Interaction Between Rider, Horse and Equestrian Trainer – a challenging puzzle

Mari Zetterqvist Blokhuis
Interaction Between Rider, Horse and Equestrian Trainer
– A Challenging Puzzle

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Abstract
This thesis examines the complex and challenging relationships between rider, horse and equestrian trainer in the context of teaching horse riding. By the end of last century, people began to question the prevailing view that animals are inferior to humans, and thus a re-examination of existing relationships between humans and animals has been sought. An immediate outcome of this critical undertaking has been the raising of ethical questions regarding the involvement of animals in sports. As part of this, the discipline of sports dressage has been subject to heavy criticism. Today, within both contemporary theoretical discourses and equestrian practices, greater focus is placed on the horse’s own subjectivity, along with its own field of experiences and its own perspective. Due to this, it is possible to index how it is that: traditional equestrian cultures are today in transition.

At least in Europe, the development of teaching in riding has its roots in traditional military discourse, which assumed the horse to be an instrument rather than a sensitive, feeling animal, and therefore considered the horse to be under the command of the rider. In contradistinction to this view, this thesis begins by assuming that horse riding relies on embodied and “tacit” knowledge, which is achieved through practical experience, and is personal as well as context dependent. Since this kind of knowledge is (in most cases) difficult to completely express in words, it is also difficult to convey. “Equestrian feel” is a part of tacit knowledge and is considered as the most rewarding aspect of equestrian communication. However, teaching in riding has so far focused on riding technique rather than feel. Although horse riding has been taught for hundreds of years, knowledge about the learning situation during riding lessons, as well as about the practical knowledge that skilled trainers and riding teachers use, is sorely lacking.

The main aim of this thesis is to describe and analyse the interactions between rider, horse and trainer. What strategies and methods do equestrian trainers use to support the riders’ understanding of, and performance with, their horses? What role is the horse assigned in this form of interaction? This thesis also explores whether there are any visible national or cultural differences related to the practice of rider-horse training. Furthermore, the study as a whole seeks to develop theories of practical knowledge in the practice of teaching riding.

The thesis operates at the intersection between practical knowledge and human-animal/equine studies. My personal experiences both as a rider and a trainer have played an essential role in my capacity as a researcher throughout the study. In order to explore the relationships between rider, horse and trainer, an Aristotelian approach to knowledge has been adopted. Thus the concepts of *episteme* (theoretical knowledge), *techne* (technical knowing or art) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) have been used. These basic categories have, during the course of writing the four articles comprising this thesis, been supplemented by the work of John Dewey, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Bengt Molander, and Donald Schön. The thesis is based on empirical material collected through observations and in-depth interviews.
with Polish and Swedish riders and trainers. An ethnographic approach serves as the basis for the study’s field work.

The results show that riders have difficulties in describing the role of their horse in interspecies communication. This may reflect a tension between the way riders have historically perceived the role of the horse in equestrian sport as predominantly a tool or instrument, on the one hand, and contemporary attitudes that consider animals as having their own mind and consciousness, on the other. Thus, techne can be seen as the kind of knowledge typifying the longstanding military viewpoint while phronesis might be regarded as the kind of embodied practical knowledge that the rider uses to listen to and try to understand the horse, as suggested for instance in posthumanism and cognitive ethology. Therefore, when the rider works towards a special goal, this is related to techne, while phronesis involves both practical reasoning and moral consideration of what is wise to do in a particular situation, according to which the good action is itself the goal. This could be for instance the rider’s understanding of the relation with each individual horse.

Trainers use their own practical and embodied knowledge to help riders to build a reciprocal communication with their horses, and they try to adapt to each individual rider and situation. Trainers make explicit the “tacit” knowledge of how to understand the relation with the horse by, for example, using metaphors. However, the role of the horse in rider-horse communication has not received much attention during training sessions, showing that the recognition of the horse as a sentient and thinking individual seems not to be built into existing equestrian teaching practices.

Trainers in this study seemed to be adept at dealing with on-the-spot problems during training sessions, using their kinaesthetic empathy. They thus demonstrated phronesis. However, trainers had difficulties to explain why they acted as they did, and thus did not manage to make this “tacit” knowledge explicit to their riders. Results did not reveal any national difference among sport dressage riders, and this points to the strength and coherence of the international horse cultures and traditions of equestrian sport.

In conclusion, there is a need for new teaching strategies in horse riding. More emphasis ought to be placed on equestrian feel and on how riders experience their own as well as their horses’ bodies and minds. As an active part in the communicative process, the horse’s role needs further appreciation within existing teaching programmes. A trainer should be better at recognising the subjects of both rider and horse, and thereby support each individual rider-horse combination’s active process in creating something together (“becoming with”). Moreover, equestrian trainers need to improve their skills to make explicit to the rider what they see and why they choose to give certain instructions, thus contributing to the further development of a rider’s phronesis.

Equestrian cultures are in transition and the traditional systems of training and teaching rider-horse combinations have been challenged. Yet the power of military norms in contemporary practice persists. The use of horses for sport raises ethical
questions, and it might be time for sport riders to seriously re-examine and re-evaluate their own relation with their horses with respect to how this affects the horse as a conscious and sensitive animal. It is the hope that in some way this thesis contributes to improved teaching strategies and methods and thus to promote better welfare for both horse and rider.

**Keywords:** Equestrian sport, equestrian cultures, practical knowledge, interspecies relationships, ethics, equestrian teaching, equestrian feel, tacit knowledge, phronesis.
Foreword

On the cover of my thesis, the interaction between rider, horse and equestrian trainer is illustrated as a puzzle. This is how I see these relations, as a puzzle with many different pieces where there is often a piece lying in the wrong place, and the puzzle will probably never be finished. The interaction is complex and includes embodied and non-verbal communication between two different species, rider and horse, and a third party, the equestrian trainer, serving as a mediator between the two. All three actors having different personalities, moods, physical and mental skills, levels of education and motivations.

However, the puzzle also symbolises my time as a doctoral student during which I combined my role as a researcher with my experience from equestrian practices. In this combined role, I tried to handle (and often struggled with) my own experiences, my empirical material, and various theories derived from philosophy, practical knowledge, human-animal studies, riding theory, and pedagogics and didactics. At the same time I tried to produce a coherent thesis. Which was not always easy.

Many people and horses have contributed to this thesis. First of all, thanks to Ulla Ekström von Essen, Jonna Bornemark and Petra Andersson for taking the initiative to apply for funding to make the project Horse Cultures in Transition come true. It is one of the largest projects ever to receive funding for studying the relation between human and horse within the humanistic and human-animal fields. Thanks for the trust that I would be able to carry out the work as a doctoral student. Special thanks to Ulla and Petra for joining me and help out with the filming (and driving!) in Poland. And to Petra for all hard work that resulted in our common chapter in the anthology produced within our project.

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Bernt, your deep knowledge, experience and relaxed attitude made you serve as a rock for me to lean on when my self-confidence failed. No question was too small, too big, or too stupid, and you are like an encyclopaedia, knowing all different philosophical theories and their connections by head.

Thanks also to Charlotte Lundgren from Linköping University with whom I had a research project before starting as a doctoral student, for being co-author of my
second article. You provided me with many valuable ideas and helped me to see certain things more clearly.

Special thanks to the participating trainers and riders from Sweden and Poland for letting me video record your training sessions and for sharing your experiences with me. And thus helping to unfold the practical knowledge used when riders are communicating with their horse and how trainers teach this complicated and interspecies communication to the riders. You were all very engaged and willing to share your experiences and reflections within this both complex and challenging topic. Without your participation, this thesis would not have been realised.

My colleagues at the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge at Södertörn University, thanks for relentlessly reading my draft articles and providing me with inspiring feedback, valuable advice and challenging ideas during the seminars when I presented my articles. You certainly put a lot of effort in my texts even if most of you are not familiar with horse riding. I also loved the nice atmosphere at Primus to which many contributed: besides Ulla and Jonna, whom I have already mentioned, Stina Bäckström, Carl Cederberg, Martin Gunnarsson, John Haglund, Krystof Kasprazak, Jonna Lappalainen, Ursula Naeve-Bucher, Adrian Ratkic, Eva Schwarz, Patrick Seniuk, Mani Shutzberg, Fredrik Svenaeus, Lotta Tillberg, Anna Wennergren, and Maria Wolrath Söderberg. A special thanks to my room mates Anna-Mia Bergkvist and Maria Pröckl for helping me to survive the challenging and advanced courses for doctoral students in Critical and Cultural Theory, and for endless support and some good laughs. Thanks also to Ewa Rogström for excellent support with administration and practical planning for the dissertation.

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Thanks also to members of Nätverket för humanistisk och samhällsvetenskaplig hästforskning. This network initiated the conference Equine Cultures in Transition organized in Stockholm in 2016 together with our research project, and was followed up by a conference in Leeds in 2018. Thanks to all participants for a creative atmosphere and many interesting presentations and discussions on these conferences.

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When I had difficulties to bridge the gap between theory and practice, I was lucky to have many horsey friends that helped me to deal with the contrasts between action and reflection and to sort out my thoughts when moving in and out of my
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Special thanks to my horse Darwin for playing an active role in my research. He is a sensitive and attentive horse that always does his best independent of if we work together on the riding arena or hack out in the wood. I had many horses throughout the years, but none has so clearly expressed his point of view. It could of course be that I have learned to be more attentive to what he communicates through the work on this thesis. Anyway, the relation between him and me is an important part of this thesis. I also believe that my drive has always been to contribute to make humans and horses enjoy their relation and to make life better for both.

Finally, I want to thank my family. Harry, my husband and love of my life, with whom I had many and long-lasting discussions trying to sort out my thoughts. Thanks for your endless support. With your optimism, and your attitude that no problem is too big or impossible to solve, you are my largest source of inspiration. Moreover, I want to thank my mother, that has always supported me whatever I wanted to do in life, but who tragically moved into dementia during the time of my study. She would have been very proud of me. Thanks also to my daughters Monica and Tina for enduring with all my (sometimes crazy) ideas, and for being such strong and independent young women.

When starting as a doctoral student in Södertörn in September 2014, I thought, as always, “how difficult can it be”? I must admit that it has been quite challenging. Unfortunately, as a person used to practical work, I never managed to get used to attending the two hour humanistic seminars without any break. I still feel as a “reflective practitioner” as emphasised by Schön (1983). However, here I am today. I see this thesis as the “crown” on my long journey among horses and riders. I realise that I did this unusual journey in my own very unique and personal way, and I must say that it has not always been easy. I hope that this thesis will inspire riders, trainers and riding teachers in the future, and that it will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between rider, horse and trainer, and thus help to improve teaching strategies and methods. Horse riding and equestrian sport is fantastic, but I believe that it should be built on mutual understanding between rider and horse, and it should thus be a nice experience for both parties involved.

I finish off with a quote from the Brazilian top equestrian trainer Nelson Pessoa: Why do it simply when you can do it difficult?

Skokloster, March 2019
Mari Zetterqvist Blokhuis
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List of papers

This thesis contains four articles in total that are referred to by the number they are given below:


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**Personal contribution**

In the co-written publications 2 and 3, my personal contribution has been the main responsibility for planning the studies, for data collection and analysis of data together with the writing of the main content of the articles. In addition to contributing to the writing of the articles, Charlotte Lundgren and Petra Andersson have supported the process by supervision.
Introduction

Anna and her horse Spirit walk on a large circle in the riding hall and I stand in the middle of the circle facing them. Both rider and horse look tense. Spirit takes short, hesitant steps and keeps his head in a high position. His ears move back and forth as if wondering what will happen. Or maybe he is waiting for Anna’s sign. Anna sits stiff with her shoulders forward: the contact she makes with Spirit’s mouth seems hard and tense. She pushes Spirit with her legs but he goes no faster. My own body feels tense as it senses the tension from rider and horse; my breath becomes short and intense and my mouth feels dry. Suddenly Spirit throws his head up and jumps to the side. He neighs loudly. I become even more tense and wonder what to do next. How should I act? Where do I start?

Several questions immediately arise from this example of a riding lesson with Anna and Spirit: How does Anna experience the communication with her horse? And how does Spirit experience his communication with Anna? Relatedly, in what way does Spirit contribute to building a relationship with Anna? What is the role of Anna and of Spirit respectively in their communication with each other? Moreover, how should I act as a trainer so as to facilitate a fruitful communication between Anna and Spirit? What strategies and methods should I use? And where ought I to start?

The relationship between rider, horse and riding teacher or equestrian trainer¹ in the teaching of horse riding is both complex and challenging. Teaching riding in-

¹ During the military era, people teaching riding were traditionally called Riding Instructor. This was the case in many European countries, for instance in England and Sweden (Maw, 2012; Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015). In Sweden in the early twentieth century, the title was changed to riding teacher. After completing an exam for professionals, there are three different levels (Level 1 to 3) that can be achieved. This level system is based on an international system developed by the International Group for Equestrian Qualification (IGEQ), an organisation that aims to define an international standard for the educational levels within equestrian sport (IGEQ, 2019). In 1991, an education for equestrian trainers was established in Sweden, in order to educate those training sport riders. Thus there are two forms of education available: on the one hand, an educational program for equestrian trainers to train sport riders with their own private horses and, on the other hand, an education for riding teachers who predominately prepare students for work at a riding school. In this thesis, I focus on persons in the first category and therefore use the title “equestrian trainer”.

