

When Beasts are Burdens: Equine Agency in the Exploration of Australia's Mid North Coast

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Abstract

This article explores the effects and affects of equine and other agency in an historical text. In 1841, surveyor Clement Hodgkinson made the questionable decision to bring horses on an expedition to the Bellinger River Valley. This resulted in considerable hardship for Hodgkinson, his Aboriginal guides, and the horses who struggled over some very difficult terrain. While the decision to bring horses appears superficially misguided, a broader perspective of agency in this case lends it a degree of proximal rationality. When framed within theories of Bruno Latour and Vinciane Despret, the decision to bring horses on the expedition becomes a matter of inter-agency in which Hodgkinson was motivated by how he was 'made-to-feel' by his horses. Decolonising agency in this context opens up the field to a broad array of human and non-human actors, including horses, who affected and influenced the decisions of Hodgkinson and, by extension, the exploration and subsequent colonisation of the Mid North Coast. This leads to a reanalysis of the concept of power and how it is distributed broadly but is mediated by rationality acting in proximal and ultimate ways.

Keywords

Affect, Agency, Colonisation, Horses, Rationality

Introduction

In March 1841, surveyor Clement Hodgkinson left his station in the Macleay River Valley in the colony of New South Wales (NSW) to explore the Bellinger River Valley, some 90 kilometres to the north. He was responding to a report by sawyers who had travelled up the coast in a small boat and reported an abundance of cedar trees along the Bellinger's banks. By this time, the cedar trees in the Macleay Valley were exhausted and there was an inexorable movement of colonists northwards to exploit the rich forests on the Gumbaynggirr-speaking peoples' lands on the NSW Mid North Coast (Townsend 10). The close-grained cedar from this region was highly prized by cabinet makers in Sydney and held such value that it has been referred to as 'red gold' (Secomb). There was also increasing demand in the colony for the grazing and agricultural land that would follow the cedar removal, so Hodgkinson sought to weigh the practicalities of grazing and agriculture in the hitherto unexplored Bellinger River Valley.

Hodgkinson made two expeditions to the valley, the first in 1841, the second in 1842. On the first expedition he travelled with three horses – one ridden by himself, one by his stockman, William Miles, and the third carrying provisions. On his second expedition, Hodgkinson travelled without horses. He documented these expeditions in a book titled, *Australia, from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay* (Hodgkinson). This is the earliest written account of contact between European colonists and Aboriginal people of the Mid North Coast of NSW. In terms of distance travelled and hardship endured, Hodgkinson's story pales in comparison to that of the explorer, Ludwig Leichhardt, who travelled thousands of kilometres, lost or killed many horses and mules and eventually disappeared (Leichardt). No men or horses in Hodgkinson's party were killed and there was no dire lack of food or water. However, history is not a competition and Hodgkinson's text reveals much about agency, affect, and the colonisation of the Mid North Coast of NSW. In the text, Hodgkinson has complete control of the narrative and as such it is difficult to filter his account of any biases, misunderstandings, inaccuracies or lies. He portrays himself according to the trope of the indefatigable British explorer, master of his destiny, surmounting

hardships, discovering worlds of always-inferior others. However, the story he tells of his expeditions contains small apertures – viewports into agencies and intentionalities other than his own and other-than-human – and these can shed light on the more-than-human dimensions of colonisation. A close reading of his text reveals mistakes, failings, affects, dependencies, and vulnerabilities that speak of the agency and affordances of other beings.

In this article I aim to explore the agency of Hodgkinson's horses in terms of his exploration of the Mid North Coast. I begin with a discussion of the recent scholarly concern about accessing the agency of non-humans in historical accounts. In this discourse, horses have a prominent position due to their close associations with humans and their roles in human history. I argue that it is productive to conceptualize agency in terms of assemblages in which agency is distributed among multiple actors. This resonates with the works of philosophers, Bruno Latour, Vinciane Despret, and John Law, who argue for analysis of *relations* between entities rather than of entities in and of themselves. Attending to these distributed agencies helps reveal how decisions attributed to Hodgkinson were in fact negotiated within a more-than-human assemblage, in which fatigue, terrain, animal disposition, and sensory attunements all played causal roles. Such an analysis not only complicates narratives of intention and control but also opens a methodological pathway for writing histories that register the liveliness of non-human participants without collapsing agency into dominance or command. I follow this discussion of non-human agency with a brief description of the first expedition of Hodgkinson and a consideration of the question: why did he bring horses? Answering this question opens up the possibilities for more-than-human agency and allows a view of Hodgkinson's actions in terms of how he was 'made to do' in Latour's terms, and also how he was 'made-to-feel'. This kind of analysis sees agency widely distributed, albeit with qualifications as to whether it acts proximally or ultimately. This is tempered with the question of how power is distributed, with a qualification that it is erroneous to conflate agency with power.

