An ecological-phenomenological perspective on multispecies leisure and the horse-human relationship in events

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Abstract

More-than-human approaches open up theoretical and methodological space for considering if and how all animals, human and nonhuman, play important roles in shaping relationships, actions and encounters in leisure. This paper introduces an ecological-phenomenological framework for understanding relationships between animate actors and their environment in and through leisure. The example of human riders and horses in the context of a pleasure ride leisure event is used to illustrate the application of the framework for understanding the importance of individual differences and constraints, and their interaction with the environment, in appreciating the variety of affordances and possible outcomes in leisure practices. The ecological-phenomenological framework has theoretical and methodological implications for researchers of multispecies leisure, and may have practical application for event managers and designers of multispecies leisure activities. This article is important because it transforms current appreciation of multispecies leisure and opens doors to new ways of thinking and investigating the value and meaning of leisure in a multispecies context.

Key words: ecological psychology; events; more-than-human; multispecies leisure; phenomenology

Introduction

Leisure studies is a field dominated by anthropocentric, humanist approaches which prioritise human perspectives and actions, and downplay nonhuman experiences (Dashper, 2018). However, the 'animal turn' that is affecting many other social science disciplines and subject areas is starting to be recognised in leisure studies as well. Leisure cannot be seen as a wholly human practice, and empirical studies and theoretical analyses are beginning to recognise the varied and often significant roles played by animate nonhumans in leisure spaces and practices. A variety of approaches have been adopted for considering if and how leisure can be understood as a more-than-human phenomenon involving animate nonhumans, in order to open up space for explorations of some of the difficult, messy and complicated interactions that constitute leisure (and other practices) in multispecies worlds.

There are a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives that draw on more-than-human perspectives that can be used to explore multispecies and more-than-human leisure, challenging the dominance of humanism in the social sciences and seeking to decentre human experiences and human actions as the main foci of research (Badmington, 2003). These theories "challenge human exceptionalism, posit that human-nonhuman relations/relationships emerge temporally, and/or demonstrate how what we ontologically understand as 'human' is really a complex relation with other species" (Lloro-Bodart, 2017: 113). Such perspectives open up space for considering if and how nonhumans (animate and inanimate) play key roles in different spaces, contexts and interactions, and for exploring some of the complex interplay between humans and nonhumans in different settings. In so doing, researchers operating within more-than-human frameworks are required to challenge traditional ways of thinking about and doing research, in order to try and incorporate nonhuman others as actors and subjects, a project which "entails challenging, and moving away from, the privileging of the speaking, rationally reflective human agent/research that continues, implicitly at least, to frame knowledge production in the social sciences and humanities" (Dowling et al., 2017: 827).

In this paper we introduce an ecological-phenomenological approach as a fruitful tool for understanding multispecies leisure as a dynamic relationship between animate perceivers (human and nonhuman) and environment. This relational approach may provide a useful framework for understanding some of the complexities of leisure involving multiple species in a variety of environments. We use the example of horse-riding leisure events – 'pleasure rides' – to illustrate

some of the theoretical and practical applications of this framework in the context of multispecies leisure.

Current approaches in multispecies leisure research

Two of the dominant conceptual frameworks for researching multispecies leisure are Actor Network Theory (ANT) and human-animal studies. Both draw on more-than-human insights to consider the important roles that nonhumans play in leisure, but do so in different ways and with different emphases. Both ANT and human-animal studies offer interesting and informative frameworks for researching leisure as a multispecies practice, but both also have limitations for considering human-nonhuman interactions, some of which are addressed by the ecological-phenomenological approach we introduce below.

Actor network theory (ANT) has been a popular perspective adopted in leisure and tourism studies, and represents one useful way for approaching multispecies leisure. Described by its proponents as less of a theory and more of a method or a 'toolbox', ANT focuses less on the 'why' questions of social science, and more on the 'how' – "how it [tourism in this case] is assembled, enacted, and ordered; how it holds together; and how it may fall apart" (van der Duim et al., 2013: 5). One of the basic premises of ANT is the principle of general symmetry: analytically, all actors – human and nonhuman – are supposed to be treated in the same way, and are seen as equally able to create effects (van der Duim et al., 2017). The methodological result of this approach is that no assumptions can be made in advance about who or what will act in any given circumstance (van der Duim, 2007). The researcher is encouraged to 'follow the actor' to understand how networks are brought into being, how they develop and how they may disintegrate. The researcher cannot know in advance which actors in leisure networks are of most significance, so the task is to describe relations in the network.