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volves many different aspects, these include: the personality and physical ability of the rider; the personality and mood of the horse, as well as the personality and skills of the trainer. While riding has been taught for hundreds of years, there remains a lack of knowledge about the learning situation of a riding lesson and about the practical knowledge that skilled practitioners (trainers and riding teachers) use. This is not the case in other related fields. For example, in music- and dance educations, alongside other areas of sports and physical education, notable studies have been undertaken (see for instance Akinleye, 2016, 2018; Åberg, 2008; Bäckström 2014).

In this thesis, my main aim is to describe and analyse the interaction and practical knowledge between rider, horse and trainer with special emphasis on embodied and implicit knowledge. The principal focus will be on the role the horse is awarded in this interaction. Moreover, I aim to develop theories of practical knowledge in the practice of teaching riding, and thus contribute to a theorisation of the relation between rider, horse and trainer. Unfolding the practical knowledge used by professional trainers in equestrian sport will contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between rider, horse and trainer, and thus will hopefully result in the development of improved teaching strategies and methods.

Horses and horse riding have been a lifelong passion of mine, and I will explore the practices of horse riding and teaching how to ride from, so to speak, the “inside”, by drawing on my own experiences from many years of both riding and teaching riders. This study is based on a combination of ethnographic data and interviews in order to investigate how riders express themselves about the communication with their horse during riding, and how equestrian trainers can contribute to a fruitful communication between rider and horse. This thesis is situated in the interdisciplinary field of human – animal research, examining the complex relationships between humans and non-human animals.

Humans have been fascinated by horses throughout history, with the latter symbolising, *inter alia*, power, strength and freedom. Horse riding (or equestrianism) remains popular worldwide, and many different reasons account for its popularity. How humans’ experience horse riding and their particular interaction with horses during a ride varies from show jumping riders talking about their thrilling experience of flying over big fences to groups of children enjoying a slow trek through the woods on Shetland ponies. In many parts of the world, the horse remains vital for agriculture and for the purposes of transportation. Irrespective of the horse’s function and its location in the world, the specific communicative relation between each human and horse is unique.

The skill of how to ride a horse is built on practical knowledge; the rider’s knowing is personal and is situated in the body, mainly learned by and through practical experience. We learn by engaging with horses and other horse people, and by taking part in “communities of practice” in which knowledge and learning are produced through interactions with others (Birke and Thompson, 2018, p. 132). The relation between human and horse is an essential part of riding, and horse riding involves
interspecies communication and body-to-body contact between rider and horse, thereby entailing a form of dialogue transmitted bodily (Dashper, 2017a). In riding, the two parts are constantly interacting with each other, whether intended or not. Learning how to ride thus contains bodily and sensory aspects of knowing, and emotions and feelings here play an important role. Equestrian feel (or equestrian tact) is described as the complicated skill of how a rider should combine or “time” her or his signs in accordance to the feedback that s/he receives from the horse. This has been compared to the hearing of musicians (Podhajsky, 1965). Much of the knowing in riding is “tacit”, meaning that it is embodied and implicit, and in most cases cannot be completely verbally expressed (Polanyi, 1966; West, 2012). Instead, it is transferred mainly through models (from master to apprentice), practice and personal experience (Molander, 2015). Moreover, the embodied knowledge of how to ride is itself embedded in cultural and historical contexts (Birke and Thompson, 2018). Thus, those methods about how to ride and train horses have developed and changed throughout the years, varying between different equestrian cultures.

Horse riding is at one and the same time defined as a sport and an “equestrian art”. In this thesis, the focus is on the practice of sports dressage, an Olympic discipline with a long history that dates back to the first horsemanship manual written by Xenophon (b. 430 B.C.). When competing, horse and rider perform certain sets of movements in specific gaits and tempos that are then evaluated by appointed referees. The modern style of horseback riding has, at least in Europe, its roots in military tradition. The education of riders, riding teachers and equestrian trainers is strongly based on military manuals, with the German handbook being the most well-known (Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015; Dashper, 2014). However, these manuals often focus on technical descriptions of how the rider should sit on the horse, how to use the seat, and how to use signals (aids). They are mainly premised on the idea that the horse is an instrument or tool that is expected to obey the rider. Riding is thus interpreted as the transmission of orders from rider to horse.

The interaction between humans and animals has been studied within the natural sciences as well as within the field of human-animal studies (HAS), a field more readily associated with the humanistic and social science and social sciences. While rider and horse interaction has been studied mainly by objective measures (e.g. the use of a rein tension meter in order to register the contact between a rider’s hand and the horse’s mouth), within the interdisciplinary field of horse-human studies, the focus tends to be more on the emotional aspects of the rider–horse relation, where mostly qualitative methods are used (see for instance Brandt, 2004; Birke, 2007, 2008, 2009; Maurstad et al., 2013; Birke and Hockenhull, 2015). A central aspect in this thesis is that emotions and feelings play an important role in riding. Interaction between rider and horse involves interspecies communication, with each needing to find a way to move and interact together. The horse interacts with the rider by using his or her highly sensitive body to read the rider’s body language (Despret, 2004).
In this thesis, I will suppose that horses are not only individuals with minds of their own; horses are also thinking and feeling animals with likes and dislikes. Even if unable to speak with words, horses use their body gestures and body language (for instance movements of mouth, ears, tail, and sounds) to react and to communicate their desires to the human. Thus, rider and horse are both embodied subjects taking part in an active process of “becoming with”, as suggested by Despret (2004) and Hagström (2016).

During the last decades, the horse industry – e.g. horse management and equestrian sport – has, at least in the West, undergone some fundamental changes. With changes in society, the horse’s role has substantially altered. Therefore, rather than being at the forefront of the transport system, the cavalry and agricultural practice, today’s horses are mainly used for leisure, equestrian sport, and as companions in human therapy. Horse management has also changed gender code; from being male gender coded, horses and equestrian sports are now coded as female, attracting girls, teenagers and women (Hedenborg, 2009; Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015; Birke, 2007). Moreover, traditions and long-established knowledge about horses have in recent years been questioned and challenged, within both equestrian sport organisations as well as in animal rights movements (Thorell, 2016; Daspher, 2017a). Indeed, new theoretical fields (e.g. posthumanism and cognitive ethology) have emerged, introducing views on animals that differ markedly from traditional ways of perceiving animals as inferior to humans (Braidotti, 2013; Harraway, 2008; Birke, 2009). These new fields have inspired horse researchers. During the last fifteen years, the availability of new theoretical discourses has contributed to the emergence of a significant number of studies broaching the relation between humans and horses.

Today, several indications exist that point to a growing interest in the subjectivity of the horse, both in theory and in equestrian practice. It is because of these emergent tendencies that we can speak of equestrian cultures being in transition. Owing to this transitional phase, however, we should not expect these changing theories and practices to necessarily converge. There is a mixture of new and old practices present today; with respect to the education of riders, for example, military manuals are still in use. One may well ask where sport riders position themselves in the sometimes conflicting ways in which horses are presently viewed.

I will start by expounding my own point of departure, explaining how my long journey as a participant in equestrian practices has given rise to the research questions to be explored in my thesis.

My point of departure

Since my personal experience is a starting point and an essential part of this thesis, I will start by describing my own personal journey in the equestrian world. My reflections on this journey will also be included, and I will lay out how my experiences led to the theme of this thesis and the research questions posed.
I started to ride when I was nine years old in Valla Park in Linköping. After we had groomed the ponies we were instructed by the male military teacher to line up outside the stall of our pony and say: “Horse Peggy examined, no damages”. I was fascinated by these beautiful ponies and wanted to spend more time in the stable. There were many other animals in Valla Park, and after a while I was allowed to take care of a guinea pig. Later I was responsible for an ugly, bad smelling goat called Greta. Finally, at about the age of eleven I was given the opportunity to take care of a Shetland foal. This was part of the tough journey of life at that time: first I needed to demonstrate I was a responsible and trustworthy person before receiving something in return. I spent all my spare time in Valla Park. My mother packed me a lunch and off I went on my bike. We cleaned stables, groomed and trained the ponies. Since I was riding almost every day, I became more and more skilled, and it did not take long until I started taking part in jumping competitions. I felt so much more alive and at home in the stable environment compared to spending time with my class mates at school. I became increasingly immersed in the cultural practices of horse riding and horsemanship, and already at around 15 years old I began to teach groups of riders.

By seventeen, I was riding in the riding school in Linköping (Änestad stable) where they had Warmblood horses. Three military riding teachers worked there; it was a harsh environment built on military norms and traditions. There was always a long whip standing in the corner of the riding hall; if your horse did not move fast enough forward then, without warning, the military riding teacher would sometimes give your horse a lash of the whip, thereby resulting in the horse running at full speed through the riding hall, and thus indicating the fact that the whip is but a mechanical way of communicating between rider and horse. At this time, only one view of the horse prevailed in the practice of riding, that of the horse as a tool rather than a sentient being. The activity of riding was predominately human-centred, while a behaviourist view of the horse dominated.

Soon I was doing voluntary work in the stables during weekends. I was highly motivated to become a skilled rider, taking part in competitions in show jumping and dressage as much as was allowed on the riding school horses. The manager of the riding school, a mild-mannered man and an amazingly good rider, was my role model. When I finished college, I started to study pedagogy at Linköping University. During this time I spent even more time in the stables, where I would teach riding on Sundays. My riding master offered me to buy his private horse, “Gavott”, a very sensitive horse. Since I lacked savings, the gentleman suggest I buy this horse and pay off the debt when on receiving my study loan. Gavott was a well-educated horse, and with almost immediate effect I could start participating in dressage competitions at intermediate level. My main focus was to successfully train and compete, and thus I was much focused on achieving good results in any competition in which I participated. Even if I loved my horse, in retrospect I realise that I regarded him mainly as a tool for building up my own confidence and identity as a rider.
When I was 21 years old, I was accepted as a student on a two-month education for riding teachers at the Swedish National Equestrian Centre (SNEC) in Strömsholm. On my second morning, I awoke adamant that I would become a professional riding teacher. Up to that moment, I had always seen teaching in riding as simply a nice hobby. This marked a significant “turn” in my life. Before taking the course, I had the idea that a riding teacher was a profession exclusively for military men. However, while at Strömsholm, I met several youngsters, who did not conform to my stereotype, already working as riding teachers. My riding teacher in Linköping managed to arrange a job that was partly subsidised by the municipality; I had a wonderful time working as both a riding teacher and a recreation leader for the many children and teenagers who, just as I had done, spent their spare time at the riding school. After some time I bought a younger horse, and during the same period I took two further courses at Strömsholm, after which I was awarded the highest rank (level 3) for a Swedish Riding Teacher. Military norms and traditions, including strong hierarchies and language of command, pervaded the entire set-up at Strömsholm. The general philosophy seemed to be first to push down the students, only later, step by step, to rebuild their confidence. I believe that it is precisely this way of educating riding teachers that has contributed to the enduring influence of the military over the teaching in Swedish riding, as described by Thorell (2017).

By the 1980s, I was managing my own riding school in Katrineholm, doing so for five years. This period was both hard and unglamorous. It was a small school with only 15 horses. Yet I was very proud of my horses and looked upon them as my working partners. I was interested in teaching riders to successfully communicate with the horses, and my principal focus was on the performance of the rider-horse combinations. We arranged many competitions at the riding school and I personally took part in national competitions, at least as much as I had time for. Even though I loved the teaching part of my job, it was just too much work to bring in the hay, build fences and undertake all the stable work.

After some time doing other things, I was employed as a teacher at the centre in Strömsholm. When I first started, I was teaching in different subjects – e.g. riding, horse management, riding theory, pedagogy, didactics, how to teach children and riding school management. After one year, I was offered the possibility of attending a part time education to become a Folkhögskole teacher.² The education was two years. During this course, I gained a deeper understanding of pedagogy and what it means to teach, as well as the importance of taking into account the personality and learning style of each and every rider. But how could this be realised in the teaching of riding? This question guided my future work and encouraged me to seek deeper knowledge in this field.

In 1993, Equine Studies, a two-year university programme for riding teachers and stable managers organised by Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)

² i.e. a teacher for adults.
started, and I took part in the writing of the course plans. I personally taught pedagogy and didactics on the programme. After finishing my teacher education, I was offered the job as vice principal, and suddenly I was managing all the education at Strömsholm: the university education “Equine Studies”, Folk high school courses for riding teachers, as well as a programme for talented young riders between the ages of 16 and 19 years. During this time an EU supported programme, Programme Strömsholm, started and the area received almost 10 million Euros during a ten-year period. New stables, riding halls and outside riding arenas were rapidly built; it was a very inspiring and challenging environment in which to work. I had my own horse in a stable in Strömsholm and trained with the other teachers, but I lacked the motivation to compete. I gradually became more interested in the interaction between rider and horse, and also in different ways of teaching. One was the challenging question of how to teach equestrian feel – the emotional part of riding. I received funding from the SLU for a project called Didactics in Show jumping where I carried out interviews with world famous trainers about their teaching methods, focusing on what strategies they used to teach equestrian feel. The main knowledge gained was that trainers identified feel in different ways, and most were unable to articulate what methods they were using to teach this feel. Moreover, trainers considered ambition to be more important than feel (Zetterqvist, 2000). This interest in how to teach equestrian feel still remains, and, indeed, is one of the main questions explored in this thesis.