This article highlights the agency of actors other than Hodgkinson, who in various ways facilitated or impeded the colonial project. Some of these actors include the

Gumbaynggirr-speaking peoples of the Nambucca and Bellinger River valleys on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. While I highlight their agency in terms of curating the landscapes that Hodgkinson exploited, I am interested in equine agency here, so I do not focus on the agency of his Aboriginal guides even though both were ostensibly marginalized in the text, and in life. Such an analysis is worthwhile but would require an entire article, or perhaps a monograph. I also emphasize that highlighting the agency of Aboriginal people is not in any way an ascription of blame on these peoples for their own colonisation. If anything, it highlights the autonomy that they enjoyed and how they shaped their own environments in sometimes profound ways until these were occupied and upended by colonists in the pursuit of material wealth. The landscape that was curated by Gumbaynggirr-speaking peoples provided abundance that colonisers sought to exploit, which resulted in conflict, resistance and displacement.

In this article, the term ‘Aboriginal’ is used to refer to the First Nations peoples who occupied the Mid North Coast of NSW at the time of colonisation. It should be noted that these people would not have referred to themselves as Aboriginal. Largely these were Gumbaynggirr-speaking peoples but given their ties to Dunghutti and Ngamba and others, it is too much of a simplification to call them Gumbaynggirr. There would have been women and men sharing a camp and communicating in Gumbaynggirr, but who had different first languages (Morris 68). Indeed, Gumbaynggirr itself had different dialects across the north, south, and north-west areas (Morelli et al.). Where Hodgkinson mentions the name of a ‘tribe’, I adopt this, with a qualification that he was an outsider who sometimes ascribed names and territorial associations that were not accurate.

Horses as Agents

The animal turn in the humanities has seen much debate about the agency of animals in history and whether animal agency, and its role in shaping history, can be accessed and written about based on historical texts and/or the archaeological record (Argent; Glover

and Mitchell; Pearson). Horses, especially, have figured prominently in these debates, not coincidentally as they have been involved in warfare since the early Bronze Age and war has attracted the attention of historians since classical times (Rees). Moreover, the alignment of horses with higher strata of societies means that some of the most written-about historical figures have owned horses and often been on horseback at significant historical moments (Clutton-Brock). In some cases, history has even given us the names of these horses while many other human figures in these stories remain anonymous. Consider Bucephalus at the Battle of Gaugamela or Wellington's Copenhagen at Waterloo. However, even where these animals are ascribed historical importance, they are not viewed as agential beings with the capacity to shape history. Where Bucephalus carried Alexander across the Granicus to shape the outcome of the battle against Darius's army, the agency is entirely given to Alexander and none to the horse – without whose willingness to descend a muddy bank and plunge into a river amidst the noise of battle, Alexander would have been done for. Bucephalus, while named, is but a functionary; a living vehicle for the facilitation of human pursuits.

So, without any histories written by the horses themselves, how can we access the agency of horses in historical accounts where they are invariably depicted as functionaries? While some contend that the horses themselves cannot be discussed, only their representations, the same can be said for historical humans, especially those in oppressed groups. We can also recognize that not just histories but *all* texts about horses, including contemporary research papers, are written by humans. Admittedly, research papers acquire a higher degree of validity through the peer review process, but still, the reviewers are never horses. Thus, outside of direct interaction, we are always in a position where we can only access the agency of horses based on what another human is telling us. We must take the other's word for it. While ostensibly limiting, this does in fact level the playing field somewhat and opens up possibilities for accessing equine agency in others' accounts. It places historical sources on a similar footing to contemporary writings and moves the focus toward analysing the writing in its socio-historical context (Swart 197).

In terms of eliciting horses' agency from historical texts, positioning them in histories as oppressed groups is a productive direction to take as it recognizes that members of such groups are not only acted upon but act 'in their own right' (Swart 200). Here the materiality of history not only restates the oppression but belies any claim that horses are passive actors. Consider stirrups, reins, hobbles, bits, and stables; all artifacts of all artifacts of humans' efforts to curb horses' agency. In literature, the use of metaphors such as 'hobbling', 'reining-in', and 'spurring-on', even in human contexts, all speak to a recognition of horse agency based on a tacit acceptance that horses have intentions that are often at variance with those of humans, and therefore that they have agency. From surveys of contemporary equestrian riders, highly desirable traits in horses include 'cooperating when ridden', 'not running away', and 'willingness to go forward' (Górecka-Bruzda et al. 383). These are characteristics of agential beings. In the face of such artifacts and accounts, it behoves us to examine histories closely and find where agency seeps through the cracks of anthropocentric accounts.