Applied to leisure studies this suggests that nonhumans can act and have effects on others (including humans) in leisure spaces and contexts, but that to understand what those effects may be will require careful empirical investigation and analysis. Ethnography is a commonly used approach in ANT-influenced studies, as researchers can remain open to possibilities of different actors – human and nonhuman – acting in surprising and unexpected ways (Beard et al., 2016; Lamers et al., 2017). As Sayes (2014: 145) argues, ANT "asks that we remain open to the possibility that nonhumans add something that is of sociological relevance to a chain of events: that something happens, that this

something is added by a nonhuman, and that this addition falls under the general rubric of action and agency."

ANT is thus a useful position from which to explore more-than-human aspects of tourism and leisure, but it has limitations in terms of understanding leisure as a multispecies phenomenon, where human and nonhuman *animals* act together, sometimes separately, and sometimes in opposition. One of the key features of ANT that make it a distinct and powerful approach from which to explore issues from a more-than-human position is perhaps also its biggest weakness in terms of trying to understand interspecies interactions. General symmetry is fundamental to decentring human experience and overcoming human exceptionalism, as it positions all actors – human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate – as analytically equal. However in doing so, individuals and specific interspecies encounters and relationships can disappear and nonhuman animals in particular risk fading from focus (Dashper, 2018). As Cohen and Cohen (2017: 9) argue, within many ANT studies "live animals seem to lose their status as sentient beings, paradoxically within the very approaches that advocate a posthumanist ontology".

Human-animal studies offers a different position from which to consider multispecies phenomena and begins to overcome this limitation in ANT. Still building on more-than-human assumptions and goals, human-animal studies focuses specifically on interactions and relationships between human and nonhuman *animals* and leaves other materials and objects to take a backseat in analysis. Human-animal studies is a broad field, and researchers within this area adopt a variety of theoretical positions and come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in anthropology, sociology, geography and management, amongst others. However, what binds this approach together is focus on the interactions between human and nonhuman animals, and, as Haraway (2008: 66) puts it, "the fleshy, historical reality of face-to-face, body-to-body subject making across species" that take place within different spaces and contexts. As with ANT, human-animal studies scholars often adopt ethnographic methods to study interspecies encounters, and the subpractice of multispecies ethnography is a multidisciplinary endeavour through which researchers are "studying contact zones where lines separating nature from culture have broken down, where encounters between *homo sapiens* and other beings generate mutual ecologies and coproduced niches" (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010: 546). Attempts are made to recognise nonhuman animals as actors in their encounters with humans and to try to understand nonhumans as far as possible on their own terms. Within leisure studies, Dashper (2017) has explored human-horse relationships and the deeply embodied, non-verbal interactions that take place as rider and horse try to negotiate complex tasks together. Charles (Charles & Davis, 2008; Charles, 2014) has studied pet keeping, whilst Gillespie et al. (2002) and Carr (2014) consider dog agility and other forms of human-dog leisure. These, and other studies,

make nonhuman animals visible and central in the research, and focus on the lived, embodied experiences of multispecies leisure.

However, although multispecies ethnography and human-animal studies offer exciting avenues for researching multispecies leisure, they are not without their limitations. For all good intentions to include nonhuman animals as active actors in interspecies encounters, multispecies ethnography retains links to its humanist ethnographic home through focus on verbal and written language, on what can be seen and understood by a human researcher, and the necessity to communicate multispecies encounters in forms accepted and understood within the academy. This limits the extent to which the 'voices' of nonhuman animals can really be heard, understood and represented within multispecies ethnography (Madden, 2014; Dashper, 2017). Multispecies researchers, whilst openly committed to the more-than-human project to decentre human actions and account for nonhuman experiences, often struggle to actually do this in practice. Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2016) discuss some of these challenges in their own work, and call on scholars to continue to push boundaries, theoretically and methodologically, arguing that "making the shift from representing animals as objects of study to engaging with animals as active research subjects requires a different set of habits, skills and dispositions" (p.156). This is extremely challenging, and researchers continue to experiment through drawing on ethology and autoethnography, amongst other tools and positions, to try to understand nonhuman animal experiences in more-than-human ways (Birke & Hockenhull, 2015; Dashper, 2017).

This brief consideration of two key approaches to researching multispecies encounters illustrates that this is a dynamic, evolving and challenging field, with researchers experimenting with method, approach and representation in an effort to overcome human exceptionalism and account for the importance of nonhuman actors. In the next section we introduce an ecological-phenomenological framework as another fruitful approach for trying to understand multispecies leisure and one that can begin to overcome some of the limitations in both ANT approaches and human-animal studies as briefly outlined here.

