 1962 p.21). One possible reason for this apparent lack of affection on the part of the soldiers might be that the Greek war horse, not having benefited from centuries of domestication, may have been unpredictable and even dangerous to handle and ride. Throughout the book, reference is made to how the soldier should handle the horse so that he is not harmed by him. For example, in chapter six of the book Xenophon explains in detail how a 'man' might groom a horse, "with the least danger to himself and the greatest good to the animal" (Felton 1962 p.35).

The Greek soldiers always rode stallions<sup>4</sup> and this may be one reason why Xenophon considered the horse to be dangerous, as stallions can often be unpredictable. Even later, the horse who was to become Alexander the Great's most famous horse Bucephalus, upon being brought to the court, was described as a fierce and unmanageable beast who refused to let riders mount him and would attack anyone who came near (Figure 5). The kind temperament often seen in today's horses, appears then to be largely absent from the horses in ancient Greece, (Morgan, 1999). Conversely, such sentiments may also reflect an ideology, present at the time, in which horses were misunderstood and unfairly dismissed by humans as being wilful machines or brutes. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the horse was regarded as somewhat unpredictable, the message throughout the book is one of kindness in his treatment, an attitude which most likely arose out of a need to attain the co-operation of the horse so that the soldier could rely on him during battle, rather than out of any true affection for him. It must also be remembered that some of what was considered to be kind treatment of the horse during this period is unlikely to be considered so today,

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<sup>4</sup> Un-castrated male horses

and Xenophon certainly appears to have no compunction in punishing the horse severely for any perceived disobedience. The images that we see of Greek riders depicted on coins or in sculptures of the time show that in order to achieve the desired 'look' of a high arched neck in the horses they were ridden under almost constant restraint (Felton, 1962).



**Figure 5 The Taming of Bucephalus . Francois Schommer, photograph of old drawing depicting the young Alexander the Great training Bucephalus**

Following Xenophon, and throughout the first five centuries of the Christian era, very little was written about the development of equitation and the training of horses, although studies of archaeological remains, statues and early artworks suggest that inventions and developments undoubtedly did take place (Chenevix Trench, 1970). Evidence of the advancement of equitation through the Middle- Ages is provided by artworks such as the Bayeux Tapestry where a whole series of pictures illustrates how the knights at the Battle of Hastings rode and fought. For war, these knights, like the soldiers who rode under

Xenophon, were again always mounted on stallions. Precisely how these animals were trained is not clear, as again there is little written evidence to refer to. Nevertheless, medieval pictures depicting horses apparently being taught what we would now describe as the '*High School Airs*' suggest that equitation was advancing. What was of significance was that the Knights dressed themselves and their horses in very heavy metal armour to protect themselves against the lances and long bows of their opponents. This meant that a much heavier, larger breed of horse was required to carry such a burdensome load, and this larger horse, weighed down with armour, was much less likely to be agile, and so too, was his rider. It is unlikely then that such heavy armour allowed for any finesse in equitation at this time. Illustrations of the harsh bits and spurs used by the knights at the time also suggest that this lack of balance resulted in the riders relying on such tools to ensure that the horse stopped and moved forward but is also indicative of the fact that the kind ways advocated previously by Xenophon had been largely ignored. Further evidence of this is provided by Felton in his book *Masters of Equitation*, in which he cites a quote from a treatise of equitation written at the time by Laurentius Ruisius in which it is stated that:

The nappy horse<sup>5</sup> should be kept locked in a stable for forty days. Thereupon to be mounted wearing large spurs and a strong whip; or else the rider will carry an iron bar, three or four feet long and ending in three well-sharpened hooks and if the horse refuses to go forward he will dig one of these hooks into the horse's quarters and draw him forward; alternatively an assistant may apply a heated iron bar under the horse's tail, while the rider drives the spurs in with all available strength (Felton, 1962, p. 23).

This quote is a further indication of the abandonment of the ideal of the humane treatment of the horse, and one can only imagine the suffering present in the animals subjected to such treatment. However, the plight of the horse was not to improve in the short term at least, and it was out of this culture of inhumanity to the horse that the later Neopolitan School of equitation was to emerge.

## **The Renaissance**

We have to wait until the 16th century before a number of text books on equitation were to appear, partly as a result of a resurgence of interest in classical learning (Chenevix Trench, 1970). During this period there was also an interest in equitation for its own sake, as opposed to merely producing horses for the battlefield, and with this came the

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'nappy horse' refers to an animal who is non-compliant or difficult to train

development of the manège (a riding hall or arena) as a place in which to ride and train.

The object of the manège, according to Chenevix Trench, was

art for art's sake, to practise a very difficult and, to its practitioners, satisfying form of equitation... it also served the useful purpose of displaying great men in a glamorous and heroic role, curvetting and caracoling about, before lesser mortals (p.103).

Whilst the primary purpose of the Greek warhorse had been as a vehicle for battle, the ability of the horse to highlight certain traits in the rider, such as those of moral virtue, magnificence, courage and honour, were recognised at the time, and were now to be taken to a new level. The horse was to become a symbol of social standing as well as of bravery and artistry.

This change in emphasis came about largely due to a shedding of the heavy and cumbersome protective armour worn during warfare, which meant that the horses carried much less weight on their backs. Lighter, finer horses could be used for riding and this made it possible to develop equitation to great levels of refinement (Windisch-Graetz M. , 1958). This, along with a resurgence of interest in classical learning, led to many horsemen rediscovering Xenophon's text, and thereby being inspired to write down their own philosophies relating to the riding and training of the horse.

At the same time, the first civilian riding academy appeared in Naples, opened by a nobleman, Frederico Grisone, in 1532. His text published in 1550 and entitled *Gli Ordini di Cavalcare (Rules of Horse Riding)*, set out his own distinctive methods of training. What distinguished these methods from those advocated by Xenophon however, was the emphasis on the complete domination of the horse and this was frequently achieved by using extreme brutality, to force the horse to do what was required. The idea was not to provide the horse with exercises to make his body supple and improve his balance but to destroy any resistance he might show to being trained. The way that this resistance was dealt with was by total domination, with the horse being rewarded not by kindness but by the removal of the harsh punishment that seemed an almost continuous feature employed in the unfortunate animal's training. Threatening with the voice, beating the horse between the ears with a stick or taking the horse to a heavily ploughed field on a lungeing rein (a long rein) and flogging him until "the devil of disobedience had been exorcised" (Chenevix Trench, 1970, p. 107), were just a few of the methods employed. These, coupled with the use of ornate curb bits with a very strong lever action, severe spurs and multiple types of whip further suggest that compassion and empathy were not present in the handling and riding of these animals.

Thus the idea of the horse as an animal worthy of kind treatment, previously advocated by Xenophon, is missing from Grisone's text, and so too is the concern with the presentation of the beauty of the horse. Nevertheless, Grisone's work and those of a few of his pupils, contributed to knowledge about horses and riding being amassed at the time. One of these pupils was Pignatelli, who is thought to be responsible for the introduction of the single pillar for training the horse in certain 'airs' (movements), where the horse was attached to a pillar via a leather strap and required to move around it on a circle. This resulted in a crossing of the hind legs, which was thought to develop strength and suppleness throughout the back and hindquarters of the horse. Though very little is actually known about Pignatelli and his training methods, he is considered an important figure because of the influence he was to have on subsequent riding masters in Spain, France and Germany, especially the French master, Antoine de Pluvinel.

Naples was not alone in the production of great riding masters and authors during this period. In 1623 the French riding master Antoine de Pluvinel who had studied for six years under Pignatelli, returned from Italy to his native France and published a book entitled *Manège du Roy* in 1623 (*Manège of the King*), which was re-published five years later under the title *L'Instruction du Roy en l'exercice de Monter à Cheval (Instructions of the King in the Exercise of Horse Riding)*. This text consists of a dialogue between the author and his student the young King Louis XII, in the form of question and answer sessions between the two, and is illustrated with copperplate images from the Dutch printmaker Crispin de Passe the Younger (Nelson, 1985). Despite having been trained by a student of the Neopolitan School, Pluvinel advocated a much kinder approach to the training of horses, suggesting that it is far better to teach by kindness than by strictness. He urged his students to appeal to the intelligence of the horse rather than to resort to violence. For Pluvinel, the correct way to obtain obedience in a horse involved the use of frequent praise, tidbits and patting, and whilst whips and spurs were undoubtedly present in the horse's training, he advised the use of them with caution. Like Xenophon before him, Pluvinel recognised the horse as being a highly developed creature that is capable of thought and as such should be taught to think for himself. Pluvinel's methods appealed to the nature of the horse and his ability to learn and remember, rather than by instilling in the animal the constant fear of punishment. A good horseman, he suggested, should never lose his temper and beat the horse (Nelson, 1985). In his view, the refined and advanced art of riding was something which not only tested the physical capabilities of the rider but something that enhanced certain virtues in a man: skill, judgement, patience, honour and courage, an even

temperament, a sense of *bienséance* (propriety or decorum) and perhaps most importantly, moral virtue. These qualities were deemed necessary in life, but were also believed to ensure the closest possible union between man and horse.

A further feature for which Pluvinel is remembered is that he was the first person to explain adequately the use of the two pillars in training the horse, where the horse was attached to each of the two pillars which stood on either side of him and which prevented him from moving forwards (Figure 6). At the same time, his hindquarters were activated by the waving of a whip. Such activity of the hindquarters, coupled with an inability to move forward, resulted in more weight being taken on the horse's back legs and a consequent lightening of the load on the front legs. The use of the pillars in training the horse was, and continues to be, a matter of great controversy. The enforced restriction and restraint of the horse that the pillars impose can be seen as the ultimate method of control, rendering the horse completely helpless. Concerns about the use of pillars was initially voiced by William Cavendish (The Duke of Newcastle 1592-1676) who argued against them based on the fact that he had witnessed many horses being ruined by their use. He argued that "one tires and torments a horse in the pillars to no purpose, making it lift the forehead and hoping thereby to put it on its haunches. This is against the natural order and mortifies all horses..." (La Gueriniere, 1994, p. 147). One can share the concern about the pillars going "against the natural order". For an animal such as the horse, flight is an essential survival skill, and one can imagine that such restraint might cause great anxiety and fear in the horse prevented from fleeing from a situation that he found potentially dangerous or alarming.

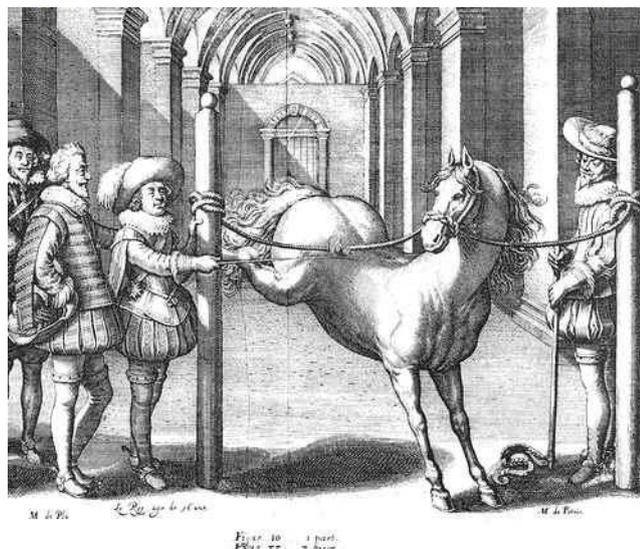


Figure 6 Pluvinel's work between the pillars

However, despite the concerns of William Cavendish, the use of the pillars as tools of training was to continue, as the benefits were perceived to outweigh the disadvantages of their use. The use of pillars has been defended by many horsemen over the years, on the grounds that when the pillars are used correctly, and with great patience and skill, this is a very effective training method whilst it does not appear to cause the horse any more concern than other training methods. However, trust in the trainer, and the gentle handling of the horse when he is between the pillars, are vital if the horse is to be kept calm and free from anxiety during this process. Whilst largely absent from the training of modern dressage horses in the United Kingdom and many other parts of the world, the work between the pillars can still be seen today at the SRS and at certain other training establishments in Spain, France and Portugal .

The powerful influence of Grisone and Pignatelli continued to spread all over Europe, in particular in France at the then newly-founded School of Versailles, where under Louis XIV (1638-1715), the art of equitation was to flourish. A keen horseman and lover of beautiful horses, Louis moved his entire royal stables from the centre of Paris to Versailles in 1682. (Chenevix Trench, 1970). Here he employed *Premier-Ecuvers* (first Equerries – who had charge of the horses which the sovereign used personally) to preside over the training of the horses and to give instruction in the art of equitation. The royal stables kept a variety of breeds for particular purposes, with the best of the school horses being recognised by the gold on their bridles. (Loch, 2001). This manège in the School of Versailles was to become world famous not only for its grandeur, but also for the quality of riding and training that it produced. Here again we encounter a move away from the harsh and sometimes cruel training methods that had previously been employed in Naples, with a move towards an increased emphasis on kindness towards the horse when training, as well as a revived interest in the practice of ‘lightness in hand’ when riding the horse. The pinnacle of achievement in the manège at this time was considered to be an exact and polished performance of a series of leaps known as the ‘airs above the ground’ which, when performed well, provided a dramatic spectacle. However, to achieve the excellence required by these ‘airs’ the horse had to undergo prolonged systematic training over many years, involving the employment of exercises designed to assist in shifting the animal’s weight from his forelegs (forehand) to his hind legs. The aim of this was to develop in the horse sufficient strength to enable him to shift his weight almost entirely from his front end to his back end (haunches), so that he appeared to be sitting with his haunches on the

ground. Such strength enabled the horse to propel himself off his hind legs and into the jumps, as well as to rest his weight onto the hind legs while the forelegs were raised in the air, constituting a movement known as the *levade*. Thus, the completion of the horse's training culminated in his ability to perform these jumps effortlessly and "then and only then, could a horse be ridden in best show before a Prince" (Chenevix Trench, 1970, p. 121). The difficulty of these jumps, and the physical strength they required, meant that no matter how well-bred a horse was, or how strong he appeared, only a few of the most talented individuals had sufficient strength and temperament to achieve them.

Perhaps however, the greatest *ecuyer* of all, to emerge from the influence of the school of Versailles, was the nobleman François Robichon de la Guérinière (1688-1751), a man who was to become particularly influential in relation to the training and riding techniques employed at the Spanish Riding School; his book *Ecole de Cavalerie (School of Horsemanship)* was first published in four parts between 1729 -31 and would eventually become the authoritative text for many of the great riders and teachers of the time.

## The Influence of François Robichon de la Guérinière



Figure 7 François Robichon de la Guérinière ( standing)

La Guérinière, whilst strongly associated with the school at Versailles, was never actually based there, but ran his own academy at the Rue de Vaugirand in Paris opposite the Palais du Luxembourg, having previously received his title of *ecuyer* in 1715 from the Comte D'Armagnac (Loch, 2001). As a brilliant horseman, trainer and scholar, his services were much sought after, and in 1730 he was appointed *Ecuyer Royale* at the Manège des Tuileries (Loch, 2001). La Guérinière is however most remembered for his humility and for the compassionate methods employed in the handling and training of the horses in his care. The discussions of training in his book *Ecole de Cavalerie* reveal a man with a deep-seated affection for the horse, and with a great sense of responsibility in relation to its care; characteristics which are largely absent in the philosophies of numerous other contemporary texts on equitation.

*Ecole de Cavalerie* is divided into three sections; Part One is entitled 'On the name and position of the external parts of the horse' and deals with, as its name suggests, the external points and appearance of the horse. Part Three is entitled, 'Hipposteology, or treatise on the bones of the horse', and deals with equine anatomy and various equine veterinary conditions and their treatments, (a reading of this section and the one devoted to surgical operations to treat certain ailments in the horse, makes one extremely grateful for modern veterinary science). However, the section which is of most relevance to this discussion is to be found in Part Two, entitled 'On the manner of training horses according to the various uses for which they are intended' and it is here that the philosophy underpinning La Guérinière's principles of training is to be found. In section one of this chapter he suggests that,

There are few people who do not love horses: it seems that this inclination is based upon the recognition we owe to an animal from which we receive the benefit of so many services; and if there be anyone who thinks differently, he is punished for his indifference by the accidents to which he exposes himself, or by being deprived of the aid he hoped to have from the horse (La Guérinière, 1994, p. 79).

Here for the first time is the word 'love' used in conjunction with the horse, along with a recognition of the service that the horse gave to his trainer and a subsequent sense of gratitude for this service. Although the term love is an emotive one and is difficult to conceptualise in this context, it does appear to imply that a shift in attitude was taking place, from one in which the horse was regarded as servile and simply a tool to be used either for war or to enhance the qualities in the rider, towards a more compassionate approach. However, a reading of La Guérinière's section 'On the chastisements of the horse' reveals that the ethical treatment of the horse still had a long way to go.

Chastisements were defined by La Guérinière as “the punishments consequent to the disobedience of the horse to certain commands given” (La Guérinière p.121). These involved the use of three tools: the long whip, the switch and the spurs. These would be applied in varying degrees of severity depending upon the particular level of perceived disobedience in the horse.

The advantages of the adoption of this seemingly more benign approach to training, is referred to often throughout La Guérinière’s book, with many references being made to the advantages of praise over punishment. There is an emphasis on understanding that if a horse disobeys an instruction, he often does so not out of any malice or desire to avoid doing what is asked of him, but rather because he has failed to understand the instructions given. Furthermore the book also expounds an interpretation of Xenophon’s theory of the role of reward and punishment in training the horse, advocating that a fair and appropriate balance between these two aspects will produce a horse that does his work willingly.

La Guérinière also advocates that training a horse, should be a slow process; one that should not be rushed, proposing that

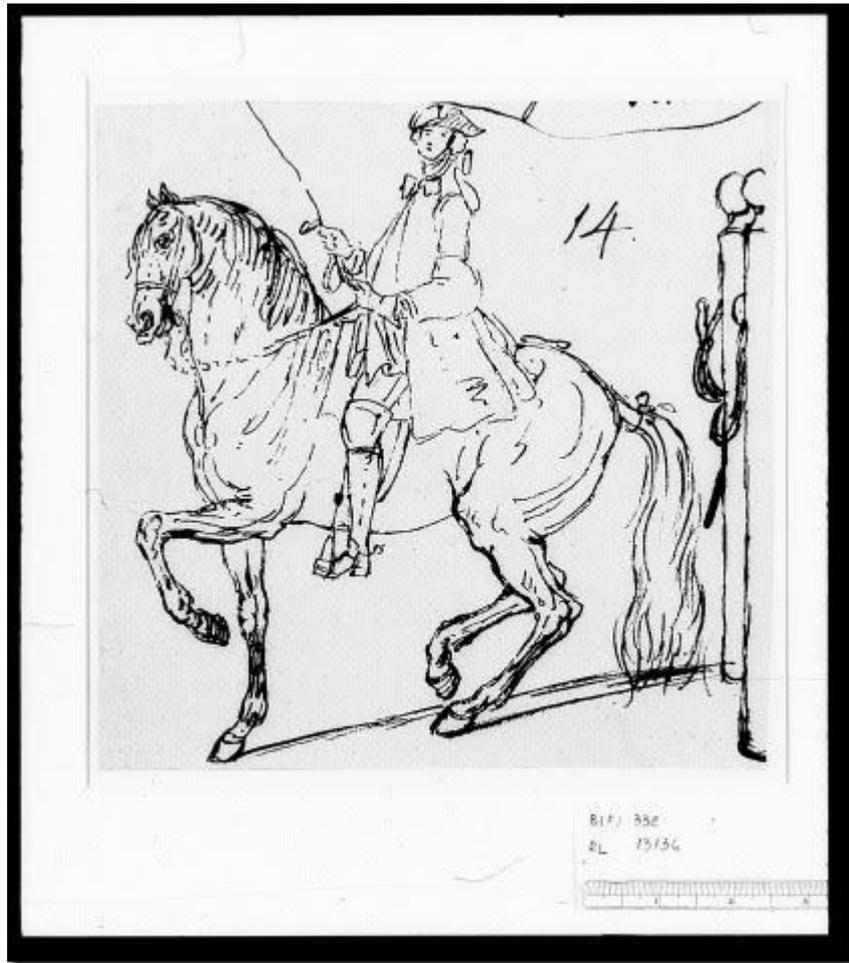
The origin of the greater part of the horse’s defences does not always lie with nature; one often requires of them things of which they are incapable, desiring to accelerate too greatly their learning and to teach them too much; this coercion renders exercise odious to them, strains and exhausts their tendons and sinews, whose elasticity is the very foundation of suppleness; and often they are ruined when one believes they are trained; then, no longer having the will to resist, they obey, but with ill-will and without any vigour whatsoever (La Guerinere, 1994, p. 82).

Here we clearly see a level of concern for the horse’s well-being, and a warning of the dangers of rushing the training, and over-training, leading to a destruction of the horse’s mind and body and subsequently his inability to perform the movements with any energy or enthusiasm. The repeated insistence in this book on the need to secure the horse’s co-operation rather than to beat him, or tire him into submission, suggests that the latter method was very much in existence, and possibly common practice, and therefore required repeated warnings as to its dangers.

In addition to his approach to the training of horses, la Guérinière is also credited with the development of an exercise known as the ‘*shoulder-in*’, although he is quick to acknowledge, that a similar exercise performed on a circle around the single pillar had previously been developed by William Cavendish, the first Duke of Newcastle (1592- 1676). The *shoulder-in* continues to be used today both in Vienna, and in competitive training establishments as an exercise in the training of many young horses, as it helps to increase

the horse's suppleness on both sides of his body, as well as developing muscles which enable the horse to take more weight on his hind legs.

La Guérinière's book provides an exposition of certain ethical and practical principles in the training of horses, and it offers advice to the rider on the best way to sit astride a horse so that he would best retain his balance. Unlike Xenophon, however, la Guérinière does not appear overly concerned with presenting beauty in the ridden horse, but he does make reference to other aesthetic qualities such as grace, and harmony and refers to some aspects of equitation as being pleasing to the eye. Where beauty is mentioned in relation to the horse, it is mentioned in relation to its form and function, where the beauty of the horse, according to la Guérinière, consisted of "good conformation and just proportion of its external parts" (p.11). Ideals of beauty in the horse are subject to the fashions of the time and the illustrations in la Guérinière's book depict animals that are 'short coupled', with powerful hindquarters. Their necks are short and strong, they appear to have small heads and disproportionately small ears. In each of the engravings in the book the horses are pictured with their necks arched and the haunches lowered (even when not ridden), representing the ideals of collection. Collection refers to the re-distribution of weight from the front of the horse to the back end of the horse. This results in the appearance of a higher neck and lower haunches in the horse, coupled with a shorter higher stride. To the viewer, the horse appears more compressed (shorter in body length) and more powerful.



**Figure 8 Sketch by Charles Parrocel (1688-1752) Monsieur de Krant. Sketch for a plate in Ecole de Cavalerie by La Gueriniere. Paris 1733. Image reproduced courtesy of the Royal Collection Trust, property of Her Majesty the Queen.**

Thus it can be seen that throughout the history of equitation, riders have been concerned with the enhancement of certain spectacular natural movements of the horse and have made use of them, initially on the battlefield, and then later in the manège. Yet the retention of the beauty, and splendour, of these natural movements created a paradox. The horse had to be trained, his natural exuberance had to be harnessed and controlled in order to make him obedient and safe to ride, and this sometimes had the result of destroying the very thing that was sought. The sometimes cruel techniques, employed to train the horse; to 'break him in'<sup>6</sup> served only to diminish him, to make him fearful and tense, and as Xenophon had previously suggested, this could never produce beauty. A balance had to be found in which the training was conducted humanely and was also of sufficient duration that the body and mind of the horse were not adversely affected by it. It

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<sup>6</sup> An unfortunate term, referring to the initial training of horses to be ridden

was vital that the horse was kept fit, and healthy, that his muscles were not put under undue strain, or damaged by being forced to perform movements that he was ill prepared to execute. Furthermore, it was important that the horse's natural exuberance, expression and brilliance in motion were nurtured and retained.

It should also be remembered that this idea of beauty in relation to the horse, so sought after throughout the history of equitation, was of a particular kind: it highlighted and celebrated what were considered to be desirable characteristics of the male form. Here the movements of the courting stallion were sought: his high steps, arched neck, front end lightened in the semi or full rear, his ability to gallop and to come to an abrupt halt, to spin and to leap in the air and kick out. Harnessed for their function to protect the soldier they also had the effect of conveying to an opponent the power, status and bravery of the rider. It is not surprising then that the many statues and paintings produced throughout history celebrating great statesmen and generals have depicted them sitting on a large stallion positioned in a semi rear. The horse's neck is arched and often his genitals are visible to the viewer; sexuality and maleness merge with greatness on the battlefield and with success in life. The powerful male body of the horse merged with the body of the male rider and the appearance of this unified male body provided a prominent field in which to visualise the ideals of masculinity present at the time (see figure 9).



**Figure 9 Charles II on Horseback. The horse's neck is arched and often his genitals are on display to the viewer**

However, apart from the desire to present his masculinity, it was also important that the nobleman was able to demonstrate his skill in training and riding the horse to an onlooker. The development of such skill not only required instruction from great teachers who were very highly regarded and sought after, but also required a suitable environment in which such skills could be learned and displayed to the court. Inclement weather in the winter months and the presence of biting insects and the hot sun in the summer meant that many of the Royal Households built riding halls specifically designed to provide not only shelter from the elements but also to provide an appropriate lavish setting in which the 'art' of riding and training could take place. The Spanish Riding School's Winter Riding School is one of the few such riding halls that remain; it is still used today for its intended purpose, the

training of horses and their riders, but it also provides the main venue in which to view the performances of the Spanish Riding School.

## **The Viennese Winter Riding School**

The outside gives no clue to its use, which makes the interior all the more overwhelming. Untouched by the centuries, the hall rises before the eyes of the visitor, a huge building filled with natural light, a wonderful symphony in white. Opposite the entrance, on the first gallery, is the Royal Box in which hangs the portrait of the founder Charles VI mounted on a Lipizzaner stallion. It provides the only colour in this huge white hall. (Podhajsky, 1991, p. 251).

It might seem unusual in a discussion of the historical origins of the SRS to devote space to a section on the Winter Riding School (WRS), and yet this building forms an integral part of the appreciation of the SRS and its performances. This building is not only beautiful in its own right and of interest from an architectural point of view, but it is also important because it provides an appropriate space in which the performances can be appreciated. Within the walls of this lovely baroque hall the stage is set to appreciate the many years of equitation practised there; the sense of history is almost palpable. Like many theatrical settings, it provides an atmosphere which to induce in the audience, a characteristic mood or in the words of the philosopher Gernot Böhme, to “attune the spectators to the theatrical performance” (Bohme, 2013, p. sec 7). The first mention of a manège (training arena for horses) being built on the *Rosstumbplatz* in Vienna dates from 1572, and appears in a document mentioning a delivery of wood needed to construct the building to house it.

More than one hundred years later, Emperor Leopold I (1658-1705), commissioned a riding hall which was partially built, but was then badly damaged during the Ottoman wars. Following nearly a hundred years of war, there was a move to rebuild many damaged buildings and construct new ones in several parts of Europe. This re-building was influenced by the earlier aspirations of the Italian Renaissance, culminating in the style of Roman Baroque. Vienna was transformed into a city of Baroque palaces set in great parks, and one of these palaces, the Hofburg, was extended to include the Imperial Library, the Spanish Riding School and the Imperial stables (Windisch-Graetz M. , 1958). The Winter Riding School that stands in the heart of Vienna today was commissioned by Emperor Charles VI in 1729, designed by Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, and was built by his son Josef. The building was completed in 1735 and was opened by Charles VI on September 14<sup>th</sup> of that

year. Whilst designed to be used primarily as a riding school, initially this ornate hall had a variety of uses, including being a concert and dance hall.

Following the death of Charles VI in 1740, Maria Theresa, a keen and skilled rider herself, became regent and held lavish masked balls and parties as well as the 'Knights games' and carousels that were so popular at the time. Beethoven is rumoured to have conducted an orchestra there, and the building was eventually to become the centre of the festivities held during the Congress of Vienna in 1815 (Figure 10). Nevertheless, it was for the housing of the presentations of classical dressage that the hall was to become famous, and this remains the case today. This beautiful Baroque building with its two storeys and phalanx of white columns which support the galleries above is as striking as many of the opera houses found elsewhere in Europe and as is the case with many buildings of its age and grandeur, it evokes a sense of history, imperialism and wealth.



**Figure 10 Festivities at the Winter Riding School during the Congress of Vienna 1815**

Above the entrance to the hall is a sign which informs the visitor that: This Imperial Riding School was constructed in the Year 1735 to be used for the Instruction and Training of the Youth of the Nobility and for the Schooling of Horses in Riding for Art and for War. The riders enter the hall through semi glazed doors which are situated at the opposite end of the hall to the Royal Box within which hangs the huge portrait of Charles VI.

The audience views the performance from one of the balconies above the arena, each of which is supported by stone columns, and joined by elaborate balustrades. Lighting is provided by wall lights in the balconies, and by three huge crystal chandeliers which are suspended above the riding arena. At the centre of the riding arena stand the two large pillars, topped by two Austrian flags (see figure11).



**Figure 11 Winter Riding School**

The hall has itself changed little since it was first constructed, save for the repairs and restoration conducted as a result of the damage it sustained during the various wars in Europe. It remains a perfect setting in which to house the performances of the Spanish Riding School's famous white baroque horses, the Lipizzaners.



Figure 12 Charles VI riding a Lipizzaner Portrait hangs in the Winter Riding School

The revival of interest in equitation in 16th century Europe also fuelled a desire to attain even higher standards of training and riding than had previously existed. The aim was to combine the skills of the soldiers of Ancient Greece with the methods employed by the medieval knights (Windisch-Graetz M. , 1958). To achieve this, a very special breed of horse was sought, one that was finer in stature, more 'noble' in character and also possessed of great beauty. This search led to the Spanish Horse, a breed much admired for its beauty, lightness of foot and fearlessness on the battlefield. These horses also possessed great strength, had a high, extravagant front leg action and were visually impressive, making

them an ideal choice of horse for the Austrian nobility who were anxious to take their place in the world of high school equitation. The first of these Spanish horses were imported to Bohemia by the King of Bohemia, Ferdinand I (1526-1564) in 1562, and served as the foundation stock for what was to become the breed of horse for the Spanish Riding School: the Lipizzaner. In 1580 Archduke Charles II of Austria (1540-1590) moved the horses, comprising three young mares, six young stallions and twenty four broodmares, to the small village of Lipizza east of Trieste where they were to remain until the dangers posed by the First World War meant that a new home had to be found for the stud. This led to its move to Piber, in Austria, where it has remained to this day. (Windisch-Graetz M. , 1958). The greatest threat to the Lipizzaner however, was to occur during World War II and the placing of the stud under the care of Dr Gustav Rau who had previously been in charge of the German military studs. Dr Rau on a visit to Piber declared that the stud was unsuitable due to the lack of stabling and recommended that it be moved to Hostau in Czechoslovakia. Despite opposition from the Director of the Spanish Riding School at the time, Colonel Podhajsky, the first mares were moved from Piber in 1942. Following his inspection of the new broodmares, Rau had rejected a number of them and replaced them with Lipizzaner mares from the stud in Czechoslovakia. This meant that some of the original bloodlines of the stock at Piber of such importance to the SRS were 'diluted' by bloodlines from other stock.

Rau also engaged in breeding experiments in which mares were mated with their full brothers or fathers in an attempt (in his view) to increase the purity of certain bloodlines, a practice which had never been used in the stud at Piber because of the possible danger of genetic defects arising from inbreeding. The strict rules governing the breeding of the horses were thus being undermined and so too was the welfare of the horses. At Piber it was accepted that mares do not reach breeding maturity until they are four years old and to allow them to carry and deliver foals before that age often caused the young mares problems. It was common practice under Rau's direction however, to breed from the mares as young as two or three years old. The constant arguments over this and other matters at the stud between Podhajsky and Rau, eventually led to a compromise and the abolition of some of these breeding experiments.

The need for the horses to be moved again, this time out of Hostau, became increasingly pressing as the war progressed. Many of them had been sold from the stud and were now in the hands of private owners. Years of austerity and lack of food resulted in a dwindling number of horses as some of them had been disposed of for food. In April 28th 1945 the

United States Second Cavalry unit occupied Hostau and discovered the horses. Upon learning of this, General Patton arranged for Podhajsky to be flown to Hostau where, seeing the plight of the horses, Podhajsky made an immediate request for the assistance of Patton and the American troops under his command to provide safe passage for the horses out of Czechoslovakia. On May 7<sup>th</sup> 1945 the horses were moved out, escorted by five American tanks and transported to Schwarzenberg in Bavaria (Podhajsky, 1964). The journey back to Austria was beset with difficulty. Lack of fodder and illness meant that some of the horses died, and problems with the transporting of the animals meant that they were forced to remain in exile until the spring of 1947, when a few mares and three of the stallions were finally sent back to Piber. The remainder stayed at the stud in Wimsbach in Upper Austria under Colonel Podhajsky's care until 1952 until they too were able to return to Piber where they remain today.

### **Characteristics of the Lipizzaner Horse**

The modern Lipizzaner that can be seen at the SRS today, is a horse that has developed from six original sire or paternal blood lines: Favory born in 1779, Maestoso born in 1819, Neopolitan's Conversano born in 1767, Neopolitano born in 1790, Pluto born in 1765, and Siglavy, a grey Arabian horse, born in 1810, and thought to provide the dominant gene responsible for the characteristic grey coat (Lipizzaner, 2010) .

The Lipizzaner has been selectively bred for hundreds of years to possess specific characteristics. The horses are almost exclusively white in colour; they are small, rarely reaching above 15.2 hands in height; they are particularly strong, and, by virtue of their early Andalusian genes, are notably friendly and trainable. These characteristics make them ideally suited to the rigorous demands imposed upon them by their training at Vienna.

Though these horses are predominately white in colour, all of the foals possess a black coat when they are born. This later turns dark grey, the characteristic white coat developing when they are between six and ten years old. However, of all of the foals born at Piber, approximately one in a hundred will retain their black coat, usually as a result of a genetic throwback to the Neopolitan line. These dark bay or black horses are usually considered to bring good luck and some of the more talented individuals continue to be used in the performances.

During the first six months of their lives, the young Lipizzaners spend their time in the mountain pastures at Piber. They are then weaned from their mothers and returned to the

pasture in the company of other young horses of the same gender, and for three years they remain at the stud and continue to grow and develop. During their third year the young colts are assessed by a panel of experts consisting of a vet, several of the senior riders and various members of the SRS, when a decision is made as to their suitability for training at the SRS. Those not chosen for the SRS remain at Piber, where they are trained as riding and carriage horses, before being offered for sale to the public. Those colts selected for the SRS are transported to Vienna to commence their many years of training, culminating for the most talented horses in participation in the public performances.

### **Selecting a horse for the SRS**

The selection process involves an assessment of each horse in terms of his outward appearance, and also his personality (Hausberger, 2014). A horse with correct conformation is sought, one who has the necessary physique to ensure that his body will stand up to the rigorous training that he will receive at Vienna. The horse is observed whilst standing and also when he is in motion. Correct, straight flowing paces are desired because as well as providing greater comfort for the rider, they also provide a rhythmical and harmonious picture for the onlooker.

Apart from his conformation, the horse is also assessed in terms of his temperament. From the hour of their birth to their selection by the SRS, the horses are never left alone; they are constantly supervised by the staff at Piber, who are therefore very aware of each animal's temperament and can advise the selection team about the suitability of each one. The team will wish to know whether a particular colt is dominant or submissive in the herd, and what position he occupies within its social structure. Does he display any overt aggressive behaviour toward the other horses? Is he nervous about new situations? Does he demonstrate excessive 'stallion behaviours' such as biting his equine or human companions, or mounting other colts? (Hausberger, 2014). Whilst a demonstration of such behaviours does not necessarily exclude the colt from admission into training, they are behaviours that the selection team need to be aware of, as training requires that the horses work and live in very close proximity to each other. Furthermore, the continuation of such behaviours could be problematic in relation to the later presentation of the horses in the performances.

## The Performances: A Background

The Spanish Riding School has presented classical equitation to an audience since its inception. According to Colonel Podhajsky these early performances would have been relatively modest, consisting of the senior or head rider presenting a few of the stallions and demonstrating the '*airs above the ground*' along with the '*work on the long rein*,' highlighting the paces and exercises of the High School. "There might also have been a *Pas de Deux* and the performance was brought to a close by a Quadrille of four riders" (Podhajsky, 1991, p. 277). The purpose of these performances was initially to demonstrate the beauty of one's horses and the skills possessed by the riders and trainers.

The Spanish Riding School continued to belong to the Emperor's court until 1918. Following the disintegration of the Austrian Empire it then became the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture of the newly-formed Austrian Republic. (Podhajsky, 1964), and during this period many of the horses from the SRS were returned to Lipizza as part of an agreement with Italy. Those horses that remained encountered a significant change in their standard of living, as the poverty and food rationing that plagued their human companions was also to affect them. The Emperor was now gone, and the Lipizzaners represented, for many people, the decadence and excesses of the court. The horses, previously accustomed to the adoration of crowds, now had to be kept hidden from the people for fear of arousing their anger, and were frequently unable to be taken from their stables for days at a time. Subsequently, when the emotions of the population were thought to have subsided somewhat, the horses were gradually re-introduced to the public via a series of processions through the centre of Vienna (Podhajsky, 1964). Following the events of 1918, with the school under pressure to increase its profile, performances were given every Sunday and thus training had to be re-scheduled around these increased obligations.

The next noteworthy period in the history of the SRS occurs in 1939, when the school was placed under the protection of the German Wehrmacht, and Colonel Alois Podhajsky (1939-1965) became Director of the school. Podhajsky, who was to become one of the school's most famous directors, had previously been in the cavalry before his appointment in Vienna, and had represented Austria in dressage in the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936 and was to do so again in London in 1948. However, it was for his role in the evacuation of the horses from Vienna during the Second World War that Colonel Podhajsky will be remembered most. A man with a great love of horses, Podhajsky often referred to the

Lipizzaners in his care as 'my dancing white stallions' and as a great traditionalist, one of his first accomplishments following his appointment at Vienna was to reinstate the salute of the riders. For centuries every time a rider entered the riding hall, he had saluted the portrait that hung above the Royal Box of Charles VI, the school's founder (see figure 12). From 1939, the riders had been required to lift their right hand in the manner of a Nazi salute, an act that Podhajsky considered to be an abomination. Following numerous arguments with the authorities, he managed to have the traditional Austrian salute restored.

Aside from such breaches of traditional protocol, Podhajsky was also very concerned that the training of the horses for the performances had led to a neglect of what he regarded as the adherence to correct classical principles in the training of both horse and rider. He argued that fundamental differences existed between the training at the SRS and training for general dressage. He was furthermore acutely aware of the need for the school to inform sporting dressage, arguing that, "For an institution functioning with living creatures –men and animals – cannot be run as a museum if it is not to risk losing the public interest" (Podhajsky, 1964, p. 55). Yet, it was the strict adherence to historical traditions, the fact that it was a kind of living museum that was to ensure, at least in part, the later survival of the school.

By 1942 Vienna was being subjected to air raids that threatened much of the city including the school, and during these raids the horses were led from their stables to underground bomb shelters for their protection. Evacuation had been prevented up to this point by officials who considered that moving the horses to safety would be tantamount to admitting defeat. It was not until 1944 when the air raids on Vienna were increasing in intensity that the horses were evacuated, initially to St Martin's in Upper Austria, and later to Wels, where they were to remain in exile for several years, a period which was subsequently to be captured in the Disney film *The Miracle of the White Stallions*.

The Spanish Riding School survived the war and soon after, despite remaining in exile, the performances recommenced, first in Europe and then in the USA. It was not until 1955, after the last occupying troops had finally left the city and the final repairs were made to the Riding Hall that the school was finally permitted to return to its original home in Vienna.

The years following the war were quiet for the Spanish Riding School as they continued to present their performances both at home and abroad. In 2001 the school separated from the federal administration of Austria and had to become self-sufficient, leading once again

to an increase in the number of performances in an attempt to develop more revenue. This provoked criticism relating to the strain that such an increase in work load was putting on the horses and their riders, and consequently, several of the senior riders left the school in protest. Arguably, one of the most socially significant changes was to occur in 2008, when the SRS admitted two female riders for the first time in its history.

## **The Spanish Riding School Performances Today**

The performances that are seen in Vienna today have changed very little since the first public performances. These consist today, as they did in the past, of staged presentations of classical equitation to an audience, and may be of shorter or longer duration. The longer of these presentations is divided into seven sections, each accompanied by music and each demonstrating the different stages of training of the horse according to specific principles. Shorter presentations of the performance sometimes occur, and in these cases one or more sections may be removed or shortened. The Spanish Riding School present these performances in the form of 'galas' that are steeped in tradition and ritual and notable for their formality and staging. The 'morning training sessions' are also open to the public and whilst they contain many traditional rituals they are rather less formal affairs.

The longer of the performances are divided into seven sections, each with a different musical accompaniment, with the first section introducing the horses and riders to the audience. The music starts, the glass doors into the hall open and the horses enter; ridden in single file and at walk, their riders dressed in dark brown tailcoats adorned with brass buttons, with light breeches and high black boots. The riders guide the horses through the two pillars in the centre of the hall towards the Royal Box whilst at the same time with the reins in their left hand they slowly remove their black two-pointed hats in salute to the portrait of Charles VI. There is dignity and solemnity in their entrance and their slow procession to the music of Andreus Leonhardt's *Prinz Eugen Marsch*. However, it is to the horses that one's eyes are drawn, with their pure white coats appearing to shimmer under the light provided by the huge chandeliers hanging above the arena. Adorned in gold plated bridles, breast plates and cruppers referred to as *Goldzeugs*, white buck-skin saddles and vibrantly coloured saddle cloths denoting the status of their riders, the horses walk slowly and in single file, the only sound audible, apart from the music, coming from the tinkling sound of the horses gently chewing on the two bits that form part of their bridles. Having

saluted, the riders slowly replace their bicorne hats, turn their horses and leave the arena. Thus the audience has its introduction to the stars of the show for that evening.

The performances often begin with the presentation of the young stallions in their first or second year of training. This section is intended to demonstrate the early ridden work of the young horse and includes the basic requirements of this early training, namely the horse's ability to be calm when ridden, to travel forward into walk, trot and canter when asked to do so, and to remain straight in these gaits. In other words, to move in such a way that the hind legs follow the line of front legs. The liveliness of the horses, and their sometimes unpredictable responses to elements of the environment, illustrate the fact that their training is a work in progress.

This can be a most entertaining spectacle for the audience, as these young stallions at the beginning of their ridden careers are often exuberant, and one is never quite sure how they might behave. One of them might become excited by something, real or imagined, and will buck or leap about which appears to infect the others and soon all of them will join in the fun (Gurtler, 2010). The riders sit patiently while the youngsters show off their athleticism and exuberance and only very rarely might a rider lose his position or become unbalanced. These young horses are enjoyable to observe and remind the viewer that they are in fact, living creatures, and not mere automata doing what they have been programmed to do.

The actual performance begins with a section entitled, *The Steps and Movements of the Classical School Part One*. Here up to seven horses and their trainers are presented to the audience and demonstrate, individually, the movements of the classical school. These forward and sideways movements are performed to the music of J Strauss's (The elder) *Annenpolka*, Rupprecht's *Aus eigener Kraft*, and Wiedemann's *Grenadier March* and appear perfectly in time with their musical accompaniment. In this each horse performs the movements in which they excel. At any given moment there are horses seemingly everywhere, doing a variety of movements from the '*shoulder-in*', in which the horse moves with his shoulders slightly to the inside as if he were on a circle yet at the same time travelling forward, to the '*piaffe*', the explosive high stepping trot on the spot, where the horse lowers his back end so that he almost appears to sit on the floor. It is difficult to know exactly where to direct one's attention for it is impossible to take everything in at once. The horses seem to fill the arena and then it is over, and again the riders salute the famous portrait and leave the arena to the sound of applause.

Next there is a *pas de deux*. Here two horses work together, matched perfectly both in size and the rhythmicity of their gaits, and they move together in complete synchrony, accompanied by Mozart's *Symphony No. 40 in G Minor*<sup>7</sup>. Such is the precision of the riding that the horses appear as if they were mirror images of each other, each perfectly in step with the other. What makes this part of the performance so special is that the horses not only have to work in harmony but do so whilst performing the difficult movements of the classical school including the *shoulder in*, and the *piaffe*. To these are added the *half pass* which is a movement in which the horse travels forward and at the same time glides sideways, and the *passage* in which the horse has a high stepping trot, like the *piaffe* but travelling forwards. One of the most impressive movements of this section is where the two horses make a *half pirouette* around each other, something which requires perfect timing. However, whether they work side by side or apart, the horses appear to glide across the floor in perfect step and rhythm with each other. (Figure 13)



Figure 13 The Pas de deux. Photo courtesy of the SRS

In the next section the 'Work in hand' or 'On the short rein' is demonstrated where the stallions are not ridden but worked from the ground with a handler walking beside them, holding onto to single rein. This demonstrates to the audience the un-ridden preparation that the horses receive in order to teach them the complex and difficult 'airs above the

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBrMMvTrqjs>

ground' such as the 'high school jumps' and the 'work between the pillars'.<sup>8</sup> Up to six horses may take part in this element of the performance, each demonstrating the skill to which they are best suited. Some may do the *school jumps*; the *courbette* and the *capriole*, and these horses are recognisable by the fact that their tails are braided within what is known as a 'queue' to prevent the hair of the tail being ripped by the movement of the hind legs in the jumps. Another horse may demonstrate his *piaffe* between the pillars, and yet another demonstrate the *levade*, all accompanied by the music of Boccherini's *Minuet*. Despite the activity in the arena one's attention is often drawn to the horse working between the pillars, who having completed a few steps of his *piaffe*, will stop, and with ears pricked, will turn as far towards his trainer as the straps that attach him to the pillars will allow. He waits patiently as he is well aware that in the pocket of his trainer's coat there is a plentiful supply of sugar, which is doled out to him at regular intervals, should his effort warrant it.