Given that the task here is to critically examine the text of a settler colonist, a promising way forward is to decolonise the concept of agency itself (Bang and Marin 542). Following Despret, we can disembody it from humanist conceptions in which agency is understood as intentional, rational and premeditated – as the sole domain of the 'rational, liberal, individual self' (29). We can decouple agency from these conceptions and reframe it in terms of what Despret calls 'agencement', meaning an assemblage that produces 'agentivity' (38). In this way, the unit of analysis is no longer the autonomous self but rather the relations that emerge out of hybrid networks of actors (Latour 31). Here, living beings are capable of both affecting and being affected, creating a 'flow of forces' that articulate agency (Brandt). This is not to suggest that horses are not intentional or rational. Given the opportunity and the right methodology, horses communicate, manipulate, plan, recognize, resist, and cooperate. For example, horses have been shown to use referential gestures to direct the attention of humans to unreachable food items, indicating an awareness that they can affect the actions of humans (Malavasi and Huber 899). But the task here is not so much

to discover what Hodgkinson's horses wanted or intended. Rather, it is to examine the effects that they had within these assemblages generated by, and generating, processes of colonisation. While there was a power imbalance in terms of whose choices were being followed, whose backs were being sat upon and who had knowledge of the terrain, the conditions and the extent of the expedition, we can acknowledge that the horses' actions were not solely instinctive, conditioned, or enforced but rather agential, allowing for rationality and intentionality. Yet, at the same time, we can recognize that their agency lies within moving and being moved in relation to other beings and the environment.

Where Latour and others hold that agency lies in an entity's capacity to affect, Tim Ingold takes exception and argues that we should consider the action rather than the actor. In giving credit to Actor Network Theory, which treats humans and non-humans as equally influential actors in shaping social systems, Ingold holds that agency is indeed distributed throughout networks, but he diverges somewhat in arguing that agency lies primarily within capacity for perception and movement. As such we do not consider the wind itself as an entity, rather it is the movement of air. Ingold suggests that it is absurd to claim equivalence between a grain of sand and an aphid in terms of agency because the latter is capable of movement and perception (Ingold 90, 116). However, in reiterating subject/object binaries, Ingold undermines his own argument for the primacy of movement rather than agency. Here Despret asks, 'does agency lie in the contrast between moving and being moved? (Despret 37)'. A grain of sand, while not self-propelled, can indeed move through tidal action, and it can respond – albeit over longer periods of time and in ways that differ from an aphid. How is perception important to the difference? What may be important here is not the ways in which agents act but rather the ways in which they affect and how their effects ramify. Horses, in their capacity to move, think, and feel, elude this debate; however, it is pertinent in terms of what Latour would refer to as the hybrid networks in which Hodgkinson, his horses, and others – both human and non-human – enabled and resisted colonisation. There were ostensibly stationary entities in Hodgkinson's narrative

that, when considered in terms of ‘agencement’ – in webs of relations with his horses – had profound effects on his exploration of the Bellinger River Valley and its subsequent colonisation.

First Expedition – The Inland Route, March 1841

The first route that Hodgkinson took to reach the Bellinger River Valley was a curious choice. Rather than following a coastal route across gently undulating land, he kept ‘inland as much as possible’ (40). This route led the party over some very rugged, densely forested, mountainous terrain with peaks and ridges rising above 400 meters. The only reason Hodgkinson gives for taking this route is that it would enable him to see if the Bellinger was a ‘stream of any importance’ (44). He was seeking to determine whether the upper reaches of the river were similar to the Macleay River, where he lived, in being bordered by broad, fertile plains. He does appear to have known in advance that the terrain he was going to travel across was challenging. He knew that the rivers to the north were separated by steep mountain ranges. Indeed, by the second night of the expedition, Hodgkinson could see ahead of him, ‘tier beyond tier of mountains [rising] in serrated ridges of steep, high conical summits’ (73). At this point, he could have descended toward the east and travelled the lowlands closer to the sea, but he persisted with the inland route. Hodgkinson and his party, including the horses, experienced significant hardship in consequence (40, 44).

On the second day of crossing ‘densely-wooded ranges’ and cutting their way through the ‘entangled creepers of the brushes’, the party had to cease progress for an hour for the horses to ‘have some grass’ (41, 42, 43). It was immediately apparent that the horses were not going to be able to carry people or supplies over such difficult terrain. For much of the journey from this point, they distributed the loads of the horses among the two guides of the Tanban tribe who Hodgkinson had recruited, and five Aboriginal people from Nambucca Valley who had joined the party. Indeed, Hodgkinson states that without the help of his guides, he ‘could never have reached the Bellengen [sic] River with horses’ (47). At this

point in the journey, they encountered stinging nettle tree saplings which caused the horses significant pain and impeded progress until the effects waned. On the third day, after having had to cut ‘every yard’ of their way through thick brush, the party had to continue into the night as it was ‘indispensable that [they] should reach a place where grass was to be had’ (48). They ‘dragged’ themselves and the horses up to the crest of a range and camped on a ridge where the horses could graze (49). After crossing the Kalang River, they once again had to dismount and cut a passage for the horses ‘through the masses of briars and creepers’ (42). The horses – who were, by the fourth day, ‘a great source of inconvenience’ – had tremendous difficulty crossing the rocky streams and negotiating steep ravines (50). On two occasions one of the horses fell backward. On one of these occasions, the pack horse fell backward into a river and destroyed some of the provisions. By the time the party reached the Bellinger River, the horses were, for all intents and purposes, riding the men.

