Robin Irvine

Thinking with Horses: Troubles with Subjects, Objects, and Diverse Entities in Eastern Mongolia

Setting the scene. Uugaa's daily life is saturated with horses. A summer day begins with a long step over the threshold of the *ger* (felt tent and home), carrying his working saddle. This step takes Uugaa from the warmth and domesticity of the interior into the chill of the early morning Eastern Mongolian sun. Hundreds of horses are visible, apparent as slowly moving constellations of four-legged dots in the distance (see fig. 1). Most are off to the South, grazing out towards the hills where Uugaa's family live in the winter. One herd in particular is immediately marked as present or absent in Uugaa's eyes. This is a loosely fused grouping of four stallion bands numbering fewer than a hundred in total. Today they might be grazing in a hollow barely a kilometer from the household encampment. Tomorrow they might be many kilometers away, hidden by the barely perceptible rolling of the steppe. These are his father's horses, of which Uugaa will inherit a significant proportion as the eldest son. At 23, Uugaa is not only the oldest heir but is also the most horse-oriented when compared to his two sisters and younger brother. He is heavily involved with the training of the family horses for racing. His father, Dorj, inherited the core horses of the herd from the Soviet style collective for which he managed around 1500 horses until the dissolution of the socialist state in the early 1990s.

Fig. 1: A distant herd of horses moves across the front of the *ger* as we wait out the rain inside. Hidden amongst the herd is the herder on his motorcycle. (Photo by author.)

Once the distant situation of the family herd has been determined by Uugaa, or if the horses are out of sight, his attention moves to the foreground. This part of the steppe lacks fences and obvious visual divisions, but the summer homes scattered along the river occupy definite spaces. An invisible but appreciable perimeter is established around each *ger* at about the distance a guard dog will challenge an intruder. Within this space one or two individual horses are usually present. In this case, Uugaa has kept back just one horse. Overnight it has grazed a neat circle of grass on its groundline and hobble. Skirting the mostly still sleeping herd of sheep and goats in front of the *ger*, Uugaa makes his way over to the horse, reeling it in firmly before saddling and bridling it where it stands. Sometimes this horse is a seasoned riding horse, stoically wary but used to being sporadically plucked from the herd and worked for a few days. At other times, the horse is green, standing tense as Uugaa tightens the girths, tossing its head when he pulls it round to stop it from moving off as he swings up into the saddle. On occasion, the horse is completely absent, having slipped its hobble and rejoined the herd during the night. In these cases, if another horse has not been kept back for riding Uugaa relies on neighbors or, if the herd is nearby, the off-chance he might be able to catch one of the seasoned horses on foot. Once mounted, the riding horse generally needs no encouragement to head off in the direction of the herd, even if its herdmates are not visible.

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Fig. 2: A hobbled riding horse grazing on its ground line. The family herd will be located somewhere in the space between the foreground of this photo and the distant hills to the South. (Photo by author.)

A short while later, the herd trots by the *ger* and on down towards the river, pushed by a still slightly sleepy Uugaa. He is tall and skinny, but sits low and relaxed in the v of his sparsely padded wooden saddle, wrapped in the folds of his dark Mongolian overcoat. Once the horses are in position he leaves them to move as they will, knowing that as the July heat builds they will most likely remain near or in the river (see fig. 3). Uugaa is working alone while I stay with his family, as his father and younger brother are away racing three of their horses in Central Mongolia. Before coming in for breakfast he must also gather the now grazing sheep and goats, bunch them and encourage them across the river to graze on the marshy flats beyond. Sometimes he gets his younger sister to do this if he has other things on his mind, such as talking to visiting anthropologists.

Fig. 3: Horses moving into the river to cool off – clearly unsure about my presence. (Photo by author.)

The day has barely begun and Uugaa has not only already ridden an individual horse, he has engaged with an entire herd of horses. He has managed their attention with shouts and sweeping arcs at trot, and with the familiarity of routine as they move back towards the *ger* by the river. Every such morning also adds to Uugaa's knowledge of the herd and his appreciation of the individual animals within the different sub-bands, noting injuries and changes. On another level, Uugaa, his riding horse, and his herd have been moving within a wider system of movement. To the East and the West along the river other rural families have also been waking up and mobilizing their livestock. Each encampment and its associated animals occupy a position within a shifting network of agreements, some administered by the local government and some unofficial. Moreover, as Uugaa moves with his herds of horses, he is constantly microadjusting his position in relation to others in order to avoid stallion fights. If we zoom the lens out further still, Uugaa and his neighbors are grazing their horses in Khölönbuir district, in Dornod province, which sits to the far Northeast of Mongolia (see fig. 3). Here the elevation is lower than that of Central Mongolia, the climate milder

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and the pasture is said to better for horses. Locals and even some non-locals claim that this rich and varied grazing produces the best and the fastest horses for the long distance racing that is so popular across Mongolia.

Fig. 4: Map showing location of fieldsite in Eastern Mongolia: Khölönbuir district, Dornod province.

Mongolia in the 21st Century. This is post-socialist Mongolia. Since the early 1990s the country has undergone a series of structural reforms geared towards creating a democratic state and concomitant market economy. This has taken place under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank and other institutions consistent with a new international orientation towards East Asia and the United States (Sneath 41). Stopping short of the privatization of land, the reforms have resulted in the privatization of livestock and the ascent of the individual stock owning herder as the basic economic unit. This represents a radical change from not only Soviet era collectives, but also pre-socialist socio-political systems for managing land use that saw herders have flexible, custodial access to large areas of grazing under the jurisdiction of monastic and aristocratic authorities who in turn managed land and livestock for the Manchu emperor (Sneath 44). Today, Uugaa's parents are responsible for their own finances, assets and debt. State bailouts generally are only available in extreme cases of winter disaster. In terms of horses, Uugaa's family had taken a post-socialist enterprise model even further. Over the course of the last decade they sold the bulk of their original horses and invested in stallions from Sukhbaatar province to the South, said to be the area where the Qing emperors' "iron herd" was maintained. Furthermore, they also acquired horses with Arab and Thoroughbred bloodlines: cross-breds (*eerliiz mor'*). The herd dropped from a few hundred head to less than a hundred, but the potential net

value of the herd increased dramatically as the height and speed of the horses over short distances improved. Success in the races over the summer would make it all worthwhile; they could sell the winners on (see fig. 5). Investing so much in so few horses also entailed risk: lack of success or accidents would cost relatively more. The family had already sold many of their sheep and goats to pay for the education of the children. Although their situation was not precarious, it was not entirely secure. This radical program of downsizing and quality improvement stood in contrast to some of their more conservative neighbors', who retained larger herds of horses originating solely from the area. These local horses were labelled Mongolian and were not thought of as hybrids, despite a long history of movement of people and animals to, from, and within the province, which now borders Russia and China (see fig. 4).