Then follows the 'Work on the long rein', (Figure 14) in which a senior stallion is put through all the paces and movements that the ridden horses perform, yet with the handler walking behind the horse guiding him with long reins attached to the bit.<sup>9</sup> The horse wears no saddle, breastplate or crupper, only a red and gold bridle and the red and gold *Shabrack* or saddle cloth which is embroidered with the emblem of the Austrian Empire. This part of the performance is usually undertaken by one of the more senior stallions, one who has demonstrated both the skill required but also the temperament suited to the exercise. What is remarkable is the fact that the horse performs a series of complicated and difficult movements with only the reins and the trainer's voice to guide him. So without assistance from a rider, the horse executes a variety of movements starting with the *shoulder-in*, then gliding across the arena in the half-pass to the left and then to the right. He also demonstrates the beautiful rhythmical *pirouettes at the canter*, as well as the one time *flying changes* in which he appears to skip in time to the music. Then follows the slow and elevated *piaffe* and finally the *passage*, the high stepping majestic trot, all to a musical accompaniment of Viennese marches.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AxqXoCC-b8>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6urnGDYxcCU>



Figure 14 The Work on the Long Rein. Photo courtesy of the SRS

The fifth section demonstrates the ridden '*Airs above the ground*', where the horses display their strength and agility in a number of leaps and jumps and where the natural movements of the horse have been transformed into battle movements that were employed during conflicts in the seventeenth century. Only the school's strongest most gymnastic horses, coupled with the most experienced riders, are suitable for this demanding mounted work, as great balance is required by the rider to remain seated on the horse during these most difficult of *airs*, especially as they are required to do so without the assistance of stirrups. The movements included in this section are the *levade*, (Figure 15) where the horse squats deeply on his hind legs and raises his forefeet off the ground until he attains an angle of 30 to 35 degrees from the horizontal. This position is only held for a few seconds at a time, due to the amount of physical strength that the movement requires.



Figure 15 The Levade Photo courtesy of the SRS

The *courbette* ( see Figure 16) is one of the most difficult of the *high school airs*, and here the horse raises his fore legs as he does in the *levade*, but then takes several leaps forwards off his hind legs without lowering his forefeet to the ground. Thought to arise from a movement used on the battlefield, it is easy to see how this imposing movement might intimidate one's opponents. The final movement in these airs is the *capriole* (Figure 17) which is again thought to have its origins on the battlefield and was used by the medieval knight to rid him of attacking foot soldiers. Here the horse leaps with all four feet off the ground, and at the maximum height of the leap and with his body almost horizontal, the horse kicks out violently with his hind legs.

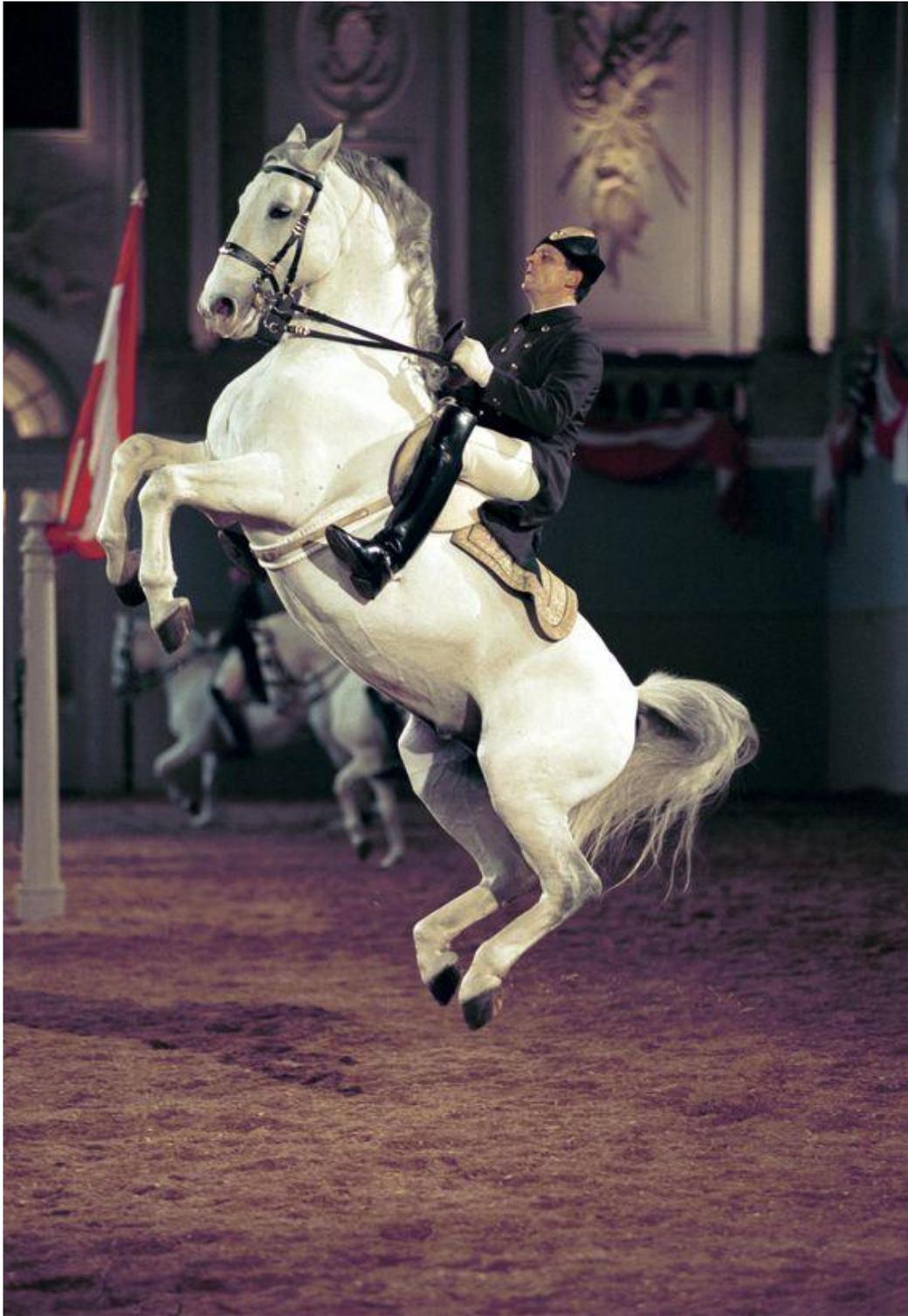


Figure 16 The Courbette. Photo courtesy of the SRS



Figure 17 The Capriole. Courtesy of the SRS

The penultimate section of the performance is entitled '*Exercises and Paces of the High School Part Two*' and is a solo performance by a horse and rider demonstrating the various movements and gaits of the trained horse. To emphasise the skill of both horse and rider at this level, the display is conducted with the rider holding the reins of the curb bit in one hand only, whilst in the other hand holding upright a simple birch twig which, although never used on the horse, is designed to illustrate that the horse is trained sufficiently to require only minimal instruction from the rider. Apart from the '*Work on the long rein*' this is the only section of the performance in which the audience's attention is directed to just one horse and rider. To the marches of Ziechrer, Kral and Jurek, horse and rider glide across the arena under a spotlight, demonstrating once again, the various movements of advanced level equitation but without the *school jumps*.

The finale of the performance is known as '*the quadrille*', where up to twelve horses perform advanced movements in complete harmony, demonstrating perfect precision and timing to the music of Bizet, Chopin, Riedinger and Leonhardt. This section of the performance, thought to have originated in the Royal Courts from the Carousels, is referred to as '*The Ballet of the White Stallions*'. Lasting for up to twenty minutes, it also forms the longest section in which the horses work in synchrony, again demonstrating the various

movements of the classical school. The horses move in one line, and then separate into two or four sections, travelling in the same direction or crossing over, weaving in and out of each other's way in perfect time and rhythm. Then it is all over, the riders make their final salute, pass through the pillars and leave the arena through the glass door to their final applause.



**Figure 18 The School Quadrille Photo courtesy of the SRS**

One of the distinctive features of the SRS and one which distinguishes it from other types of equestrian performance is the fact that the visual focus of the audience is directed towards the horses themselves rather than the human handlers or riders; pure white, dressed in their trappings of gold coloured bridles, with elaborate saddle cloths and saddles, these animals are visually spectacular. One might appreciate the beauty of the horses when viewing them in their stables, or when they stand in the arena under the lights but it is when these creatures are in motion that their true beauty is apparent. Movement forms the essence of these performances, from the young to the older fully trained stallions. The harmony, balance and lightness of step, whilst travelling forwards and sideways, either alone or in groups, are what draw the attention of the audience to the horses. A sentiment

which is best illustrated by the following review of one of the SRS's performances given in 1956, by the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* of July 18th:

It is the same act as for more than two hundred years; the same piaffes, leaps, and figures as in the famous engravings. They are- or so it seems- the same horses and the same riders. The perfect form of a completely formal age is preserved here in the action of man and animal, just as enduringly as in music and architecture. Only the gallery changes. The farther the spectators stray from that form themselves, the greater is their stillness in its presence.

The movements naturally executed by the horse in courtship and play are harnessed by the rider and executed at his will to the music that accompanies them. Often described as an equine ballet, these performances demonstrate beautifully the power and movement of the trained horse. There is something magical about witnessing such power and grace present in an animal, for, as the environmental ethicist Homes Rolston suggests,

... we do enjoy seeing the Impala leap; there is grace in their motions. The aesthetic experience arises in my encounters with them, but the muscular power driving their locomotion is an evolutionary achievement objectively realised in the embodied animal. My aesthetic capacities track their aesthetic properties (Rolston, 2002, p. 133).

This too is the case when observing the horses during the performance; one is drawn to their movement, their grace and their power, qualities derived from millions of years of evolution and adaptation, where, as in the case of the Impala described above, the horse has developed a lightness of foot and a capacity for quick flight.

The powerful visual components of the performance are enhanced by its musical accompaniment. Each section of the performance has its own musical accompaniment and the music is chosen to complement the particular rhythm and gaits of the horse, as opposed to the animals moving their bodies in time with the music as is the case with many human dances. The music has a distinctively Austrian feel to it, from the Waltzes of the Strauss family and Austrian marches to the pieces by Mozart, each piece adding a particular mood or atmosphere to the performance, as well as contributing to a cultural and historical context. Music, as the philosopher of music Anthony Storr suggests, also has the effect of "intensifying or underlying the emotion which a particular event calls forth" and it does so by "simultaneously co-ordinating the emotions of a group of people" (Storr, 1993, p. 24). Thus, the music contributes to the overall feel of the performance, and unites the audience in a shared experience, providing a sense of occasion, and a context within which

to appreciate the performance in much the same way that a film score provides these elements to the scenes in a film. However in the case of the SRS performance, since the selected music shares a rhythmic structure with the gaits and movement of the horse, it further functions as music does in dance, providing an acoustic rhythmic structure to the visual rhythmic structure present in the movement of the horse. Thus, both sense modalities combine to provide a unified sensory experience, one that is rhythmical, melodious and harmonious.

Whilst attending the performances is the main way in which to experience the work of the Spanish Riding School, the public can also attend the morning training sessions and take a tour of the stables and the winter riding hall. The morning training sessions are in some ways similar to the performances in that they occur in the winter riding school and have music playing in the background. They offer the public the opportunity to witness the warming up and training of the young and older stallions. The older horses are dressed in their ornate gold bridles and white saddles with their riders wearing the traditional uniform. The young horses are recognisable by their often darker coloured coats and the fact that they wear simple snaffle bridles and more modern dressage saddles, both young and older horses wearing protective leg bandages. The traditional Austrian music that accompanies the morning training is largely intended for the benefit of the audience, playing softly in the background, with the music intended to provide atmosphere rather than to contribute to the visual elements of the spectacle as it does in the performance. The main difference between the morning training sessions and the performance itself is that the training is intended purely for the horses and riders and not to entertain the audience. It is clear that whilst some of the work produced even during training is of very high quality, some errors and mistakes by horse and rider inevitably do occur and require correction. Correction takes the form of repeating the movement until the required results are obtained, or performing another movement to supple the horse so that he can perform the movement required. Each horse trains for a maximum of 25 minutes and then is taken back to the stables. Whilst the morning training sessions are less formal than the performances, traditions and rituals are adhered to. For example, at the end of each training session, the riders line their horses up in a row and dismount. The rider then runs his stirrups up, and stands in front of the horse, often giving the horse a cube of sugar as a reward. The horse is then led from the school by the grooms and the next group of riders enters.

The value of attending these training sessions is that the public can see how the horses are trained and handled. This not only provides an insight into the philosophy of the training system used at the school, but also reveals how the horses are regarded and treated.

Positive reinforcement in the form of a sugar treat or a gentle stroke on the neck are very much in evidence, and the transparency of the training under the watchful eye of the public is a reassurance to those attending that the horses are treated well during their training.

Sadly this is not always the case in the training of many horses at other training establishments. One of the most revealing indicators of the unfair treatment that can occur in the training of horses is not how the animal responds when he does something correctly, but rather how he behaves when something goes wrong. Horses who are used to being punished for errors frequently become anxious or agitated if they do something wrong, often anticipating the wrath of the rider. So even if severe correction is not witnessed, the experienced observer can often get a sense of how the horse is treated behind the scenes. Whilst errors do occur that require correction during the morning training sessions, one gets no sense that the horses at the SRS are fearful, or that they might anticipate punishment for any mistakes.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described the history of equitation in relation to the Spanish Riding School of Vienna and its performances. Throughout this history, the concepts of utility and beauty have merged and challenged certain ideas about horses, ideas about how they should be ridden, trained and treated, and ultimately this has served to define the relationship between the horse and the human that we see today. The Spanish Riding School is distinctive in that its performances and training provide an unbroken link with a bygone age and an awareness of the history of this institution, and what it represents, can assist the audience better to understand and appreciate some of the many elements present in the performances. Everything that occurs, the rider's position on the horse, the salute given by the riders at the beginning and the end of the performance, the uniforms worn by the horses and their riders, the pillars situated in the centre of the riding hall, each has historical significance. So too does the core of the performance itself, which is the presentation of the horses and riders and their training, which has evolved over the centuries into what we see today. Furthermore, it is the age of this institution, plus its ability to adapt and subsequently to survive over hundreds of years, which separates it

from many other schools of a similar kind. The Spanish Riding School is the only remaining school of equitation to have survived the many wars and revolutions that engulfed Europe in the 18th century. However, it has also managed to adapt and change sufficiently to be relevant to the audiences of today, whilst at the same time, managing to retain its own historical and cultural rituals and traditions, thus providing an unbroken link with the past, a sense of which is palpable in the performances. A concern with the presentation of the beauty of the horse is pivotal in the philosophy of the Spanish Riding School. The horse is intended to be the sole focus of interest for the audience, whilst the riders are intended to be almost invisible.

Although very little has actually been written about the SRS and its performances, the literature that is available concentrates mainly on the history of the school and on some of the training methods employed there, but there is so much more to this institution and its performances that is worthy of exploration. The performances, aside from being informative, are also intended to provide the audience with an aesthetic spectacle. The type of experience they offer, the specific qualities they possess, and the ways in which these performances might be appreciated, will be explored later.

Obviously, one of the most distinctive elements of these performances, and one which separates them from other types of performance such as those of dance or theatre, is the fact that animals are present in them. Whilst the discussion about the history of equitation above has emphasised the importance placed by certain key figures on the humane treatment of horses, a philosophy adopted by and continued at the SRS today, as a frequent visitor to the school and to its performances, I am nevertheless sometimes acutely aware of a sense of dubiety. On the one hand, I am aware that it is easy to be captivated by the beauty and the spectacle present and yet, on the other hand, I am also aware of a sense of unease. Should we humans be 'designing' horses to fulfil some age-old ideal and then controlling every aspect of their lives so that they can perform in order to educate or entertain the public? Is my enjoyment in seeing the stallion between the pillars receiving his sugar the result of some romantic fairy tale that fails to recognise that while doing so, he is restrained, tied by leather straps to an immovable structure, rendered helpless and dependent on the human who placed him there? Is there any dignity in this for the horse? Have I, and many others like me, been seduced by the music and the ceremony, not to mention the emphasis that is placed on the value of the historical past and traditions? This, despite Colonel Podhajsky's claim that this institution is not a museum, is after all a museum of sorts, one in which ancient traditions are kept alive and presented on a regular

basis. Is it possible that we might sometimes forget, or worse still not care, that this particular museum is not dealing with fossils, paintings or sculpture but with living creatures? Creatures, that have no real awareness of what they are being trained to do, nor being in possession of the power to influence or withdraw from this training.

Although the SRS is indeed worthy of appreciation from an historical point of view, to examine it solely from this one perspective, fails to take into account the value of other ways in which the SRS can, or should, be appreciated and evaluated. The 21st century has seen great progress being made in relation to the way that non-human animals are viewed, increased awareness of the cognitive abilities of many animals has led to certain species such as the cetaceans (dolphins and whales), being deemed of sufficient intelligence to warrant the status of non-human personhood. The granting of this new status may ultimately lead to a complete ban on whaling, and it further calls into question the moral acceptability of keeping of whales and dolphins in captivity, and also their use in entertainment. Such a ruling may also result in questions being asked about the moral acceptability of any animal, including the horse, being used in performances or displays to entertain the public. Therefore, one of the first questions that needs to be addressed is the question of whether performances such as those given by the SRS, are morally acceptable. It would seem appropriate therefore, to begin with an evaluation of the practices of this prestigious riding school from an ethical point of view, and it is to this that I now turn.

## Chapter Two

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# Performing Animals

### Introduction

Roger Scruton begins his book *Animal Rights and Wrongs* with the following statement: “Animals were once regarded as things, placed on earth for our use and enjoyment, to be treated according to our convenience. This is no longer so” (Scruton, 2000, p. 1). This change in attitude, Scruton believes, came about in the West as a result of a decline in religious beliefs, and the attitudes towards animals that such beliefs endorsed. The assertion is contestable, however. The fact that many people no longer attend church, nor believe in a deity of one kind or another, does not necessarily mean that thousands of years of indoctrination by the Judao-Christian tradition relating to the superior position of mankind over other creatures has disappeared as a result. An investigation into the attitudes towards animals would suggest that this is not the case.

On 6<sup>th</sup> June 2000 a ruling from the Kerala High Court in India recommended the banning of the training and exhibition of certain animals in circuses; bears, monkeys, tigers, panthers and dogs (although the recommendation for banning dogs was subsequently over-turned). It was held that such activities “are not essential to the progress and welfare of society, but merely serve as entertainment or exhibiting spectacles, and can be easily curtailed.” Furthermore, the court argued that “the unnatural tricks or performances which are against the basic nature of animals, and which lead to abnormal behaviours need to be discontinued” (Kerala, 2000, p. 3). The Indian Circus Federation (ICF) challenged the ruling, but was unsuccessful.

The decision to establish the ban was partly influenced by the views put forward by the Animal Welfare Board of India (India, 20.11.1997) which stated that

Wild animals dislike being stared at. Sometimes if they are well fed and rested, they can be indifferent to the staring humans or they will retreat into the rear portion of their enclosure in the zoos, but circus animals have nowhere to go to retreat. Not only are they exposed to the gazing eyes, but three or four times a day before a shrieking and clamouring audience,

under hot dazzling lights, with noisy bands blaring and drums beating, they must perform the tricks they have been taught (India, 20.11.1997 p.9).

The court in this case makes a distinction between different species of animals arguing that “the history of human evolution reveals that tigers, panthers and bears are different from the animals which were domesticated by mankind” (India, 20.11.1997 p.6). This difference influences a judgement as to the suitability of certain animals for human-designed activities such as performing in circuses, and also the impact that these activities have on the well-being of the animal.

The ruling, proposing that the teaching of animals to perform tricks which go against their nature and which result in abnormal behaviours, should be discontinued, is commendable from a viewpoint which does not regard them as mere things. However, the court in this case fails to recognise that this applies equally to domesticated animals that appear in circuses such as the dog and the horse and raises the question of the acceptability of any animal, irrespective of its species, being used to entertain or inform the public.

Those who argue that it is morally acceptable to use animals in certain kinds of performance must consider several elements: first, the individual members of the species involved; second, the impact of the way that the animals are required to live; third, the training methods employed and their suitability for that particular individual and fourth, the impact that being ‘looked at’ by an audience might have on the animal. All of these elements have the potential to influence the animals’ quality of life and their ability to flourish.

Circuses have been criticised for presenting animals in such a way that renders them servile and helpless, for using inhumane methods of training, and for keeping them in conditions that are insufficient for their needs. Do all performing animals suffer the same fate? Should all performances that include animals be banned, irrespective of whether or not they contain non-domesticated animals? In this chapter I explore these questions in relation to a particular group of performing animals, the stallions at the prestigious Spanish Riding School of Vienna.

## **The Horse World**

Before embarking on an exploration of the moral acceptability of using horses in performances such as those given by the Spanish Riding School to entertain or inform the

public, it might be prudent first to investigate how the horse is viewed and treated by what is referred to as the 'horse world' in the twenty first century.

With few exceptions the horse today is bred to provide pleasure, amusement, entertainment, or to provide financial gain for those who 'own' it, or who pay to see it, or who ride it. As a result, the horse is viewed by many as an animal which, unlike the majority of domestic pets, is expected to 'earn its keep,' this may be due in part to the considerable infrastructure and cost that is necessary to keep a horse.

For some, the horse is merely a commodity, or a means to an end. One does not have to venture too far from the marble encased, chandelier-illuminated setting of the Spanish Riding School to witness this. In the square outside the entrance to this prestigious institution in the centre of Vienna it is common to see, lined up in single file, a collection of privately owned horses and carriages which are used to take tourists on a tour of the city. These horses are expected to stand immobile for hours on end in all weathers. The animals are barely visible beneath the paraphernalia that attaches them to their carriages. They are rendered partially sighted due to the wearing of large leather blinkers, they appear diminished in size by the carriages they are required to pull and, as such, they are a pitiful sight. Their degradation is completed by the requirement that 'in the interests of hygiene,' they are forced to wear a canvas nappy, lest they foul the pristine streets of Vienna with the sight or smell of their excrement.

Some sleep, their heads lowered as far as the leather will allow, and rest a hind leg, whilst others engage in a repetitive head nodding. None could be described as exhibiting the behaviours of contented animals. The tourists arrive and climb into the carriages and many do not even acknowledge the existence of the horse that is harnessed to the carriage in which they sit. Off they go, into the heavy traffic, the horses' shod hooves slipping on the cobbles, negotiating the trams, buses, and cars, whilst their passengers are free to admire the splendid architecture of Vienna. After an hour or so they return, and again stand in line, though this time at the end of the queue, and wait for the next lot of tourists; and so it goes on.

Vienna is not the only city where such horses can be seen. They exist in many cities of Europe and in other parts of the world, all intended to provide the tourists with a different kind of experience. Such horses reflect the attitudes towards, and the invisibility of, many working horses, and by working horses I refer also to those engaged in sports such as show jumping, eventing, racing, hunting and of course, competitive dressage. Such activities have

become so ingrained in the cultural narrative relating to what the horse is supposed to be, or to do, that they are rarely questioned. Yet each of these activities poses moral problems in relation to the treatment of the horse.

The status of horses as mere commodities is further highlighted by the fact that like many other animals, they can be bought and sold. A horse can be advertised for sale in equine magazines or on a web site, or at auctions or markets. At these, the horses have numbered stickers placed on their rumps and are paraded as 'lots' where they are sold to the highest bidder, irrespective of whether or not the bidder has sufficient expertise or experience to care for them. Some will be lucky, and will end up in homes where they are cared for and cherished but others may not. Those that are not beautiful enough or are not useful in some way, or those who might have 'broken down' on the racetrack, will often go for slaughter. The feral horses which exist in herds in various parts of the UK, and whose numbers increase beyond what is considered acceptable, are 'culled'. This can be justified for ecological reasons or for the overall welfare of the herd (but fails to address the rights of the slaughtered individual). Furthermore, discussions have recently arisen in relation to these animals being slaughtered for human consumption, the argument being that this will improve welfare.

Compared to the lives of the many horses I have described, the stallions at the Spanish Riding School appear to live in a charmed and pampered world: they are housed in palatial surroundings (literally) where they are required to work for no more than twenty minutes at a time; they are given several 'holidays' a year when they go to the school's training centre at Heldenburg, spending time in paddocks where they can graze and rest, and also go for hacks with their riders in the surrounding countryside.

These horses receive slow, sympathetic and methodical training which is intended to support their well-being, to enable them to remain fit and healthy, and to allow them continue to work sometimes until they are in their late twenties or maybe their early thirties (rare in the modern competitive dressage horse). Furthermore, the strict breeding programme adhered to by the school is intended to ensure that not only are these horses physically and psychologically equipped to deal with the demands that are placed upon them, but also that over-breeding, resulting in a glut of unwanted horses and the corresponding associated welfare problems, does not occur.

Both these prized horses of the Spanish Riding School and the carriage horses found outside it reflect some of the ways in which the modern horse is perceived today. On the

one hand, a pure white treasure to be protected, kept in a marble palace, and presented to the public. On the other a dirty, incontinent beast, barely noticed or deserving of attention. Between these two extremes lies the attitude towards competition horses, those engaged in racing, dressage and a variety of other activities which are intended either to make money or to win a variety of cardboard rosettes or silver trophies that demonstrate the skill or enhance the self-esteem of their trainers. Such horses are often 'medicated' to keep them in work and are seen as 'disposable' when they fail to perform or become too old to do so.

The horse, then, is viewed in many different ways: sometimes a slave, sometimes a hero, sometimes a trophy, sometimes a crutch to support a real or imagined need present in the person caring for him or her. Throughout the history of its domestication, the horse has been revered, loathed and feared sometimes in equal measures, but he or she has always been and continues to be 'used' for a variety of human devised activities. Such attitudes will inevitably have a direct impact on how the horse is treated, and this will have an impact upon his or her quality of life.

But how is this quality of life to be assessed? How might we know whether the needs of the horse are being met? Can we assume that the stallion at the Spanish Riding School has a better quality of life than the carriage horse by virtue of the opulence and attention that surrounds him? Can he really flourish as a horse, amidst the Strauss waltzes, the constant supervision, and the almost continuous gaze of the public? Do the famous performances by this institution serve to enlighten the audience about the potential for a possible harmonious relationship between a human and a horse, or do they merely reinforce and reflect the existing idea of the horse as being nothing more than a charming servant?

In this chapter I address these questions, and also argue that any moral theory dealing with the treatment of animals such as these horses, must consider the life of the individual animal, above that of the group or species. The question should be, not is this animal flourishing as a horse, but rather is he flourishing as an individual? I further argue that the possession of rationality, so important in Kantian and Social Contract theories in relation to animals, is insufficient grounds on which to base a moral theory relating to these animals. Finally, I argue that despite the artificiality of the lives of the horses at the Spanish Riding School, these animals do indeed lead a life in which they are able to flourish.

In what follows, I explore what the Spanish Riding School does, namely the breeding, selecting, training, and riding of horses for their presentation in performances for the

public. I will examine the impact of this on the lives of the animals through the lens of Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach, which I use as a quality of life assessment tool in support of my arguments. This particular approach differs from other theories of animal ethics, such as Peter Singer's, 'preference utilitarianism' and Tom Regan's, 'subject-of-a – life or 'intrinsic value' theories in a variety of dimensions. In his seminal text on animal ethics, *Animal Liberation*, Singer has argued, following Jeremy Bentham, that the only morally significant characteristic that a sentient being can possess or lack, is the ability to suffer (Singer, 1995). This view presents animals as suffering bodies and pays little attention to the variety of other aspects of animal's lives which may also be morally significant such as companionship with members of their own species for example. Nussbaum proposes that other aspects of an animal's subjectivity are morally significant and she identifies these as capabilities which are necessary for the animal to flourish (Weisberg, 2015). The emphasis on animal capabilities coupled with the fact that she extends these capabilities to all animals irrespective of species, distinguishes Nussbaum's theory from Singer's and provides a more robust account of animal entitlements.

Perhaps the greatest difference to be found between Utilitarianism and the Capabilities Approach however, resides in the former's reliance on utility rather than the individual as an end. Utilitarianism is after all a "benefit-maximising theory" and this, as Nussbaum points out, regards the individual as "an input into a social calculus, and this is insufficiently sensitive to the distinctiveness of each individual life" (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 282). As such, she proposes that " thinking about total or average utility does not seem to be a good way of thinking about social justice, which ought to treat each and every person as an end, not as a means to the ends of others" (p.282). Failure to recognise and respect each individual as an individual in their own right, is as pressing a concern for animals as it is for humans, yet interspecies comparisons of utility are difficult to determine as are the interpretation of preferences within a given species or for an individual within that species. For these reasons Nussbaum postulates that, "the Capabilities Approach goes beyond the intuitive starting point of Utilitarianism because it takes an interest not just in pleasure and pain, but in the complex forms of life and functioning. It wants to see each thing flourish as the sort of thing it is" (2007, p.349). Furthermore, Nussbaum argues that unlike

Utilitarianism, the Capabilities Approach respects each individual creature, “refusing to aggregate the good of different lives and types of lives” (2007, p.351). In this she states, “No creature is being used as a means to an ends of others, or of society as a whole” (p.351).

In sum, the Capabilities Approach, unlike Utilitarianism, emphasises the fact that “each species has a different form of life and different ends; moreover, within a given species, each life has multiple and heterogeneous ends” (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 351).

Tom Regan’s ‘subject of a life’ theory appears to have more in common with the capabilities approach than it does with preference utilitarianism. Regan believes that beings, at least those beings that are mentally normal mammals of a year or more, qualify as subjects- of- a- life. Furthermore, he suggests that certain individuals have value in themselves which he refers to as inherent value (Regan, 1988). Regan extends this notion of inherent value beyond that of moral agency arguing that,

It might be thought- and it is thought by some, most notably Kant,- that the notion of inherent value or some related idea (e.g. Conceiving of moral agents as “ends in themselves”) applies to all moral agents and only to moral agents. But the attempt to restrict inherent value to moral agents is arbitrary (Regan, 1988, p. 239).

Whilst the idea of extending the concept of inherent value to beings other than those traditionally considered to possess moral agency namely, human beings, is commendable, we must remember that Regan limits this to “normal mammalian animals, aged one year or more” (p.239). This fails to recognise inherent value of the lives of many young animals such as the foals born at the Spanish Riding School and perhaps more significantly, the lives of the many young animals who are killed for the meat industry, many of whom are only a few weeks or months old. Furthermore, his idea of ‘normal mammalian animals’ is puzzling, it is probable that Regan is referring to animals who are not physically defective or imperfect in some way, although he does not elaborate on this, nor does he state why this might be significant.

In contrast to both Singer and Regan’s theories, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, in my view, provides a valuable quality of life assessment tool, which can be used to view the lives of the horses at the Spanish Riding School. Its main contribution rests on its emphasis on the rights of the individual over species membership, the rejection of rationality as a sole basis of concern for animals, its raising of questions of justice in relation to non-human

animals, and its assertion that animals are entitled to both a dignified existence in whatever life they lead, and a right to flourish in that life.

The capabilities approach is therefore best equipped to assess the lives of animals in terms of their just treatment and ability to flourish. Its application to the lives of the stallions at the Spanish Riding School as I shall argue, reveals that in relation to breeding, training, overall care and during performing, these animals are able to flourish, lead a dignified existence and are treated justly.

Nussbaum's theory is not perfect, by her own admission; it is a work in progress, but the value of this theory lies in its compassion, and its attempt to attain justice for non-human animals. For this reason, it is superior in my view to social contract theories, where justice, according to the Kantian view, rests on rationality, which it is argued, animals do not possess.<sup>10</sup>

Any moral theory dealing with the case of animals reflects the society's cultural views proposing it. In the case of the Kerala High Court judgement with which I began this chapter, the judgement rested on aspects of the cultural ideology of India which is informed by religious beliefs arising from the philosophy of Hinduism and Buddhism, beliefs which can be contrasted to the Judao-Christian beliefs found in the West in the following statement by the court:

The ICF (Indian Circus Federation) placed reliance on the fact that many European countries are allowing display of animals in the circuses. They argue that,

Even if their contention is accepted, the ethos and perception of the people in this country is much different from their Western counterparts. We, in our country, see the same soul being represented in all living beings on this planet. It is because of this ideology that a provision has been made in the Constitution of India to have love and compassion for all living beings. It may therefore, not be appropriate to be guided by, or blindly follow what is being practised in other parts of the world (Indian Circus Federation p.6).

This provides an example where love and compassion for other beings is supported by a legal system which does attempt to provide justice for animals who are treated without regard to the dignity I discuss in the next section. Compassion in itself, as Nussbaum points out, is insufficient to ensure that animals are treated fairly. She suggests instead that "we

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<sup>10</sup> A view that has been discussed in the anti-speciesist, utilitarian, animal welfare approach, exemplified by Peter Singer. I will not explore this view further as I do not consider utilitarianism as a sound basis for animal ethics as it treats utility, not individual animals as ends.

go beyond compassion and humanity because we are dealing with issues of justice”  
(Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 301)

In many other parts of the world however, the idea that all living beings are entitled to justice if they are treated unjustly (in the sense discussed below) does not feature in the ideology surrounding the relationship with non-human animals. In place of this there exists an assumption that the respect and care that are owed to other species is partly determined by how similar, or how different to humans, these creatures are perceived to be. One of the main differences often cited is that animals lack the rationality present in humans, and by virtue of this, they are considered inferior.

On what then, do we in the West rest our beliefs about animals? In the following section I explore three views.

### **Kant, Schopenhauer and Nussbaum on rationality, dignity, justice and non-human animals**

For Immanuel Kant, human beings hold a superior position over other creatures which he felt were mere means to an end. Humans thus had the right to do whatever they wanted with animals. In his *Lectures on Ethics* Kant asserted that “so far as animals are concerned we have no direct duties. Animals are there merely as (a means to) an end. That end is man” (Rachels, 1986, p. 6). According to this view animals exist purely for the use of humans and have no rights to speak of. The idea that animals are deserving of a dignified existence, one in which their species-specific needs are met and respected, is absent.

Conversely, according to Kant, humans possess dignity by virtue of their being rational agents, and they are able to set goals and guide their conduct by virtue of reason (Rachels, 1986). Kant views dignity as possessing a particular type of value, one above all price, and suggests that beings in possession of this dignity “have the sort of value for which there is no equivalent” Animals on the other hand, possess value only in terms of their ability to serve human interests, as a means to an end, and not in relation to any intrinsic value that they may have. So for Kant, whilst we have a direct duty of beneficence to our fellow human beings, (who must never be used as a means to an end) animals are not deserving of this right (Rachels, 1986). In the section preceding the second formulation of the categorical imperative Kant makes this position clear, and suggests that

Beings the existence of which rests not on our will but on nature, if they are beings without reason, have only a relative worth, as means, and are therefore called 'things' whereas rational beings are called persons because their nature already makes them out as an end in itself, that is, as something that may not be used merely as a means (Kant I. , 1998, p. 428)

Nussbaum suggests that this view emerges from a prevailing Judaeo-Christian tradition which teaches that humans were given dominion over animals and plants a view, she argues, that influences much of Western philosophy. Nevertheless, whilst Kant did not believe that animals had any rights as such, he did believe that they should be treated fairly, albeit because a failure to do so could lead to the unfair treatment of humans. He argued that when animals are killed for food this should be done humanely and quickly, without pain. He also suggested that when humans use animals for work they should not push them beyond their capacities, although one wonders if this arose out of a realisation that the working lives of animals, and therefore their usefulness to humans, is shortened as a result. However, Kant did condemn the frivolous practice of experimentation upon animals, proposing that "to do so just to speculate should be abhorred" (Kant, 1998,6:433). Furthermore, as Korsgaard points out, Kant also had harsh words for those people who shot their horses or dogs when they were deemed to be no longer useful "such animals Kant argues should be treated as if they were members of the household" (Korsgaard, 2004, p. 14). Kant's account seems confusing, and it is difficult to reconcile his seemingly conflicting ideas of animals on the one hand being 'things' and yet on the other hand deserving of being treated as members of the household.

However, despite these concessions, the recognition that animals have dignity, or are beings deserving of justice, which are the central aspects of Nussbaum's theory, do not appear in Kant's account of our dealings with non-human animals, and this is one of the main reasons that Nussbaum describes herself as being 'non-Kantian' (FOJ, p. 153,154, 161). She regards her own account of dignity as being in direct opposition to the Kantian account, and her views as being superior to it.

In relation to the Kantian division between animality and rationality, Nussbaum suggests that this split "ignores the fact that our dignity is just the dignity of a certain sort of animal" (FOJ, p. 132). Furthermore, in the *Future of Feminist Liberalism*, she proposes that dignity is inherent in animality, and failure to acknowledge this fact "leads us to slight aspects of our own lives that have worth and distort our relationship to other animals" (Nussbaum, November 2000, p.48). In other words, the failure to recognise that we too are animals

prevents us from acknowledging that the dignity which we hold to be of value, should apply equally to the other animals with whom we share the world.

Kant's account fails to recognise the many similarities which exist between humans and animals and he exalts human beings to a position of higher status based on their rationality alone. This fails to address the fact that many animals are capable of quite complex feats of learning, have the ability to form relationships with members of their own species and others, to suffer when these relationships end, and are capable of experiencing pleasure and pain. According to Nussbaum, what is fundamentally lacking in Kant's account "is the sense of the animal itself as an agent and a subject, a creature to whom something is due, a creature who is itself an end" (2007, p.337). Nussbaum argues that, Kantian theories fall short in recognising our duties to non-human animals, and they do so partly because of this emphasis on rationality as the basis for dignity. Furthermore, they arise from a notion of a contract amongst equals, in which animals can have no part, leading to the assumption that we have no obligations of justice to animals. Such views, Nussbaum argues, can be criticised on the grounds that they fail to recognise the extent of the intelligence present in many animals. Furthermore, she challenges the idea that "only those who can join a contract as rough equals can be primary, non-derivative subjects of a theory of justice" (2007 p.327). If these contracts are based on rationality, language and a variety of other human characteristics then it is difficult to imagine how animals might be included. The majority of contracts, including the social contract, are deemed to be legitimate or legally binding, "if and only if it is (or could be) the outcome of collective agreement of free, equal and rational individuals" (Mason Pope, 2003, p. 127). Animals like some humans, fall short in each of these dimensions.

However, Nussbaum posits an alternative view: "if we see animals with sufficient richness and complexity, we may after all find the idea of a social contract involving them perfectly plausible, at least as an illuminating hypothesis" (2007 p.332). She subsequently identifies problems with this view, suggesting that such a contract would be difficult due to the fact that humans and animals would not have equal power in such matters; that animals do not make contracts, and furthermore "the type of intelligence that animals possess is not the sort that we need to postulate to imagine a contractual process" (2007 p.334). Of course it could be argued that animals who live in herds, packs or flocks, or in a relationship with humans, do make contracts of a sort, that establishing dominant or submissive roles, curbing natural instincts such as greed and aggression or promoting instincts or sharing, are events that are contractual in nature, albeit not in the political sense.

Nussbaum's objections to Kantian views on animals rest on the importance attributed to the notion that animals are viewed as being different from humans by virtue of their lack of rationality and therefore dignity. Thus they are not viewed as subjects (or recipients) of justice. She suggests that The Capabilities Approach by contrast, does treat animals as subjects seeking a flourishing existence; and this, she proposes, is one of its greatest strengths (2007, p.337).

Of course, one might excuse aspects of Kant's somewhat narrow view of animals, given that he was writing in the eighteenth century, and he would not have had access to the research on genetics, ethology and animal psychology that are available today, which suggest that humans and animals do indeed share many features and, despite lacking rationality in the human sense, animals are nonetheless capable of forming relationships, of experiencing pain and suffering, and of making choices in their own lives.

Arthur Schopenhauer was less inclined to forgive Kant's limited views on animals and the prevailing traditions which informed him (though we might be less inclined to forgive the antisemitism embedded in the next two quotations from Schopenhauer). Writing in *On the Basis of Morality*, Schopenhauer (who was strongly influenced by Eastern philosophy), argued that "we must remind the Western Judaized despiser of animals and idolater of the faculty of reason, that just as he was suckled by his mother, so too was the dog by his" (Schopenhauer, 1995, p. 178). He further suggested that "since compassion for animals is so intimately associated with goodness of character, it may confidently be asserted that whoever is cruel to animals cannot be a good man" (1995, p.179).

For Schopenhauer, animals share many similarities with humans, and he is less inclined to dismiss the idea that they are lesser beings by virtue of not possessing reason. He suggests that,

one must be really quite blind or totally chloroformed by the *foetor Judaicus* not to recognise that the essential and principal thing in the animal and man is the same, and that what distinguishes one from the other is not to be found in the primary and original principle, in the archaicus, in the inner nature, in the kernel of the two phenomena, such kernel being in both alike and the *will* of the individual; but only in the secondary, in the intellect, in the degree of the cognitive faculty (1995, p.178).

This presupposed that animals differ only in their ability to reason as humans do, and this would seem to imply that they are deserving of similar consideration to that given to young children and to those people who suffer with mental impairments.

Schopenhauer had no objections to animals being eaten for food however, as long as the animal is killed painlessly, which he suggested “should be made even easier by means of chloroform” (1995 p.182). Like Kant, he also had no objections to animals being used to work for humans, and suggested as did Kant, that “cruelty only occurs when it (the animal) is subjected to undue strain” (1995, p.182).

Kant’s assertion that man can have no duty to any beings except human beings, fails to address the important fact that domestication has resulted in many animals being dependent upon human beings not only for their survival, but also for many of their physical, emotional and social needs, and this obliges us to take responsibility for, and to be accountable for, our actions in relation to these creatures.

Kant further argued that cruelty to animals was “contrary to man’s duty to himself” but only in as much as it “deadens in him the feeling of sympathy for their sufferings, and thus a natural tendency that is very useful to morality in relation to other human beings is weakened”. This view demonstrated very little compassion towards the suffering of the animal itself and was more concerned with the impact that witnessing such suffering can have on the plight of other human beings. This was a view challenged and criticised by Schopenhauer, who regarded this view as both revolting and abominable (Schopenhauer, 1995).

For Schopenhauer, the utilisation of animals for human entertainment arose out of the notion that animals were viewed as ‘things’, there to do with as we pleased, irrespective of the suffering that might be caused in the process. Such a notion was born, according to Schopenhauer, out of theology, or more specifically, Christian (or Jewish) morality, which he proposed “leaves animals out of account” (1995, p.96). Animals, according to Christian tradition, can “be used for vivisection, hunting, coursing, bullfights, and horse-racing and can be whipped to death as they struggle along with heavy carts of stone” (1995, p.96). This was something that Schopenhauer regarded as shameful.

The effects of creating this kind of division between animals and humans can be compared to the formation of ‘in groups’ and ‘out groups’ created between humans that give rise to hierarchical categories and have led to human rights abuses. Such divisions legitimise the poor treatment of some people and animals on the basis that they, by virtue of being perceived as ‘different’ as a result of their sex, ‘race’, or species, are somehow inferior, and are therefore not entitled to the same rights as others.

It is here that Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach comes into its own. As an ethical theory applied to the treatment of animals, Kant's views fall short of being adequate; what makes Nussbaum's theory much more promising is the idea that animals are the subjects of justice, that they have a right to be treated fairly and to pursue their lives according to both their individual and species-particular needs. Animals are vulnerable, embodied beings, which are capable of living a dignified existence according to their own version of what that may entail. In Nussbaum's approach they are viewed as agents in their own lives and not seen as merely a means to an end of overall utility.

## **Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach**

Despite all the evidence that animals have lives, meaning that they have experiences that they feel as such, and that they have awareness and emotion and many types of thought and social networks, we humans treat them like things much of the time (Nussbaum, 2001, p.n/a).

Nussbaum is correct in her assertion; we human beings very often persist in treating animals as things. Kant's notion that animals are only a means to an end remains alive and well despite all of the knowledge that we have amassed since the 1800s. This applies not only to the horse, as I argued at the start of this chapter, but also in relation to farm animals, domestic pets and those animals in laboratories used for research. The moral problems associated with treating animals as things cannot, as we have seen, be solved by the social contract theory.

The capabilities approach contains a set of political principles, consisting of ten core entitlements appearing in Nussbaum's *Frontiers of Justice* (2007). The theory was first outlined by Amartya Sen in the 1980s (Sen, 2010). Sen argued that living a life consists of a combination of doing and being, with capabilities consisting of a person being able to perform valuable acts or to reach valuable states of being.

For Nussbaum, the capabilities approach began as a theory to deal with the issue of women's rights but it was subsequently extended in *Frontiers of Justice* to include other members of society, including those with mental and physical impairments and more recently, with non-human animals.

She proposes that three unresolved issues in relation to social justice remain, the first being the issue of justice for people with certain physical and mental impairments. Such

people, she claims, “have not as yet been included in existing societies, as citizens on a basis of equality with other citizens” (2007, p.1). The second issue relates to the extension of justice to all world citizens so that, “accidents of birth and national origin do not warp people’s life chances pervasively and from the start” (2007 p.2). The third issue concerns issues of justice in relation to the human treatment of non-human animals; which previously, Nussbaum argues, was considered to be an ethical issue rather than one of social justice (2007 p.2).

However, she is not only suggesting that animals are worthy of being treated well, she also argues that should their caregivers treat them unfairly, then there should be legal consequences for doing so, and proposes that these three issues as outlined above cannot be solved by social contract theory such as that of John Rawls. Consequently, she postulates that her capabilities approach is an alternative, arguing that it “suggests promising insights, and insights superior to those suggested for these particular problems by the social contract tradition” (2007 p.5).

Her version of the capabilities approach has its roots in the theory of Aristotle, where political arrangements should provide people with what they need to enable them to live rich and flourishing lives. She furthermore extends this notion to include other species, in which animals become such subjects of justice and argues that this justice is needed to secure a dignified life for animals, and that it should result in their being able to flourish within a given set of species-specific (and individual) capabilities.