Introducing an ecological-phenomenological approach to multispecies leisure

Ecological psychology stemmed from the desire to understand human behaviour and cognition, and the realisation that the traditional approach that emphasised the individual and cognitive structures was limited (Gibson, 1979). Ecological psychology undermined the Realist-Cartesian paradigm and shifted the emphasis to recognise the importance of the animal-environment relationship in

behaviour. As a consequence the processes underlying behaviour were considered consistent across all animal (including human) life. The ecological psychology approach is predicated on the animal (animate perceiver)-environment relationship. Rather than seeing cognition, behaviour and so forth as rooted in the cognitive functions of individual (generally human) actors, the ecological psychology approach recognises the role of the environment. The notion stems from the realisation that as animal and world evolved together and are interdependent it is important to consider them in relation to each other (Costall, 2001). The animal-environment mutuality as the scale of analysis for understanding multispecies leisure provides an opportunity to address the role of individual differences across all animal species (including human animals); rather than assuming a 'species' focus it allows for the capacity to think in terms of singular animals (Lestel, Busolini & Churlew, 2014). Behaviour emerges from individual animals as they attempt to satisfy a range of individual, task and environmental constraints at any moment in time (Davids, Button & Bennett, 2008). In recent years the ecological psychology approach has been expanded through the addition of phenomenological concepts and approaches to investigating experience (Immonen et al., 2018). The complex relationships indicated by animal-environment systems requires a phenomenological approach to make visible otherwise hidden meaning (Withagen et al., 2017). Similar to the ecological approach in psychology, phenomenology does not follow the traditional positivist approach to understanding phenomenona (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2017). For the most part in modern times phenomenological analyses have dealt with human lived experience. However, as Martin and Peñaranda (2001) point out, humans are animals and the phenomenological method has been extended to investigating the *lifeworld* of nonhuman animals. According to Lestel et al. (2014) Husserl explicitly referred to all animate life when explicating his methodology. Phenomenology, considers consciousness as intentional, which means that consciousness and cognition are always towards something (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2017).

Intentionality is present in the lived worlds of many animals. Lestel et al. (2014) exemplified this process through describing the knot tying activities of an Orang-utan. The significance of this notion implies that all animal behaviour involves meaningful relations between the animal and its environment, as opposed to causal or mechanistic interactions. We share our world not just with other humans, but with other animals who are intentional, responsive, interpreting agents (Painter & Lotz, 2007). Aspects of the phenomenological method, such as bracketing or the setting aside the taken for granted scientific or naturalistic attitudes towards all other animate beings, opens up the possibility to intuit intentionality in the other as embodied agent. As researchers, phenomenology opens up ways of being and understanding the 'other' and a process that helps enhance our capacity

to be sensitive to the "distinctiveness of particular embodied souls and the intelligible intentionality and subjectivity they manifest" (Lestel et al., p.138). As Ruonakoski (p. 77) pointed out:

> just as we cannot live the experience of a poet of the 16th Century, neither can we capture the experience of a chimpanzee, a parrot or a gorilla, without any mediations. We can, however, without abandoning the standards of scientific rigor, give ourselves over to the task and the project of interpretation, and in so doing, we can be open to non-human animal others.

Both the phenomenological and ecological frameworks have critiqued the Realist-Cartesian paradigm in favour of a relational approach. While not yet applied to multispecies leisure, this approach has become established in human activities such as sport, learning and behaviour change (Brymer, Davids & Mallabon, 2014; Brymer & Davids, 2013). In this section we show how this combined approach is ideally suited to the multispecies leisure field because it proposes that the interactive relationship between the individual animal and the environment is a relevant scale of analysis for understanding animal (including human) interactions. Key concepts from this approach include the notions of constraints and affordances.

Constraints

Constraints are boundaries which shape the emergence of behaviours (Newell, 1986). The interaction of different constraints guides the animal to seek stable and effective patterns of behaviour during goal-directed activity, which satisfies these constraints. Constraints have been classified as individual, environment and task.

Individual constraints are the unique structural and functional characteristics of each animal and include attributes related to their historical, physical, psychological, cognitive and emotional make up. In ecological psychology, the individual is conceptualised as exemplifying a complex, open system in nature. Such a system is defined as containing a number of interacting constituent parts or dimensions, all capable of interacting and influencing system behaviours over time. An animal's body shape, fitness level, age and psychological factors may shape the way the individual animal approaches a task. Individual constraints also include previous experiences, needs, interests, meanings and patterns of behaviour (Maitney, 2002). These individual factors provide affordances (see next section) for action and play a significant and important role in determining the behaviours adopted by individual animals. Individuals are described as active agents with different individual constraints that illustrate the distinct strategies that may be used to solve problems. The solutions which emerge from the activities of different individual animals present important implications for the design of multispecies leisure experiences and for understanding multispecies leisure activities.