Fig. 5: Uugaa's younger brother, Töögii, with two of the horses destined to be raced and potentially sold in Central Mongolia. (Photo by author.)

Uugaa's horses and family exist in a moment that is marked by many Mongolians as the "age of the market" (*zah zeeliin üye*) (Sneath 2001, 41). Over the course of the transition to democracy and a market economy Humphrey ("The moral authority of the past")

observed a parallel trend towards a religious and traditionalist renaissance as Mongolians reached for the moral authority of the "deep past" amid an ongoing period of "post-socialist turmoil" (Humphrey & Ujeed vii). Moreover, Bulag notes that what constituted Mongolianness during this period was very much debated, despite or perhaps because of decades of socialist efforts to homogenize Mongolia according to successive visions of socialist modernity. Concerns that have emerged and become increasingly overtly contested in the two decades since the transition include the purity or hybridity of Mongolia, its history, its constitutive ethnicities and concomitant traditions (Bulag). Mongolia's geopolitical situation in a wider post-socialist world, and in particular the exploitation of its mineral resources by transnational corporations, have also emerged as major issues in the public imagination (High). Both Buddhism (Abrahms-Kavunenko; Humphrey, "The moral authority of the past") and shamanism (Pedersen) have experienced creative revivals in different parts of the country. Additionally, high literacy levels, ongoing links with Russia, commercial engagement with China, and the everyday popularity of South Korean television series available in many of the remotest provinces of Mongolia, demonstrate the sheer variety of threads influencing the lives of contemporary Mongolians.

It is in this context of upheaval, ongoing debate, and explosive creativity that we can begin to appreciate the significance of the different ways horses and people co-exist in 21st century Mongolia. I have already touched briefly on the tension between selling one's horses and maintaining one's original herd, which is part of one's connection with the local area. The decision to invest in cross-bred horses was not uncontroversial, and Uugaa's family worked hard to maintain connections to other kinds of horse-human relationships. This included owning gaited horses, seen as prestigious and beautiful, but also as a type of horse that is declining in terms of numbers and presence in Mongolia. Furthermore, Uugaa was also known for his skill in treating injured horses, training young horses, and catching horses on the open steppe. These skills form part of a constellation of features that constitute a "good man" across Mongolia: hardy, adaptive, mobile, and horse-savvy. In addition, Uugaa's family took very seriously their relationship with the local spiritual "masters of the land" (Empson 122). Beyond merely dedicating a lock of hair or a photo of a horse (or some other form of livestock), Uugaa's family dedicated an actual mare to the local spiritual entity in order to accumulate good fortune to live and herd in the area. These skills and practices involving horses did not necessarily stand in opposition to cross-breeding and selling horses outside the area, but they did allow the family to maintain a strong claim to being good horsepeople

from various local and external perspectives. It should be noted that all of these practices were debated to some extent, and there was no single path to becoming a "good man" through horses.

I have mentioned the recent concerns about hybridity and purity in Mongolia, along with a parallel renaissance of religion and tradition as Mongolians address the perceived knowledge gap caused by the socialist period. The decision of Uugaa's family to introduce hybrid breeding lines to their herd becomes interesting in light of the way breeds or types of horse frequently become entangled with "national and ethnic identity" (Cassidy, "The Horse" 12). "Nationality," "breed," and "ethnicity" are here understood as emergent facts of difference that entail material and discursive work to achieve and sustain. An example of such work is the decision taken in Mongolia in 2011 to separate cross-breeds and Mongolian horses in horseracing categories, even if a formal breed standard has not yet been introduced, as it has in other Central Asian countries like Kyrgyzstan. Also, as Khölönbuir is a largely Barga Mongolian district, Uugaa's family are positioned as part of an ethnic minority in terms of human politics of origins and difference. During the seven decades of state socialism in the 20th century, Khalkh Mongols were promoted as the "biological and cultural ethnic core of the Mongol nation" (Bulag 34). Alongside practices deemed religious or backwards, ethnic difference was alternately repressed and rendered mere folklore: dangerous threats to national solidarity or quaint obstructions to socialist modernity. The Barga in particular, having migrated from Inner Mongolia in the 1940s, were persecuted for their relative wealth and as potential Japanese spies. Animals and animal husbandry were also included in the modernization and homogenization endeavors of the Soviet era. An influx of Soviet-trained veterinary technicians operating on the collectives during state socialism attempted to modernize and increase the productivity of indigenous types of livestock through cross-breeding projects (Fijn). The efforts of Uugaa's family to raise both Mongolian and hybrid horses to race and sell in the Khalkh heartland of Central Mongolia need to be understood in terms of this historical background of concerns about the advent of capitalism, the revival of pre-socialist Mongolian traditions, as well as about ethnicity, nationality, and hybridity.