Due to the spoiled provisions and the steep mountain ranges, ‘almost inaccessible’ for the horses, Hodgkinson decided that it was useless to proceed further (53). The guides were also exhausted from having to carry the loads. The party proceeded downriver for a few miles and headed homewards, once again ascending the steep ranges. The men journeyed almost entirely on foot, leading the horses, and still on three occasions the horses ‘made stumbles at the sides of gullies, into which they narrowly escaped falling’ (57). Here, Hodgkinson was sorry to see that ‘the horses, which were first-rate ones, and possessed extraordinary powers of endurance, frequently exemplified on previous occasions, were nearly knocked up’ (57). The following day they had ‘great difficulty’ once again in getting the horses across the Kalang River. As Hodgkinson was ‘dragging’ his horse over the rocks of the crossing, the horse made a sudden spring and struck him violently with his forefeet (59). From this point, Hodgkinson followed a more easterly route, which proved easier. After ten days, the expedition arrived at Wollumbucca creek, where Hodgkinson’s surveying party was camped. There he made a ‘vigorous inroad into a mess of salt-beef and peas’ and revived his horse with a ‘good feed of maize’ (60).

The Question of Horses

Considering the difficulties brought about by the horses on the expedition, the obvious question is: why did Hodgkinson bring them? As indicated above, he must have known in advance the steepness of the terrain ahead of him. The mountains separating the river valleys are easy to see from the plains. Indeed, on the second day of the expedition, while the party was camped on the summit of a high range, Hodgkinson had line of sight back to a hill known as Arakoon/Marrgaan which stands at the entrance to the Macleay River and which he knew firsthand. Logically, he would previously have seen the mountain he was standing on from other direction – from Arakoon/Marrgaan. This foreknowledge of the terrain would also explain why he chose ‘strong bush horses’ and loaded his provisions on ‘the most sure-footed pack horse’ that he had (40). So, while ease of travel on the plains might have been a reason for bringing horses, his foreknowledge of the mountainous terrain, which he later acknowledges was ‘too steep for horses’, should have tempered that (55). Given that Hodgkinson eschewed horses on the second expedition, we should seek additional reasons for why he brought them on the first.

It may be that Hodgkinson brought horses in order to intimidate. He was well aware of Aboriginal people’s violent, lethal resistance to the incursions of cedar sawyers along the Nambucca River Valley through which he was travelling. It is telling that he and his companion, Miles, went ‘well armed with carbines, pistols and swords’, the latter two of which are certainly not hunting weapons (40). In what Swart refers to as a ‘performance’ of power in colonialism, horses were used by colonial forces to intimidate; they can inspire fear in people who have never before seen terrestrial mammals larger than 80 kilograms (2, 19). However, in this case it is unlikely, as Peter Mitchell notes that knowledge of horses in the colonial context tended to precede the horses themselves (328). Moreover, as Natasha Fijn documents, direct encounters with horses as escaped domesticates often preceded direct encounters with colonists (10, 12). Knowledge of both colonists and horses among the Gumbaynggirr-speaking people of the Bellinger Valley may well have come from firsthand experience that preceded Hodgkinson’s arrival. They had close social ties with tribes of the

Macleay Valley and likely visited Arakoon/Marrgaan, which was, and is, a ceremonial site with great spiritual significance for Aboriginal peoples of the Mid North Coast Matthews 57; Morelli et al. 54). They also engaged in ritualized warfare with groups that were based hundreds of kilometres to the north and south. So, it is highly likely that some of the Gumbaynggirr-speaking people had already seen horses being ridden by colonists. Supporting this is that at no point in the text does Hodgkinson describe any kind of reaction to his horses on the part of the Aboriginal people that he encountered. The silence in this regard indicates that his intention may have been that the horses would intimidate the ‘wild blacks’, not through their novelty, but through their familiarity (61). The ubiquitous, colonial dyad of guns and horses afforded armed white men superior height, mobility and firepower, and a reputation for killing large numbers of Aboriginal people. From the earliest times of Australia’s colonisation, the dyad’s reputation would have preceded them up the coast and down from the tablelands, where killings and displacement were already occurring (Clayton-Dixon 73). Even without guns, horses can inspire fear – in that they can kick and bite – so intimidation may well have been a factor in Hodgkinson’s choice. Secondly, and not exclusive of the above reasons, bringing horses could have been a matter of fashion. Hodgkinson was familiar with the expeditions of Thomas Mitchell and Charles Sturt, both of whom had explored west of the Great Dividing Range, and these men had undertaken journeys on horseback (Mitchell 320).