These unique individual characteristics can be viewed as resources for each animal that channel the perception of information and the solving of particular task problems. These relatively unique characteristics can lead to individual-specific adaptations. An individual's functional behaviours in response to task challenges aim to satisfy his/her own unique constraints. Variability in behaviour is to be expected and can play a functional role as each individual seeks to achieve a task goal (e.g. cats catching a mouse, or Orang-utans tying knots, Lestel, Busolini, & Churlew, 2014) in his/her own way. It is important to recognise that behaviour is emergent under these interacting constraints (Chow et al., 2011). What this idea indicates is that expecting a prescribed outcome for each animal might limit individual capacity.

Environmental constraints are multilayered but most often presented as consisting of physical and sociological factors. Physical factors comprise the immediate surroundings and include physical influences such as gravity, altitude and the characteristics of behavioural contexts, such as ambient temperature, prevailing weather or whether the environment is familiar, novel, remote or physically demanding (Dillon et al., 2006; Paisley, Furman, Sibthorp, & Gookin, 2008). Sociological factors include the role of social contexts such as peer groups, and cultural expectations. In multispecies leisure the social context would include interspecies interactions where the human may not be at the heart of meaning making (Lestel, Busolini, & Churlew, 2014). Social environmental constraints such as critical group members, the presence of support and access to high quality and appropriate infrastructure and facilities can have a powerful influence on behaviour (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). In multispecies leisure research the human researcher might also be considered an environmental constraint. The skill, beliefs, fears, attitudes and research paradigm adopted by a researcher can have a positive or negative impact on an individual animal's behaviours. Rather than assuming that the researcher can adopt an objective stance this notion should be embraced and understood as part of the interactive process.

Task constraints consist of the goals of the specific task, conventions of the activity and the implements or equipment used during the experience. In contrast to the other constraints task constraints are easily manipulated, for example in learning contexts it might be important to consider interactive style or setting activities that are designed for different individuals. Due to non-proportionality and an appreciation that learning is nonlinear, small manipulations can often lead to large scale changes in an individual's behaviour.

Affordances

The concept of affordances is now well established within the fields of ecological and environmental psychology. Affordances are invitations for actions that stem from the relationship between an

individual and the environment (Gibson, 1979; Sanders, 1993; Stoffregen, 2003). When an environment is described in terms of affordances the emphasis changes from a physical description to a functional description (Gibson, 1979). That is, the environment is described in term of what it offers the animal (for good or ill). For example, an apple affords eating for a hungry individual if that individual has the physiological structure to eat apples, the physical capacity to reach the apple and the apple is edible. This offers a shift away from a more traditional dualist view of the environment and individual and the notion of 'one-size fits all'. Instead it offers a rich framework that supports an individual approach to appreciating multispecies leisure. Gibson (1979) argued that the meaning of a particular environment for the animal (i.e. what it affords for action) is more relevant than physical qualities of the environment (i.e. structural qualities like colour or material, number or colour of other individuals and so forth), indicating that affordances might be shaped by individual, social or other influences, and that individuals express agency in selecting affordances from a landscape of opportunities for behavioural interaction. Perception and action of affordances is an embodied process where an agent actively interacts with their environment and acts upon the environment as the environment (social and physical) acts upon the agent in order to realise action possibilities. Visual perception, for instance, involves not just the eyes but the body and head as the agent moves to secure a more effective position for affordance realisation, as the use of blinkers to focus the attention of horses pulling carts and carriages illustrates. Perception and action of affordances also depends on goal directed intentions and individuals become attuned to information in the environment. For example, affordance perception and action might differ for the same individual in the same geographic area depending on whether the actor is intent on hunting, play, exploration or if other actors are around. In a social context when an animal is in the presence of another animal or animals the interrelated nature of the bidirectional influence is more obvious because the original animal experiences the other or others as living bodies (San Martin & Peneranda, 2001), and therefore 'experiences' the other(s) as active agent(s).

In simple terms, a specific environment (social or physical) has specific properties that invite actions. For instance, affordances in the physical environment such as colour properties of water may be perceived as providing depth to dive into or shallowness to wade, and angles of inclination suggest different approaches to circumnavigation. Trees, for many, afford climbing opportunities, and gaps afford jumping across, stepping up and so on, depending on each individual's action capabilities. Equally, in the social environment a chair in full sunlight or warm human lap might afford relaxation for a cat (Lestel, Busolini, & Churlew, 2014). Each individual perceives, utilises and shapes these opportunities for action from a unique perspective fashioned by their own individual constraints (Brymer et al., 2013). For example, two individuals climbing in trees might be working with the same

environmental constraints but differences in individual constraints, such as limb length, body mass and previous experiences, could result in different opportunities for perceptions and actions. Objectively, a gap might be stepped over or leaped across and a tree might have climbing affordances but because of different individual constraints not all individuals can take advantage of the affordance. Affordances are dynamic and change as a function of time and context, illustrating the relevance of the person-environment scale of analysis. Different system states can influence the way that each individual interacts with the environment, for example, in constraining which affordances are perceived.