The concept of dignity, or a dignified life, forms the premise for moral claims and entitlements to justice. Thus for Nussbaum, justice includes “being treated as full equals to other people” (2007 p.15) and also being included in making choices in social institutions. For those unable to make such choices, such as those with severe mental impairments of some sort or in the case of animals, she insists that “there is some other way to take their interests into account” (2007 p.15).

Nussbaum suggests that animals deserve the right to flourish and the right to justice in whatever life they lead. ‘Justice’ in this sense requires that not only do non-human animals have certain entitlements, but also that should these be denied to them, those responsible should have to face certain consequences. She argues that, “no sentient animal should be cut off from the chance for a flourishing life, a life with a type of dignity relevant to that species” (2007 p.348). Thus, justice in relation to animals refers to them having the chance or opportunity to flourish within their given capabilities, irrespective of whether they are

wild or domesticated. What is more, it concentrates on the capabilities of the individual animal and not just the group or species. This is a vital point, in that it ensures the rights of the individual; rights which might be overlooked by a concentration on the specific needs of a particular species.

In the case of horses for example, we find a highly social species of herd animal, accustomed to travelling great distances in search of grass and water, and one might assume that keeping them in individual stables, preventing them from socialising or running from fearful sights and sounds might amount to a failure to keep them in accordance with their capabilities; and for some horses this might be true. However, some individuals may see their stables as a sanctuary, and may relish coming in from the field and enjoying the warmth and security that the stable provides. For others, the stable is like a prison, and they become anxious and distressed when confined. Thus concentrating on perceived species-specific needs may not always present an accurate picture of the specific needs of the individual animal and it is the individual animal that concerns us here. However, a species- normal mode of flourishing remains important as a starting point.

What is significant about Nussbaum's capabilities approach is that she sees it as dynamic and open-ended and furthermore she is aware of the difficulties posed when applying her human-based capabilities to non-human animals. These non-human capabilities, which she mentions are analogous to the human ones, and their significance and implications, vary from species to species. In any ethical theory the main question has to be: what is the value of its application to the lives of animals?

## **Nussbaum's Ten Capabilities**

### **Life**

Nussbaum asserts that all animals are entitled to live their lives irrespective of whether or not they have a conscious awareness of doing so and until pain and decrepitude make death no longer a harm (2007 p.393). A comparison is made here between sentient animals and others such as insects. In this case, when there is a plausible reason for killing insects, as in the case of preventing harm to crops or people, she argues that "no entitlement based on justice has been violated" (2007 p.393). Sentient animals, contrastingly, have "a secure entitlement against gratuitous killing for sport. Killing for luxury items such as fur falls into this category and should be banned, as should all cruel practices and painful killings in the process of raising animals for food" (2007 p.394). However, killing sentient animals for food

does not amount to an injustice, so that the entitlement for life in this case, does not apply to those animals intended for the food chain.<sup>11</sup>

### **Bodily Health**

Nussbaum argues that animals are entitled to a healthy life. This means the banning of the confinement and ill treatment of animals in the meat and fur industries, and the banning of harsh or cruel treatment for working animals, including circus animals (2007 p.394).

Nussbaum points to an asymmetry that exists in the treatment of domestic animals and those animals that are raised for food, arguing that such asymmetry must be eliminated, and that laws governing permissible treatment can be closely modelled on laws dealing with parental responsibility to children (2007 p.394). Asymmetry does exist in the way that domestic pets and farm animals are treated, yet the asymmetry that exists between the way that humans and animals are treated is greater. No law dealing with parental responsibilities to their children would allow the children to be killed for food before they were eighteen months of age, nor would it permit females to be kept continuously pregnant while their offspring are removed from them soon after birth in order to provide milk for others.

### **Bodily Integrity**

This capability relates to the notion that animals have direct entitlements against violations of their bodily integrity by violence, abuse and other forms of mistreatment, irrespective of whether this treatment is painful or not. Thus, the docking of dogs' tails and the de-clawing of cats constitute violations against the animal's bodily integrity, as they prevent the animals from flourishing in their own particular way (2007 p.395). Nevertheless, there may be instances in which such actions actually enhance flourishing, for example in the case where a dog's dew claws keep getting caught and being ripped. This would cause considerable pain for the dog, and thus the removal of these claws may give the animal a

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<sup>11</sup> Some authors find this aspect of Nussbaum's theory problematic. For example, Anders Schinkel (Schinkel, 2008, p. 45) has accused Nussbaum of inconsistency in arguing that the human use of animals which Nussbaum wishes to retain (killing them for food or for use in research) and sees as justifiable, does not go together with her capabilities approach to animal rights. Nussbaum could be more consistent in her own principles and argue that the unnecessary killing of sentient animals is unjust. However, given that this does not apply to the SRS, I will not pursue the argument any further.

better quality of life. Nussbaum goes on to assert that “other mutilations that simply make the animal more beautiful are similarly inappropriate” (2007p.395).

In relation to the training of animals such as the horse, Nussbaum has no objection to the training itself, nor the use of equipment such as the bridle or bit that support it. She defends this view by asserting that, the “fact that the horse is at first annoyed by the bridle is not a negative thing any more than is the annoyance of human children at compulsory schooling, and can be justified by the role such promoting adult flourishing and capability” (2007 p.395). However, she does not mention the fact that the accoutrements which often support horse-training can in themselves damage the body of the horse: harsh bits, ill-fitting saddles and the various levers and other contraptions sometimes used to obtain submission. I explore these in more detail later in relation to the training of horses.

Nussbaum continues her comparisons between humans and animals in relation to the right to have opportunities for reproduction and sexual satisfaction. In the case of animals, she states that it would seem right to protect this capability and yet she argues that the castrating of male animals seems also to be compatible with their flourishing lives. Contrastingly, in relation to male humans, she argues that even, “the castration of a violent human seems utterly inappropriate” (2007 p.395). However, the castration of male animals is often carried out for the convenience of humans rather than for any perceived benefit to the animal in question, and whilst one can argue that these animals can continue to flourish following castration, they are still denied one of their most basic of needs, that of reproduction.

### **Senses, Imagination and Thought**

Here, Nussbaum argues for laws regulating the abusive treatment of animals and ensuring their access to sources of pleasure. This for her involves free movement in an environment that will sufficiently please their senses (2007 p.396). Such an environment may include spaciousness, light and shade, and she also alludes to an environment that produces adequate sensory stimulation, although it may prove difficult to ascertain what exactly constitutes adequate sensory stimulation for different species.

She further proposes that some animals are also entitled to a suitable education, stating that, with a border collie or some breeds of horse, if they have not been trained, then they have been abused. Even something as seemingly trivial as failing to house-train a pet, she

suggests, may also constitute abuse as some “animals connect cleanliness with the absence of shame” (2007, p.397).

### **Emotions**

According to Nussbaum, animals are capable of experiencing a wide range of emotions including fear, anger, resentment, gratitude, grief, envy and joy, with a small number even able to experience compassion (2007, p.397). As such, they are entitled to a life that encourages the formation of attachments to others, which means that they should not be kept in isolation from others, nor subjected to the deliberate infliction of fear, presumably from humans, but also from more dominant members of their own species.

### **Practical Reason**

Though reason is considered a key capability in the case of human beings, Nussbaum argues that no direct analogy exists in relation to this capability in animals. However, she suggests that in each individual case we should assess the ability of the creature to frame goals and to plan its life. For some species however we should make such an assessment at the levels of the species norms (2007, p.398).

### **Affiliation**

This notion refers to the animal’s entitlement to the opportunity to form attachments and to engage in characteristic forms of bonding and interrelationships (2007, p.398) with members of its own species, and with the humans who care for them. This concept is dependent upon the relationship being rewarding and mutual, as opposed to being tyrannical. Nussbaum also argues that animals are entitled to live in a world culture that respects and treats them as dignified beings and this she suggests, means that animals should be protected from humiliation, arguing that they will experience this as being painful.

### **Other Species**

This capability she suggests, when seen from both the animal’s and the human’s perspective, calls for the gradual formation of an interdependent world in which all species will enjoy cooperative and mutually supportive relations. Nussbaum recognises however,

that nature does not operate in this way, and as a result this capability, she suggests, calls for “a gradual supplanting of the natural by the just” (2007, p.399). However, this is problematic and would require, as Schinkel points out, “not so much a gradual transformation of this world but simply the destruction of the (animal) world as it exists today (Schinkel, 2008, p. 49). In the animal world, he continues, “carnivores predate on other animals. Whatever level of justice social animals may be capable of reaching in their own societies, no animals (human beings aside) seem capable of extending justice to other species” (2008 p.50).<sup>12</sup>

## **Play**

This capability is central to the lives of many animals, both young and old. According to Nussbaum, it calls for many of the same policies already discussed: the protection of adequate space, light and sensory stimulation, and above all the presence of other species members (2007, p.400).

## **Control over one’s Environment**

For non-human animals this aspect requires respect for the territorial integrity of their habitat, whether they are domesticated or in the wild (2007, p.400). It might also include offering the animal choices wherever possible, in relation to this habitat.

## **Nussbaum and the Concept of Dignity**

Central to Nussbaum’s capabilities approach is the concept of dignity. Her chapter on justice for non-human animals begins with the ruling from the Kerala High Court following a case relating to the treatment of circus animals. The court ruled that the conditions in which these animals were kept, and the undignified way of life which they had to lead, were unlawful. The ruling held that “Though not homosapiens, they (the circus animals),

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<sup>12</sup> This is a problematic claim for Nussbaum and one in which she is both hesitant and ambivalent about the prospect of ‘policing nature to make it just’. We are clearly not in the position to police nature in any comprehensive way without making things worse, in terms of capabilities or flourishing, for the animals concerned. As this does not have any direct bearing on the just treatment of domesticated horses, I am not going to pursue this issue further.

are also beings entitled to a dignified existence, and humane treatments sans cruelty and torture” (2007 p.325).

What does a dignified existence consist of in the case of animals? Nussbaum addresses this by asserting that it relates to enjoyment of the threshold level capability entitlements that allow them to flourish in their own species-specific ways. Although Nussbaum does not expand on what these threshold levels might be, she does suggest that they refer to a minimum beneath which a decently dignified life for citizens (or animals) is not available (2007, p.179). Nussbaum also recognises that these threshold levels for a particular capability may be subject to change, and may vary in different societies in accordance with their histories and circumstances.

She also suggests that it is difficult to know precisely what the term ‘a dignified existence’ means but nevertheless, she argues that it is clear what it does not mean: “the conditions of the circus animals in the case, squeezed into cramped and filthy cages, starved, terrorized, and beaten, given only the minimal care that would make them presentable in the ring the following day” (2007, p.326). For her, a dignified existence would seem at the very least to require the following:

- 1) Adequate opportunity for nutrition and physical activity
- 2) Freedom from pain, squalor and cruelty
- 3) Freedom to act in ways that are characteristic of the particular species
- 4) Freedom from fear and opportunities for rewarding interactions with others of the same species
- 5) A chance to enjoy light and air in tranquillity. (2007, p.326).

These five elements form the basis of the ideal of a dignified existence, and relate to Nussbaum’s ten capabilities in that they contribute to the quality of life of the animal by ensuring that life itself is maintained, that the animal’s physical and mental needs are met, and that the animal has the opportunity for social relationships with other members of its own species and with other species. To deny animals these freedoms and opportunities, to which they are entitled as a matter of justice, is to deny them a dignified existence.

It is important to emphasise that for Nussbaum, these issues are matters of justice. Thus, if we argue that being cruel to animals is unjust this means that not only is it morally wrong to be cruel to them, but also that the animal has a moral right not to be treated in such a way. This approach adopts a ‘quality of life’ approach, which holds that all animals,

irrespective of sentience or any other pre-determined quality, are capable of a dignified existence, and that they have a right to that dignified existence. Furthermore, it holds that humans do not have the right to treat animals in a way which might violate this right.

Nussbaum herself states that “the capabilities approach provides better theoretical guidance than do other approaches to the question of animal entitlements”. It does this because it is “capable of recognising a wide range of types of animal dignity, and of corresponding needs for flourishing, and because it is attentive to the variety of activities and goals that creatures of many types pursue” (2007, p.327).

This model is distinctive in that Nussbaum is one of the first philosophers to extend the concept of justice beyond humanity. In so doing she raises a number of salient points not previously dealt with by theories such as Kantian and social contract theories, which dealt predominately with the relationship between rational agency and rights. Her account aims to deal both with species which are sentient and those which are not, proposing that “dignity does not rest on some actual property of persons such as the possession of reason or other specific capabilities” (2007, p.326). This approach highlights not only moral obligations which need to be considered in relation to non-human animals, in that they should be treated well and not suffer as a result of our dealings with them, but also highlights the issue of justice. This raises further responsibilities, in that we have a moral obligation to do something about injustice, should it occur, and this might involve the reporting of injustice to the relevant authorities, or speaking out about what we observe.

Nussbaum’s list of capabilities highlights what she thinks are essential to ensure that animals lead a good life. To what extent can this approach shed light on the question of whether the animals at the Spanish Riding School are given the opportunity to flourish or lead a dignified life? In the following section, I apply her theory to the care and management of these animals throughout their lives, both in relation to her five requirements for a dignified existence, and also in relation to the ten capabilities, which she deems necessary in order to lead a flourishing life.

Both the capabilities that Nussbaum describes, and the elements necessary for a dignified existence, can be categorised under three headings: biological or physical requirements; social requirements; and emotional requirements. These elements do not exist independently, and, in order for an animal to flourish, a balance between these elements is needed.

This theory provides a way in which we might assess the lives of many animals, especially those who are required to live in a humanised environment. Whilst the theory is far from

perfect, it does at least recognise that animals are individuals, that they are deserving of being treated well, and that they are owed a life in which attempts should be made to ensure that they flourish. Should they be denied this, then an injustice has occurred.

## **Being a horse**

An assessment of the flourishing needs and capabilities of horses requires knowledge about what it might mean to be a horse. In a famous paper, the American philosopher Thomas Nagel raises the question: *What is it like to be a bat?* This paper, primarily concerned with the mind body problem, highlights the difficulties of imagining the experience of another species. In relation to bats he proposes that, “our own experience provides the basic material for our imagination, whose range is therefore limited” (Nagel, 1974, p. 436). In essence, we have no way of knowing what it means to be a bat. The central question for Nagel becomes, not what might it be like for me to behave like a bat but rather what is it like for a bat to be a bat? Yet, he argues that “if I try to imagine this I am restricted by the resources of my own mind and those resources are inadequate for the task” (1974 p.436). How then, as we cannot enter the mind of the horse, and ‘know’ what it is to actually experience the world in the same way that a horse does, can we possibly assess what they need in their lives to enable them to flourish? One might turn to studies of the biology of the horse or observational studies of them under certain conditions for clues. But here too the analysis of the data collected relies on our interpretation of it, and this interpretation is informed by our experience of the world and not by that of the experience of the world of the horse. However, we have to begin somewhere and such studies do provide clues as to what it is that the horse needs to enable it to be physically and psychologically healthy and what it might need to flourish as a horse.

One solution to this problem for Kiley-Worthington is for more research to be conducted on the perceptual world of the horse, but this only gives us information about what the animal sees, smells and tastes. What it cannot do is tell us about how the animal might regard these stimuli. Research is also a key component of Nussbaum’s approach, arguing that “it makes sense to begin with the best studies that we can devise of what animals do when left to their own devices, for how else are we to understand how they conceive their own flourishing” (2007, p.369), and later, she suggests that “part of respect for other species is a willingness to look and study, learning the internal rhythms of an animal community and the sense of value the way of life expresses” (2007, p.371).

Such studies provide information about what is required for animals to flourish and may also help to prevent misguided attempts to ascribe particular intentions to their behaviours. As Nussbaum suggests “Apart from the issue of harm to others, it seems best for humans not to engage in too much second-guessing of animal capabilities, but to try to observe what each creature actually considers important, on the basis of what it does” (2007, p.371). The problem with this though, as Nussbaum is well aware, is that observation requires interpretation in order to determine the appropriate course of action. Such interpretation will undoubtedly be influenced by a number of factors including the level of experience of the observer, and their cultural background and the historical traditions that inform them. Horses are more than just members of the equine species, they are individuals, and any discussion of their flourishing must take that into account. Nussbaum argues that concepts such as that of a natural teleology form only one part of flourishing for the being in question, and suggests that “we must be constantly alert to the fact that some possibility that used to belong to the realm of chance or nature now might belong to the social realm, the realm shaped by justice” (2007, p.181). Whilst accepting that the ‘horseness’ of the horse is an important contributing factor in deciding how best to assess the flourishing of the animal, it is critical to recognise that this alone may not always be sufficient in itself. Given the diversity of individual needs which exist within the species and also that the behaviour of the animal may have been altered (by domestication or training), it may be impossible to identify their needs by reference to a notion of some ‘purely natural’ horseness.

Despite this, observations of horses, both scientific and non-scientific, reveal that they have social, psychological and physical requirements which need to be fulfilled in order for them to flourish. In what follows I investigate the needs of horses in relation to their complex social structures, their relationship with their human caregivers, their breeding, nutrition and play.

## Equine social structures

Left to their own devices, horses will form groups with a varied number of mares, a stallion, and their offspring. Young mares and colts are allowed to stay with the group up until puberty, and will then be driven from the group by the senior stallion. Kiley-Worthington, who has kept a variety of experimental herds, has found that any extra stallions will band together into groups and may remain in them for several years. The critical factor in the success of these groups seems to depend upon the age at which the males join. Kiley-Worthington suggests that the optimum age for them to join is between one and five years (Kiley-Worthington, 1987). This may explain why the stallions for the SRS are selected and moved to the stables in Vienna at the age of three years, as this gives them the opportunity to get used to their new accommodation, to become acquainted with the other stallions, and to join the group.

Stallions, unlike most geldings (castrated males), often regard each other as competitors, meaning that real conflicts can arise with the animals inflicting great harm on each other.



**Figure 19 Young Stallions fighting**

For this reason, in domesticated situations, stallions are usually kept out of each other's reach and rules are applied so that the horse knows that displays of aggression or extreme dominance are not acceptable. At the Spanish Riding School for example, the careful selection of the animals when they are three years old means that horses who are overly

aggressive or who display overly 'stallionish' behaviour do not get selected for training, and furthermore, animals displaying these traits would also not be selected as breeding stallions. Should mild occurrences of these behaviours present, training is usually sufficient to discourage them. Such training may involve the handler indicating his disapproval to the horse by altering his tone of voice, or by ignoring the behaviour completely and then rewarding the horse when he does not behave in an unwanted manner.

An additional aspect of the requirement for a dignified life according to Nussbaum, relates to the freedom to experience rewarding interactions with others of the same species. I have suggested that in the case of stallions kept together this is unrealistic, as their idea of a rewarding interaction may well involve the use of hooves and teeth, leading to injury to the animals and large veterinary bills. Such behaviours constitute what Nussbaum terms 'harmful capabilities', and her approach is largely in favour of the suppression of these capabilities, asserting that "capabilities theorists will have a strong inclination to say that harm-causing capabilities are not among those that should be protected by political and social principles" (2007, p.369). Conversely, she suggests that "part of what it is to flourish, for a creature, is to settle certain very important matters on its own without human intervention, even of a benevolent sort" (2007, p.373). This might certainly be the case, in that denying the stallions an opportunity to sort out a 'pecking order' may result in confusion for the animals and consequently, influence their ability to flourish as horses. Strict social hierarchy is a vital aspect of the social lives of horses, and this is often achieved through the settling of disputes and the dominance of one animal over another.

## **Horses and Humans**

Is it possible for animals to have rewarding or meaningful relationships with other species of animals, including humans? Whilst it is frequently problematic to assess just how 'rewarding' human/equine interactions are for the horse, and indeed how these might be identified, there are nevertheless a number of behavioural clues that can provide some indication.

Kiley-Worthington suggests that horses can show lack of pleasure by refusing to do what is requested, by appearing fearful, frustrated, or panicked, or by displaying aggression towards their human trainers. Conversely, they can demonstrate pleasure by coming when called, or by actively seeking the company of humans, even when they have equine companions. They may neigh in recognition, or engage in affiliative behaviours such as

sniffing, licking, nuzzling, grooming or following (Kiley Worthington, 1997, p.71). Generally speaking, when horses have developed a relationship with a handler or trainer their behaviour expresses interest, curiosity and a willingness not only to do what is asked, but also to engage in activities which in the past have brought them some reward, either in the form of a food treat or approval. They may also engage in protective behaviours ensuring that other horses are not allowed near their handler or trainer and may in some cases, actually express anxiety when their human companion leaves. Whilst such behaviours could be argued to arise as a result of conditioning, the possibility exists that humans do feature as meaningful others in the lives of some horses just as they do in the lives of some dogs and cats. The crucial point is that a clear difference exists in the reaction of horses to people whom they trust and to those of whom they are fearful, and these behaviours can provide clues to the relationship that exists.

Nevertheless, it is possible that a horse which has been treated badly by a human in the past will express fear in the presence of all humans, irrespective of how the horse is currently being treated. Notwithstanding this, their behaviour may provide a valuable insight into the way in which the horse might regard human handlers and trainers. Observation of the stallions at the SRS during training and the performances reveals animals who engage in affiliative behaviours with their trainers, and who do not demonstrate any behaviour that might lead one to presume that they are fearful of them.

## **Horse Breeding**

Whilst in many societies the breeding of humans to achieve some desired end or to select for certain desirable characteristics is deemed morally reprehensible, in the case of many animals such practice is commonplace, rarely questioned, and indeed forms the basis for much of livestock farming. The reason behind selective breeding is to 'improve' the type of animal that is being bred or to continue a particular desirable 'blood line'. 'Breed standards' are often set down by the various breed societies, and in some cases these standards pay little attention to the unintended consequences to the welfare of the animals. The Kennel Club, for example, has previously endorsed the breeding of certain characteristics in dogs irrespective of the fact that these animals suffer as a result. The German Shepherd has been selectively bred to have lowered hind quarters and this, over time, has resulted in the increased tendency toward hip dysplasia in even very young dogs. Other breeds may suffer from an inability to breathe easily due to the attempt to produce a particular 'look,' present

in the animal's facial features. The desire to produce a human ideal of beauty in animals such as the dog and the horse have inevitably had negative consequences for the animal's health and longevity, and this cannot be considered to be morally acceptable or just, in Nussbaum's capability terms.

However, in places such as the Spanish Riding School where horses are bred with a specific purpose in mind and selective breeding is aimed at producing animals which are healthy, and capable both physically and psychologically of performing the role for which they are intended, they are in consequence more likely to live a long and rewarding life. This can be argued to be just.

It would be appropriate to assume that one of the first considerations that have to be borne in mind when breeding animals is that they should have a chance of leading a 'good life'; in other words that they should be both physically healthy and emotionally able to deal with the lives which they will be required to live (Kiley-Worthington, 1997).

Furthermore, in keeping with Nussbaum's account, an opportunity should be available for the horse to fulfil the purpose for which it has been bred and to receive sufficient mental and physical stimulation for its needs in that life.

The actual practicalities of breeding horses are however fraught with moral problems. For example, few horses are offered the opportunity to breed 'naturally' and by that I mean that they are not allowed to engage in the prolonged courtship that occurs among horses kept at pasture or in the wild (Kiley-Worthington, 1987). Furthermore, the mare is often subjected to intrusive physical examinations which involve the veterinary surgeon introducing his or her arm into the rectum of the mare (rectal palpation) to examine her ovaries to assess whether she is ovulating and therefore likely to accept the attention of the stallion (Rose, 1989). If she is, then her vulva is washed with antiseptic and she will be introduced to the stallion usually behind some fixed door. If she appears receptive to the stallion, he will be brought around to 'cover' her. This involves allowing the stallion to mount the mare while his penis is manipulated into her vulva. Once covering is completed, the stallion jumps off the mare and is immediately led away. This process is repeated every other day or so until the mare has ovulated and her 'season' finishes.

Often horses at stud receive little or no introduction to each other before mating, and both mare and stallion are restrained. Should the mare object to the stallion or try to kick him, she is 'twitched' which involves twisting a piece of cord around her top lip and holding it tightly twisted, a practice thought to release endorphins which quieten the mare down. In

extreme cases she is both twitched and 'hobbled' which involves binding her hind legs together so she cannot move. The whole process of this 'covering in hand' and the restraint to both animals that accompanies it, are justified on the basis that it is deemed safer for the stallion and mare and that it prevents the stallion covering the same mare too often, because he may have to be used for many other mares. However, this method of breeding horses fails to produce the high percentage of pregnancy success found in horses which are left to their own devices. One reason for this may be the denial of the long courtship process that occurs in natural conditions and the role that this plays in the fertility of both parties. Conversely, it could also be that such interference causes both of the animals involved a high degree of stress.

Furthermore, the strong bond that occurs between mares and stallions in a herd setting is absent. Under more natural conditions the mare will remain in season for up to ten days during which time she will become familiar with the stallion and his attempts to court her and is therefore less likely to be frightened of him. Should she not be ready for covering, she will let the stallion know by kicking him or getting away from him if she chooses, something that is denied her in the human controlled setting (Kiley-Worthington, 1997). Having kept a breeding stallion who runs with mares for many years, and also witnessing the 'covering in hand' method, it is striking how relaxed the horses are in the natural setting and how tense they are when being held by humans, and this may be one reason for the differences in conception rates between the two methods. It has been estimated that the conception rates in feral horses (even when they are under-nourished) is 90% compared with 68% found at studs (Rossdale, 1983)

Horses have evolved a particular range of breeding and courtship behaviours which are denied them in artificial human-controlled settings where the need for financial gain or ease of management is preferred over that which is more beneficial for the horse. The over use of physical restraint and of pharmaceutical preparations used to ensure that the mare is in season, are commonplace and, in my view, are not morally justified. Forcing a mare to 'stand' for a stallion which she does not know, with no way of escape can both terrify her and may lead to subsequent behavioural problems. In essence such practice amounts to sexual exploitation of the animal and is thus morally wrong. Stallions too can become frustrated and aggressive with mares and engage in abnormal behaviours such as severe biting of the mare during covering, something that does not occur in more natural settings. It would seem that these practices contravene the horse's ability to flourish in two respects. First, by virtue of the fact that they impact on the capabilities of bodily health and integrity

by the use of force and chemical interference; second, on the emotional, and affiliative capabilities by virtue of the fact that the horses are prevented from engaging in the horse-appropriate courtship behaviours necessary for successful breeding. As a result, these practices amount to a lack of respect for the animal's dignity and for their flourishing needs, and in consequence raise an issue of justice.

The practices that I have described above are both accepted and commonplace in most equine breeding studs. More recently, in view of the dangers inherent in these practices, there has been a move toward an even more unnatural way of breeding horses, that of artificial insemination. Here a stallion is trained to mount an artificial 'dummy' mare and semen is collected from him. The semen is then transferred to the waiting mare via a tube inserted by a veterinary surgeon whilst the mare is held in a 'crush' (commonly referred to as the rape-rack for obvious reasons) and is unable to move. In this case the horses do not even get to see, smell or hear each other; their contact is removed completely. In the case where chilled or frozen semen is used, the stallion and mare can be in different countries.

The ideal situation in terms of dignified flourishing would be one where horses can run together in herds at studs and produce their foals with minimal human intervention, but, given the way in which modern horses are kept, this is not always feasible. In order for a stallion to run out with mares he must first be socialised and become used to being in a herd otherwise the practice can be very dangerous. Horses that have been brought up with other herd members of both sexes, learn quickly what the social rules are, whereas those who have not may often behave aggressively or inappropriately since they have no idea of the social rules. It is not the case that stallions can just be turned out into a field with mares they must first receive informal socialisation from encounters with the other horses in a herd. For many horses today, the opportunity for this access to socialisation is absent.

## **Nutrition**

According to Nussbaum,

... with Aristotle and Marx, the capability approach has insisted that there are waste and tragedy when a living creature with the innate or 'basic' capability for some functions that are evaluated as important and good never gets the opportunity to perform those functions (2007, p.346).

For the horse, one of these innate, important, and good functions is the ability to graze. Grazing for the horse requires more than just the eating of grass it also involves the ability to move around searching for the most nutritious of shoots, and often doing so in the company of others. As such, grazing fulfils a lot of the horse's physical and emotional capabilities.

Horses are herbivores and the anatomical structure of their intestine and stomach means that they require small amounts of high fibre food regularly to keep their gut working. During any 24 hour period, horses that are free to graze will spend an estimated 16 hours of this period doing just that (Carson, 1983). Grazing not only provides nutrition and prevents boredom, but also requires movement as the horse tends to eat a few mouthfuls of grass in one place and then moves on to another patch. Those horses that are stabled most of the time miss out on this ability to 'eat on the move', and to forage for specific types of herbs and grasses which they might need.

However, advances in equine nutrition mean that it is possible to provide stabled horses with a well-balanced diet, similar to that which they might encounter when grazing. Therefore, from a nutritional point of view at least, grazing is no longer essential. Like many stabled horses the animals at the Spanish Riding School are provided with hay and straw which supply their needs for roughage, and 'hard feed' such as grains, pulses and supplements which provide the necessary vitamins and minerals. What is missing though is the mooching and foraging behaviours engaged in by horses living in or having access to pasture. It is unclear whether this has any effect on their digestive processes, although recent research does suggest a link between increased episodes of impaction colic in stabled horses, compared to those at pasture. In these studies it was found that stabled horses had reduced gut motility, which predisposed them to colic, as well as higher incidences of gastric ulceration (Huntington, 2011). It might be that lack of movement leads to a reduction in gut motility, or it might be that the development of repetitive abnormal behaviours such as weaving and wind-sucking (associated with boredom and anxiety) contribute to digestive upset (Huntington, 2011). Many horse owners recognise the beneficial effects of turning their horses out in paddocks for periods of time, but this is not feasible for some horses and they are confined to stables, dependent on their human handlers to provide them with the nutrition and exercise that they require.

The moral issue in relation to nutrition then, rests not only on whether the animal has sufficient food to thrive, but is also related to the animal's ability to engage in behaviours associated with obtaining food and optimising digestive health. When horses are able to

graze with others this also provides security and friendship so important for highly social herd animals. Grazing for food and the opportunity for close affiliative behaviours that grazing provides are lacking for the majority of stabled horses, not only those in Vienna but also those in many private and commercial establishments such as racing, livery and dressage yards, who receive little or no opportunity to graze in paddocks. Permanent or continuous stabling prevents the horse from engaging in a range of biological and social behaviours; this in turn can impact on their psychological and physical well-being and rob them of the choices as to when and what to eat, when to move, and also when to engage in social behaviours.

Is such a system of management consistent with the horse's just entitlements? If it is not, then Nussbaum would suggest that it would become an issue of justice. However, whilst stabling horses for long periods may be an issue of justice, it is also crucial to recognise that horses left out at grass for long periods of time can also suffer. The seasonal variations in protein and sugars present in grass can lead to the development of metabolic problems in horses as well as the development of the debilitating, painful and potentially life-threatening condition of laminitis which can affect horses which have become obese as a result of over-indulgence in rich grass. In this case owners have no choice but to stable these animals so that they can be nursed and put onto a weight reduction regime, a measure frequently necessary to save their lives. Conversely, horses which are out on poor quality grass may suffer as a result of malnutrition, or as a result of an increased parasite burden. There are also greater opportunities for horses to injure themselves whilst out in the fields by getting limbs caught in fences, or by being kicked or bitten by other horses.

The optimal regime for keeping horses where their just entitlements are met requires a middle way, a balance between ensuring optimal physical and psychological health by providing them with choices and social contact, whilst also acting to protect them from preventable harm. This form of management requires, as Nussbaum states, that "we adopt a type of paternalism that is highly sensitive to the different forms of flourishing that the different species pursue" (2007, p.375). Nussbaum would presumably also support an assessment being made of the threshold requirements of the individual animal in relation to its needs, and an optimal management plan designed to fulfil these needs encompassing an awareness and appreciation of the species-normal mode of flourishing.

## Play

We used to gallop all together round and round the field as hard as we could go. Sometimes we had rather rough play, for they would frequently bite and kick as well as gallop. (Sewell, 2012 edition, p. 1)

The quote above is from one of the most influential literary treatises on the lives of horses, Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*. This text (although arguably highly anthropomorphic) contains some valuable insights into the nature of horses based on her many years of observations of them. Furthermore, it highlights the gregariousness of these animals, their ability to form friendships with each other and the need of young horses to play. According to Nussbaum play forms one of the capabilities constitutive of dignified flourishing. It requires in her view, the provision of adequate light and sensory stimulation in living places, and, above all, the presence of other species members.

Play is an important factor in the cognitive and motor development of young foals, and it is through play that they develop the skills that they will require in later life. According to Andrew Frazer, aside from the various physical and mental benefits of playing, in all of its manifestations there is the single emotion of apparent pleasure (Frazer A. , 1992). When play is denied to young horses, or indeed to some adults, there is, according to Frazer, an outburst of play activity seen in these animals on release. There seems to be a difference in the types and frequency of play present in colts and fillies; colts initiate play more often and mount their play mates. Most play involves varying degrees of nipping each other but "running around alone or in groups, and chasing with much head tossing, sudden stops and starts, and kicking of the hind legs in the air are also typical" (Frazer A. , 1992, p. 71) The opportunity to play seems to form an important part of the lives of horses, fulfilling a variety of functions, and this leads Frazer to propose that "the phenomenon of play could become an important factor in the determination of conditions of welfare, particularly as it relates to the development of the athletic horse" (Frazer, A.,1992, p.183).

The importance of play highlights the need for periods of time to be set aside for the horse to be able to engage in play activity, something that occurs infrequently in the horses of the Spanish Riding School. It may not always be possible to provide adult horses with the

freedom to engage in play activities with each other, and this is particularly the case with stallions, who may be more concerned with serious fighting than they are with playing.

That is not to say that playing cannot and does not occur in the SRS horse, as play takes many forms in the adult horse. One of these forms may occur in the training or working sessions.

Frazer suggests that as a result of domestication the natural energy and exuberance of the horse have been directed into work and recreational activities, and he further proposes that for the horse, these activities may be analogous to natural play. Additionally, he further suggests that “Even dressage, with its variety and formality, might evoke a play approach in some horses” (Frazer, A.,1992 p.184) and also that “some forms of work for horses can contain elements of stimulation for this inherent inclination to take opportunities to play creatively” (1992 p.184). Creative play has often been thought to be outside the realm of the cognitive capabilities of the horse. Yet horses do appear to be able to use objects such as footballs and dustbin lids or even buckets and create a ‘game’ around these objects.

## **The training of horses**

In order for the stallions at the Spanish Riding School to be used in performances they have to undergo years of training. Whilst Nussbaum’s theory deals briefly with this issue, I would like to explore the aims of training and the methods employed not only within the SRS but also within the horse world at large, and examine their moral acceptability.

The purpose of training any animal is to bring about a change in behaviour, and it is directed towards either stopping unwanted behaviours or introducing new behaviours. Both of these require that the animal learns, and training is geared toward teaching the animal what is required by the trainer. Horses, like many other animals, are capable of quite complex feats of learning and these have been studied and documented by authors such as Marthe Kiley- Worthington, Lucy Rees and others. Horses learn which behaviours are desirable and which are not, initially from their mothers, or other members of the herd where undesirable behaviours are dealt with by threatening postures or in extreme circumstances by biting, kicking or by chasing the offender away and thus isolating them. In many cases, a threatening posture will suffice and horses become extremely adept at recognising changes in body language in their companions and will submit immediately to avoid confrontations.

Horses who have spent their early lives in herds, such as those of the SRS, thus come to their human trainers having already learned some basic skills such as respect for the personal space of another being, that certain behaviours are unacceptable, and that engaging in these has consequences. It is only when faced with a horse that has been denied this experience, such as in the case of the orphan foal that is hand-reared by humans, that the value of this early herd training becomes apparent. Orphan foals are notoriously problematic to train later in life, as they often have little or no respect for the personal space of the trainer and have often not learned basic 'manners'.

Whilst horses understand dominance hierarchies it is also important to stress that under more natural conditions where they are kept in herds they tend to engage in more affiliative or cohesive behaviours than they do in aggressive or dominance based ones (Kiley-Worthington, 1987) Horses are, for the most part, peaceful animals who will avoid confrontations with others unless they are threatened or are competing for food, territory or a mate, yet the underlying narrative relating to the training of horses continues to promote the need for the trainer to be dominant and to obtain 'submission' in the horse. In fact the score sheets used in competitive dressage actually contain a segment in which the horse's submission is assessed and scored. Whilst the submission by the horse to the will of the trainer is not in itself cause for concern, the methods that are sometimes adopted to obtain this submission can be.

Teaching the horse to understand these aids or instructions usually involves the use of three processes of Skinnerian operant conditioning or associative learning: positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and punishment (Frazer A. , 1992).

Positive reinforcement includes the technique of providing the horse with the conditions conducive for a desired behaviour to occur, and then rewarding him for the behaviour. Reward for the horse might include a titbit such as a sugar cube or a carrot, or a secondary reinforcement such as verbal praise or a pat on the neck which has previously been paired with food.

Negative reinforcement occurs when an undesirable or negative stimulus is removed when a required behaviour occurs. For example a tap on the horse's side with the rider's leg ceasing when the horse goes into a desired gait or the rider's hand on the rein lightening when the horse softens his neck or places his head in a desired position.

The use of punishment is the most controversial of these learning strategies and whilst not used at the SRS, but commonplace outside it, involves the use of an aversive stimulus such

as a smack with a whip, a jab in the mouth by the bit, or a stab with a spur in the horse's side following an undesired action from the animal. None of these techniques are free from moral problems and as such deserve further investigation.

**Positive reinforcement** usually involves rewarding a particular behaviour as this has been shown to increase the probability of the behaviour or response recurring. The most common form of 'reward' for the horse is the administration of a treat such as a sugar cube, or some other food. For this kind of reinforcement to be effective, however, it must be administered immediately after the desired response has been obtained, a principle known in psychology as temporal contiguity, although psychologists differ about its effectiveness (Macintosh, 1983).

This type of reinforcement has been studied extensively in experimental psychology, initially by Skinner and later by a number of Skinnerian scholars; a number of findings have emerged which assist animal trainers of all kinds. The most effective way to ensure that a desired behaviour occurs with any reliability is to use what are termed as variable schedules of reinforcement. This means that the animal is rewarded initially every time he or she responds appropriately and thereafter, every third or fourth time. Should the rewards stop altogether for a period of time then the responses may also stop, a phenomenon known as extinction (Lieberman, 1990).

To train an animal, intermittent rewards appear to be the most successful way of achieving learning, according to this theory. One important objection to this in relation to horses lies not in its application as such, but on the fact that it supports dependence in animals, and further highlights the inequality that exists between horse and human. The giving of treats when one has been a 'good boy or girl' can be considered condescending and degrading to an animal even though the animal is unlikely to perceive it as such. Furthermore it can encourage in horses the tendency to nip or bite if a hand is placed near their mouths, something which will usually be dealt with by punishment.

Feeding an animal by hand is also considered to be an indicator of the power of the feeder and dependence of the animal being fed. Yet people love to see it, and for many it inspires confidence that the animal is well treated, cared for, even loved. What is even more appealing is the sight of horses nuzzling the pockets of their trainers, or offering a movement or behaviour which has not been asked for such as pawing the ground, in other words 'begging' for the treat. Far from being seen as degrading to the animal, this is seen as endearing, as Yi-Fu Tuan suggests is the case with visitors to zoos:

One of the pleasures of visiting a zoo is feeding the animals. The act is generous and the pleasure is innocent, although both derive from a base of insecurity and power. Making another being eat out of our hand – *that* yields a special thrill all the greater if the animal is first made to beg and if it is large enough to crush us in another setting less structured in our favour (Tuan, 1984, p. 80).

The sight of an animal being rewarded with treats is commonplace during a performance of the SRS, usually during the 'in-hand' section of the performance where the horse, having completed a difficult movement, waits for his trainer to administer the treat which is kept in a special pocket in the trainer's coat known as 'the sugar pocket'. Even though the animal is restrained by the rein held by the trainer plus the side reins which run from the bit to the saddle and hold his head in a fixed position, this administration of a treat is seen as an act of benign generosity and kindness, as it is with other animals in similar training situations. Yet, as Tuan suggests, in some circumstances it can also be perceived as being an act of administering control over a dependent being.

**Negative reinforcement** involves the removal of an aversive stimulus as a reward for a desired response. Such stimuli include the use of the rider's hand on the rein which exerts pressure on the horse's mouth via the bit, the taps or kicks of the rider's leg against the horse's sides, moderate taps with a whip to get the horse to move forward and the use of the spur. Each of these stimuli creates varying levels of discomfort in the horse and dependent upon their severity and in the case of their over-application, can cause extreme pain. The application of these 'aids', continues until the horse does what is wanted and then, theoretically at least, they should cease as a way of rewarding the horse.

**Punishment** The use of punishment as a technique to train horses is often challenged, and for this reason, it is often conducted 'behind closed doors' away from the gaze of spectators. Punishment is often administered as a painful stimulus to discourage unwanted behaviours, and in the case of horses, painful stimuli are inflicted by the use of whips, spurs, and jabs in the mouth with the bit. The withholding of food or water to 'teach the horse a lesson' is also used in some circumstances.

There is a moral problem in inflicting punishment such as smacking on animals, just as there is in inflicting it on humans. Research conducted by Holden has suggested that in the case of children, smacking produces emotional distress such as anger, fear, humiliation, sadness and feelings of guilt (Holden, 2002). I would argue that if this is the case for humans there is no reason why it should be different for animals, at least as regards the emotions Holden

refers (whether animals 'guilt' may be more contestable). Furthermore, such punishment can also be challenged as a valid tool in learning, firstly because it creates fear and anxiety, which are not states conducive to learning, and secondly because it is morally wrong knowingly to inflict pain on another being, especially when there is no way for that being to escape it. Additionally, given the power imbalance, punishment is used too often for reasons other than to stop a particular undesirable behaviour in the horse; it is used out of frustration, anger, fear or even some sadistic desire to inflict pain.

Whilst the hitting of a child in public is likely to cause outrage amongst onlookers in most if not all European societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, inflicting pain on horses as in the use of the whip in racing, or for hitting a horse that refuses to go over a jump, or to go past some obstacle that alarms it, often fails to elicit any response from the crowd. It is such a standard practice that no one turns a hair at the sight, and a visit to any horse show or gymkhana will bear testament to this fact, where even very small children can be seen kicking their ponies in the ribs, hitting them with whips or jabbing them in the mouth via the reins.

Whilst smacking children or dogs might seem inappropriate to an onlooker it is viewed so partly because of the visible exertion of power over a smaller, more vulnerable being. The horse, on the other hand, is visibly much larger than the human and more powerful, and horses are known to be unpredictable and sometimes even dangerous, so that such treatment might be excused by some on these grounds. Yet this does not make it acceptable.

Horses are indeed large, powerful, and unpredictable animals and they are capable of inflicting harm on their human handlers, so that if we are to use them for riding and other activities then training is necessary. However, this training to ensure human safety carries an obligation of morality and justice towards the horses themselves to train them to participate in our world effectively, safely and with dignity. As Scruton suggests, if we are to keep animals that are dependent upon us then we have a duty to train them to participate in the human world (Scruton, 2000). Nussbaum also regards training as necessary for the animal to flourish. Kiley-Worthington has suggested that training can serve both to stimulate the intellectual capabilities in horses and provide them with an interest. However, we share no common language with the horse, nor do we have any way of 'showing' this large, powerful, and sometimes unpredictable animal, what it is that we might wish it to do.

Horses can be trained successfully and training can be conducted in a manner which does not involve the use of painful punishment and yet enables them to flourish and participate in the human world. However, such training takes time, and considerable effort and skill on the part of the trainer. The search for 'quick fixes' either to achieve a desired 'look' or for financial gain puts the horse at greater risk of abuse, as does the overestimation of the horse's ability to know what it is that the trainer wants, and the tendency to blame the horse for being wilfully disobedient when things do not go according to the trainer's expectations.

The optimum training system involves mutual co-operation without coercion and also mutual respect. Horses, as I suggested earlier, understand about hierarchy and respecting each other, and they also recognise approval and disapproval and are acutely adept at reading body language, as the case of Clever Hans illustrated. Clever Hans was a horse who became famous in Germany early in the twentieth century for his apparent ability to solve mathematical problems, tell the time, recognise coins and answer certain questions. The horse's responses to these questions were either to paw with his front leg for the mathematical answers or to shake his head for yes or no answers to other questions. Investigations into this horse's behaviour revealed that he was responding to almost imperceptible changes in the body language of his trainer rather than working out the answers to the questions. The ability of the horse to respond to cues such as the body language and mood of the trainer has been demonstrated in other horses since Clever Hans, and illustrates how remarkable these animals can be. But how does one go about utilising these abilities in training?

It would appear that whilst classical and operant conditioning techniques play a part in training horses, other factors such as the level of trust that the horses have with their trainers also has an influence on their willingness to engage with learning and therefore increase the likelihood of training being successful. Horses which have a relationship with their trainers based on trust and co-operation are more likely to be motivated to engage with that trainer and are therefore more likely to learn, and to learn more quickly than those horses which are fearful of their trainer. Training techniques based on fear serve only to confuse the horse and to create tension, and furthermore the horse may withdraw, become aggressive to defend himself or even give up trying to understand what is required of him (Frazer A. , 1992). However, when the horse views his trainer as a senior partner, and not a potential source of pain, learning can be an enjoyable experience for the horse, who will engage in his work willingly and, with confidence. This will actually result in the

horse being much safer to handle and ride. Interestingly, such a horse may also require less disciplining and the need to punish the horse is often markedly reduced as a result (Frazer, 1992). For such animals, the only punishment required for misdemeanours such as nipping, are usually a tap on the shoulder with the hand, or a slight raise of the voice. It is also possible that the horse can detect disapproval in the body language of the trainer, which in itself may be sufficient to stop an unwanted behaviour. So, wherever possible, minor transgressions should be ignored and these will usually disappear when the horse learns that they have no effect. The use of inappropriate discipline, especially when poorly and forcibly applied, does nothing but destroy the horse's trust, weaken his enthusiasm for his work, and cause him pain, anger, and frustration and, possibly, humiliation. None of this is conducive to learning.