As Uugaa and his horses move forward in the 21st century, this historical background also needs to be understood as lived and dynamic. Through his relationships with the

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people, animals, and other fixtures of the environing world he exists in, Uugaa transgresses easy distinctions between ethnicities and breeds, or commercialism and traditionalism. He also moves smoothly between engaging with horses as individuals and horses as herds, types and fragments of wider histories and relationships. The multiple ways horses are present in Uugaa's life and the way these presences were made visible in the field for myself as an anthropologist also raise questions about the assumption of a crisis of representation in multi-species ethnographic research. Through a further exploration of how Uugaa's life is saturated with horses, I want to showcase in this article an ethnographic instance that demands an open ended multi-species approach: I want to avoid interpreting the multi-species turn as a simple move towards taking horses (animals) seriously as kinds of "subjects," "selves," or "persons" in research that comes under the ambit of animal studies. In addition, through an examination of Uugaa's relationship with a particular horse, I highlight the importance of not retrospectively condemning the allegedly anthropocentric research approaches to animals that came before the rise of posthumanism and multi-species ethnography — that is, approaches that for the most part focused on how humans used animals as symbolic and economic resources. As I develop these ideas in the next section, I suggest that while we must tackle the biases of our predecessors we must also tackle our own assumptions that emerge as we react to their work in the context of the current socio-political climate of the academy and animal studies. The chief reason I make this argument is that, given that the theoretical concerns of the day effect what researchers can see and make visible in the field, it is important to maintain the openness of human-animal theory to allow animals and their various relationships with humans to continue to emerge in new forms.

Multi-species Fieldwork: Theory and Practice

> *The same person is simultaneously a mass of atoms, a physiology, a mind, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic machine, a voter, a lover etc. etc.* (Huxley)

In this article I hope to illustrate how the "same" horse was simultaneously present in multiple ways over the course of my anthropological fieldwork in Eastern Mongolia. I do this with an awareness that I am writing in a moment that we might call a paradigm shift in animal-centered anthropology and animal studies more generally. According to Kirksey & Helmreich (545), within socio-cultural anthropology, at least, this shift towards multi-species ethnography is characterized by the pressing "into the

foreground" of "animals, plants, fungi, and microbes" in ethnographic accounts. This foregrounding of "nonhuman others" (Kirksey & Helmreich 554) or the "animals, *themselves*" (Argent, "Inked" 178 [my emphasis]) in academic accounts is sometimes placed in opposition to a previous cross-disciplinary paradigm, in which animals were predominantly "kinds, calories or constructs" or "objects" (Argent, "Do the clothes make the horse?" 157). For example Kirksey & Helmreich (545) suggest that the emergence of multi-species ethnography has seen animals in academic accounts move from the confines of "the realm of *zoe* or 'bare life'" to "the realm of bios," where they too can lead "biographical and political lives" alongside humans. This appropriation of Agamben's *zoe/bios* distinction suggests that animals in anthropology have been elevated from the zone of the merely "killable" or usable background matter to entities with legible, traceable social lives. This notwithstanding, it is worth noting that the ethnographic existence of animal personhood has been an interest in anthropology at least since the 1960s (Carrithers, Bracken, & Emery 663).

In the context of this apparent paradigm shift, and the flourishing of human-animal centered anthropology since the turn of the century, animals are variously considered "subjects" or "agentive individuals" (Maurstad, Davis & Cowles), kinds of "person" (Knight), "selves" (Kohn) or "response-able" beings (Haraway). Although each of these concepts has its own nuances, what they share is a desire to decenter the human as the only kind of subject/agent/being worthy of study, and concomitantly of scholarly representation. Also shared and now considered a basis for anthropological analysis is the "idea that diverse entities are fellow participants in the same world, and co-constitute each others' environments" (Long and Moore 18).

The term "diverse entities" is relatively open. It merely conveys something that exists: a thing. An entity can be a living being, a subject, an inanimate object, or anything in between. In terms of ethnographic fieldwork, in an ideal world animals would always be unknown entities to some extent prior to the commencement of the research. This is not always the case, however, and it is clear that theory informs what can be observed in the field. What concerns me is the risk of slippage from a default theoretical position of *animals are objects* to a default position of *animals are subjects*. The latter would be just as problematically ethnocentric as the assumption that animals are always-already merely background objects, there to be counted, eaten, and used as resources for

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symbolic thinking. This is particularly the case when dealing with fieldsites in places such as Mongolia, far from the North Atlantic centers of anglophone academia. It is in places like this that we are likely to encounter understandings of animals that are radically different to those already in circulation in the academy. Given this, any *a priori* assumption about what constitutes an animal — e.g. animals are subjects/objects — is potentially a foreclosure or a blindspot that might block the emergence of new understandings of what animals are and can be in different circumstances.

Academic research does not take place in a socio-political vacuum, and much recent anglophone human-animal and particularly human-horse relations research originates from and is based in North Atlantic societies (e.g. Cassidy, *The Sport of Kings*; Maurstad, Davis & Cowles). Given this, what parallel tropes and concerns might we juxtapose with the concern to make animals visible as kinds of subject, kinds of person, or beings to live "with" intersubjectively? The publication of Singer's *Animal Liberation* and subsequently Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* is often cited as a pivotal moment in the development of animal-centered scholarship (Carrithers, Bracken, & Emery; Shapiro & DeMello). Carrithers, Bracken, & Emery (665) suggest that in particular the refinement of Regan's (264) notion that animals too were "subjects to a life" facilitated the comparison of individual animals with individual humans as at least partially equivalent kinds of person. The authors also note that the rhetorical force of this proposition has much deeper roots in Western society, namely in the sacredness of human (and now animal) personhood and the individual human (and now animal) becoming the chief unit of moral regard (Carrithers, Bracken, & Emery 665). The trope that directs us "to equate an individual animal with an individual person" is then considered a "supercharged argument" in the North Atlantic context (*ibid.* 663), and perhaps now more than ever in the academy. Thus "moral personhood" is extended from "well-to-do Northern European men to the poor, slaves, women, children, other races," and now animals too (*ibid.* 663). With that extension comes an assumed crisis of representation: who are we to speak for *them*?