When starting my work at the centre in Strömsholm in 1993, my main goal was to try to improve both the pedagogy and didactics in the teaching of riding. Already in 1987, SNEC had become Hästsportens Folkhögskola (Further Education College for Horse Sport). It educated both riding teachers and grooms for their work both in stables and at riding schools. Subjects like pedagogy and developmental psychology were part of the education for riding teachers. In the beginning, pedagogy was not of especial importance. This soon changed. Owing to the riders’ rising demands for a more individualised training routine, more in line with the general developments of teaching methods in society as a whole, the subject gradually received a higher status among riding teacher students. It became obvious that teaching by way of a two-way dialogue was more successful than just barking commands and instructions. As a consequence, teaching methods slowly started to change. For my part, I experienced a tension between theoretical knowledge (e.g. theories of how humans learn) and practical skills (e.g. how to teach riding in practice). What kind of knowledge was most important in becoming a skilled riding teacher or equestrian trainer?

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3 Further education centres or folkhögskolor are free and voluntary institutions for adult education that are part of the general education provision in Sweden, and are subsidized by the Swedish state, the county councils and the municipalities. This means that most of the education is free. Such colleges are not connected to the university system.
When I started to work as a riding teacher in Linköping, I was usually teaching groups of 12–15 riders. The space was narrow and it was difficult for the riders to communicate and “listen” to their horses without running into each other. Today, I have a general impression that most riding schools work with smaller numbers of riders in each groups (except for riding schools situated in large cities), and this enhances the possibilities for a more fruitful interaction between rider and horse (and riding teacher). In my experience, each rider AND horse are individuals. Thus, teaching needs to be tailored to suit each equipage. The Swedish Equestrian Federation (SEF) have placed onus on the fact that horse riding should be made available for people in general, as a part of the “sport for all” initiative (Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015, p. 1). But this has meant a rise in class numbers for the sake of keeping the price of riding lessons down. Since there are groups of new riders, all of whom have different reasons for riding, there is, I believe, a need to further improve teaching strategies and methods that promote both better performance and improved welfare for both horses and riders. And furthermore there is a need to be more attentive to the unique relation of each individual rider-horse combination, a point that will be further explored in this thesis.

In 1999, I took the initiative to start the Equestrian Educational Network involving ten of the most prestigious European National Equestrian centres. The network still exists today. After five years of hard work, I decided to quit my job as a vice principal, though I would keep teaching part-time. The time gained meant that I could work with different projects. I wrote a book entitled Pedagogik för ridlärare (Pedagogy for riding teachers), which remains part of the syllabus for the education of riding teachers. I also finished my Bachelor’s degree in Social Science at the University of Linköping, while studying part time.

In 2005, I participated in a course given at the centre for the German Equestrian Federation in Warendorf by Eckart Meyners, a German sport physicist. This course marked another “turn” in my life; Meyners showed us how riders can use dismounted exercises as a complement to the established training that a rider does. I was surprised by how much I did not know about the use of one’s own body during riding. Together with two colleagues, I applied for funding from the Swedish-Norwegian Fund for Equine Research (Stiftelsen Hästforskning) and received a grant for a three year research project called “Develop methods to improve the seat of the rider through dismounted exercises.” Here, I investigated the effects of complementary dismounted exercises for riders. It was a part-time project that resulted in the article Assessing Riders’ Seat and Horse Behaviour: Difficulties and Perspectives (2008). This project was my first tentative steps towards becoming a researcher. After studying the rider’s seat, I wanted to take the next step and further explore the communication between rider and horse, and furthermore how to teach riders this skill. This thesis is the result of this investigation.

During an international conference in Vienna in 1997, I met my husband Harry. After being in a long-distance relationship for several years, we moved in together.
in Skokloster, northwest of Stockholm. I started my own business (*MZ Equitation*) giving clinics, courses and producing teaching material. During this time, I had the opportunity to meet and teach many different rider-horse combinations, both in Sweden and in some other countries. I no longer had a horse of my own. Instead, I rode other people’s horses a few times per week without taking part in any training sessions or competitions. I became more interested in the unique interaction between rider and horse, and started to question the way that horses are used by humans, and thus to question my own practice. In 2011, I struck a special bond with my own horse Darwin, and the interaction between him and I has played an essential role in the development of my thinking during the writing of this thesis.

For me, a real pleasure is gained simply by watching a skilled practitioner handle horses, both from hand and from horse back. They know how to move around horses, and seem to be able to create a deep relation with their equine friends. When for instance watching a rider-horse combination moving smoothly in “harmony” in a common rhythm; well, it is like watching a joyful dance! It seems like the rider just needs to think about a certain movement and the horse picks up the subtlest of signs. The horse moves in a graceful, expressive, but at the same time relaxed way, attentive to whatever the rider wants the horse to do. In these moments, riding is an aesthetically pleasant experience – it is an art. I think that that is the goal of all riders and one of the reasons why I and many others are fascinated by riding. However, I also see examples of rider-horse combinations that struggle and fight with each other; the interaction between the movements of the rider and the horse is nonexistent, with both showing signs of stress and unhappiness. Are horses used for sport and leisure still seen as instruments or tools that humans can use for their own disposal? Is there a tension between riding as an art and as a tool used for equestrian sport? Is it even possible to evaluate this interaction between rider and horse?

I went to my first conference organised by the International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) in 2007, and have presented my research at some of their annual conferences. In 2010, I was the chair of the organising committee for *ISES Sweden 2010*, the annual conference of the organisation taking place in Uppsala. The organisation’s main aim is to “objectively” measure the interaction between rider and horse, for instance by measuring the weight distribution of the rider using a pressure mat. The mission of the ISES is moreover to create meetings between researchers and equestrian practitioners by organising a “practical day” during each conference and thus contributing to build bridges between academic and equestrian practices. However, since the interaction is complex and includes learning and development for humans as well as horses, it is often difficult or even impossible to measure all aspects of the interaction with the use of quantitative measures. Hence, I believe that there is a need to further explore the interaction between rider and horse by using qualitative methods, which could help to reveal and improve the complex communication between two different species. These different ways of
approaching the study of rider-horse combinations use distinct ontologies. For example, in a qualitative approach, the very status of the horse differs from the perspective adopted by the natural sciences; in the case of the former, the starting point is that human and horse are able to create a way of co-existing, becoming something together that is altogether different from the human and the horse when perceived in isolation. In having written this thesis, it is within this field that I seek to make a contribution, if not with increased knowledge, then at the very least by contributing to the ongoing discussions.

In 2009, I was invited as a speaker at a symposium entitled Kentauren at Södertörn University. I wrote a chapter in an anthology based on the interventions made at the event. The year after, Ulla Ekström von Essen, Jonna Bornemark, Petra Andersson and I made a joint application for a horse research project. It took a few years, but in 2014, the project received funding by the Foundation for Baltic and Eastern-European Studies. In the meantime, a collaborative project with Charlotte Lundgren from Linköping University was accepted for funding for the period 2013–14, and this cooperation resulted in the second article included in this thesis. In September 2014, I finally started as a doctoral student at Södertörn, another important “turn” in my life.

These four and a half years spent as a doctoral student have given me unique possibilities to deeply explore the relation between rider, horse and trainer from a humanistic and multidisciplinary perspective. During this time, I had “one foot” at Södertörn University, among colleagues at the Centre of Studies in Practical Knowledge and doctoral students in Critical and Cultural Theory, and the other foot at the equestrian practice, riding my horse almost every day. To study equine cultures and equestrian practices is particularly interesting in times when the horse receives greater attention in contemporary society, and when the role of the horse is in transition. This study has forced me to question how I myself look at horses. How do I reflect on the interaction with my own horse? Does he understand what I want from him? And what does my horse try to communicate to me? I think that I have always been interested in my relation with my own horses, and I marvel at the amazing animals they are; if treated in a respectful way, a horse shows us so much trust and affection.

I am also very pleased that, in our project, we took an active part in the building of an international network of researchers from (mainly) humanities and social sciences working on horse-human relationships. The first conference, Equine Cultures in Transition, was organised in October 2016 in Stockholm by our project, while a second took place at Leeds University in UK in June 2018. Our project has also resulted in the anthology Equine Cultures in Transition: Ethical Questions

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4 Ontology is the philosophical study of being. It studies concepts that directly relate to being: in particular becoming, existence, and reality. Not only, though, an investigation into the basic categories of being, but their relation too.
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(2019), which has just been published by Routledge; one of the contributions in the volume was co-written by myself and Petra Andersson, and appears as the third article in this thesis. My large international network of horse researchers has contributed to my decision to write this thesis in English.

One of the driving forces for my doctoral studies is the fact that I experience riders and “horse people” to hold a variety of different opinions about what is the “right way” to train horses. Riding and training horses is built on practical experience rather than scientific knowledge, and I experience that there is a tendency among horse people (and people representing various equestrian cultures) to be categorical about what is the best way to keep, handle and train horses. Thus, there are many taken for granted assumptions deeply rooted in equestrian cultures built on habits of how to do things rather than being open to questions like: Why do we do it in this way? Even if people claim otherwise, there are many things we do not know for sure, like, for instance, how best to train horses, or how the horse experiences the rider. In a recent study, it was demonstrated that riders often over-estimate their knowledge, resulting in the misplaced belief that they think they know more than they actually do, a problem since it leads to issues concerning welfare and safety for both rider and horse. (Marlin et al., 2018).

The aim of this study has been to contribute to increased knowledge about the embodied and multispecies communication between rider and horse, and how to teach this complex skill. There are however limits to our knowledge and thus we need to be responsive to what is possible to know. I believe that, as a researcher, it is important to cast a critical light on the habits and established traditions in equestrian practices, and provide food for reflection and discussion. Moreover, I am grateful that I had the possibility to execute this study in times when equestrian cultures appear to be in transition, and where the role of the horse in society is once more increasing in visibility and undergoing transformations.

Practical knowledge – what is it?

What kind of knowledge is needed to become a skilled rider, or to become a successful riding teacher or equestrian trainer? And how does one attain the practical knowledge associated with skilled riders and trainers? This thesis is built on the assumption that for experienced riders, the interaction between rider and horse is based on practical knowledge. This, the rider acquires through practical experience, meaning that s/he learns how to ride by spending time in the saddle. Moreover, teaching in riding is also built on practical knowledge of how to teach different rider-horse combinations at different ages and on different levels. My thesis is situated in the research area of practical knowledge and human-animal/equine relationships, and I will below try to define a research field that has as its principal focus an understanding of how the relation between rider, horse and trainer is constituted in equestrian practices. The theories used in this study have been selected with one purpose in mind: to obtain a
better insight into how practical knowledge is used by skilled riders and equestrian trainers. In this chapter I will give a short overview of what I mean by practical knowledge, how it will be used in this thesis, and how the theories of practical knowledge have developed as a research area.

Practical knowledge is defined as knowledge based on practical activity, like, for instance, driving a car or playing tennis; it is knowledge demonstrated, we can say, in the “doing” (Hjertström Lappalainen, 2015). In practical knowledge, our knowing is in the action. It is situated mainly in the body and is learned by experience (Pröckl, 2016, p. 7). It is a kind of bodily knowledge that helps us to form our identity. Practical knowledge is something that only the person who has been practicing a specific activity is able to perform. Admittedly, on these definitions, it is a very wide concept, since it is used and defined in many different ways.

This thesis is built on the assumption that a skilled rider has acquired a practical knowledge that helps her or him to act intuitively, meaning that the rider does not need to think about what s/he is doing when communicating with the horse. When, for instance, my horse does something unexpected like run faster without me giving him this signal, I respond intuitively by asking him to slow down, using both body signals and voice. Since I am an experienced rider, this happens automatically, with barely a second thought. Thus, practical knowledge is personally acquired by an individual, and is performed in an intuitive way. Intuition is defined in different ways, and I will use it as described by the Swedish philosopher Hans Larsson (1892), and later republished by Josefsson (1997). Larsson emphasises that intuition is the highest order of knowledge, where feel and intellectuality are closely connected. This is in line with Nussbaum (1995), who denies any clear difference between a person’s cognitive abilities and emotions. In this thesis, I am interested in what role intuition is afforded by riders when interacting with their horses.

Practical knowledge is considered impossible to acquire by simply reading manuals or learning piecemeal. Such knowledge is also context dependent. This means that a person can be skilled in one area while being a beginner in another. Reflection is also an essential part of practical knowledge. An important point of departure is that practical knowledge includes not only the skill but also the ethical decision of how to act; it is always related to a particular activity. Apart from being able to master a specific skill, a person needs to be morally judicious with an ability to act wisely and responsibly in each specific situation (Svenaeus, 2009). For example, as a rider, I have a moral responsibility to treat my horse as well as possible and thus for his daily care; the ethical thus escorts me in all of my actions.

The opposition between theoretical and practical knowledge is often discussed and debated. The general societal presumption is that physical labour is of lower value compared to intellectual work. In the pragmatic school, of which John Dewey (1910, 1916) and Donald Schön (1983) are representatives, theory is about thinking on and considering different actions, while practice means being involved in an unfolding action. When a horse for instance gets scared by a plastic bag that sud-
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denly flies through the air, the rider needs to know how to handle this specific situation with this individual horse in the very flow of the ride. Certainly, it is advantageous if the rider knows theoretically that a horse is tuned to flee when something dangerous appears, and thus can be prepared for contingencies. Knowing and doing are impossible to distinguish, and thus theory and practice reveal themselves as intertwined (Schön, 1983, p. 165).

Who possesses practical knowledge, and how is it achieved? In contrast to theoretical knowledge, practitioners “learn by doing”, as suggested by Dewey (1916). And it is only by diving into the doing that one learns more about how to do things, and what one is doing. Allan Janik (1996) suggests that practical knowledge is based on examples of actions, and that a person learns new skills by repetitive actions until s/he has learned to perform a specific movement pattern. This is generally made by clear orders and instructions followed by feedback on the person’s performance. The actions need to be repeated until they are internalised in our bodies, and until we feel them as though they are “second nature”. During the time of learning a technique, we also internalise a judgement or practical wisdom meaning that we learn what is needed in each given situation (Janik, 1996). In riding, the rider learns how to communicate with the horse by repetition, and also gradually learns over time to judge how to act in different situations and with different horses.