Here it is important to understand that a major contributing factor in Hodgkinson’s decision to bring horses was how they made him feel. Hodgkinson was a creditable artist, and his text is accompanied by some illustrations that provide valuable insights into the world in which he moved. Most of these are of the Aboriginal people of the region engaged in ceremony, warfare and fishing. They provide details of the material culture, the body adornments and the sheer numbers of people gathered at ceremonies. However, two of these illustrations are of Hodgkinson himself, and in both, he is on horseback. While Hodgkinson’s depictions of humans and dogs are somewhat awkward and stiff, and those of flora uniform and sterile, his horses are far more naturalistic. He details their musculature,

the gleam of their coats, their balanced stances and natural gaits. It belies a familiarity with horses bordering on fascination. In both illustrations he and his horse are the central figures. In the first, titled 'A Halt Near a Fern Tree Scrub', his companion, Miles, kneels at a campfire beside a sitting Tanban guide [Figure 1]. The other Tanban man, holding the reins of the pack horse, looks up at Hodgkinson who sits on his horse with a sword at his hip and pistol attached to his saddle. Horses literally and figuratively elevate their riders, and Hodgkinson makes explicit the sense of importance, confidence, safety, superiority and control that his horse gave him (Lawrence 224).



Figure 1. Clement Hodgkinson, *A Halt Near a Fern tree Scrub*, from Hodgkinson, C. 1845, *Australia, from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay*.

In his text Hodgkinson also attests to the feeling of freedom he experienced while riding. In describing settler life, he counterbalances the 'absence of conveniences' with the 'feeling of unrestrained independence' that the settler enjoyed, roaming 'through the grassy wilderness, with his horse, gun, and kangaroo-dogs, with a thousand times more freedom than the wildest chiefs of the African deserts' (148, 149). He depicts this in his second

illustration, ‘Kangaroo at bay’, in which he is mounted on a galloping horse, holding a rifle, bearing down on a kangaroo that is bailed up by two Aboriginal men and his kangaroo-dogs [Figure 2]. He has power over every element in the illustration, including his own destiny. The feelings he likely experienced from being on horseback lend a degree of *proximal* rationality to his decision to take horses. By this I mean that his decisions seem rational in the immediacy of his circumstances. They would assuage his fears of hostile Aboriginal people, give him some sense of having control over his situation, and bring along the sense of freedom that he experienced riding in the Macleay River Valley. However, my point is that ultimately, and in light of the difficult terrain, the decision to bring horses was irrational precisely because they were based primarily on how the horses would make him feel. This is not to say that feelings and rationality are incompatible but rather that a decision based on being made to feel a particular way can be rational in the immediate moment – proximally – while ultimately causing suffering or distress. Cigarette smoking is a clear example of this.



Figure 2. Clement Hodgkinson, *Kangaroo at Bay*,
from Hodgkinson, C. 1845, *Australia, from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay*.

Being elevated also gave Hodgkinson a sense of another kind of freedom: a degree of removal from a hostile environment. In describing the ‘dense brushes’ of NSW he says the sportsman must ‘take care that he does not put his hand on some venomous snake’ (196). In fact, Hodgkinson recounts a time, prior to the expedition, when he was bitten by a snake (200). On this occasion he had leaped to the ground from the back of his horse and landed on a snake, which bit his foot. Being on horseback must have conferred on Hodgkinson a sense of relaxed security in that he would not have to constantly scan the ground for snakes and would not need to fear being bitten. While travelling on foot Hodgkinson was also plagued by ticks, stinging ants and leeches, all of which are very active during March, which is when Hodgkinson was exploring northwards. I can attest from firsthand fieldwork experience in this region how disquieting it is to walk through long grass or to stand among the leaf litter while leeches crawl into socks, ticks lie in wait on the long grass and unsuspecting snakes lie motionless, concealed by the vegetation. The feeling of being on horseback is liberating on such terrain. As the expedition unfolded, however, Hodgkinson was only able to ride for a few hundred yards at a time before having to dismount (50).

Following Despret – who asks, does the pollinator pollinate or is it drawn to the flower? (37) – we can ask, does Hodgkinson ride his horse or does the horse compel Hodgkinson to sit on his back? Latour frames it in French as ‘faire-faire’ or ‘make to do’ (21). Latour provides a comic vignette in which a girl, in response to her father’s comment that he is smoking a cigarette, remarks dryly, ‘I thought the cigarette was smoking you’. This triggers an existential crisis in the father who tries to wrest the agency from his cigarettes by destroying them. However, as Latour says, neither the girl nor her father is correct. Neither the cigarettes nor the man are sole agents, nor are they solely subject to the other, rather they are bound together in *agencement* – a hybrid network of man, cigarette and other less visible agents bound up in networks of attachments (22). While the horse is literally bound by Hodgkinson, the man in turn is bound by the ways that his horse makes him feel, by his fascination with horses, by the feelings he experiences while horse riding, and by a host of other influences. The Aboriginal people who he anticipated on his

expedition, the snakes and the biting invertebrates all would have affected Hodgkinson and his choices in his expedition. Rationality is elusive here, in that, were Hodgkinson to give it due consideration, bringing horses on a trek across forested mountains is ultimately irrational. However, proximally, in terms of the feelings of freedom and security conferred by being mounted on a horse, the decision is rational. It is more similar to smoking a cigarette than it would first appear. So, if we decouple agency from rationality as promised, we find that agency in this case is distributed among the human and the horse and beyond. The people who attacked the cedar swayers in the Nambucca Valley instilled fear in Hodgkinson and this aligned with his affective dependence on horses (37). The snakes lying in the long grass, the ticks, ants and leeches instilled desire on his part to be elevated. Hence the decision to bring the horse is a veneer. It is undergirded by agencement, or an assemblage of actors affecting and being affected.

