

Master Medical Anthropology and Sociology
University of Amsterdam

Constructing more-than-human therapeutic landscapes:
A multispecies ethnography of the relationship between
humans and animals at a care farm

Farahnash Soekhlal

11184272

September 26th, 2022

wordcount 19791

supervisor: dr. Else Vogel

co-reader: dr. Danny de Vries

Master Medical Anthropology and Sociology
University of Amsterdam

Constructing more-than-human therapeutic landscapes:
A multispecies ethnography of the relationship between
humans and animals at a care farm

Farahnash Soekhlal

Declaration:

“I have read and understood the UvA-rules regarding fraud and plagiarism [<http://student.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/studentensites/uva-studentensite/nl/a-z/regelingen-en-reglementen/fraude-enplagiaatregeling-2010.pdf?1283201371000>]. I declare that this written piece is entirely my own work, that I have cited all my used sources carefully and correctly, and that I have quoted according to these rules. I build these statements on some of my own earlier non-published work, such as older term papers from previous UvA courses.”

“How it is that animals understand things I do not know, but it is certain that they do understand. Perhaps there is a language which is not made of words and everything in the world understands it.”

- Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess*, 1905

“We need another and a wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals. Remote from universal nature and living by complicated artifice, man in civilization surveys the creature through the glass of his knowledge and sees thereby a feather magnified and the whole image in distortion. We patronise them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate, for having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein do we err. For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours, they move finished and complete, gifted with the extension of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings: they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.”

—Henry Beston, *The Outermost House: A Year of Life On The Great Beach of Cape Cod*, 1928

Preface

This thesis was written as part of my graduation from the master in Medical Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. Motivated by my own curiosity towards sharing a space with different species, co-constructing more-than-human societies, and animals' potential therapeutic abilities, I carried out this research with enjoyment and appreciation. The research for this thesis was executed at a therapeutic care farm in the Netherlands, where I conducted my fieldwork between March 2022 and June 2022. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude towards the staff, animals and clients at the care farm for allowing me into their space and sharing their knowledge and personal experiences with me. More specifically, I would like to thank them for answering all my questions, teaching me the basics of farmlife and showing me different perspectives on creating a healing environment. For the thesis subject, I was inspired by a lecture given by Else Vogel, who simultaneously functioned as my supervisor. I would like to thank Else for her unwavering support, feedback and guidance. Especially when I could not see the forest for the trees, she was there to make sense of my data. Finally, I would like to thank Amna, Amra, Marvin and Steven for a helping hand and most of all for their moral support in writing the thesis.

I wish you an insightful reading journey,

Farahnash Soekhlal

Rotterdam, September 26th, 2022

Abstract

This research aimed to seek a deeper understanding of the relationship between animals and humans at a therapeutic care farm. A multispecies ethnography approach was used to understand care, collaboration and well-being between different actors such as professionals, young clients and animals. This qualitative study concerns young clients, aged ten to eighteen, who either live at the farm or regularly visit, as well as professionals working at the care farm. Data was obtained through volunteering, participant observation, partaking in coaching sessions and three qualitative interviews. This research shows that treatment, at the care farm, does not necessarily mean getting progressively better at something. Treatment and care at the farm is guided by a relational approach and not by medical indications. Furthermore, by centering experiences of humans who are part of a therapeutic bond with an animal, this study contributed to a better understanding of how therapeutic landscapes and therapeutic human-animal bonds can be shaped and maintained. As a result, most clients who visit the farm do so for daytime activities and the environment, and not to participate in therapeutic sessions. This research demonstrated that therapy animals are inextricably linked to the broader environment of the care farm, and that therapy goes beyond scheduled therapeutic sessions and how animal-assisted interventions are commonly described. In conclusion, this research contributes to the existing literature about therapeutic landscapes. There are multiple ways of doing ‘good’ care and everyone has their own notions of what ‘good’ is, which complicates how care is negotiated. This multispecies or more-than-human therapeutic landscape is an example of how ‘good’ care is negotiated between different actors and how different dilemmas come into play.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and problem statement	7
2. Background and rationale	9
2.1 Context.....	9
2.2 Literature review.....	10
3. Theoretical inspiration	14
3.1 Multispecies ethnography.....	14
3.2 Collaboration, agency and pack.....	15
3.3 Reciprocity.....	16
3.4 Non-verbal communication.....	17
3.5 Well-being.....	19
3.6 Therapeutic landscape.....	20
4. Research methodology	21
4.1 Specific research questions.....	21
4.2 Methodology.....	21
4.2.1 Data analysis.....	23
4.2.2 Data management.....	23
5. Ethical considerations and positionality	24
5.1 Consent.....	24
5.2 Vulnerable clients.....	25
5.3 Confidentiality.....	26
5.4 Positionality.....	26
6. Empirical findings	28
6.1 Therapeutic coaching.....	28
6.1.1 Fran and Bailey’s coaching session.....	28
6.1.2 My coaching with donkeys.....	30
6.1.3 My coaching with horses.....	32
6.1.4 To coach or not to coach.....	35
6.1.5 Conclusion coaching.....	36
6.2 Collaboration between animals, young clients and professionals.....	37
6.2.1 Reciprocity.....	37
6.2.1 Boundaries and consent.....	40
6.2.3 Kinship.....	42
6.2.4 Becoming one with the herd.....	43
6.2.5 Conclusion collaborations.....	44

6.3	Challenges and of AAI.....	45
6.3.1	Moral considerations.....	45
6.3.2	The working burden.....	48
6.3.3	Accessibility.....	49
6.3.4	Safety.....	51
6.3.5	Conclusion challenges.....	52
6.4	Limitations.....	52
7.	Constructing a more-than-human therapeutic landscape.....	54
8.	List of references.....	56
9.	Appendices.....	59
9.1	Appendix A: Operationalisation table.....	59
9.2	Appendix B: Interview guide.....	61
9.3	Appendix C: Interview transcript example.....	62
9.4	Appendix D: Processing fieldwork notes.....	67
9.5	Appendix E: Table empirical data example.....	68
9.6	Appendix F: Thesis writing with a cat.....	69

1. Introduction and problem statement

When we look around us, animals are undeniably a part of our surroundings. May it be as pets in our homes, in areas specifically designed for animals so we can pay them a visit, in videos providing us comic relief, or as passers-by in the public space. Historically, animals have been important for human beings to evolve, for instance in terms of food supply and transportation (Beck 2006, 21). However, besides for practical reasons, animals can also be our companions. According to recent estimates, about 24% of European households have at least one dog as a companion animal (Bowen, Bulbena and Fatjó 2021, 2). Records of animal companionship go back thousands of years and in today's society, animal companionship is a still-growing phenomenon (Wells 2009, 524).

When scrolling through Netflix' digital catalogue, our fascination with the human-animal bond is reflected in documentaries such as *'Canine Interventions'*, *'My Octopus Teacher'* and *'Inside the Mind of a Cat'*. The latter one, for instance, showcases how house cats generally prefer social rewards and human connection rather than food or toys and how 79% of cats look to their owners for advice. The documentary explains how cats are empaths and experts at feeling our feelings, which they can reflect back at us through their behaviours.¹ Companion animals can play huge roles in the lives of the people they live with. Besides providing companionship, animals can potentially promote health and well-being in humans. Physical touch between human and animal, for instance, has shown to lower heart rate and blood pressure, and decrease the experienced level of stress (Wells 2009, 524).

If we go further, into academic literature about animals and some of their empathic skills, research shows that direct contact with animals, such as playing with an animal, as well as indirect contact, such as listening to whale sounds can have therapeutic benefits and increase positive affect within humans (Beck 2006, 36). While the idea of animals contributing to one's well-being is not new, research concerning the benefits of animal companionship or animal assisted therapy is fairly recent (Nimer and Lundahl 2007, 225; Beck 2006, 21; Wells 2009, 524). Studies have found that animals can provide support, and reduce anxiety and stress responses (Meehan, Massavelli and Pachana 2017, 274, Wells 2009, 525). Animals can also act as social catalysts and enable people to engage in social behaviour; for instance, dog-walkers significantly experience more social interaction with passers-by (Wells 2009, 527-528). Due to animals' supportive nature and abilities to reduce anxiety, they can contribute to the feeling of a safe environment for humans (Nimer and Lundahl 2007, 226; Wells 2009, 523).

¹ <https://www.netflix.com/title/81447086>

The potential value of animal assisted interventions is thus often recognised, but some scholars have raised the concern that scientific studies concerning animals assisting in therapeutic practises rarely take into account what effects human-animal interactions have on the animals and their well-being (Tannenbaum 2013, 2; Haubehofer and Kirchengast 2006, 166). What strikes me, is how vital animals are to the functioning and existence of animals assisting in therapeutic practises, yet how little focus is put on their interests and cooperation in comparison to the people benefitting from it. So on one hand, we as humans benefit from the animals because they help in therapeutic practices, and on the other hand there is also a question about the reciprocity principle: how can we care for animals in an ethical way, when they do this work for us? In other words, how do we give back what we received from them?

With this ethnographic study, I dive into the mutual as well as conditional care relationship between humans and therapy animals at a therapeutic care farm. I am especially interested in how care, collaboration and well-being are understood and co-constructed. The aim of this research is to provide an ethnographic example of how ‘good’ care is negotiated between different actors. With my research, I seek to better understand therapeutic human-animal bonds and illustrate how implementing ‘good care’ in therapeutic environments is accompanied by dilemmas. There are multiple ways of doing ‘good’ care and everyone has their own notions of what ‘good’ is, which complicates how care is negotiated. With this thesis, I contribute to existing literature about therapeutic landscapes, by showcasing a multispecies or more-than-human therapeutic landscape.

2. Background and rationale

2.1 Context

I conducted my ethnographic research at a care farm, which is a place dedicated to farming practices such as growing crops and taking care of animals, but for therapeutic purposes. Most care farms within the Netherlands offer supervised services such as daytime activities involving animals and animal-assisted therapy for people who cope with things such as medical indications, behavioural problems, disabilities, loneliness, psychological issues, trauma or a ‘distance to the labour market’. The care farm I conducted my research at specified that they are a *therapeutic* care farm, which is different from a regular care farm. Care farms usually still live off the land and the animals through produce, while offering additional therapeutic services. For my research location, the animals mostly cost money rather than serving as their source of income. The farm’s main source of income is gathered through the clients and their health insurance.

To sketch the environment, the care farm is located in a quiet village with nature reserves all around. The farm was bought by a couple, Juniper and Harry, which they repurposed as a therapeutic care farm. Juniper and Harry live and work at the property most of the time. They have two sons: Victor who works at the farm full time and lives outside of town with his family; and Boaz who lives on the property with his partner Olivia and their son. Olivia works at the farm full time as well. All the staff members are trained as either social workers, coaches or something similar, and need to have had training to recognise and understand animal behaviour. Besides the family, there are a few employees that work regular shifts and, for instance, engage in activities with the clients or take care of household tasks.

The farm has a main building, with a living room, dining table, kitchen and separate bedrooms for the clients. This is where everyone comes together when they start the day and where they prepare meals, eat together and have meetings. At the property, there is a private building for the family in which they can retreat from the clients and another building that serves as a space for events and parties, (educational) games, conversations and other activities. Additionally, the farm has a jacuzzi so that the clients can relax in the water during warmer days. There is also an inflatable water slide, an inflatable trampoline, some swings, a boxing dummy, go-karts, picnic tables and some smaller objects which all contribute to the atmosphere of the farm.

Next, the farm has various enclosures and meadows where the animals reside. The chickens, pigs and rabbits mostly live together. The two large and six smaller donkeys, and the

three sheep share a field. The four large horses and one miniature horse² have their own fields. Sometimes the sheep and donkeys share a larger field with the horses. The two goats have their own meadow. Lastly, there are six dogs and a couple cats around the farm. The dogs mostly live with the people inside the main building. With regards to the clients, three clients live at the farm and one client lives there for parts of the week. They have their own private bedroom. At the time I was doing my research, about eight to ten clients visited regularly.

During my quest for potential research locations, this specific care farm appealed to me the most. Their website says they mostly work with donkeys and that the donkeys are perceived as ‘mirrors’ for people who interact with them. The idea is that through the responses an individual elicits within the donkey they are engaging with, people can learn more about their own behaviour. Upon reading this, I saw connections with my research interests and decided to contact them, with a fruitful outcome. Conducting research at this care farm was an opportunity to study animal-assisted interventions with people who are experienced in animal behaviour and human-animal bonding.

2.2 Literature review

When it specifically concerns a therapeutic relationship between humans and animals, I came across the term ‘animal-assisted interventions’ or AAI, which is the umbrella term for animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy (O’Haire et al 2014, 163). Animal-assisted activities or AAA refer to humans engaging in activities with animals within the context of care settings, possibly as part of a treatment plan, but without a specific goal, whereas animal-assisted therapy or AAT refers to a goal-directed intervention. AAT involves engaging with animals, such as playing fetch with a dog to improve motor skills or for children with developmental issues to reduce anxiety and increase social skills through engaging with an animal (Nimer and Lundahl 2007, 225-226). For AAA, by contrast, animals do not have to be trained as therapy animals. Moreover, engaging in animal-assisted activities does not have to be implemented by trained staff (O’Haire et al 2014, 163). A context in which AAA can be applied, is in care for the elderly. Researchers who studied elderly people who cope with issues such as loneliness and dementia interact with animals have shown that the presence of animals increases social behaviours such as smiling and showing affection (Beck 2006, 25). Thus, while AAA can be applied with the intention to improve general well-being, it is not specifically used as a therapeutic means. AAI can both take place in a supervised setting such as a hospital, as

² A type of horse characterised by its small size. Usually miniature horses do not exceed 100 cm in height.

well as in a household setting, for instance, in the shape of assistance dogs (Bowen, Bulbena and Fatjó 2021, 2).

Currently, there is more interest in researching the therapeutic efficacy of animal companionship and AAI. According to a meta-analysis of 49 studies by Nimer and Lundahl, AAT shows efficacy and strong improvements for people, such as less behavioural problems and medical difficulties for people on the autism-spectrum. In general, people report an increase in well-being. The article states that AAT efficacy depends on which animals are assisting, the environment, the length and frequency of animal exposure and if AAT takes place in a group setting or individually (Nimer and Lundahl 2007, 226). The meta-analysis, however, focused on the question *whether* AAI has therapeutic efficacy – a question which is relevant for the acknowledgment of AAI in order for, for instance, insurance companies to consider AAI as a legitimate therapeutic means. Their research was not designed to investigate *how* and *why* AAI is effective. The authors note that researching how AAI can support treatment and the healing process is relevant, especially now that the efficacy of AAI is evidence-based (Nimer and Lundahl 2007, 235).