Furthermore, as Nussbaum points out in relation to the capability of reciprocation, animals are entitled to relations with humans that are rewarding and reciprocal rather than tyrannical. At the same time, she continues "they are entitled to live in a world public culture that respects them and treats them as dignified beings. This entitlement does not just mean protecting them from instances of humiliation that they will *feel* as painful" (2007, p.398). The optimum training system would thus appear to be one which recognises and respects the horse's individual strengths and weaknesses, considers the horse a partner not a servant, uses positive, and not negative techniques to reinforce learning, and does not stretch the horse beyond his or her physical or psychological abilities.

## Species, performances and Inequalities



Figure 20 Performing Circus Tigers

Animals are entertaining. This is a well-founded truth in our culture, and the theatres in which we – as humans – can look at animals for our amusement, are many (Jonsson, 2012, p. 50).

The theatres to which Jonsson refers include circuses, zoos, wild-life parks, television documentaries and films, but of these it is the circus that affords the spectator the opportunity to see, in the flesh so to speak, the trained animal perform the tricks that it has been taught. Throughout the history of the circus and the menagerie that preceded it, it is the exotic species of performing animals which have drawn the greatest crowds. However the presentation of animals to amuse the public is fraught with moral problems. When discussing the moral issues surrounding the use of animals in such performances, a problem arises, in that animals are not treated equally in our assessments. It seems that we are guilty of inconsistency when it comes to judgements about performing animals based on their perceived 'wildness'.

In one study, DEFRA asked respondents, "Do you think that there are any species of wild animal which it is acceptable to use in travelling circuses?" It was found that 95.5% of the people questioned (10,576) answered 'No' (defra.org, 2012). The main reasons provided for this included the poor conditions which the animals were kept, the unnatural environment, the cruel training methods, the fact that they felt that it was unethical or immoral to use such animals to entertain humans in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain, and that they felt that it was

unnatural for animals to perform tricks. Those in favour of circuses believed that the animals are well looked after, that they are rewarded by treats when they perform, that they are saved from the predators that they would encounter in the wild and that circuses are a tradition which should be preserved.

Some may also hold the view that presenting wild animals has certain advantages in that it enables people to see animals to which they would not normally have access, such as bears, big cats and elephants, and this in turn makes people aware of the need to conserve these species and their habitats. This idea presumably rests on the premise that seeing these animals enables us to form some sort of empathy with them, which in turn will make us more likely to support their conservation. This view is challenged by the RSPCA's wild life scientist Dr Ros Clubb, who asserts that "watching animals perform unnatural tricks does nothing to educate the public or promote compassion for animals." (RSPCA, 2010). Furthermore, witnessing animals perform degrading and unnatural behaviours may even serve to uphold ideals relating to the existing inequalities of power that exist in our relationships with them.

Whilst people appear to object to the presentation of large cats, elephants, sea-lions and the great apes, they seem less concerned about dogs and horses being used in performances. Why should this be the case? The answer, I suspect, lies in our interpretation of wildness, with some species of animal being viewed as more 'wild' than others. Therefore, their use in circuses and zoos is seen as an imprisonment, depriving them of their wild status. The idea of wildness applies even if the animals in question have been bred in captivity for generations and have no experience of their wild world. Thus the term wildness refers to those animals living outside captivity, and those animals that remain undomesticated or untrained. It is quite possible for an untrained domesticated animal to be (fairly) wild in the second sense without being wild in the first sense. Captive breeding often involves the selection of certain desirable traits or features where, over time, a different breed emerges; different to the one which natural selection would support. This new breed is often created with human wishes or aesthetic preferences in mind. Therefore, the labelling an animal such as a zebra as a 'wild animal' when that animal has been born and bred in captivity, can be misleading.

Conversely, there might arguably be ethically important differences between a captive and a wild zebra, should the former be the result of many years of selective breeding. Outrage may not occur in relation to wild horses captured to perform, as is the case of the mustangs in North America, yet may occur when their close relative the zebra is seen performing.

However, there is no evidence to suggest that the zebra suffers more as a result of being in captivity. Dogs taught to dance or do tricks can cause delight, yet, the domestication and presentation of wolves is regarded as wrong.

Therefore the moral status of animals used in performances is at least partly based on a judgement we make about how wild they are perceived to be. This classification is not, however, completely without its merits. The animals to which we object being in circuses and zoos, namely the large cats and bears, are animals that have resisted domestication; it seems that their relationship with us is based on mutual fear and suspicion, and these large, solitary, predators appear to suffer great distress in their encounters with us. It is for this reason that the sight of many such animals performing has become unpalatable.

Such distress is clear in Suzanne Laba Cataldi's account of her reaction to watching the performing bears in the Moscow state circus:

What is so painful about looking at these bears, I realize, apart from the physical abuses they may or may not have suffered, is their lack of a certain dignity, a certain bear dignity that cannot be maintained, or ascertained, under this set of circumstances of this kind of circus performance. The bear's stature, its might is tampered with.... All 'broken in' – broken inside – they are like puppets on strings, hollowed out, stuffed animals. Externally controlled and manipulated, with the aid of silly props and costumes in unnatural human settings. For at this stage, or on this stage, with their baby carriages and balloons, they really do appear, to be beyond freedom and dignity (Laba-Cataldi, 2002, p. 107).



**Figure 21 Performing Brown Bear Moscow State Circus**

The use of exotic animals in circus is, thankfully, in decline. However, should we move away from the use of all animals in performances to delight and entertain us? This not only depends on how they are treated, but also on how they are portrayed in the performances.

If they become objects of ridicule, something to be laughed at, humiliated and abused, then the use of any animal, irrespective of species, is not morally justified.

## Performing Animals and Dignity



Figure 22 Ice skating Polar Bear Act

The dignity of animals used in performances can of course be violated in a variety of ways other than those described above, as the picture of the polar bear illustrates (Figure 22). Laba Cataldi (2002) elaborates on her experience of a visit to the Moscow circus where bears are used in the performances. In this case she proposes that both the performance and the presentation of these animals seemed “undignified in a nontrivial, that is, morally objectionable sense of the word” (2002, p.104) which she argues, is, “a particular experience of oppression, the violation of any animal’s dignity” (2002 p.105). Thus the

possibility exists, that merely presenting certain animals before an audience, amounts to an infringement of their dignity.

Even before witnessing the performance, she describes how a few bears are present in the lobby, seated in individual coves or huts where, for a fee, people can have their photographs taken with their children stroking or patting the 'harmless' animals. This harmlessness, she suspects, is due to the animals being given sedative drugs to render them compliant and docile. Whether they are drugged or not, the author suggests that "they are made to look ridiculously foolish. Instead of chains or leashes, they sport brightly coloured clown collars... in their paws they clutch balloons, on a string" (2002 p.106). She continues, "It makes me feel sorry, embarrassed for the bear, for the bear stripped of its natural nakedness, and dressed up like a clown. To be looked at and laughed at and photographed for tourists. I think of the bear as defiled and the photographer as a pimp" (2002, p.106). The author here is expressing a concern that many who have witnessed animals such as bears in circus performances may have experienced: a sense that there is something morally wrong with reducing an animal with its own dignity to a caricature of itself, to changing the essence of the animal to fit in with some human script or narrative.

The performance itself continues the theme, and the act that is remembered most vividly by Laba Cataldi is that of 'momma bear,' "a bear with a frilly apron draped over its torso and tied around the waist-standing on its hind legs and pushing a toy baby carriage around the circular ring." She explains,

The bear totters around, lurching forward with the carriage. It seems to be on tippy toes, wobbling on imaginary high heels trying not to fall. In striving to maintain its balance, the burly bear appears clumsy... like a tipsy overweight ballerina. People find this act hilarious. The audience laughs, applauds. Bears do not normally walk on their hind legs. So this is quite a trick, to get them to do this (2002, p.106).

This clearly provides an example of animals being taught to perform 'tricks' which not only rest outside the animal's normal repertoire of behaviours, but also serve to degrade them.



**Figure 23** Marsha an 11 year old Brown Bear from the Russian State Circus

Such an account captures the degradation of the animal, and one can empathise with the author's discomfort at this spectacle. Yet, how different is this from a Spanish Riding School performance, where admittedly without the prams and aprons, the stallions too are required to walk and jump on their hind legs? Is it any more dignified for them?

Somehow, there is a difference. Not only do bouts of walking on their hind legs and jumping in the air occur in the natural behaviour of the horse when courting or fighting, but it also seems less invasive and undignified for domesticated, highly trained, social animals to perform these acts, than it does for non-domesticated species such as bears and tigers. Despite this, an investigation into the presentation of horses in certain kinds of performances, such as those of the circus, reveals that horses can also suffer the same indignities and abuses as those suffered by the more exotic species.

### **Performing horses and dignity**

When people are treated like amusing performing animals, the line between condescension and sadistic taunt is thin ( (Tuan, 1984, p. 15).

Li-Fu Tuan suggests that certain types of human performance can be demeaning and lead to condescension and sadistic taunts. He also suggests that this is the case with certain

kinds of animal performance. The term 'performance' in relation to animals does not just imply their presentation in a circus; there are many animals which are presented at breed shows or at displays where an infringement of their dignity occurs by virtue of what they are required to do, or the means that are employed to get them to 'perform'.

Recently, the American Humane Society (AHS) investigated cases relating to the management of Tennessee Walking horses. These animals are presented in displays and in the show ring, and are expected to show an exaggerated gait while trotting. Success depends upon this artificial and human-induced gait and consequently trainers are going to extreme lengths to get the horses to perform in this way. The footage shown by the AHS shows these lengths which include repeated beatings, and the application of caustic lotions to their front feet and legs in order to compel them to lift their feet higher (a process known as soring). The pain and suffering caused to the horses as a result of these practices to obtain an artificial gait known as the 'Big Lick' ([http://youtu.be/gxVlxT\\_x-f0](http://youtu.be/gxVlxT_x-f0)). (See Figure 24).

The Humane Society of the United States suggests that, the lives of many of these animals is filled with pain, suffering and fear and that they are subjected to this cruelty all for the sake of a ribbon. ([www.humanesociety.org/issues/tenn\\_walkinghorses](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/tenn_walkinghorses)). It is also evident that this particular form of cruelty is associated with the sadistic taunting and condescension of the animals involved as the video clip above clearly demonstrates.



**Figure 24 Tennessee Walking Horse Training for the 'Big Lick'**

The Tennessee Walking horse is by no means an isolated example in the equestrian world of abuse co-existing with human ambition or financial gain. Examples are to be found in sports, in the show ring, in the circus arena, on the race track, in show jumping, and on the hunting field (Nevzorov A. , 2012).

Why do we humans continue to use animals in this way? Yi-Fu Tuan proposes that activities such as showing dogs “cater to the usual human vanity and competitiveness, but they also provide the occasion and the excuse to demonstrate openly and to public applause the power to dominate and humble another being” (1984 p.107). In relation to equestrianism, (Nevzorov, 2011)suggests that every single equestrian discipline has one main unifying feature:

...they are all based on a complete lack of understanding of the horse, ignorance of it, not hearing it and they all conceive of the horse as a biological mechanism that is obligated to serve man for his entertainment, simply because, well, because it is obligated to do so (2011 loc 1400).

He further argues that “Nearly 100% of sporting horses are invalids that live, and move in a haze of searing pain in the mouth, the back, the neck, the legs and the poll” (2011, loc 1400).

## **Horses and the Circus**

Horses have long been associated with the circus; historically the circus has provided a platform upon which riders and trainers can demonstrate their skills to an audience. Indeed some of the world’s greatest horsemen such as François Baucher, Renéé Bacharach and his pupil, the famous Portuguese riding master, Nuno Oliveira to name but a few, have all performed in the circus. Aside from these great riders, the trainer’s skills have also been on display where the horse is presented ‘at liberty’ (a somewhat misleading term). Here the horse or more commonly, groups of horses, are shown without saddles or bridles or any form of physical restraint (though psychological restraint is clearly present) and perform by standing on their hind legs or jumping through hoops. These animals are usually presented with a trainer, who is dressed in jodhpurs, a red coat, leather boots and carrying a large whip which is ‘cracked’ to keep the horses’ attention, or more likely to intimidate the

animals. However, such acts are popular with the crowds especially where a single horse is presented performing tricks such as bowing, standing on large drums, lying down on command and covering themselves with a blanket, or seeming to 'attack' the trainer. Another popular trick is to get them to sit like a dog (Figure 25).



**Figure 25 Circus Horse sitting**

Comedy forms an integral part of many of these horse-based performances, especially where the horses, or more commonly miniature ponies, are seen to engage in what is perceived by the audience as 'naughty' behaviour where the animals are apparently ignoring the trainer's instructions and 'doing their own thing'. The fact that they appear to be acting 'naturally' often results in the misconception that these animals enjoy what they do and this often causes less concern for the audiences in relation to the moral appropriateness of the acts. These, after all, are domesticated animals and their performances and the way that they are kept and trained is deemed less morally problematic than that of their more exotic cousins.

The reality is that these animals often suffer the same injustices as the big cats, elephants and bears. They too are often subjected to harsh training methods, inappropriate housing for their needs, lack of exercise and stimulation and the stress of travelling sometimes long distances in cramped lorries or trailers, plus the stresses associated with performing. Yet, concern for them or for performing dogs in the same environment is seldom voiced. Even

the International League for the Protection of Horses states that it has no policy objections to the use of horses in circuses as long as they are well cared for and the acts that they undertake are not demeaning. The ILPH goes as far as to assert that, “horses and ponies employed in circuses are not that different to those that appear in the ring at shows and sporting events from Olympia to the Olympic Games (ILPH 8.12.1999). One obvious objection to this is that these activities themselves are morally objectionable, but circus acts by their very nature are demeaning for animals, their sole purpose is to entertain audiences by presenting animals in a way that is contrary to their nature, by dressing them up in human clothes and forcing them to behave in ways that ensures that audiences laugh at them. One of the most disturbing examples of this that I have seen involves the presentation of brown bears, tigers and lions ‘riding’ horses at the Moscow State Circus. This spectacle is abhorrent and the distress to both parties is plain to see ([youtube.circus-tv.ru/bears horse riding](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)).

Furthermore, most circus animals are trained by negative reinforcement and punishment more often than they are by positive reinforcement. One of the first lessons that the horse in the circus has to learn is not to defecate in the main ring. Here, according to Alexander Nevzorov,

they train the horse to poop without fail before going into the arena. Exclusively so that it doesn’t happen in the arena, in front of the public, since dung spoils the presentation. How do they teach her? It’s simple: they beat her in the stall before making her appearance (Nevzorov, 2011, loc.2369).

He continues, “In the beating process, the horse who understands nothing and knows that she isn’t guilty of anything begins to be awfully nervous and excited a consequence of which is that she defecates” (Nevzorov, 2011, loc.2369). This ‘teaching’ becomes paired with the act of turning the horse in a very small circle outside the arena, essentially the horse learns to defecate on command.

The public are rarely permitted access into the world of horse training at the circus, the majority of which is conducted in secret away from the prying eyes of potential animal activists. Occasionally though, often by accident, the public witness the treatment of the animals. In 1988, Morrison writes,

“The *Daily Mail* published a letter from a 16 year old girl who had just returned from a school holiday in Russia, and visit to the Moscow State Circus. ‘Several people walked out crying,’ she wrote, after seeing them whip the horses around the face to make them walk on their hind legs and hitting them to make them fall over” (Morrison, 2012, p. loc.1789).

This is just one example of the cruel treatment of horses in the circus, and sadly, the list of examples is long.

Not only are these animals suffering from literal harm, in the sense that they are being physically and psychologically abused, but they are also suffering from what Jonsson refers to as being “symbolically harmed”, in that they are being subjected as members of a species, for human use and exploited for the benefit of human interests (Jonsson, 2012). In this case, the human interest is that of being entertained.

In the examples that I have examined above many animals including horses are regarded as ‘things’, and as a result of this they live lives in which they fail to flourish and where their dignity is compromised. The Tennessee Walking horses suffer an injustice as a result of the direct infliction of pain and mutilation caused by soring. There is no doubt that these animals, the bears discussed by Laba Cataldi and the horses used in circuses, all lead lives in which fear and pain are present, where they have no control over their own lives and little opportunity to engage in affiliative or other behaviours necessary for their particular species. Furthermore, they are often made to perform tricks or to engage in behaviours which are degrading, simply to entertain the public. As a result, their dignity and their threshold capability entitlements are severely compromised; clearly these are cases in which severe injustice is present.

Many activities involving horses, as I have suggested, are morally problematic. Such problems include the way in which the animals are bred, kept, trained and presented to the public. This raises the question as to whether there is anything that is morally acceptable to do with non-consenting animals such as the horse for the sake of human interests? In the following chapter I discuss some of the morally problematic areas of horse management described above, which have involved many other equestrian based performances, comparing them to the practices at the Spanish Riding School of Vienna. I shall argue that this institution provides a direct contrast to the examples previously given, in terms of its attitudes towards the animals in its care, and the methods of training it employs. This institution, also presents horses to the public but here, there is no humiliating of the animals, no beatings or attempts made to force them defecate outside of the arena, no use of degrading tricks or props that serve to make them look foolish. Instead, the horses are presented as highly trained and valued participants in the performance. Furthermore, unlike the circus, the emphasis is placed on the ability and beauty of the animal rather than on the ‘mastery’ of the trainer and his or her, ability to subdue and control a helpless animal, who has, in many cases, been trained by fear and coercion. Both the horses and

riders at the SRS undergo many years of training in order to present skilled performances, which are not merely intended to amuse or to entertain, but rather to educate and to inspire as well as to present the beauty of the correctly trained horse.

## **Chapter Three**

# **Horses and the Spanish Riding School of Vienna**

In the previous chapter I discussed the moral implications of using horses for a variety of activities and discussed Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities approach in relation to the care and management of these horses with regard to some of these activities. In this chapter I discuss the specific management and care of the horses at the Spanish Riding School, and I argue that despite the seemingly highly 'un-natural' conditions in which the horses are kept, the care and attention that they receive does enable them to flourish in relation to Nussbaum's capabilities, at least up to threshold levels. I propose that perhaps with the exception of the intrusion that accompanies the public tours of the stables, that the animals receive care where they are respected as individuals, and where they lead a dignified existence. In what follows, and in light of Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach, I discuss the breeding practices, the care and management of the horses, their training at the school, before finally discussing the public performances for which the school is famous.

### **What the SRS does**

The Spanish Riding School of Vienna was founded in 1735, to train noblemen and their horses for war and for 'art'. To this day, the school employs the exact same training principles for both horse and rider, established in France at the time of its founding by the 18<sup>th</sup> Century riding master, Francois de la Guérinière. The stated aims of the school today are: 1) to preserve for future generations the traditional practices of classical equitation and to demonstrate these in public performances; 2) To exert a general influence over the 'art' of dressage based on the classical principles handed down by the school; and 3) to

exercise control over the breeding of the Lipizzaner horses, so that only proven horses with an aptitude for dressage are used for breeding.

To accomplish the last of these aims, the school runs a large stud at Piber in Styria, Upper Austria, where 20 to 30 Lipizzaner foals are bred every year to provide future generations of stallions for the Spanish Riding School. Careful selections are made as to which mare is to be bred with which stallion, in an attempt to optimise the progeny's suitability, either for use in the school, or as a parent for future generations.

After their birth, the foals remain with their mothers until they are six months old, whereupon they are weaned (separated from their mothers) and move away from them to live in same sex groups until they are three or four years old. Once a year, a delegation is sent from Vienna to Piber to assess the best three and four year old stallions, the most gifted of which will then go for training in Vienna, where over time, they become accustomed to the saddle and bridle, and begin their basic training in carrying a rider. The overall training can take up to 10 years until the horse is fully accomplished, and is deemed sufficiently trained to be used in the performances. Whilst at Vienna the horses are stabled in the Hofburg Palace for the majority of their working lives, though, they do get several 'holidays' a year at the school's training centre in Heldenburg. The horses will continue to work at Vienna for about 20 years or until it is felt that they are becoming tired of performing, or until illness, old age or injury prevents them from continuing. They return to Piber for their retirement when they continue to receive the same standards of care that they received in Vienna, and where their health is monitored regularly (Gurtler E. , 2010).

Thus, the SRS exerts complete control over the lives of these animals, from even before their birth until their death. They control breeding, selection, housing, training, performing, and care for their end of life. Each one of these elements poses different challenges to the horses' ability to flourish up to what Nussbaum terms 'threshold levels'. It is of course, notoriously difficult to establish exactly what levels of care and management might lead to a satisfactory 'threshold level' for the horse, or other animal. Furthermore, difficulty can often arise in relation to both the human view of what the animal actually needs to flourish, and the fact that the needs of some animals may prove problematic in relation to human ideals and expectations. Indeed, Nussbaum highlights this difficulty in her discussion of many large cats kept captive in zoos, where she proposes that,

noticing that they were giving predatory animals insufficient exercise for their predatory capabilities, they had to face the question of the harm done to smaller animals by allowing these capabilities to be exercised (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 370).

In other words, allowing these large predators to exercise their particular capability of obtaining food, namely by letting them have live prey to chase, had implications for the smaller animals which were the prey. Should they, she asks, “give a tiger a tender gazelle to crunch on?” A solution was found she believes, by the Bronx Zoo, where the keepers gave a tiger a “large ball on a rope, whose resistance and weight symbolize the gazelle” a result of which Nussbaum says, “the tiger seems satisfied” (2007,p.371). This large ball on a rope may symbolize, by virtue of its resistance and weight, a gazelle to the zoo keeper, but one wonders whether the tiger saw it as such, and was indeed ‘satisfied’. Whilst not an expert on the feeding behaviours of large predators, a question comes to mind about whether it is the case with tigers as with many other predatory species, that smell, taste and the behaviour of the prey play a huge part in feeding behaviours? If this is the case, then one wonders how can one assert with any confidence, that the Bronx tiger was indeed ‘satisfied’ with his or her ball, and be content that in this case, the animal’s capabilities are being met to a threshold level? This question has been addressed in depth by several authors including (Schlosberg, 2007), (Cripps, 2010) and (Hailwood, 2011).

The case of the Bronx tiger raises two important issues: first, often we have to rely on human observation and interpretation of the behaviour of an animal to determine whether or not the animal is flourishing; second, if the human caretaker ‘knows’ a particular animal very well, then they are often well placed to determine, with a reasonable level of accuracy, what it is that a particular animal might require in order to ensure that its capabilities are being met.

The idea that caretakers play a large part in determining what a particular animal might need is highlighted in what follows, namely an investigation into the lives of the horses at the Spanish Riding School. As I have stated, these animals, even before they are born, are under the constant observation and care of the staff employed to look after them. However, does this level of care ensure that that the horses are provided with an opportunity to lead a dignified existence, or that their species-specific and individual capabilities are being met?

I begin my exploration into this issue by investigating the practices used for breeding the horses at this institution.

## Breeding the foals For the Spanish Riding School



Figure 26 Brood Mare and Foal Piber. Photo courtesy of the SRS

One aspect of the capability of ‘bodily integrity’ mentioned by Nussbaum encompasses “having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction” (2007, p.76). Indeed, for humans, these are seen as a fundamental right. Every living creature is driven toward the desire to propagate its own species, and yet, for many domesticated animals under human control, this opportunity is denied to them. Furthermore, where breeding is deemed appropriate, choice in terms of sexual partner and in terms of where and when the animal can breed, is carefully controlled. This is the case at the majority of equine studs, including that of the Spanish Riding School.

The brood mares at the Spanish Riding School’s stud at Piber begin their maternal activity when they approach five years old, as before this they are not deemed physically mature enough to carry a foal (Gurtler E. , 2010). Once they start breeding, they are put in foal every year, with breaks given every few years, so that their bodies do not become overly stressed from being constantly pregnant, or from continuously feeding hungry foals.

The selection of the breeding stallions and mares is clearly defined by the stud, and is set out in the stud book's definition of breeding characteristics. Further to these characteristics, the stallion chosen has to be healthy, and to be talented and strong enough for basic training and the *haute école*. Strict adherence to the bloodlines is also important when assessing the suitability of a particular stallion for a mare. The potential brood mares must be typical of the breed, be athletic and trainable and have an amenable nature in order to be considered as breeding stock. The mares, although never used for training at the riding school, are nonetheless often trained for riding or for driving, where their physical and psychological qualities can be assessed.

In private correspondence with the stud in which I questioned the particular breeding practices used in Piber in comparison to those adopted by other studs, I received the following response:

For our mares it is not necessary to use anything like twitches and hobbles (during covering). All of our horses live together with our grooms since their birth and are used to being cared for around the clock, so basically all of our horses are friendly and trustful. Our covering process is also calm, slow and accompanied by our experienced grooms. First the mare is taken behind a shelter and makes contact with the stallion. As soon as both horses are willing, we take the mare out of her shelter and start the live covering. [...] We practise live covering, but of course there are exceptions (e.g. too many mares in heat for one stallion per day), where we have to take fresh semen and do artificial insemination. Our mares are bred basically every year, after several foals we plan a year off; it also depends upon the constitution and health of each horse (Hubinger, 2014).

It is clear from this account, that the safety and well-being of these animals during the covering process is carefully considered, and, unlike the breeding practices mentioned in the previous chapter, the way that these horses are kept and handled from birth means that they develop a trusting relationship with those caring for them. This removes the need for excessive restraint during covering, an experience which can be very frightening for some mares, especially those that are young and inexperienced, and who may never have had contact with a stallion before.

The mares at the stud at Piber also have the advantage of being introduced to breeding at their home, in an environment with which they are familiar and with handlers that they know and trust. This is not always the case with mares in other settings, who often have to travel to a stud in a strange environment with people that they do not know, and where the routine may be different to that with which they are familiar and comfortable.

Covering mares in hand is a very dangerous activity, both for the horses and their handlers, as some stallions can be very aggressive during the process, or in some cases mares may kick out if they are not appreciative of the stallion's courtship attempts. The act of covering requires that the stallion has to stand on his hind-legs and this means that the potential for harm to handlers or to the mare is increased if this is not managed correctly. The wealth of experience of the staff at the stud at Piber means that the stallions are carefully handled during the covering process and therefore are not allowed to rush at the mares or to frighten them by being too 'enthusiastic'. This also reduces the possibility of injury occurring to either the horses or their handlers.

The gestation period for horses is 330 days (11 months) and during this time, the pregnant mares remain at pasture in their herds. As the time for delivering the foals approaches, the mares are brought into their barns and are never left unattended (Gurtler E. , 2010). Equine labour and delivery are usually uneventful events and rarely require human intervention. The whole process of the second stage of labour takes no more than 20 minutes after the first contraction. Whilst rare, complications can occur and may be catastrophic, so it is vitally important that help be at hand if it is needed in order to ensure the safety or survival of the mare and her foal.

Following the birth, the mare and foal remain in their post-natal accommodation for up to seven days, where they are both closely observed, before being moved to an outside pen. Here they continue to be observed where careful attention is paid to ensure that the foals play around enough, that they are out and about in the fresh air every day, that they do not overexert themselves when letting off energy, that they drink enough of their mother's milk, eat properly and get enough rest (Gurtler E. , 2010, p. 59). Such diligent attention by the carers of the horses not only ensures the safety of the animals but also ensures that the majority of Nussbaum's capabilities are met.



**Figure 27 Mares and Foals returning from pasture at Piber. (Photo courtesy of the SRS)**

The young foals remain with their mothers (and their human guardians) in the pastures at Piber until they are approximately six months old, whereupon they are 'weaned'. Weaning refers to the enforced separation of the mare from her foal and is standard practice in nearly all equine studs. As is often the case with well-established equine practices, whether it is morally acceptable, necessary, or desirable is rarely questioned. It is well recognised that weaning is extremely stressful for the mare, foal and those involved in it. So why then is it done? Feral mares (assuming they are pregnant again) will wean their current foal at between eight and nine months. If they are not pregnant, the foal will stay with them for much longer between 12 and 24 months, depending on the sex of the foal, as fillies tend to stay with their mothers much longer than colts do.

Weaning provides an example of another aspect of the human desire to completely control the lives of these animals. Mares are perfectly capable of weaning their own foals and they are able to do it in a stress free manner. Why then are they not left alone to choose when their foals should be weaned? Explanations for this practice vary, and some believe that if the mare is pregnant then carrying a developing foal and feeding the current one, places great strain on her body. For others weaning foals at six months is traditional and is therefore, carried out purely because it is what has always been done.

Weaning is common practice at the SRS stud, but unlike many other studs here the young foals have the advantage of being able immediately to join large groups of other foals of the same age and sex, with whom they will remain at pasture until they are three or four years old. There is security to be found and friendships to be made in such large groups, and as the foals get older, there are rivalries and pecking orders to establish as well as ample opportunity to engage in another of Nussbaum's capabilities, that of play.

## **Play at the SRS**



**Figure 28 Young stallions playing at Piber (Photo courtesy of the SRS)**

Up to the age of three years when the young horses are in the fields at Piber, there is unlimited opportunity for them to play and to benefit from the cognitive, behavioural and physical advantages that play offers them. Play may take the form of the young foals galloping about and chasing each other, or the mock fights that occur between young colts as they get older, the mounting of each other as a display of dominance, or the more serious mock fights that can occur between the ages of two to three years that are thought to establish leadership and hierarchy.

Play in horses does not necessarily cease when they reach adulthood; many older horses may continue to engage in spontaneous games with their companions, or play with buckets

or toys such as footballs if they are provided with them. Training sessions can also provide horses with the opportunity to play, but in a slightly more controlled setting.

One might imagine that the seriousness with which the principles of dressage are adhered to at Vienna might prevent the horses from regarding their work as play, yet this does not seem to be the case. Displays of playful behaviour are not uncommon, especially in the case of the younger horses; the occasional buck (lifting of the hind quarters) while being ridden, pouncing, squealing, and the occasional attempt to run off, are all behaviours that have been associated with playing, although such behaviour in the horses in Vienna is usually only witnessed in the morning training sessions and rarely in the performances themselves.

However, whenever these behaviours occur, they are largely ignored by the riders, and are certainly not punished since experienced riders recognise the behaviour for what it is. The ability to demonstrate playful behaviour in such a way may be indicative of emotional states associated with physical and psychological well-being, and this may be why adult horses engage in it long after any developmental benefits have ceased.

Thus, the lack of time available for designated periods of 'playtime' for the adult horses to engage in sessions of play with their equine companions at the SRS does not constitute an unjust absence of play entitlement, since the horses can and do find opportunities to engage in playful behaviour in a variety of situations; both at liberty and while working.

One further objection might be that such management is not perfect in the sense that it does not conform to the ideal, that is to say the way that feral horses live. However, it must be remembered that these animals are not, and never have been, feral; they are selectively bred, domesticated animals who have lived, and become accustomed to, a particular standard of management. Were they suddenly to be denied this care, there is no doubt that they would suffer as a result. If for example, they were suddenly turned out in fields to fend for themselves, they would probably struggle to survive.

The management and care of the horses at the SRS stud does ensure that the young horses are provided with the opportunity and the space in which to play during the crucial stages of their development from foals to adolescents. Their move to the stables at Vienna corresponds with their development into adulthood when rivalries between the stallions can occur, and with this comes the possibility of causing serious injury to each other.

Therefore allowing them to 'play' with each other, as the foals do, could constitute a harm and as such, contravene the capabilities of bodily health and integrity. Insofar as is possible when dealing with stallions, the management of these young horses at the SRS, does

provide them with a dignified existence, and also enables them to flourish in relation to this capability within the limitations that this imposes.

## **Selection of the young horses for training**

From the time that they are born the young horses are under the constant supervision of the staff at Piber and as such, the staff 'know' each horse very well, and are aware of each individual's strengths, weaknesses and temperament. When the young stallions reach three years old, a selection team consisting of senior riders from Vienna visit the stud and assess (in collaboration with the staff at the stud) each young horse's suitability for training at the school. During this process the young horses are assessed for their conformation (the perceived ideal proportion of their body parts), their movement, and their psychological characteristics and temperament. Only those horses deemed both physically and psychologically able to cope with life at Vienna are selected for training. Those who are not selected will go to private homes as riding or carriage horses. Here too, the stud aims to ensure that the horses sold to private buyers are matched to the buyer's needs. Prospective buyers visit the stud and look at the horses for sale. Accompanied by the grooms or managers who know every aspect of the horse's ability and temperament, the buyers will be guided towards those horses that best suit them. Even following the sale of the horse, the buyers are encouraged to keep in touch with the stud and can ask for help or advice if needed and the stud remains in contact with about 80 percent of the buyers from all over the world (Hubinger, 2014). The process of selection is thus a key feature in the flourishing of the horses for both the Spanish Riding School and for the private buyers, ensuring that only horses that are suited to the life that they will be required to live are chosen.

## **Life at the Spanish Riding School**

Those young horses selected for the Spanish Riding School are taken to Vienna to prepare for the training which will begin when they are four years old. It is testament to the temperament and ability to adapt to new situations that these young horses possess, that they appear to settle into their new lives relatively quickly in the majority of cases. But what does this new life consist of and does it provide them with conditions in which they can flourish as horses and live a dignified life?

The move from the pastures at Piber to the stables at Vienna is undoubtedly a time of great change for these young horses, where the freedom that came with running in a herd and the security that accompanies it is denied to them. Suddenly, these young horses are housed in individual stables and are completely dependent upon the humans that care for them. It is inevitable that some of the animals will experience this change as stressful. Their ability to flourish is largely dependent upon this level of care and attention that they receive at this time.

The care and management of the stallions from the time of their arrival, and throughout their working lives is the responsibility of the stable manager. He plans and oversees the care of the stallions which is always organised around the particular stallion's characteristics and needs. Inquisitive horses are allocated corner or outside stables where they are able to watch more of what is going on; the nervous, shy or stressed individuals are placed next to older, experienced animals who often convey a sense of calm to their neighbour. Patient stallions are placed next to more dominant horses, extroverts next to the more introverted individuals (Gurtler E. , 2010), and those who take exception to their immediate neighbour, are moved next to a horse that they find more agreeable. Such management ensures that the capabilities of affiliation, bodily health, senses imagination and thought, and emotional well-being are being met in so far as possible. Thus, it is the stable manager who really knows each of the 73 stallions, their preferences, temperament, moods and idiosyncrasies, and it is he who allocates each stallion to his own groom, who will deliver the personalised care. The current Director of the school, Mrs Gurtler, goes as far to suggest that "if all 73 stallions at the SRS were to be mixed up into a paddock, the herd would be a collection of individuals to the stable master who could name all of them without a moment's pause" (Gurtler E. , 2010, p. 85). It is this careful attention to the specific individual needs of each animal, coupled with the wealth of knowledge and

experience available that ensures the horses are provided with a dignified existence and conditions which enable them to flourish in capability terms.

## Accommodation and living



Figure 29 Internal stables at the Stallberg. Photo courtesy of the SRS

Nussbaum has suggested that one pre-requisite for a dignified existence for animals is the opportunity to enjoy light and air in tranquillity. The horses at the SRS live in stables in the Stallberg opposite the Hofburg palace in central Vienna, where they are stabled for up to 24 hours a day, generally only leaving their stables for their morning training sessions and afternoon or the evening performances. The stables are designed so that the horses can see each other and are able to communicate with each other but as we can see in the photograph above, their contact is limited.

The horses are fed at regular intervals throughout the day, and they are provided with a deep, clean bed of straw or wood-shavings to lie on. Water is constantly available to them, and during the colder months the horses wear thick stable rugs to keep them warm. As they live and train indoors for the most part, they rarely see the outside world and thus do

not come into contact with direct sunlight. During the months of July and August the horses are moved from Vienna to their holiday accommodation in Heldenberg, lower Austria, where they have daily access to paddocks and are free to run around, graze and play as they wish. Their exercise is also supplemented by being ridden in the surrounding countryside, which provides the horses with a change of scenery and an opportunity to be ridden without being specifically trained for performances.

In order to ensure the continuity of their care, every morning the stallion's own grooms are transported from Vienna to Heldenberg on the 'company bus', so that the animals do not get upset by being cared for by grooms who they do not know.



**Figure 30 Hacking in the woods at Heldenberg. Photo courtesy of the SRS**

Notwithstanding this, the first challenge that could be levelled at the SRS (and many other stables, both commercial and private) is that the horses live a highly unnatural and human-driven existence. They are well fed and extremely well cared for, but they are still denied the freedom to move around as much as they would were they living more 'naturally' at pasture. As such, there is little opportunity for them to run around and 'let off steam', something which contributes to their physical and mental well-being. Thus, like many other domesticated horses, there is no aspect of their lives that they have any control over. Their meals are brought to them removing any choice about what they eat, they are not allowed

any prolonged contact with equine companions, and their level of exercise is largely determined by their trainer.

Some might even argue that the life of the stabled horse and that of the prison inmate is almost identical. Writing in 1864, Edward Mayhew was vehement in his criticism of equine accommodation. Stables, he proposed, “are tainted with all the evils of antiquity. Improvement has changed the homes of the people and has even amended the cage of the imprisoned songster; but it has completely skipped over the gaol of the horse” (Mayhew, 1864, p. 326). The question to be considered he suggests is “not what stables are, but what they should be” (1864 p.326). Why then should we treat the loss of freedom and liberty that prolonged stabling inflicts on a horse as acceptable, when a corresponding incarceration of humans is considered a punishment?

Unlike the case with human prisoners, who can convey their needs and frustrations to those looking after them, horses share no common language with their caregivers, it is therefore almost impossible for them to communicate any suffering that they might be experiencing, until it has become sufficiently evident to alter their perceivable behaviour in some way. Furthermore, it is often only when these marked behavioural changes occur that we may suspect that something is wrong. Once noticed, it is up to us to try and work out what may be causing the animal distress, something which often proves problematic. Thankfully, as Nussbaum suggests, humans do possess an ability to imagine the suffering of others and she further proposes that “it does not seem impossible for the sympathetic imagination to cross the species barrier” (2007, p.335). It is only by observing the behaviour of animals, by ‘knowing’ them sufficiently that we become aware of changes in their behaviour that lead us to suspect that they may be suffering in some way, that their capabilities are not being met.

For some people, the fact that horses have evolved as highly social herbivores, leads to the assumption that unless they are left free to ‘roam the plains’ or at least spend most of their left to their own devices, that they are suffering an injustice as a result. Therefore, the case of the SRS stallions whose lives are under the complete control of their human care-givers might lead such people to assume that these animals automatically suffer as a result of the ‘un-natural’ manner in which they are kept.

Why should it automatically be assumed that the extent of human intervention in the lives of these horses might lead them to suffer in some way? Nussbaum would certainly argue that this is not the case, furthermore, as Epstein points out,

Animals left to their own devices may have no masters; nor do they have any peace. Life in the wild leaves them exposed to the elements, to attacks by other animals, to the inability to find food or shelter, to accidental injury and to disease. The expected life of animals in the wild need not be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. But it is often rugged, and rarely placid and untroubled (Epstein, 2004, p. 148).

Human intervention can of course inflict suffering on animals, but it can also improve the quality of life for many. Certainly, one could argue that the care and attention bestowed upon these particular stallions provides them with a life that is certainly more comfortable than that experienced by their feral or wild cousins, who certainly have no one to notice if they are sick or suffering. Animals living in more 'natural' settings may also be prevented from leading a dignified life, and from flourishing, not as a result of human intervention but rather, as a result of the lack of it.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that despite the many home comforts bestowed upon domesticated horses, some individuals do find it difficult to cope with the life that they are required to live. Some horses who are kept confined in stables may convey this inability to cope by developing stereotypies such as 'wind-sucking', 'weaving', or 'box-walking', yet other horses living in the same conditions do not. The extent to which different animals experience or display their discomfort depends, in part, upon the individual temperament of the animal and their ability to adapt to different circumstances. Wind-sucking (Figure 31) is an obsessive behaviour in which the animal gets hold of their manger, fences or, more commonly, the stable door, with his or her teeth and sucks in air. As a result of this 'air sucking' the horses can be prone to bouts of colic and weight loss. This behaviour is often associated with frustration and boredom, although the precise cause has not been established. Once established, it is almost impossible to eradicate despite attempts being made with a variety of collars aimed at preventing the horse from engaging in it.



**Figure 31 Horse wind-sucking**

Weaving, another obsessive behaviour is commonly found in horses with a nervous disposition: it involves the animal standing in one place but swaying from side to side in a repetitive manner. Animals who engage in these behaviours can quickly become exhausted, and over time, they can lose considerable amounts of body weight (Frazer, 1992). Box walking, another recognised stereotype, involves the animal repeatedly walking around and around the stable in a repetitive fashion and is usually found in horses that do not receive sufficient exercise for their needs, such as those on 'box rest' for illness or injury.

Whatever the cause, these stereotypical behaviours are an indicator that the animal is not coping with their circumstances. A further problem is that horses can apparently learn these behaviours from observing other horses and as such they can become 'contagious'. Once formed, these behaviours are very difficult to eradicate, and over time they can have detrimental effects on the physical well-being of the animal.

It has also been suggested that stereotypies arise in certain horses that may have a genetic tendency to develop them, and this, coupled with an environment in which the animal is bored, stressed or isolated, increases the chances of them occurring (Kiley Worthington,

1997). Horses of course, are not the only species in which stereotypes can occur; they have also been identified in the behaviour of human children in the early institutionalised Romanian orphanages, and also in species such as captive bears, big cats, primates, elephants, and rodents. In relation to circus animals William Morrison in the *Rose Tinted Menagerie* writes,

even in the most prestigious of circuses, it is normal practice for wild animals to be confined for life to cramped and bare beast wagons, The ritual defence is that they know of nothing else and that an animal experiencing fear or deprivation in their confinement would howl, scratch and gnaw at the bars. But would even a human prisoner continue to howl after realising that there is no use in doing so? [He continues] Only with time and a realisation of futility, is this distress gradually translated into stereotyped behaviour... (Morrison, 2012, p. loc.2332)

Stereotypes, in both humans and animals are thus late indicators that something is very wrong and that the animal or human is suffering, therefore, their presence necessitates an investigation into which particular capabilities are being thwarted. Nussbaum has suggested that there is an obligation of justice to ensure that we provide animals with conditions that do not cause such stress or suffering, and furthermore that animals have just entitlements to these conditions. Despite the seemingly 'unnatural' living conditions found at the SRS, reports of such behavioural problems are rare.

Whilst it does not appear to be the case that these horses display the abnormal stereotypical behaviours found in many racehorses, for example, the absence of external or behavioural manifestations of stress does not necessarily provide sufficient evidence to guarantee that the animals do not experience stress or anxiety as a result of the way that they live. Furthermore, given that the survival of the SRS is largely dependent upon their audiences *believing* that the horses are not suffering from any problems associated with the way in which they are kept, it is unlikely that such information, should it exist, would be reported.

What is striking when visiting the stables at Vienna is just how well the animals seem to be cared for in terms of human ideals. The school employs up to 20 grooms, with each groom caring for six to eight stallions. The individualised care that each stallion receives ensures that the horses not only have their physical needs met, but it also enables them to become familiar with, and to form relationships with, those looking after them, and this goes toward fulfilling Nussbaum's capability of affiliation. The horses not only live in contact with other members of their own species, but they are afforded the opportunity to engage in various forms of interaction with their human caregivers. This also provides the human

grooms with the opportunity to engage with the horses, to get to know them, earn their trust and therefore, to be in a good position to assess their well-being and to individualise their care.

In keeping with Nussbaum's Capability of bodily health, the horses receive regular health checks from the school's veterinary surgeons and receive regular nutritional assessments from equine nutritionists to ensure that the diet they receive is sufficient for their needs. Lipizzaners have a tendency to gain weight, partly as a result of being especially fond of their food, and partly due to being in receipt of varying quantities of sugar cubes, offered as a treat. As a result of this, a few years ago many of the horses who were becoming somewhat 'portly' were put on a strict diet, and their grooms and riders instructed to reduce the amount of sugar cubes that they gave to the horses.



**Figure 32** Chief Rider Andreas Hausberger rewarding his horse. Photo courtesy of Image Equine

However, do such palatial living quarters and high standards of individual care provide the horses with a dignified existence? The absence of pain in the animals' lives and their freedom from cruel treatment do indeed contribute to bodily integrity, emotional health and a positive relationship with their handlers. Notwithstanding this, having a spotlessly clean environment, a dazzling white coat and shiny mane and tail may arguably be more for

the benefit of their human caregivers and observers than it is for the horses themselves. The clean appearance of a washed coat does not seem to feature high on the species-specific needs of the horse, who, given the opportunity, will roll in wet mud without any concern for his resultant appearance. Rolling is a species-specific behaviour that horses engage in when given the opportunity, freedom, or room so to do. Cleanliness of the coat in the majority of horses is achieved by self-grooming, mutual grooming with another horse, rolling in mud or dust, and rubbing areas of the neck and back against available fences or trees. (Kiley Worthington, 1997) Most of these behaviours are denied to the stallions in Vienna who remain dependent on their grooms to assist with the removal of scurf and dead hair from their coats. However, during the act of grooming the horse, the groom has the opportunity to closely observe the animal, to check for cuts or any signs of ill health, and it may also contribute to the formation of a bond between the horse and the human and so contributes towards the capabilities of bodily health and affiliation.

Thus the Spanish Riding School, despite the artificiality of the setting, does indeed work to ensure that the optimal physical, mental and where possible, social health of its horses are met. The horses are also offered the opportunity, whilst on their 'breaks' to Heldenberg, to graze in paddocks, to socialize to a limited extent, and to play, whilst every measure is taken to ensure their safety and well-being. I believe that the benign paternalism involved in the care of these animals does indeed provide them with a dignified life and promotes their flourishing and their entitlements to thresholds of capabilities. The point is not that the horses have just entitlements to the maximum levels of their capabilities but rather that the levels of care that they receive provides them with sufficient opportunity to flourish with dignity. Judging these threshold levels and determining what is sufficient is of course, problematic as I have suggested, and Nussbaum is not always a reliable guide in this. However, the close attention to the specific needs of the individual's needs coupled with a desire to provide the best life possible for the animals would appear to influence the specific management of the horses at the SRS. The absence of any visible stereotypies or distress in these horses does not, in itself, provide sufficient evidence for the absence of any unjust treatment of them. However, much more compelling evidence of just treatment is found in the reliable processes that are in place at the SRS which ensure close attention is paid to the flourishing of the horses.