I am not arguing that this is problematic in itself. Taking animals seriously as subjects/selves/persons has been and will continue to be an important corrective to approaches that align themselves solely with the contrary trope: "other animal species are not persons but are means to our ends" (*ibid.* 663). However, both an object-centered approach and a subject-centered approach privilege the emergence of particular kinds of animal entities. This is particularly the case when dealing with charismatic animals

such as horses, who, compared to the plants, fungi, and microbes are rhetorically advantaged — from many North Atlantic perspectives, at least — in terms of human perception of "response" in human-animal relationships (*ibid.* 664). It is easy for an ethnographer to watch Uugaa with his horses and see mutual patterns of response develop as he rides and herds. *They* have eyes and *they* see *him* and move accordingly. The grass beneath the hooves also moves in response to Uugaa's passing, but the relationship is apparently readily observable as having a different quality. I say "apparently" because in making this statement I am already recreating a Western hierarchy of natural existence in which grass comes far below horses in terms of its ability to respond — this hierarchy being the product of a specific set of histories and socio-cultural contexts itself. Grass does not have eyes or a mouth, nor is it situated anywhere near humans when species are classified phylogentically — this hierarchy being the product of a specific set of histories and socio-cultural contexts itself. Though this might be an extreme example, it does highlight the potential ethnocentricity of privileging face-to-face, body-to-body, intersubjective relationships over other kinds of relationship animals might "participate" in, or other forms that animals might take. This problem is particularly acute when we observe that single animals and single humans participate in multiple relationships and kinds of relationships across series of linked contexts. What if a horse can concurrently or at least contextually be both an "it" and a "he/she/they"?

If the same horse is simultaneously present in diverse forms, as I will argue below, then I am inclined to draw out this diversity. The mass of equine atoms, the physiology of the horse, the horse as commodity (a cog in the economic machine), and the horse in art are all horse-human relationships, just as much as face-to-face intersubjectivity between these two large social mammals. The problem then becomes less a problem of the politically charged representation of a nonhuman other and more a problem of tracking the sheer number of different kinds of representational relationship and the entities they produce. This applies to human-only relationships just as much as multi-species relationships.

Candea (243) addresses these issues from a different angle by posing the question "what counts as a social relation and who can participate?", suggesting that, not surprisingly, the answer varies depending on the theoretical paradigm being employed.

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What is interesting is that Candea suggests that the "inclusion" of animals is not necessarily the most interesting issue, but rather how they are included. If following a classic or "Durkheimian" model, where social relations are relations between subjects mediated by objects, then animals might be incorporated into scholarship as subjects (*ibid*. 243). This is in line with the extension of sacred personhood to animals mentioned above. However, according to Candea a parallel movement to include or foreground animals (in a very different form) can be found in the opening up of the definition of "social relations" in the work of scholars such as Bruno Latour (see Latour "A Plea for Earthly Sciences" & Reassembling the Social; *ibid.* 243). Within this approach, questions of subjectivity, intentionality, and cognition are backgrounded in favor of mapping the different ways "actants" (people, animals, things) come together or associate (*ibid*. 243). Here lies an intriguing dilemma at the heart of multi-species ethnography: on the one hand, scholars engage with mushrooms and cup-corals (Kirksey & Helmreich) and, on the other hand, scholars engage with large mammals that are among the first candidates for the extension of moral personhood, such as dogs (Haraway) or horses (Maurstad, Davis & Cowles). Can we expect a divide to form between scholars who study the former and the latter groups of non-human species, given the "resistance" of fungi and marine invertebrates to being defined as individual animals/persons (Carrithers, Bracken, & Emery)? Can some aspects of equine lives and relationships with humans also be resistant to subject-centric narratives?

The positioning of animals in scholarly accounts is a political question, but it is arguably not necessarily an either/or question. Might it be possible to conduct analyses that allow animals as kinds of objects and animals as kinds of subjects to sit alongside each other? That is, an open-ended multi-species ethnography, one that can continue to cope with the contextual emergence of living beings as objects, subjects, and other entities that do not quite fit into these two polarized categories? This is what I attempt through my subsequent description of Uugaa's developing relationships with a new racehorse. I aim to familiarize the reader with some of the contexts through which this one horse emerged as a being with multiple ethnographically salient aspects in Eastern Mongolia.

Catching a racehorse. Let us return to Uugaa and his horse-saturated mornings. Once he has breakfasted, Uugaa generally heads out again, usually to do something with his horses, the horses of his neighbors, or the cross-breds that belonged to an absentee horse owner and trainer, which are grazed in isolation across the river to the North. The day after his father and younger brother left for Central Mongolia with a mixture of

cross-bred and pure Mongolian horses, Uugaa told me that he was going to take another horse through the final stages of its fittening for its first race the following week. The horse was simply referred to as *khongor mor'* (dun gelding/horse). The context of Uugaa's project and his intimate knowledge of the herd provided the means to differentiate this dun gelding from others of a similarly auspicious color. Generally, only the most famous horses are named and even these names often refer to the appearance (*züs*) of the animal. In subsequent sections of this article the reader will also come to know who or what *khongor mor'* was through his circumstances and placement in the overall family herd, as well as his appearance. But first, in order to restart the training process *khongor mor'* had to be captured and separated from the herd. This was done with a lasso-pole and riding horse (see fig. 6a & 6b).

Fig. 6a: Uugaa with a riding horse and his lasso-pole approaching the herd in order to catch a horse in the open. The lasso-pole (uurga) consists of a slender wooden shaft with a leather noose attached to the end, though Uugaa's was customized for extra length and a snappy whipping action. (Photo by author.)

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Fig. 6b: Uugaa in action with the lasso-pole, catching another riding horse to exchange it for the one he is riding in the photo. (Photo by author.)

The technique of capturing horses using the lasso-pole was something that Uugaa was adept at. It was a skill deemed particularly Mongolian, especially when referenced in narratives of the decline of good horsemanship. Many people favored enclosures and standard lassos. Uugaa was frequently asked to capture difficult horses from neighboring herds, risking his own riding horse and equipment in the swirling, dusty mayhem of a less well known mass of flying hooves and pressing equine bodies.

The basic procedure for catching a horse with the lasso-pole is as follows. Upon approaching the herd, Uugaa would single out the horse he was after and attempt to drive it into the midst of its bandmates. Often one or two other horses would run with the target horse. This method of driving the desired horse into the main body of the herd slowed it down enough to allow Uugaa to whip the noose over its head and twist it tight. Long chases in the open are often an indication of the inexperience of the herder. Once the horse was snagged properly, Uugaa would sit back behind the saddle of his riding horse and come to a halt rapidly, bracing himself to take up the strain if the horse resisted. The horse could then either be led to the encampment or bridled on the spot, often with the assistance of someone on the ground (see fig. 7).

Fig. 7: Töögii bridles a horse Uugaa has caught. (Photo by author.)