Despite AAI being evidence-based, animal-assisted interventions are not a commonly acknowledged therapy practice yet. AAI is generally perceived as a form of alternative and supplementary medicine (Nimer and Lundahl 2007, 228). Animals such as dogs, horses, rabbits, cats and donkeys are regarded as potential therapy assistants due to their affective nature and tendency to bond with people (O’Haire et al 2014). Moreover, most research around AAI revolves around the use of animals to benefit humans in a way medical tools such as pharmaceuticals and appliances do. This can be seen in language choices such as ‘using animals for..’ (Beck 2006, 29). Contrary to what the metaphor of ‘a tool’ may suggest, animals are not therapeutically effective by definition or through human commands, such as telling an animal to sit down. The same claim applies to pharmaceuticals and appliances. Profoundly, there is much tinkering and care involved in making the latter adaptable (Pols 2012, 144), however the difference between the two is that animals are living organisms. This raises the question of what is needed in order for human-animal relationships to function in a sustainable and therapeutic sense. Learning to be a therapy animal, as well as opening up to the potential influence of a therapy animal and tuning into each other is necessary in order to create a therapeutic bond.

In the aforementioned medical studies of efficacy, the effect on humans is measured through behavioural observations and self-report questionnaires in which humans are portrayed as recipients of an intervention. Within the field of medical anthropology and sociology, the notion of efficacy, or more so the notion of what is perceived to be 'good', shows that every form of intervention has its own notions of 'good'. In other words, every intervention has its own yardstick. In this case, the subjects are the clients and animals involved in AAI. And thereby this research not only highlights the relevance of efficacy but also contributes to the process of demedicalisation of AAI.

In contrast to people, animals are often not 'asked' what they think of a practice within the studies of therapeutic human-animal bonds. When they are considered, it is often as workers at risk of exploitation (Beck 2006). Researchers often focus on biology, which can be rather reductive. Methods to research animals in a biological sense revolve around short term physiological elements, such as measuring saliva, heart rate and blood pressure. Studies show, for instance, that when dogs and horses are being petted, their blood pressure and heart rate slows down, which the researchers interpret as the animals enjoying the physical touch (Beck 2006, 37).

Another study researched cortisol levels in the saliva of companion dogs who are part of AAI. This study shows that cortisol levels were higher on 'working' days during which the dogs assisted in therapy, whereas lower levels of cortisol were seen on control days. What is interesting, is how the cortisol levels were increased when there was more time pressure. Yet the study was unable to make claims whether the cortisol levels indicated negative stress or positive excitement within the dogs (Haubenhofner and Kirchengast 2006). Both studies show direct response to stimuli, however the relationship between human and animal and the focus on their bond is beyond the scope of their studies.

A theory that does focus on the relationship between humans and animals, is attachment theory. At first glance, attachment theory might not seem fitting, because it concerns companion animals and not therapy or 'working' animals as described above. However, the care farm where I conducted my research, treats their farm animals as companion animals. Looking at human-animal bonds through attachment theory differs from studying physiological elements as it puts the focus on the bond. Such research reveals that often, people see companion animals as family members with emotional and supportive value. A study amongst 1161 pet owners, for instance, showed that the respondents see their pets as part of their support

system, similarly to how they perceive humans within their support system (Meehan, Massavelli and Pachana 2017, 273-274).

Such research shows that animal presence is valued and that humans and animals create affective bonds, however, the animals who are part of the bond, are not asked what they want and value. Their well-being in attachment theory is tied to shelter, basic needs and receiving affection from humans. I would like to build on the idea of attachment through the frame of creating something together rather than being attached through needs such as emotional support for humans and food, water and outside breaks for animals. Creating a bond between human and non-human is an ongoing process of care, effort and maintenance (de Laet, Driessen and Vogel 2021, 805) and I am curious how this process influences the depth of the bond and, in a more profound way, what is valued in it.

When it comes to farm animals specifically, and their bond with humans, Evans-Pritchard wrote an ethnography about the Nuer people in Sudan and their bond with cattle, before they became a more developed community. For the Nuer, cattle are of the highest symbolic and economic value. Marriage was, for instance, negotiated through the exchange of cattle. The Nuer were dependent on cattle for their livelihoods; the skin, dung and urine were used to make weapons, hygienic products and clothing, amongst other things. Their cattle are sacred to the Nuer, thus, the cattle was never eaten for pleasure. Whenever they ate their cattle, the cattle was honoured. Their entire lives were organised around the cattle; the Nuer moved around, for instance, to protect their cattle from weather conditions and disease (Evans-Pritchard 1940).

A more recent ethnography of animals and humans caring for each other, is *Human-Canine Collaboration in Care*. In this study, Eason describes the participation of assistance dogs in recognising warning signs in people with type 1 diabetes. Through their sense of smell, they are trained to alert people of their symptoms, which lowers the risk for unconsciousness or worse. The author demonstrates a reciprocal relationship between human and dog, which transcends the role of a 'pet animal' and allows the dog more possibilities of 'co-presence' because the human becomes dependent on the dog for their own sensory abilities. Eason argues that because of this bond, humans and animals can both flourish (Eason 2021).

3. Theoretical inspiration

3.1 Multispecies ethnography

Multispecies ethnography is a field of study that emerged from anthropology, animal studies, science and technology studies and environmental studies, and complicates the idea that natural sciences should study plants and animals as ‘resources’, while social sciences should study human relationships (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, 545). While animals are part of many ethnographic studies, one of the main arguments for multispecies ethnography is: understanding the lives and perspectives of other-than-humans. Multispecies ethnography goes beyond the conventional categories provided by classical anthropologists, which are often limited to describing animals as stock or as a food source without providing ethnographic details about the affective relations and interactions that take place between humans and their other-than-human companions ((Lien and Pálsson 2019, 5, 16). Moving beyond humans at the centre of anthropological inquiry, a multispecies ethnographer approaches animals, plants, fungi and microbes as not merely part of the landscape and useful resources for humans, but as entangled with humans. They shape and are shaped by politics, economics and culture (ibid.: 16; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, 545).

Working in this emerging field, Eduardo Kohn studies multispecies relations in an Amazonian village. Kohn advocates for moving ethnography beyond the human, to an anthropology which is concerned with the encounters between all organisms (Kohn 2007, 3). According to Kohn, moving beyond a strict distinction between humans and animals allows anthropologists to see ecosystems as part of us (Kohn 2007).

In multispecies literature, animals are foregrounded and seen as organisms with agency within a relational context. The object of study within multispecies ethnography is not 'animals' or 'plants' but the relationship between organisms and what these organisms become within those relationships. Within human-animal relations, living with animals means engaging with them and even considering how animals can be anthropologists themselves, in the sense that they study the behaviour of the people who care for them. This can be seen, for instance, in apes who reside in zoos and get to know the characters of their human keepers (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, 552), quite similarly to animals within a care farm who tune into their human counterparts in a process of mutual ‘becoming’ (Haraway 2008). Multispecies ethnography is conducted in spaces where the boundaries between nature and culture are blurred and where encounters between species co-create ecologies (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, 546). Doing multispecies ethnography, means to reimagine natural and cultural categories of human and nonhuman, which can be useful in understanding (new) reflections of agency in a more profound way (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, 563).

3.2 Collaboration, agency and pack

To engage in multispecies ethnography, I will use the notions of ‘collaboration’, ‘agency’ and ‘pack’ as described by Marianne De Laet. These concepts allow me to centralise both human and animal as part of an ecosystem. De Laet writes how, when it comes to human-animal bonds, our human language is centred around domestication, otherness and control. Domestication in this context, entails that the feral part of an animal is tamed by humans. From this perspective, animals are subjected to the humans’ control. For my research, moving beyond this framing is important to understand the reciprocal relationship between humans and animals.

In her autoethnography, de Laet reflects on the experience of living with dogs and argues that her relationship to her dogs cannot simply be framed as her domesticating the dogs (de Laet 2021, 185, 188). Focusing on the leash as a material mediator in human-dog relationships, De Laet steps away from the idea that a leash gives power to the human, instead framing it as a collaboration between human and animal. She critiques domestication as a concept through which humans relate to nature because of its emphasis on hierarchy and control, a focus that she argues does not do justice to all the actors involved (de Laet 2021, 187). She argues that, for an animal to be a subject who listens to commands, there has to be a collaboration. They do not have to comply and through this collaboration animals express their subjectivity and agency (de Laet 2021, 192).

As an alternative to the frame of domestication that imagines living together with animals as a process where humans tame and control animals, de Laet offers an alternative notion of a multispecies collective. De Laet suggests living with animals could be understood as being part of a pack. Being a pack member does not mean denouncing alterity, rather it creates space for moving beyond the idea of humans domesticating animals for their own benefit. To be able to be with one another, she argues, we need to accept being affected. This acceptance is not a passive move, but a sign of agency, which goes for both humans as well as animals (de Laet 2021, 195). It is the togetherness that determines what happens, not commanding and the dog following commands. This connection can be broken at any time, but both de Laet as well as the dog maintain the togetherness in the moment they move together as a pack (de Laet 2021, 200). What is especially interesting, is how de Laet uses ‘dog-models’ such as ‘pack’ to conceptualise her relationship to her dogs, instead of ‘human-models’ of power and domestication, thus she writes about dogs-with-humans instead of humans-and-their-dogs. To interpret my observations in the field I use De Laet's claims about activities such as walking with a leash or accepting to be influenced by a bond as a useful lens/tool. I, for

instance, wonder if humans can temporarily become part of ‘the pack’ within the context of the farm and how collaboration then takes place.

3.3 Reciprocity

Another concept within multispecies ethnography is reciprocity, or the exchange of energy and support for a mutual benefit. In doing my research, I was occasionally reminded of, and felt drawn to, Robin Wall Kimmerer’s work. Kimmerer is a botanist, scholar and professor in Environmental and Forest Biology of Native American descent and author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. In this book, she explores the reciprocal relationship between plants and humans in Native American tradition. With *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer would like readers to understand that dominant science and indigenous knowledge go together and can contribute to a reciprocal relationship with the earth and all its living beings (Kimmerer 2013).

She describes the Native American practice of braiding sweetgrass, and that when sweetgrass is plucked, people only take what they need and always ask the plant for permission. Consequently, pickers make sure they do not damage the roots so that sweetgrass can continue growing. The Native American teachings say that if one uses plants in a respectful manner, they remain and flourish. Because sweetgrass is disappearing from areas, botanists were asked if harvesting methods could be influencing their demise.

With regards to participating in this research, Kimmerer describes a discrepancy in language and understanding between science and more traditional knowledge. She is hesitant about analysing the teachings of sweetgrass through a rigid scientific framework, but acknowledges that in order to be recognised by science and institutions, it is important to speak in the language of the ones that you want to be seen by (ibid.). On doing science she says:

To me, an experiment is a kind of conversation with plants: I have a question for them, but since we don’t speak the same language, I can’t ask them directly and they won’t answer verbally. But plants can be eloquent in their physical responses and behaviours. Plants answer questions by the way they live, by their responses to change; you just need to learn how to ask. I smile when I hear my colleagues say “I discovered X.” That’s kind of like Columbus claiming to have discovered America. It was here all along, it’s just that he didn’t know it. Experiments are not about discovery but about listening and translating the knowledge of other beings.

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, 2013, page 158

I too felt the ambivalence of doing qualitative research as Kimmerer describes, with data so rich I could write a book, but that needs to be translated into a scientifically manageable analysis. Kimmerer shares how the initial research and local knowledge was not taken seriously because it was not scientific enough. The researchers were told by university staff that everyone knows harvesting will damage plants, upon which they started measuring all the sweetgrass and its interactions with humans. Kimmerer continues by describing that she found out that sweetgrass has become dependent on humans to be plucked, as the plucking stimulated growth. Sweetgrass that was untouched, turned the most lifeless with dead stems, whereas sweetgrass that was being used by humans, thrived. Kimmerer eventually says that humans participate in a symbiosis with sweetgrass, as the crop provides the people with fragrant leaves out of which they make cultural elements, and by harvesting the sweetgrass it can continue flourishing. The relationship is balanced when the people adhere to only taking what they need, whereas taking everything by the root for mass consumption is responsible for the disappearance of sweetgrass (Kimmerer 2013).

In this thesis I will use Kimmerer's description of reciprocity to analyse the care that is negotiated between humans and animals. Kimmerer describes a subtle distinction between exploitation and reciprocity. Taking a piece of sweetgrass can initially seem like exploiting the plant, however it turns out that the plant actually grows better when humans interfere. Could it be similar for the animals at the farm and is the care between human and animal reciprocal?

3.4 Nonverbal communication

At first, going from doing research with humans to doing research that includes animals, might seem like a big step, because animals do not speak verbal languages. However, humans and animals have similar needs and nonverbal expressions when it comes to sharing a language. Within human communication, language encompasses both verbal and nonverbal messaging with the goal to "create shared meaning between a sender and a receiver" (Argent 2012, 115). Verbal communication between humans is often foregrounded, although, relational messages and affection is mostly communicated nonverbally. When nonverbal and verbal messages are in conflict with each other, people tend to believe the nonverbal messaging which shows the importance of nonverbal language (Argent 2012, 115).

To illustrate nonverbal communication between human and animal, I will draw upon the relationship between horses and riders. According to horse riders, movement, touch and space are most important within equine communication. Kinesics refer to body movement,

such as facial expressions, posture and gestures. Similarly to people, horses are expressive and convey numerous emotions. When horses have pinned ears, it is interpreted to not push them to do something, their nostrils wrinkle when they are disgusted and a quick swish of their tail can mean they are annoyed. Horses seek closeness with other horses and engage in touch mostly for affective reasons, such as licking foals to comfort them. With regards to space, horses tend to stay in close proximity to each other and closer distances are associated with deeper bonds (Argent 2012, 115-116).

From this perspective, horses possess an ability to read bodies and intentions, and predict behaviours, in a way they can synchronise their movements with others, such as riding with a human (Argent 2012, 113). Argent describes the practice of riding as corporeal synchrony: a sensory experience during which boundaries between each other disappear and a feeling of oneness between horse and human takes form. Horses and humans have similar needs and nonverbal expressions which facilitates a human-horse bond in which they share a language and attune their bodies to each other. Argent argues that it is not only because of horses' nonverbal skills, but also their agency and choice to participate in riding (Argent 2012, 116, 119, 120).

During my research, the professionals shared their interpretations of the movement, touch and space of the animals in a similar fashion to how horses' behaviour is read and interpreted. The 'local knowledge' the professionals provided me with, can be used in analysing the human-animal bond. The challenge I set myself, namely how to communicate with animals, is also a challenge within the field of study. In AAI, clients learn how to communicate with animals beyond human verbal language from the professionals, however every animal is its own individual and it is an ongoing process to learn to communicate and understand each other.

3.5 Well-being

Another core concept for my research is 'well-being'. To illustrate well-being and the importance of constructing a bond between human and animal, it is interesting to compare my care farm to animal rescue work. Animal rescue workers dedicate themselves to saving animals from abusive situations and finding adoptive homes for the rescuees. Within animal rescue work, dogs are trained to be suitable for adoption and conform to human expectations (Porter 2019). In her ethnography of rescue work, Porter describes how achieving well-being for

rescue dogs, in this context, involves managing their bodily responses to the external world. This work is not limited to the dogs, but also extends to the people trying to train them. Porter gives the example of a dog expressing anxious behaviour such as barking or panting. To steer it away from such troublesome behaviour, the human caretaker engages in calm breaths and even tries to avoid thinking anxious thoughts in an effort to calm the dog down. Rescue workers who are trying to figure out what their dog needs, thus do not only train their dog's bodies, but also their own bodies in order to accommodate the dog, thus conditioning the well-being of both human and animal (Porter 2019, 103). What we can see here is that power is understood as a relational and mutual construction through communication, bodily attunement and evaluating each other (Porter 2019, 103).