Not only was Hodgkinson ‘made to do’ by his horses, but he was ‘made to feel’ – and in very curious, transformative ways. Much has been written about the experience of shared embodiment brought about by horse riding. Keri Brandt argues that people who work with horses need to be acutely aware of the horses’ emotional states through conscious or unconscious attention to the various embodied signals that horses give (308, 309). Davis et al. argue that empathy, connectedness and trust are mediated by terrain. Their contention is that the shared experience of terrain and the way it commands the attention of both horse and rider confers a mutually adaptive dimension to riding that extends selfhood and identity beyond the human body (55). This is in line with the works of Sandra and Matthew Blakeslee, who describe how we map our bodies beyond their physical limits. This has been demonstrated with experiments using virtual reality technology, in which people learn to control body parts that don’t exist. In the case of horse riding, people conceptually extend their bodies to incorporate the bodies of horses, as Game describes, experiencing the world as a cognitive centaur (1). This fosters an experience of embodiment that operates bidirectionally in both spatial and communicative dimensions. It is not a one-way sense of mapping one’s body onto that of a horse but instead a human/horse embodiment that is

immanent in attention, perception, and interspecies communication. This in turn leads to a sense of shared identity in which the boundary between human and horse becomes blurred despite asymmetrical power relations (Baynes-Rock and Teressa 312). Hodgkinson, in riding his horse or leading him across difficult terrain, was subject to this attentional mode of experiencing terrain through his horses' hooves. He perceived sharp rocks, hummocks, and slippery surfaces in terms of how they affected his horses. However, he is mostly silent on this matter. In his account of his expedition, he dryly comments on his horses experiencing difficulties with steep mountainsides, slipping and falling and losing footing and nearly being killed, and only seems affected insofar as his supplies are ruined when his pack horse falls backward into a river. There are only a few places in his account that bespeak a sense of shared experience of the landscape. One is his account of the effects of nettle tree saplings (*Trema tomentosa*). He describes the intense pain felt by the horses, who develop large, painful blisters from the stings of the nettle trees, and remarks that the horses experience 'great temporary constitutional derangement' (43). One of his horses 'threw himself on the ground, snorting convulsively with pain' (42). Here, in the words of Despret, Hodgkinson resists de-animating the world. No longer portraying himself as the dispassionate observer he acknowledges his horses' suffering, their capacity to feel pain, their capacity to lose themselves in that pain, and by extension their capacity to regain themselves as the pain wanes. They regain their rationality. He recognizes one of his horses suffering more than the others, belying any notion that horses experience the world uniformly or mechanistically by acknowledging the suffering of one particular horse. In this, the landscape creates a shared sensory experience that is far more pronounced than the feeling of sharp rocks in a riverbed or of trying to maintain footing on uneven ground. The horses' experiences of nettle tree stings are made more accessible for Hodgkinson, who is also stung by the leaves on his arms and hands, albeit with lesser effects in comparison to the horses, who 'suffer infinitely worse' (42, 43).

Another kind of made-to-feel emerged from the horses' dependence on grass. This simple relationship preoccupied Hodgkinson throughout the expedition and profoundly

impacted his choices in terms of where to camp and whether to stop and rest or to continue. He came to view the landscape in terms of the amount of grass available. In six places in the text, he talks of the grass's 'luxuriance' in positive terms because the more luxuriant the grass was, the more fuel there was for his horses (28). However, in his commentaries elsewhere, on the fertility of the Macleay Valley, he characterizes the 'luxuriance' of wheat crops in negative terms because it means a comparatively diminished grain yield (27). Luxuriant grass provides food for horses but not for humans. At every stop during his expedition, Hodgkinson needed to ensure that there was feed for his horses while they rested. Often the party had to travel through difficult terrain in darkness because it was necessary for them to find a grassy place at which to camp. When they finally reached the Bellinger River, they had been travelling into the night and Hodgkinson was relieved to find there 'a beautiful grassy forest bank' that would provide a campsite and, more importantly, fuel for his horses (52). On the seventh day the party stopped and refreshed themselves on a 'small grassy plain' (54). At this point, and in spite of his Tanban companions' exhaustion from carrying the load of the pack horse, Hodgkinson wanted to ascend the range beside the Bellinger by nightfall because 'the grass on the mountains was younger and sweeter than that in the valley' (54). Hodgkinson was writing as if it was he who was eating the grass.