## Training at the SRS



Figure 33 Morning Training. Photo Courtesy of the SRS

Whilst the high standards of care in terms of their living arrangements enables these horses to flourish up to threshold levels, it has to be remembered that these animals are not kept as pets, they are expected to earn their keep, and they do this by undergoing years of training intended to establish them as ridden athletes, and later, by them taking part in the school's public performances. Both training and the act of being ridden have the potential adversely affect the horses' ability to flourish in capability terms. As a result of this, I will deal with each aspect separately.

The training of animals need not compromise their ability to flourish, as we have seen, Nussbaum would argue that most domesticated animals profit from some training and discipline, furthermore she proposes that training and learning can actually serve to provide interest and mental stimulation in what might be an otherwise dull environment (Nussbaum M. , 2007). There are instances as she points out, such as in the case of the sheep dog, bred to herd, where failure to provide the opportunity for them to fulfil the function for which they have been bred is in itself, a harm. We also have a duty in some cases, as we do with children, to provide animals with a level of education which ensures

their ability to reach their physical and psychological potential but also to become responsible members of society.

In animals, the consequences for not learning how to behave appropriately can result in their harsh treatment or even in their destruction. The horse or dog who has not learnt that biting humans is unacceptable for example, may well end up being euthanized. All owners of domesticated animals therefore have a duty to ensure that their animal is appropriately trained and socialised, not only in order to provide the animal, with sufficient mental stimulation, but also to ensure that the animal does not cause harm to other animals or humans.

The Spanish Riding School is responsible for the training of both the horses and the riders in its care. In both cases the aim is to provide discipline and to improve suppleness, balance and obedience, where both parties learn to respond to instructions given by their trainers. In its elaborate hall, young horses are trained under the watchful eye of senior riders. The young riders or *élèves* as they are known, actually begin their training in the stables where they learn to take care of the stallions, to muck out stables and to clean the tack. Their riding training includes receiving instruction both from senior riders and also from the more experienced, older horses affectionately referred to as the 'professors'.

To be able to receive teaching from a horse in this way requires a certain level of humility on the part of the rider. During an interview with Chief Rider Andreas Hausberger in 2014, I was informed of the importance that is placed on the young rider acquiring this humility during the early stages of his training. Those who are unable to demonstrate this may have their training terminated. Furthermore, the young rider is not only expected to develop humility as well as riding ability and the skills necessary to communicate to the horse, but is also required to develop a high degree of empathy toward the stallions (Gurtler E. , 2010). Of the few texts that are available written by previous riders at the SRS, each is unrelenting on the importance of developing a positive relationship with the stallions. For example, the former director of the school, Kurt Albrecht writes of the rider, "He needs to acquire insight into the mind of horses. The faculty of empathy is better developed in some riders than in others; nevertheless empathy is the essential psychological foundation for the physical aids" (Albrecht, 1981, p. 10). He continues, "Foremost amongst the qualities of a genuine horseman are modesty and consideration. He should be happy to climb off his throne sometimes, to consult his equine partner" (1981 p.15). It is therefore not considered to be the case that purpose of riding is to 'master' the horse, but rather to learn from, and with him, so it is therefore not surprising that the senior stallions play an important role in the

training of the young rider, a fact reiterated by another former director of the SRS who states that,

from the good school (senior) stallion the young rider learns to know the correct use of the aids and their effect and becomes initiated into the details of the apparent secret communication between rider and horse. Here the school stallion proves himself to be the best teacher which cannot be replaced by any theory or riding master... in this way the Spanish Riding School keeps up the tradition of training which is of especial importance, because the young rider learns from the old school horse and the young stallion from the experienced rider (Podhajsky A. , 1964, p. 22)

What this appears to suggest is that at Vienna there is a significant degree of interactive reciprocity between the horses and their human companions; such that the SRS appears to constitute something of a genuine horse/human community in which both are deemed important for the continued development of the other. Here the animals are regarded as active participants, at least to some extent, in the community within which they live. Furthermore, Nussbaum's idea that the morally sensible way in which to view animals, namely as companions in need of prudent guardianship, would appear to be being demonstrated.

Such reciprocity between the riders and the stallions also accords with Nussbaum's capability of affiliation, in which she proposes that

Animals are entitled to opportunities to form attachments and to engage in characteristic forms of bonding and interrelationship. They are also entitled to relations with humans, where humans enter the picture, that are rewarding and reciprocal, rather than tyrannical (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 398).

The training of the young horse at the SRS is always conducted by experienced trainers and begins with the horse becoming accustomed to the saddle and bridle and then 'lunged' on a twenty metre circle. Lungeing consists of the horse being asked to travel at walk trot and canter around the trainer on a circle with a long line attached to a cavesson (head stall). Here the horse learns to balance himself and to travel at whatever gait his trainer commands. After this fitness and balancing training, the horse is introduced to the weight of a rider on his back, again on the lunge until he learns to respond to the rider's aids (instructions).



**Figure 34 Young stallion being lunged at Heldenberg. Photo courtesy of the SRS**

Training then progresses over many years by first teaching the horse to move forward in all three gaits, to move laterally, and then when the horse is deemed supple, strong and balanced enough, the more advanced training can begin, incorporating the high school movements. Depending upon the capabilities or talent of the horse, it is expected that the training to produce a fully 'dressed' or trained horse will take up to ten years.

As a training institute for both riders and horses, the SRS has long been held to be the ideal, Sylvia Loch in her treatise on dressage writes,

The most refreshing aspect of teaching at the Spanish Riding School is neither the constant quest for perfection, nor the glittering trappings of traditional tack and turn-out, nor even the upholding of a system that has changed little in four hundred years of empirical teaching. What emerges forcefully from Vienna today is the underlying concern for the well-being of the horse. This is classical riding at its best (Loch S. , 2001, p. 173).

This institution consistently produces well-trained horses and skilful riders, all seemingly without resorting to cruelty or to painful methods to achieve these aims. Observation of the training of the horse and rider continues for many years and should a rider repeatedly become frustrated with his horses, or fail to treat them fairly, then he is asked to leave the school and not to return. The school cannot be seen to tolerate any such treatment of the horses in its care by temperamental riders. It would appear that disciplinary codes are in

place, these ensure that riders who contravene these rules are provided with warnings, and if these warnings are not heeded then the rider is dismissed.

Each rider is allocated six to eight horses, and he will remain with these horses for the duration of their training. The training of both horses and riders is achieved slowly and systematically, and each stage of training has to be mastered before going on to the next. It is recognised that both horses and riders are individuals and that training has to be adapted to suit the individual concerned. This requires a careful assessment of the physical and psychological abilities of the individual horse and rider. The aim of training is to bring out the best that each stallion can achieve rather than attempting to train him to perform movements that he is not capable of. Furthermore, each horse and rider may not necessarily be suited to some movements but may excel in others, and it is to the latter that such individual training is geared.

There is also recognition that the attention span of the horse, plus his ability to work intensely for prolonged periods may be limited. For this reason training sessions are kept to a maximum of twenty minutes at a time. This ensures that the horses do not become mentally or physically tired and that their muscles are not subjected to undue strain. The training session finishes with the rider dismounting in the arena, and before the horse is led away by the groom, the rider spends time at the head of his horse, stroking his head and administering the obligatory, and always well received, lump of sugar.

As I previously mentioned, much of the training of the horses at Vienna is conducted under the watchful eye of the more experienced trainers who themselves trained at the school, as most of the principles of training are passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Very few written directives actually exist, so these experienced trainers are vitally important for the continuation of the school. Recently, the school has suffered the loss of some experienced trainers who had become dissatisfied with new management directives. As a result of this, concerns have been voiced by some 'experts' on social media about the admission of some 'newer' methods of training, along with the publication of some photographs appearing to show the horses being worked using controversial techniques, usually only seen in some competitive dressage horses. As the Spanish Riding School has been highly regarded for centuries because of its integrity in relation to training horses, it is highly likely that if these alleged new practices exist and continue, then the trust, affection and high regard, with which the school has been held by the public, will disappear and its future will become uncertain.

Overall, as we have seen, the lives of the animals at the SRS are far removed from the lives of the circus animals cited in the Kerala High court case mentioned by Nussbaum in her opening section on the chapter on justice for non-human animals (Nussbaum M. , 2007). Whilst Nussbaum identifies the many ways in which these particular animals suffered an undignified life, she concedes that it is difficult to know precisely what a dignified life entails. Thus, we are left with the assumption that the dreadful conditions suffered by the circus animals were below the minimum threshold for their capabilities and that, in their case, justice had not been served.

It must also be remembered however, that the case of the Kerala High Court focused primarily on circus animals, and ruled that the conditions in which they were forced to live and the treatment they received was morally unacceptable for any animal. However, any discussion on the topic of dignity in relation to animals must take into account that fact that there are various species of animal who, by virtue of their very nature, are not suited to living in close proximity to humans, or in circumstances in which they are required to 'perform', even when these animals live in suitable accommodation and are otherwise treated fairly.

One of the reasons that the horses at the SRS seem not to suffer from a loss of dignity as a result of the way that they are kept and trained, is that they have been selectively bred for centuries for the specific purpose for which they are intended, and furthermore, only those animals deemed able to cope with the life they will be required to live at Vienna are selected to train at the school. Therefore, as regards the determination of a dignified existence for animals, the species of animal is a crucial issue to consider, as is the temperament and needs of the individual animal.

What might be a dignified life for one animal, therefore, may not constitute a dignified life for another and it is for this reason that Nussbaum is keen to point out that animals' dignity is associated with capabilities that must be ensured for all members of their species (Nussbaum M. , 2007). If these capabilities are ensured, then this will partly constitute a life worthy of the appropriate kind of dignity for the species. In other words, for each species of animal, we should take into account its characteristic activities and the capabilities central to that species flourishing, whilst at the same time recognising that the individual needs of the species member should not be ignored.

## The Riding of Horses: Implications for Flourishing

Sitting on and riding a horse will inevitably have consequences for the animal. The added weight of the rider can put strain upon the animal's spine, legs, and muscular-skeletal system, not to mention the impact that the varying accoutrements associated with the activity of equestrianism have on the physical and mental well-being of the horse. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in some equine welfare groups about the effects of riding, and some views put forward go so far as to question whether it is morally acceptable to ride horses at all<sup>13</sup>. Be that as it may, it is unlikely that equestrianism in any of its many forms will disappear in the foreseeable future.

Despite the fact that it has long been suspected that in some cases riding a horse can be detrimental to the animal's well-being, actually very little research has been conducted on the effects that equitation has on the horse. Research has been conducted on the effects of ill-fitting saddles (Fruehwirth, 2004), the effects that the various bits might have on the horse's mouth (Cook, 2003) and so forth, but very little has been done thus far on the effects that riding (especially bad riding) has on the horse. Some however, have attempted to investigate how asymmetry in the rider may influence the horse (Symes, 2009).

The main reason for including a separate section on the impact of riding on the horse is my belief, that under certain circumstances, riding can and does affect the ability of the horse to flourish, and therefore impacts on their overall well-being. In an article investigating the consequences of riding on the welfare of the horse, Odberg and Bouissou suggest that "Many saddle horses are slaughtered at a young age which could be indicative of a welfare problem" (Odberg, 1999, p. 26). One element of this 'welfare problem' the authors propose, is effect of bad riding. They go on to argue that,

It might be an error to believe that those horses which are still performing whilst being badly ridden are not suffering and are happy to oblige. Even though they are obeying, they could be in a state of learned helplessness, not knowing what else to do. Within a given species, some individuals react actively to stress, while others do so passively. Horses which have been submitted to inconsistent signals and painful stimuli from bad schooling are sometimes said to have 'character' because they tend to fight back and refuse to obey. They are repetitively sold and submitted to increasingly harder methods of schooling. Such horses are probably slaughtered at a young age. Those who tend to react passively may also be suffering stress although they give the impression of not suffering (Odberg, 1999, p. 26).

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<sup>13</sup> See Alexander Nevzorov *The Horse Crucified and Risen*

Whilst the authors fail to provide evidence of the exact numbers of young animals slaughtered and the reasons for doing so, for anyone familiar with the world of equestrianism these statements do not seem unrealistic. What is it then, about bad riding that can have such a detrimental effect on the horses subjected to it?

The main detrimental effect on the horse arises primarily from the rider's lack of balance. First, the rider who is out of balance will tend to hang on to the reins to stay on, and in so doing, can cause severe pain in the mouth of the horse by their actions increasing the pressure of the bit on the mouth of the horse. Second, the out of balance rider is in no position to support the horse or to assist him, should he fall out of balance, which in the case of the young horse, happens not infrequently. Lack of balance in the rider also results in the rider banging on the saddle with his or her seat and therefore inflicting pain on the back of the animal. That coupled with an inability to stay in rhythm with the horse's movements, results in a situation that can be very painful and upsetting for the animal and results in a loss of trust in his rider.

Therefore the unbalanced or uneducated rider can, by his or her actions, affect the horse adversely by impacting on the capabilities of life, bodily integrity, affiliation, and emotion. It is no mistake therefore, that the Spanish Riding School begin their education of the young rider on the lunge and under the watchful eye of the senior rider. Here the rider is placed on an experienced horse (the professor) who is reliable and gentle, and who will respond immediately to the voice of the trainer. Thus, the rider can gain his/her balance and confidence with a trusted partner, under the complete control of the trainer. It is to these experienced horses that the rider will owe their greatest debt. It is the recognition of this fact which paves the way for the learning of humility, which as I previously stated is an integral part of their education.

During these sessions the young riders are instructed to perform a variety of exercises aimed at improving their balance (Figure 35). This training can continue for as long as eighteen months or at least until the rider has developed what is termed as an 'independent seat', whereupon they can remain in balance with the horse in all gaits, without relying on the support of the reins or by gripping with the legs. Then and only then, is the rider allowed to take the reins and to control the horse by himself, again, always under strict supervision. It is only once the rider has achieved balance can his actual training begin. A pupil who has been taught to master his balance correctly is in a much better position to ride horses who are young and unbalanced as well as those who are lively and possibly unpredictable in their exuberance.



**Figure 35** Young rider on the Lunge. Photo courtesy of the SRS

It is no accident then that the training of the rider at the Spanish Riding School is considered as important as the training of the horse. Prior to introduction to his book *The Principles of Dressage*, the former director of the SRS Kurt Albrecht writes,

The novice dressage rider should not expect praise; he should only constantly endeavour to link his movements to those of his horse. In the absence of unity of movement between horse and rider, neither knowledge nor strength can produce artistic horsemanship (Albrecht, 1981, p. 1).

The rider's ability to be in control of his balance and to shift his centre of balance in tune with that of the horse is a vital component of this artistic horsemanship. Aside from this, balance also enables the rider to give clear instructions to the horse in time with the rhythm of the gaits, so the horse is not disturbed by them. The rider, by making subtle changes in his own position, can also assist the horse himself to remain in balance. The development of balance in the saddle is only one of the many skills that the classical rider must master, and a fuller account of the training of the rider can be found in a variety of texts on the training at the Spanish Riding School.

Thus far, I have explored aspects of the lives of the horses at Vienna relating to breeding, husbandry, training, and riding. However, one of the main reasons for keeping and training these animals is that ultimately, they will be expected to take part in performances for the public. They are ultimately, performing animals, and performing animals historically and currently have raised many moral concerns in relation to their ability to flourish.

## Performing at the Spanish Riding School

The use of animals in displays and performances carries with it the real risk of abuse. In the examples described in the previous chapter, the animals have clearly suffered an injustice. But do all performing animals suffer the same fate? The application of the capabilities approach to the SRS horses would suggest not and indeed, learning and performing may actually provide these animals with a stimulating life. Nussbaum is insistent that animals that are kept as the horses at the SRS are, and as other domesticated animals should be, are “treated as we currently treat children and many people with mental disabilities, who have a large menu of rights and are in that sense far from being ‘mere property’, although these rights should be exercised through human guardianship” (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 376).

It is possible for animals such as the horses at the SRS to flourish, lead a dignified existence, and still to entertain and delight us. No one goes to the SRS performance to laugh at the ridiculousness of animals dressed in human clothes performing tricks; quite the contrary, the performances are conducted in the utmost solemnity. If the audience does laugh, it is because the horses do something that they are not supposed to, such as buck or shy at something. No one laughs *at* the horses but at the fact that they *are* horses, and this is what horses sometimes do, irrespective of how well trained they are. These horses are not presented as ‘cute’ animals dressed in ridiculous human clothes with human props and unlike Cataldi’s bears discussed previously, their dignity is not undermined as a result. The uniform that they wear of the gold braided bridles, red saddle cloths, and white saddles do not detract from the beauty of the animals, they are intended to enhance it. The animals are presented as powerful, beautiful creatures and not as pathetic caricatures. These equestrian performances represent the co-operation between two distinct species, made possible by mutual respect. As I mentioned earlier, this is an environment in which the animals are respected, valued members of a community within which they participate in the training of future generations of young rider. There are no beatings, no standing on hot coals to make them dance, no applications of caustic ointments to their legs, no depriving them of food or water to make them co-operate and no sedatives to keep them docile and harmless.

However, for some even these performing animals cause concern. In a review written in an online forum by an audience member present at an SRS performance in Vienna, one man argued that he had “derived no pleasure from seeing animals performing movements that they clearly found difficult, and furthermore, that getting them to do so in such an artificial setting was both pointless and unnatural” (ref. unavailable).

Are these performances pointless and or unnatural? The point of them, as I stated earlier, is to preserve an ancient tradition of riding and training, and to demonstrate these to the public. The preservation of ancient relics for historical or aesthetic interest is part and parcel of many human cultures, and may be deemed necessary for the education of future generations. But is this morally justified in the case of using animals such as in the SRS, where it is doubtful whether their contribution has any real impact on the lives or well-being of horses outside the school, or indeed on many of the public who ride?

The performances of this institution remain hugely popular; the school’s reputation, level of skill and polished performances still attract the crowds both in Vienna and in other parts of the world. People, it would seem, still want to see how horses are trained according to ancient principles: they want to see the beauty, elegance and mastery on display and be inspired by it, perhaps. The performances for these reasons alone are certainly not pointless since they entertain, educate, and delight many of the people who go to see them as well as showcasing tried and tested historical principles of training horses humanely.

Are the advanced movements demonstrated in the performances unnatural and difficult for the horses? Many of the movements performed by the horses resemble those that exist within the horses’ own repertoire. They are typically movements performed by stallions used when fighting or when attempting to attract the interest of a mare, and they have been harnessed by human trainers for use on the battlefield or in the dressage arena (Fig 36).



**Figure 36 Horse and Rider performing the Courbette Photo courtesy of the SRS**

Yet we must exercise caution here, the claim that animals are just doing what is ‘natural’ for them has long been used as a public relations defence in the use of wild animals in circuses. As Morrison points out, “At centre stage of this new public relations strategy is the claim that the exotic animals performing in the arena displays nothing but the most natural of behaviour, fully in tune with its own innate instincts” (Morrison, 2012, p. loc.2083). Examples given by Morrison of these “natural behaviours” include boxing kangaroos, the ice skating polar bears of the Ukraine pictured in the previous chapter, and the snow leopard that has featured in various displays at the Clubb/Chipperfield circus. This act was defended by the trainer at the circus, Jim Clubb, who argued that leopards naturally jump and sit. The walking on ropes that they are required to do as part of the circus act, is merely an extension of their ability to walk on branches in trees. Therefore, it is argued, everything they are taught is only an extension of what they would naturally do in the wild. “We are

simply exploiting their natural abilities” (Morrison, 2012, p. loc.2099) Exploitation is of course exactly what is being done here, as the animals have no real control over what they are expected to do.

In the case of the SRS, whilst the movements themselves may be natural to the horse in certain more ‘natural’ conditions, what is less natural is that these movements are performed at the request of a rider, and some are frequently executed with the added weight of the rider on their back. Under conditions in which the horse himself chooses to perform these movements, the likelihood is that he is aware of when it is safe to do so and also that he can stop when his balance is compromised or his joints are under strain. This is not an option for the majority of horses under human control.

A further concern is that the horses are required to perform these movements several times during a performance, and the risk of damage to the horse increases the more frequently that he is required to perform them. Since 2001, when the Spanish Riding School was privatised and thus lost funding from the Austrian government, the pressure to become financially self-sufficient has led to an increased work-load for both the horses and the riders. In 2008, the school cancelled a tour to the United States because of welfare concerns regarding the fitness of some of the older horses and in the same year it was estimated that the school was close to bankruptcy having lost £2.9m. The solution to this problem was to change the management structure at the School and appoint a new director. Previously, directors of the SRS had been selected from senior riders or veterinary surgeons associated with the SRS, many of whom may have had little experience with financial management. On this occasion the position of director was given to Mrs Gurtler, a successful hotelier in the hope that given her business experience, she could assist the school with its financial affairs.

One of the first things to occur under this new directorship was an increase in the number of performances from 38 to 69 per year in order to generate more revenue (Daily Mail, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2008). The increase in the number of performances led to a number of riders expressing concern for the well-being of the horses, and those who felt strongly enough left in protest, whilst others who continued to voice their concerns were ‘let go’. As a result many of the most experienced senior riders were no longer present to oversee the training of the horses and junior riders, and this has led to concerns about the horses being pushed to perform movements that they were not yet physically capable of, and ending up lame as a result of injury.

The most damning event to occur in the history of the school occurred in 2014 with the publication by a freelance photographer of a number of images taken of several riders from the school warming their horses up before a performance. These images appear to show the riders engaging in a practice known as *Rollkur*. This practice, mostly associated with the competitive dressage world, involves riding the horse with the animal's neck hyper-flexed, sometimes to the extent that the animal's chin almost touches his/her chest (see Figure 37). This practice has received widespread condemnation from the public due to the perceived damage to the physical and psychological systems of the horse.



**Figure 37 Example of Rollkur**

Despite this, opinions within the veterinary profession remain divided as to the level of damage caused by this practice, but nevertheless, many believe that Rollkur causes extreme pressure on the ligaments, muscles and the spine of the animal and can cause extreme pain, anxiety and due to the position of the head, a reduction in the horse's normal visual field.

The publication of these photographs via social media prompted a variety of angry complaints from horse lovers around the world. Many felt betrayed that this institution, so revered and steeped in historical tradition, would resort to such measures in the training and working of its horses. Despite a press release being issued by the director of the School to attempt to diffuse the situation, emotions ran high. There was some suggestion that the release of these photographs had caused irreparable damage to the reputation of the school from which it may not recover.

What has emerged from this incident is that it has highlighted the uneasy relationship that exists between the need to stay financially viable and the alleged counter-productive exploitation of the riders and animals in order to do so. It has also showed that any

deviation from the historical classical principles of riding and training horses, for which the school is famous, in favour of more modern techniques, especially those considered harmful to the horse, will not be tolerated by knowledgeable members of the equestrian public.

In this instance, the techniques allegedly resorted to in preparation for the performances, the fact that the number of performances have been increased considerably, the loss of senior riders, the need to train these vulnerable young horses quickly to replace the increasing older population of horses, all have the potential to impact on the horse's capabilities and therefore raise issues of justice. Furthermore, it also fails to respect the dignity of the animals who are, in this case, clearly in danger of being used as a means to an end.

The use of the horses in performances at the SRS, particularly when compared to the fate of many exotic species performing in circuses, does not appear historically to have amounted to a loss of dignity for the animals, nor has it raised concerns about a loss of the animal's entitlements for flourishing. However, the need to remain financially secure has recently resulted in the school offering tours for the public that include the stables where the animals can be viewed, and this raises a different set of moral problems.

## **The moral problem of looking at the horses**

The idea that we can be rude to animals is galvanising. Being rude means that you do not recognise the others selfhood (Diski, 2010, p. 146).

In the previous chapter I recounted a statement from the Animal Welfare Board of India who asserted that one problem in the case of circuses and zoos was that, wild animals dislike being stared at. In this section I propose that many domesticated animals also dislike being stared at, that they often feel threatened by the human gaze, and will avoid it if they can. Furthermore I believe that in certain circumstances, the act of 'staring' at animals, amounts to a violation of their privacy, and this is an example of one of the many ways in which we may be rude to them.

On a recent visit to the Spanish Riding School I was struck by the realization that there are few aspects of these stallions' lives that are not available for the public to view. They can be viewed during the performances, during the morning training sessions and more recently on guided tours of their stables. On the one hand, one might argue that the advantage of this is that there is a constant policing by the public of the ways in which they are handled, treated and kept. But does such observation of these animals amount to a specific kind of voyeurism? If so, is it morally acceptable?

The areas in which the horses can be viewed can also be divided into their 'public' lives, as in the case of the performances and morning training sessions, and a life which is possibly more deserving of being called 'private' when they are in their stables. If it is unacceptable to invade the privacy of human beings by photographing them or by watching them in their daily lives when at home without their consent, then why should it be acceptable in the case of these animals?

Recent research has questioned the acceptability of such intrusion into the private lives of animals as in the photographing of wild animals for television documentaries, with some authors proposing that this amounts to an invasion of their privacy (Mills, 2010). Other writers such as (Malamud, 1998) and (Berger J. , 2009) have highlighted the moral problems associated with zoo spectatorship. Nothing has been written however, on the case of domesticated animals. Perhaps this is because the perceived 'ownership' of domesticated animals such as horses, excludes them from such considerations. However, I believe that looking at domestic animals such as the horse poses the same problems as looking at animals in zoos, wildlife parks and television documentaries, namely that merely the act of

'looking' evokes and upholds the relational dynamic of mastery and domination over members of another species. Animals such as the horse who are prey animals may find such staring threatening, as the act of staring (in an objectifying manner) is associated with predators (Evernden, 1993). However, non-human predators, as Evernden suggests, rarely gaze at their prey for prolonged periods, whereas human observers can do just that. Furthermore, staring at animals serves to support the view that one of the functions of animals is to entertain us; animals thus becoming visual objects which are expected to delight, provoke or engage with us in some way.

In this investigation into these tours of the stables, I approach the problems of looking at animals by reviewing a number of problematic areas, although these by no means provide an exhaustive account. The first area of concern relates to the unequal distribution of power present in these encounters.

### **The issue of Inequality**

Writing about spectatorship at zoos, Berger argues that "However you look at animals even if the animal is up against the bars, less than a foot from you, looking outwards in the public direction, you are still looking at something that has been rendered marginal" (Berger, 1977, p. 24). The majority of literature concerned with spectatorship of animals (Evernden 1993; Berger 1977; Diski 2010; Mills 2010 and Tuan 2004) highlights the relational dynamic of mastery present when viewing animals that are contained or presented for the purpose. It is precisely because the animal cannot free himself from the gaze of the observer that he is marginalized with the power resting predominately with the viewer. It was on a tour of the stables at Vienna that the realization of this power became apparent.

The Spanish Riding School's 72 stallions are housed in the Stallberg, a building in the centre of Vienna, across from the Winter Riding School. The internal stables are organised into two rows with a central passageway through which the spectators can pass. Each stable consists of one back solid wall and three partially solid walls, the top of each containing bars through which the animals are viewed. The resemblance to a prison cell or a zoo is striking. Unlike the modern zoo however, there is no dense foliage, nor any hidden area to which the horse can escape to avoid the gaze of the spectator. Overwhelmingly, there is a sense that these animals are 'goods' placed on display for the public to view in return for a fee, the payment of which somehow permits them to view the animals doing what they do, eating, drinking water, defecating, urinating or just dozing. Somehow, viewing the animals

in their stables, their homes and the place where they can be what they are, provoked a sense of voyeurism; a sense that somehow this was wrong.

Furthermore, comments that were made by some of my fellow voyeurs compounded this sense of unease. Some expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with the animals that they were seeing in the stables and a comparison was made between the animals that they had seen in the performance or morning training sessions and the animals that they were viewing now: "Aren't they small?"; "I thought that they would be bigger than that". One of the more experienced viewers commented, "Aren't they very short in the neck?" It was almost as if the horses, stripped of their gold trappings, failed to fulfil the expectations of the viewers in some way. In the stables they were just horses, indistinguishable from other horses that could be seen anywhere.

The behaviour of the stallions did nothing to make the situation any more tolerable. With the exception of one four year old they all ignored us, most standing at the back of their stables, some with their backs to us, some just foraging in their spotless bedding for stray bits of straw. Rightly or wrongly, I experienced this indifference as an indicator that my presence was neither required nor wanted, and was regarded by the animals as an intruder

### **The Invisibility of the animals**

Whilst these horses are viewed and photographed repeatedly, the behaviour of the animals and that of my fellow spectators revealed that whilst being looked at, these animals were not really being 'seen'. Row after row of seemingly identical white horses merged into a collective. There was no sense of the individual animal, there was no mention made, or questions asked about a particular animal's characteristics, likes or dislikes. My fellow visitors behaved as the zoo spectators described by Berger; they proceeded from one stable to another rather like attendants who visit a museum or art gallery, stopping at the stable to glance at the inhabitant or exhibit before moving on to the next. Once more the idea of the individual being was reduced to that of an object for observation.

### **The question of privacy**

The idea of animals as 'others,' denies them a right to privacy expected by us. Denying animals this right to privacy is one of those tenets upon which humans perceived right to mastery over other species is upheld and maintained (Mills, 2010, p. 193).

Privacy is not a concept usually associated with animals and yet recently discussions have emerged, by Mills in particular, into the appropriateness of capturing images of animals for wildlife documentaries and the possible intrusion into the privacy of the lives of animals that this produces. However, aside from this, violating an animal's privacy also impacts upon several of Nussbaum's capabilities. For example, she states that animals are entitled to enjoy light and air in tranquillity (Nussbaum M. , 2007), and it is inevitable that the tranquillity that exists will be disturbed by the streams of noisy strangers passing the horses' stables. Furthermore, capabilities such as control over the environment, and affiliation, are also likely to be compromised in this instance.

In the tour of the stables most aspects of the animals' lives are on view, and they can be watched eating, drinking, urinating and defecating, as with the lives of certain domesticated and wild animals available for viewing on TV. There are many aspects of the lives of humans which are not deemed appropriate to view without expressed consent such as giving birth, dying, being fed, eliminating and suffering, yet such behaviours can be watched on a daily basis in many television programmes about both domestic and wild animals, concentrating on vets, the RSPCA and many wildlife documentaries.

My experience of discomfort on touring the stables arose in part because of a sensation of entering the realm of the private world of these famous horses. Issues of privacy are closely related to issues of respect and dignity of the being, irrespective of whether the animal in question is aware of this right. To intrude to this extent seems not only to show blatant disregard for the possibility of the existence of this 'private life' that the animal is entitled to, but also to show a lack of respect for the animal himself.

Many animals will choose, if they have the opportunity to do so, to eliminate, to mate, to give birth to their young or to die, away from the gaze of members of their own groups and certainly away from the gaze of humans. Why then do we assume that we have a right to intrude upon such private events?

### **The desire for reciprocal engagement**

The sense of intrusion I experienced was compounded by the behaviour of a few of my co-viewers. It seemed that the horses ignoring us aroused in some, a sense of being short changed, that somehow the horse had to relate to, or at least engage with us for the experience to be complete. Despite the fact that the stallions chose not to take any real notice of us, one or two people tried to get their attention by sticking their fingers through

the bars, by clicking their tongues, and calling to them. One stallion was clearly annoyed at a woman who invaded his space and put his ears back as a warning. Horses are territorial animals and will guard their personal space even when in a field with other horses, let alone when confined to a small stable which provides them with a fraction of that space.

Such an expectation of the animals being required to respond is further testament to the blatant lack of regard for the needs of the individual animal and a lack of respect for their space demonstrated by the visitors. This desire to evoke a response in the animal being viewed has also been mentioned in the literature concerned with zoo spectatorship, and it is reminiscent of the Victorian pastime of spectators paying a penny and being allowed to prod the inmates at Bedlam, to get the passive inmates to respond in a way that was amusing, to get them to *do* something.

Another aspect of looking at the horse in such a setting is the requirement that they are presented in such a way as to be rendered acceptable to the spectator. Such presentation includes that the horses be clean, with no staining on their coats, that they have no bedding in their manes or tails and that the environment that surrounds them is free from the sight or smell of excrement. One of the distinguishing factors of the stables at Vienna is their cleanliness, almost to the point of sterility. The horses beds are filled with new fresh shavings, the animals themselves are spotlessly clean and well groomed. Such presentation is seen as being synonymous with the animals' welfare and yet one wonders who it is really for. Gleaming white horses presented in spotless stables, coupled with the sense of artificiality, smacks of specific criteria being fulfilled to make viewing the animal acceptable.

The animals in their stables at the Spanish Riding School are objectified by the visitors who come to see them there, and are subjected to the constant scrutiny of people that they do not know, and with no way to avoid the gaze and attention that they clearly do not want. In many ways this particular aspect of viewing the horses is similar to viewing animals in a zoo which, Malamud suggests, offers the viewer the opportunity to "retain cultural and cognitive mastery over animals but without the smell of shit" (Malamud, 1998, p. 234).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have adopted Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach as a theoretical framework within which to explore the lives of the horses at the SRS. I have argued that in many other situations, horses are objectified and treated as 'things'. I proposed that apart from this being morally unacceptable viewpoint, it also has a direct impact on how the animals are regarded and managed. The SRS, on the other hand, provides a direct contrast to this prevailing view of the horse. The horses at the SRS reside in an environment in which every opportunity is taken to fulfil not only their species-specific needs, but also their individual needs and preferences. Furthermore, the SRS supports and nurtures a culture within which the horses are regarded as valued participants in the lives that they lead.

In relation to Nussbaum's first capability of *life*, these animals receive their entitlement to live their lives unless and until death and decrepitude make their lives intolerable. Furthermore, they receive individualised care throughout each of the stages of life, including those stages when they are not being 'productive' in the sense of working at the school or at the stud; as a foal, and when retired to the stud at the end of their working lives. The animals live their lives until such a time that the quality of their lives is compromised by disease or injury and then they are humanely euthanized by one of the school's veterinary surgeons. This provides a direct contrast to the lives of many other horses, some of whom are euthanized, or neglected when they are no longer deemed useful.

Throughout their lives the school pays meticulous attention to maintaining and supporting the horses' entitlement to maintaining bodily health, they receive slow, successive, training which is geared specifically toward this end. Furthermore, should they become injured or contract an illness or disease then they receive immediate care and treatment from the school's veterinary surgeons, and access to state of the art veterinary facilities.

Aside from supporting the animal's bodily health the school also safeguards the capability of *bodily integrity* by ensuring that the stallions are not subjected to prolonged training sessions, that they are not pushed beyond their capabilities, and that their training is individually tailored to their needs. Furthermore, these animals are never subjected to harsh or abusive treatment that may cause them physical or psychological distress. The strict breeding programme adopted by the school ensures that only those animals that are

physically and psychologically capable of doing what will be required of them are bred from.

The capability of *senses, imagination and thought*, encompasses a wide range of entitlements according to Nussbaum, one of which is to an appropriate education (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 397). The education and training provided to both horses and riders at the SRS, encompasses ideals of mutual respect, discipline, and co-operation. In regard to the horses, training is intended to be a pleasurable experience where accomplishments are always recognised and rewarded.

For humans, this capability is also associated with a level of personal freedom which encompasses freedom of speech and artistic expression for which as Nussbaum points out there are no analogues in the case of animals. However, the fact that the horses at the SRS are considered to be participants in their lives at the school would imply that there is the opportunity for levels of expression on the part of the horses to be taken into consideration. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, the horse's expression of his individual psychological or personality traits results in his management being altered accordingly, for example, the curious or inquisitive horse being given an outside stable so that he is better able to watch the activity around him. Thus not only is the horse 'free' in a sense to express his preferences, but these preferences are recognised as valid by his carers and are responded to and accommodated accordingly.

Also incorporated into this capability is the entitlement of animals to have a suitable education. (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 397) I have argued that not only is this entitlement recognised by the SRS, but it is provided in a way that ensures that the individual animal is educated or trained up to, and never beyond his specific ability, and also, that he is considered to be a valued contributor to the training of future riders at the school.

The capability of *emotions* encompasses the absence of fear, anger and resentment and frustration plus the ability to form attachments to others, both those of the same or a different species. I have proposed that in all of its dealings with the horses in its care, from the stud to the riding school, the SRS endeavours to provide the animals with what Nussbaum terms, "a decent emotional life" (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 397). These animals are given the opportunity to form attachments to their attendants, trainers, and equine stable companions, and as I have stated earlier, every attempt is made to match individual horses with those other horses and humans who will complement their particular temperament, or will provide security or support when it is required.

Nussbaum also states that animals are entitled to a world view “that respects them and treats them as dignified beings” (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 398) and this the Spanish Riding School does. Interestingly, the only time that I felt that this entitlement was under threat, was not during the performances, nor the morning training sessions, but on the tour of the stables when a few members of the public objectified the horses, disregarded their personal space, and failed to respect their privacy. Furthermore, pointing, commenting and laughing as the horses urinated, was, in my view, an instance of humiliation, and one which Nussbaum proposes that animals “will feel as painful” (2007 p.398).

Notwithstanding this, I have argued that the horses at the SRS can and do enjoy very close bonds with those humans who care for them, train them and ride them, and that these bonds are based on trust, co-operation and mutual respect, and ones where the animal’s dignity is respected. The continuity and stability of these relationships is considered an important part of the stallions’ emotional well-being and so every effort is made to ensure that they are safeguarded.

Nussbaum’s penultimate capability is that of *play*, and I have argued that again, the importance of this entitlement to the horses is well recognised at the SRS. There is ample opportunity given to foals and young horses at the stud to engage in play and this continues even when the young horses move to Vienna. Whilst not actively encouraged during training or performing, opportunities to engage in self-directed play are available to these older horses, especially when they are on their several ‘holidays’ at the centre at Heldenberg.

Nussbaum’s final capability relates to the exercising of *control over one’s environment*. This entitlement is upheld by the staff of SRS who (unlike some visiting members of the public discussed above) do respect the territorial integrity of the horse, and are aware of the importance of not invading his personal space. Alongside this, there is also the opportunity for the horse’s specific preferences in relation to his choice of neighbour, or the position of his stable to be respected. In this sense, the horse can be said to exercising some limited control over his environment.

In this, I argue that at the Spanish Riding school of Vienna, the horses are considered participants in what Nussbaum terms a culture that is framed so as to respect them, and is committed to treating them justly (Nussbaum M. , 2007, p. 400). The culture that surrounds the SRS does respect these animals and endeavours to provide them with a dignified life; one where their capabilities are met to threshold levels and above.

Increasing pressure to remain financially viable can, however, create tension between ensuring the animal's capabilities are met and the need to support the vast infrastructure that incorporates the SRS. Increasing the number of performances, coupled with the need to produce highly trained animals to replace the older stallions, will inevitably impact upon the culture that currently exists and directly affect the well-being of both the horses, and their trainers and carers. Yet, the very survival of the school is dependent upon the continued support of a knowledgeable public, one which will not tolerate any unjust treatment of the horses.

The Spanish Riding School will only continue to exist as it does, if and only if, it continues to follow the strict historical guidelines of the art of classical equitation, laid down in its directives, and continues to provide the horses with high standards of care and attention for which it is renowned. It is these high ethical standards present which ultimately lead to the development of trust and mutual co-operation that exist between horse and human.

Thus far, I have suggested that because performances of classical equitation include animals and that they emphasise the role of training and management of the horses that it is wrong to suppose that our evaluation of them can be assessed without reference to the moral treatment the animals involved. Furthermore, in what follows I argue that within performances including animals, such as those given by the SRS, a complex inter-relationship exists between how the animals are treated and the visual results that are obtained. The main aim of classical equitation, as I have stated is to preserve the natural beauty of the horse whilst he is ridden and also in the case of the SRS, to present an aesthetically pleasing spectacle to an audience. In the following two chapters I address these two elements. Chapter four investigates some theoretical perspectives concerned with the issues involved in our finding certain animals aesthetically pleasing. Chapter five contains an exploration of the aesthetic elements present in the performances given by the SRS and compares these to the aesthetic elements found in performances of classical ballets.

## Chapter Four

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# Aesthetics and Animals

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### Introduction

The popularity of circuses, zoos, wildlife parks, and television animal documentaries is evidence that many people like to observe or to admire animals. We find animals amusing, entertaining, charming and moving, and we also find them beautiful. How curious then that despite the fact that animals are so often admired for their grace, elegance and beauty, they receive only scant attention from scholars devoted to the exploration of aesthetics, the discipline within philosophy devoted to studies of beauty in art and in nature. Early writings on aesthetics, such as those by Edmund Burke, do however include animals as beings worthy of consideration from an aesthetic point of view, yet modern scholars – with the exception of a few – have completely disregarded animals, and have devoted themselves almost exclusively to the consideration of inanimate nature, artworks and more recently, everyday objects.

This tendency to focus on art as the main area of interest fails to acknowledge myriad of other encounters with beauty which feature in life. In fact, encounters with animals are much more commonplace in everyday life for many of us than encounters with art, yet philosophy has been largely silent about the kinds of experience that such encounters might offer.

In this chapter, I begin by exploring the concepts of ‘aesthetics’ and ‘beauty’ from a variety of perspectives, before going on to discuss what these theories might contribute to an understanding of our aesthetic appreciation of animals. Central to my argument is the idea that the aesthetic appreciation of living beings differs significantly from the aesthetic appreciation of the inanimate objects that feature so strongly in the discourse on art works.

Using the influential Kantian thesis that aesthetic judgements require a disinterested aesthetic attitude, I argue that 'disinterestedness' is an inappropriate perspective from which to discuss the specific aesthetic attitude that we might adopt in the aesthetic appreciation of animals.

Throughout the chapter I identify and discuss three specific layers of appreciation in relation to animals. The first arises from the idea that there are evolutionary mechanisms in place which serve to guide our aesthetic preferences for certain animals over others. Evolutionary aesthetics, as a theoretical perspective, provides valuable insight into the possible origins of our aesthetic preferences for certain animals and furthermore, how these preferences might influence our emotional responses to them.

Secondly, I explore the role that formal properties play in the aesthetic appreciation of animals. In this, I focus specifically on William Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, in which he proposes that the role of 'fitness for function' is an element of beauty that is reflected in the configuration of certain lines, dimensions and proportions. Using the example of the selective breeding of Arabian horses, I propose that certain lines, dimensions and proportions influence selective breeding and contribute to the aesthetic appeal of these animals.

The third level of appreciation that I explore relates specifically to the concept of 'fitness for function.' If it is the case, as I suggest, that we appreciate the beauty of animals differently than we might appreciate a painting, a building or a flower, then it raises the question of what kind of beauty it is that certain animals possess. One useful way of exploring this is in relation to Kant's distinction between the judgements of beauty that he determines are 'free' and those which he holds to be 'dependent'. Kant's idea that horses are judged as having dependent beauty suggests that our familiarity with them as a species, coupled with our having a concept of what it is they should be, influences our aesthetic judgements of them. The idea of our having a concept of what horses are and what they should be leads on to the idea that another way of appreciating horses – or animals generally – is closely tied to the particular function that they perform, an idea that can be traced back to Socrates, through William Hogarth and more recently, to Kendall Walton, Nick Zangwill and Glen Parsons, namely that beauty is closely associated with 'fitness for function'.

I then argue that experiencing the beauty in animals does not exist in some sort of perceptual vacuum but rather encompasses issues of emotional engagement, morality, responsibility, and dignity in relation to the creature being observed.

Finally, I go on to discuss the Spanish Riding School of Vienna, an institution in which humans and animals join together in public performances of a stylised form of 'dance' to a musical accompaniment. I will examine the elements present within the performance that I believe contribute to their aesthetic appeal. However, before doing this, I first explore some theoretical perspectives that surround the concepts of aesthetics and beauty.

## **Perspectives on Aesthetics**

It is not uncommon in discussions relating to art and its objects to use the terms 'theory of art' and 'aesthetics' interchangeably, and yet to do so fails to recognise important differences that exist between these two theoretical perspectives. In a paper on the difference between these two disciplines, Gary Peters proposes that art theory relies on several distinct areas of enquiry: analysis, interpretation, contextualisation and legitimisation. In short, art theory largely concerns itself with knowledge about art, with attempts being made to define and theorise about the concept of art itself. Such enquiry also attempts to understand the function that art plays in our lives, and this analysis may involve placing artworks in a moral, political, economic, or gender based context (Peters, 2001). Art theory then, according to this explanation, is largely concerned with conceptual clarification.

Aesthetics, on the other hand, according to Peters, since its development in the eighteenth century, has attempted to search for a manner of experiencing art and beauty in relation to the pleasure that is derived from encounters with them. The aesthetic, Peters suggests, "was firstly, an analysis of human feeling, imagination, reflection, judgement and communication, with art being a secondary, if important consideration" (Peters, 2001, p. 8). This is because the primary emphasis at this time was often geared towards the beauty that could be found in nature.

On the other hand, the philosopher Frank Sibley informs us that aesthetics deals with a kind of perception. The crucial thing, he suggests, is that,

people have to *see* the grace or unity of a work, *hear* the plaintiveness or frenzy in the music, *notice* the gaudiness of a colour scheme, *feel* the power of a novel, its mood or its uncertainty of tone... the crucial thing is to see, hear, feel (Sibley, 1965, p. 137).

The word itself is of Greek origin and refers primarily to sensory perception, and was later utilised in the 1750's by Alexander Baumgarten to name his 'science of perception'.

Baumgarten's studies were not confined to the subjects of art and beauty, and others who

followed him and were influenced by his ideas, adopted the term 'aesthetics' and 'the aesthetic' predominantly in discussions of art and beauty (Collinson, 1992), for which the term is still largely used today.

Aside from the ability to perceive, via the senses, the qualities that are inherent in a thing of beauty or a work of art, the term as suggested above also refers to the kinds of response that can be evoked by such encounters, the kinds of properties present in an object which lead it to be described as aesthetic, the state of mind or attitude required in order to experience something aesthetically, and what this distinctive experience consists of. However, the identification of the subject matter of interest to aestheticians does not support a precise, essential, definition of the term, which remains elusive. There are two reasons postulated for this: the first relates to the sheer size of the field of the subject matter covered by the field of aesthetics; and the second relates to the differences in the treatment given to the topic throughout history (Kovach, 1976). However, despite these difficulties and for the specific purpose of this chapter, I take the term 'aesthetics' to refer to a generic field existing within philosophy, part of which deals with the appreciation of beautiful things, an appreciation which involves the senses and the engagement of the emotions and the imagination.