Training dogs is a way to control more feral behaviours that are generally viewed as inconvenient by humans, which raises ethical questions concerning who benefits from the bond between rescue dog and rescue worker. Dogs are more likely to find a full time residence after training, yet it is of a conditional nature (Porter 2019, 123). Similar questions have been raised about AAI. Communities concerned with animal rights in particular question if animal assisted interventions can ever be ethical, as animals are often regarded as tools to achieve something, which can also be seen within rescue dogs. Next to that, Beck found that animals who are active within institutions are at risk of fatigue and burn-out or being neglected due to other priorities of staff (Beck 2006, 26-27). Another argument, however, is that by making animals more useful for humans, and thus increasing their value, this might make people more inclined to take care of them, thus offering benefits to the animal as well (Beck 2006, 37) which complicates the notion of well-being.

For my thesis, I am both interested in how people understand and work towards well-being within themselves as well as how they ensure the well-being of animals. Essentially, well-being is about one's quality of life, however, the definition of well-being is subjective and evaluated through experience of what contributes to the life of a specific being.

3.6 Therapeutic landscapes

A concept used to describe an environment that promotes healing, is 'therapeutic landscape'. Therapeutic landscapes are settings which encompass the physical and psychological aspects of treatment and contribute to the illness experience (Williams 1998, 1194). The concept comes from holistic medicine, and refers to healing practices different from hegemonic biomedicine

such as naturopathy, art therapy and animal-assisted therapy. From a holistic medicine perspective, landscapes are essential to maintaining well-being and preventing certain illnesses.

Therapeutic landscapes, according to Williams, can either be inauthentic in the sense that they are detached from connection, or authentic with the focus on creating a caring environment based on community. Furthermore, the literal landscape in terms of access to natural environments and activities to engage in matters for the overall experience of well-being (Williams 1998, 1196-1199). The concept has been important in research about how environmental, social and individual factors are interwoven when it comes to suitable healing places (Doughty 2018, 26). Doughty further describes that much of the recovery and healing process take place outside of the biomedical sphere, as recovery and healing are part of everyday life. The idea that places outside of the hospital can promote healing is not new, however it is only recently that the public health sector acknowledges that natural environments and spaces of community care are places of recovery and healing (Doughty 2018, 37).

A therapeutic landscape approach allows me to recognise the multitude of spaces in which well-being and healing can be promoted. Traditionally, therapeutic landscapes are about the effects an environment has on a person. With my thesis, I am contributing to the existing literature by analysing the therapeutic landscape humans and animals are negotiating and structuring together.

4. Research methodology

4.1 Specific research questions

The focus of this research is the care relationship between humans and animals, and how they create a therapeutic space together at the farm. The humans in my research are divided into the group of young clients aged between ten and eighteen years old, and staff at the care farm, which I will refer to as professionals. To research how the relationship between humans and animals is established and understood, the main question I am asking is: **How are human-animal bonds established and evaluated at a therapeutic care farm in the Netherlands?**

The sub questions are:

1. How is therapeutic coaching practised and understood at the care farm?
2. How do professionals, young clients and animals work together to create a mutually beneficial relationship?
3. How do professionals and young clients understand the challenges of AAI with regards to the well-being of the animals involved?

4.2 Methodology

In this thesis, I am taking on a multispecies ethnography approach. Ethnography is a field of scientific research and to do ethnography, researchers spend time in the communities they want to observe and learn about. Through participant observation, ethnographers try to become part of a certain group for a limited period of time, to understand how different actors interact with each other and influence each other, and what the living conditions and interactions mean for that community (Green and Thorogood 2004, 135). Multispecies ethnography specifically, takes into account all organisms that are part of a community and how they interact with- and influence each other.

As an autoethnographer, I included my human story in relation to the farm and the therapeutic practices that take place. To investigate my research questions, I collected data through participant observation and semi-structured qualitative interviews. Participant observation allowed me to get to know the farm, professionals, children and animals during their daily functioning. As part of participant observation, I volunteered at the care farm two days a week. For nineteen days, I got to know the staff, clients and animals and assisted in daily farm tasks, such as cleaning, feeding and grooming animals, as well as playing games and going on little field trips with the clients, such as kayaking. The first three weeks, I was more focused on daily farm tasks, bonding with- and learning to understand the animals and building

trust with the young clients and professionals. In the weeks after, when everyone felt comfortable with my presence, I had more in-depth conversations.

Additionally, I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with three professionals at the care farm. Regarding interview formats, I asked every participant what they preferred. Juniper wanted to stand in between the donkeys and sheep in the meadow with a cup of tea, Victor wanted to tell about the care farm in a story-format, and with Olivia I had an interview on my last day after the coaching session, during which I could ask all my final questions. For the young clients, traditional interview formats such as sitting down across each other could be unfamiliar territory during which they feel more obliged to answer. To prevent a situation in which a child could feel uncomfortable, I sometimes asked questions during activities, such as during brushing the donkeys or horses.

The interviews furthered my understanding of therapeutic practices with animals, the environment of the care farm and the staff's approach to care. The interviews' additional benefits were for me to make sense of what I saw in the field, understand the care farm's values and how these translate into a broader context. Limitations of both participant observation and interviews include people acting in a way they think is desired. Another limitation of participant observation is that it was not always obvious I was conducting research, for instance when I was participating in an activity or informal conversation (Green and Thorogood 2004, 135). Sometimes I asked permission for partaking in an activity, or I discussed my research with a staff member which foregrounded my position as a researcher again.

To deepen my understanding of how the care farm works with its clients and animals, I observed one coaching session with a client and received two coaching sessions myself. To both observe and receive a session, allowed me to have different perspectives on coaching with animals which are not only dependent on observing and descriptions. When I observed a session, I was a bit more sceptical about the animals' roles, and how much was interpretation and how much was actually the animals' doing. However, once I partook in a session, I was astonished by how much the animals showed me and how their behaviour and body language changed once I was amongst them.

4.2.1 Data analysis

The first step of my analysis was to find overarching themes within the three main objectives of this research: 1) therapeutic coaching 2) collaboration between young clients, professionals and animals, and 3) the challenges and benefits of AAI. I chose to do the analysis by hand as opposed to using digital software, to get more familiar with my data and because my notes could often only be understood by me. In order to find themes, I read through the observational data first and grouped them based on the three main objectives. I then sought to find overarching themes across the data, which is called open coding. The observational data I wrote down is in some way relevant for this research as I was usually triggered by something in the field that made me write it down in the first place. In the interviews not all data is as relevant, thus they were analysed secondly, with the previously found themes in mind while allowing for new codes to be created whenever needed.

4.2.2 Data management

During and after fieldwork days, I wrote down my observations which I processed further once I got home.³ I recorded the interviews with my phone, and transcribed them afterwards.⁴ Audio recordings, interview transcripts and digitised field notes were uploaded to the UvA's OneDrive, after which I deleted any data existing outside of the OneDrive. In case of anyone withdrawing their consent to participate in my research, their data will be deleted. Individuals can opt out of the research until one month before the master thesis publication. I will store my data for a year after completion of the master thesis.

³ See Appendix D for how I processed my fieldwork notes.

⁴ See Appendix C for a transcription example.

5. Ethical considerations and positionality

To conduct my research, I obtained ethical clearance by the University of Amsterdam Graduate School of Social Sciences. In the following paragraphs, I will reflect on my own positionality, ethical considerations and the people and animals I engaged with.

5.1 Consent

Prior to my research, I contacted the care farm I was interested in. First, we had a call to discuss my research and the possibilities at the care farm. Following this call, a professional at the care farm invited me for a first acquaintance and guided tour to establish if there is a match between the care farm and my interests. The professional consulted with her team consisting of four other members after which I have obtained written informed consent to volunteer and conduct my research at the care farm. During my final day at the farm, my main contact revealed that she always goes into the donkey field with a potential hire or intern, to see how the animals respond. Sometimes the animals respond in chaotic or rejecting ways, upon which the professionals ask more questions to the potential hire and let themselves be guided by the animals' responses. In my case, the animals did not show any problematic signs, thus in a way the animals also consented to my presence at the farm.

The professionals deemed it most fitting to make the process of obtaining informed consent of an informal nature by informing the caretakers of the underage clients themselves of my presence and research activities, and asking their permission to include their children in the research. The professionals are also the caretakers for some of the young clients, as some of the children live at the property. They are not the legal guardians, but are responsible for the clients to a certain extent. During my research, I particularly bonded with Fran, one of the clients who is also a resident at the farm. Fran's mother regularly came to visit the farm, and I discussed my research with the mother, who consented as well. Because I did not get in touch with the other parents, I have only included detailed ethnographic data about Fran. Next, the professionals notified the young clients at the care farm about my work at the farm. They did not necessarily discuss my research activities with the clients as they did not find it relevant to tell the clients unless they had questions and wanted to know more themselves. The staff preferred it like this, because when young clients come to the farm, they do not have to share with other clients why they are there unless they want to, and the professionals also do not share with clients why someone is coming there. At the farm, there was a broader 'culture of consent', which I tried to join. By culture of consent, I mean that the clients were encouraged

to be autonomous humans, respect all beings and decide for themselves if they want to participate in something or not.

At the care farm, I was present as an academic, researcher and volunteer. This implies a certain power position. Especially within the context of doing research with children, my informants could be more vulnerable to feeling coerced or influenced to participate (Bracken-Roche et al. 2017, 10). However, most young clients saw me as someone at the farm, not necessarily with a specific role. In the end, most clients I met did ask what I was doing there out of curiosity. Some found it exciting, some were not really bothered and no one was hesitant about my research or showed signs of feeling pressured to participate in a way.

As discussed with the professionals, the first weeks were mostly centred around establishing mutual trust, observing and volunteering. After the first two weeks I felt settled in and had more conversations with the young clients. Informed consent is an ongoing process and even during short questions in between I emphasised they do not have to answer if they do not want to. Also during the interviews with professionals, I explained that participation is voluntary and that they can opt-out at any time. Sometimes painful memories came up during interviews. Once, Juniper asked me to stop the recording for a bit, which I did. I tried to be sensitive to all the information and stories people provided me with and respected their choice to not engage in particular topics.

Finally, when it comes to animals, also outside of the farm context, I usually acknowledge them by greeting and establishing some eye contact. I put out my fingers or hand, so they can sniff around and decide whether they are interested or not. When they remain close, or show other bodily cues of wanting to be touched, such as rolling on their backs and showing their belly, I continue giving them physical affection, such as petting them. At the farm, I learnt that it is custom to greet an animal in a similar way I was already doing instinctively: by acknowledging the animal and establishing physical contact. If someone is partaking in a therapeutic session or other activity, it is also custom to thank the animals afterwards.

5.2 Vulnerable clients

The people who visit care farms are usually experiencing some form of physical and/or emotional difficulties. For this reason, it is important that I take care to remain sensitive to their privacy and possible difficulties they are dealing with. The entire research took place within

the sphere of the care farm to ensure safety. At all times, at least one professional was present at the care farm.

Additionally, I never asked about someone's background or indications as they are not relevant to my research. With regards to talking to young clients, it is possible children find it difficult to talk about their reasons to visit the care farm. To make them feel comfortable, I did not question the young clients on why they are involved in AAI. Whenever a young client or professional wanted to share something about their experiences or conditions, it was on their own terms. Initially, I wanted to interview the young clients. However, during my fieldwork I felt like interviewing the young clients would not have additional benefit to the short conversations during activities. I noticed that they started sharing more and more on their own during activities or games, whereas when I asked a question in between, the answers were usually quite short in comparison to sharing on their own initiative, regardless of it being an open ended question. I found this quite interesting as it also showcases the young clients' agency and them sharing on their own terms.

5.3 Confidentiality

To ensure privacy, I am using pseudonyms for the care farm professionals and young clients. In the digitised fieldnotes and interview transcripts, I used pseudonyms instead of people's actual names; and changed or left open other identifying information whenever necessary, such as age, medical information or place of residence. One client asked me if she would be in my thesis. I responded that she might be and only if she wants to. She was curious if her name would be in there, and I explained that it would not. She then asked if it would say 'girl' and found it really cool that it could indeed say 'girl'. The name and location of the care farm will not be mentioned in my thesis either. The fieldwork notes, audio recordings and transcripts remain confidential and will not be shared with children, caretakers or professionals.

5.4 Positionality

It is important to note that I am drawn to animals and like spending time with them, but have never engaged in therapeutic practices with animals before I visited the farm. Part of why I am doing this research is because I believe in and experience the benefits of animal companionship. Being born and raised in a village and growing up around the beach, ocean and the presence of dogs and other pet animals contributed to my mental and physical health. However, this is not the same as AAI. My experience with AAI is limited and as a researcher, I am not an expert on the topic. I am trying to broaden my knowledge through people who are more knowledgeable

on the topic thanks to their own unique lived experience (Green and Thorogood 2004, 69). It is important to be aware of how my own ideas and experiences shape my work as a researcher and not assume all clients at the care farm have positive experiences with AAI. When I was conducting my research, I tried to make sure I was not steering my participants a certain way as it is not my intention to convince anyone of the potential benefits of animal-assisted interventions, based on literature or my own thoughts. The stories my participants shared helped me reflect on my own assumptions and thoughts during and after writing down my fieldwork notes.

Furthermore, when dealing with vulnerable as well as young participants, it is essential to be sensitive to their circumstances. In retrospect, I think it went well, partially due to my working experience as a social worker. I work with different target groups across all ages such as people with mental and/or physical disabilities, people who cope with addiction, homeless people and teenage moms. A professional at the care farm specifically asked me if I have any experience with groups of children. As part of my job, I regularly work with children aged between eight and seventeen years old who have a history of abuse, anger issues or depression amongst other things.

Lastly, my appearance suggests an urban lifestyle and upon hearing that I live in Rotterdam, staff members or clients regularly talked to me about living in the city. Sometimes a staff member made jokes about city life, which highlighted the difference between urban and rural living. Quite often, I engaged in more political topics with some of the staff members during which my positionality became more apparent, as living in a city, being a university social sciences student and being a woman of colour influenced my political convictions. Sometimes we disagreed during these political talks, however they were always interesting and respectful, and this contributed to the bond with staff members.

6. Empirical Findings

In the following chapters I will present and discuss the data. This research encompasses three main objectives: 1) therapeutic coaching 2) collaboration between young clients, professionals and animals, and 3) the challenges and benefits of AAI. The main objectives provide the answers to the specific research questions as shown in chapter 4.1. The first objective in chapter 6.1 answers the question about the practicisation and understanding of therapeutic coaching at the care farm. The second objective analyses the relations between the different actors involved such as the professionals, young clients and animals that work together in order for them to create a mutually beneficial relationship. The third objective provides an insight into the challenges of AAI with regards to the well-being of the animals involved.