Beyond these basic steps, every such encounter between the involved parties is unique. Horses with the experience of *khongor mor'* usually come quietly once noosed. Others will not come quietly and will struggle at the end of the pole. Each sortie with the lasso-pole tested Uugaa's knowledge of the target horse: whom it would run with, when it would turn, how it would react to the noose, etc. Equally, as horses get older and more experienced they will learn to duck to evade capture just as the pole whooshes over them, or to shrug their heads to the side as the noose hits their ears. The terror and struggle of first encounters with the lasso-pole gradually fade with age until resignation is the norm upon capture. The horse and rider combination will also learn together, with turns and stops becoming sharper over time, for example. At first glance this is a three-way game that demands "relationships of response" between living beings: an ongoing micro-adjustment to each other, each encounter feeding into the history of the relationships between the concerned parties and changing them (Haraway 82). We might call this face-to-face intersubjectivity, or better yet, lasso-pole-mediated intersubjectivity. Taking seriously the idea that horses too can be "knowers" or subjects to signification (Kohn 6) foregrounds the mutuality of such relationships. That is, both Uugaa and *khongor' mor* develop as dynamic fixtures in each other's worlds — in a co-

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constitutive manner — at opposite ends of the lasso-pole. A young horse learns to release the pressure of the noose by stopping. A young Uugaa learns when to release that pressure and when to apply it in response to the horse's response. Both horse and human emerge from the encounter as slightly changed entities.

According to Kirksey & Helmreich, the concept of "becoming" with or becoming together has increasingly been used to capture the ongoing nature of such mutual transformations. (For a recent ethnographic example see Maurstad, Davis & Cowles 2013). "Becoming" in this sense originated with Deleuze & Guattari (1987) to express how the properties of elements in assemblages change or align themselves with the other constitutive elements of that assemblage. However, through its popularization in human-animal studies via the work of Haraway, it has become an appealingly straightforward way of countering anthropocentric accounts of human-animal relations by emphasizing how such relations involve "co-domesticating" or "co-shaping" between "subjects" or "agentive individuals" (Maurstad, Davis & Cowles 324). Thus, rather than Uugaa being the human subject capturing, training, and modifying an equine object with properties that are exhausted by its knowable nature, both Uugaa and *khongor mor'* might be construed as subjects modifying each other; becoming something novel together. Or, on a grander scale, rather than humans in Mongolia domesticating horses, humans and horses are seen to have domesticated each other in a process of mutual change (Fijn). Deleuze & Guattari (1987) did not, however, root their version of "becoming" in encounters solely between subjects or species. Although different, their approach is more in line with a Latourian concern for "things," where elements in an assemblage attain their status as entities with properties through their connections with other elements (Latour, *Reassembling*). Despite this, in light of the trope discussed above (an individual animal = an individual person) the "with" in "becoming with" (Haraway 16) carries appreciable rhetorical force, arguably gravitating towards encounters between subjects or kinds of person. This might not be such a problem when discussing plants or landscapes, but in this instance, in Uugaa's relationship(s) with *khongor mor'*, I suggest that treating Uugaa and the horse solely as two subjects co-shaping each other impoverishes the ethnographic account.

By widening the definition of social relations to include the association of the "diverse entities" that swirl around Uugaa as he plunges into the herd and the river in the figure 6b above, we can enrich the account by multiplying the involved parties. If we think about the way Uugaa at once manipulates and responds to the shifting mass of horses

to disrupt the rapid flight of his target, then we can foreground the role that the body of the herd plays in these encounters. The mass of individual animals is a responding entity that predictably shapes and molds itself around Uugaa's movements. The way the horses cohere to each other, the way *khongor mor'* sticks with his fellow geldings when running in front of Uugaa, can be seen as part of larger whole, a larger entity, or series of connecting entities.

We might plausibly reconfigure Huxley's words to suggest that not only is the same horse ["person"] "simultaneously a mass of atoms, a physiology, a mind, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic machine." The same herd is simultaneously a mass of horses, an entity with component parts, a responding being, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic or ecological machine etc. etc. In terms of *khongor mor'* this means taking seriously not only his presence as a individual being, but also his presence as part of the herd and its various manifestations.

Selecting a racehorse. "Being with" *khongor mor'* for Uugaa, and for the watching ethnographer, takes place on various levels and in the context of various wider histories and relationships. *Khongor mor'* as a responding being is never entirely absent from the wider field of relations within which his selection for training occurred, but his "response-able" presence (Haraway 82) is frequently less ethnographically salient than it was during his capture. His presence took on other forms as part of the constitution of the family herd and its connections with both Sukhbaatar province to the South and Uugaa's Barga ethnicity. Uugaa's family tended to tie the current riding horse up at the line of carts situated to the North of most Barga homes, while racehorses were tied to a separate high-line off to one side (see fig. 8). This is generally referred to as a tying up place (*uya*) in Mongolian; the poles that elevate the line are called *sojig*. However, Uugaa and his family called the whole tying up area *sojig*, as they do in Sukhbaatar province to the South, where some of the key (Mongolian) horses of Dorj's herd come from. This was one claim among many nested claims to horse-related authority and connections extending beyond Uugaa's home encampment.

At the level of the household, every family was supposed to have their own training tricks and superstitions geared towards getting the best out of the land and the horses. Within the community, friendships and relationships of patronage between Uugaa, his

peers, and older trainers were distributed unevenly, giving some youngsters better access to a wider variety of knowledge. Uugaa was an active gatherer of techniques of horsecare, being not only a skilled catcher of horses, but also a skilled treater of equine injuries. At the level of ethnicity, Uugaa suggested that the Barga were defined not only by lineage, by their carts, their sheep, and their ornate silver-worked tack, but also by their knowledge of how to fatten horses in the area. Beyond that, as part of the Eastern province of Dornod, Khölönbuir district, along with Sukhbaatar province, was within an area fabled for its excellent horsestock and horse-raising conditions. This notwithstanding, Uugaa was also aware of an emergent pan-Mongolian horsemanship, defined largely along Khalkh ethnicity lines (Bulag). For Uugaa, these local, provincial, ethnic, and pan-Mongolian threads of horsemanship were not abstract but lived through specific practices like calling the *uya* the *sojig*. Another example of pan-Mongolian horsemanship is the way Uugaa and his brother had attempted to ferment mares' milk one summer to produce an alcoholic beverage that he said he had greatly enjoyed while racing horses in Central Mongolia. The Barga apparently had no tradition of doing this, and indeed this was supposed to be one of the reasons why, although their horses were particularly fast, their men were poor wrestlers. The mares' milk was said to give strength as a white food, but this strength went directly to the foals in Khölönbuir rather than to the men. As I will develop shortly, this strength and concomitant fortune, which has ultimately come from the land, can contribute to the fortune of the household through either wrestling or horse-racing.