Bengt Molander (2015) emphasises that practical knowledge is often considered a pure physical activity. But this risks oversimplification, since it also includes a great deal of thinking and mental processes. Learning practical skills is based on observation, training and experience, as well as demanding personal commitment and judgement (Molander, 2015). A rider learns how to ride by watching other riders, by handling horses in various practically oriented situations and, in most cases, by participating in training sessions offered by experienced equestrian trainers. Much happens in the environment surrounding the rider, horse and trainer, and for this reason it is easier to understand and learn a practice within its wider social context (Lave and Wenger, 2001). By spending time in a social environment, we slowly grow into the traditions and culture that orient a given practice. We learn for instance how to move when being around horses. This part of a rider’s learning is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

Theory of practical knowledge does not have a clear disciplinary belonging. It is instead multidisciplinary and emerges at the interface between philosophy, pedagogy, aesthetics, and history of ideas (Hjertström Lappalainen, 2015). It has grown out of the need to discuss interpersonal relations that are not easy to uncover, and is characterised as being relatively “open” to developing in different directions. It is however oriented towards the humanities. One relevant question is how to make practical knowledge visible. Is it possible to verbalise “tacit” knowledge? Can this kind of knowledge be explored by the use of the standard scientific theories? While theoretical knowledge is in most cases general, practical knowledge is situated and thus not possible to generalise. This results in a different way of writing and another
way of relating to the academic language. In this thesis, I have partly used the essay method, applied by the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge, as a tool to explore my own practical knowledge in riding and in the teaching of riding. The theories of Aristotle (1980) have been particularly useful as a point of departure for practical knowledge, in general, and also for this thesis, in particular. These will be presented below, in the chapter “Theoretical Perspectives”.

So, how did the theory of practical knowledge emerge as a research discipline? Practical (or professional) knowledge as a research area was first attended to in Sweden by the Swedish Centre for Working Life (Arbetslivscentrum), established in 1977, and later transformed into The Institute for Working Life (Arbetslivsinstitutet) in 1995. This institute carried out research within professional practices, but was closed down in 2007 by the government, claiming that this kind of research was better undertaken by universities. Parallel to this development, in 1987 the Royal Institute of Technology, the Swedish National Centre for Working Life and the Royal Dramatic Theatre started collaborative research in Stockholm in professional knowledge and technology. Led by Bo Göranzon, it provided an encounter between different perspectives of knowledge tackling subjects like skill, technology, culture and communication (Ennals, 2006, p.1). This research was initiated mainly because of the potential threat posed by society's increasing dependence on computers and how this would affect the practical tasks performed by humans. Thus, working closely with companies, a new foundation was developed based on practical philosophy, with dialogue as its core activity (Ennals, 2006, p.2).

In 2001, the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge was established at Södertörn University in Stockholm, providing a humanities based perspective on professional knowledge. Ingela Josefsson was its first director. The centre offers a part-time Master's programme in Practical Knowledge where the aim is to encourage professionals to formulate and explore their own professional knowledge, principally through writing scientific essays (Svenaeus, 2009, p. 9). Already in 1997, the Senter for praktisk kunskap was created at the Nord University in Bodø in Norway, functioning as a centre for education and research within practical knowledge. Today it holds both a master’s education and doctoral students in the subject (Senter for praktisk kunnskap, 2019).

Practical knowledge is an interdisciplinary research area that emerged from an interest in exploring the practical knowledge within interpersonal professions (e.g. healthcare, the teaching and caring professions, as well as policework and the arts in higher education) (Svenaeus, 2009). The aim is to explore, as well as to raise awareness of and develop practical knowledge with an emphasis on different forms of knowledge in working life. In this respect, practical knowledge is used to clarify and raise awareness of professionals’ own praxis through a combination of theory and practice (Hjertström Lappalainen, 2015). The courses organised by the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge are often based on the participants’ experiences and investigate these from a (mostly) humanistic theoretical perspective, and make
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possible encounters between different forms of knowledge: theory and practice, art and science. The method builds on the use of concrete narrative experiences written from a first-hand perspective, which are then tied to abstract reasoning and theories to make the experienced based knowledge of the professionals more visible (Alsterdal, 2016, p. 402–403). Thus a dialogue takes place between practice and scientific knowledge, so that “tacit” knowledge can find its voice, but also be critically assessed and further developed (Svenaeus, 2009). The Centre of Studies in Practical Knowledge has grown rapidly, and in 2014, the first doctoral students were appointed. Presently, ongoing research about practical or professional knowledge includes areas health care, pedagogy and learning, and artistic research. Moreover, there is also research connected to specific professions, for instance Work/Labour and Employment research in USA and England (Hjertström Lappalainen, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore, Hjertström and Lappalainen (2015) emphasise that practical knowledge is not just about the doing, it also includes a meta-reflection about different practices. An essential part of this is that professionals are encouraged to reflect on their experiences in order to improve their own praxis.

Aims and research questions

In this thesis, I aim to describe, interpret and analyse the interaction and practical knowledge between rider, horse and trainer with special emphasis on implicit knowledge. Moreover, I also aim to contribute to the development of theories surrounding practical knowledge in the practice of teaching about horse riding. In doing so, I will apply theories of practical knowledge to explore the praxis of horse riding from the “inside” – by using my own experience from many years of riding and teaching rider-horse combinations – as well as from the “outside” – by using empirical data to investigate how riders express themselves about the communication with their horse during a ride. In the last part, the manner in which equestrian trainers contribute to develop riders’ skill and equestrian feel will be explored through in-depth interviews with skilled, professional trainers. A special focus will be on how the horse contributes to the communication between rider and horse, and between trainer and rider.

Moreover, I also want to investigate if there are any visible national or cultural differences between Sweden and Poland related to the practice of rider-horse training in sports dressage. Being a Swede myself I wanted to broaden my view of equestrian practices, avoiding getting caught in a narrow perspective by turning to another European country. Sweden and Poland have both long traditions of breeding and using horses. At the same time they are two countries with notable historical and cultural differences. I was thus interested to make visible possible similarities and differences in equestrian practices and training of rider-horse combinations between these two countries.
Since my personal experience is an essential part of this thesis, the perspective used will contain a combination of “inside” and “outside” views on the interaction between rider, horse and trainer. In order to reveal the intrinsic knowledge of skilled practitioners, I will thus have a combined role of researcher and practitioner, as described for instance by Groth (2017, p. 76). My experiences as a practitioner will help to formulate and ask relevant research questions, while my role as a researcher will be to constantly explore and analyse the results by asking myself: What does this mean to me as a researcher? I will constantly alternate between these two mutually informing positions. However, when communicating and explicating my results, my role will be that of a researcher.

In order to fulfil the above aim, I have formulated a number of research questions, which I have tried to answer in the four articles included in this thesis.

A first constellation of questions concern the interaction between rider and horse:

How do I interact with the horse when riding?
What is the role of emotions and “equestrian feel” in my riding?
(These first two questions will be explored in article one).

How do sport dressage riders describe the communication with their horse?
How do riders describe and understand the role of their horse through interspecies communication between rider and horse in sports dressage?
Are there any visible national and/or cultural differences related to the practice of rider-horse training of sports dressage between Sweden and Poland?
(These questions will be discussed in article two and three).

Since my aim is also to reveal the relation between rider, horse and trainer, I direct my attention to the interaction between equestrian trainers and rider-horse combinations in the second part of my questions, which are as follows:

What strategies and methods do equestrian trainers use to develop riders’ communication with their horse and how do they support their performance?
How do trainers adapt their teaching to each rider-horse combination?
How do trainers see their contribution to the development of the riders’ equestrian feel?
Do trainers contribute in making visible the role of the horse to their riders?
Are there any visible national and/or cultural differences related to training of rider-horse combinations in sports dressage between Sweden and Poland?
(These questions will be address in article four).
Exploring the practical knowledge used by professional trainers in equestrian sport might contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between rider, horse, and trainer, and thus help to improve teaching strategies and methods. This thesis also aims to contribute to increased insight of the field of practical knowledge. Moreover, my hope is that this thesis will make an important contribution to the recently emerging field of research on human-horse relationships in both the humanities and social sciences.

Limitations of this study

In this thesis, my focus has been on the relation between rider, horse, and trainer in equestrian sport. More specifically the purpose is to reveal the practical knowledge of skilled amateur riders and equestrian trainers in Olympic sports dressage. This thesis is thus tailored towards adult riders riding warm blood horses. As a consequence, children and novices have not been included in the study. I have also chosen to study those riding their own private horses. Here, I am well aware that this study focuses on “luxury” riding lessons and therefore privileged situations for which many riders are immediately excluded on point of fact of the considerable costs involved in keeping a private horse. However, I believe that the knowledge gained in this study can make a valuable contribution to the teaching of group lessons at riding schools.

This study has not included riders from other equestrian practices, for instance Western riding, Islandic horse riding or Liberty dressage. This focus has strongly influenced the results and discussions of this thesis. Since interaction between rider and horse, as well as teaching in riding, is a research area that presently has not achieved much attention, I have chosen to focus on dressage. This is because dressage is a sport with clear international regulations and is thus built on strong traditions and culture (FEI, 2019). Dressage is also employed by many riders, even those who do not take part in competition. Moreover, the principles of dressage are used in the basic education of riders at riding schools in Sweden as well as in several other European countries. I assume that there would be more diverse views about the interaction between rider, horse, and trainer among riders’ practicing other disciplines that lack the same enduring history and established traditions as dressage has in Sweden. This would, however, have been an interesting issue to explore.

The training sessions recorded focused on riding practices and not on other aspects of interaction between human and horse, e.g. the handling of the horse from the ground or in the stable system. Any perspective of teaching that broaches “horsemanship” is thus missing and not generally discussed in this thesis.

Outline of the dissertation

In the first chapter presented above, I have introduced this thesis, laying out my point of departure and presenting the study’s research aims and questions. More-
over, I have introduced practical knowledge as a subject. In the next chapter, I will identify my research field, focussing on equestrian cultures and the relationships between rider and horse in equestrian sport. I will make a short overview summarising how horse riding has developed over time, and outline how horses are used today in equestrian sport and leisure. Some of the recent tensions in how we view and use horses in contemporary society will also be presented. Moreover, I will compare equestrian sport and the practice of horse riding as it is performed in both Sweden and Poland.

In chapter three, I present some of the recent theoretical perspectives on human-horse relationships, giving a brief background of how the relation between humans and horses as viewed by humans has developed in theoretical contexts over the years. I describe how issues pertaining to animal welfare has come to influence the general discussion in contemporary society, and attend to how the way we use and view animals has been transformed in recent years. Some previous studies focusing on rider-horse interaction and communication will be addressed. Moreover, I also point to some contemporary tensions in the field of equestrianism. Chapter four will consider the ways in which rider and horse communicate through their bodies, with special emphasis on equestrian feel. Elaborated on will be the role of the rider, horse and trainer respectively in this multi-faceted and interspecies relation. How does the horse contribute to the communication with the rider, and to the rider’s learning? Moreover, I discuss some of the previous research about teaching in riding relevant for this thesis.

This thesis is framed in the research area of practical knowledge and human-animal/equine studies. Thus, in chapter five, I present the theories that will be used as theoretical tools to describe and analyse the interaction and practical knowledge between rider, horse and equestrian trainer in sports dressage, and will go on to explain how they will be used in relation to my empirical work. In chapter six, the methodological disposition of the thesis, along with the specific methods used, will be presented. This includes: (i) a presentation of the point of view adopted for this study; (ii) the selected research methods; (iii) data collection, and (iv) how the analysis of the data was accomplished. A final reflection over the methods used will be offered, and ethical considerations will be discussed.

Chapter seven includes the main findings of each of the four articles included in this dissertation. As part of this task, I will outline the interconnections between the different articles, and show how they form a coherent picture of the challenging puzzle making up the interaction and communication between rider, horse and equestrian trainer. In chapter eight, some of the results highlighted will be discussed, along with some of its more general implications. At this point, I will also outline the possible contributions to knowledge this thesis has sought to make, and bring forth some final suggestions for future research and further developments. Chapter nine will contain a Swedish summary of the thesis.
Equestrian practices

In this chapter, I aim to identify my research field. Since my thesis focuses on horse riding and the relationships between rider and horse in equestrian sport, I will start with a short overview regarding how horse riding has developed over time. Furthermore, I will also outline how horses are used today in equestrian sport and leisure. Some of the recent tensions concerning how we view and use horses in contemporary society will also be presented. These remarks are wholly derived from previous research.

It is interesting to note that theoretical studies on human-horse relationships (HAS) have often been conducted in proximity to horse practices. There exists also a research tradition called Critical Animal Studies (CAS), which is more political in orientation (Taylor and Twine, 2014). While research within the area of human-animal relations has taken a closer look at many different practices, focusing on the relation and mutual becoming of human and animal, CAS has a more radical agenda, striving for solidarity with and the total liberation of animals. This thesis is built on the assumption that recent transformations have been initiated by a combination of new theoretical perspectives and developments in equestrian practices. This claim will be further explored in the next chapter, entitled “Human-animal/equine relationships in theory”.