6.1 Therapeutic coaching

At the farm, the professionals describe coaching as a therapeutic practice between clients and animals during which animals ‘mirror’ an outsider’s behaviour. In this chapter, I will describe the coaching session I observed and the two coaching sessions I received, to understand how therapeutic coaching is practised and understood within the context of the care farm and to illustrate how professionals, animals and clients work together to promote the clients’ well-being.

6.1.1 Fran and Bailey’s coaching session

The children who would normally attend school, spent more time at the farm during the May holiday, which facilitated my bonding with Fran, one of the clients who lives at the farm. She was gifted a bicycle for her birthday, and asked me to time her bike rides at the farm. We made a game out of it, to test her speed and endurance. Seeing we had developed a trusting relationship, Olivia, one of the staff members, asked Fran if I could watch her next coaching session, to which she agreed.

The day of the session, Fran and I went up to the horses, after which Fran was asked to put the bridle and reins⁵ around the farm’s miniature horse, Bailey, and lead it to the sandbox. Olivia gave Fran a piece of rope and asked her to place the rope anywhere in the sandbox. Fran chose the outer corner of the sandbox. She spread the rope from one side of the fence to the other on the ground, creating a sort of pyramid shape. She then took Bailey by its reins and stepped in the demarcated space. Bailey, however, stopped right in front of the rope and the little space Fran was standing in. Olivia noted that Bailey was standing with one hoof over the

⁵ The bridle is the headgear which carries a bit and reins. The strap or rope attached to the bridle, are the reins, used to direct an animal.

other, which indicates a resting position. Olivia asked Fran if the horse was showing her something, to which Fran responded: “I’m not sure. Bailey is not moving further than the rope and is blocking my way out”. Olivia then asked: “Why is that?”, she paused and continued: “How does it feel when someone crosses your boundaries? What would you do if it were to happen?”. Fran found it difficult to come up with an answer. Olivia then walked up to her and crossed the rope - her ‘boundary’. To me, it actually looked as if Olivia was crossing Fran’s boundary, because the moment Olivia was standing within the rope, she was standing right in front of Fran, which can be interpreted as intimidating in another context. Because Fran was laughing, I could tell she was comfortable. Olivia then said:

If I am standing here, you have no way to go. You put yourself in the corner and Bailey and I are closing in on you from the frontside. The way I know you, you make yourself invisible and you try to disappear into the background. Would you like practising setting boundaries in the future? - Olivia

Fran responded with: “I don’t really know why I put myself here in the corner” and agreed to practising boundaries. At first, I did not really understand what was happening in the sandbox. After the session, Olivia said it was a ‘Rock and Water’⁶ technique to promote resilience and social skills in order for children to learn how to stand up for themselves. What Fran did not know yet during the session, is that Olivia was testing her boundaries in a controlled setting. Olivia added Bailey as an actor in the coaching session, partially because Fran feels really comfortable with Bailey, and partially because Olivia knows Bailey will not cross the rope. Because Bailey did not cross the rope, he reflected the ‘true’ meaning of the rope - a boundary. Putting a rope in between them is a literal boundary for the horse and according to Olivia, the horse would only step over it if Fran was really determined. After the session, Fran took Bailey by its reins and walked him to hop over a few small obstacles in the sandbox. Fran and Bailey did this without any hesitation, in contrast to moments before with the rope. This shows the different meanings that are given to different obstacles, by both Fran and Bailey. When I took Bailey by its reins to hop over the obstacles, I felt really unsure and said: “He probably won’t do it with me”, and indeed Bailey would not move an inch. Could this reflect my determination?

Olivia further explained how every session is tailored to the clients’ needs and therefore looks very different. During some coaching sessions, the professionals say less and the animals

⁶ <https://www.rotsenwater.nl> more information about the Rock and Water method, can be found on their site.

do more than in other sessions. Olivia knows that Fran has issues with setting boundaries and speaking up. That is why she led this coaching session for Fran, to experience both what it feels to have her boundaries respected by Bailey and crossed by Olivia. Fran did not say that much during the session, however, the next day she was excited and asked when they could have the next session. Olivia explained to me that therapeutic sessions are always at least two weeks apart for clients to feel and integrate what happened during the sessions, and also in order for the animals to not get overworked. This ethnographic account, is a good example of AAT as it involves engaging with animals, in order to improve a certain social skill (Nimer and Lundahl 2007, 225-226)

6.1.2 My coaching with donkeys

During one of my fieldwork days, most staff and clients left for other activities outside of the farm. Victor, a staff member, and I were not sure what I could do during the next few hours. Since I had not yet experienced a coaching session myself, Victor instructed me to go into the donkey field, with a topic in mind that was currently relevant in my life: “First make contact with the donkeys by touching them. When you stand in between the donkeys, what is happening? What are they doing? What do you feel? How do you interpret this?” I started walking towards the donkeys, while thinking about a topic. I then chose ‘letting go of control’. I was not sure if the topic was a suitable one for coaching, and because I was by myself I did not really know what to take notice of. Usually, coaching sessions are led by a staff member. Since Victor was busy with a client, this session was not a regular coaching session. I was not expecting much and thought nothing would really happen.

Once I greeted the animals with a touch, I actually observed a series of behaviours in the animals that were different from other times when I was, for instance, brushing them. Pepper, one of the larger donkeys, lightly grazed her head against my belly twice. To me, it felt like Pepper was showing affection, however, the third time she touched my belly with her head, she pushed me away with some force, after which I got a bit scared. I felt rejected and walked towards the fence where I felt safer. I wanted the donkeys to like me, and got the feeling Pepper did exactly the opposite, or was at least setting a boundary by pushing me away. Six donkeys followed me to the fence, including Pepper. One of the smaller donkeys, Skittles, stood in between me and Pepper, which to me felt as if she was trying to protect me. Pepper was trying to get close to me, but Skittles made sure she was not able to. Pepper and the other donkeys then walked away and started grazing. I was cuddling with Skittles, and thought to myself: ‘My topic is letting go of control. Am I trying to be in control of the narrative by avoiding Pepper?’

I wanted to approach Pepper again, however, the moment I started walking away from Skittles, she started braying (the hee-haw sound) and following me, to which all the donkeys responded by braying as well. I was not sure what it meant, so I assumed that Skittles wanted me to stay, which I did.

Victor arrived at the donkey field after about forty five minutes. He asked me how it was going and what I noticed. I told him about my topic and everything that occurred. Victor then explained that the professionals ask questions based on what is happening:

The interpretation part is always done by the client. That is why it is difficult for some people, sometimes they think 'what am I supposed to do with this?'. It is not instant healing that provides answers. - Victor

He also explained that a client can assign roles: “We give a role to the donkey: you greet the donkey and tell what role it has, based on your topic.” I responded with: “In retrospect, I think Skittles is my ‘control animal’ because she felt safe and controlled, and Pepper is my ‘letting go of control animal’ because she pushed me away”, to which Victor said “what if you turn it around?” I started thinking, ‘what if I wanted to control the image Pepper had of me, and did not respect its boundaries?’ By not approaching Pepper for a second time I let go of the urge to control how living beings perceive me. Accepting help from someone, in this case Skittles, is also a way of letting go of control.

After my session, I wanted to know how the professionals interpret the braying that happened during my session. Victor said that braying is a sound to communicate with the pack, but it can also be affection or discomfort. When I asked Juniper about it, she responded with:

Everything always means something during a coaching session. What does it mean to you? If it was protective of you, is it to protect you? Is it calling the others for a reason? Is it calling you? - Juniper

When it does not involve a session, the staff members gladly share what, they think, certain body language could mean. When it concerns a coaching session, however, their task is to note the animals’ behaviour in relation to the client and ask the client what they think it could mean. They never fill in the blanks for a client. Since it is someone else’s coaching session and not theirs, only the client knows what they are carrying inside themselves and how this is reflected in the animals’ behaviour.

I found this way of doing therapy particularly interesting, as it becomes a highly interpretable practice, which leaves a lot of space for a client to feel and process things at their own pace. My session shows how much of the therapeutic work depends on the client's willingness to feel, observe and interpret. The work is done together by the client, the animals and the professionals and it is mostly an emotional experience. Victor referred to it as "something being felt on a soul level, which makes it more difficult for quantitative science to understand".

6.1.3 My coaching with horses

My second coaching session took place during my last day at the farm. Olivia asked me to come to the horses' meadow. She was already sitting there and asked: "Have you thought about the different options for coaching?" I actually wanted to have a 'family constellation'⁷, which entails a therapeutic intervention to gain insights on possible dysfunctional patterns that keep people stuck or encountering similar problems. Traditionally, human participants represent the client's family members; at the farm family constellations are done with the horses or donkeys. Especially because Olivia mentioned that she sees how the animals position themselves when I am near them, and that they mirror behaviours that have to do with my foundation and family relations, I wanted to have a family constellation. On another occasion she said: "Sometimes you leave some of the shit in the meadow, which literally means that you have some shit lying in your way". She was referring to the daily tasks of cleaning up the animals' faeces in the meadows. After her comment I was hyper focused on not leaving any shit behind, possibly hoping it would work the other way around as well and clean up the shit in my way.

Since it was my first guided coaching session, Olivia suggested we could start with one horse that represented me, thus mirroring my behaviour: "You can pick a horse that resembles you, or feels good". Two horses were nearby, eating some hay. I went up to the horses, greeted them both and saw that the lower lip of Amery was trembling. I recognised myself, because I sometimes tremble with my mouth in a similar way when I am trying to hold in my emotions. I then chose Amery to represent me. Olivia guided him towards the sandbox and I followed. The coach, in this case Olivia, always stands outside of the sandbox to make sure the animal is not mirroring the coach as well. Olivia specified that when she asks observation-related questions, I can answer them if I want to, but do not have to.

⁷ <https://elsvansteijn.nl/en/blog/family-constellations-this-is-how-they-reveal-invisible-patterns-and-bring-the-flow-back-into-your-life> More information about therapeutic family constellations can be found here.

The first thing that happened was Amery disappearing into the rear stable. I thought that Amery did not want to participate in a coaching, but then Olivia asked: “What could it mean? Don't you want to be seen?” After a little while, Amery returned and stood on my right side. Olivia started to make some observations:

He is standing on your right side, which is your masculine side. He is shaking a lot, which means he is irritated. Do you feel irritated? His lower lip is trembling, so he wants to say something but it's not possible or no one is listening. Do you feel that way? Now, he is standing almost systematically [representing a family member] and then stops. This has often to do with a father figure, but a mother figure is also possible.

I agreed it could have something to do with my mother, because my interactions with Pepper also kept reminding me of my mother. Amery then moved and stood right in between Olivia and me for a few minutes. After Amery stepped away, Olivia started talking:

When a horse stands in between client and coach, it means we have to stop talking. Do you need time or space to process and think, or do you maybe want to be shielded from the outside world?

I did not immediately know what it could be. Amery stood in between us again, which I preferred so that I could think. When Amery stepped away again, I said that it could be both.

Olivia: “What do you want to be protected from?”

Farah: “Many things I think.. disappointment, pain.”

Olivia: “Amery now moved to your left side, your feminine side. How does that feel?”

Farah: Better, he's also different. His head is leaning against my back, and his body against my side. It feels supportive.”

This was the first time during the coaching that I felt really comfortable. Amery then moved his head from my backside to my frontside, forcing me to bow.

Olivia: “Horses are sensitive and really know where they stand and move, so it wants you to bow. Why do you think that is? “

Farah: “Maybe bowing to social standards that I don't want to bow to at all.”

Olivia: “Are you in a situation you don't want to be in/want out of?”

Farah: "Yes"

Olivia: "Does that situation also have something to do with your mother?"

Farah: "Yes"

Olivia: "Do you want to be seen, perhaps by your mother?"

Amery started blowing warm air into my hands, and increased skin contact by leaning against me more. Outside coaching sessions, a horse never came this close to me and if it would have, his six hundred kilograms might have intimidated me, however within this specific context it felt supportive and affective.

Another horse, Twilight, came near and was observing Amery and me in the sandbox. I pointed it out to Olivia, to which she responded:

Everything always participates, including the horse that presents itself. They can feel called and come for a reason. If you'd like, we can put Amery and Twilight in the sandbox together so they can represent you and your mom, and we can observe how that plays out.

I agreed and Olivia asked: "Who do you want mom and you to be?" I hesitated, but when Olivia got close to Twilight, he tried evading her and wanted to run away, so I said, "Okay that's my mom, Amery is me." In the sandbox, I could either whisper to them who they were representing, or visualise them in the roles and tell them in that way. Both their skins were trembling, which means they were irritated. Olivia started making observations again:

Twilight is standing in the corner and looks as if it feels cornered. Is that true in the case of your mother? You [Amery] are standing behind Twilight in a supportive attitude, but your horse does look sad in his eyes. They're almost standing in a foal-mother setup, despite being stallions.

I saw that another horse, Phoenix, came closer and was observing us from a little distance. The first thing I thought was 'that's my dad'. Olivia then asked: "Could that be your dad?" When Phoenix left, I noticed that as well, and I watched him leave.

Olivia: "That's also something significant. What does that say to you?"

Farah: "That my dad is there, but remains aloof."

Olivia: "You [Amery] are not leaving and remain in a supportive position. Why do you stay? What keeps you here?"

Farah: "My mother can be motherly when she is sober, but she drinks almost everyday. I also have a responsibility for my grandmother [the three of us live together] and that I think that my mother cannot handle the care alone."

Olivia: "Does she have certain traumas? Where do you think it's coming from?"

Farah: "Many reasons, from not feeling at home to abuse [...]."

Olivia: "Why do you think your father also came closer?"

Farah: "Before, I wanted them to break up. Now that my dad is doing better in his rebound, I just want them to come closer."

Olivia: "What do you think is the solution?"

Farah: "I would like my dad to be more active and to be with my mom or at least care for her because I don't think she's capable of that herself.. that my mother seeks help and opens up."

Mutton, one of the sheep, and Bailey also presented themselves as members in the family constellation who wanted to participate. Because we were already in the sandbox for quite a while, we ended the coaching. At the end, Olivia said: "You can whisper or mentally say something to Twilight, which you would like to say to your actual mother, because it can work energetically." To reflect back on this experience, it is interesting to see that what I hoped for but did not expect to happen, which was my dad to care for my mom, actually happened in the past months.

6.1.4 To coach or not to coach

As I illustrated in the previous examples, coaching is a therapeutic practice between client and animals during which animals mirror a client's behaviour. During a session, the professional will bring awareness to the animals' altered behaviour and ask questions relating to this behaviour. It is important to note that what the professionals describe in the animals' behaviour during coaching sessions, is learned according to a certain framework. According to this framework, humans are only aware of 5% of our behaviour, the rest is unconscious behaviour. The animals often mirror our unconscious behaviour to make this visible to us. They do this for evolutionary reasons, on which Olivia elaborates:

Because it is about the foundation of the safety of the herd or the pack. As soon as another factor comes in, a cat or a sheep or whoever, it affects the herd. Pack animals such as horses and donkeys are constantly communicating about their

place within the pack and how they need to collaborate when something happens.