Fig. 8: *Khongor mor'* **with Uugaa a few days into the fittening process. In the background the high-line can be seen, with its supporting poles. Uugaa's family have added individual ties with swivels to minimize the chance of fankles. (Photo by author.)**

In terms of the above connections, *khongor mor'* was from Sukhbaatar province, a gift from a friend of Uugaa's who lived and bred horses there. He was the descendant of a particularly great horse on his dam's side, named Bosoo Kheer. *Galshar* (fast lines of ancestry) were traced through both sire and dam. The Sukhbaatar horses in the herd were generally smaller than even the normal Barga horses, as well as the cross-bred stock. My interpreter-assisted interviews with older neighbors pointed to a long history of cross-breeding in the area, with the Barga horses reflecting the presence of taller ancestors from Inner Mongolia. This was not conflated with the recent surge in the acquisition of Arab and Thoroughbred lineages, however. The added height tells in the shorter races of the younger age-bands, though the cross-breds were then said to struggle in terms of endurance once the races were longer than 30km for 6 year olds and above.

In order to explain to me why *khongor mor'* was more suitable for training than other horses of the same age, Uugaa referred not only to his ancestry, but also his conformation. To describe the horse's ideal features and physical shortfalls he drew on

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books, pamphlets, and past debates with his father and the person who bred the horse. Some of these books were recently published by great Mongolian horse trainers, others were published during the socialist era, when horseracing was also important, if different. It is said that during socialist times, any herder and his jockey son might hope to win the regional or national horseraces, if they had a fast horse. Now, however, with the advent of cross-breeding, expensive medicines, wormers, supplements, and hard feed (oats), horseracing was said to have become largely a rich man's game. These books and pamphlets depicted ideal types of racing horse based on central animals in a Mongolian-Buddhist tradition (see fig. 9).
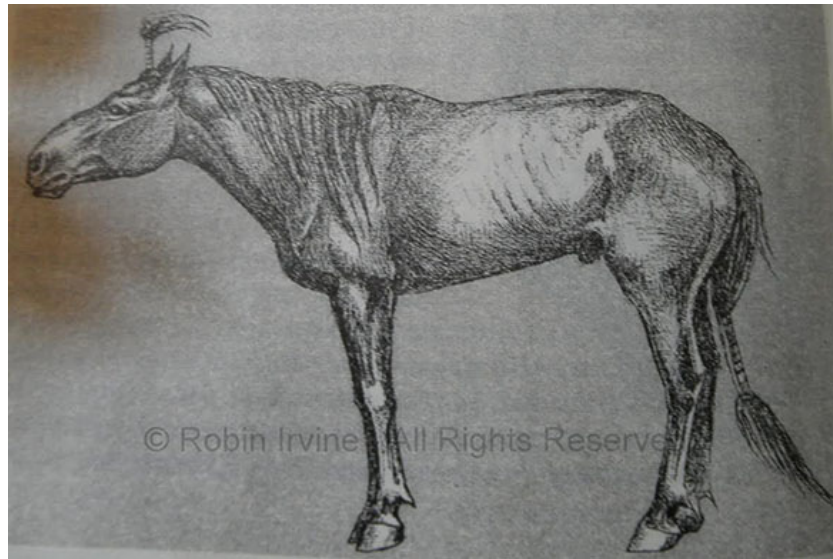

Fig. 9: An exemplar of the frog ideal type of racing horse.

Uugaa would flick from page to page as we discussed *khongor mor'* in the confines of the home. The books did not leave the *ger* and were part of a larger collection of horse-related literature stored beneath the flat-screen television in the honorific zone at the back of the home. This zone, the *khoimor*, contained not only the television but also equipment for hunting and racing that was not of an everyday nature. The silk scarves awarded to winning horses could be found here, as well as photos of great horses from the family. Everything to do with the household's fortune was here, including locks of tail hair from deceased fast horses, the sweatscrapers for the racehorses, Uugaa's hat and his younger brother's judo medals. Although the contents vary, some being more religious than others, *khoimor* zones at the furthest end of the *ger* are a feature of homes right across Mongolia (Humphrey, "Inside a Mongolian Tent"). If a family has any connection with horseracing, that connection will appear in material form within the

khoimor, reflecting the way racing is tied up with household fortune and masculine prestige.

Having leafed through the books, once we were outside with the horse Uugaa would highlight features he had indicated inside — the back of his hands running across the body of *khongor mor'*, coming to rest on salient features. The palm of the hand might dispel good fortune lodged in the horse. I will develop this point below. In Uugaa's eyes, khongor mor' tended towards being a frog type, based on his broad jaw and prominent forehead (see figs. 9 & 10).

Fig. 10: *Khongor mor'* **– Uugaa was demonstrating the width of his jaw to me. He also pointed out the thick base of the horse's ears and how they rose to a crisp tip. (Photo by author.)**

Uugaa mentioned that his father disagreed with this assessment, pointing towards the horse's well defined gazelle-like back (another ideal type). In fact, Uugaa's explanations of what exactly made *khongor mor'* or any of his horses a good horse were voiced in a spirit of auto-critique. Uugaa was well aware that tying wolf bones into the tails of his racehorses might be considered backwards and superstitious, but this did not stop him. What was important was that *khongor mor'* had a constellation of features that could be

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related to the ideal types within the well-thumbed pages of the books. Moreover, khongor mor' had the four very solid and straight legs typical of a good Mongolian horse, along with a long back. His legs were just a little short for his back length (see figs. 8 & 12). Another way of differentiating and discerning racing potential was to examine the relative distribution of the five elements in a horse's body (fire, iron, water, air, and wood). In this case *khongor mor's* strong shoulders led to his designation as predominantly a fire horse (see fig. 11). Compared to the cross-bred horses in the herd, *khongor' mor* had nostrils that were relatively closed. Uugaa would have liked his Mongolian horses of both Barga and Sukhbaatar origin to have a better ability to draw oxygen while racing.