It is on the subject of grass that *agencement* extends to include more than Hodgkinson, his guides, and his horses. What is not stated in his text is how the grass came to be where it was and as luxuriant as it was. While the extent and nature of Aboriginal fire-management prior to colonisation is a much-debated subject, it is widely accepted that prior to colonisation, Aboriginal peoples practiced intensive land management, primarily with fire, and in many places, this resulted in pasture that was attractive to colonists. The body of oral histories has been buttressed by assessments of historical sources and through archaeological methods (Gammage; Fletcher et al.). So, it is important to understand how Hodgkinson's preoccupation with grass affected his expedition because it speaks to the agency of Aboriginal people and how, as in other places, the colonial project exploited thousands of years of traditional land management. Hodgkinson does not make this

connection in the text. He does refer to Aboriginal people burning reeds in order to hunt swamp hens, but on other aspects of landscape management through burning, he is silent. He speculates that the fertility of the river valleys in the region is in part due to sediment from the 'frequent bush fires' (21) in the mountains but does not connect the fires with deliberate land management. Aboriginal informants on the Mid North Coast have described how the 'old people' used to burn the spurs and ridgelines.¹ This would explain Hodgkinson's ease of movement along ridgelines and frequent stops on ridgelines to rest or camp. Indeed, he states that it was only along the crests of ridges that they were able to 'ride for two or three hundred yards without dismounting' (50). Further, Hodgkinson describes movement on spurs 'without difficulty' suggesting that these were free of brush (51). Indeed, even at a point where the party had some difficulty traversing a spur, this was due to the spur being comprised of 'pointed hummocks' which again suggests grass (52). Another indication that Hodgkinson relied on Aboriginal people burning the land comes from his account of arrival at the Bellinger River, where the party found a deserted Aboriginal camp on a grassy riverbank. This is curious in that on the other side of the river was 'dense cedar brush' (52). He does not question why the vegetation should be so markedly different on directly opposite sides of the river. The more parsimonious explanation is that people were using fire to create a patchwork of vegetation in different successional stages (Bliege Bird *et al.*). He describes the Bellinger Valley as a patchwork of 'brush, cedar plains, and [grassy] forest flats' with the cedar plains having broad bladed grass 'as high as a man's middle' (53). What Hodgkinson describes is a mosaic landscape, which is very strong evidence for intensive management on the part of the Aboriginal people.

To return to Latour's 'made to do', the notion of Hodgkinson as a rational agent of the Enlightenment, as master of his expedition, becomes increasingly untenable. Since the publication in the late 1960s of Rhys Jones's seminal article, 'Fire-Stick Farming', much

¹ Author's unpublished data from interviews with Gumbaynggirr people.

attention has been given to the ways in which Aboriginal people used and use fire to manage plants and animals (Jones; Neale). What is referred to as *cultural burning* creates patch mosaic landscapes that are resource-rich due to their composition and successional stages. This has entirely demolished colonial conceptions of Aboriginal people as aimless nomads and instead framed traditional Aboriginal land management as organized, deliberate and productive.

One major element of burning is to create grasslands that attract kangaroos. However, kangaroos also require forest or brush in which to shelter during the day, so burning is not traditionally broad in scale but rather undertaken in patch mosaic fashion to create heterogeneous landscapes that are attractive to kangaroos (Bliege Bird et al. 4; Coddington et al.). But the mosaics are not an incidental effect of small scale burning, rather they are a result of targeted burning that has the effect of moving the kangaroos, or whatever prey animals are being attracted, across the landscape. This is why cultural burning has been referred to as ‘fire-stick farming’. From this perspective, Aboriginal people of the Mid North Coast, through their burning practices, effectively but incidentally, moved Hodgkinson and his party across the landscape like kangaroos. Proximally, he was already moved across the landscape by his guides who sought out ‘the best crossing places for [his] horses over the creeks’ (41). And he was moved to go there by cedar trees that grew in abundance at great heights, without lateral branches below 90 feet. These merged with a colonial, capitalist economy and a demand in Sydney for cedar that drew Hodgkinson northwards. But he was also ultimately moved by anonymous Aboriginal people whose burning practices created grasslands that profoundly affected his choices through his being made-to-feel by his horses. The grasslands created by Aboriginal people determined the terrain over which the party would move, at which places they would stop and rest, and where and when they could set camp for the night. Agency here is distributed far more widely than Hodgkinson would have had us believe and more than he could imagine.

At this point, having distributed agency quite broadly across the landscape that Hodgkinson explored, it is worth narrowing the focus once again and reconsidering the horses. These animals, while agents in the passive sense, also played an active role in the

expedition despite having many of their choices made for them. Two questions arise: first, what we can know of their subjective experiences, and second, how their subjectivities intersect with other agencies in terms of agencement. In terms of their experiences, hardship is an obvious motif. Struggling up steep mountains, stumbling on uneven ground, falling into rivers, stepping on sharp rocks, and suffering the pain of stinging nettles must have profoundly impacted the horses' experiences. These hardships in turn would be mediated by sensory experiences. Horses have highly developed senses of smell and hearing, which would impact on their experience of unfamiliar terrain. So, we need to recognize that these experiences would have affected their relationships with Hodgkinson, Miles and the Aboriginal guides. Most important in this is that, according to Hodgkinson, the horses cooperated. Lynda Birke and Jo Hockenhull have demonstrated that horses cooperate more willingly with familiar rather than unfamiliar humans (89, 95), in which case we need to account for degrees of trust. While we can never know how horses evaluate relationships with particular persons, and certainly this is made harder in an historical account from the horses' master, we can at least allow that horses did evaluate their relationships. Horses differentiate between individual humans and respond differently based on the ways that they are treated by those individuals (Proops and McComb). There is some level of evaluation occurring.