## **Ideas on Beauty**

The idea that beauty resides in the mind of the observer and not in properties present in the object can be found in the early writings of philosophers such as Hume who believed that there must be more to perceiving beauty than merely perceiving the objective qualities possessed by an object (Hanfling, 1995, p. 44). Hume writes,

Euclid has fully explained every quality of the circle, but has not, in any proposition, said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. Beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line ... It is only the effect which that figure produces upon a mind, whose particular fabric or structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments. In vain would you look for it in the circle (in Hanfling 1995, p.45).

The reason that Hume suggests that that one would fail to find the beauty of the circle actually *in* the circle is that, in his view, beauty resides only in the mind of the observer and cannot be ascribed to any qualities inherent in an object that exists outside the mind.

Observing an object, Hume asserted, arouses 'feelings' in us which sometimes leads us to mistakenly attribute importance to the external elements of the object in question. Beauty and feeling for Hume were one and the same thing, and resided only in the mind of the

beholder. Such sentiment can be also found in the later work of Croce who held that “the beautiful is not a physical fact; it does not belong to things, but in the activity of man, to spiritual energy” (Kovach, 1976, p. 53) and also in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, where he suggested that beauty without a reference to the feeling of the subject is nothing by itself.

Conversely, one may adopt the position of aesthetic objectivism, where emphasis is placed on the extra-mental objective reality of beauty. In other words an object is beautiful because *it* possesses beauty; beauty therefore, is an objective quality of things (Kovach, 1976), rather than being a quality in the mind that observes it. Such a position inevitably leads to a search for any identifiable qualities of an object that might give rise to the experience of beauty. Attempts of this kind can be found in the writings of William Hogarth, who identified what he termed the lines of beauty and of those of grace (Hogarth, 1753).

In adopting the position of objectivism, one attempts to establish, whether there is a collection of properties present in something, which leads us to declare that this something or someone is beautiful. Such properties, as I stated, are inevitably sought in the person or the object itself. As such, we may assert that a person is beautiful because they possess large blue eyes, but blue eyes, in and of themselves, are no reliable indicator of beauty. Assuming that properties such as blue eyes cannot guarantee beauty, the possibility exists that there is no group of formal properties that may be identified that can with any certainty determine the presence of beauty in an object or a person.

However, as Kovach suggests, a third possibility exists alongside aesthetic subjectivism and aesthetic objectivism, and that is aesthetic relationism. This theory proposes that the experience of beauty arises from an interaction, one which occurs between the senses, the emotions, and the imagination (Kovach, 1976). This view has received support from several aestheticians, one of whom, according to Kovach, is J.L Jarret who proposes that “for beauty to be present something is required of both object and subject: the object must be right – right for some person; and the subject must be ready – ready for engaging this object. Then beauty emerges in the relation between the two” (Jarret, 1957, p. 34). For the experience of beauty to arise, then, both the senses and the mind of the perceiver must be engaged with the object, as Hume also suggests. The senses register and identify the components of the object, and the mind (imagination, reason and emotions) plays with the resultant image or sound as it will, something which Kant in the *Critique of Judgement* referred to as “nothing other than the state of mind in the free play of the imagination and the understanding” (Guyer, 2000, p. 227). The essence of this is that a judgement of beauty

(aesthetic judgement), can only be made when the imagination is free from the burdens placed upon it by the understanding.<sup>14</sup>

Such theoretical explanation informs us of what is required for beauty to occur, but an actual definition of the term continues to elude us. The best that we can say, despite hundreds or even thousands of years of exploration, is that the experience of beauty is a spontaneous, emotional reaction to an object, event or person, which often leads to an intense feeling of pleasure. As to an exact definition of the term itself, one wonders whether, given the elusive nature of the concept, Kant might have been correct in his assertion that no concept of beauty exists and therefore, no definition of it will be possible. Beauty remains a dynamic term; ideas of what is, and what is not, considered beautiful, change over time. What might have been thought beautiful in the past may not be considered to be so today. Furthermore, ideals of beauty vary between cultures, between social groups and between individuals, yet despite this, there remains a sense that when we talk about beauty, the person that we speak to has at least some understanding of what we mean by the term.

There has been a tendency of late for aestheticians to expand their explorations of beauty beyond art and natural landscapes to include less natural environments, such as that of home decor and even everyday objects, but what is puzzling is that despite these numerous examinations into beauty that have been the central preoccupation of aesthetics, and despite the fact that animals feature so heavily in historical discourse on beauty, aestheticians today remain largely silent about the beauty of animals.

## **Aesthetically Appreciating Animals**

What is clear when we consider the experience of beauty is that it is a valued human experience, one which arises as a result of sensory encounters with objects, people, animals or events, in art, nature, and life and which often causes delight or a variety of other emotions to be present in an observer. It is clear from this statement that beauty

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<sup>14</sup> An argument that I will explore in more detail later.

involves both the perceptual engagement with certain qualities present in something, and an emotional response to these qualities. Philosophers, since studies of beauty began, have been unclear and divided about the origins of beauty, and as we have seen, have questioned whether beauty resides in certain combinations of lines, colours or some other qualities in an object or whether it exists in the eye of the beholder. Some have even gone so far to suggest that beauty cannot be defined at all. In his book, *What is Art?* Tolstoy proposes that,

all attempts to define absolute beauty in itself - whether as an imitation of nature, or as suitability to its object, or as a correspondence of parts, or as symmetry, or as harmony, or as unity in variety, etc. either define nothing at all, or define only some traits of some artistic productions... (Tolstoy, 1996, p. loc.644).

Of course this raises the question of whether such a definition is actually needed or should be made available. The assumption that it should, according to Wittgenstein, rests on a false understanding of language, where language can, and does, function perfectly well without such definitions, and this “does not undermine our ability to know what we are talking about when we use the words in question” (Hanfling, 1995, p. 1). So where might this lead us in relation to a discussion on beauty in animals? Are we to assume that this kind of beauty cannot be explained at all?

For Edmund Burke beauty was closely associated with the emotional experiences of love, affection and tenderness, and he defines beauty as “qualities in bodies, which cause love or some passion similar to it” (Burke, 1990, p. 83). In relation to animals, he writes that,

when other animals give us a source of joy and pleasure in beholding them, (and there are many that do so) they inspire in us sentiments of tenderness and affection toward their persons; we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary (1990, p.39).

He further suggests that the experience of this kind of beauty is “like sublimity, immediate and not subject to reason” (Burke, 1990, p. 22).

There is a clear distinction here between relating to how people might regard beauty in objects, and how they might regard beauty in living beings, and also how the emotional engagement with living beings differs from that of objects. If Burke is correct in this respect, and that appreciating beauty in animals is closely associated with feelings of tenderness and affection, then one might also suppose that this can also lead to sympathy and concern for their well-being and this suggests a relationship with moral issues.

Animals play an important role in the lives of many people. As companions and even as friends, they are used in therapeutic settings such as care homes; horses are employed in many riding schools to help children with autism or physical disabilities to improve their well-being; dogs are used as assistants for those who are deaf or visually impaired, who are diabetic or prone to epileptic fits. Animals are of course, also used for food, clothing, for milk producing and for transport. Our relationship with animals is as complex as our relationships with our own species, though of course the relationship with animals – as John Berger has suggested – often exists amidst misunderstanding and incomprehension (Berger J. , 2009). Furthermore it is also more often than not, geared toward some benefit to the human. Nevertheless, for those who love animals, the bonds formed with them can be very strong, and can involve both pleasure and attachment, with many people regarding and indeed treating their pets as family members. Animals, particularly companion animals, can and do provide people with a variety of positive experiences but this can extend beyond companion animals, with many people developing attachments to the hedgehogs, foxes badgers or birds that may visit their gardens on a regular basis.

Thus, there is a variety of ways in which we can appreciate animals. On the one hand, we may appreciate our engagement with and attachments to them, or we might take a more analytical approach and admire their specific biological functions, the ability of bats to use echo-location for example. We might also appreciate certain behavioural traits in certain species, such as the gentleness of horses or the intelligence of dogs. If, on the other hand, we look at animals as creatures of beauty, and admire their elegance, grace and charm, then we see them from a different point of view, the aesthetic point of view, and this leads to a different kind of perspective (Parsons, 2007).

Certain authors, for example Kant, Schopenhauer, and Bullough, have suggested that viewing things from this particular aesthetic perspective requires that we adopt a specific attitude: the aesthetic attitude. For Kant, this attitude is one of ‘disinterestedness’ by which he meant that the object of beauty is appreciated for its own sake rather than from some intrinsic (something that Kant calls the internal perfection of a thing) or extrinsic, consideration towards the object itself such as sensuous desire, political or utilitarian concerns. Aesthetic consideration cannot take into account such characteristics. In other words, for the purpose of the aesthetic judgement, we have no interest in the existence or utility of the object, but only in its appearance.

The concept of disinterested pleasure, although attributed to Kant, could actually be found in the writings of authors that predated him such Shaftsbury, Hutcheson, Gerard, and

Burke, all of whom wrote in the early part of the eighteenth century (Crawford, 1974). Kant defines disinterestedness in terms of the absence of interest which he describes as “the delight which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object” (Meredith, 1986, p. 42). Although the term interest reflects a state of mind, that of pleasure, this contrasts with the experience of the beautiful, which although also leading to a pleasurable state of mind, is “disinterestedly based on the formal subjective purposiveness in the object” (Crawford, 1974, p. 38). Kant goes as far as to argue that “one must not be in the least prepossessed in favour of the real existence of the thing, but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge in matters of taste” (Meredith, 1986, p. 43). Furthermore he argues that, “Everyone must allow that a judgement on the beautiful which is tinged with the slightest interest, is very partial and not a pure judgement of taste” (Meredith, 1986, p.43). Any judgements that are tinged with interest are, for Kant, referring to the delight in the agreeable (and indeed the good) and not the beautiful. In relation to the agreeable Kant proposes that “...a judgement on an object by which its agreeableness is affirmed, expresses an interest in it, is evident from the fact that through sensation it provokes a desire for similar objects, consequently the delight presupposes, not the simple judgement about it, but the bearing its real existence has upon my state so far as affected by such an Object” (Meredith, 1986 p.45). Hence, he continues, “we do not merely say of the agreeable that it *pleases*, but that it *gratifies*” (Meredith, 1986 p.45). What is agreeable, Kant maintains, makes a direct appeal to the senses, and therefore arouses a desire to possess the actual agreeable object or something like it (Collinson, 1992, p. 135). Kant thus distinguishes between the feelings of pleasure in the experience of the beautiful, and the feelings of pleasure in the encounters with other things, with the main difference being the involvement of interest.

The claims made by Kant in relation to the role played by disinterestedness in aesthetic judgements have not gone unchallenged. Nietzsche, for example, has gone so far as to suggest that, “If our aestheticians never weary of siding with Kant, in maintaining that under the spell of beauty, men can view *even* statues of the nude female form ‘without interest’, we can certainly laugh a little at their expense” (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 90). If it is the case, as Nietzsche suggests, that external considerations such as desire do come into play even when regarding an inanimate statue as beautiful, then how much more problematic it must be to exclude considerations such as sympathy, concern or love from our contemplation of other living beings. In the case of art, and certainly in the case of our

appreciation of animals, disinterested pleasure may be sometimes difficult if not impossible to achieve.

Disinterested pleasure, according to Kant, arises out of the contemplation of the object for its own sake and it differs from other kinds of pleasure such as sensual pleasure or pleasure in the good. One of the problems with the concept of disinterest is that it is almost impossible to experience pleasure in the beautiful in isolation from emotional or pleasurable activity occurring whether or not we are aware of it. Furthermore, how are we to assess that our pleasure is disinterested, and therefore 'pure' in the Kantian sense?

Beauty does not exist in isolation. It arises in the presence of certain conditions, some of which may have little to do with the form of the object or being and include, consciously or unconsciously, the moral, the utility or function, the political or the contextual. The problem with the concept of disinterest is that it fails to take into account the whole range of mental activity that is involved in the experience of beauty. As Melissa McMahon succinctly argues, "Kant's notion of disinterest marks not a distance but a loss, an encounter which precisely strips the subject of its habits of thought" (McMahon, 1995). It is doubtful whether the imagination can indeed be separated from the understanding, but as Kant has suggested, it is likely that the two continue to work side by side but with one or the other at the fore depending on the situation, something that Kant referred to as, the free-play of the imagination and understanding.

However, there are cases where an attitude of disinterest might have value. Take for example the case of the art critic: it is understandable that this person would benefit in their assessments of artworks from the adoption of an attitude of disinterest. Furthermore, it might be advantageous in relation to the aesthetic appreciation of nature, to have the ability to 'stand back' and to appreciate the natural world for what it is, rather than resorting to our pleasure-seeking, recreational ideas about it (Hepburn, 2003).

Notwithstanding this, in the case of living beings such as animals, which form the main area of interest in this thesis, it is difficult to identify a way in which the inclusion of Kantian disinterestedness can play any role in our attempt to understand the forces involved in the aesthetic appreciation of animals.

Whilst distance or disinterest might be useful at times and indeed may occur in certain circumstances, there are other occasions where it might be impossible. Consider the case of the George Stubbs painting of a lion attacking a horse (Figure 39). Whilst observing the painting, it is possible that the viewer might adopt an attitude where he or she is able to

concentrate on the formal properties of the artwork, its colours, lines, perspective and so on, and divorce these from the subject matter. Such distance prevents the viewer engaging too much with the actual content of the painting which shows the terror on the face of the animal who is almost certainly facing its own painful death. This representation of the mountain lion attacking a horse is far removed from the reality of actually watching a live animal being attacked and killed. Distance and context ensure that this is the case. Herein, lies the difference between the aesthetic appreciation of live animals and the aesthetic appreciation of representations of them in artworks.



Figure 38 George Stubbs (1769) *Horse Attacked by Lion* © Tate London (2015)

It is of course, perfectly possible when admiring this painting, to concentrate solely on the formal features of the painting whilst attending less to its subject matter. However, if one were to *actually* witness an attack on a living horse, then it is doubtful whether merely attending to the formal features of the horse, the lion, or the event itself would be possible. It is far more likely that the drama of the event itself would prevent such an analysis

occurring by overwhelming the senses and the emotions and thus rendering irrelevant any aesthetic elements present.

Discussing animals from an aesthetic point of view is fraught with difficulty, and this may well account for their relative absence in philosophical discourse. One such area of difficulty has been postulated by Parsons, and includes the very problem of separating the aesthetic pleasure that might be attained from a contemplation of animals from other types of pleasure that are associated with them, such as love, affection and the pleasure that results from the satisfaction of our interests in some way, for example, in the way that pets might fill some emotional void in our lives (Parsons, 2007). The pleasure that we derive from engaging in a relationship with our pets is thus very different from the pleasure that we might derive from watching the horses at the Spanish Riding School perform. On the one hand, the horses are less familiar to us than our own pets might be; we do not after all, have a personal relationship with these horses. On the other hand, the context also differs; our enjoyment of the SRS encompasses the setting, the staging and the 'specialness' of the performances. Therefore, we are likely to view the horses as being subjects who are part of the performance.

Thus, the possibility of the 'disinterested' aesthetic pleasure that is taken to form part of our engagement with artworks is even more problematic when considering the pleasure that we might take in appreciating live animals from an aesthetic point of view, it seems almost impossible to equate our responses to living beings with our responses to inanimate objects, such as a painting or a vase. We regard them, and we respond to them quite differently. The challenge now becomes one of a reassessment of contemporary aesthetic theory to adapt to include animals rather than trying to fit a discussion of animals into an existing paradigm that has traditionally concerned itself almost exclusively with human-made or natural inanimate objects or scenes. An assessment of the aesthetic features of a vase or a painting might or might not elicit a particular response, yet an aesthetic engagement with a living being, on the other hand, will inevitably include a range of emotional and moral responses – not all of which will be disinterested, but are aesthetic nonetheless. As Parsons points out, "As in the case of art, moral considerations do cloud the issue, as well as our linguistic usage, but all the same we can, and do, succeed in appreciating other people, why would the same not be true for animals?" (Parsons, 2007, p. 6). Why indeed?

The moral considerations that cloud the issue are varied and can include the sexualisation and objectification of beautiful women, men and sometimes children. Animals too, are

objectified and this can result in their mistreatment, or simply by their not being taken into account as agents in their own lives. Feminist writers such as Carol Adams, Josephine Donovan, (Adams, 1999) and Joan Dunayer (Dunayer, 1999) have drawn attention to the fact that woman and animals share many injustices as a result of this objectification.

The concept of objectification was first coined by Kant who described objectified people as being a means to an end, (something which he thought was acceptable in the case of animals but that he believed people should never become) and as such, they are stripped of their individuality, and their humanity (Kant, 1963). To be objectified means that one's body and life exist for the pleasure or benefit of some other person, one becomes a 'thing' that serves some purpose. Objectification is also closely associated with the concept of dehumanisation. Dehumanisation, or the belief that certain individuals or groups of people are somehow less than human, can occur in a variety of social or political situations, but it is also frequently discussed in terms of the impact that for example, pornography has on women, in the equating of femaleness with animality (Haslam, 2006). When a woman is associated with animals in this way, she is sexualized and assessed or evaluated in terms of her usability to satisfy male sexual desire. If on the other hand, the woman is associated with objects, then she is assessed purely on how she looks – as if she herself were a decorative object (Haslam, 2006). An explanation of the way in which this objectification can occur has been discussed by Martha Nussbaum who identified seven features associated with it (Nussbaum, 1995).

In this section, I have introduced some of the problems associated with using a paradigm of aesthetic appreciation which has predominately focused on inanimate objects in order to explain the aesthetic appreciation of animate beings. I have identified that there is a variety of different kinds of relationships and responses that we might have to other humans and to animals but the aesthetic relationship differs in some respects to these.

There are of course, a variety of contexts in which we might appreciate humans from an aesthetic perspective. In art forms such as dance, for instance, we might appreciate the grace of the human form, its elasticity and flexibility. We might also appreciate the aesthetic features of the human form engaged in certain sports where strength and athleticism are on display, or we may be captivated by the beauty of a young child. So too, we may appreciate similar beauty in young animals, the grace and athleticism of the racehorse and the flexibility and elasticity of the dressage horse. Animal beauty can also be appreciated in the representations of their form in artworks, in everyday encounters with

them and in observing them as ‘performing subjects’ as in the case of the Spanish Riding School.

That the form of living beings is appreciated differently from the form of inanimate art suggests the possibility that different mechanisms may be in operation which guide our appreciation of them, and also the ways in which they may be objectified by individuals or even by cultures. In what follows, I identify three levels of appreciation present in our aesthetic appraisal of animals. The first relates to the idea that finding certain animals beautiful is guided by evolutionary mechanisms. The second level of appreciation is concerned with the physical properties present in certain animals which influence our aesthetic judgements about them, and closely related to this, is the third level of appreciation which rests on the idea of ‘fitness for function’.

## **Evolutionary Aesthetics**

That our aesthetic appraisal of animals as other living beings, with emotions, experiences and lives that we can relate to requires a level of emotional and moral engagement unnecessary in our appraisals of inanimate objects need hardly surprise us. The fact that there are almost certainly universal aesthetic responses to certain animals such as the cute and furry on the one hand and the scaly or slimy on the other, suggests that some of these responses may well have their origins in our evolutionary history as well as being ingrained in our cultural and social narratives, and it is to an exploration of the biological groundings in our aesthetic responses to certain animals that I now turn.

Evolutionary aesthetics is a theoretical perspective which combines two disciplines: that of evolutionary psychology and philosophical aesthetics. The basic underlying principle being that human beings have evolved to have certain aesthetic preferences. The marriage of psychological theories with aesthetics is not a new phenomenon. Rather, as Dutton points out, it is an ancient marriage whose origins can be found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Plato, Dutton suggests, “wrote of art not only from the standpoint of metaphysics, but also in terms of the psychic, especially emotional dangers that are posed to individuals and society” (Dutton, 2003, p. 693). Perhaps though, Dutton suggests, it was Aristotle who firstly and “more self-consciously tied his art theory to a general psychology” (2003, p.1). The relationship between art and beauty and the psyche is perhaps more

evident when we consider the wide range of emotional responses that are associated with encounters with artworks and beautiful objects or beings. These include feelings of pleasure or dis-pleasure, attraction or revulsion, happiness or sadness, love or loathing, and a variety of other kinds of emotions which may fall between these. However, what unites these feelings or emotions according to evolutionary theorists is that they all have adaptive relevance (Dutton, 2003).

Evolutionary theory provides two distinct lines of inquiry relevant to the present discussion. First it supplies an account for the existence of aesthetic pleasure in terms of these evolutionary adaptations, and second, it points towards specific evolutionary influences impacting on the specific aesthetic appraisal of animals.

It is also in the field of evolutionary aesthetics where we find support for the idea that our aesthetic responses to animals rests as much on our emotional engagement with them as it does on the appreciation of certain lines and colours. For example, when discussing the bird of paradise, Wilson, in his treatise on the *Biophilia Hypothesis*, suggests that,

the outer qualities,... its plumes, dance, and daily life, are functional traits open to a deeper understanding through the exact description of their constituent parts. They can be defined as holistic properties that alter our perception and emotion in surprising and pleasant ways (Wilson, 1984, p. 54).

These 'holistic properties' that Wilson mentions arise from the interaction between the aesthetic features of the animal coupled with its behaviour, which, in combination, give rise to an aesthetic response distinctive in the appreciation of another living being. The term he uses to describe this innately emotional affiliation to nature and to other living beings, including trees and plants is 'biophilia'. Wilson further proposed that many aesthetic judgements are central to biophilia which he describes as, "the innate tendency to focus on life and life like processes" (Wilson, 1984 p.1).

The aesthetic judgement itself is viewed by some as a manifestation of psychological adaptations (Voland, 2003). For example, Dutton argues that,

The range of items in experience for which there may be some kind of Pleistocene inheritance includes our emotional disposition toward other human beings, their comportment, expression and behaviour; our response to the environment, including animals and plants, the dark of night, and to natural landscapes; our interest in creating and listening to narratives with identifiable themes, including imaginative dangers and the overcoming of romantic obstacles; our enjoyment of problem-solving; our liking for communal activity; and our appreciation of displays of skill and virtuosity (Dutton D. , 2003, p. 698).

Psychological adaptations are responsible for a wide variety of human feelings, emotion, creativity, learning and behaviour and influence our aesthetic preferences not only in relation to choices of habitat or sexual partners but also in relation to the appreciation of beauty in art, in nature and in other animals.

This is more clearly identified when we consider the case of finding another human being beautiful. Human beauty has long been identified with markers of fitness. Among these markers of fitness we find the desirable qualities of grace, strength, balance, dexterity, agility and athleticism (Davies, 2014, p. 72) Interestingly, these are qualities that we also admire in non-human animals, and ones which contribute to their aesthetic appeal.

However, not all aesthetic responses to animals are positive in the sense that we are moved by them, or find them beautiful. Certain animals can arouse emotions such as fear or disgust, which may also be due to evolutionary influences, an example being the common fear of or revulsion of snakes. Snakes arouse a fear response in many people, ranging from a mild dislike to an intense phobia, and it seems that human beings may not be alone in this. Rhesus Macaques (large brown primates native to Asia) have been shown to exhibit a fear response in the presence of snakes (Wilson, 1984). Even those primates raised in laboratories who have never seen a snake will exhibit a similar response, leading Wilson to conclude that, "it is the form of the snake and perhaps even its distinctive movements that contain the key stimuli to which the monkeys are innately tuned" (Wilson, p. 93). It is not difficult to imagine that this response can increase the chances of the survival of both humans and non-human animals, since a bite from certain snakes can be deadly. The chances of the curious or fearless getting bitten and surviving to reproduce these traits in their offspring are low, and one might thus appreciate how revulsion toward certain dangerous species might be beneficial in ensuring survival.

How may an experience of beauty be understood in terms of natural selection? In other words, how can this particular experience contribute towards species 'fitness'? After all, the aesthetic encounters that human beings experience are associated with the mind, the emotions, and the imagination, elements not always associated with biological functioning, (at least, not in relation to aesthetics). As Voland points out, "beauty itself is not useful, it only signals usefulness" (Voland, 2003, p. loc.3226). However, our evolutionary adaptations, clearly affect more than the fact that we are bi-pedal, have eyes situated in the front of our heads, or that we are no longer covered in long hair. These adaptations can also influence the type and intensity of aesthetic encounters, including the experiences of and preferences that we develop for, non-human animals. The question then becomes:

where do these aesthetic preferences come from? Charles Darwin asserts that “why certain bright colours should excite pleasure cannot, I presume, be explained, any more than why certain flowers and scents are agreeable...”. Further on, he states that, “whether we can or not give any reason for the pleasure thus derived from vision and hearing, yet man and many of the lower animals are alike pleased by the same colours, graceful shading and forms, and the same sounds” (Darwin, 2008, p. 99).

Darwin, in keeping with his general philosophy of natural selection, suggests that a sense of the aesthetic may not only be present in humans but in non-human animals as well. He provides evidence for this claim by discussing the breeding patterns of certain birds, arguing that, “the nests of humming-birds, and the playing passages of bower-birds are tastefully ornamented with gaily-coloured objects; and this shows that they must receive some kind of pleasure from the sight of such things” (Darwin, 2008 p.98) Later on in the same passage he states, “With the great majority of animals, however, the taste for the beautiful is confined, as far as we can judge, to the attractions of the opposite sex” (p.98 ).

In human beings, Darwin seems unconvinced that the sense of beauty is linked exclusively to reproduction, and accepts that cultural influences may also play a part in our appreciation of the beautiful, conceding that in relation to aesthetic preferences for the human body, universal standards might not exist.

Darwin seems unable to give a full account of how and why aesthetic preferences arise in relation to objects and beings that can have no impact on reproduction. It is entirely possible, however, that the aesthetic preferences that arise out of reproductive choices can be transferred to other areas of aesthetic interest. For example, in the case of non-human animals, our aesthetic choices may well be guided by evolutionary influences determining a preference for child-like features such as wide-set eyes, and this is a point made by Konrad Lorenz. Lorenz proposed that ‘cuteness’ in animals plays a large part in the human aesthetic response to them. (Lorenz, 1950, p. 135). By cuteness, he was referring to infant-like physical traits such as small body size, with a disproportionately larger head, round soft bodies, and the presence of infant personality traits, such as playfulness, innocence, curiosity and a need to be nurtured. These infantile features, according to Lorenz, trigger a nurturing response in humans which arises from an evolutionary adaptation derived to ensure the survival of infants and the species.

Whilst this might be the case for certain animals, it fails to deal with other aesthetic responses that human beings have to animals, such as being moved by the majesty of an

elephant or the grace of a gazelle – neither of which evoke a desire to nurture. But Lorenz’s main contribution to this discussion arises out of his assertion that “in the course of evolution certain environmental stimuli which promoted reproductive success were connected to positive emotional responses” (Lorenz, 1950, p. 115). Here, Lorenz hints at the fact that the human brain has adapted to respond positively to certain sensory stimuli, although he doesn’t elaborate on what these stimuli may be. Natural beauty, the beauty of animals and certain artefacts may well be included in his thesis, and this contributes to the relationship that exists between the senses and the emotions when experiencing beauty in animals.

Whilst studies of evolutionary aesthetics undoubtedly shed light on why we might find certain objects or beings beautiful, they fail to capture the very essence of the kind of experience that beauty offers us. It is quite conceivable that some of our aesthetic preferences for certain animals may have been shaped by our evolutionary history, but this may not be the case for all of our aesthetic responses to animals. Indeed as Davies suggests, “some other aesthetic approaches to animals have no biological basis at all” (Davies, 2012, p. 78). One intriguing alternative postulated by Davies is that “We might regard animals as works of art and appreciate their aesthetic properties as we would do for artworks” (Davies, 2012, p.79). In this Davies is suggesting that we might attend to the formal properties of animals by “the self-conscious adoption of an aesthetic attitude that abstracts and distances what is viewed, both from its natural realm and from its living, organic existence, so that it can be appreciated purely as a formal, expressive or sensory arrangement” (Davies, 2012 p.79). There is a danger of course, in distancing an animal or a person from its living organic existence, in aesthetics or in life, and that is that by just attending to formal external properties you reduce the being to an object and this as we have seen can have moral consequences.

It would seem that whilst evolutionary aesthetics can shed some light on why it is that we might find certain animals aesthetically appealing, to place the cause of our aesthetic preferences firmly in terms of biological adaptations seems to me to ignore the many other personal, individual and societal influences that affect our judgements about animals. As such, it provides an incomplete account. Neither does evolutionary aesthetics suggest what kind of beauty it might be that certain animals possess. In the following section I explore one theory that offers an alternative explanation, that of the role played by the combination of certain lines and features in our aesthetic appreciation of animals.

## William Hogarth's Lines of Beauty and Grace

One of the many questions relating to beauty that has occupied the attention of philosophers is the question of whether beauty resides in the object itself, in the senses or 'eye of the beholder' or in the relationship between these two. For the artist William Hogarth who published his treatise on beauty in 1753, the object and the composition of its lines were the main focus of interest. Despite the age of this book, it still contains remarkable insights which are of relevance to the modern study of beauty although one senses that it is considered less seriously than many other texts on the subject.

Be that as it may, this text is of particular interest in the current discussion as Hogarth's search for beauty is essentially a search for the beauty of bodies in nature, both human and animal, which are determined by particular combinations of lines and shapes. Examples of these beautiful 'bodies' are provided by Hogarth from studies of artworks, with examples given of buildings and statues, including the *Antinous* which he describes as "a media balance of mass and slenderness expressing both active strength and graceful movement" (1753, p.81). He also provides examples from the natural world, the human face and also from animals, where horses feature heavily. It is here that he also recognises the role of 'fitness of function' as an element of beauty, which is reflected in particular dimensions and proportions.

Of great interest in Hogarth's analysis is his 'shell conception of form,' and two particular configurations of shapes and lines: in chapter IX he discusses composition with the wavy line or the line of beauty, and chapter X is devoted to composition with the serpentine line, the line of grace. He also identifies five fundamental principles which bestow beauty and elegance, these are: fitness, variety, uniformity, simplicity, intricacy and quantity (Davis, 2010). The central point of the book is to "teach us to see with our own eyes" the beauty present in something without relying on the views of those he refers to as "gentlemen connoisseurs"; presumably by this he means art experts or critics, and whom he suggests are biased by their own knowledge of art. The book was written not with these people in mind but instead with an intended audience of artists and the public (Davis, 2010).

What makes this text relevant to the current discussion of animals and the Spanish Riding School are the inclusion of animals in the discourse on beauty, the presence of lines and shapes in their form that might contribute to them being found to be beautiful, and also

the emphases on motion and 'fitness for function', all of which in combination contribute to our finding these particular animals beautiful.

There can be no doubt that particular configurations of geometrical shapes and lines contribute to the finding of some objects as being pleasing to the eye. For Hogarth, these lines include what he calls the line of beauty and the line of grace or elegance. In chapter VII of the *Analysis of Beauty*, Hogarth discusses the role of lines in objects. He identifies straight lines (which he argues, "vary only in length, and therefore are least ornamental") circular lines, waving lines and serpentine lines. The waving line he identifies as the line of beauty and the serpentine line, the line of grace. Examples are given throughout the text of bodies, artworks, buildings and dance where these lines can be identified. One need look no further for an illustration of Hogarth's line of beauty than the picture in Figure 39 of the Arabian Horse, where we can see the waving line of beauty present in the head and neck of the animal.

However, we might also argue that the lines of beauty and grace can be identified in many forms in which straight lines are absent, irrespective of whether or not they are considered beautiful. Conversely, are we to assume that an Art Deco ring containing sapphires and diamonds cannot be described as beautiful because it does not contain any waving lines? The presence or absence of these lines is not always sufficient in itself to make the judgement that something is beautiful, and yet the presence of such shapes and lines do seem to feature in animals and objects that we might find so.

The search to perfect the beauty of the animal by selective breeding practices, aimed at enhancing visual lines, influences the breeding practices at equine studs where there is often the desire to enhance the features of the animals by striving to exaggerate them. This is especially so in the case of breeding Arabian horses destined for the show ring. Here, two main factors are important: the shape of the head and the body, and the movement of the animal at trot. The desired head shape is illustrated in Figure 40 and is one of fine chiselled features, with a concave nose, large widely set eyes and a small muzzle. When trotting, the horse must appear to 'hover' above the ground and move in a slow, almost staccato gait with its tail carried high and like a banner, as the video footage of the Arabian horse show in the United Arab Emirates illustrates.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> (<https://www.youtube.UAE.Arabianhorseshow2014>)

These animals provide examples of selective breeding practices present in order to produce a particular configuration of lines in the animal's body which are deemed desirable and this, coupled with a particular kind of movement, defines what is regarded as beautiful about the Arabian.



**Figure 39 Arabian horse in motion**

Aside from the formal features associated with beauty, features which are also considered desirable in these animals are the existence of what are termed 'expressive qualities' or just 'expression' in their bearing and movement which reflect the traits of power, elegance and high spirits, deemed as important characteristics of the breed.

Now the question arises as to the extent to which the expressiveness of animals in relation to their movement, behaviour, or physical attributes can impact upon our finding them beautiful. In a paper predominantly geared towards wild animals, Emily Brady proposes that such expressive qualities should feature in discussions of animal beauty (Brady, 2009). She argues that, "expressive qualities are central to experiences that we have no difficulty in describing as aesthetic, where pleasure or displeasure is taken in the look, feel or meaning of something" (p.9). One of the fundamental problems with this, as Brady recognises, is the tendency both to misinterpret these qualities, or worse still, to interpret them from a purely human point of view. Examples of this might be the seemingly 'happy'

facial expression of the dolphin or the 'grumpy' look of the Persian cat, or as Brady mentions, the 'sad' face of the St Bernard dog – none of which may accurately reflect the actual mental state of the animal concerned. But the fact remains that, rightly or wrongly, we attribute certain emotional qualities to particular features in animals. As Brady suggests, "with many mammals though, aesthetic interest is connected to affinities with humans. Animals have eyes and facial expressions; they use familiar gestures, and move in ways that we recognise" (Brady 2009, p.4). As such, we recognise them as similar, and at the same time, different to us.

The expressive qualities that animals possess engage with us emotionally and contribute in some cases to our finding them beautiful. These features may be compatible with function but are not necessarily dependent upon it; they are the main element that differentiates inanimate objects from animate beings and are a significant source of the aesthetic value of some animals.

Thus far, I have suggested that the reasons why we might find certain animals beautiful rest on a variety of influences: the biological tendency to be drawn towards certain features; and the combination of particular lines and shapes of their form, function and expression. These may also be present in our appreciation of inanimate objects, such as artworks, but in the case of finding living beings beautiful it is the existence of life, of expression and of movement in animals that affords us a specific experience, one that is closely tied to a specific emotional engagement where concern is present for the continued existence of the animal and is therefore devoid of disinterest. Parsons has suggested that one reason why discussions of animals have remained on the margins of aesthetic discourse is that often it is difficult to separate the experience of beauty from other experiences in our encounters with animals. He writes, "We can often mistake positive feelings of love and sympathy directed at animals for aesthetic pleasure" (2007, p.5). For Parsons this amounts to a mistake and, yet, as I have argued, these experiences are interconnected.

Both Parsons and Brady in their discussions of the aesthetic appreciation of animals have concentrated largely on wild species of animals and this raises the question of whether our finding domestic species beautiful might differ in some way to that of exotic or wild species. Whether an animal is wild or domesticated, another possible level of aesthetic appreciation is that which is guided by the notion of 'fitness for function'.

## Fitness for function as an aesthetic concept

In section 16 of the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant suggests that there are two judgements of beauty: free beauty and beauty which is merely dependent. He proposes that free beauty, “presupposes no concept of what the object should be” and dependent beauty, “does presuppose such a concept and, with it, an answering perfection of the object” (Kant, 1986, p. 72). Kant goes on to give examples of these different types of beauty. Flowers, he argues, are free beauties of nature and they are so because,

hardly anyone but a botanist knows the true nature of a flower, and even he, while recognising in the flower the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end when using his taste to judge its beauty (1986, p.72).

The flower is appreciated in isolation from any concept of a flower and appreciated for its own beauty, not in comparison to any ideal of perfection. Other examples Kant gives of free beauty include those of,

many birds (the parrot, the hummingbird, the bird of paradise) and a number of crustacea, all of which are self-subsisting beauties which are not appurtenant to any object defined with respect to its end, but please freely and on their own account (Kant, 1986, p.72).

He also cites certain designs such as (*a la grècque*) foliage for framework or on wall-papers, and music that is not set to words. Here, says Kant, in the estimation of free-beauty (according to mere form) we have the pure judgement of taste. We have no conception of the object in this case, which would be “an encumbrance which would only restrict the freedom of the imagination, that as it were, is at play in the contemplation of the outward form” (1986, p.72). A judgement about free beauty, for example in the case of a bird, will be a judgement of the bird that it is beautiful and not a judgement based on the fact that this is a beautiful example of that type of bird. Dependent beauty on the other hand, does presuppose such a concept. Kant’s examples include, “the beauty of man (including under his heading that of a man, woman or child), the beauty of a horse, or of a building (such as a church, palace, arsenal or summer house)”, (1986, p.72) which he suggests, “presupposes a concept of the end that defines what the thing has to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection and is therefore merely appendant beauty” (1986, p.72).

The distinctions that Kant makes between the different types of beauty are puzzling. Why, for example, does he place horses in the dependent beauty category, when other examples from the natural world such as birds and flowers exist in the free beauty category? Scarre suggests that one possibility might be that Kant considered horses to be important due to

their capacity to serve humans' practical needs and "thought it wrong to diminish their serviceability by any mode of decoration (e.g. over heavy caparisons) which hindered movement" (Scarre, 1981, p. 362). However, historical plates and images of equitation illustrate that in many instances horses were ridden in very ornate, heavy saddles, which may in some cases, have hindered movement and yet were considered to enhance the beauty of the animal whilst being ridden. The same is true of many heavy and ornate carriages pulled by horses. Or, perhaps as Scarre suggests in the following paragraph, we should "look for a clue in the *Critique of Practical Reason* where Kant says that the strength and swiftness of many animals induces admiration, a feeling akin to the moral one of respect" (Scarre, 1981, p.362). But this does not explain why horses should be placed in the dependent beauty category as opposed to the free beauty category. One might admire these qualities in some humans and animals and yet not find them beautiful at all. So according to Scarre, Kant's view might be that "the limits of the legitimate decoration of horses are set by a quasi-ethical requirement of preserving their ability to display their strength and swiftness" (1981, p.362).

Whilst it is possible that Kant placed horses in the dependent category by virtue of their being useful for human purposes, it does not seem plausible that he would be concerned with any mode of decoration placed on the horse, whether it reduced their serviceability or not. It would seem that the question in relation to horses in Kant's account is the question of our familiarity with them, much as it might be in the case of other domesticated animals to whom we have frequent exposure, such as dogs and cats. This familiarity may be what prevents us from judging these animals as having free beauty.

It is also unclear in Kant's account when he places horses in the dependent beauty category, whether he was referring to *all* horses or merely the ones that he might be familiar with, such as those used for transport, war or some other human designed purpose. It must be remembered that Kant was writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and at that time the horse was used primarily as a work animal. For this reason it is entirely possible that Kant was referring specifically to these working animals, and that those which remained wild or un-domesticated may have fitted into his free beauty category. Horses, like many other animals, were viewed by Kant as objects or mere things, there for the use by people as a means to an end. Thus, the minute a horse is domesticated and trained for some purpose, it moves from the category in which it might be judged as a free beauty into one in which it is judged as having dependent beauty, and as such becomes part of a conception of what it should be and where an ideal of perfection exists. So might it be the case that the

free/dependent beauty classification in relation to the horse is based on context? If this is so, then in what category might Kant place the caged bird of paradise and the parrot? Would they remain judged as free beauties if kept as pets in a cage? With respect to works of Art, Kendall Walton has suggested that the aesthetic properties that we perceive a work to have is a direct function of the categories under which we experience it, in other words as what sort of thing we perceive it as being (Walton, 1970). Whilst this might be the case for artworks does this apply equally to our appreciation of natural objects and beings? Carlson proposes that it does, (Carlson, 1981) yet others, such as Zangwill, suggest that whilst this might be the case in some instances, there are also cases in which it does not apply. Using the example of watching a polar bear swimming under water he invites us to consider the elegant and somewhat dainty beauty of the polar bear and suggests that we, “did not find it elegant as a polar bear. It has a category free beauty. The underwater polar bear is a beautiful thing in beautiful motion” (Zangwill, 2001, p. 214).

Whilst Kant’s account has divided philosophers, there are a few clues as to what Kant was intending by this classification. Free beauty he saw as a pure judgement of taste, and the fact that he refers to ‘merely’ dependent beauty suggests that dependent beauty is a subclass of free beauty which relies on ‘dependent’ factors in its appreciation. But what factors might these be?

It may be that one of the concepts that is attached to dependent beauty (in the case of the horse at least) is the concept of function. It is possible that the beauty in horses arises from their athleticism, their power, their economy of movement and so forth. The ‘appendent beauty’ Kant describes as being the result of a concept of its perfection, may arise in the horse as a result of: a) it having the qualities that we associate with a horse; b) the qualities that enable the horse to fulfil a function – for example the beauty we might experience in a racehorse might be dependent upon the particular animal ‘looking’ like a racehorse, or what we perceive a racehorse to be; c) the beauty arising from contemplating the animal’s muscled and slight form; grace when moving at speed – all of which are necessary for the animal to race. In the case of the Lipizzaner at the SRS, the beauty might arise from his stocky, powerful form, his arched neck and his elegance in motion, all of which are what are expected in this type of horse, and which enable him to perform the complex and difficult dressage movements required of him.

The main problem with this argument is that throughout the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant repeatedly states that the perception of beauty arises from feeling and not from cognition where concepts arise. So how can these seemingly different accounts be reconciled? Some

suggest that a fresh reading of Kant’s doctrine is required and has to tackle the question of “what role does Kant take concepts of perfection to play in the judgements of dependent beauty?” (Scarre, 1981, p.351) According to Scarre, the perceived wisdom is that,

Kant held a thing to possess dependent beauty in proportion to the degree of approximation to the standards of perfection for things of its type, these standards forming species-specific criteria of beauty logically independent of standards of free beauty (1981, p.351).

So according to this argument, my judgement that a particular Arabian horse is beautiful rests on my knowing the breed standard for the Arabian horse, for example, a concave or ‘dished’ head; a small muzzle, large eyes, a long neck and so on (see Figure 39). My judgement of beauty is then made based on how closely this particular animal fits this standard. So a particular horse may be considered beautiful, indeed a whole breed may be, but does it necessarily follow that all horses are perceived as beautiful?



**Figure 40** Arabian stallion



**Figure 39a** Przewalski’s Horse

Compare the animals in Figures 39 and 39a. The Arabian horse in Figure 39 has been selectively bred over centuries, where features that are considered to enhance the beauty of the animal have been selected for and inform the breed standard. The animal in Figure 39a, the Przewalski horse, on the other hand, is an example of one of the few remaining truly wild horses, never domesticated and as such not selectively bred for any particular human deemed desirable features. The differences in appearance of these two animals are

remarkable, and few might regard the horse in Fig 39a as beautiful, or at least, not as beautiful as the Arabian. It is feasible therefore that given the selective breeding of the Arabian horse for certain functions, coupled with the selection of certain physical features that correspond to human ideals of beauty, plus our familiarity with domesticated rather than wild breeds of horses, that Kant places the horse in the dependent beauty category.

Edmund Burke in his treatise of 1757 highlights the differences in the beauty present in animals of the same species, and he argues that among animals “the greyhound is more beautiful than the mastiff; and the delicacy of a gennet, a barb, or an Arabian horse, is much more amiable than the strength and stability of some horse of war or carriage” (Burke, 1990, p. 106). However, he does not state why he believes this to be the case. Furthermore, even within a given species or breed, beauty may only arise in certain individual members of a group.

Dutton proposes that there are three ways to respond to Kant’s account. Firstly, we might dismiss Kant’s account of dependent beauty as being a mistake, a view put forward by Ruth Lorand. It is feasible, under this response, to assume that dependent beauty was not intended by Kant to be a type of beauty at all (Lorand., 1989). However, as Dutton rightly points out, the majority of artworks reside in this category, so to dismiss it would remove art from Kant’s aesthetics altogether which is not a reasonable prospect. Secondly, to reconcile the categories of free and dependent beauty as Robert Stecker does (Stecker, 1990) or thirdly, to acknowledge, as Dutton puts it, “that Kant is saddled with a contradiction” (1994, p.231). The solution for Dutton rests not in abandoning the category of dependent beauty but rather abandoning the idea of free beauty, arguing that the problem Kant faces is that “free beauties of the sort he initially posits, are not experienced as he wants to describe” (Dutton D. , 1994, p. 231). Dutton proposes that even the example that Kant uses as an ideal of free beauty, the flower which Kant claims is based on no perfection of any kind, is subject to criteria of perfection and preconceived ideas about the beauty of flowers. What he asks “of a flower that is wilted, or whose white petals show brown spots?” (1994, p.231). It would appear from this that everything that might be experienced as beautiful is subject to conceptual analysis, in Dutton’s view. His suggestion that no beauty exists without concepts would appear to render Kant’s distinction between free and dependent beauty redundant.

In this section I have suggested that one way of appreciating the beauty of the horses such as the Arabian or the Lipizzaner of the SRS is as dependent beauty, due to the fact that the animals have been selectively bred for centuries to possess characteristics which fit in with

human conceptions of beauty, but as the discussion above suggests, the possibility also exists, that their beauty resides in their ability to perform the specific function for which they were intended.