The history of horse riding

Horses were domesticated by humans around 3000 BC, and when they started to be used for riding and for the driving of carriages, horses immediately became a symbol for status and power (Nisser-Dalman, 2012). Horses increased people’s power and strength, and kings and princes were often portrayed on horseback. Against the backdrop of the formation of cavalry units, Xenophon, a student of Socrates, wrote the first horsemanship manual around 360 BC (Xenophon, 1962 [c. 360 BC]). The purpose of the text was most likely to improve the training methods of horses, in order to make them more useful on the battle fields (Ekström von Essen, 2010).

In the 16th century, René Descartes declared that animals were “automatons” without a soul, shorn of both thoughts and emotions. He thus denied that non-
human animals could feel anything, like for instance pain (Crist, 1999). Not only did Descartes' ideas influence received views on animals, they also had a long-lasting impact on man’s practices towards animals. Today, the Cartesian position still shapes the treatment of animals in some parts of the world (e.g. established practices in animal industries).

In the west, the art of riding was by the 16th century more systematically established. During this period, several riding academies were formed in Europe. The horse became an attribute of the aristocracy, a symbol of strength, power and wealth (Ekström von Essen, 2010). Horses at this time were seen by some riders as having the ability to interact with humans, though they were regarded as inferior to humans. The training methods used were often cruel and harsh (Nisser-Dalman, 2012). Throughout the years, the changing role of horses in equestrian practice has affected the precise articulation of theories of horse riding and vice versa.

During the enlightenment of the 18th century, a common humanisation of society took place and this extended to views on animals. A few influential persons (e.g. Bourgelat) advanced the idea that the art of riding should be considered a science, with riding theory needed in order to further develop the practical knowledge of riding (Ekström von Essen, 2010). Notable figures, such as Federigo Grisone, Antoine de Pluvinel, Francois Rubinchon de la Guérinière, and Duke of Newcastle, committed to paper their thoughts, deliberations and experiences, presenting them as a “riding system” or a “riding theory.” Such writings have over the centuries been supplemented and developed, even influencing the riding theories of today (Meyners et al., 2014).

During the Napoleonic wars at the end of the 18th century, big cavalry units were formed, requiring that men be schooled in the art of riding. In these cavalries, both the soldiers and the horses were seen as disposable resources, and were thus accorded “low value”. Horses were thus regarded as “material” and war machines rather than as individuals (Ekström von Essen, 2010). Notwithstanding this, evidence points to the fact that close links existed between some soldiers and their horses, a point described by Flynn (2018).

Detailed manuals were written as tools for educating soldiers, the main aim of which was to move a group of soldiers (on horseback) from one place to another. Some of these manuals are today still in use in the education of riders, riding teachers and equestrian trainers in Europe. One of the most well-known manuals is probably the one published by the German Equestrian Federation (1997), which has been translated into many different languages (Thorell, 2017). This manual, as well as several other military-manuals, is built on the perception that the horse is a tool or instrument at the disposal of human beings rather than as a thinking and feeling subject. Accordingly, the focus in such manuals is placed on riders needing to use specific signals to achieve a certain outcome. Moreover, it is assumed that all horses can be trained in a similar way, with little space set aside for an appreciation of the individuality of either the rider or the horse. A clear distinction can be discerned.
between the training of riding skills for the aristocrats during the Baroque era, and the mass education of soldiers for the big European armies during the 18th and 19th centuries. The classic principles of riding inherited from the renaissance were however preserved, for instance, by the Spanish riding school in Vienna (Maw, 2012).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the largest group of riders was comprised of male professional riders within the army. Horse riding was also a privileged leisure activity, preserved for the upper classes (Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015). In 1912, the disciplines of dressage, show jumping and eventing appeared in the Olympics in Stockholm, and have been part of the games ever since (Hedenborg and White, 2012).

After the Second World War, the number of horses rapidly decreased in Sweden, and this was also the case in the rest of Europe. However, by the late twentieth century, an increasing number of riding clubs began to appear throughout Europe. Such clubs were especially attractive to young women. The riding teachers were mostly from military backgrounds, thereby contributing to the transmission of military norms and traditions to this new group of civilian-riders (Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015). The number of horses have increased during the 1970s and 1980s, and continued to do so. Today, most horses are used for a variety of tasks; some for equestrianism while others are used either as riding school horses or as “care workers” in human therapy, or, even, horses used in the tourist industry. And there are also horses bred for meat production in some European Countries (Kovak, 2018).

The role of the horse is expanding once again, with the number of equidae in Europe recently estimated at seven million (Eurogroup for Animals, 2015). The number of horses in Sweden have increased from 280.000 horses in 2006 to 360.000 in 2017. Most people in Sweden learn the basic skills of riding in one of around 450 riding schools and an increasing number of people are buying and keeping their own horses (Jordbruksverket, 2019). Horse management has changed gender code, shifting from being a male dominated arena to becoming a female domain (Hedenborg and White, 2012; Birke, 2007). In Sweden today, 85% of the members of the Swedish Equestrian Federation (SEF) are female. Riding is considered a “popular pastime” in Sweden with most riding schools obtaining direct financial support from local and municipal authorities. However, and as previous studies have shown, masculine military norms still exist in spite of these changes (Thorell and Hedenborg, 2016; Dashper, 2014; Maw, 2012).

The Swedish National Equestrian Centre (SNEC) in Strömsholm was established as a riding academy in the nineteenth century, and from 1868 until 1968, SNEC trained Swedish officers and military members in riding, and sometimes also in driving horses (Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015). When the army was mechanised and horses were replaced with motor vehicles, the role of SNEC changed. In 1968, the new organisation, Society for the Promotion of Horse Riding (In Swedish: Ridfrämjandet), took over SNEC with the aim of training riding teachers for the modern
riding school. Today, SNEC educates riding teachers and other professionals for the horse industry.

The breed of horses has also developed and changed according to the role of the horse in society, and the breeding of different types of horses for specific needs has occurred throughout history. Nowadays, sport riders request a horse that is suitable for the purpose of competition, and there has been a general development from cold-blooded to warm-blooded horses, or, to put it otherwise, from the work horse to the sport horse (Hedenborg, 2007). The breeding of the Swedish Warmblood has for instance developed from a heavy horse with a body strong enough to suit the army, towards a horse with athletic abilities and exceptional movements better suited for participating in top sport. Moreover, these horses have a livelier temperament compared to the “old” Swedish Warmblood. A similar development can be traced with respect to the Finn horse, and this has been described by Leinonen (2016). According to Leinonen (2016), the sport horse is bred and trained for specific sports and has thus become an “instrument of human competitive instinct and ambition” (p. 63). This same development has been also described by Brown (2016), but with respect to the Connemara pony.

The way that we keep and use horses has remained a relative constant, from the time that horses were used for military purpose up to the end of the twentieth century (Backman, 2018). In recent years, however, big changes have taken place. For example, better housing for horses (at least in Sweden) was an outcome of specific public and political discussions surrounding horse welfare. There is now a better understanding that horses are social animals who need to be kept together with con-species. Moreover, there is the further recognition that horses need to be able to fulfil their natural needs (e.g. having the possibility to move freely and to be fed several times per day). In the 1990s, the Swedish Centre at Strömsholm (SNEC) started to build several paddocks, and nowadays some horses are even kept in groups in a so called “active stable” where they have access to roughage and the possibility to move all the time (Strömsholm, 2019). There are also more strict regulations from the government on how horses should be kept and looked after.

Confusion still reigns concerning the titles of professionals responsible for teaching riding. During the military era, people teaching riding were in many European countries (e.g. England and Sweden) traditionally called “Riding Instructors”, although several countries prefer to use the title “Riding Teacher” (Maw, 2012; Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015). In the early twentieth century, the title in Sweden was changed to “Riding Teacher”, and there are three different levels (Level 1 to 3) that can be achieved after completing an exam for professionals. This level system is based on an internationally recognised classification developed by the International Group for Equestrian Qualification (IGEQ), an organisation that aims to define an international standardisation of the educational levels within equestrian sport (IGEQ, 2019). The educational programme for riding teachers is offered in different formats and at different places in Sweden. However, SNEC remains the main centre
and is also the site for the educational centre of SEF (Thorell et al., 2016). The change of nomenclature from “Riding Instructor” to “Riding Teacher” most likely reflects the adaptation of teaching in riding from military environments to both leisure and sport.

In 1991, an education for equestrian trainers was established in Sweden to meet the new demand for teachers to train sports riders. There are thus two different educations available. While the educational programme for equestrian trainers has the specific purpose of educating teachers so that they are able to train sport riders with their own private horses, an alternative education exists, in which riding teachers prepare students predominately for work at a riding school. However, several people in Sweden are both licensed trainers and appointed riding teachers. There is, though, a difference in pedagogy since the education for trainers places emphasis on performance (the trainer as a “coach”), while the education for riding teachers focuses on how to teach basic riding skills to riders of different ages and educational backgrounds. In England, the title of riding teacher has recently changed to “Performance Coach in Complete Horsemanship”, an adaption to coach that follows other sports.

In recent years, new understandings have begun to grow surrounding the role of the trainer and the trainer’s communication. This in part is a result of developments in teaching in general, where students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning process (Birke, 2007; Maw, 2012). Thorell (2017) describes how economic challenges for the horse sector, along with a general need to adapt to new teaching styles, has contributed to a transformation in teaching methods: from a model of the teacher simply giving orders to new teaching styles built on dialogue between riding teacher and rider. The way of performing lessons in riding schools has thus started to shift from an instructional approach to a coaching model. This trend is certainly notable in Sweden. Military manuals are however still in use in both the education of riders and riding teachers in Europe. In these manuals, the horse is described as a tool or instrument in need of orders from the rider, and not as a sentient being.

During the last couple of years, several riding manuals have been written by experienced rider and equestrian trainers, again indicating a shift from seeing the horse as solely a tool (as put forth in military manuals) towards viewing the horse as a thinking and feeling subject. An example of this alternative form of riding manual is Rider + Horse = 1, by Eckart Meyners et al. (2014). Here, riding is emphasised as a “dialogic” relation between rider and horse. There are also signs that trainers today are more inclined to understand each horse as an individual with specific characteristics that both rider and trainer need to take into account (Robert, 2005; Markne, 2014). Accordingly, it is necessary that the training adapts to the condi-

1 The explicit aim of coaching sports is to create better competitors at all levels (Maw, 2012, p. 134.)
tions and abilities of each horse (and rider) during training. Peter Markne writes that “Horses are different, just like humans, and from this we plan and adapt our training” (2014, p. 26). Another example is the book The girl on the dancing horse (2018) where Charlotte Dujardin, multiple winner of Olympic gold in dressage, describes her relationship with her horse, Valegro. Dujardin recounts how, when entering the arena at the Olympics in Rio, she was so nervous that her legs felt like jelly; it felt as though Valegro took hold of her hand and signalled to his rider: “We can do it”, thus indicating that the horse took an active part in the performance by helping her to carry out the task (2018, p. 226). These stories together with several others, where riders experience the connection between themselves and their horse as almost telepathic, advance a view of the horse as an individual with his or her own mind, a view that considerably differs from the image of the horse as merely an instrument or tool.

In this section, I have made a short summary of how horse riding has developed throughout the years. As we have seen, the methods of how to ride and “school” a horse has a long history dating all the way back to Xenophon (4th century BC). The theories of horse riding have emerged throughout the years as a mixture of the art of riding written down by aristocrats along with detailed military manuals produced originally as tools for educating masses of soldiers. Equestrianism has thus evolved during a long process. In earlier years, horses were mostly used for warfare, agriculture, and for transportation; today, in developed countries, horses are mainly used for leisure, equestrian sports, as companions, and in human therapy. As a result of the changing roles and functions of the horse, there are several signs indicating that equestrian cultures are in transition, as shown not least by how new ideas about horse riding have started to emerge and to circulate. At the same time, and as suggested by Thorell et al. (2017) the power of military norms and traditions still seem to dominate in horse riding and in the teaching of riding (2017). Based on these historical perspectives and traditions, in this thesis I aim to search for a deeper understanding of how horses are used and viewed in contemporary society. Moreover, I am interested in exploring the ongoing shifts in equestrian practice as well as in theoretical contexts, and how they possibly influence each other.

**The horse in equestrian sport and leisure**

In this section, I will point out some of the recent tensions in how horses are viewed and used for sport and leisure in contemporary society. Horse riding has been an Olympic Sport since 1912, and it is the only sport where males and females compete against each other. Moreover, horse sports are sometimes defined as the “equestrian art”, and there is a visible tension between these two perspectives. Thompson (2019) suggests that “dressage can be accounted for by its multiple and at times incompatible dimensions as a sport, an art and a social practice” (p. 151). As a sport, horse and rider are expected to perform and gain a competitive edge, while as an art, dres-
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sage is subject to specific aesthetic evaluation. Moreover, Thompson (2019) emphasises how dressage can often be regarded as a joyful dance between rider and horse, but equally can be regarded as a “disciplinary aesthetics”; the dressage horse is, after all, supposed to be kept under control and exhibit obedience (p. 153). Thompson shows us how aesthetic interpretations are culturally specific, and can thus contribute to the acceptance of ethically questionable interactions with horses trained in dressage. Even the ideals and standards among horse people regarding what is “good riding” differ over time, coupled with the variety of opinions and interpretations that circulate regarding what is ethically acceptable to do with animals. Even the idea of using horses for sport can be questioned (Gilbert and Gillett, 2011).