The implication of these ideas is that theoretical perspectives that focus on dualistic approaches and animals as species rather than individuals might be limited as tools for theoretical explanation. Instead, the ecological-phenomenological approach outlined here proposes that a relational understanding of multispecies leisure and animal-human interactions, where individual animals are perceived as embodied active agents, is a more effective medium for behavioural analysis (Said, 2012, Fiskum & Jacobsen, 2013). This idea emphasises that the mutual interaction between individual animals and their social and physical environment is key to interpreting multispecies interactions. The crucial idea is that the functional properties of the social and physical environment invite or encourage particular behaviours by providing ecological (i.e. task and environmental) constraints on animal behaviour.

An important relationship relevant to human-nonhuman interactions that is identified through the ecological approach concerns the animate-animate relationship (Gibson, 1979). That is the relationship between two perceiving, animate beings with 'Minds'. In this instance each animal is capable of perceiving the other and potentially capable of perceiving the other's Mind. In contrast to the Cartesian perspective, from an ecological-phenomenological perspective Mind does not exist solely in the head but is readily available to be perceived by other active agents with the capacity to perceive. In a context such as multispecies leisure this is important because all individuals will be distinguishing affordances for action that have direct meaning for themselves (Charles, 2011). However, differently from affordances in the physical environment, affordances in the animal-animal environment are dependent on the temporary properties of the animate individual who may be fearful, hungry, calm, satiated, asleep or receptive, for example (Gibson, 1979). Attuned individuals are able to perceive and respond to each other's mental states, goals, and intentions. What determines whether an affordance solicits action or how each individual experience affordances depends on individual constraints and whether the affordance has meaning for the animal. Further, the salience of affordances can be traced back to evolutionary niches. That is, not only might the same affordance solicit different actions for different individuals but some affordances might have

greater solicitation 'power' based on evolutionary importance. In multispecies leisure this suggests the potential for conflicting actions, for example, while the immediate physical environment might seem fixed, affordances acted on might be different for each individual (Dings, 2018) depending on what it offers each agent at a particular point in time. An affordance might present itself as an attraction for one half of a multispecies pair in a particular leisure context, at a particular time, but as an avoidance for the other. In the following sections we highlight how this understanding might help develop a more meaningful interpretation of multispecies leisure.

Applying an ecological-phenomenological perspective to multispecies leisure events: horse riding pleasure rides

Horse riding is a popular form of multispecies leisure, and includes a variety of practices from trail riding to competitive sport. Trail riding, or 'hacking' as it is known in the UK, is a popular form of multispecies leisure that involves human and horse riding out together in open space – i.e. beyond the confines of an arena. Hacking can be a very enjoyable and relaxing experience for the rider, and many riders believe their horse also gains pleasure from the relative lack of structure and constraint placed on horse and rider as they traverse a variety of landscapes for exercise and enjoyment (Cochrane & Dashper, 2015). However, hacking can also be a stressful experience for horse and/or rider, as a variety of hazards may be encountered (from road traffic, to other animals, to other potentially scary sights, sounds and smells). The sense of freedom of hacking can also be a cause for concern for some riders, as beyond the relative safety of the arena some horses' behaviour can seem to change as he or she becomes more alert to her/his surroundings, which has the potential to result in the horse bolting – running off – with (or without) their rider. Consequently although often an enjoyable experience, some riders are fearful of hacking, particularly without the company of another horse and rider, and some horses also lack confidence out in open space (Dashper, 2017). As a result, increasing numbers of riders look to organised events called 'pleasure rides' to provide some structure and a sense of safety, whilst maintaining the enjoyable aspects of hacking. A pleasure ride is usually a one-day event that entails horses and riders following a predefined hacking route that is signposted and checked for accessibility and safety. Often run by equestrian charities as a fundraising activity, pleasure rides can see up to 100 horse-rider pairs set out on a route (usually between 10-20 miles) over the course of several hours.

The scenario

In this section we illustrate some of the potential benefits of applying an ecological-phenomenological framework to understanding hacking as a form of multispecies leisure in the context of a pleasure ride event. We begin by outlining a fictional pleasure ride scenario, developed from the first author's ethnographic research:

Participants:

- Human rider- female, mid 40s, 20+ years' experience of riding, had a hacking accident on previous horse 5 years ago, resulting in dislocated shoulder.
- Horse – gelding (castrated male), 8 years old, been a general riding horse for 4 years, partaking in hacking and jumping.
- The rider and horse have been a partnership for 2 years and hack out three times a week. They have attended four previous pleasure rides together.