In the previous chapter, I stated that a visit to the stables at the Spanish Riding School revealed that certain comments made by other visitors led me to suppose that the horses were perceived differently when in their stables than they were in the performances, and that in their stables the animals were found to be lacking in some way. I argued that stripped of their finery and when placed in a different context, the horses became ‘just horses in a stable’, and not magical performing animals. Viewed in their stables these same horses were perceived to move from the realm of the extraordinary into the realm of the ordinary and this, for some visitors, proved disappointing. The horses themselves were the same horses, they were unchanged, but what does change in this example, is the perceiver’s experience of them. This not only raises the question as to the role that the particular situation within which we observe the animals plays in our aesthetic appreciation of them, but also the role played by their ability to fulfil some human-devised function in our aesthetic assessment of them. This raises this question: when one is attending a performance of the SRS, is it the horses themselves, or the performances of the horses with their riders, that we find beautiful? During these performances the animals display their strength, power, agility and grace, qualities that they have been selectively bred to possess. Might it be the case then that the perception of beauty in these performing horses is closely related to the function that they perform?

The possibility that beauty is related to function is not a new idea, and Socrates was probably the first philosopher to link beauty with the useful (Kovach, 1976, p. 159). Much later, in *The Analysis of Beauty*, William Hogarth suggests that the racehorse, “having all its parts of such dimensions as best fit the purposes of speed, acquires, on that account, a consistent character of one sort of beauty.” (Hogarth, 1753, p. loc 79). He goes on to suggest that if the head and neck of the war-horse were to be placed on the shoulders of the racehorse then “it would disgust and deform, instead of adding beauty; because the judgement would condemn it as unfit” (1753, loc.79).

Aside from disturbing the lines of the graceful head and neck of the thoroughbred, Hogarth appears to imply it is the powerful head and neck of the war-horse, being ill-suited to supporting speed, is what renders it unfit as a judgement of beauty. For Hogarth, the quality of being ‘fit for function’ is what contributes to a judgement of beauty. He suggests that, “fitness of the parts to the design for which every individual thing is formed, either by

art or by nature, is first to be considered, as it is of the greatest consequence to the beauty of the whole” (1753, loc.73).

If we consider the case of the Lipizzaner stallion at the Spanish Riding School, here is an animal well-suited to the function he is required to perform: he is often smaller in stature and more compact than the thoroughbred; he has very powerful hindquarters and his limbs are sturdy; his neck also may be considerably shorter than that of the thoroughbred. This is an animal which has been bred not to gallop at great speed over distance, but rather to carry a rider in a range of movements which serve to test his strength and balance. When these horses are in their stables, they resemble any other small white horse, but when they perform these complex movements, when they are seen in motion, their beauty becomes apparent.

Parsons, in a paper on the role of functional beauty in animals, attempts to reconcile the moral aspects of finding animals beautiful with their function. Parsons suggests that being ‘fit for function’ is a familiar aspect of viewing animals and therefore offers a useful concept of aesthetic value. Furthermore, he suggests that viewing animals from this perspective, “allows us to address the charge that aesthetic appreciation is superficial and hence a morally inappropriate way of relating to animals” (Parsons, 2007, p. 151).

A number of objections can be made to these claims however, since the idea of being ‘fit for function’ varies according to whether we are looking at wild animals or domesticated animals. To use Parsons’ example of the wild cheetah, it could be argued that part of the animal’s aesthetic appeal rests on its lithe body shape and its various proportions which enable the animal to move at speed in search of its prey. However, if we consider the horse that has been selectively bred to fulfil some human-devised purpose, to fit in with some human narrative or human ideal of beauty, then we find ourselves on slightly shakier moral ground.

A further problem with this theory, and one which had been addressed previously by Burke, is that although fitness for function and beauty may occur together, they are not necessarily dependent upon each other. Many beings and objects may have a function and yet not be considered beautiful though, conversely, there are some objects or beings for which no function is evident and yet we might describe them as being beautiful. Therefore, as Burke has suggested, being fit for function is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for beauty. Parson’s suggests, that viewing the beauty of animals from the

perspective of 'fitness for function' addresses the moral problem of the superficiality of aesthetic judgements? In the following section I explore this issue.

## **Separating beauty from morality**

There has been a tendency within contemporary philosophy to consider aesthetics and morality as two separate and distinct entities. This Separation Thesis according to Moore holds that,

from the fact that something-an artwork, or an artist, say- is highly moral (or immoral) nothing at all follows regarding aesthetic excellence (or lack of it). And, conversely, from the fact that something is beautiful or ugly, elegant, sublime, graceful, dainty, dumpy, and so forth, nothing at all follows regarding its moral status (Moore, 1995, p. 19).

This position, Moore suggests, would hold that the aesthetic and the moral differ by virtue of the fact that they are conceptually different and henceforth, incompatible (1995, p.19).

Whilst this position has received some support within aesthetics, Marcia Eaton believes that this separation rests on mistaken premises. Eaton believes that our responses to certain things can certainly be moral in some situations and aesthetic in others, but some may both moral and aesthetic at the same time. Taking a more holistic approach to aesthetic theory, one which is not limited to artworks, she proposes that,

our experiences, our encounters with and in the world and the decisions we make as a result, do not typically come in separate packets, with the moral, aesthetic, economic, religious, scientific, etc. serving as viewing stands distanced from one another. So we look at the world first from one end and then from another standpoint (Eaton, 1992, p. 226).

She further proposes that, "Any fully meaningful life, will be characterised by an integration of the moral and the aesthetic" (1992, p.238). This idea of a 'fully meaningful life' fits in with what forms Eaton's wider view, namely that of a "theory of art within traditions" which holds that we are, as aesthetic and moral beings, conditioned by our culture's history, practices and expectations (Moore, 1995, p. 22). These practices and expectations shape not only what we might admire and value about beauty in art and in life, but also, as a society how we might respond to that admiration, and more often than not, especially in relation to living beings, these responses have moral implications.

There is no doubt that in many societies, being considered beautiful carries with it certain advantages, both for animals and for humans. Research suggests that physically attractive people, beginning from birth, are often evaluated more positively than those who are considered to be less so; they are more likely to be viewed as more intelligent, likeable and good (Rhode, 2010). Physically attractive students are often judged more favourably by their teachers in a variety of dimensions including being perceived as more intelligent, as having more academic potential, of obtaining better grades and as having better social skills (Ritts, 1992). As a result they may receive more attention from teachers, and are therefore more likely to be academically successful. In the case of animals, those considered beautiful in animal shelters are more likely to be re-homed than are those who are considered less beautiful. In terms of wider conservation issues, animals that are deemed to be beautiful receive more public sympathy and support than do those creatures that are slimy or scaly and therefore aesthetically unappealing.

Being beautiful can therefore have far reaching positive social and economic consequences for the individuals concerned. However, this can also be a double-edged sword, as being a beautiful human can often result in being looked at or receiving unwanted sexual advances or comments that can be perceived as threatening. In other words, beautiful humans can be reduced to the sum of their physical features at the expense of perceiving them as a whole person with intrinsic value. That is to say, as suggested earlier, they can be objectified. The tendency to focus purely on the physical attributes of beautiful people also fails to take into account elements such as their intelligence, personality and other non-perceivable aspects of their being. Taken to its logical conclusion, this de-humanising can lead to physical or psychological abuse and to other forms of harmful exploitation.

In the case of animals, being beautiful can lead to exploitation also. Certain animals face capture and are forced to live as pets purely on the basis that they are considered to be 'cute'. A recent example of this is the case of the exploitation of African meerkats who are being captured in great numbers due to increased interest in them as household pets, partly thought to be due to popular television advertisements featuring puppetry representations of them (albeit with Russian accents). These highly social, extremely highly strung creatures have become the latest 'designer pet' and demand for them has soared, resulting in the capture and removal of numbers of individuals from their habitats. In the

case of animals kept in zoos, it is often the prettiest or more magnificent animals that get 'looked at' irrespective of the damaging impact that this can have on them.<sup>16</sup>

The result of this is that there are moral consequences associated with finding living beings beautiful, both in life and in art. In a book on the ethics of painting live cats, entitled *Why Paint Cats*, Silver and Busch propose that, "while the appropriation of a live animal in the name of art may offer the key to hitherto unimagined realm of aesthetic pleasure, it also entrusts the animal's manipulator with the responsibility of ensuring its welfare" (2006, p.13), and they continue, "the animal (in this case a cat) must remain unharmed before during and after the process (having paint applied to his or her coat)" and also that "the completed work does not demean or objectify it" (Silver, 2006, p. 13). What is important here is that the perceiver of this 'art' can be assured that in the process of the painting, the animal was considered and was treated fairly. Why should this matter, when what is required is an aesthetic appreciation of the artwork itself? It matters greatly when considering live animals as subjects of aesthetic contemplation, as the emotional engagement with living creatures is considerably different to the emotional engagement one might have with a painted vase or a canvas. We can only be 'free' to appreciate beauty in living creatures if our emotional engagement has not been overshadowed by ethical concerns for the creature in question.

In so far as any performing animals go, it is probable that the audience (or at least many of them) invest emotionally in the performance. One possible objection to this might be the case of the bullfight, where the animal is fought and killed (often slowly) in front of an audience. Fans of the bullfight might argue that there is beauty to be found in such performances, and that the death of the bull is a contributing factor in the experience of this beauty because of what it is symbolic of – namely, the bravery of the matador.

However, an important distinction arises here between the bullfight and the SRS, and that is that the audience go to a bullfight 'expecting' to see a bull killed, it is part of the attraction. The more sensitive members of an audience attending the performances containing animals, such as those of the SRS, on the other hand, might expect to see that the animals are in good health, and that they are treated fairly. For these people, such considerations are an integral part of the show. In either case, there is an element of self-selection in the audiences. Those who appreciate bullfighting go to bullfights and accept that an animal will be tortured and finally killed as part of the 'show'. Many people who

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<sup>16</sup> A point I discuss in detail in the chapter on ethics and animals

attend the SRS performances, on the other hand, will not expect to see animals harmed or tortured, though of course there will be some present, who simply might not care. However, for those who do care, if ethical concerns do arise about the treatment of the horses, then this may have an impact on the ability of the perceiver to appreciate any aesthetic elements present.

Of course the same can also be said of performances involving human beings. One might be concerned about a dancer who appears to perform whilst in pain or injured in some way, or one who appears to be too thin. Ethical concerns have also been raised about the presentation of children in beauty pageants, where the children are dressed up as adults, painted and made up as dolls and sexualised. Such treatment of children, apart from putting them at risk from the attention of sexual predators, is exploitative, demeaning and morally questionable. In these beauty pageants winning a prize becomes very important, and many children may suffer as a result of being put into a competitive situation that they are not mature enough to comprehend, nor over which they have any control. In certain conditions, the presentation of beautiful women, children and sometimes men, thus leads to unwanted objectification and sexualisation. Being beautiful appears to come at a price, and the desire to look at beautiful people often just leads to a concentration on the physical attributes at the expense of appreciating the person as a whole being.

In relation to performing animals, ethical concerns of course might arise as a result of witnessing cruelty, but can also arise if cruelty is suspected or even if something viewed as essential to the animal's being is missing. An example of this is to be found in the account given by Suzanne Laba Cataldi following a visit to a Russian circus, where she watched a performance of bears trained to walk on their hind legs. She writes, "As I begin to wonder what you must do to a bear to get it to do this, my smile becomes more and more strained until finally I drop the façade of enjoying the performance all together. I do not clap, I am appalled" (Laba Cataldi, 2002, p. 106). This reaction occurred in the author, not in the face of cruelty to the animal that was actually witnessed, but rather the author's imagination leading her to suspect that cruelty is involved. She writes, "I do not know if the training of these particular bears involved cruelty. I only imagined or inferred from their behaviour that it did" (2002, p.109).

What concerns the author in this case is the apparent docility of the bears, which leads her to suspect that they might have been drugged to make them more amenable, "no one is afraid of the bears" she suggests (2002, p.107). What emerges from this account is that the author has, on the basis and demeanour of these animals, achieved a psychological state

that prohibits her from viewing any beauty that might be present in the animals themselves or in the performance. Her mind, so consumed with concern for the bears, cannot see anything beyond their plight. She writes, “As the bear blunders by, disturbing sinister thoughts collect and collide in the pit of my stomach, where a kind of sick and sinking feeling comes over me” (2002, p.107). There is no disinterest here; the author identifies with the bear, she knows what the bear should be, and what, in the name of entertainment, it has been forced to become. Two main levels of concern emerge: one where the author is concerned for the animal’s well-being and the other for what she perceives to be the animal’s humiliation, which arouses feelings of great pity in her. She suggests that, “what is painful about looking at the bears, apart from the physical abuses they may have suffered, is their lack of a certain dignity” (2002, p.107).

What this example highlights is the fact that concerns such as the ones she expresses, prevent the ability to perceive beauty in the animal. The author’s mind and her imagination are not ‘free’ to engage in anything other than the attempt to analyse what is or what might be happening to these animals. This is what sets such performances presenting living beings aside from other types of performance or artworks and enhances the level to which the observer engages in what Nussbaum terms ‘sympathetic imagining’: a degree of which is present in the engagement with novels and their characters, or with films, opera and dance.

There is, however, a difference: in the latter case one identifies the work as being fictional, and in the former one knows or is aware of the reality of the situation, that the animal or person in the performance is *actually* suffering and is suffering now. Disinterest in this is not possible. Interest in the well-being, and in the preservation of an animal’s dignity, are two conditions which for many must be satisfied before one can begin to appreciate beauty. Only once the spectator is aware that ‘all is well’, in these and other respects, is his or her mind free to engage with the possibility of experiencing beauty. As Hume has suggested, the pre-requisite for being a good judge of beauty, is “a perfect serenity of mind” Hume explains that,

A perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object; if any of these circumstances be wanting, our experiment will be fallacious and we shall be unable to judge of the catholic and universal beauty (Hume, 2010 , p. loc.90).

Surely such serenity of mind is only possible when the mind is free from concerns and worries. Thus, I propose that the appreciation of beauty in the horses of the SRS forms a large part of the interest of the audiences at the performances, and that the ability to

appreciate this beauty rests on the lack of concern about ethical issues, such as the potential for the animals being exploited or abused in some way. The mind of the spectator is then sufficiently released from concern to enable him or her to experience the beauty of the horses in motion, the harmony between horse and rider and the performative aspects of the spectacle on show, and it is to these particular elements that I now turn.

## **Horses, Equitation and Aesthetics**

One animal that has featured in early aesthetic discourse on animals is the horse, and has been included in writings by Burke and Kant in relation to beauty, and also by authors of texts relating to the 'art' of equitation. In chapter 1 of this thesis, I suggested that a study of the history of equitation revealed that the beauty of the horse was important in bestowing on the (usually male) rider certain desirable characteristics, such as bravery, power and status. The qualities prized in the (usually male) horses that were considered desirable at the time, reflected the power, strength, spirit and masculinity of the animal on to its rider. Powerful arched necks, height, and a spirited nature, coupled with a barely controlled slow and high stepping gait were not only considered beautiful but also communicated the status of the rider and foreboding to the foot-soldiers on the ground.

The coupling of beauty with the desire to make a statement about the rider has continued to the present day and has influenced breeders to strive to improve the way that the horse looks and also to attend to factors such the ability to be physically capable of performing certain functions for which it is intended. The act of perceiving the horse as an animal of beauty thus depends upon the particular configuration of lines of the animal's body, its ability to perform certain tasks (function), and how its spirited nature is projected to the observer whilst doing so (expression).

The classical training of the dressage horse is geared towards the adherence to strict principles of training that ultimately result in the horse displaying the same pride, effortless elegance and beauty in motion when ridden as he or she does when at liberty. This results in a particular kind of beauty, one which was referred to by the journalist David Foster Wallace as 'kinetic beauty'. Wallace, writing in the *New York Times*, used the phrase to refer to the beauty present in watching a consummate sportsman, in this case the tennis player Roger Federer, perform (Foster Wallace, 2006). Kinetic beauty can be said to refer to

the beauty of the moving body and this offers its own specific kind of beauty. It would appear that there are certain elements present when observing the body (human or animal) in motion that lead us to assert that it is beautiful. However, not all kinds of motion are beautiful, that which is laboured, stiff, arrhythmic or forced is certainly unlikely to be appraised as beautiful when compared with movement which is effortless, free, rhythmical and unforced. To these criteria I would add that the appreciation of the human or animal in motion also includes the idea of the conservation of energy in motion, and the softness of the outline of the body whilst doing so.

If we return to the Foster Wallace's example of Roger Federer, here is a sportsman who embodies all of these elements. His actions when playing are extremely minimal; he seems often to expend less psychological and physical energy when playing than do many of his opponents. This leads to the illusion that Federer conserves energy, that his tennis is effortless. His movement is graceful and the outline of his body when moving is soft. This softness in outline is an important aesthetic feature in the appreciation of bodies in motion and one which I will return to in due course.

In keeping with the sporting theme, David Best argues that, "a specific movement is aesthetically satisfying only if in the correct context of the action as a whole it is seen as forming a unified structure which is regarded as the most economical and efficient method of achieving the required end" (Best D. , 1974, p. 205). So for Best, for an athlete to appear aesthetically pleasing the movement of his or her body must be appropriate for the task in hand. For example, if Roger Federer were to serve a ball to his opponent using a style more appropriate for badminton or table tennis, then this would detract from the overall appeal of the movement. Likewise, if the riders at the Spanish Riding School were to adopt a position on horseback similar to that adopted by National Hunt jockeys, then this too would be inappropriate and not aesthetically appealing. Thus, the aesthetic appeal of human or animal movement may well be dependent upon the situation within which the movement takes place.

One of the distinguishing features of riding horses according to the classical principles of equitation is that, in relation to the rider, movement must be kept to an absolute minimum and be almost invisible to the onlooker. Riders actually do move a great deal to keep in balance with the horse, but to the observer this is almost imperceptible in the case of experienced, well trained rider. Economy of movement in this instance is taken to the extreme and any superfluous movement on behalf of the rider detracts from the overall picture as it can impact on the balance of the horse. Another feature of equitation is that

the rider is not only responsible for keeping superfluous movement in his or her own body to a minimum, but also in the body of the horse that he or she is riding. In this instance, the overall picture should give the impression of unity and harmony of *one* being in motion, and not the picture of two separate beings moving, either together or independently, as one might see in the case of the balletic *pas de deux* for example.<sup>17</sup>

## Dance and Equitation

The philosopher David Best has made a useful distinction in the aesthetics of sport, that between purposive and aesthetic sport. In the former, aesthetic appeal is a superfluous bonus, in the latter, a necessary aspect of the activity. In gymnastics, synchronised swimming, diving, trampolining and figure skating, not only is it important to demonstrate great skill and ability but also it matters how the athlete looks whilst doing so. To this list of 'aesthetic' sports one can also include competitive dressage, where qualities such as harmony, balance and elegance also feature in the judges' marking system, in the column of 'overall appearance'. It matters that the test is harmonious and elegant, free from error and that the movements are executed in a particular order and in a particular way. Like many sporting activities though, what matters in this case is winning, albeit that attention is paid to the manner in which this is achieved.

Dressage is, and always has been, an activity in which considerable skill goes side by side with aesthetic appeal, and nowhere is this more apparent than at the Spanish Riding School. The performances offered by the school to the public differ greatly from the dressage that is seen in the competitive arena. In the first place there is no desire to 'win' anything, no individual or collective medals are awarded for a specific performance. The sole purpose of the performances is to present to the public an aesthetic spectacle, one which showcases the historical traditions of training horses in the classical style.

Classical equitation as performed by the SRS and other institutions similar to it share many characteristics with classical dance such as ballet, as both involve living bodies engaged in carefully choreographed movement to a musical accompaniment. In both cases, this movement arises as a result of many years of training which renders the body supple,

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<sup>17</sup> One of the best examples of this can be found in Carlos Acosta and Natalia Osipova's *pas de deux* in Act 2 of *Giselle* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL3o-1eSdbQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL3o-1eSdbQ))

strong and graceful. The creation of beautiful lines or outlines of the body is important in both instances. Where equitation differs from ballet is that in each horse/ rider unit a separate dance occurs simultaneously with the dance that occurs outside of this unit. As I suggested above, in the *pas de deux* element of the programme, there are in fact not one but two *pas de deux* occurring. Unlike the case of the human dancer, the rider in a performance of equitation is seemingly still, and there should be no sign of movement on his or her part. The aids given to the horse should be invisible and the rider should absorb the movement of the horse without the onlooker seeing any attempt to do so. It is the horse that is intended to be the sole focus of attention for the observer.

The situation within which performances occur both in classical ballet and in equitation, serve to set a particular scene, one which distinguishes the performance from other kinds of activity. In both of our examples here, music, costume, lighting, scenery, and other stage effects, plus the presence of an audience set these performances aside from everyday activities. In the context of the theatre, as in the frame of a painting, what occurs within the boundaries set is an activity where something is presented: a story, a parable or a scene which is surrounded by cultural, social, political, historical, moral or fictional narratives. Many dances occur on a stage which provides a boundary in which to attend to the performance and also delivers a focus of attention. The stage forms a 'setting' for the parable that is about to unfold. This is as true of ballet as it is of equitation, although as I have previously stated, in artworks such as ballet or theatre, the narrative is overt and an integral part of the performance. In equitation no overt narrative exists but one exists nonetheless. The relationship that exists is reflected in the behaviour and demeanour of the horse and rider. The horse that is respected and who is treated fairly, often behaves in a different manner to the horse that is not. The well-trained horse who respects his rider, and who has been sufficiently and sympathetically trained to do what is required of him, will appear relaxed in body and mind. He will respond immediately to the instructions given to him by his rider and will respond without fear. His expression will grow, his movement will be constant and rhythmical and his beauty will increase as a result. Conversely, the horse who is fearful of reprimand will often express anxiety, as a result of which his body will be tense, his movement irregular, his expression may be dull, or – depending on his temperament – he may become over-excited. In no other kinds of performances are the links between ethics and beauty more apparent. These are not fictional depictions but rather live occurrences of humanity's treatment and ideas about our relationship with other species.

Traditions form a central role in the training of both ballet dancers and horses. For the dancer these traditions involve upholding historical forms of training and the presentation of the particular ballet in keeping with what the composer of the music and the choreographer of the dance intended. Of course variations do exist, and some choreographers may wish to challenge the boundaries of such historical traditions, such as Matthew Bourne's presentation of *Swan Lake* in which all of the dancers are male. Nevertheless, in many cases, there is an attempt to keep the performances 'true' to their historical and cultural origins.

The stage upon which the dance is performed is important in terms of setting the scene for the historical and cultural backdrop for the dance story, and contributes to the creation of an atmosphere. When the curtain rises slowly and the stage is empty, a sense of expectation and anticipation are evoked. Lighting also sets a particular desired mood, and the set provides a context within which to experience the story. The same also holds true for the presentations of classical equitation. The stage is often at ground level rather than raised as is the case of many ballet stages; the audience surround the stage and as such obtain a different perspective depending upon the position of their seats. The 'set' usually involves a sand covered floor to provide a secure footing for the horses and invariably two pillars are situated in the centre of the arena or stage. Unlike ballet sets there are no depictions of mountains, taverns or lakes, the set in this case remaining constant throughout the performance. Despite the simplicity of the setting, a great deal is communicated to the audience. Often there is a strong sense of simplicity and of history, coupled with a sense of tradition.

I have suggested that one of the main differences between human dance and equitation is the ability to convey an overt narrative. In many romantic ballets, such as *Giselle*, the love story is conveyed by the dancers to the audience in human movement and gesture, coupled with facial expression and supported by the tempo and the loudness or softness of the accompanying music. In this example there are codes of communication that exist and are transmitted by the choreographer and the dancers to the audience. This is achieved not only by movement but by things like the proximity of the dancers to each other during a particular scene: for example, those who dance close together suggest intimacy and those who dance far apart suggest distance, both physical and psychological. Dance is thus capable of communicating a great deal of complex emotional content to an audience. Romantic dance has a specific story which is often familiar to the audience, the

choreographer and the dancers attempt to communicate this story with movement and gesture in partnership with the composer's music.

Dance is first and foremost a human endeavour, engaged in by people who understand the concept of dance and who have trained specifically to use their bodies to convey information and emotion. Might it be the case that an exploration of the aesthetics of dance can provide a theoretical framework from which to address the question of the appropriate way in which the performances of the Spanish Riding School might be evaluated and appreciated? In the following chapter I explore this question.

## Chapter Five

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# Appreciation and the Ballet of the ‘Dancing White Stallions’

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### Introduction

*Awed by the grace of these horses, newspaper editors sent their dance critics to review the performance. (New York Times Magazine, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1982, p.57)*

The distinctive performances of the Spanish Riding School raise the question as to how these performances are to be appreciated. In the previous chapter I drew attention to the fact that classical equitation has many similarities with classical ballet, therefore perhaps one way of evaluating and appreciating the performances might be similar to the way in which we appreciate performances of classical ballet. An analogy between classical ballet and the performances of the Spanish Riding School might offer a useful way to understand its performative or aesthetic aspects, identifying the similarities and differences that exist between these two disciplines. In this chapter I elaborate on these comparisons, and also discuss how the historical origins of classical equitation may shed light on a potentially appropriate way of evaluating and appreciating the performances from an aesthetic point of view.

Ballet and equitation share comparative historical and social traditions. As I have previously outlined the historical origins of equitation in detail in Chapter 2, I refer to it only briefly here, and concentrate instead on a concise account of the historical origins of ballet.

### The Origins of Classical Ballet

Ballet has been in existence for about 500 years; it originated initially in Italy, and was then subsequently adopted by the Royal Court in France under Louis XIV. The king was a keen

dancer, and founded the *Académie de Danse* in Paris in 1661. Resurgence of interest in this new dance form arose, in part, as a result of the desire of the aristocracy to present themselves to their subjects and peers in a particular way. This was attained by playing close attention to the organisation of movements of the body. Grace and a certain kind of beauty in motion were sought, wherein the body is perceived as being relaxed, in control and at ease in a particular kind of comportment. The idea was to 'float', and to appear as if no effort were being expended in motion, with dancers being expected to glide effortlessly. In essence, the person was intended to appear as if they were not 'working' at moving at all, because aristocrats could not be seen to be 'working' at anything. Interestingly, these same principles applied to the 'art' of equitation at the time; the aim was to ride the horse with imperceptible aids, to appear perfectly still and yet in control of a 500kg animal, and to encourage it to move as though by its own volition.

Louis XIV, whilst enjoying dancing and performing in his own ballets, was also a keen horseman and an admirer of beautiful horses. Furthermore, he was responsible for the employment of world famous *écuyers* to teach in his magnificent stables at the Palace of Versailles. Dance and equitation in the French court were both regarded as ways in which the aristocracy could present themselves to each other and to their subjects.

This French School and the masters of equitation that emerged from the various schools in France were to lay the foundations for the School in Vienna. As was the case with classical ballets, in classical equestrian ballets of the time there were no written texts provided, nor were there any standardized sets of rules or instructions to follow from which technique might be learned and passed on. In relation to the Spanish Riding School, limited directives were published in 1898 by H.E von Holbein, entitled, *Directives for the Training of Horses and Riders at the Imperial Spanish High-School of Equitation of Vienna*. These *Directives* were never intended to provide anything more than very general guidelines, indicating to the rider the correct way of conducting his own education and that of his horse. The emphasis was on the use of successive stages of training that culminated in the high school. However, great stress was placed in these *Directives* on the necessity of the riders to conform to the correct principles upon which the classical art of horsemanship was founded (Albrecht, 1993). Furthermore, as the former Commander of the SRS, Brigadier General Albrecht, points out, "An additional intention of the *Directives* was to prune out superficial refinements and generally simplify and elucidate notions that had become garbled over the years by unrecorded verbal transmission of experience" (Albrecht, 1993, p.

120). In this case, it was felt that too much written prescriptive information could stifle the artistic process, the *Directives* according to Colonel Podhajsky, contain the statement

Beginning with the principle that working to a fixed pattern will be detrimental to any art this book does not lay down fixed rules, but gives a line to follow which should help a rider to maintain a methodical system while training his horse (Podhajsky, 1991, p. 21).

It would appear that classical ballet possesses no such directives. As the dancer and ballet historian Jennifer Homans proposes, “And yet it is because ballet has no fixed texts, because it is an oral and physical tradition, a storytelling art passed on, like Homer’s epics, from person to person, that it is more and not less rooted in the past” (Homans, 2013, p. loc. 193). It would seem then that ballet, despite the lack of written directives like equitation, relies upon the existence of knowledgeable masters to safeguard, protect and pass on by word of mouth the traditions of the rituals, principles and training of movements which they themselves have inherited.

Historical tradition thus features strongly in the identity of both classical ballet and the Spanish Riding School, with verbal transmission being the favoured way of continuing traditions from one generation to the next. However, whereas modern choreographers of ballet might have sufficient artistic licence to alter a dance or to apply a different interpretation, this is not the case with the Spanish Riding School, where the senior riders have the responsibility of being custodians of classical equitation and its principles, and are expected to adhere strictly to these traditions. Any deviation from this heritage would be seen as unacceptable by both the public and by scholars of equitation.

Historical traditions and practices are seemingly of value when appreciating certain activities and perhaps certain objects too. In a world where constant change is the norm there is comfort to be found in the traditional and the familiar. The familiar is predictable and safe; it enables us to engage with something that we are aware many previous generations have experienced. A sense of continuity can arise; we are able to ‘know’ exactly what it is that we are going to see or hear, and can derive comfort from that knowledge. Aside from the ‘security’ that experiencing historical practices provides, in relation to artefacts Korsmeyer argues, that “age is among the salient aesthetic features of artistic artefacts” (Korsmeyer, 2008, p. 122). Whilst age is not often associated with aesthetic value, Korsmeyer suggests that there are surely times when it is. She continues, when one touches with awe something that has endured over time and stands before remnants of the past. This is a direct and immediate acquaintance with strong affective

valence just as standard accounts of aesthetic encounters require, and it delivers a particular singular, often unique grasp of the object of attention (2008, p.122).

If this is the case with objects, as Korsmeyer suggests, then there is no reason to suppose that the same might not be true of viewing historically informed performances.

However, differences have been identified between age value and historical value. Citing Riegl, Korsmeyer states that age value can be “found in objects that embody the passage of time and that show the marks of their antiquity”, whereas historical value, “attaches to objects insofar as they represent a stage of cultural activity” (2008, p.122). In these examples, it is evident that the value of many ballet performances and those performances of the SRS, resides in relation to their historical value and not necessarily to their age value. The institutions themselves may be old, and their performances may be conducted in old buildings, but the performances themselves are historically informed and steeped in cultural traditions, and it is here that their value lies.

## **The Role of movement**

Alongside these social and historical similarities, ballet and classical equitation both require their performers to engage in the presentation of certain stylised movements. Here the emphasis is not on the movement itself *per se*, but rather on the execution of often difficult movements which challenge the body and often appear to defy gravity. Examples of this are the jumps (*jettés*) found in ballet and the corresponding high school jumps presented by the SRS, both of which are intended to be presented in a seemingly effortless and graceful manner. Writing in the *New York Times* following the SRS’s visit to Madison Square Gardens in 1982, the correspondent Linda Bird Franke writes, “Snorting and tossing their platinum manes and tails, these statuesque animals seem to float above the ground, moving with the utmost balletic grace” (Bird Franke, 1982, p. 56).

Grace, harmony, elegance and the appearance of weightlessness in time to music, tie these two traditions closely to each other, both in the balletic jumps (see Figure 41), and in the equestrian high school jumps (see Figure 42). These jumps serve to present a spectacle to the audience, one which evokes the illusion of weightlessness and flight, and where the human or the horse appears to be lifted by invisible wings. It is possible that both balletic and equestrian jumps derived from the classical Greek ideals of attempting to gain access to the realm of the gods. This sentiment is echoed in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where “The function of the wing,” Socrates informs us, “is to take what is heavy and raise it up into the region

above, where the gods dwell; of all things connected with the body it has the greatest affinity with the divine” (Jowett, 2013, p. 246). Furthermore, “The wing is the corporeal element which is most akin to the divine, and which by nature tends to soar aloft and carry that which graduates downwards into the upper regions, which is the habitat of the gods” (Jowett, 2013, p. 246).



**Figure 41 Grand Jette from Giselle**



Figure 42 Equestrian Capriole Photo courtesy of the SRS

Weightlessness and the appearance of lifting off the ground had greater significance than merely being a gymnastic or technically correct manoeuvre: on the contrary, they signified the movement from the realm of the earth into the realm of the gods. Of course, the Greeks would have had no knowledge of ballet but, as had been the case with equitation, the Renaissance's accompanying resurgence of interest in and rediscovery of ancient Greek texts was to redefine the approach to many of the arts, ballet and equitation included. Beauty in dance and in equitation was at this time closely associated with contemporary cultural and social ideals and the graceful presentation of the self, where ungainly, unbalanced movements of the body were viewed as being socially unacceptable. Interestingly, both disciplines were predominantly pursuits engaged in by aristocratic men; it was only much later that the ballerina was to take centre stage in dance, when, in the late 1600s professional women dancers (*filles d'opéra*) took to the stage. By contrast, in equitation the tradition of noblemen featuring predominantly was to continue (Homans, 2013).

The early ballets presented at the court of Louis XIV were often conducted in rectangular floor spaces. Indeed, sometimes even the lavish riding schools were used as spaces in which

to present them. The audience would typically sit in balconies above the dancers so that they could better appreciate the presentation of geometric patterns of movement on display. These early dances, unlike the ballets of today, did not tell a story as such, but rather they reflected celestial events such as night following day (Homans, 2013). As Homans points out,

The idea that ballet could tell a story better than words, that it could express some essential human truth with a moral force that words could simply not convey, was an idea which came straight out of the French Enlightenment, and it was this which changed ballet from a decorative ornament to the independent narrative art form that we think of today as the story of ballet (p.67).

Conversely, presentations of equitation were to remain presentations without any overt narrative or meaning. That is not to say that they were regarded as mere presentations of empty and meaningless virtuosity, rather, they remained imbued with social and historical meaning and were considered to be of great significance. However, it was ballet's evolution into a female-dominated, narrative art where the prima ballerina took centre stage, that was ultimately to separate the two disciplines.

There was, and there remains, no such thing as a profound equestrian performance. Dodd describes a profound artwork as one which is

revelatory, not merely of things of long-standing or perennial interest, but of fundamental aspects of the human condition: things such as what makes life worthwhile, the extent of our freedom, the inevitability of death, the possibility of self-redemption and so on. Profound works of art handle such themes in ways that enable us to see things that we would not have seen otherwise, or which serve to remind us of things that we are apt to forget or underestimate (Dodd, 2014, p. 299).

Whilst these elements are largely absent from performances given by the SRS, it would be a mistake to assume that whilst lacking profundity, and, arguably, expression, coupled with their not being mimetic, the SRS performances also lack meaning. The meaning that is to be derived from them today differs significantly from the meaning possibly derived from them in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where they were seen as opportunities to demonstrate to the nobility the wealth and skills of members of the royal houses of Europe. Nevertheless, some meaning is indeed present, and this resides in the covert story of inter-species relationships, the mutual trust and harmony possible between two beings. Human characteristics of humility, patience, fairness and benevolence coupled with the desire for human 'egolessness' are subliminally, as opposed to overtly, communicated to an audience as being the ideal as regards the engagement of the trainer/rider with the horse. Gone is the presentation of the egotistical nobleman in all of his glory.

The survival of the Spanish Riding School over the course of several centuries has demanded that it evolve by embracing the contemporary moral, social and political climate, particularly in relation to the management and treatment of the horses. The success and continued existence of the school has relied on several factors: the continued adherence to the classical principles of training and riding; the ability to evolve in keeping with prevailing social attitudes whilst at the same time remaining true to its ideals and the provision of appropriate standards of care and treatment of the stallions in its care. Thus, history, morality and presentations of beauty are features that define this institution, features that are so interconnected that it is frequently impossible to distinguish where one feature begins and another ends.

A lack of profundity however, is not the only element which separates classical equitation from classical ballet. There are two further vital elements which divide these disciplines and which prevent us from asserting with any confidence that we can appreciate the SRS performances in the same way as we might appreciate classical dance. The first of these elements is the use of the movements of the body to express emotional states or events.

## Expressive Movement



Figure 43 Expression in dance

The balance between the physical and the spiritual, muscle fitness and emotional subtext, the truth behind every single movement, makes dance into an art which reflects life (Lowski, 1998, p. 59).

Whilst the movements of the dancer in ballet and the movement of the horse and rider in equitation share many formal characteristics, such as balance, strength, and elegance, one fundamental difference is the ability of the dancer to impart to an audience information about the story of the dance and also any corresponding emotions associated with it through his or her movements. One way of achieving this is by the use of gestures of the hands or head, facial expressions, the use of proximity between the dancers, which signifies either intimacy or distance, and the appropriate use of pauses or stillness. This communication of information or emotion requires that the audience understand and possibly identify with the particular gestures used. In other words, in this communication

between dancer and audience an un-written code exists: a grammar of motion which is understood by the choreographer, the dancer and the audience, and one through which essential information about the plot or narrative is conveyed. As Arnold suggests, “in dance, the expressive qualities of the dancer become inescapably part of what the dance is” (Arnold, 2000, p. 89). The ability to communicate information about the plot and the emotions associated with it are part and parcel of what it means to be a dancer. The individual has to not only possess the great skill which arises from diligent training and hours of practice, but also has to be able to dance with such confidence that his or her attention can be divided between the need to perform complex movements within a given choreography and also to ‘act’ the part of the character convincingly. Simultaneously, they have to convey the appropriate emotional states produced by this fictional event to the audience.

By contrast, for the riders and horses at the SRS, no such plot exists, therefore the need to convey a narrative via an expressive form is not a requirement. Furthermore, the practice of classical equitation requires that the rider appear perfectly still on the back of the horse, any superfluous movements of the arms or legs would be regarded as both irrelevant and unsightly. Neither does the rider use facial expressions to convey any meaning, in fact, the face of the rider must remain impassive throughout. Here, unlike during ballet performances, the presentation of the horse’s motion, involving accuracy, elegance and correctly executed movements in an atmosphere of solemnity is deemed sufficient. Yet, the horse, by virtue of his movement, the state of his body in tension or in relaxation, the flicks of his tail and the positioning of his ears, is capable of conveying to a knowledgeable audience, an expression of his state of well-being or lack thereof.

## The dancer as an agent



Figure 44 Darcey Bussell

One of the distinguishing features that is believed to separate great dancers such as Margot Fonteyne, Darcey Bussell (Figure 44), or Rudolph Nureyev from those who are merely technically proficient, is the ability to interpret the dance, and to stamp this personal interpretation on to their dance performance. The dancer is of course often required to dance within the sometimes strict guidelines imposed by the choreography, but nevertheless, the opportunity does exist for some artistic licence in interpretation. The human ballet dancer is both an agent, in that there is some room for freedom of artistic expression, and also a subject in that the dancer is able to observe the experience of the dance as a dancer. This idea of agency is further expanded upon by Arnold, who suggests that, “The concept of an agent is *prima facie* the concept of a being who is, at least some of the time, free to act in a way that he or she chooses and that is appropriate in a given context”. He further suggests that,

what the context of agency resists is that a dancer is but a body whose movements are like so many sequences of causally related happenings that go on in the world or that they are, or should be, entirely determined by the choreographer as if the dancer were some sort of puppet or programmed performer (Arnold, 2000, p. 89).

The stallions performing at the SRS, whilst they may be in most cases revered and cherished by their trainers and caretakers, do not possess such agency. Every aspect of their movement in the performance is determined by their rider who, in this case, assumes the role of guide in the choreography. The horses become to a certain extent, what Arnold terms ‘programmed performers’ with little or no say in their role in this ‘dance’. However,

one would be reluctant to describe them as mere puppets as they can, and do occasionally, breach the rules of the choreographer and instead act from instinct, rather than from training. An example of such instinctual behaviour might be the case of the horse taking fright at something in the arena or exuberantly bucking during a performance. This deviation from the prescribed choreography need not necessarily detract from the performance, in some cases it can add interest, and amusement as we are reminded that these animals are living participants, who, although impeccably trained, retain an element of agency.

Arnold further identifies two distinct types of dancer: one he refers to as 'active dancers' where agency is dominant and the dancer engages in both the creation of and the presentation of the dance. The other group he refers to as 'passive' dancers, where the dancer is "perceived to be a willing and compliant vehicle in the hands of the choreographer" (Arnold, 2000, p. 89). The passive dancer "submits herself to the control of the choreographer...and attempts as obediently and as skilfully as possible to carry out that which is dictated" (2000, p.89). Furthermore, he argues that "the role of the passive dancer, whether seen from the perspective of the dancer or the choreographer, is essentially one of a tool or an instrument to be manipulated" (2000, p.89). In this instance, "Individuality and initiative are neither wanted nor encouraged" (2000, p.89).

Contrastingly, in the case of both the passive and the active dancer, choice and free-will must play a part in their decision to dance. This is clearly not the case with animals such as those from the SRS, where the freedom to make such choices is not available to them. Furthermore, the idea that a dancer is merely a tool to be manipulated at the expense of individuality and initiative at the hands of the choreographer/ trainer finds support in the literature relating to the training of ballet dancers and also in literature relating to the treatment of some performing animals, although the issues involved differ. In a damning review of Russia's Ballet Schools, David Kinsella's documentary *A Beautiful Tragedy*, highlights a culture of competitiveness and eating disorders prevalent among many of the young dancers, some of whom who are in their early teens. Furthermore, he discusses classes where the young dancers' bodies are stretched to the extent that extreme pain and injury are commonplace, issues that are addressed in the Darren Aronofsky film *Black Swan*.

Furthermore, the Prima Ballerina Mariafrancesca Garritano was dismissed by La Scala Opera House after claiming that one in five ballerinas there suffered from an eating disorder. The British Ballerina Rachel Parker, formerly of the Birmingham Royal Ballet and a

sufferer of an undiagnosed eating disorder, explained that “Ballet is always about aesthetic lines and unfortunately you associate this kind of thinness with beauty in the ballet world” (Shoker, 2013, p. 1). A culture that pushes young dancers to strive for the perfect body and threatens to ‘drop’ them if they do not achieve it cannot be said to be providing its dancers with an opportunity for expressing their individuality or their initiative. In Nussbaum’s capability terms there would appear to be an injustice occurring in this instance with the dancer’s capabilities of bodily integrity, bodily health, senses imagination and thought and emotions being violated.

## **Aesthetic Appreciation and the Spanish Riding School Performances**

In attempting to gain an understanding of how the performances of the SRS might be appreciated from an aesthetic point of view, it might be prudent to investigate them with reference to the historical and social context within which they have existed and continue to exist today. These performances, as we have discussed, arose out of the desire of the nobility to present to their peers, the qualities of comportment, elegance and grace, characteristics deemed necessary to the identity of these men at the time. The horse was merely a means by which to present these characteristics, although the horse himself had to possess great beauty and to complement his rider in this. The training of the horse was considered a valuable skill, and those people who were able to produce well-trained horses were revered. This historical background and the traditions associated with it contribute toward making the SRS performances both distinctive and unique.

### **The Role of setting and Tradition in Aesthetic Appreciation**

How we appreciate and evaluate artworks and many other kinds of objects or events is largely determined by the setting within which we appreciate them. The term setting refers to a variety of features or elements which provides us with the opportunity to experience something in a particular way. For example, my experience of the artwork displayed in a classroom at a primary school will differ considerably from my experience of the artworks

that hang in the Louvre. Of course, they will also differ in terms of the level of skill on display as well as a variety of other important dimensions, but it is generally the setting within which we view the two kinds of work which enables us to identify them as examples of what they are.

Similarly, the specific setting within which the performances of the SRS occur, serves to afford the opportunity to appreciate and experience them in a different way than one might experience or appreciate other kinds of equestrian performances. The SRS performances are identified by certain features: the environment in which the performances take place; the specific uniform (costume) worn by the riders; the distinctive saddlery worn by the horse; the specific breed (and colour) of the horses used in the performances; the kinds of dressage movements on display; and the type of music used to accompany the movements of the horse. However, of all of these, perhaps alongside the skill on display, it is the setting within which these performances occur that separates them from other equestrian performances, and brings them more in line with ballet or theatre performances. Whilst the SRS perform in a variety of arenas and halls when on tour, it is their performances in the baroque hall that is the winter riding school in the heart of Vienna that serve to identify them. This particular setting has been the home of the SRS performances for centuries. This distinctive stage for the performances serves not only to provide an opulent setting reminiscent of the courts of Europe of a bygone age, but also serves to place the performances in a particular historical and socio-political setting.

One important feature of any artistic performance such as dance or theatre is the way in which the stage is lit. Lighting serves two main functions: first, it illuminates the stage and the auditorium, which enables the audience to see the environment and to distinguish the stage as the main focus of interest; second, it helps to create an atmosphere or mood which can, in some cases, increase the emotional impact of what is happening on stage. The use of light and shade, colours and patterns, all serve to affect the perception and mood of the spectator. The use of spotlights on particular dancers or actors also serves to direct the perception and attention of the spectator toward salient aspects of the performance. Darkness serves to create a sense of anticipation, as well as to provide pauses between the various acts, whereas, soft lighting may suggest calmness with strong lighting suggesting energy and activity. Strobe lighting creates distortion and chaos, whereas the careful use of soft consistent light may give the impression of order and continuity.

The impact that stage lighting can have on the perception of the performances is a feature that has been recognised at the Spanish Riding School. Lighting is provided by three large

chandeliers that are suspended above the arena, as well as by side lights used to illuminate the seating areas; indeed the school has recently contracted the Austrian lighting artist Rudolph Lamprecht to maximise the effect of the lighting provided by the chandeliers. Now, whilst the audience awaits the start of the performance, they sit in their seats with a soft blue light emanating throughout the theatre (Figure 45). The light then changes colour as the first horses arrive on 'set'. Each part of the performance is accompanied by subtle changes in the lighting, aimed at enhancing the activity occurring in the arena. The lighting also enables the audience to see and experience the movement of the horse and it also enhances the iridescence of the horses' coats and the glimmer of the gold on the bridles. These aspects promote the notion that these are not ordinary horses such as one might find elsewhere, but that they are special, and special in a particular way.