Both social media and equestrian photography have initiated intense scrutiny over equestrian practices. In Descriptive Falsterbo Moments, Crispin Parelius Johannessen (2019) discusses, using the example of hyperflexion (rollkür), how a person’s interpretation of equestrian images of equine faces differs depending on the form and context within which they are perceived. While some see beauty, others see brutality and abuse. There are important ethical dimensions to dressage which deserve attention, and it has been suggested by some that if sport dressage is going to proceed along a sustainable pathway, then its athletic, aesthetic and ethical dimensions will need to align (Thompson, 2019).

Against the background of these ethical ambiguities, equestrian sport has nonetheless grown in popularity in both Europe and North America during the last decades. On point of fact of its increasingly appeal, it has also become more commercialised (Dashper, 2014; McLean and McGreevy, 2010; Smith, 2014). The horse industry has gained in size, both in terms of the number of people actively involved in it and with respect to the revenue it generates. The financial and commercial value of sport horses has risen just as further emphasis is placed on high performance. There is thus a tension in equestrian sport between putting the horse’s needs first and trying to win a competition (Birke and Thompson, 2018). Moreover, horses themselves are drawn into the logic of the commodity-form; they are quickly sold if they do not live up to the expectations of the owner (McLean and McGreevy, 2010; Dashper, 2014).

A huge number of horses travel from one country to another for competition each week. In 2018, there was, for instance, 160 horses flying from Europe to US in order to take part in the World Championships. It is not unusual that horses are injured or even die during these events. Horses participate in many stressful activities that are simply unnatural for them, such as leaving their mates and being transported to foreign environments. It is well documented that many suffer from behavioural as well as health problems, e.g. ulcers (Nieto et al., 2009). Frequent protests from the general public about the way horses are used for sport provokes the important question whether and how these concerns will be met by riders and equestrian organisations. What activities involving horses are acceptable? How do sport riders self-reflect on the way horses are used for sporting activities? And how do riders deal with
the seemingly inconsistent requirements of, on the one hand, an aesthetic appearance built on partnership between rider and horse, and, on the other, control and obedience? This is something that will be discussed in article three.

In summarising the above, what many have rightly put in question is the view that animals are inferior to humans, necessitating that there by a general re-examination of human-animal relations (Haraway, 2008). Traditions and long-established knowledge about horses is today primarily questioned and challenged, within equestrian sport organisations as well as in social movements (Thorell, 2017; Daspher, 2017). For example, the involvement of animals in human sport practices raises ethical questions, along with the way we humans use horses for sport is exposed to heavy criticism, both in and on social media and in theoretical discourse (Smith, 2014). There is thus a rising concern in society about the welfare of horses used for equestrian sport (McGreevy and McLean, 2010, Gilbert and Gillett, 2013, Thompson and Neseli, 2013). The risk for maltreatment in training and competition has been discussed (McLean and McGreevy, 2010; Savvides, 2012), and the use of equipment (e.g. the use of restrictive noseband), and training methods are debated both in public media and in the equestrian sport organisations themselves.

Is it possible to see the horse more as a partner and a subject with her or his own will, experiences and feelings, while still participating in equestrian sport? Most European Countries have active animal rights groups. In Sweden, for instance, the national animal rights group is a relatively powerful organisation that functions as a referral body (Djurens rätt, 2019). There is thus a demand for more humane training methods as well as more strict regulations concerning, for instance, the type of equipment used in equestrian sport.

Apart for being expended for equestrian sport, many horses are used for leisure, as companions, and for therapy. Many of us ride for fun, relaxation and enjoyment and do not take part in equestrian sport. Instead, people enjoy just being around horses, caring for them, training them and hacking out with them (Daspher, 2017). Equestrianism, on the other hand, has been suggested not only to be a sport or activity but a way of life since owning a horse affects all aspects of life: time, money and one’s relationships with others (Daspher, 2017a, p. 4). In this thesis the focus will be on the relation between riders and horses used for equestrian sport.

During the last decades, an academisation of riding and teaching in riding in Sweden has taken place, which started with the setting up of the program Equine Studies in 1994, a three year university education given by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) that today also includes a Bachelor’s degree in Equine Studies. Two part time professors in the art of riding have been appointed by the university on the basis of their own professional careers as riders and equestrian trainers. There are also a number of courses at university level in other European countries, for instance in UK and the Netherlands. This development has been influenced by a general academisation of many practical professions like for instance nurses and the police, and has contributed to the inclusion of more theo-
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retical knowledge, even if practical knowledge and skills remain integral to these educational programmes. Within this contextual frame of academisation, I hope this thesis will contribute with a humanistic perspective that, by developing theories and methods of practical knowledge, can provide insight into the interaction between rider, horse and the equestrian trainer.

More diverse use of horses in Sweden

Even if the number of professional riders and trainers has increased, the largest number of riders in Sweden are amateur riders.2 Nowadays, less and less people grow up in the countryside and have natural contact with animals during their childhood. The Swedish public riding school is a good base for learning how to ride, but many have lost customers during the last decade and thus need financial support (Thorell et al., 2016). There are also many individuals in Sweden who buy their own horse, and it is generally discussed that some lack enough knowledge about a horse’s needs, how a horse should be handled and how to ride. This has led to increased concerns about animal welfare, with a greater number of accidents involving both horses and humans recorded. To keep and train a horse requires a lot of knowledge – e.g. knowledge about horse welfare, how to feed and keep horses healthy, and how to handle and train them. As a horse owner, you are the one responsible for the welfare of the horse, and the welfare is determined primarily by the horse owner’s performance of husbandry and management practices, as suggested by Hemsworth et al. (2015). Most private horses in Sweden are placed in livery yards close to urban areas. Horse owners and riders spend limited time in the stable, and are thus in need of more formal education in riding and horsemanship, as suggested by Thorell (2017).

There has also been a development towards a more diverse horse industry in Europe. While in bygone times, most riders aimed at participating in traditional equestrian sports like dressage or show jumping, there are now a number of different riding disciplines, e.g. Islandic Horse riding, Western riding, Academic riding and Working Equitation. Many riders do not participate in competitions, and there are even people that keep horses as companions where the owners do not ride them at all. There are conflicting views and lively discussions between advocates from these different disciplines regarding what is the best way to train horses, where each interested party argues that they are equipped with the best training methods and apply the best horse welfare available. Savvides (2012) has for instance explored how riders from two different disciplines – dressage and natural horsemanship – adopt both similar and divergent methods in training their horses.

2 There are around 150,000 members in the Swedish Equestrian Federation (SEF) but it is estimated that around 500,000 people ride. There are around 30,000 riders that have a license to compete, which is 17% of the total number of riders.
In recent decades, the general view of how to handle and train horses has undergone a transformation. Smith (2014) goes so far as to talk about a “revolution” in modern horse handling, training and riding, with a number of new books and methods in circulation; texts such as “Natural Horsemanship”, “Dancing with the horse” and “Naked liberty”. These new methods have broken away from the patterns inherited from military traditions. The concept of “Natural Horsemanship” has, in particular, attracted many supporters and is claimed to be built on a partnership between horse and human. Here, humans are encouraged to use the same method of communicating as horses use to communicate with each other, the desired outcome of which is that the human becomes a leader similar to the horse who is the leader of a herd (Birke, 2008). It has however been suggested that it is difficult to say something about what a meaningful partnership with a human could mean to a horse (Hartmann et al., 2017). How a particular horse reacts to a human being is influenced by the relationship they have established with that particular individual. This can have either a positive or negative valence depending for instance on the training methods used (e.g. positive or negative reinforcement). Thus, the reactions of horses towards humans can often be explained (or predicted) from previous interactions (Hartmann et al., 2017). All this said, it is nonetheless important to underline how natural horsemanship is said to have broken with the patterns inherited from military traditions by precisely seeing the horse as a subject.

Today, the horse also has an important therapeutic role, from physiotherapy to treatment of patients with psychiatric disorders. Physiotherapy on horseback challenges the patient into engaging in complex movement training, since movements transferred from horse to rider will flow through the trunk and extremities providing a unique influence on the rider’s body (Håkansson, 2008). Horses are also used in social work and can contribute to enhancement in an individual’s self-image, self-esteem and overall confidence (Carlsson, 2017). Horses are excellent in reading feelings and moods through vocal intonation, bodily position, and expressions, and are thus able to offer humans the possibility to investigate their intuition, feelings, attitudes, relations, and communication (Carlsson, 2017). In social work, the horse is seen as a subject and an actor with her or his own agency. This view of the horse has gained increasing prominence during the last decade.

In summary, the adventure of the horse has gone hand in hand with cultural developments in society. The horse has moved from being an attribute of the aristocracy, via a war machine, to a tool for equestrian sport, a leisure partner and/or companion. In our own contemporaneity, people are becoming increasingly aware of the horse’s own subjectivity, as evident, for instance, with Liberty Dressage. As a researcher, I am interested in investigating if these practices have influenced how horses are looked upon in the more conventional discipline of dressage. How is the personality and the perspective of the horse interpreted by sport riders? I will seek to connect these questions to the active work undertaken by professional
trainers, as I explore the contribution they make in rendering visible the role of the horse to their riders.

Equestrian sport in Sweden and Poland

As a Swedish rider, my own view of equestrian sport is indelibly marked by a set of situated practices and contextual frames of reference. Even if I have had several opportunities to look at this sport within other European countries, e.g. in England, Germany and the Netherlands, my own perspective is unreflectingly informed by the equine practices of Sweden. Therefore, in order to broaden my view, I have turned to Poland, with the purpose of investigating whether there are any possible national or cultural differences related to the practice of rider-horse training between the two countries. Sweden and Poland are countries with historical and cultural differences, despite the fact that they are neighbours, separated only by the Baltic Sea.

The development of the use of horses in Sweden and Poland has followed the general European development trend, i.e. from cold-blooded to warm-blooded structure, or otherwise put, from the work horse to the sport horse (Hedenborg, 2007). However, while in Sweden the number of working horses decreased already in the 1950s and 1960s, cold blood horses were still used as working horses, especially in the eastern parts of Poland, up to the beginning of the new millennium (Kovak, 2018). In Poland, there are two equestrian organisations: the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK), which takes care of recreation, tourism and sports tourism (including pleasure or recreational riding), and the Polish Equestrian Federation (PZJ), which is responsible for traditional equestrian sport. There is also an organisation for horse breeding (the Polish Horse Breeders Association, PZHK). In 2006, it was estimated that there were about 320,000 horses in Poland (Liljenstolpe, 2009). Presently, Poland has a fast growing economy, with numbers of both riders and horses reportedly increasing owing to the emergence of a new and wealthier middle class.

Sweden has the highest number of horses per capita in EU, and moreover, riding is the second largest sport in Sweden for children and youngsters (SEF, 2019). From 2006, the latest estimation of horses per capita in Europe shows that while Sweden had 30.9 horses per thousand people, Poland had just 8.4 (Liljenstolpe, 2009). In Poland, a large number of horses are still bred for meat production, though, according to Kovak (2018), this number seems to be decreasing.

In times gone by, Poland was famous for its mounted armies, which had much success on the battle fields. The country in actual fact has a long tradition of breeding horses, though this was almost entirely eliminated during the communist era. It is most common that people learn how to ride in private yards; there is a limited number of public riding schools. There are, though, a growing number of equestrian centres, the majority of which are close to urban areas. In addition, a
number of international horse shows are organised. In the northern town of Sopot, a very modern equestrian centre has been built where a number of competitions are held each year. Since equestrian sport is a global phenomenon today, Poland is being heavily influenced by other countries like US, Germany and UK. Presently, the number of licensed Polish trainers stands at approximately 4000, most of whom are women (Kovak, 2018). Sweden has around 700 equestrian trainers and 1500 riding teachers (SEF, 2019).

Sweden has detailed and strict national regulations on horse housing and welfare. For instance, horses should have social contact with other horses, be given attention every day, and have on a daily basis the possibility to move freely in all three natural gaits (Jordbruksverket, 2010). All horse premises must have special permission to keep horses (Viksten et al., 2016). Horse welfare in Sweden is safeguarded by County administrative boards (21), which perform official controls conducted by official animal welfare inspectors. There are resource- and management based measures (e.g. box size, care- and feeding regimes) and also animal-based (injury, disease, body- and hoof condition) (Hitchens et al., 2016). In Poland no specific guidelines exist other than those already present in EU legislation. Having accounted for some of the main similarities as well as differences between equestrian cultures in Sweden and Poland, I will investigate if there are any visible national and/or cultural differences related to the practice of rider-horse training in sports dressage. Thus, data from interviews with riders and equestrian trainers from both countries have been included in this study and will be discussed in articles three and four.
Theories about human-animal/equine relationships

I will give a brief background in this chapter of how the way we humans view the relation between humans and non-human animals – and particularly between humans and horses – has been developed in theoretical contexts over the years, and moreover how animal welfare has come to influence the general discussions in contemporary society. I will then go on to attend to how the way we use and view animals has been transformed in recent years, with particular focus on the relation between human and horse. Some previous studies I have found to be particularly enlightening on rider-horse interaction and communication, will be addressed. Furthermore, I will also lay out recent developments in the use of the horse and point to some contemporary tensions in the field of equestrianism. Finally, I will point out how these theoretical aspects will be used in this dissertation.

How the view of non-human animals has developed and been transformed throughout history

Over the centuries, human attitudes towards animals, as well as towards the role of animals in society, have varied profoundly. From the 17th century, Descartes’ ideas that animals were machines or “automatons” and inferior to humans were pervasive in theoretical discourse (Crist, 1999). One of the first laws against animal abuse was An Act to prevent the cruel and improper Treatment of Cattle, passed by UK Parliament in 1822.