Physical environment:

- A shallow river crossing, three quarters of the way round the route. The approach to the river is gently sloping and has pebbles. There are trees overhanging, which provide shade from the sun but may make the area appear dark.
- The river is not deep, varying from 20-40 cm, and horses have to cross a width of about three metres as part of the ride. Beyond the river is an open field.

This is a relatively common feature of pleasure rides, as in order to access countryside it may be necessary to cross water. However, not all horses are happy walking through a river, even if it is shallow, and may resist or even refuse to enter the river crossing. Pleasure ride event organisers provide participants with a map of the route, and will usually mark-up water crossings clearly to ensure riders are prepared. For some horse-rider pairs, this scenario may cause few problems and the horse may calmly walk down the slope and through the river crossing, before continuing on the ride. However, numerous issues may also arise. Sometimes the horse may spook on the approach to the river crossing, become scared or just resistant, backing up, spinning around and maybe even turning and running in the opposite direction. The rider may become concerned, tense up and communicate this corporeally to the horse, causing the horse to also become nervous and exacerbating any of these behaviours. An ecological-phenomenological perspective would be a useful tool for analysing this scenario and for understanding what is happening in this multispecies leisure encounter. This may provide pleasure ride event organisers with useful information on how individual horses may react to this kind of feature of a ride, which could inform future ride design

and the production of supporting materials to help riders cope with any difficulties they may encounter in such a scenario.

An ecological-phenomenological analysis of the scenario

The first aspect to consider is that of constraints, beginning with individual constraints. The ecological-phenomenological approach offered here acknowledges that all animals – human and nonhuman – have individual constraints that are influenced by their species but not reducible to species differences. In the scenario above, the individual constraints of two actors need to be considered –horse and rider. Each will influence the unfolding of the situation. Some broad expectations can be made about how each is likely to behave in this encounter, but without knowledge of each individual animal it is difficult to determine intentionality and meaning and therefore predict what they will do and to understand why they behave as they do. For example, the rider is experienced and so might be expected to be able to handle this routine situation without much trouble. But she has had a serious injury, potentially as the result of a similar situation. Does she become more fearful as a result? Is she less clear than normal in communication with the horse? The horse also has some experience with hacking and pleasure rides, but some horses dislike water and are resistant to walking through rivers. Has this horse had a previous bad experience when walking through water? Does he have flatter feet, which makes walking on stony ground (the river crossing) uncomfortable? Is he getting tired on the ride, and so less willing to exert himself and communicate effectively with his rider?

The next analytical tool in this framework is to consider environmental constraints: physical and socio-cultural factors. In this scenario the physical environment plays an important role, setting out the space in which the encounter occurs and imposing limitations in terms of how horse and rider approach the river crossing, how they see the water and judge its depth, and how inviting this seems to both horse and human on this particular day and time. Other aspects of the physical environment may also come into play, such as the weather (which may affect visibility, or strong wind might make the horse more flighty), or if other horses can be seen in the opposite field cantering away, which may distract or excite the horse further. The socio-cultural environment also plays a role here. The rider is experienced and has been on previous pleasure ride events, and so she knows she should be able to get her horse past a relatively simple river crossing. However, she may be concerned about other riders on the event catching up with her and getting stuck behind her and the horse, or she may decide to wait for another rider to come along and use the horse's desire to be with other horses to her advantage so they can follow another horse through the water. The horse will also be aware that there are other, probably unknown, horses around and he may be more tuned in to them

than his rider. He may want to rush through, or try to jump over, the water to catch up with horses in the next field, or he might want to turn back to other horses behind him for security. In this situation he may not be 'listening' to his human partner, and relying more on fellow horses to provide guidance and security.

The third type of constraint to consider relates to the task. It might be expected that a horse-rider pair that regularly hack out and attend pleasure ride events should be able to cross a simple river without too much trouble, but many horse-rider combinations do not often encounter water crossings in their routine riding activities, and so may have few opportunities to train for this scenario. The pair should be well enough attuned to communicate clearly with each other, but this can easily break down, or one or both of them may attune to unhelpful information in the environment during stressful situations, which the river crossing may represent for the horse and/or rider. Task constraints appear relatively easy to manage, but in association with individual and environmental constraints, outlined above, may prove to be less straightforward and predictable than expected, especially in a multispecies context involving multiple actors.