**Figure 45** Lighting at the SRS

The staging, modern lighting techniques and 'props' used in these performances thus convey a great deal to the audience, both about what the Spanish Riding School is, and what it once was, conveying the image of a bygone age of imperialist Europe and the opulence associated with it. Intertwined with this is the constant reminder to the audience that what they are witnessing is steeped in tradition and ritual, and it is this aspect as much as anything else which serves to set the Spanish Riding School aside from other equestrian performances. It also, as in the case of ballet and theatre productions, contributes to the aesthetic appeal of its performances.

## **Movement and music**

I have suggested that, despite being referred to as ‘The dance of the white stallions’ or the ‘ballet of the white horses,’ the performances of the SRS differ in many respects, from the activity that we usually refer to as dance. One of the main differences, as I have suggested, resides in the fact that these performances lack the expressive movement and narrative that are usually associated with classical ballet. Nonetheless, the fact that these performances contain movements that are choreographed to a musical accompaniment may suggest that they are dance-like in this respect. Unlike ballet, however, the choreography of the performances is not open to interpretation by a choreographer, audience or indeed the equine or human parties involved. The choreography consists in a series of movements showcasing the progressive training of the horse and culminating in the presentation of complex exercises, including the high school jumps. What these presentations are not intended to do is to express emotions such as love or sadness, or to illustrate a specific event of some kind.

Moreover, these movements are not choreographed in a way such that they would correspond to changes in the music that accompanies them. Rather than the movements fitting in with the changes in the music, the music is chosen in order to compliment the movements of the horse, his natural rhythm and particular gaits. Neither the specific choreography of the movements, the movements themselves, nor indeed the music that accompanies them, have altered since the school first started putting on performances for audiences in the 1800s. Here too the traditions of the school are reflected, and a sense of continuity consequently emerges as a result. It is this which contributes to the authenticity of this institution and distinguishes it from examples of a similar kind.

## **The Role of Geometric Shapes**

Music and dancing not only give great pleasure but have the honour of depending upon mathematics, for they consist in number and in measure. And to this must be added painting and perspective and the use of very elaborate machines, all of which are necessary for the ornament of theatres at ballet and at comedies. Charles Sorrel (Homans, 2013, p. 3)

In Paris during 1570, Charles IX established the *Académie de Poésie et de Musique* that brought together a group of distinguished French poets, the purpose of which was to develop a new kind of spectacle, one, “in which the rigorous rhythms of Classical Greek

verse would harmonize dance, music and language into a measured whole. Number, Proportion, and Design they felt, could elucidate the occult order of the universe, thus revealing God” (Homans, 2013, p. 5). This harmonizing of dance it was hoped would lead the dancer to break some of the ties which bound him to the earth and so he would be able to elevate himself closer to the angels. The hope was that, “The movements of the body, disciplined with poetic rhythm and meter and brought into accord with musical and mathematical principles, could tune him to celestial harmonies” (Homans, 2013, p. 5). This academy was intended to provide scholarly insights into subjects such as natural philosophy, languages, mathematics, music, painting and the military arts. It is probable that it also encompassed under the ‘military arts’, the subject of equitation.

The emergence of classical dressage and the birth of ballet during the Renaissance thus brought with them ideas that were present in ancient Greek thought, and one of these ideas encompassed the importance and uses of mathematics. Perhaps one of the most important subfields of mathematics relating to dance, music and equitation is geometry. The term ‘geometry’ refers specifically to measurements of the earth and it formed an important part of the education of the Greek scholar, along with arithmetic, astronomy and the Quadrivium, which was the study of harmony and music (Lawlor, 1992 ).

The goal of this education, Lawlor suggests, was to “enable the mind to become a channel through which the ‘earth’ (the level of manifested form) could receive the abstract, cosmic life of the heavens” (Lawlor, 1992 , p. 6). Geometry thus became, “the study of spatial order through the measure and relationships of forms” (*ibid* p.6). Geometric study and practice became a way of understanding the order of the universe and, as such, became an avenue for intellectual and spiritual insight (Ackerman, 1997).

Sacred Geometry “charts the unfolding of number in space and differs from mundane geometry in the sense that its moves, concepts and products are regarded as having symbolic value and meaning” (Lundy, 2012, p. 1). Examples of this symbolism include that the simple circle was closely associated with the idea of the heavens, and the square associated the earth. The idea of ‘squaring the circle’ can be visualised in Leonardo Da Vinci’s famous diagrammatic representation of Vitruvian man. This pen and ink drawing depicts a naked male figure in two superimposed positions with his arms and legs apart and simultaneously inscribed in a square and a circle (Figure 46).

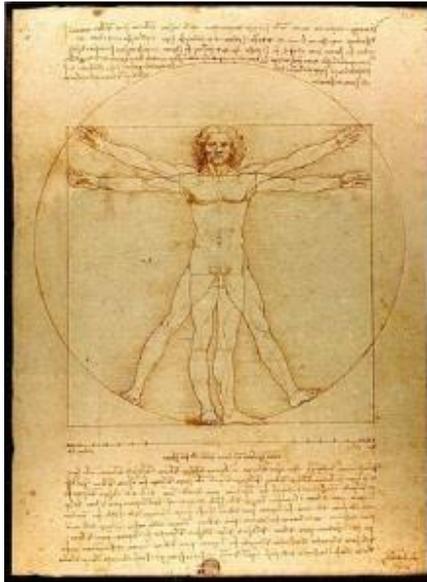


Figure 46 Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian man

When the two shapes are combined as in the Da Vinci image, it symbolises the uniting of heaven and earth or spirit and matter.

The use of geometric shapes in dance or equitation are rooted in the ancient ideals of symbolism and far from being a collection of random shapes, each shape represents an idea and contributes toward the appearance of grace, elegance and balance. Furthermore, the search for perfection in these shapes leads to the unity of mind, body and spirit.

In Chapter 1 I suggested that one of the earliest remaining texts on equitation was written by Xenophon, who was born around 430 BC. Xenophon had been a pupil of Socrates and undoubtedly would have received some schooling in classic geometry, although there is no mention of geometry, nor is there mention of geometrical shapes being used to train horses in his text on equitation. Nevertheless, the use of geometric shapes and figures in the *manège*, both historically and currently, serves two purposes. First, the use of straight and bended lines, including the work on the circle, is believed to strengthen and to balance the body of both horse and rider. Second, the practice of riding in geometric figures is also thought to be beneficial in assisting in the uniting of the body, mind and spirit of the rider. So important were these shapes considered to be that the famous 18<sup>th</sup> century text book *School of Horsemanship*, most closely associated with the training of horses and riders at the SRS, contains many illustrations of these geometric shapes and their uses. Figures 47, and 48 show the work on the circle (*volte*), and on the square.

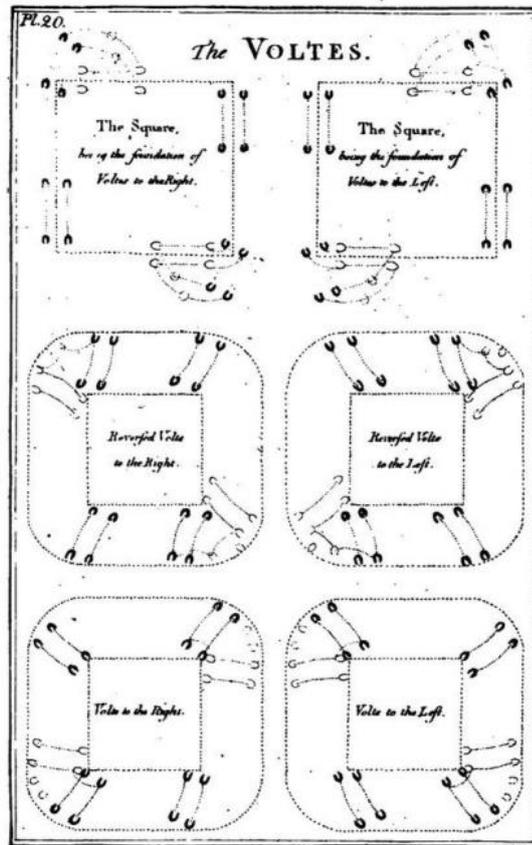


Figure 47 The Volte from *School of Horsemanship*, Francois Rubichon de la Guérinière

It was this notion that De Kunffy believes was fundamental to the origins of dressage, where ancient teachings held that, “Beauty is expressed by harmony which was born of perfect balance” (De Kunffy, 1993, p. 42). The goal of equitation was to enable the body, mind and spirit of the rider to “attain this integrated state of balance... when equally attended to they produced a harmonious partnership between horse and rider which expressed itself in beauty” (De Kunffy, 1993, p. 42). In order to attain this balance in equitation, the correct training of the mind and body of both horse and rider is necessary. One vital part of this training as I mentioned above, encompasses the use of particular shapes and figures adopted in the *manège*.

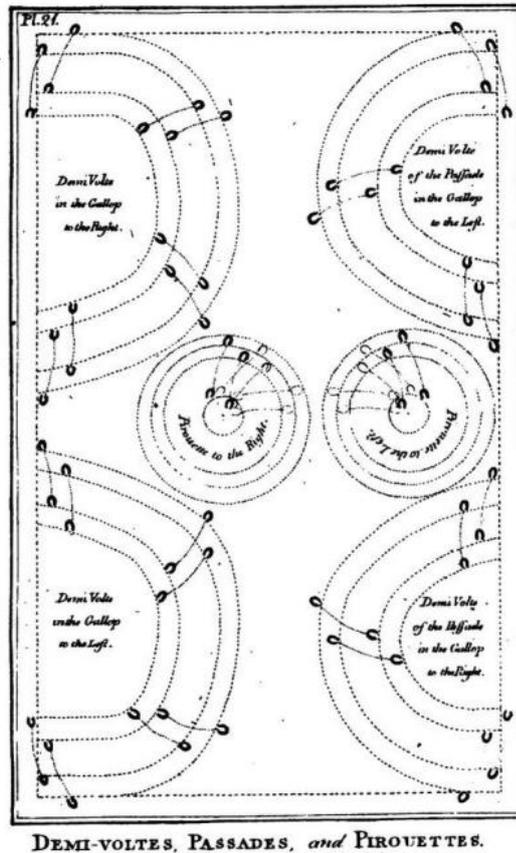


Figure 48 Figures of the manège

## The figures of the *Manège*

The *manège* itself, (see Figure 48 above) is a rectangular shaped area used for providing an enclosed area within which to train and ride horses. These enclosed areas vary in size with 20m by 40m being the norm, although some competitive arenas can be considerably larger, with arenas in historic buildings often being smaller. Whatever the size, all arenas will have two long sides and two shorter sides to form a rectangle. Within this structure, the figures of training can be applied, with the walls of the *manège* forming not only a boundary but also providing a frame within which the correct utilisation of the various required geometrical shapes can be assessed. One of the first shapes used in the training of the young horse is the circle. The circle, Ackerman informs us, is “a school for lateral balance, provides a place where the physical instruments of both horse and rider become equally strengthened and supplied from side to side” (1997, p.13). Horses, like humans, have a tendency to be right or left sided depending on which side of the cerebral hemisphere is

dominant; the work on the circle, the figure of eight and the serpentine is intended to correct this imbalance in both horse and rider.

Aside from the benefits of correcting this crookedness, when ridden correctly, the work on the circle also, “trains our neuro-systems to permit synchronised hemispheric activity” (Ackerman, 1997, p. 15). The idea is that this synchronisation of the two cerebral hemispheres results in an “expansion of consciousness and meditation in all its forms” (Mann, 1995, p. 9). Here we see a link being made between the utilitarian benefits of a geometric shape on the body of the rider and the possibility of subsequent ‘spiritual’ benefits which arise as a result of the expanding levels of consciousness caused by the synchronisation of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Historically, in the writings relating to sacred geometry, the circle was viewed as the symbol for oneness, unity and wholeness, to which, in the case of equitation, one could add balance, harmony and grace as qualities which were considered essential in the pursuit of beauty in horsemanship. The training on the circle is, therefore seen as being a way in which these qualities can be attained.

Initially, when the young horse is introduced to training, he is introduced to the circle whilst on the lunge. Lunging can be likened to the geometrical compass used to draw the perfect circle. The trainer takes the position of the centre point, and the horse moves around the circle attached to a long line which is held at the other end by the trainer’s hand. At the earliest stages in the young horse’s training, the radius he moves around can be as large as 20 metres; as the horse’s balance improves under the weight of the rider, the size of the circle can be reduced to 10 metres and then to the smallest circle ‘volte’ or six-metre circle, culminating in the fully trained-trained horse being able to execute the smallest circle possible: the pirouette.

The circle is not the only geometric shape used in the *manège* to balance and make supple the young horse; the square is also used. One of the most common uses for the square in classical equitation is to teach the correct execution of the *volte* or very small circle. In his book *School of Horsemanship*, the Renaissance riding master Francois Robichon de la Guérinière states, “In battle *voltes*, the horse is not taken on a square; for the rider would thus be unable to reach the croup of the foe’s horse” (1994, p.6) However, in relation to the dressage horse, he proposes that, “with regard to School *voltes*, they should be done on two tracks, on a square, the four corners of which are rounded by the shoulders, this being called embracing the *volte*” (de la Gueriniere, 1994, p. 66). The precise meaning of this

statement is not necessary for our current discussion, however, the idea that the square has benefits in terms of training exercises is.

If we consider the diagram from de la Guérinière's book illustrating the teaching of the *volte*, (see Figure 48) and we compare this with the image provided by Lawlor of the sacred mandala, (see Figure 49) we see figures that are very similar in appearance. For the horseman, these figures may have a purely utilitarian function, but it must also be remembered that these shapes were of great significance and they conveyed meaning in the classical philosophy of geometry. The 'sacred mandala' appears in the art and architecture of many Islamic and Christian dome structures, and the shape itself, like many geometric shapes, is of great cultural and religious significance.

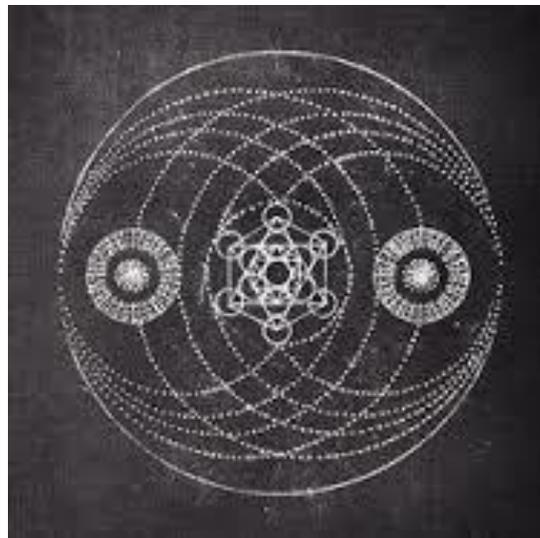


Figure 49 . Sacred Mandala

Lawlor suggests that,

Ancient geometry rests on no *a priori* axioms or assumptions. Unlike Euclidian and the more recent geometries, the starting point of ancient geometric thought is not a network of intellectual definitions or abstractions, but instead a meditation upon a metaphysical Unity, followed by an attempt to symbolise visually and to contemplate the pure, formal order which springs forth from this incomprehensible Oneness (Lawlor, 1992 , p. 16).

Ancient geometry he continues, “begins with One, while modern mathematics and geometry begin with Zero” (1992, p.16). Therefore, many of the exercises that emerged from the resurgence of interest in the classic texts on horsemanship during the Renaissance, and which were illustrated in the artworks of Leonardo da Vinci and others, arose from the ideals of sacred geometry. The search for Oneness is never more apparent

than in the training of the horse and rider, a search which it is hoped ultimately results in the 'centaur effect' wherein the horse and rider become so entwined that it is difficult to see anything other than the whole united being. The geometrical shapes used in the arena assist in this process by uniting the left and right sides of the body of both horse and rider, developing mutual balance, harmony, and strength.

Aside from the spiritual dimensions associated with it, sacred geometry was also linked to beauty, which during the renaissance in Italy, led to the notion that beauty was to be found in harmony, proportion and balance, (for the ancient Greeks non-dissonance), and ratio were the measure of beauty, and where beauty was also associated with the good. The good, the true and the beautiful were seen as a tri-partite experience of the same thing. Perhaps, as Plotinus suggested, "the good and the beautiful are the same and must be investigated by one and the same process" (Taylor, 1917, p. loc.208). Plotinus further informs us that,

Beauty for the most part consists in objects of sight; but it is also received through the ears, by the skilful composition of words, and the consonant proportion of sounds; for in every species of harmony, beauty is to be found. And if we rise from the sense into the regions of the soul, we shall there perceive studies and offices, actions and habits, sciences and virtues, invested with a much larger portion of beauty. But whether there is, above these, a still higher beauty, will appear as we advance in its investigation (Taylor, 1917, p. loc.93).

For Plotinus the experience of the beautiful is first honed by the senses; however, it is only by virtue that we can aspire to reach the ultimate beauty that resides in the soul. Access to this beauty, he suggests, is obtained by what would be referred to today as a meditative practice. Recall your thoughts inward, he advises,

and if while contemplating yourself, you do not perceive yourself beautiful, imitate the statuary; who when he desires a beautiful statue cuts away what is superfluous, smooths and polishes what is rough, and never desists until he has given it all the beauty his art is able to effect (Taylor, 1917, loc 260).

It is the process of stripping away all that is superfluous from the mind including the infection of what he calls 'sordid concern' which results in a clarity which enables the mind to perceive the beautiful via the senses.

It is perhaps in the words from these ancient Greek philosophers concerned with sacred geometry, spirituality and beauty arising from the unity of harmony, virtue and the truth, more than anywhere else that we might encounter an explanation of the beauty in classical

equitation as practised by the Spanish Riding School of Vienna. The three facets of the dressage rider, the mind, the body, and the soul de Kunffy informs us,

must always be in perfect balance. The cultivation of one at the expense of the other two components will result in disharmony and discord. However, when equally cultivated and attended to, they will produce a harmonious partnership, which expresses itself in beauty (De Kunffy, 1993, p. 42).

Plotinus' idea of searching inward in a meditative fashion also finds credence in more modern literature on classical equitation: for example, Ackerman holds that "Our entrance into the dressage sanctuary requires that we withdraw into the darkness of our inner space, a darkness that is pregnant with potential" (Ackerman, 1997, p. 63). Correct riding requires total immersion in the activity; such absorption enables the rider to let go of the 'I' or the ego and become integrated with the horse. This integration can ultimately lead to the 'centaur effect'. The mythical 'centaur' was half horse and half human and is, according to Ackerman, a "symbol of the integration of body and mind" (1997, p.63). In this integration, de Kunffy suggests, "the rider must offer his mind to guide the body of the horse, while both of their spirits are animated by the joy of this partnership" (De Kunffy, 1993, p. 42).

These animated spirits, and the beauty that they evoke, can only emerge in the presence of certain conditions. One of these conditions, as Xenophon had previously suggested, is the absence of force. Force belongs to the desire to control and to dominate, both of which are facets of the ego. Letting go of the ego and its destructive nature is part of the journey, and this was recognised by Xenophon. Xenophon, Belasik suggests was "well aware of that work with horses has metaphorical properties, as well as meditative value. His writing clearly reflects this, as opposed to being only a treatise on animal behaviour, or horse-training" (Belasik, 1994, p. 129).

It is perhaps here that the greatest difference between classical dressage and the dressage found in the competitive arenas around the world can be found. In the latter, an external system of gratification for both horse and rider exist, which features an animal training system which is concerned with training the animal to perform dressage movements in an arena where the accuracy of the movements, submission and obedience of the horse and 'correctness' are scored by an external party. This, according to Belasik, is a system of external reward.

Reward the horse for the desired response; punish him for the undesired response. Give the horse a carrot. Reward the rider for the desired response with a prize... the ego reigns

in these places. It will not recede. The rider can't further develop and must be vulnerable to manipulation from the outside. The whole process gets arrested on a certain plane (1994, p.132).

The ego's desire to receive praise or external gratification by reward can result, as I suggested in Chapter 3, in the adoption of abusive techniques designed to 'get' the horse to perform in a certain way so that the goals of the rider's ego can be achieved.

Conversely, classical equitation pursues different goals, and the path to realising these goals is not dependent upon external reward. The reward comes from the reaching of personal potential in self-development. This requires a humane approach both to oneself and to the horse, where the horse and rider are seen as similar beings, both part of nature, and where the act of being destructive to one is recognised as being destructive to the other. This doctrine of humaneness towards the self and the horse emerges according to Belasik, from a meditation on the unity of the two beings, and not "from a search for the most cost-effective way to get the horse to do what the trainer/rider wants" (1994, p.133).

It is here that I believe that the aesthetic appeal of classical horsemanship resides: not in the showy movements of the horse, nor in the expert skill of the rider, although both do contribute to the overall picture, but rather in the relationship that is produced in the combination of the two independent beings. De Kunffy argues this point succinctly when he suggests that, "In the equestrian art, beyond aesthetic beauty one finds an attractive inspirational, perhaps spiritual beauty" (1993, p.125).

This is an intriguing proposition, and one which deserves further investigation. What one might take this statement to mean is that the beauty in this case is not necessarily the beauty that is experienced by the senses but that which is experienced at some deeper level of understanding. The relationship between horse and rider is, I believe, an integral part of this spiritual beauty, and can only occur in the presence of mutual understanding, respect, trust and love.



Figure 50 Photo courtesy of the SRS

In relation to this equestrian art, the Portuguese riding master Nuno Oliveira informs us that,

the horse and rider must have reached a state where all tension and contraction are eliminated, thereby establishing a deep communion by which a spectator, ignorant or not of these subtleties in this Art, but having a deep sensitivity, can appreciate the sublime beauty, in the same way that he appreciated great moments in any artistic production of ballet, concert or theatre (Oliveira, 1988, p. 20).

This deep level of communication arises by adhering to certain principles, one of which, according to Oliveira, is that of tact and the other being great skill. However, he cautions that, “if tact is lacking, all the skills in the world are useless” (1998, p.28). Furthermore, “the person who loves horses, who understands them and feels their needs, only he can have equestrian tact” (1998, p.28).

Thus, tact coupled with a love for horses contributes to the spectacle of beauty on display, a view shared by Ackerman, who proposes that, “The process of training and riding horses is to participate in the beautiful and requires love” (Ackerman, 1997, p. 61). The concept of love itself has many meanings, and therefore it is appropriate to describe the kind of love to which both Oliveira and Ackerman are referring. Ackerman refers specifically to Plotinus, who described love as “the desire to be united with a beautiful object, and thereby produce or create beauty” (Ackerman, 1997, p. 61). She further distinguishes between two different kinds of love: *eros* and *agape*. *Eros*, she suggests, is essentially self-transcendence, the aim of which is to “establish ever greater unities, to bind together” (1997, p.61). *Agape*, on the

other hand, occurs during the higher “reaching down and embracing the lower” (1997, p.61) which enables us to love the horse even when the horse struggles to understand or is unable to do what we require. This compassion manifests itself in understanding and acceptance of what the horse is, rather than what we expect or want it to be. Agape prevents us from acting harshly and being driven by the desires needs of the ego or by the moods associated with it, the dangers of which experienced masters of equitation are aware of. Xenophon cautioned that, “The one great precept and practice in using a horse is this- never deal with him when you are in a fit of passion. A fit of passion has no foresight in it, and so we often have to rue the day when we gave way to it (Morgan M. , 1999, p. 37). In *Heiro*, Xenophon further states that to enjoy the object of our affection by force is to act more like a robber than a lover.

The presence of beauty in classical equitation relies upon the existence of a tri-partite system which includes the adherence to certain historical principles laid down during the renaissance but originating from the doctrines of ancient Greek philosophy, and the continued use of humane methods adopted during systematic gymnastic training that strives to achieve symmetry and balance in the bodies and minds of both the horse and the rider. It further includes the recognition of the existence of a ‘spiritual dimension’ present in the uniting of the two beings. This spiritual dimension has little to do with religion, in this sense it refers to the availability of access to a higher level of consciousness. McIntosh in *The Presence of the Infinite* proposes that anyone who has ever “felt the power of truth, the kindness of goodness, or the loveliness of beauty has had an experience of spirit” (McIntosh, 2015, p. Loc.130). Thus, correctly practised equitation involves the integration of moral concern for the animals involved, and ethical practices that ensure their wellbeing, with the physical training of the body and the acceptance of the possibility of spiritual growth.

Equitation is not the only discipline to have re-emerged during the Renaissance in which an adherence to the ancient Greek ideals of beauty, proportion and morality is evident. In her text on the history of classical ballet, Homans suggests that,

all dancers carry in their mind some Apollonian image or feeling of the grace, proportion and ease they strive to achieve. And as any good dancer knows, it is not enough to assume Apollonian poses or to appear as he does in art and statuary: for the positions to be truly convincing, the dancer must, somehow, become civilized. Physical problems are thus never merely mechanical, but have a moral dimension too (Homans, 2013, p. loc.232).

Likewise, the rider must become civilised in the execution of riding the correct geometric shapes of the *manège*.

Whilst the pursuit of the perfect geometric shape undoubtedly impacts upon the rider and the dancer, it must also be remembered that both the dancer and the horse and rider at the SRS are intended to take part in a spectacle for an audience, and will experience the performance in a particular way. It is to an investigation of this specific kind of experience that I now turn.

## **The Spectator**

Being an audience for anything is never a simple or singular process. It is a process that begins in advance of the actual encounter, as people gather knowledge and build expectations. In other words, audiences bring their social and personal histories with them (Baker, 2006, p. 124).

The audiences attending the performances of the Spanish Riding School today differ greatly from those originally intended to attend them. As discussed in Chapter 1, the royal riding schools that emerged in Europe during the Renaissance were intended to demonstrate the wealth and skill of the monarch who had commissioned and built them, as well as the beauty of the horses of the royal stables and the skill and mastery of the *écuyers* or riding masters employed to train the horses and to teach riding to the monarch in question. The early audiences would have comprised members of the nobility invited to attend as guests of the court. Thus, the social and personal histories brought to these early displays of equitation differed vastly from those brought by today's audiences, which comprise mostly members of the paying public. Nevertheless, the expectations of what the audience is to see or hear may have changed very little. In both cases, performances of excellence in the art of equitation, coupled with the sight of beautiful horses in opulent surroundings, was and still is what is anticipated by the spectator.

The winter riding school in Vienna, although also used for carousels and musical performances, was never intended to hold large numbers of spectators; seating is in fact quite modest, and the audience, like those at the early ballet performances, are seated above the arena so that they look down upon the horses and riders. This particular perspective was most likely intended to facilitate the audience witnessing the accuracy of the riding of the various geometric shapes employed in the training of the horses, as well as enabling the audience to assess the purity, rhythm and 'straightness' of the gaits of the

horse in time with a musical accompaniment. These important aspects of equitation, and indeed those found in the early ballets, were seen as essential for enhancing character, and “to perfect man, both in mind and in body” (Homans, 2013, p. 5). Perhaps in witnessing such displays one became inspired by the possibilities of such perfection in oneself. It is unlikely that the same motivation inspires audiences of today; nevertheless, the aspects associated with the continuance of a tradition that seeks perfection in both human and horse and one which strives to treat the horse with respect and dignity may serve as an inspiration for some audiences attending the SRS.

What is also significant in the seating of the audiences at these early royal riding schools, like those of modern ballet theatres, is that the audience is kept at quite a physical distance from the performers. In addition there is a clear demarcation line between the arena and the audience’s seats. It may be, in the case of equestrian performances, that this was considered necessary to prevent accidents from happening and spectators being hurt by a kick from a highly strung-horse or by one engaged in displaying the high school jumps. Nevertheless, this separation is as symbolic as it is necessary: in early ballets, as high platform stages had not yet come into being, dancers mingled with their audiences. This was never to occur in equestrian performances: distance reinforced the mystery and elevated status of the nobility. Furthermore, the horses at the SRS were, until fairly recently, kept far away from members of the public, who to this day are still not permitted any physical contact with them. Whilst this may be interpreted as safeguarding the horses from attempts to poison them or to cause them physical or mental harm, historically-speaking it is likely to have been a strategy to highlight the monetary and symbolic ‘value’ of the royal horses. This has the effect of creating what today might be termed as ‘celebrity status’, creating the illusion that these particular horses are elevated above, or at least are different in some way from, other horses, and are therefore special. This inevitably creates an air of mystery which serves to arouse both curiosity and interest, and may be one reason why the recent opening of the stables to the public has become such a popular tourist attraction.

The creation of this interest has not always been of benefit to the horses themselves, however. Apart from the previously discussed intrusion that such stable tours bring, such interest in the horses historically resulted in the need to secretly evacuate them to Upper Austria during World War II to prevent Hitler from having them killed. Today, as is the case for many other institutions, the school is on alert for the possibility of attacks from a variety of potential terrorist organisations.

The spectators at the SRS are therefore not encouraged to participate in the performances, nor are they permitted to have any contact with the horses either during the performance, or at any other time. The audience's behaviour, however, is greatly influenced by the presence of the horses in the performances, and this distinguishes them from other kinds of theatre or concert goer. At the SRS, even the innocent act of moving suddenly, coughing or sneezing loudly, even applauding, needs to be carefully considered whenever possible so that the horses performing at the time are not disturbed or alarmed. The taking of photographs is not permitted although it does in fact occur, and the flashes produced by a variety of devices can frighten the horses, as can children crying, people moving suddenly or objects being dropped. The audience are frequently aware of the possibility of their movements or noise affecting the behaviour of the horses; for this reason, applause is often guarded, indeed and may not occur at all if one of the horses seems to be frightened or anxious. In some cases, the audience appear to need permission or assurance from the commentator that applause is in fact permitted.

Thus, performances featuring animals often elicit very different behaviour from audiences than performances that do not feature animals. Although strict rules of conduct do of course apply to most theatre performances of dance music or plays, it is simply the case that the consequences for breaches in SRS audience etiquette can result in injury to the horse or to the rider. The rules that exist are not always made specific, but there appears to be a 'group' influence present which serves to assist in controlling the behaviour of some members of the audience who feel that they can ignore or disregard the rules. One such example is the rule relating to the taking of photographs. The Spanish Riding School are, and always have been, extremely strict about the taking of photographs. Usually, cameras and video equipment are not permitted into the venue during the performances and attendants roam around to ensure that these rules are not being flouted. Inevitably, people attempt to take photographs with their phones and, if caught, are made to leave such is the perceived seriousness of the transgression. It is often other members of the audience, recognising that photography is not permitted because flashes from cameras can cause a fear response in the horses who, alert the patrolling attendants and inform them of who is taking the illicit photographs.

The behaviour of some audience members is influenced by the presence of the horses, but so too may be their experience. The animals, by virtue of their beauty and their possible vulnerability, can provide a quite distinctive experience that the presence of human performers alone cannot provide. The combination of horses working closely with their

human handlers or riders provides the audience with an almost unique insight into the relationship between human and animals. This leads de Kunffy to assert that “indeed, horsemanship has spiritually, or if you prefer, emotionally or mentally redeeming values. When it is practiced right, horsemanship makes for a beautiful display” (De Kunffy, 1993, p. 123). Indeed it does, and it is this beautiful display that enchants many of the people who have attended the performances of the Spanish Riding School over the last 450 years.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have investigated the similarities and differences that exist between classical ballet and the performances of the SRS. The historical traditions underpinning the ideals of both performances are very similar both re-emerged during the Renaissance and as such both were heavily influenced by the writings and philosophies of ancient Greece. Both share in the presentation of ‘bodies’ in choreographed movement to music, and feature the use of geometric shapes in performing and training. Nevertheless, there is one fundamental difference that separates the two disciplines which is the fact that in classical ballet the dancers dance, and they have an understanding of the purposes of their activity and of the specific rules governing it. By contrast, the horses at the SRS, despite the romantic narrative that often surrounds them, cannot be aware of any of these things. They have no awareness of the human culture associated with dance and its stories or myths, and they have no real autonomy or freedom of expression in relation to what they are required to perform. Yet, with correct and systematic training they are capable of working with their trainers in what might legitimately be termed as a ‘dance-like’ activity, and it is for this reason that these performances are so often referred to as an equestrian ballet or a dance of the white horses.

However, can we be certain that those who describe these performances in such specific terms are completely mistaken? Some definitions of dance might be capable of incorporating dressage; for example, Hanna’s definition of dance as being that which “has the appearance of what is generally considered dance, even though, for the participants concerned, it is not dance, because they have no such concept” (Hanna, 1979, p. 18), would certainly appear to do so. Also, Jones (1999) believes that the spectator may well experience or see something as being dance that is not actually intended by the performer to be seen as dance at all. Using the example of dancing rabbits, she suggests that this may arise from,

the application of the rules implicit in behaviour known as dance, within what Wittgenstein describes as one 'form of life' (human) to another 'form of life' (rabbits) who, do not apply or even recognise these rules. The performer (the rabbit) is not guided by the rules of dance; at best, he merely accords with them. However, there is a sense in which the person watching the rabbit is *guided* by the rules (Jones, 1999, p. 95).

If we substitute the horse for Jones' example of the rabbit, we see that the performances of the SRS may well be legitimately perceived as dance by the audience, who, applying the known rules of dance, may reasonably conclude that this activity is indeed a dance even though it contains actions that occur outside of the realm of normal human dance activities. Does this mean that we can state with any certainty that the horses are actually dancing or are we just engaging in mistaken anthropomorphism to suggest that this might be the case? Jones suggests that even if we are, including the activities of rabbits (or in this case, horses), into a dialogue about dance can assist in our understanding of the concept. She argues that,

It can be seen that, rather than hindering our understanding of the concept *dance*, anthropomorphism, metaphor and analogy can provide valuable ways of achieving understanding of what might be meant by this term "dance"- into its variety, so to speak. So, when asked the question 'do rabbits dance?', we could answer 'yes' because sometimes rabbits may be *seen* (by spectators knowledgeable about dance) to be performing actions we intentionally *choose* to call dance (Jones, 1999, p. 98).

Is the spectator correct in describing the actions of the rabbits as dance? This will depend of course on what the spectator means by the term. If the spectator is describing the movements of the rabbits as resembling dance or are using the term in the descriptive sense, then we can argue that this might be a legitimate use of the term. If on the other hand, they are using the term to define these movements in the evaluative sense in that they are making interpretive judgements about their merits, in the same way that one might when discussing Carlos Acosta's performance in *Spartacus* for example, then this is an incorrect use of the term. The movements of the rabbits cannot be evaluated in the same way. Dance, ultimately, is a human devised concept to explain human-based behaviour for which animals can have no understanding. The rabbits are engaging in movements which resembles dance in some cases but the rabbits (or the horses) are not intending to dance, nor following the rules that enable an evaluation of dance-works to occur. The best that we can say about the rabbits or the stallions at the SRS is that they are engaging in behaviour that is dance-like.

Perhaps though, the most significant feature that distinguishes the dance-like movements of the rabbits from the dance-like movements of Vienna's white horses is the presence in the latter of human involvement and intention, evident in the artistry to be found in the training and the choreographed riding of the horses to music in order to create an informative and aesthetic spectacle. The significance of this artistry is summed up by de Kunffy,

And so it transpires that if the 'beautiful artes' (*belle arti*) can be measured by their sophistication in the number of dimensions their experience contains, the riding of horses may be the greatest art of them all. For it contains dimensions of sophisticated experiences surpassing the nearest of kin, dancing and gymnastics (De Kunffy, 1993, p. 126).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to address the question of how the performances of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna might be evaluated and appreciated. However, I am under no illusion that my account of this topic has been exhaustive. Aside from this primary investigation my aim has been to instigate a discussion, one which raises the possibility of future investigation into an institution that has thus far been neglected by academia. The fact that this distinctive institution presents performances that are historically informed, carrying with them the weight and influence of 450 years of traditions which in turn can be traced back to ancient Greek ideals of beauty in the ridden horse and the men who rode them, is itself worthy of study. But perhaps more so, is the idea that in the living horse the presentation of beauty is closely related to the humane treatment of the animal, a fact which has great relevance to contemporary ideas within aesthetics about morality being relevant in some instances of aesthetic appreciation.

I have suggested that the factors which influence assessments of the moral treatment of performing animals, such as the horse, include the knowledge not only that the animal is able to live a life in which his capabilities are met up to threshold levels, but also that he lives a life in which his dignity is maintained. Using Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach in relation to animals, as a quality of life assessment tool, I have argued that this indeed appears to be the case at the Spanish Riding School. However, one issue that is not addressed by Nussbaum, and one which I believe impacts further upon the dignity of animals, is the right to privacy. In many cases animals that are under the constant, and often unwanted gaze of human spectators are denied this right; this is an area of concern, not only during the public tours of the stables at the SRS, but also at many zoos and circuses, and indeed, anywhere where animals are placed on display. I have proposed that rather than being a harmless pastime, looking at animals in certain situations serves to objectify them and reinforces existing ideas relating to their status as 'objects' which in turn leads to their oppression and marginalisation and that this is not morally acceptable, any more than it would be morally acceptable for the public to view human dancers backstage putting on their costumes or listening to their private conversations. Notwithstanding this, on balance one might also argue that viewing these animals in all of these aspects of their lives does in fact ensure that the horses continue to be treated justly and therefore safeguards their welfare.

The fact that audiences are aware that these horses at the SRS are treated justly and trained humanely enables them to experience the performances without undue concern for the well-being of the animals. Furthermore, it means that the animals themselves are presented honestly, in such a way that they are seen as horses and not as some parody of a robotic or diminished animal. The horses do occasionally buck or shy at something, they are not always perfectly behaved and they do very occasionally make mistakes. But far from detracting from the performance these occasions add to their charm and reflect the fact that the horses are sentient living creatures, ones who are not regarded and treated as machines, and who are furthermore, not fearful of the consequences of their misdemeanours.

Such expressions of spirit can only occur in an animal that experiences a level of security, and well-being, and it is this that contributes to the experience of beauty. The diminished or fearful animal cannot express himself freely, he cannot move with ease, grace and elegance. He cannot present himself by arching his neck and stepping highly, elements that have long been associated with beauty in the ridden horse. Resentment and fear manifest themselves in the behaviour, body language and facial expressions of the horse. The expressions of fear, misery and anger are almost universal amongst mammals with whom we share many similarities. These are clearly identifiable by the spectator who, depending upon their levels of sensitivity may consciously acknowledge and respond to them, or simply ignore them. Nevertheless, they will undoubtedly have an impact upon the experience of spectating.

Conversely, the absence of concerns about the animals' training enables the spectator to engage fully with the spectacle on offer. This engagement includes the aesthetic appreciation of the animals themselves, the horse/rider combination, and the multitude of other aesthetic features present in these performances, including the presentation of stylised movement to music.

I have proposed that one way in which these performances might be appreciated is as we might appreciate classical ballet, with which the SRS performances have many similarities. However, there are crucial dissimilarities: the presence of the animals themselves, the absence of narrative accompanying the performances; the fact that the horses do not possess the same agency as dancers, that they are not able to express themselves in the same way as dancers do; and the fact that they are not aware of the concept of dance itself, would all appear to preclude these performances as being discussed as dance in anything other than an evaluative sense. Yet, as I have suggested, while not conflating SRS

performances and ballet, it is nevertheless possible to widen the definition of dance to include them.

Perhaps a more helpful way of addressing the issue of appreciation and evaluation in this instance is to concede that these performances are distinctive dance-like performances, in that they contain an amalgam of features which in combination give rise to a different kind of performative experience for the spectator.

## **The Future of the Spanish Riding School**

That the SRS has survived for 450 years is testament to the value that is placed on it as a cultural and historical institution. The continued survival of this school depends upon its ability to uphold and present the ideals of classical equitation in relation to the care, management and training of the horses and the riders in its tutelage, and the continued presentation of these principles in its performances. Furthermore, its duties also lie in the continued breeding of the Lipizzaner horse to ensure the survival of the breed. These two important aspects of the institution have recently been recognised by UNESCO, which in 2015 awarded the Spanish Riding School and its stud at Piber world heritage status under the category of 'intangible cultural heritage of humanity' which deals with arts and traditions of the world.

The continued survival of the SRS thus depends upon its ability to continue to uphold the high standards of classical equitation and the welfare of the animals in its care whilst remaining financially secure. Economics and animal and human welfare are often uncomfortable bedfellows and are only possible with continued public vigilance and support. At the moment, the continued existence of the SRS appears secure, yet as we gain more understanding about the needs of animals and what they may require to flourish in their lives, we might question the moral acceptability of the use of any animal to entertain or inform the public irrespective of their species, only time will tell about how this issue is to be resolved.

Despite the schools commitment to the welfare of its animals, there have been a number of unsubstantiated claims made in recent years that appear to suggest that the SRS is moving away from classical techniques of training in favour of more modern techniques frequently seen in the competitive dressage world. Such claims have appeared on social media and in the equine press but have been vehemently denied by the current director of the school. It is difficult to assess the factual basis of these claims, but should they prove to

be accurate then this will pose a serious threat to the continuity of the traditions at the SRS and their continued UNESCO status as this suggests a move away from the ideals of classical equitation which the school is obligated to uphold.

## **Implications for future research**

Throughout this thesis I have adopted a multi-disciplinary approach to the investigation of the SRS, and yet I am aware that I have barely scratched the surface in relation to the potential for future investigation from a variety of different theoretical perspectives. For the aesthetician there is room for the development of a long overdue, new theory within aesthetics which includes animals as the main subjects of its focus. Coupled with this there is a need for further investigation into the moral acceptability of using not only exotic species, but also domesticated species to entertain or to educate the paying public.

Another aspect of interest to the ethicist might be the issue of techniques of training employed in training the horse. That the SRS has adopted techniques of training that span centuries does not necessarily mean that these methods are without reproach. Modern advocates of horse welfare such as Alexander Nevzorov would argue that even the act of riding horses causes them harm and discomfort. Furthermore, he suggests that the use of bits in the horse's mouth, something that has been long adopted as a means of control, is inhumane and unnecessary. Placing a bit in the horse's mouth is however just one of the ways in which riders have, over hundreds of years, attempted to control the horse. Other methods of physical restraint such as pulleys and straps, though never used at the SRS, are commonly employed and their moral acceptability is deserving of further investigation as indeed, are the many psychological techniques employed as a means of control and restraint.

A further theme that I have identified, but due to time and word-limit constraints have been unable to explore in more detail, is the narrative that exists in relation to gender, not only in relation to the SRS, but also in the history of equitation in general. Women feature very little in the discourse surrounding equitation throughout the ages, yet there is no doubt that women were, and are as capable of riding horses to a high standard as men. Over the last few decades, women have dominated competitive dressage arenas and are

responsible for winning the majority of Olympic gold medals in the discipline. Competitive dressage is in fact, one discipline in which women and men compete equally. Yet in the field of classical equitation, in much of Europe especially, men remain predominant figures. In classical ballet, with which I have drawn many parallels, women took centre stage from men as early as the seventeenth century, when the prima ballerina came to prominence, but no corresponding shift from male to female dominance has occurred in classical equitation. Yet, this may be about to change; the SRS which for four hundred and fifty years has been dominated by male riders, accepted its first two female students in 2008 albeit amid a tidal wave of comment from purists who proposed that the SRS had sold its soul to the devil of political correctness.

The inclusion of women students at the SRS raises a number of issues of philosophical, political and sociological interest. First, one might question what the presence of women contributes to the performances themselves. One response to this is that the proponents of female riders would argue that the riders' sex make no difference to the levels of skill required (as is the case in competitive dressage), therefore banning women from riding at the SRS is indefensible. Second, there is the issue that if, as I have argued, the SRS is partly defined, appreciated and evaluated in terms of its adherence to historical traditions, something which led to its UNESCO award, then accepting women riders is clearly a move away from such traditions in an institution which was set up to train men. The historian might argue of course that there exist numerous paintings which clearly show Maria Theresa riding in the Winter Riding Hall during some of the court equestrian balls therefore an historical precedent has been set.

Another point of interest for the scholar concerned with feminist issues is that although the SRS has accepted a few women into its fold, these women are required to wear the same uniform worn by the male riders which makes them visually indistinguishable from the men, and therefore, invisible. The underlying narrative appears to be 'you may join us but you have to look like us'. One reporter from the Independent in 2008 went so far as to suggest that the first two female rider's uniforms made them look "decidedly butch", but maybe that was the idea? On the one hand, one might argue that this presents men and women as equals. On the other hand one might argue that this fails to recognise the female riders' femininity.

The historian too may have something to contribute in relation to the attire of the SRS'S female students. One might argue that evidence of Maria Theresa riding at the School historically justifies the acceptance of female students today, yet clearly, Maria Theresa

would not have been dressed in the male uniform, in fact the portraits suggest that she was dressed in ornate gowns and, like many of the noblewomen at court, would have been riding side-saddle for the majority of the time in order to preserve modesty (see Figure 51).



**Figure 51 Maria Theresa on horseback**

Perhaps then, the acceptance of women into the SRS should have included reference to these historical and social conventions and even if they are not required to ride side saddle, the ladies might be dressed in a way that distinguishes them from men and actually celebrates them as women with their own historical conventions within the field of equitation. Furthermore, it might also enable the inclusion in the performance of a pas de deux which involves one male and one female rider which feature in some other performances of classical equitation, and of course in many balletic performances.

It is, however, within the relatively new academic discipline of human animal studies that further investigation of equitation, and the SRS might make its greatest contribution. This institution with its horse-centred approach and its emphasis on mutual co-operation between horse and rider reveals a lot about the possibility of treating horses as participants

in the activity within which they partake. This opens up the possibility for a discourse that recognises animals as agents in their own lives despite being engaged in human-driven activities.

Another point of interest is the idea of a mutually beneficial engagement that occurs in our engagement with animals such as the horse, and the qualities that can be developed in humans as a result of this engagement. Many authors writing about equitation emphasise the possibility of a more Zen-like approach to life which includes a loss of ego-driven behaviours and the traits associated with it. This more 'spiritual' approach to our engagement with horses (and indeed with other species of animal) whilst possible, may remain outside the experience of many, yet the possibility of it is intriguing and like many aspects of our relationship with other creatures, the topic is deserving of further exploration and investigation.

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