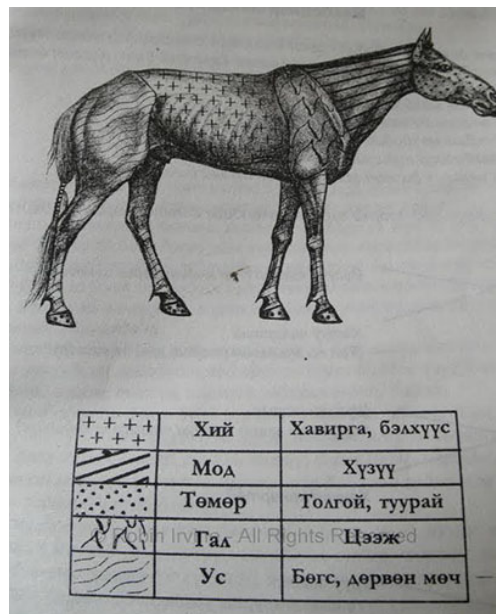|	Хий	Хавирга, бэлхүүс
	Мод	Хүзүү
	Төмөр	Толгой, туурай
	Гал	Цээж
	Ус	Бөгс, дөрвөн мөч

Fig. 11: The horse's body, divided up in terms of the five elements: air, wood, iron, fire, and water. Every horse is stronger or weaker in one or more of these elements.

Fig. 12: *Khongor mor'* tied up at the *sojig* during the day. The solidity of his legs and shoulders are visible in this photo. (Photo by author.)

What was in the ethnographic foreground during the above discussions about conformation, or when Uugaa thumbed through the pages of his books, or as his hands located points of strength and weakness on the body of the horse? To some extent he is certainly touching a history that belongs to the dun horse from Sukhbaatar, but from an anthropologist's perspective that history is lodged just as much in Uugaa's books and hands as in the life experiences of the horse *itself*. That same horse has fragmented: bits of his body map onto images of ideal types and vital elements leaping from the pages of pamphlets to lodge themselves onto that body in turn. The "thing" or horse that Uugaa and I discuss and touch exists as much through the words and images in the books as through the actual arrangement of an equine physicality. Although *khongor mor'* might reassert his presence as a living being by swinging round as we move to look at his hooves, in this particular ethnographic moment his ability to respond is largely backgrounded.

Haraway describes moments of rupture between her and her dog, Cayenne — moments when their smooth, co-operative entanglement comes undone during agility contests, and something goes wrong. When Uugaa and I talk about *khongor mor'* and run our hands over his body as we refer to the books inside, the moment of response or the

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moment when the horse makes himself present as a living being is the moment of rupture or interruption. This is the inverse situation, where *khongor mor'* as a subject becomes an intrusion, disrupting the presence of *khongor mor'* as the mute equine form we were debating moments before.

Sweating a racehorse. The equine body that is designated *khongor mor'* was being prepared for a race of approximately 15km, although he was not expected to win. Running the race was part of a longer trajectory of development for the horse. The training included tying the horse up for long periods during the day, without allowing him to graze. Khongor mor' was fed oats. He was also sweated: wrapped in blankets and ridden until the sweat seeped out; then he was ridden further, to the point that when the blankets were removed the sweat splashed out on the ground round the sojig, mixing with the dust.

Fig. 13: Uugaa's younger sister, Otgon, walks off a sweaty and fidgety *khongor mor'* after a training session. (Photo by author.)

Khongor mor' started off in solid summer condition, exuding salty sweat after only a short distance. But by the eve of the race, when the horse has already been "opened up" over 10km of steppe, the sweat Uugaa tasted with the tip of his tongue was no longer quite so salty, and the horse was beginning to look more like the lean running machines depicted in the books (see figs. 9, 13 & 14). The simple motion Uugaa made to taste the sweat represented not only a moment of assessment, but also a trajectory of assessments

and efforts as Uugaa and the horse worked towards race condition. It spoke of commitment and a project with tendrils that run through books, the herd, the encampment, the ancestry of the horses and humans involves, as well as the bodies of Uugaa and *khongor mor'*.

Fig. 14: A leaner, more racehorse shaped khongor mor' returns to graze with the herd in the evening. (Photo by author.)

The importance of sweat reappears at the finishing line, as the crowd rushes forward to be enveloped by the dust of the winning horses and attempts to touch the perspiration of the exhausted winner (Humphrey & Ujeed 160). Dust and sweat are formless means of transporting fortune or vitality. Just as a careless hand might lift fortune from the back of a horse, so a caring hand can wipe the muzzle of an animal due to be sold or killed on the inside of a *deel* (overcoat) in order to retain any fortune lodged in the animal. The ground around the *sojig* where the racehorses were tied was literally saturated with fortune-bearing sweat, and hence it was a very private space. The result on this specific raceday was not particularly important, so *khongor' mor* was ridden by a young son of a neighboring family who was neither the best nor the worst jockey. He did not place, but it was never anticipated that he would. His final fittening up had started a bit late and it was his first proper race. If we think back to the wider changes in

Uugaa's family's herd, we can begin to imagine the annual rhythm of preparing a mixture of cross-bred and Sukhbaatar-bred horses for races. We can begin to see how it is necessarily a long term project.