- Olivia

Thus, they are in touch with each other and need to be aware of potential threats for the pack. That is why they immediately respond when someone enters the pack temporarily and why they can mirror someone's foundational issues, such as trauma.

Eventually, therapeutic coaching is about a client's interpretation, and not about what a professional is seeing. Quite similarly to therapy with a human therapist, a person reflects information back to their client, and the client interprets and makes sense of their own experience. Animals do the same, as they reflect something back, but the actual work is done by the client and dependant on where they are in their stages of grief, healing, acknowledgment etcetera.

When I asked what is necessary for humans to partake in therapeutic coaching, the key factor is that clients have to be open to receive therapeutic coaching with animals: "We [professionals] can say whatever we like and the animals can mirror any kind of behaviour, if someone is not willing to see or feel, the therapy does not work for them", Olivia said. Victor elaborated on this by saying that coaching can come too close to experiences clients do not want to think about:

Some kids don't really want to [do coaching]. Sometimes it just gets too close [to e.g. pain]. We are not going to force coaching, because then it will not work either. [...] You have to want and dare to see yourself. And in my experience, if it gets too close, people keep their distance. - Victor

6.1.5 Conclusion coaching

This chapter demonstrated the relationship between humans and animals during therapeutic coaching sessions. I have illustrated how therapeutic coaching sessions are organised at the farm from the human-perspective. The first ethnographic account, between Fran and Bailey, is a good example of AAT as described in the literature review. After experiencing two coaching sessions myself, evaluating the care farm's practices as AAI became more complicated. If I compare my therapeutic experiences at the farm with the academic literature I found on AAI, the kind of therapy that is practised at the farm is underrepresented in academic literature. In addition, therapy animals are not working for people, with people being passive receivers (Beck 2006), all actors work together in a coaching. As I continued my fieldwork at the farm, I

realised that coaching is only a part of the therapeutic work that is done. I noticed that in the nineteen days I was at the farm, a total of eight coaching sessions took place that I know of, including my own. I argue that most clients who visit the farm, do so for daytime activities and the environment, and not to participate in coaching sessions. In the next chapter, I will therefore look closer at the collaborative and reciprocate ways animals and humans interact with each other, beyond therapeutic coaching sessions.

6.2 Collaboration between animals, young clients and professionals

In this chapter I demonstrate the ongoing process of creating a space together that is suitable for 'healing', or rather, a space in which all actors are allowed to exist 'as they are', in the sense of mental- or physical impairments and trauma. I will also argue that, to create a mutually beneficial relationship between humans and animals, collaborations between animals, young clients and professionals need to happen continuously. With collaborations, I refer to the conversations, the bonding process and other relational processes between humans and animals at the farm. In the following paragraphs I will describe the farms specific ways of living together with both animals as well as humans.

6.2.1 Reciprocity

At the farm, reciprocity was not explicitly mentioned, however, when spending time at the farm, I noticed people sometimes described situations that made me think of reciprocal practices. In this thesis, reciprocity is understood in a relational sense and encompasses actions such as putting in effort, providing affection and meeting the needs of others for a mutual benefit. Clients were, for instance, responsible for tasks such as feeding animals, cleaning the meadows or cooking meals together. More time is spent doing tasks than actually having therapy sessions with animals, which showcases how they live together as well as care for each other. To illustrate this importance of reciprocity, I will provide two ethnographic examples.

For my second day at the farm I was asked to come and help out during Fran's birthday party. Fran invited a couple children from her school to come to the farm. They engaged in activities such as swimming in the jacuzzi and meeting the horses. One of the guests, Devi, did not want to swim initially. I suggested either watching or playing with some of the animals and she responded by saying she was afraid of animals. We went to the inflatable trampoline together, however, a couple minutes later, she wanted to watch the other girls swim. I asked her if she was interested in doing something else, upon which she replied "no". When we were watching the other kids, she slowly started asking me questions about the animals at the farm.

Buddy, a large, yet calm dog approached us and sat down closeby. He caught Devi's attention and I showed her how to pet Buddy. Buddy rolled on his back and nudged his head into our hands and lap. Devi really enjoyed petting him and even searched for Buddy throughout the day. I recognised Devi's behaviour, as I usually feel more comfortable at social gatherings when an animal is present. During my first few days at the care farm, I felt quite uncomfortable in my role, and tried to find comfort through petting the dogs and giving them attention. To me, this signifies a reciprocal bond, because the animals show signs of enjoyment when being petted. They receive affection and physical bonding while, in this context, providing the petter with comfort and affection as well.

Eventually, Devi said she wants to have a dog like Buddy at home. It would feel good to have him around, she shared, but knew her parents would not allow it. What I found particularly interesting, is how Devi initially said she was afraid of all animals, but that during her discomfort she found comfort in the presence and petting of an animal. Devi started talking and opened up when she was petting Buddy, whereas before she looked anxious and uncomfortable.

The farm and its size and many spaces to retreat, facilitates bonding with animals and personal reflection. In different accounts, the farm staff said that they themselves or the clients sit with the animals sometimes:

Sometimes Max sits down with the donkeys and just talks. Sometimes kids like to talk to donkeys because they just don't say anything back. The same goes for the horses. You can just express yourself. - Victor

I responded with: "Is that why I talk to animals?", to which Victor replied:

Yes, why not? It's nice isn't it? It's different when you talk to people. People tend to be quick to respond. And then animals are perfect listeners. They sometimes say, donkeys have such long ears for a reason. We see that children can descend very quickly in their anger or frustration or sometimes also in their fears. - Victor

Verbal communication between humans is often foregrounded, although, relational messages and affection is mostly communicated nonverbally (Argent 2012, 115). This fragment illustrates that talking to humans and talking to animals can have a different value, depending on one's needs, and relates to reciprocity through the process of becoming a co-presence and a shared understanding.

Non-verbal communication is a central part of reciprocity between animals and humans, which can be seen in activities such as physical touch (Wells 2009, 524). An example of physical touch between animals and humans, is brushing. On many occasions, I spent my time at the farm by brushing the donkeys and horses. Brushing animals is part of grooming and also referred to as ‘pansage’. According to the professionals at the farm, brushing the horses and donkeys cleans their coats, promotes blood circulation and ensures that the animals’ natural oils, which protect them against weather circumstances, are distributed all over their coats. Brushing is done regularly for healthy coats. Additionally, pansage is part of a bonding ritual at the farm, because it can create trust and familiarity between human and animal.

On one of the days I was brushing the horses with Fran while Atlas was sitting closeby. Atlas is visually impaired and sometimes prefers to sit outside and listen to what is going on. When I asked Fran about if she thinks the animals know her, she replied with:

Yes, I know they recognise me because they stand still and do not walk away when I approach them. And they allow me to cuddle them.

I then asked if she likes brushing the animals and how it makes her feel, upon which she said that she does not actually like brushing them and that brushing animals does not make her feel calm at all. She paused her speech and continued brushing one of the horses. She then resumed with:

The animals do something for you, and you do something for the animals. I know they like to be brushed. Then I like it as well. That's why I do it.

I also noticed Fran talking to the animals. One of the horses tried to scratch itself, upon which Fran said: “Let me do it Whisper, otherwise your mouth is gonna be full of hairs.”

Fran initially puzzled me. She explained that she does not actually like to brush them, however, when I was observing her, her body language was telling me she was enjoying it. She was laughing, talking to the animals, and being energetic. Although before she declined to brush the horses, eventually she wanted to brush all the horses. Later, I began to realise Fran’s responses signify a reciprocal relationship between her and the animals. Fran suggests enjoyment is created through doing things for each other. After my first weeks at the farm, I started questioning my initial research objective, which focused on the therapy sessions. In order to shed light on the principle of reciprocity, I asked Victor about the therapeutic benefits of the farm environment on its own. He replied with:

Yes, that's for sure [the environment itself can be therapeutic]. I think that if you just stand near the animals and brush them, it can already give you an enormous peace of mind. It provides a piece of peace in which you can be yourself. - Victor

This reinforces the idea of reciprocity; both humans as well as animals are situated in a therapeutic landscape. Humans are receiving the benefits of cohabitating with animals, whereas the animals receive affection and are able to live without being used for traditional farming practices.

6.2.2 Boundaries and consent

At the farm, consent and boundaries are actively taught and practised. At the farm, consent of both animals and humans is important and taught. Consent is an ongoing and active practice, as understanding consent between humans and animals can differ depending on context and emotions. In the farm's context, boundaries are the limits within both human-human as well as human-animal relationships. Animals are, for instance, greeted and 'asked' if they want to participate in practices such as brushing. If they walk away, their agency is respected. To illustrate the complex nature of boundaries and consent, I will provide two ethnographic examples.

One of my first interactions with animals at the farm was with two goats and signifies the tensions of boundaries between humans and animals. I observed the goats on the picnic tables, on which they usually hang out. After some eye contact between me and the goats, they got off the table and walked towards me. There was a wooden fence between us, and I noticed that I immediately wanted them to come closer, so I could pet them from above the fence. The goats stared at me and maintained a distance. It felt like the goats wanted to express their curiosity and acknowledge my presence by coming up to me, while at the same time set their boundaries. I was testing their boundaries in order to pet them, because I viewed them as 'cute' animals to be petted, whereas I did not know them yet and if they would want to engage in physical contact. This first meeting felt like an interlude for the things I was about to learn at the farm. When comparing this field to, for instance, a petting zoo, I probably would not have been this careful. The specific fieldwork site encouraged me not to use animals for my entertainment, thereby contributing to a broader culture of consent.

In my second week at the farm, I was asked to brush the horses and donkeys. It was the first time I practised pangsage. At the farm, pangsage is described as an intimate practice between human and animal, thus it felt good that she trusted me to go into the field with the animals

solo for the first time. I asked Olivia if there were specific instructions, and she gave me a hard and soft brush and told me not to brush against the hairs. When going into the field and doing something like brushing an animal, Olivia advised to greet an animal first and ask permission “in a way that feels good”. When I approached an animal, they usually looked up. I let them smell the brush, followed by my hand, and if they were interested, I came closer and started brushing them. If they continued doing what they were doing, I interpreted their behaviour as consent. Because a specific manner to ask for consent was not provided, this way felt the most comfortable for me.

Almost all the animals allowed me to brush them. One of the bigger donkeys however, Pepper, started walking away. The second time I tried, Pepper allowed me to brush her for a few seconds, then she started rolling on the ground and making noises almost as if she was laughing at me – and doing it on purpose! I then understood her behaviour as a boundary and continued with the other donkeys. One of the smaller donkeys, Churro, was already looking at me when I came near. I greeted her in the same way and she kept looking at me without continuing her grazing, so I was not entirely sure if she wanted to be brushed. When Churro smelled the brush, however, she made a breezing sound and pushed herself under my brush. I then assumed she wanted to be brushed and while I was petting and brushing her, she remained calm. When I walked away and wanted to leave, Churro made the breezing sound again and started following me, so I brushed her a little more.

After brushing the animals, I shared my experience with Olivia. It quickly became clear it was not that straightforward to surmise animals’ consent from their behaviour. She explained that donkeys and horses also groom themselves by rolling in the dirt and mud and by rubbing against trees. Through this lens, I understood Pepper’s behaviour not only as a boundary, but also as expressing her agency and that in the moment she wanted to do the grooming herself. When I inquired about Churro and what the breezing sound she made means, Olivia said: “When a human is close, the breezing sound usually means to let go, let the animal go, or to stop what you are doing”.

Her answer did not fully resonate, because I thought the opposite when Churro pushed herself under my brush; that Churro wanted to be brushed. This showcases the ambiguity of understanding animal behaviour. An expression can mean something according to a certain framework, however, in practice it can feel like something else is being communicated.

6.2.3 Kinship

The professionals at the farm purposely try to create an environment that resembles a family dynamic. On different occasions, Olivia, Juniper and Victor mentioned that the farm functions like a family:

I think above all a lot of respect and trust and safety is what we try to accomplish. When children come in here first, the focus is on trust and security, often because they come out of situations where there was none. [...] [Being here] is also kind of raising the children and learning them to treat all creatures respectfully. We are a care institution, but uhm, we actually function as a big family here and I think that's important in a family too, that you can do everything with confidence and safety. I think we can really work from that foundation, because we can't start working with a child and their goals if they don't feel safe and trusted here. That's also why it often doesn't work in other places. And then they come here and because they're unfamiliar with the way we work here, they just react very differently than when they go into that clinical setting. - Olivia

From their perspective, a family is a structure for safety and trust. However, a family is not a space of equal treatment and respect per se. As feminist scholars have shown, the structure of a family can also facilitate acts of violence, exploitation and other mistreatments built on socialised gender roles and patriarchal norms (Satz 2017). The way the family is described above, then, is an idealised version. The farm as a healthcare institution, is, thus relationally informed. The practises at the farm are relationally negotiated, including well-being:

To provide for the basic needs [...] and be emotionally available. I think that already does a lot for the well-being of the children here. [...] We as a team also care about each other and really love the children. [...] And of course that's not something you see a lot in healthcare institutions. You really have to be able to keep a distance. But because we are so small-scale and children are often here for a longer period of time, you can mean more to them. And of course we also give them food and drinks [both laugh]. - Olivia

From a family perspective, albeit an idealised version, every being is treated as an equal at the farm. Showing the clients how to treat animals as equals is one of the staff's key teachings:

Also the animals that are not used for therapy are treated the same [as therapy animals]. What should be normal [treating all animals as equals], is now seen as something abnormal. - Olivia

All the animals at the farm have their own name and identity. On the bathroom door, there is a calendar with the birthdays of every client, professional and animal on it. The animals are written down with their names, as part of the family. When clients and staff talk about the animals, they are always mentioned by name. As an outsider, at first I could not make out if they were talking about an animal or a human. Contrary to what is often described in literature about AAI, the animals at the farm are not regarded only as therapy animals, but also as companion animals with whom therapeutic activities can take place.

6.2.4 Becoming one with the herd

For this study, I was curious how pack behaviour manifests at the farm and if people could be a part of the pack, as de Laet describes. De Laet focuses on the collaboration that takes place in human-animal bonds, rather than tools that suggest power, such as a leash or cage (de Laet 2021). As explained in 6.1.4, humans and animals outside of the herd, become a part of the herd temporarily when you come near them:

When you are near them [the farm animals], you are also part of the herd and then they always coach. And I think you have to know what coaching is all about in order to see that. - Juniper

Well, you do become part of the pack, yes. Yes, but that's what makes it interesting. Because what does the pack do to you emotionally? What do they show you? But that's not always easy, so to speak. - Victor

Paradoxically, a human-animal bond is not necessary to become part of the herd. When I asked Victor and Olivia if animals have to get used to a specific person, they said:

No, not with a portage⁸. And not with coaching either. If someone new comes, they make physical contact with the animal first. [...] I think the most important thing is that they have established contact but a period of getting to know each other is not necessary. [...] You could do coaching with any pack animal, because coaching is about bringing their behaviour into awareness. - Victor

⁸ Laying on the back of a donkey or horse, for therapeutic purposes.