In 1859, Darwin published The Origin of Species, in which he explained both animal behaviour and the functioning of the mind from the standpoint of evolutionary theory. Darwin advanced the idea of animals as thinking and feeling subjects with the powers of imitation, attention, memory and imagination (Darwin, 1964). At the same time, though, Darwin adopted a rather mechanistic perspective on how animal life develops.

In the 1930s the first ethologists started to study animals in their natural environment. They asked questions about the function, causation, ontogeny and evolution of animal behaviour (Tinbergen, 1963), and used technical language to describe these behaviours (ethograms), advancing the idea that behaviours are released
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by external or internal stimuli. Ethologists had a picture of animals as natural objects guided by forces that they can neither know, nor control. They were also sceptical towards the idea that animals were in possession of their own mind (Crist, 1999). Ethology might tell us who the animal is, as an exemplar of a species, but generally they can tell us less about who this individual horse is (Birke and Thompson, 2018).

After the Second World War, animal production developed enormously, resulting in intensive animal farming systems. These systems enabled better food security for the ever-growing human population. But in reaction to this there has over the last few decades been a rising concern about the welfare of animals in these systems (Blokhuis et al., 2013). In the 1960s, a distinction was made between animal protection (what people are allowed to do with animals) and animal welfare (the animal’s own experience of his or her situation). The latter is a growing area of research, resulting in methods to assess an animal’s own experience, with present research putting special emphasis on how to improve animal welfare in practice.

The first EU legislation addressing farm animals concerned the protection of hens and was adopted in 1986, followed in 1991 by Council Directives on the protection of calves and pigs. This was further supplemented in 1998 with Council Directive 98/58/EC on the protection of animals of all species kept for farming purposes (Blokhuis et al., 2013). Further legislation has been developed since that time to progressively improve the welfare status of farmed animals and to set standards for transport and slaughter, for example. The member states of the EU have transposed this legislation into national laws.

However, many animal welfare problems remain, and these can be grouped under three headings: (i) the affective state of animals; (ii) the ability of animals to live a reasonable natural life and (iii) basic health (Blokhuis et al., 2013). Providing good animal welfare is sometimes defined by a list of positive conditions which should be provided to the animal. An example of this is the “Five Freedoms” (Blokhuis et al., 2013). Five Freedoms as currently expressed are: i) freedom from hunger or thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour; ii) freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area; iii) freedom from pain, injury or disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment; iv) freedom to express (most) normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal’s own kind, and finally v); Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering (Anonymous, 2012). The increased concern about the welfare of animals used for food production is also illustrated by the increased number of vegetarians and vegans in the Western world today (The Guardian, 2018). This also affects how humans look at the welfare of animals in general and is likely to influence humans’ deliberations concerning whether animals should, or should not, be used for sport. Therefore, I believe that
these developments in attitudes towards food producing animals is also relevant for understanding the contemporary transitions in equestrian cultures.

Henrik Lerner (2008) emphasises that there is nowadays two ways of distinguishing between how animals are used: according to species and according to the role that animals have for humans. As humans, we perceive differently a horse that is bred for sport, on the one hand, from a horse bred for working in the woods, on the other. Thus, Lerner argues that the role that an animal is assigned is “situation-specific” (2008, p. 26), and that its role and its belonging to a certain species has important conceptual implications (p. 186). There are thus for instance norms that determine how we view different animals and what species can be ridden or not.

**Horse welfare**

Following the general concern with the welfare of animals, the specific worry concerning the welfare of horses and how we use them is on the rise in Europe in general. Horse (or equine) welfare describes the acceptable conditions of life and use for domesticated horses. The novel *Black Beauty*, published in 1877 in England, is known as the first work that addressed equine welfare. The organisation *Horse World Welfare* was founded in 1927 with the mission to “work with horses, horse owners, communities, organizations and governments to help improve welfare standards and stamp out suffering in the UK and worldwide” (Horse World Welfare, 2019).

There are however no specific conditions defined for the housing of horses in European legislation, as is the case for hens and pigs. In the more general legislation on the welfare of farm animals (Council directive 98/58/EC, 1998) the position of horses is not clear. They may be included when they are classified as “farm animals”, and this applies to both Sweden and Poland. However, the same directive explicitly states that it does not apply to animals intended for use in sporting or cultural events, which clearly excludes many horses.

In 2015, Horse World Welfare and the Eurogroup for Animals published a document called *Removing the Blinkers: The health and welfare of European Equidae in 2015*. This is the first ever report to investigate the conditions for the seven million equids (including donkeys and mules) in Europe, legislation affecting them and key health and welfare challenges (Horse World Welfare, 2015). The report provokes many questions due to the lack of data on equids. It also points to the potential risk to which equids are subject, since they can easily fall into gaps between laws drafted for pets and those aimed at farm animals, often to the detriment of their welfare. The report also provides clear recommendations as to how these animals can be better protected for the good of animal health and welfare. Recent concerns about horse welfare include, for instance, discussions about stabling, equipment, training methods and transport. These subjects are also discussed in the report. Moreover, protests against, for instance, harness racing, endurance racing and cross-country have also
become more frequent. Among animal rights groups in most European countries, criticisms are raised about the use of horses for sport. These concerns have become more mainstream, with heated debates surrounding horse welfare gaining greater visibility on social media (McGreevy and McLean, 2010).

How have these concerns about horse welfare affected the equestrian society? The rules and regulations of dressage competitions are set by the global organisation Fédération Équestre Internationale (FEI); this organisation is also the governing body for the Olympic Games and other international competitions. The FEI has a “Code of Conduct” for the welfare of the horse, which is obligatory for the competitors registered in the different national equestrian federations (FEI, 2019). Moreover, this powerful organisation includes in its regulations that every rider should strive for the horse to be a “happy equine athlete” (FEI, 2019). This statement can be interpreted as a political indication that the horse is increasingly recognised as a subject in her or his own right. Nonetheless, no methods presently exist to determine if horses are “happy” or not. Several Equestrian Federations have set up more strict regulations concerning, for instance, what equipment is allowed in equestrian competition. These developments connect to recent ethical considerations about the treatment of horses involved in equestrian sport. How do competitive riders understand the role of their horse? Have the discussions on welfare and ethics of using horses for sport influenced how sport riders view their horses? These challenging questions calls for attention, and are explored in the third article of this thesis.

Human-animal studies

By the end of the last century, interest in the relationships between humans and non-human animals, and in the role and the status of non-human animals in (human) society began to grow (Weil, 2010; Daspher, 2017a). Humans started to question the general view of animals as inferior to humans, and thus actively re-examined their relationships with non-human animals. The starting point for this powerful social movement was initiated to a large extent from the launching of the book Animal Liberation in 1975 by Peter Singer. Studies of the relationships between humans and non-human animals are on the rise within both the humanities and the social sciences, thereby departing from an anthropological and sociological perspective. Human/animal studies (HAS) is a new, interdisciplinary approach that encourages collaboration across disciplinary divides. Analogous to women’s- and environmental studies, HAS is a response to particular social and political questions (Birke, 2009). HAS has interest both in abstract ideas regarding how we think about non-humans and in practical matters, e.g. what takes place in the animal stables and laboratories. These new perspectives involve animals’ experiences and subjectivity, seeing the relationships between human and non-human animal as involving both parties.
A more radical field of research, *Critical Animal Studies* (CAS), emerged at the beginning of this century, and takes an explicit political and critical stance against animal exploitation. The Institute of Critical Animal Studies (ICAS) was funded in 2001 as a holistic theory-to-action activist led based organisation. CAS understands itself as organically related to radical and revolutionary actions, theories, groups and movements, all of which aim for the total liberation of animals and for the tearing down of all systems of domination and relations of oppression that keep animals in positions of subordination. In contrast to HAS, CAS has a political/activist agenda, and ends up having a broader series of concerns, for instance fighting against climate change (Taylor and Twine, 2014).

Instead of considering humans as the master of all nature and creatures, as has been traditionally advanced by humanism, *posthumanism* declares that humans and non-human animals are equals sharing a common world. It is proposed, then, that we humans should seek a more reciprocal relationship with other species (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2008). Haraway (2008) suggests a nature-culture continuum as a starting point, in contrast to the commonly used dichotomy between nature and culture. There are thus no strict borders between either nature and culture or between humans and non-human animals.

A new scientific branch named *cognitive ethology* has also been developed. Here it is acknowledged that non-human animals have cognitive capacities and that their emotions and intelligence need to be taken into account in their interactions with humans, so that we come to recognise that a non-human is another self (Birke, 2009). There is moreover a branch called *multispecies ethnography* that focuses on how contacts, zones and lived experiences between humans and non-human animals could result in entanglements and engagements between the two (Davis and Maurstad, 2016). This is a movement within biosocial anthropology that proposes “new ways of thinking about animals as individual, biological and social beings that, through interspecies practices and interactions as a topic of study invite a broad perspective of analytic themes and framework” (Davis and Maurstad, 2016, p. 1). In the anthology, *The meaning of horses, Biosocial encounters*, different authors elucidate how they understand, use, value and connect to horses (eds. Davis and Maurstad, 2016). In my own work, I am interested in exploring if these new theoretical movements have influenced people’s views on horses.

**Human-horse studies**

There are clear signs that the new academic perspectives presented above have influenced the way that we view horses, as well as what role and value horses are assigned by humans. Humans have started to pay attention to the changing role of horses, shifting from an image of a horse as perceived simply as a tool mainly used for equestrian sport to an idea of a horse as an important actor in its own right. As a researcher examining the relation between rider and horse, I find these new theo-
Theoretical movements interesting when trying to understand why humans have started to re-examine the relationships between themselves and their horses. What, though, could be the possible consequences of this transformation?

There is a rising number of horse-human studies in both the humanities and the social sciences, and they are emerging from different viewpoints and subjects: anthropology; philosophy; gender studies; communication studies; ethnology; art history; history of ideas, and comparative literature (Bornemark, 2019). Owing to this diversity there is also a variety of methodological approaches used. However, these new perspectives tend to include the perspective of the horse, and thus introduce a view of horses that differs from the traditional one, originally rooted in military norms, and where the horse is seen as predominantly an instrument or tool. Horse welfare seems to have moved from solely veterinary sciences to also include social, ethical and political points of departure. Questions are raised, for instance, about the acceptable use of horses.

Departing from these new movements within human-animal studies, there are several studies where it is acknowledged that the horse has her or his own mind, and thus that a horse’s consciousness, emotions and intelligence need to be taken into account in the interaction with humans (Birke, 2009, Savvides, 2012, Despret, 2004). Recent studies have pointed out that horses are social actors (Birke and Thompson, 2018). They are for instance able to communicate their desires to humans and are capable of actively performing pointing gestures (Mejdell et al., 2016). Horses can also use “referential communication” by sending visual and tactile signals to their caretakers in a problem-solving situation where a food item is hidden in a bucket that is accessible only to the caretaker (Malavasi and Huber, 2016). Furthermore, horses can recognise human facial expressions, and an angry face from a human negatively affects how the horse perceives that human (Proops et al., 2018). The way we view horses seems to have moved to a horse welfare concept, which asks for the experience of the horse and her or his psychological, emotional and cognitive wellbeing. Have these new theoretical findings influenced equestrian practices? Or have these views of horses as social actors already been adopted by skilled riders and trainers? These questions will be discussed in article three of this thesis.

In what different ways do we humans view horses? Can we use them for our own pleasure? And how should we understand animal agency? These questions, asked both in theoretical and practical discourses, are discussed in the anthology Equine Cultures in Transition; Ethical questions (2019), recently published within our project. The anthology aims to bring together ethical questions of the new field of human-horse studies. For instance: How can we understand the horse as a social actor and as someone who, akin to a human being, becomes through interspecies relations? By what methods can we give the horse a stronger voice as well as better understand her or his becoming? These questions are raised in direct acknowledgement that the horse is an agential, sensing and relational being; the horse is part of interspecies societies and relations. The most relevant contributions for my
What does previous research tell us about the relationships between rider and horse? Riders often report that they experience a physical as well as emotional connection with their horses, and that rider and horse have a relation of mutual trust and respect (Keaveney, 2008). While Maurstad et al. (2013) suggest that rider and horse intra-act, meaning that horse and human meet and change as a result of their meeting. She sees this intra-action as a way of crossing boundaries between nature and culture, between humans and nonhumans, as well as between the social and natural sciences. Together, horse and human create new natural cultural practices, forged through mutuality and trust. Furthermore, it is suggested that creating a “becoming with” is the ultimate goal for each rider; when the rider thinks about the movements s/he wants the horse to perform, the horse can feel the rider’s movements and reproduce them in his or her body (Despret, 2004; Hagström, 2016). In this way, both human and horse affect each other’s movements.

There are various descriptions about the horses’ role in the interaction between rider and horse. Several authors emphasise that the horse is best understood as a “partner” (Wipper, 2000; Thompson and Nesci, 2013). In this way, the relation between rider and horse is often described as a working relation. Gilbert (2014) claims that rider and horse are capable of working together in a joint action in order to make equestrian sport possible. Birke and Thompson (2018) argue that one can point to several signs that indicate a sense of enjoyment procured by the horse through work. They emphasise, for example, that even if horses are subordinate to human power, they have the possibility for agency and for shaping interspecies social engagements (2018, p. 4). However, horses taking part in competitive sport have little opportunity to give consent that they agree to take part (Dashper, 2016). In order to create a mutual human-horse relationship it is important that the rider is aware that they are dealing with an agent who has the right to protest, such as, for example, if they are in pain or are ill (Birke and Thompson, 2018). Apart from engaging in interspecies relations, in which the horse is recognised as having the right to consent, horses need conditions in which their lives are interesting, are “worth-living”, and within which they can flourish (Birke and Thompson, 2018, p. 125).