Hodgkinson placed his horses in a position in which they were required to trust him, and their familiarity with Hodgkinson was a crucial part of maintaining that trust. He also ensured that at the end of each day's toil there was grass for them, in which case the horses' trust was rewarded. It reads as a sort of incentive structure in which the horses would be more likely to cooperate because, first, they were familiar with Hodgkinson and he had demonstrated goodwill, and second, that their cooperation was rewarded at the end of each day with 'luxuriant' grass, and at the end of the trial with a 'good feed of maize' (60). Cooperation is a decision every time, whether coerced with the stick or rewarded with the carrot, or both, and we should understand that this in turn impacted on Hodgkinson and his decisions during the expedition, particularly with regard to where to stop, but also with

regard to the return journey and the second expedition. Rendering the horses silent in this regard is not academic rigor but rather a political act that is bereft of imagination. It is a denial that there are ways to imagine the subjectivities of horses without wild speculation. It falls upon scholars of history to recognize the subjectivities of animals, even where they are silenced in the original accounts, and to pull together the threads that constitute their stories.

Finally, it is worthwhile to briefly explore the question of power and how it is distributed among ‘multitudinous entities’ that give rise to it within these assemblages (Latour 24). Within the concept of ‘made to do’, agency and power are not synonymous. Hodgkinson’s horses might make him feel a certain way and profoundly affect his decisions – which proved to be ultimately irrational. However, Hodgkinson had the last word and only he or Miles could put the saddles and packs on their backs. I suggest that here it is productive to think in terms of power, like rationality, as being proximal and ultimate, moving and being moved. Proximally, Hodgkinson directed the expedition while being moved by his horses. Ultimately, he was moved by cedar trees scattered in the forests and the cedar plains of the Bellinger Valley. Here, ultimate power lies in global flows of money and goods, which compelled cedar sawyers in their incursions into Aboriginal lands, and government employees – such as Hodgkinson – who surveyed the lands that were subsequently stolen. While one could argue that cedar trees exerted agency in compelling this northward invasion, the fact that they were rapidly felled and entire forests depleted cuts down any argument that they were empowered. This, however, leads to a question posed by an anonymous reviewer of this article: does power trump agency? Latour would suggest that we dispense with the concept of power relations and replace it with good or bad attachments. A saddled horse might disagree. I argue that power is always a response to agency. The stirrups, reins, hobbles, bits, and stables that I mentioned above are all artefacts of power designed as a response to the agency of horses and their potential to run away, or amuck. Wherever power is exerted over others, there lies agency, and the more extreme the exertion of power the greater the potential agency. Nevertheless, the horses’

amenability to Hodgkinson, their willingness to allow him on their backs and to follow his choices, is not indicative of a lack of agency. Rather it suggests that the intentions of Hodgkinson and the horses aligned to a certain degree. In that case, agency and power are not in contraposition to each other but constitute something like a *moiré*, or patterns that are overlain and which sometimes come into alignment and other times contrast with each other.

Conclusion

We can never know how horses evaluate relationships with humans or how they evaluated Hodgkinson. There is a body of ethological research that suggests horses do not apply herd rules in their relationships with humans, suggesting that the nature of horse/human relationships is unique to the two species. However, this inaccessibility need not preclude analyses of horse-human relations in terms of agency and affect. The horse-and-rider relationship is remarkable, not just in terms of its novelty within the animal kingdom, but also in terms of the way it affects its relata; how horse and rider can achieve a sense of shared embodiment and shared identity. Understanding this relationship lends a greater degree of clarity in terms of understanding Hodgkinson's decision to bring horses on his first expedition. However, this is but a first step in distributing agency far beyond Hodgkinson. In this, multiple actors become salient. There are Aboriginal people managing landscapes with fire and resisting colonisation; kangaroos compelling Aboriginal people to burn; grass attracting kangaroos and Hodgkinson himself. There are Aboriginal guides moving Hodgkinson across the landscape; cedar trees attracting sawyers; cedar sawyers invading the forests and killing Aboriginal people; snakes, ticks, and leeches making foot-travel uncomfortable; nettle trees imposing shared experiences of pain. While this web becomes increasingly complex, there is a framework that lends it a considerable degree of clarity: that of proximity of power and how this is separate from agency. In this we can see beyond where actors affect other agents proximally, and examine the ultimate mechanisms of power that influence and are influenced by these agents.

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