Sure there will be recognition after a few times.. They [the farm animals] recognise you as a person and recognise your scent. But what we see is, if I put you in the sandbox now and you're in the sandbox again in two weeks, the coaching can be very different, but the main topics in your life always come back. So the things you might experience, has more to do with the number of coachings you've had, more so than the bond. - Olivia

Much of the literature centred around the human-animal bond, emphasises the depth and longevity of the bond, in order to develop cooperative or therapeutic relations. Within equine social relations, for instance, interaction is based on friendship and cooperation. Horses sense what someone wants them to do and when they establish long-term bonds with others, which can be members of other species, they tend to be cooperative and faithful (Argent 2012, 113). However, in the farm's specific context, according to the professionals, no bond is necessary between humans and animals for therapeutic practices to take place, or to become part of the pack. The depth of the bond might not matter for the animals to assist therapeutically, however, research has shown that interactions with a familiar animal can have more therapeutic benefits than interactions with unfamiliar animals (Wells, 2009, 524).

Although the staff members specify that no bond is necessary, they do have bonds with the animals at the farm, and so do most of the clients. At the farm it is customary to establish bonds to a certain extent. Clients and workers spend time with animals, brush them, clean the fields and also listen to the animals in terms of body language and pack behaviour and make decisions based on that, which are relational processes that facilitate bonding.

6.2.5 Conclusion collaborations

In the first empirical chapter, I illustrated the role of some of the therapy animals, however, their role is not limited to a therapy setting. The animals are a part of the broader environment at the care farm. Therapy does not only take place in scheduled sessions:

*Therapy is everywhere, at all times and everything participates. [...] Once you know the framework around animal behaviour and its meaning, you will see it in everything the animals do. I coach everyday with the dogs, for all kinds of things.
- Juniper*

When I asked Juniper what the difference then is between a coaching session and regular life, she responded with: "Creating awareness around what you experience".

In this chapter, I have analysed the interaction between animals and humans at the farm. By doing so, I have demonstrated that therapy animals are inextricably linked to the broader environment of the care farm. Animals and humans establish a bond through reciprocity, kinship relations and evaluating each other's needs and boundaries. Consequently, I argue that therapy goes beyond scheduled therapeutic sessions and how AAI is commonly described, by constructing a therapeutic landscape together. In the next chapter, I will describe how coaching with animals and creating a therapeutic landscape as described in the previous two chapters, also comes with challenges and ethical considerations.

6.3 Challenges of AAI

As previously described, I noticed that the boundaries and consent of both humans and animals were taken very seriously at the farm. If an animal walks away during a brushing or coaching session, it is respected. If an animal wants to join in during a coaching, the animal can become part of the session, if the client allows it as well. Despite this acknowledgement of animal agency, however, I noticed during both observations and interviews acting from this ideal was not always easy. This final empirical chapter exhibits the complicated relation between ideals and the (practicality) dilemmas at the care farm. In other words, the aim of this chapter is to analyse and debunk the romanticisation of the care farm. In this chapter, I claim that in order to make decisions for everyone's well-being, one sometimes needs to do things without the consent of animals. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss some of the dilemmas that emerged at the farm, showing how certain decisions can be challenging with regards to the well-being of animals.

6.3.1 Moral considerations

At some point, when the weather started getting hotter and flies and other insect plagues started increasing, the professionals at the farm hung up an electronic trap device for flies, and other traps for rats and woodlice. On various occasions, people at the farm could hear the flies burning in the trap that was meant to attract them. The burning smell was usually acknowledged by anyone present, accompanied by Juniper mentioning how horrible it is that they are killing the insects:

We teach the children to be fair to all animals and then we do this [burning insects]. It's really awful, especially when they are sticking to the glue trap and slowly die. But it's also disgusting when those flies are inside and you know they hang out in literal shit. Burning them is actually better [because they die quicker]. - Juniper

On another occasion, I found a deceased rat around the chicken area, who had died due to a trap. Olivia said she would put it away and that she felt sorry for the rat. What is interesting in these examples, is how the professionals engage in practices they would rather not engage in and thereby consider what would be the worst death for, in this case, a fly. Whenever they engage in harmful practices, they make clear they are actually hurting animals and that it is not something to be proud of, but rather necessary for the well-being of the farm animals, clients and themselves. The farm professionals try to teach the clients that every life is important, and that animals are intelligent creatures just like humans. However, it becomes apparent that in some situations some lives are prioritised, in this case that of the farm animals and humans.

In *Saving Animals: Multispecies Ecologies of Rescue and Care*, Abrell argues that rescue work is not just saving and cuddling animals, but accompanied by making difficult decisions, for instance, regarding space and who gets rescued, management of resources and dealing with issues like corruption. Besides that, a sanctuary is still a place of confinement and control. Abrell also gives an example of the ethical ambiguity of caring for carnivores, which involves the killing of one animal to support another, such as killing mice for birds and reptiles. The ‘beauty’ of rescue work comes with dilemmas, quite similarly to what I described at the care farm (Abrell 2021).

With regards to the farm’s own animals, sometimes decisions were made without consulting the animals. These often had to do with the limited space available on the farm. For instance, a female donkey, Darcie, was pregnant and close to giving labour. To provide Darcie and her foal enough space for labour and the first few months of acclimatising, she was moved to the area where the two goats usually live. Olivia, Emily and I moved the goats and their stuff towards the front meadow, so the donkey has her own place for when she needs to give birth and raise her young. Next, when the land was fertilised, the horses were moved and confined to a smaller space than usual. The lands were off-limits for a couple of weeks in order for the grass to grow. After those weeks, the horses were free to graze the meadows again.

In both examples, the animals did not have a choice in their living situation as the decisions to move the animals around or confine them to certain areas was made by the professionals. When I asked Olivia about how the staff balances between respecting autonomy and confining the animals, she responded with:

I think it's about well-being, so I think having knowledge about a certain animal and making decisions based on that. Such as today, the horses are in the large

meadow, but tomorrow they won't be allowed there because we know that when they eat lots of grass, it's also not good for them. [...] So we pay attention to their dietary needs but.. we try to limit our limiting when it comes to the animals. - Olivia

Olivia illustrates a tension between the short-term desires of the horses (grass) and their long-term well-being (digestion or weight problems). Every choice the staff makes regarding space and living, is with consideration towards the entire ecosystem at the farm. However, often someone's well-being needs to be prioritised above that of others to ensure a safe and structured environment. In case of parasitic animals, flies and rats, the health of the people and animals are prioritised. When it comes to the arrangement of the animals and their location, a birth or fertilising the lands is prioritised over the animals' agency. So, whereas in coaching sessions or physical contact the animals' boundaries and agency are prioritised, their agency does not matter as much when it comes to more practical choices such as food and living conditions.

What I found puzzling, in contrast to the moral considerations described above, is the staff's attitude. Sometimes they made it seem as if the farm practices were self-evident. The staff explained that humans do not have to do much to receive support from the animals and that the animals are simply around:

Look, we let the pack be as they are. And the kids just walk in between them and make contact. Uh, the kids don't really do much. They make contact and they have a question in their minds, what they want to know, what they want to work on. But the animals just walk around. We let them be free in that sense. - Victor

From my perception, the context for these farm conditions to exist as the staff would like them to exist is being purposefully orchestrated. The professionals, clients and animals are continuously working on creating this both imagined as well as physical therapeutic landscape.

6.3.2 The working burden

In chapter 6.1, I touched upon the potential risk for animals to become overworked when partaking in therapeutic sessions. To prevent exhaustion, a lot of attention was given, moreover, to the mental and physical burden for animals when they partake in therapeutic activities. Victor used a metaphor to illustrate the animals' burden of taking on someone's energy during a coaching session:

It also does a lot to the donkeys, just imagine that I am talking negatively to you for the past hour we have been talking. At the end of the day, you may be quite tired. It's not a positive energy. And of course the donkeys have that too. It is often people's problems that come up, feelings, sometimes very heavy feelings. - Victor

Well, by accumulating energies from others. For example, we had a donkey that died. The whole herd was upset. All the donkeys had skin problems for a few months. [...] That's because things also work emotionally and what we humans can talk about, within the animals you can see that in behaviour or in physical defects that occur. And that is something we want to avoid. - Olivia

Animals are sensitive instruments, which carries the danger that they become overworked or stressed, and even manifest certain illnesses due to the work they do. All of the staff have said that they really look out for the animals and their behaviour. It is customary after every session to 'let the animals go' and thank them:

I think what's important is closure with the animals. You thank them with words but also mentally, and then you really close it. And then they are also freed from the child's problems, as it were, then you disconnect them from each other. [...] It's more like a goodbye. And that also comes with a touch. - Victor

What is interesting here, is that Victor assumes that the animals are freed from the clients' energy when a client thanks them, however, when I asked how he could know, he explained that it's difficult to measure or describe. When I asked Victor how the farm staff notices negative energy within the animals, Victor said he could not clearly answer that, as they are carrier animals: "They really carry the burden for you. It is more instinctive rather than obvious". Thus according to Victor animals are not so quick to indicate that they are overwhelmed or overworked which further complicates the practice of animal assisted interventions.

6.3.3 Accessibility

The farm, as welcoming as it felt, does use exclusion criteria to maintain a certain level of care and safety. There is an intake process, and people who, for instance, have a drug addiction or who are dealing with aggression problems, and babies are not allowed. Besides the exclusion criteria, it is not desirable to have clients or guests at the farm who have animal allergies or who are afraid of animals. During one of my fieldwork days, a social worker came by to talk

with the children about their satisfaction with the care they are receiving at the farm. At the entrance gate, the social worker heard barking dogs, and then explained she was afraid of them. At first, the professionals did not want her to come inside, however, eventually they did put all the dogs inside one of the buildings, so that the social worker could comfortably enter. At the time of the social worker's arrival, I was in the meadow with Juniper and Olivia, and Juniper said:

It is not fair to them [the dogs]. They know where they are sending someone. A farm has animals, what did she expect? Are we gonna lock all the dogs inside? They can send someone else. - Juniper

Thus, a potential client needs to be on a comfortable level with animals. Otherwise someone's focus will be on their fear, as the example of the social worker illustrates. Regardless of how 'good' a care facility wants to be, there are always limitations and ethical considerations which exclude possible clients. Exclusion does not only take place amongst people. The animals at the farm are also strictly selected and socialised:

We either get the animals here at a very young age or when they are quite a bit older. In case of the latter one, we immediately start by socialising them and also with regards to aggression in their behaviour and what is desirable and not. [...] Socialising animals is done through letting them walk on different surfaces, turning on the radio, allowing my kid to walk around the animals, amongst other things. - Olivia

We do select based on temperament. Well, I don't know how to define training. It's not that we train them, but it is true that they should be socialised. We cannot have a child walk behind an animal, and then they suddenly get a kick. So in that sense they are trained. - Victor

The animals are not so much trained to perform, but a training does take place. Animals are selected and socialised to fit in. The care farm is, thus, not accessible to just any animal. Desired and undesired behaviours are evaluated, upon which choices are made:

If an animal does not fit here, then it will go to some other place because it needs to be safe here for the children. However, we do deem it as important that the animals show their natural behaviour as much as possible. If they bite each other

sometimes, that's okay, but kicking or biting us [staff and clients] is not desirable and we try to limit that behaviour. - Olivia

The animals themselves, thus, do not choose to come to the farm and do not have a say in who they will be living together with or how they will be living. As Olivia describes, a negotiation takes place between letting the animal be its 'natural self' and socialising the animal, thus a negotiation between freedom of the animals, and safety of the people. Negotiations also take place between animals, for instance, in the case of a new arrival. Darcie gave birth to a foal and the both of them were separated from the other donkeys by a fence to give them privacy and bonding time. However, the professionals were worried if one of the larger donkeys, Pepper, would accept the foal into the herd or not. A previous foal that was born at the farm, was not accepted by Pepper and was sent away to another farm as a consequence. Since Pepper is valued more, due to her herd connections, history at the farm and therapeutic purposes, a consideration is made between what is best for the herd, expanding the herd and separating young from their mothers.

When it comes to accessibility, many negotiations take place to create safe conditions for both human and animal. To offer tailored treatment, the professionals can only take on a few clients at a time, which makes the farm quite exclusive. Paradoxically, to make a client or animal feel welcome, exclusion needs to take place. On top of that, potential clients need to have the right indications and insurance to receive treatment at the farm. Class comes into play here, as some people could have more financial means to pay for treatments or better insurance.

6.3.4 Safety

When it comes to safety, the staff tries to ensure both animals and humans are safe at the farm. "It remains an animal, so we cannot be a hundred percent sure.. But we do with our animals [laughs]", Olivia said. One day, I was feeding the goats with Emily, but then they escaped into the donkey field. The professionals warned me before about not letting the goats wander. Emily and I managed to lure them back with some hay. Afterwards, I asked Olivia what would happen if the goats mingled with the donkeys. She said: "Then Pepper will kill them". She said it jokingly, but was serious at the same time, because it was a possibility. Working with animals who have different characters, while also working with different humans, complicates safety because you never know what will happen in an interaction. What I found interesting, was how the professionals approached possible dangerous situations:

We once had a child bitten by a donkey. But that also says something, if someone is bitten in their shoe. They are all signals, so to speak. Sometimes we hear: 'but there was a fly on its back.' Yes, there was a fly on his back. But then you can make a decision, if the animal does that again and whether there is a fly again. What is it then? The client also shows something, unconsciously towards the pack. - Victor

A scenario that could be interpreted as dangerous, is simultaneously approached through a coaching lense. One afternoon, when I was brushing the horses, I was thinking about a topic for my coaching session. I had in mind: 'I would like to feel more, instead of rationalising feelings'. One of the horses, then stepped on my toes. It hurt quite a bit, and if I were not wearing sturdy boots, my toes would probably have been damaged more, but I continued brushing them. Victor checked on me, and then I told him what happened. Later, Olivia and Juniper told me that the coaching meaning of a horse stepping on a toe means that 'something should be felt'. When I heard this initially, I was puzzled because of the topic I had in mind when the horse stepped on my toe. This experience makes me relate to Victor's statement and that different truths, in this case a possible danger and a deeper, possibly relevant meaning, can exist next to each other. Besides physical safety, the professionals also try to manage emotional safety:

The other day with Mason, we asked him a lot of things and at one point he was very negative in his answers. And then you have to be careful that a client doesn't sink into a bottomless hole of negativity. We can then stop the coaching, so they can get out of it. - Victor

6.3.5 Conclusion challenges

In this chapter, I have argued that the farm is not a utopia or a blueprint that can be applied to other healthcare settings. Negotiations and risk management take place and sometimes one group is prioritised over another. There are tensions and risks involved for both the animals as well as the clients, which the professionals try to manage to the best of their extent. Engaging with animals in the way that is done at the farm, can feel like treading a fine line between exploitation and reciprocity, as Kimmerer described. In her example, the plant actually grows better due to human interference (Kimmerer 2013). However it is difficult to tell whether the same goes for animals in this specific context, and more research would be needed in order to do so.