This seemingly simple situation offers a wide variety of affordances to each of the actors. For the horse, the physical environment invites several different, often contradictory, actions. The gentle slope and shallow water invite the horse to walk through it calmly and without much hesitation. However, if the horse dislikes water, or even if he had a bumpy, difficult journey to the event, the river might invite him to either jump it (potentially unseating the rider) or to refuse to enter it, leading to the horse becoming increasingly distressed and potentially even backing up and running away. The visibility of the open field beyond the river also invites the horse to rush through the river crossing, potentially unbalancing the rider, to get to an open space to gallop after other horses who can be seen in the distance. The situation also offers the rider many affordances. She can ride positively, quietly and effectively to guide the horse down the slope, through the water and calmly up the other side, reassuring him if he is nervous or calming him if he gets excited. However, if she had little sleep the night before or her previous riding accident occurred as the result of the horse spooking at water the situation invites her to behave differently, to become anxious, upset, and ineffective in her communications with the horse, potentially increasing the horse's distress and leading to a breakdown in interspecies communication.

A variety of outcomes may result from this scenario, dependent on the different actors involved, their interactions with each other and with the physical environment in which the encounter takes place. At a pleasure ride event, some horse-rider pairs will tackle the river crossing without incident, some may struggle to get through, and some may even result in the rider falling off and/or the horse

bolting back to other horses or the event headquarters. The river crossing is a potentially hazardous aspect of the route for some horse-rider pairs, and consequently may result in negative feedback to the event organisers or even injury to horse or rider. The ecological-phenomenological approach outlined here offers analytical tools to try to understand how and why events unfold as they do, and why the different individual actors in the scenario behave in a certain way, which in turn can provide useful insight for event organisers designing pleasure ride routes and supporting materials such as maps, instructions and the provision of alternative routes, and situating stewards and first aid teams around the ride.

This brief discussion draws on a simple experience encountered during a pleasure ride to illustrate some of the complexities of multispecies leisure. Although a relatively mundane aspect of multispecies leisure, this scenario can develop in many different ways depending on the behaviours of both actors, and the influence of the wider environment on what unfolds. Our discussion above is a very simplistic application of some aspects of an ecological-phenomenological approach to this multispecies encounter, but it illustrates the relational aspects of such a situation, the complexities of multispecies interactions in leisure environments, and some of the challenges of understanding behaviours across individual and species barriers. We discuss some of these issues, and their practical, theoretical and methodological implications, further in the next section.

Discussion

The ecological-phenomenological approach to understanding multispecies leisure suggests that all animate actors in the leisure context, human and nonhuman, should be considered as individual embodied, active agents with their own set of intentions and individual constraints. Analytically this means that human animals are not privileged over nonhuman animals, as all actors are considered to have capacity to be attuned to environmental information and to influence the leisure act. In this way, the ecological-phenomenological approach attempts to decentre human experiences and interpretations, and thus begins to overcome deep-rooted human exceptionalism that characterises leisure studies (as well as all other social science subject areas). Within this perspective, human experiences are no longer privileged over those of other beings, and nonhuman animals are recognised as intentional, responsive, interpreting agents (Painter & Lotz, 2007) capable of meaning-making, acting and affecting actions and relationships within leisure spaces.

The ecological-phenomenological perspective we have introduced in this paper overcomes some of the potential limitations of ANT outlined previously in that it makes analytical space for individual animals and their unique abilities, corporeal realities and personal histories to shape leisure

experiences. Whereas individual animals may disappear from focus in much ANT research (Cohen & Cohen, 2017), an ecological-phenomenological framework makes the individual(s), and their interactions with each other and the environment, the core focus of analysis. The fictional scenario presented above analysed with a conceptual framework informed by ANT may foreground other, nonanimate actors in this scenario, and consequently animate actors (both human and nonhuman) and their interactions with the environment may disappear from focus.

Human-animal studies, the other important more-than-human conceptual framework discussed previously, does tend to focus on individual animals – humans and nonhumans – and their interactions, but concentrates predominantly on specific human-nonhuman animal encounters and gives less analytical priority to the influence of wider environmental factors. The fictional scenario discussed above, analysed from a human-animal studies perspective, would focus on the relationship and dynamics between the rider and the horse, considering their past interactions and shared histories as much as the event itself. The ecological-phenomenological approach we have applied here moves away from specific interspecies relationships towards the relational aspects of encounters between individual animals (animate perceivers) and their environment. Multispecies leisure takes multiples forms, and involves a variety of different individual animals (human and nonhuman) in diverse leisure spaces, and the ecological-phenomenological approach enables researchers to consider both the importance of individual differences within each actor *and* how those differences interact with features of the leisure environment to impact and shape the leisure experience.