During my stay with Uugaa's family in 2011, *khongor mor'* was at the start of a potentially long and important trajectory, where his fortune was tied up with that of Uugaa's family and also Uugaa's prospects as a trainer. For the time being, the stakes were low, but Uugaa still took great care not to risk that potential fortune. *Khongor mor'* was a cog in the economic machine of the family and the wider emerging economy of racehorses in Mongolia. Corporations and rich individuals can now not only fund the summer racing festivals (*naadam*), but also buy and run horses in their names. However, *khongor mor'* was not only a cog in a monetary machine, he was a part of Uugaa's herd and a part of the economy of fortune that centered on the *ger*. If misfortune were to strike him, if someone were to step over the lasso-pole on the ground, or place his palm on the horse's back and subdue his vitality (*khiimor'*), this could have a knock on effect for the collective fortune (*khisheg*) of the whole household. Equally, if *khongor mor'* went on to win, then his vitality would surge with the fortune of the family and their livestock. The connections between the spiritual masters of the land, the herd, and the household were not smooth and uniform, but they were there, even if they were debated and improvised to some extent. The locks of hair tied to the lattice at the back of the *ger* apparently retained the speed and fortune of deceased great horses for the household. Skulls of great horses were strategically placed in hollows in the mountainside that overlooked the pasture below. These skulls fulfilled the same function as the locks of hair on a wider scale. The sacred mare (*setertei güü*), wandering alongside *khongor mor'* when he returns to the herd, is accumulating fortune, too. The cross-breds and the horses from Sukhbaatar are becoming entangled with this network of fortune as they run and win for the household and gain a photo on the chest of drawers at the back of the ger. *Khongor mor'* is an aspect of this economy of fortune that is at once collective and individual. He is both a living fortune-bearing equine being and a cog through which vitality passes in a large fortune-making machine.

In the case of Uugaa and this horse it would be quite possible to linger on face-to-faceness in their relationship: to ask questions about how Uugaa understood the horse as an individual with idiosyncratic habits of behavior. Fijn has made the case that Mongolian herdspeople generally have an intimate knowledge of individuality within their herds; with that they have an extensive spoken vocabulary for discussing behavior

and an equally extensive corporal vocabulary for dealing with it. I could try to juxtapose Uugaa's understanding of his horse as an individual animate being that breathes (*am'tan*) with my observations of their behavior together, with an understanding of equine biology, and with my own experiences as a "working rider." This juxtaposition would highlight the mutuality of these relations (the intersubectivity) as Argent ("Do the clothes make the horse?") has argued.

Such an approach would no doubt be productive, but in centering animals as subjects we would also be decentering other forms that animals take and other kinds of relationships that they are involved in. By siting *khongor mor'* as the target in the lasso-pole game alongside *khongor mor'* the not-quite-exemplary racing body and cog in the fortune machine I am making the case for a multi-species ethnography that allows books, images, ideas, fortune, bits of horses and symbols to have traceable social and historical presences of their own, just as much as the animals (or humans) *themselves*. The point is not that these aspects of the *same* horse are ever entirely separable, but rather that the best kind of analysis might be able to tease out how these different but entangled aspects are localizable in particular micro-contexts and particular relationships that shift over time.

Conclusion: Trans-Paradigmatic Ethnography and the Horse Multiple. Having given the reader a short insight into the lives of Uugaa and *khongor mor'*, we can now return again to the image of Uugaa stepping over the threshold of his home and seeing his herd of horses in the distance. Now we can appreciate that every single one of these horses is entangled in relationships as complicated as those of *khongor mor'*. Uugaa already knows which youngsters are the greatest racing prospects or are showing signs of gaitedness that might later be cultivated. He knows which horses may have to be culled before the coming winter so they do not die a tragic death in the cold and do not go to waste. He knows which is the sacred mare and which foal is hers. He hopes that she is accumulating fortune for the whole herd and household after the journey they made to the dedication ceremony at the cairn that pertains to the local spiritual master of the land. His world is saturated with these horses and more. Moreover, the horizons of these horses as individual beings are saturated with his projects and dreams as well.

However, what I have shown in this article is that it is not just a question of his world and their world(s) or his subjectivity and their subjectivity. The equine presences I have

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made visible above are not limited to enduring equine selves. They are fragmented and partial: bits of bodies, vessels of fortune, ideal types, bearers of family debt, bearers of foreign blood and future hope. Even as they change and develop over time, each aspect of a single horse exists through legible assemblages of action, meaning, and matter. I and other authors have emphasized the chaotic feel of the current post-socialist moment in Mongolia and its "wild capitalism" (*zerleg kapitalizm*) (Empson 117). I have made it clear that Uugaa and his horses are nevertheless making something of this moment, even as they embody and transgress the characteristic tensions that 21st century Mongolia is experiencing. The flows of sweat and fortune move through *khongor mor'*, but also through other entities: through the herd or sections of the herd linked with Sukhbaatar province and Central Mongolia; through the landscape where the skulls of great horses sit close to the earth and where sacred animals wander; through the encampment and the photos sitting in the place of honor at the back of the *ger*.

With his horses and his herd, Uugaa breaches easy distinctions not only between ethnicities and breeds, or between commercialism and traditionalism, but also theoretical distinctions between subject and object. Although *khongor mor'* can be construed as a being that is present (a subject), particularly at moments such as his capture, he is not the only entity that is present or ethnographically significant in such instances. Horses, or indeed all entities, might be considered "multiple" in the sense that Mol has argued that bodies are at once one and multiple: persons' bodies do not come into existence as smooth wholes, they emerge as wholes through practice, through work, through specific ways of engaging with and therefore generating reality. In terms of *khongor mor'* and the other horses whose lives in Eastern Mongolia I have touched on in this article, what I mean is that although it is possible to draw out singularity and subjectivity in these individual horses, it might be a mistake to do this *a priori*, without considering the plurality of forms that these equine bodies take in different contexts. Herds, herding, types, lineages, races, and lassoing all see slightly different horses emerge at different points in time, and with varying ethnographic salience. If we are to push forward the potential of multi-species ethnography, we need to maintain it as an open project to allow multi-species researchers to continue to generate "trans-paradigmatic ethnography" (Navaro-Yashin) that is neither trapped in approaches that treat animals as always-already objects nor those that treat animals as always-already subjects.

I leave the reader with an image of *khongor mor'* being led away to his future. I know that he is still with Uugaa and that their riding partnership has developed to the point where he is the horse Uugaa rides for the summer festivals, where both wear their finest.

Fig. 15: Otgon leads *khongor mor'* back to the tying up area after exercise. (Photo by author.)

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