6.4 Limitations

This ethnographic study was able to demonstrate noteworthy findings, which can be related to existing academic theories. The research does, however, have some limitations. Firstly, this is an ethnography of a specific care farm, whose staff approaches therapeutic practices in their own way. Findings in this ethnography cannot easily be generalised, thus, not much can be said about other (therapeutic) care farms. Secondly, this study was done with a relatively small sample size and is not representative for AAI, people with mental or physical impairments or therapeutic care farms.

Furthermore, initially I wanted to have interviews with young clients as well, however, both my inexperience as a researcher as well as the farm's hesitation towards scheduling interviews, were limiting factors in this research. In retrospect, I could have engaged in better intermittent analysis of my data, in order to do research in a more structured way.

Next, I did not study the framework that the professionals work with. I learned from them as they are the experts, and used their local knowledge to understand the coachings and human-animal bond. Understanding the framework and how it came into being, is important to understand where the observations and interpretations come from, albeit outside the scope of my research.

Finally, this research did not measure satisfaction or improvement, amongst other things, thus, cannot prove if the care farm's methods are effective. Measuring was beyond the scope of my research, however, it could be interesting to study a more-than-human therapeutic landscape and measure effectiveness with a multispecies approach, through e.g. self-reports and longer term observations of the human-animal bond and landscape.

7. Constructing a more-than-human therapeutic landscape

A multispecies or more-than-human therapeutic landscape is an example of how there are multiple ways of doing ‘good’ care which complicates how care, collaboration and well-being is negotiated. In this concluding section, I will return to my initial puzzle and research questions. My initial puzzle was how, on one hand humans benefit from the animals in therapeutic practices and animal companionship, and on the other hand how little focus is put on the animals’ cooperation and interests; how can humans care for them in an ethical way when they ‘do’ therapeutic work for us. In the following paragraphs, I summarise my findings and thereby demonstrate how humans and animals can exist in a mutually beneficial relationship.

In the first empirical chapter I demonstrated the relationship between humans and animals during therapeutic coaching sessions. I provided a detailed description of the work that animals, clients and coaches do together and how therapeutic coaching sessions are practised and understood at the farm. The first ethnographic account, between Fran and Bailey, is a good example of AAT. The second and third ethnographic examples of my own coaching sessions, complicates the evaluation of the therapy practices at the care farm as AAT. Further into my fieldwork, I realised that coaching is only a part of the therapeutic work that is done at the farm. This chapter also showcases that different truths can exist next to each other. The professionals have learned a certain framework to analyse animal behaviour, however, in coaching sessions a client’s interpretation carries more weight than their own internalised knowledge.

In the second chapter, I argue that most clients who visit the farm, do so for daytime activities and the environment, and not to participate in coaching sessions. In this chapter, I analysed the interaction between animals and humans at the farm and thereby demonstrated that therapy animals are inextricably linked to the broader environment of the care farm. I also demonstrated that animals, clients and professionals collaborate to create a mutually beneficial relationship, and that a lot of effort is put into creating a specific environment. I have showcased that the animals are regarded as kin in some ways, and that animals and humans establish a bond through reciprocity, caring for each other, being responsible for tasks such as feeding animals, and evaluating each other's needs and boundaries. More time is spent doing tasks than actually having therapy sessions with animals. Consequently, I argue that therapy goes beyond scheduled therapeutic sessions.

In the third chapter, I argued that the farm is not a utopia. I showcase how the farm understands the challenges of AAI and working with animals, and how it can impact both the well-being of humans as well as animals. Aside from the part that animals are cared for, and the extent to which their well-being is considered, they are still confined within a space they did not choose to be in. There are tensions and risks involved for both the animals as well as the clients, which the professionals try to manage to the best of their extent. During negotiations and risk management, sometimes one group is prioritised over another.

For this ethnographic study, I was initially interested in the bond that humans and animals establish between each other at a therapeutic care farm in order for therapy to be effective. As I furthered into my fieldwork, my research became more about constructing a more-than-human therapeutic landscape. My research question was: How are human-animal bonds established and evaluated at a therapeutic care farm in the Netherlands? Therefore, the human-animal bond is partially established in coaching settings, through proximity and energetic exchange. Clients who visit the care farm do so for daytime activities and not necessarily to participate in coaching sessions. The interaction between humans and animals at the care farm encompasses living together as well as caring for each other, which demonstrates that animals are not only useful, but are participants on their own terms. Finally, a more-than-human therapeutic landscape could be useful in recognising the multitude of spaces in which well-being and healing can be promoted beyond the scope of human-only analysis.

Ultimately, I argue that the professionals, clients and animals are constructing a multispecies or more-than-human therapeutic landscape, through their relational approach to

treatment and thereby demedicalising healthcare; certain illnesses and handicaps are not approached as such and in need of traditional treatment. With my thesis, I am contributing to the existing literature by analysing the therapeutic landscape as a landscape that humans and animals are negotiating and structuring together.

8. List of references

Abrell, Elan

- 2021 *Saving Animals: Multispecies Ecologies of Rescue and Care*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Argent, Gala

- 2012 "Toward a Privileging of the Nonverbal: Communication, Corporeal Synchrony, and Transcendence in Humans and Horses." In *Experiencing Animal Minds: An Anthology of Animal-Human Encounters*, compiled by Julie A. Smith and Robert W. Mitchell, 111-128. New York City: Columbia University Press.

Beck, Alan M.

- 2006 "The Use of Animals to Benefit Humans: Animal-Assisted Therapy." In *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice*, compiled by Aubrey H. Fine, 21-40. Cambridge: Academic Press.

Bowen, Jonathan, Antonio Bulbena and Jaume Fatjó

- 2021 The Value of Companion Dogs as a Source of Social Support for their Owners: Findings from a Pre-pandemic Representative Sample and a Convenience Sample Obtained during the COVID-19 Lockdown in Spain. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12: 1-12.

Bracken-Roche, Dearbhail, Emily Bell, Mary Ellen Macdonald, and Eric Racine

- 2017 The Concept of ‘Vulnerability’ in Research Ethics: An In-depth Analysis of Policies and Guidelines. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 15(1): 1-18
- Doughty, Karolina
- 2018 “Therapeutic Landscapes.” In *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, compiled by Peter Howard et al., 27-58. London: Routledge.
- Eason, Fenella
- 2019 Human–canine Collaboration in Care: Doing Diabetes. London: Routledge.
- Evans-Pritchard, Edward Evan
- 1940 *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Fine, Aubrey H. (Ed.)
- 2019 *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Foundations and Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Interventions*. Cambridge: Academic Press.
- Haubenhofner, Dorit K. and Sylvia Kirchengast
- 2006 Physiological Arousal for Companion Dogs Working with Their Owners in Animal-Assisted Activities and Animal-Assisted Therapy. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 9(2): 165-172.
- Kirksey, S. Eben and Stefan Helmreich
- 2010 The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology*, 25(4): 545–576.
- Kohn, Eduardo
- 2007 How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement. *American Ethnologist*, 34(1): 3-24.
- Laet, Marianne de
- 2021 “To Live and Learn. Notes on Alterity and Togetherness, or: On Living with Dogs.” In *Environmental Alterities*, compiled by Cristóbal Bonelli and Antonia Walford, 185-203. Manchester: Mattering Press.
- Laet, Marianne de, Annelieke Driessen, and Else Vogel
- 2021 Thinking with Attachments: Appreciating a Generative Analytic. *Social*

Studies of Science, 51(6): 799–819.

Lee Davis, Donna, Anita Maurstad and Sarah Dean

2015 My Horse is my Therapist: The Medicalization of Pleasure Among Women Equestrians. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 29(3): 298-315.

Meehan, Michael, Bronwyn Massavelli and Nancy Pachana

2017 Using Attachment Theory and Social Support Theory to Examine and Measure Pets as Sources of Social Support and Attachment Figures. *Anthrozoös*, 30(2): 273-289.

Nepps, Peggy, Charles N. Stewart and Stephen R. Bruckno

2014 Animal-Assisted Activity: Effects of a Complementary Intervention Program on Psychological and Physiological Variables. *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine*, 19(3): 211–215.

Nimer, Janelle and Brad Lundahl

2007 Animal-Assisted Therapy: A Meta-Analysis. *Anthrozoös*, 20(3): 225-238.

Lien, Marianne Elisabeth and Gisli Pálsson

2021 Ethnography Beyond the Human: The ‘Other-than-Human’ in Ethnographic Work, *Ethnos*, 86(1): 1-20.

O'Haire, Marguerite E., Samantha J. McKenzie, Sandra McCune and Virginia Slaughter

2014 Effects of Classroom Animal-Assisted Activities on Social Functioning in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 20(3): 162–168.

Pols, Jeanette

2012 Care at a Distance: On the Closeness of Technology. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Porter, Natalie

2019 Training Dogs to Feel Good: Embodying Well-being in Multispecies Relations. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 33(1): 101-119.

Satz, Debra

2017 “Feminist Perspectives on Reproduction and the Family”. In *The Stanford*

Encyclopedia of Philosophy, compiled by Edward N. Zalta.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/feminism-family/>.

Wells, Deborah L.

2009 The Effects of Animals on Human Health and Well-being. *Journal of Social Issues*, 65(3): 523-543.

Williams, Allison

1998 Therapeutic Landscapes in Holistic Medicine. *Social Science & Medicine*, 46(9): 1193-1203.

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix A: Operationalisation table

research question	subquestion	methods	implementation	key concepts
<i>How are human-animal bonds established and evaluated on a care farm in the Netherlands?</i>		participant observation of daily life at the care farm volunteering with both kids and animals, while learning from the professionals semi-structured interviews, activities and walks coaching sessions	how do young clients and professionals talk about bonding with animals? what do they deem as essential in order for someone to bond with an animal? why do people choose to come to a care farm as opposed to e.g. having a pet, going to a zoo etc. > what is the added value of a care farm?	multispecies ethnography, collaboration, agency, pack, nonverbal communication, well-being
	<i>How do professionals, young clients and animals work together to achieve the benefits of animal companionship/A</i>	participant observation volunteering semi-structured interviews	how do people feel when around or working with animals? what benefits do humans experience? what do humans have to do to reap the benefits of AAI? what do animals have to do, so	well-being, multispecies ethnography, collaboration, agency, pack, therapeutic landscape/environment, consent

	<i>AI⁹ for the well-being and illness experience of humans?/create a mutually beneficial relationship</i>		<p>that people can experience benefits with AAI?</p> <p>how does animal companionship/AAI contribute to the illness experience?</p> <p>what does well-being mean to someone?</p>	
	<i>How do professionals and young clients understand the benefits and challenges of AAI with regards to the well-being of the animals involved?</i>	<p>participant observation</p> <p>volunteering</p> <p>semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>what are the benefits for animals according to clients and professionals?</p> <p>what is expected from animals for therapy to be effective?</p> <p>what are the challenges for animals according to clients and professionals?</p> <p>how do i perceive the animals? > e.g. healthy, forced, affective</p> <p>when are similarities and when are differences between animals and humans emphasised?</p> <p>when is an animal healthy according to a professional or client?</p> <p>how is the well-being of animals being monitored?</p>	<p>well-being, multispecies ethnography</p>
	<i>What attempts are made to establish contact between humans and animals and how is nonverbal communication interpreted?</i>	<p>participant observation, learning to communicate with animals and how to interpret their behaviour</p> <p>describe my own learning process in how to communicate/attune with/to animals</p> <p>volunteering</p>	<p>what communication methods do animals and humans use with each other?</p> <p>what do humans read in animals' body language?</p> <p>how do humans and animals treat each other?</p> <p>how do humans and animals resist each other?</p> <p>how do humans and animals move around each other?</p> <p>how do clients learn to</p>	<p>nonverbal communication, multispecies ethnography, collaboration, pack, agency</p>

⁹ Depending on what is relevant at the care farm and specific person

		semi-structured interviews	<p>communicate with animals beyond human verbal language?</p> <p>how do I interpret animal behaviour and how does a client or professional interpret the same behaviour?</p> <p>how do animals express agency?</p>	
	<i>How is therapeutic coaching practised and understood at the care farm?</i>	<p>receiving coaching sessions and reflecting on it</p> <p>partaking in coaching sessions</p> <p>participant observation</p> <p>semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>what is therapeutic coaching?</p> <p>how does it work?</p> <p>do animals need to be trained as therapy animals?</p> <p>is there a framework for understanding animal behaviour?</p> <p>how does the framework translate into reality?</p> <p>how do I experience therapeutic coaching?</p>	Therapy, AAI, therapeutic landscape/environment,

9.2 Appendix B: Interview guide

Next, are some of the questions I asked during the three qualitative interviews.

- How do you balance between fostering autonomy and parenting/doing things for the children?
- What values are important and implemented at the farm?
- How do you balance autonomy and limitations when it concerns the animals? For example, they do not choose where they stand or when they get hay.
- How do you ask permission from a horse or donkey?
- How do you recognise consent and how do you recognise rejection?
- How do you greet an animal?
- How do you respect an animal in your opinion?
- How do you thank an animal?
- Why do you think people choose to come to a care farm as opposed to e.g. having a pet, going to a zoo etc. What is the added value of a care farm?
- How do you see the farm's values in a broader context?

- Do the animals have to feel safe in the environment or are there no conditions at all for them to mirror behaviour?
- Do the animals receive training or something similar before they can be used therapeutically?
- Are there certain expectations of the animals from the farm and from clients?
- What are the benefits for the animals of being on a therapeutic care farm like this?
- From your previous experiences with animals, is there a difference in animal behaviour here and elsewhere?
- What do people have to do in order for them to experience therapeutic effects with animals?
- Do you have a connection with the animals here? And are there animals with whom you have no connection?
- How was that bond formed?
- Do horses and donkeys always mirror behaviour as soon as a human is present amongst them?
- Besides themselves and with humans, do they also mirror with other species? Or just people?
- Are you constantly interpreting the behaviour of the animals? Can you 'unsee'?
- How do clients learn to communicate with the animals? What do they learn?
- What does well-being mean to you, in the context of the farm and the support the children receive here?
- How do you look after the welfare of the animals?
- When do you think an animal is healthy or not?
- What are the challenges regarding coaching and portage towards the animals?
- How do you see whether an animal likes something or not? Do you listen to that?

9.3 Appendix C: Interview transcript example

The following fragments are the first ten minutes of my interview with Victor, to showcase my interview style and the level of detail in transcribing the interviews.

[00:00:00.04] - Farah

Maar dan kan het altijd nog? Het hoeft niet allemaal vandaag. Ik kan misschien over een paar weken nog denken oh ja, misschien weet Victor hier wat meer over. En dan stel ik je misschien nog een paar vragen.

[00:00:12.11] - Victor

Ja. Uhm. Mmm.

[00:00:20.24] - Farah

Wat jij wil vertellen.

[00:00:23.01] - Victor

Meestal als jongeren hier komen dan gaan we eerst aftasten of ze klaar over zijn, min of meer. En daar bedoel ik mee te zeggen dat niet iedere kind daar rijp voor is. Als een kind hier net aankomt, vol trauma's. En nog helemaal vol zit daarvan, dan is dat nog niet de meest handige weg om gelijk de dieren in te zetten.

[00:00:47.24] - Farah

Hoe merk je dat dan?