The ecological-phenomenological approach also indicates that research that attempts to consider multispecies leisure from the perspective of interpreting events from a species context will be limited in their capacity to draw meaningful conclusions. Within the example discussed in this paper, some broad predictions could be made about expected behaviour of both animate actors (human and horse) based on knowledge about general species behaviour, but this would provide limited information and understanding. Not all horses will respond in the same way to an environmental stimuli such as a river crossing, for example. Further, the same horse could behave differently on two different occasions. The ecological-phenomenological approach suggests that research requires in-depth knowledge of all actors within the multispecies leisure context, moving beyond generalisations at a species level. A full appreciation of individual, task and environment constraints, framed by context and time is also needed. This suggests that the researcher cannot adopt a neutral stance or approach multispecies leisure from an objective, detached position. Rather, the researcher needs to have knowledge and experience of the individual(s) involved, and preferably be intimately connected to the experience under consideration. In the example we discuss in this paper, the rider

would be the ideal researcher, as she knows herself and the horse and can apply this understanding to the experience and how it felt. Ethnographic and autoethnographic methods may thus be ideally suited to this task. Researchers might also need to appreciate the importance of the concept of Mind being 'out there' and design methodologies that combine deep knowledge of individuals and animate-animate relationships. Equally methodologies that rely too heavily on snap shots that do not appreciate the importance of context or time or do not consider individual, environment and task constraints might at best be collecting partial data and at worst be collecting data that has no ecological validity. Interdisciplinary research, drawing on ethology and biology as well as social science perspectives, may offer deeper insights on individual behaviours, constraints, actions and affordances. As human-animal studies researchers acknowledge, to try to consider an encounter or an action from a nonhuman perspective is challenging, as we tend to revert to human interpretations, human frames of reference and human priorities in our research design, conduct, analysis and representation (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016). Phenomenology, especially ecophenomenology, provides some guidance on how to interpret the lived experience of the 'other'. Rather than being fearful of our human perspective we should embrace this and open up to encountering the 'other' as a living body rather than an object of study (Ruonakoski, 2007). Effective research in multispecies leisure from this perspective is more likely to be useful if the researcher is attuned to the behavioural nuances of the 'other' and follows the phenomenological method, and maintains the phenomenological attitude (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2017). Just because it is challenging for researchers to move beyond humanism and try to understand the behaviours, actions and reactions of a nonhuman animal does not mean we should not try to do so if we truly want to appreciate a practice, such as leisure, as a multispecies encounter. Interdisciplinary research and innovative, flexible methodologies will be needed to try and achieve this.

The ecological-phenomenological perspective raises important theoretical and methodological issues in relation to multispecies leisure, but also has potential to inform practice. Event organisers and planners of multispecies leisure activities and facilities could adopt aspects of the approach outlined above to consider different issues that might arise at their event. The most important message from this approach is that one size does not fit all. Organisers need to be aware of the importance of animate-animate relationships and the key concepts that underpin this appreciation of multispecies leisure events. While it may not be possible to garner all information about possible individual constraints of partners in multispecies leisure it may be possible to gain a better appreciation of typical constraints or key affordances that might affect leisure outcomes. An appreciation of typical individual constraints might also help designers of multispecies leisure events

and activities design tasks and environments with rich affordances for all animals, human and nonhuman, to facilitate safe, enjoyable and rewarding multispecies leisure experiences.

Conclusion

In recent years there has been a surge of interest in animal-animal relationships across a variety of scientific fields. This is also reflected in an appreciation of multispecies interactions in leisure contexts. This interest brings with it complications, particularly concerning methodology and how best to understand these relationships. The traditional perception of nonhuman animals that focuses purely on biology or a species approach has been criticised as too limited to be of any value to multispecies leisure research. In this article we proposed a new appreciation for this relationship predicated on understandings drawn from ecological psychology and phenomenology which recognise that the traditional subject-object dichotomy is flawed. From this perspective multispecies leisure involves various animate perceivers (human and nonhuman) in relationship with each other. Methodologically, this suggests that the researcher needs to have intimate knowledge of the context and the actors involved. It is no longer appropriate to limit research to outdated object-subject dichotomies.

The ecological-phenomenological approach introduced in this paper has not previously been applied to research on multispecies leisure, but suggests exciting avenues for further research investigating animal agency and meaning in the leisure context, and the role of non-human animals in shaping the human leisure space. This approach might also provide a process for refining phenomenologically guided and other methodologies for investigating the varieties of non-human lived experience. This article is important, therefore, because it transforms current appreciation of multispecies leisure and opens doors to new ways of thinking and investigating the value and meaning of leisure in a multispecies context.

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