[00:00:51.00] - Victor

Nou ja, je krijgt achtergrondinformatie. Ja en uh, ik noem maar voorbeeld hoor. Maar het is meer, het is nu drie of vier jaar geleden en hij is nu twee jaar weg volgens mij. Vijf jaar geleden kwam die binnen, een jongen, en die had een hele trauma op school doorgemaakt. En uh, nou hij wilde niks. Kwam hier drie dagen per week, sliep hier twee nachten en uiteindelijk na drie jaar is hij een opleiding gaan volgen. Hij is nu een tijd bezig met z'n hbo. Dus echt van een heel eind komt hij, terwijl hij eerst mavo en doorn deed, maar dat trok hij gewoon niet. Hij voelde zich totaal niet gezien. Dus in het begin leer je zo'n jongen eerst kennen. Vertrouwen, veiligheid opbouwen. Dat is sowieso altijd standaard hier met elke jongen of elke iemand die binnenkomt.

Aan de hand daarvan ga je zien, is iemand eraan toe of niet? Dat doe je door middel van spelletjes. Uh die spring kikker spring bijvoorbeeld.

[00:01:54.20] - Farah

Ja, dat heb ik wel eens gedaan met Fran en Donna ja.

[00:01:57.22] - Victor

En dat is wel vrij aan de oppervlakte. Bij dieren gaat het wel een stuk dieper. Als je daar mee gaat coachen. Uh, dat komt omdat, ten eerste zitten ze in een roedel. En in een roedel wordt het fysieke stuk meer opgepakt. Maar ook meer je diepere gevoelens als het ware, dat komt

ook naar boven. Want zij kunnen niet praten. Dus aan de hand daarvan en allerlei gedragingen, kunnen wij dat zien (inaudible). Bijvoorbeeld met vragen.

[00:02:33.20] - Farah

Dus aan de hand van wat je zelf eigenlijk invult?

[00:02:38.00] - Victor

Of uhm, nou soms wordt, soms is het ook gewoon een letterlijke vertaling van wat een dier laat zien. Dus dit is wel vrij objectief. Om een voorbeeld te geven, was er bijvoorbeeld een kind die rondloopt en als vraagstelling die dan bij die dieren wordt neergelegd. En zij loopt er dan veilig tussen en het dier gaat voor haar staan of loopt weg. Uh. Nou vooraan staan is meestal tussen ons, dan moet ik m'n mond houden bij wijze van, en wachten met het vragen stellen. Maar als het dier achter staat kan het betekenen: heb je steun nodig? Als een ezel wegloopt kan het bijvoorbeeld betekenen: loopt iemand ergens voor weg? Het is heel breed eigenlijk. Het zijn niet echt gesloten vragen die je stelt. En daarop kan een kind weer reageren en dan kan je weer zien hoe de ezel weer reageert. Begrijp je wat ik bedoel? Bij bijvoorbeeld portage, ken je dat, portage?

[00:03:46.08] - Farah

Het liggen op een ezel, toch?

[00:03:47.21] - Victor

Ja. En dat hebben we bij best wel wat kinderen gedaan dan. Of nou ja, 'best veel', bij sommigen. Maar de rust die daar wordt ervaren als ze.. Ja, je zal het eigenlijk een keer moeten zien..

[00:04:06.08] - Farah

Ja, ik zou het eigenlijk vandaag zien, maar omdat de rest weg is.

[00:04:07.18] - Victor

Ja, nee ja. Ja, die zijn nu weg inderdaad. Maar ja, dat is wel balen, want je moet het echt een keer zien namelijk. Dus twee begeleiders staan om de ezel en het kind ligt bovenop en er staat iemand bij de kopse kant. Die is dan eten aan het geven. Dus dat is en het kauwen, dat ze horen als je ligt op de ezel. En uhm, een bewegend schommel voor het kind. Dus dat geeft enorme rust. We heb een keer een kind gehad die, die ADHD had en die enorm en enorm druk was. En je herkende dat kind gewoon niet terug. Dat was echt bijzonder. Maar wat er

ook kan gebeuren is dat door die rust dat ze dingen gaan ervaren wat ook enorm pijnlijk kan zijn.

[00:04:59.10] - Farah

Door de stilte? Of misschien omdat ze affectie voelen?

[00:05:07.04] - Victor

Nou, weet je wat het is? Kijk, misschien kan je dat zelf ook wel voelen als je heel erg gespannen bent, dan komt er niet altijd veel door. Dan blokkeren dingen, uh fysiek gezien. En ja, geestelijk gezien. En dat is het ook vaak met trauma's, dat is allemaal geblokkeerd, soms weggedrukt. Wat weer tot andere psychische problemen kan leiden. We hadden eens een vrouw hier, en die stikte van de trauma's om zo maar even te zeggen. Ik heb jarenlang met haar samengewerkt, en die ging op een ezel liggen en uh, die moest eraf. Die móest er vanaf. Die krijgt gewoon geen lucht meer. Ze had het gevoel dat alles dicht werd geknepen. Maar dat is gewoon puur, als er pure ontspanning is, wat ze lange tijd niet gekend heeft, en steeds in overlevingsstand heeft gestaan. Maar dat ze dit in een keer zo kreeg. Dus het verschilt enorm hoor.

[00:06:01.02] - Farah

Ja, ik herken dat wel hoor. Dat is met veel mensen die bepaalde trauma's hebben die altijd doorgaan en doorgaan en doorwerken. En dan weer dit doen en dat doen, en nooit iets voor zichzelf doen en rust pakken juist om ontspanning te vermijden.

[00:06:11.17] - Victor

Ja, ja en dat zag je bij haar dus ook. Maar ook kinderen die het gewoon even niet meer trokken en bijvoorbeeld coaching, waar het soms gewoon te dichtbij komt en dat mensen zeggen om te stoppen. Dus we kijken echt wel wanneer het kind er aan toe is. Dat staat namelijk gelijk. Dat zijn gelijk de voordelen, want daar vroeg je naar. Wat de voordelen waren van zulke therapie, de benefits?

[00:06:44.21] - Farah

Ja, klopt. Of nou ja, wat, wat de kinderen doen en wat jullie als begeleiders doen en wat de dieren doen, zeg maar hoe ze samenwerken om die benefits te kunnen bereiken.

[00:06:55.19] - Victor

Ja, wat, wat wat vaak is. Kijk de roedel laten we als roedel zijnde. En de kinderen lopen daar gewoon in en maken contact. Uh, de kinderen doen niet echt veel. Die maken contact en die hebben de vraag dan wel in hun hoofd, wat ze willen weten, waar ze aan willen werken. Maar de dieren lopen gewoon rond. Die laten we daarin vrij.

[00:07:18.05] - Farah

Worden de dieren getraind als therapeutische dieren?

[00:07:21.24] - Victor

Uh, nee, niet zozeer getraind. Maar we selecteren wel.

Uh, in die zin. Nou ja, training ik weet niet hoe je training moet definiëren zeg maar. Het is niet zo dat we hun trainen maar het is wel zo dat ze wat socialer moeten zijn. Het is niet zo dat er een kind achter 'm moet lopen, en dat ze ineens een trap krijgen. Dat is natuurlijk niet de bedoeling. Dus in die zin zijn ze wel getraind. Dus op die manier. En daarom selecteren we ze wel op temperament.

Maar ja, we hebben ook ns voorgekomen dat er een kind werd gebeten. Door een ezel. Maar dat zegt ook weer iets, want als ze in hun schoen wordt gebeten, zegt dat ook wel iets. Het zijn allemaal signalen, zeg maar. Die een ezel afgeeft. Uhm, soms krijgen we wel eens te horen: ja,, maar er zat toch een vlieg op z'n rug. Ja klopt, er er zat een vlieg op z'n rug ja. Maar goed dan kan je een afweging maken, als het dier dat nog een keer doet en of er dan weer een vlieg zit. Wat is het dan he? En het is.. Soms lijkt het ongeloofwaardig, maar ik denk van, ja maar het is gewoon gedrag van de roedel, zoals zij zich opstellen. Dus als er nieuw iemand bijkomt, dan verandert ook de roedel, het gedrag van die roedel. En da's ook niet geheel zonder reden. Want zij [cliënten] laten ook iets zien. Onbewust naar de roedel toe. En de vraag is: wat is dat dan? Wat heeft dat met je vraag te maken?

[00:09:00.15] - Victor

Dus ik zeg wel eens, ik weet niet in hoeverre het tot hulp kan zijn voor je onderzoek.

Sommige dingen gebeuren, naar mijn idee, op zielsniveau. Omdat.. er komen geen woorden aan te pas, geen rationaliteit. Je bent gewoon, je bent gewoon het zijn. Als persoon zijnde. De dieren [inaudible].

[00:09:47.10] - Farah

Ja. Dat is toch juist relevant?

[00:09:50.03] - Victor

Ja ja, en daarom denk ik vaak dat kinderen zoals Max, oh ik mag geen namen noemen he, die moet je maar wegstrepen.

[00:09:51.08] - Farah

Ik ga iedereen, ook jou pseudonymiseren. Dus iedereen krijgt een hele leuke naam. Dus je mag alles zeggen hoor.

[00:09:54.24] - Victor

Oh okee. Nou ja, zoals Max, die heeft echt wel dingen meegekregen vanuit huis. En soms gaat hij bij de ezels zitten en gaat hij gewoon praten. Soms praten kinderen graag tegen ezels omdat ze gewoon niks terugzeggen. Idem dito bij de paarden. Gewoon even uiten.

[00:10:12.09] - Farah

Praat ik daarom met dieren?

[00:10:14.21] - Victor

Ja, waarom niet? Het is toch fijn? Het is iets anders als je tegen mensen praat. Ik bedoel, mensen zijn toch wel snel geneigd om..

[00:10:27.09] - Farah

Iets aan je terug te geven? Op een verbale manier.

[00:10:30.00] - Victor

Ja, ja precies.

[00:10:32.03] - Farah

Of advies te geven, terwijl je dat eigenlijk niet wil.

[00:10:34.23] - Victor

Nee, en dan zijn dieren toch perfecte luisteraars. Ze zeggen wel eens, ezels hebben niet voor niets zulke lange oren. Dus ja. Dan zien we wel dat kinderen daar heel snel kunnen dalen in hun woede of hun frustraties of soms ook wel eens in hun angsten.

9.4 Appendix D: Processing fieldwork notes

Below is an example of how I processed my fieldwork notes after every day at the farm. I usually did this on the train or when I got home, when the experiences and information were still fresh.

Fieldwork notes day 8, 5/5/22

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY

During the feeding round of the chickens/rabbits/pigs I asked Fran how she was doing today. She responded with “today is good, but yesterday was not because two chickens were euthanized because they were sick, and one of those chickens was mine”.

REFLECTIONS

Interesting to see how a client’s mood coincides with the ‘reilen en zeilen’ of the animals.

EMERGING QUESTIONS/ANALYSES

Everyone at the farm is also excited and concerned with the birth of a donkey. Do moods often coincide with how the animals are doing at the farm?

FUTURE ACTION

Maybe I can observe and ask about patterns between people’s moods/well-being and how they relate to the animals’ well-being.

9.5 Appendix E: Example of table for empirical data

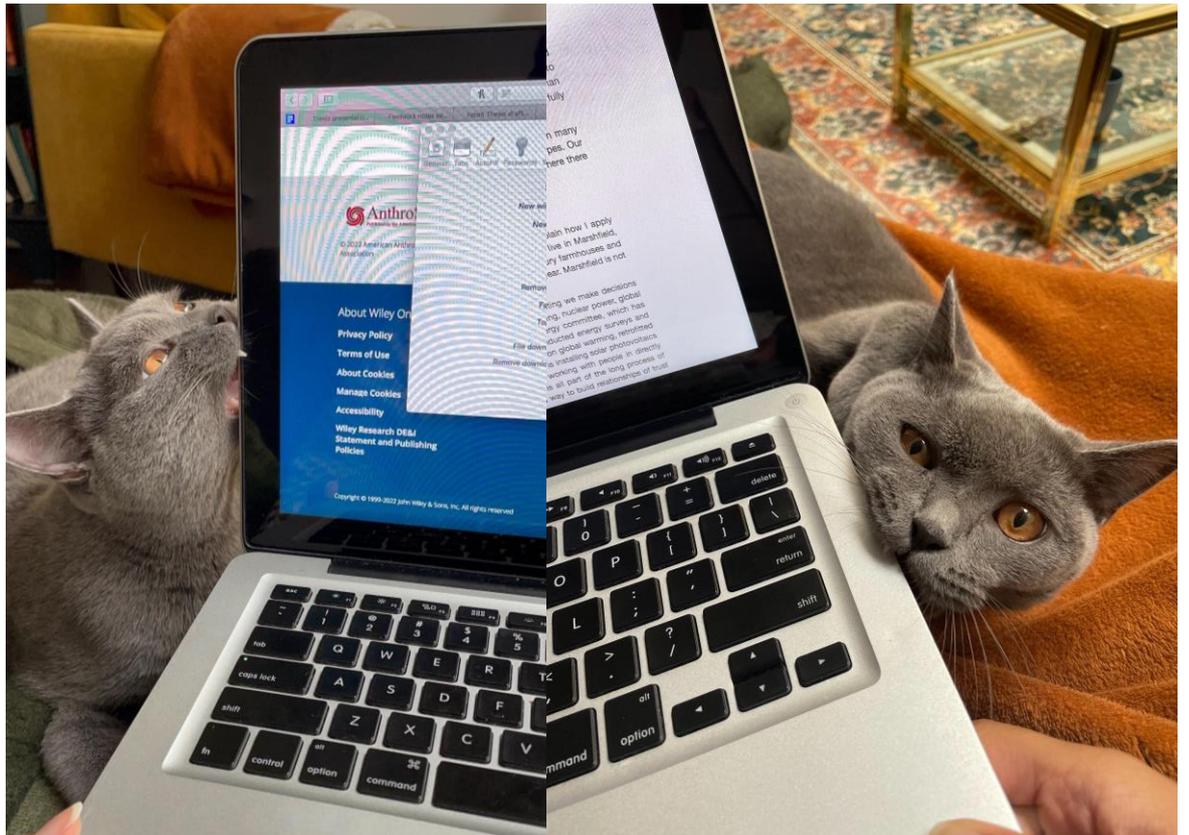
Table for empirical data used in chapter 3: Challenges

Main code	Definition	Empirical data
Decision-making process	At the farm, during both observations and interviews I noticed there were some tensions in the decision-making process, as the farm staff tries to make decisions that eventually work for everyone’s well-being. But sometimes it can mean doing things without the consent of animals.	Conversations between staff members about feeding the chickens special food actually meant for them versus scraps of their leftovers which they are getting used to. On the one hand the chickens love the leftovers and in this way nothing is thrown away, on the other hand the chickens should not get too fat and sometimes they have digestive problems due to these scraps. Besides, they are becoming spoiled and not eating their chicken food anymore.

		Because one donkey is pregnant and set to give birth in may, Emily, Olivia and I moved the goats' stuff towards the front meadow, so the donkey has her own place for when she needs to give birth.
--	--	---

9.6 Appendix F: Thesis writing with a cat

My writing



landscape.