However, the horse has also been described as a tool that can be used for humans to fulfil their needs and goals (Smith, 2014). Here, Patton (2003) emphasises that the relation between rider and horse is always asymmetric and embedded in interspecies relations of power, and should thus not be romanticised. To stress that riding is a relation between two equals is, according to Patton, to neglect an incontrovertible fact, namely that riding always involves some exercise of power over the animal. This matches the suggestion from Hagström (2018) that within
equestrian practices the rider is described as the commander while the horse is the obedient participant.

De Giorgio and Schoorl (2014) offer a zooanthropological approach that views the interaction between human and horse as a cognitive process resulting in a reciprocal dialogue between them. In this approach, it is suggested that horses have their own needs, preferences, emotions and mind-sets and that communication between human and horse takes place when both parties are continuously involved in the cognitive experience. In this approach, the goal is a fully egalitarian relation between humans and horses. The implication here is that horses should not be used for equestrian sport. Even if I find some of the ideas associated with this approach interesting, I still believe that it is possible to build a fair and equitable relation between rider and horse during riding.

The embodied relation between rider and horse has been explored by some researchers, suggesting that riding is about the intertwining of the two bodies. The ultimate goal of this communicative process is for the rider to experience the sensation of being “one with the horse” (Keaveney, 2008, p. 449). Horse owners often speak of a feeling of transcendence when being completely “in the moment” with their horse. Game (2001) writes about the “centaur effect” where riders experience that rider and horse become almost an extension of each other. Through training, horse and rider form intimate connections, and it is this that makes it possible for their joint task to be accomplished. In a study by Despret (2004), riders reported that they sometimes even perceive the borders between rider and horse as indistinctive and fuzzy. The centaur feeling is thus highly valued by riders.

In this chapter, I have defined my field of research by presenting some of the theoretical perspectives on how the relation between humans and non-human animals/equines has over time been elaborated. I have given a brief background of how the way we humans view animals has shifted from a perception of animals as “automatons” without abilities to think and feel, to new perspectives that recognise animals as sensing, feeling, and acting beings. This shift has led to a greater sensitivity towards animal welfare concerns, and thus has contributed to significant changes in the way we humans view animals in general. From within these new perspectives, relationships between humans and non-human animals are considered to involve not only the human, but rather both human and animal. Recent studies on the interaction between rider and horse from a human-animal perspective are emerging from different viewpoints and addressing a variety of themes. These include, for instance: the role of the horse as a social actor; the embodied and emotional relation between rider and horse; and how rider and horse cross the boundaries between species. What do these theoretical concepts broaching the relation between human and horse mean to me as a researcher? How do I relate to them? And, indeed, how do I view the relation between human and horse? The latter has been explored in my first article, where I describe the embodied relation
between my own horse and I, and how, for example, I adjust my body as well as my breathing to his, and thus sense both his energy and mood:

We move flesh-to-flesh, our bodies merge and I don’t know where Darwin’s body starts and my ends. Through my boots I feel his legs moving and I perceive his contact with the ground. His legs become like an extension of my legs and I can feel what he feels. His breath moves his chest in and out and I adjust my breath to his. I pick up his emotions and mood by watching the position of his ears and by taking up the energy of his movements.

In summary, then, I experience the interaction with my own horse as a constant process of communication in which we are both embodied subjects that move together in the same rhythm (most of the time) and share a mutual understanding. Our interaction is built on partnership, even if I cannot deny that the relation between my horse and I is always asymmetric, since I decide when to ride and also what activities we are going to take part in. However, I believe that my horse has a say in our interaction; my horse can always choose to resist or withdraw from our common actions.
INTERACTION BETWEEN RIDER, HORSE AND EQUESTRIAN TRAINER
Communication between rider, horse and equestrian trainer

As mentioned in the introduction, the relation between rider, horse and equestrian trainer in the teaching of riding is both complex and challenging. How do riders communicate with their horses during riding? How does the horse contribute to ongoing communication with the rider, and to the rider’s own learning processes? What is the role of the rider, horse and trainer respectively in this multifaceted and interspecies relation? In this chapter, I will attend to how rider and horse communicate through their bodies with special emphasis on equestrian feel. Moreover, I will also discuss some of the previous research on teaching in the context of riding I find to be especially relevant for this thesis.

Communication between rider and horse

Riding is built on tradition and practical knowledge. The rider acquires both these things through practical experience, while at the same time learning kinaesthetically about how to communicate with one’s horse (Birke, 2007; Brandt, 2004). The interaction between rider and horse is principally an embodied relation; the rider uses his or her senses and body language to communicate with the horse. During riding the rider strives to move synchronously and rhythmically with the horse, like two well-choreographed dancers (Engell, 2018). The rider communicates with the horse through physical touch (signs), and most of the communication is dependent on body-to-body interfaces between the horse’s back, sides and mouth and the rider’s seat (seat bones and pubic bone), legs and hands (German National Federation, 1997; von Dietze, 2005), even if there is equipment like saddle and bridle in between the rider and the horse’s bodies. The rider’s physical abilities affect his or her capacity to use these signs. An important part is the rider’s proprioception (i.e. an awareness of her own body’s position). This helps her to feel where the different body parts (for instance legs) are placed in space and time (Meyners et al., 2014). A picture of how the rider positions herself in relation to the horse’s body is considered a useful tool for the rider.
One specific challenge is that the rider constantly operates on a “moving world” – the horse. A rider’s movements on horseback are three dimensional: up and down, side to side and forward and backward. The rider thus needs to adapt to these movements (Meyners et al., 2014). This is similar to a skateboarder who needs to operate and control his or her position and movements on a moving skateboard (Bäckström, 2014, p. 754). In riding, however, this moving body is alive.

What is the role of the horse in the communication between rider and horse? The horse is an active part of the process; the horse uses her or his highly sensitive body to both read the rider’s body language and to communicate with the rider (Despret, 2004). Even if unable to speak vocally, the horse uses her or his body gestures and body language (for instance movements of the mouth, ears and tail, and sometimes also sounds) to show her or his (dis)pleasure during the ride. Moreover, as a living non-human animal with her or his own likes and dislikes, the horse responds differently in accordance with the situation (Weil, 2010; Brandt, 2004; Birke, 2009). For example, the horse can show by his or her own body position and sound (e.g. by snorting), that s/he enjoys being ridden by a certain rider. Since the communication between rider and horse is mainly built on touch, it is dependent on the sensory system in both the rider’s and the horse’s skin. Hearne suggests that to build a good communication with the horse, the rider needs to “start ‘hearing’ the horse’s skin, and in doing so become comprehensible in their own skins to the horse” (2016, chap 4, p. 22). As a result of this interaction, both rider and horse change and adapt to each other’s movements, resulting in a shared practical knowledge (Despret, 2004; Maurstad et al., 2013). However, since the horse is an animal in possession of her or his own mind, the horse can, at least to some extent, chose whether to cooperate with the rider or not.

Rider and horse create a language system together through their bodies (Brandt, 2004). The rider influences the horse through his or her weight, legs and reins. These serve as the means by which the rider communicates her or his wishes to the horse. Such means fall under two categories: natural and unnatural. Natural aids include the rider’s voice, seat, leg and hand, while unnatural comprises anything used to enhance these – a whip, spurs, or gadgets, such as martingales and draw reins, all of which “force” the horse to comply. A crucial part for the rider is to be able to combine or “time” her signs in accordance with the feedback that s/he receives from the horse (German Equestrian Federation, 1997). Most of the communication between rider and horse relies on negative reinforcement, since the rider uses pressure (and pressure release) to teach the horse to respond to the rider’s signals (McLean and Mc Greevy, 2010). There is also a mental connection between rider and horse. Riders can transmit confidence, but equally nervousness, uncertainty, and fear through their bodies (Keaveney, 2008; Hearne, 2016). However, in any communication between human and horse there is always a risk for violence and accidents. Thus good communication is important for the safety of both participants.
There are several factors contributing to the quality of equestrian communication during riding. To interact with the horse requires athletic skills like balance, strength, suppleness, body awareness and body control (Zetterqvist Blokhuis et al., 2008; Meyners, 2004). One general problem is that we humans are often unbalanced, stiff and asymmetrical. This has a negative influence both on the interaction between rider and horse and also on the horse’s health (Meyners, 2004; Engell, 2018).

Communication between rider and horse does not always work perfectly. Instead, relations between human and horse can break down, and thus often involve elements of danger and conflict (Birke and Thompson, 2018). A mismatch between rider and horse can sometimes occur and is said to be caused by an “absence of language”, possibly resulting in an increased risk of injury and bad welfare for rider and horse alike (Savvides, 2012, p. 85). On point of fact of a horse’s sensitive skin, an inexperienced rider who unknowingly gives too many signs at the same time can be very confusing and challenging for the horse (Hearne, 2016). Given that miscommunication between rider and horse does exist, riders in this study have been asked to describe how horses respond (or do not respond) to their aids. And how do riders react when the horse does not respond as they had intended? These questions will be discussed in the second article of this thesis.

David Redmalm (2019) has explored the communication between rider and horse in Swedish riding schools. He discusses the limited opportunity for face-to-face contact between rider and horse during riding. Referring to the moral responsibility to put the other before oneself in a face-to-face meeting with the other, as elaborated by Levinas, Redmalm emphasises that there is a bifocal view of horses at the riding school as both partners in embodied entanglement but also instruments that the rider must learn to control. He suggests that one could consider the whole body of the horse as a “face” and that the relationships between humans and horses at riding schools could be improved by allowing equine faces to emerge.

Rider and horse interaction has been described using different terminology, sometimes as a “conversation” but more often as a “dialogue”. A dialogue is generally characterised as taking place “face to face”, and has been described as a never ending process where it is essential to be open to other people’s interpretation and truths (Gustavsson, 2003). Moreover, a dialogue requires an honest meeting where people treat each other with mutual respect and are open to listen to each other’s point of view. The Jewish thinker Martin Buber (1923) suggests the importance of a dialogic perspective in how we humans relate to each other. He explains that we can either choose to have an I – you relation (so that we are fully present and engaged in the meeting with the other) or an I – it relation (where the other is treated as an object or thing we try to manipulate). I will use Buber’s perspective as an underlying approach when investigating what role the horse is given by riders in this thesis, and how trainers make visible the horse in the training of riders. These issues are discussed in articles three and four.
Equestrian communication has also been studied within the quickly evolving area referred to as *Equitation Science* (ES). It is built on theories of how animals learn (McGreevy and McLean, 2010). ES is promoted as “an objective, evidence-based understanding of the welfare of horses during training and competition by applying valid, quantitative scientific methods that that can identify what training techniques are ineffective or may result in equine suffering” (ISES, 2019). While human-animal studies (HAS) its origins in an interest in interspecies dialogue, ES has its roots in ethology and veterinary science and promotes an evidence-based understanding of horse-rider interactions using mainly quantitative scientific methods. These two traditions can be seen as mirroring two fundamentally different understandings of the role of the horse in equestrian communication. While HAS oriented researchers emphasise the qualities of interspecies relations and the shared experience of rider and horse, researchers oriented towards the ES paradigm instead discuss riding more as the transfer of signals from rider to the horse. Here, horses are seen more as tools responding to human initiatives, rather than as subject interacting with humans. It is interesting to note that this type of research helps to explore many of the taken for granted assumptions that we have about horses, like, for instance, the extent to which a horse’s point of gravity is moved backwards when the horse increases his collection. It has been generally accepted and expounded in equestrian literature that when the horse is ridden in collection, the horse’s point of gravity is moved backwards so that he or she carries more weight on his or her hind legs. However, when scientists evaluated the equilibrium between horses for- and hind legs by using technical measuring devices, it was evident that the change of the horse’s point of gravity was almost non-existent. How do riders describe the communication with their horse? Do riders see their horse as a responder to signals, as assumed by ES, or as an interspecies dialogue, presupposed by the traditions of HAS? Is there a possible conflict between these two views? These questions will be discussed in article two.

It is generally accepted that communication between rider and horse is influenced by the temperament of the horse and the personality of the rider. Horses’ temperaments vary; some horses are more sensitive to a rider’s signals than others (Visser et al., 2008; Axel-Nilsson et al., 2015). Communication between rider and horse is also affected by the personality of both rider and horse, and a perfect “match” has often been described as the rider feeling “as one” with the horse, where only the use of minimal cues are needed in communication (Axel-Nilsson et al., 2015, p.47–48). A good “match” between rider and horse has been reported to be relevant for both performance and safety among show jumping riders (Thompson and Nesci, 2013). This match also influences the teaching of riding, both with regard to training sport rider-horse combinations, as well as the teaching of riding in school environments.

In this dissertation, a special emphasis is placed on investigating the role of the horse in horse and rider interaction. What role is the horse assigned by riders
practicing sport dressage? I will further explore if and how equestrian trainers make visible to their riders the horse’s role during training sessions. These questions will be discussed in articles three and four.

Equestrian feel

A rider needs both technical skills (e.g. how to sit on the horse, how to use the seat, and how to use signals (aids), and equestrian feel (also called equestrian tact) when riding. The communication between rider and horse has been described in many manuals written by skilled and experienced riders and trainers. However, most of these manuals focus on technical descriptions. Even if equestrian feel has been described as a highly valued skill by riders, the emotional part of riding has hitherto received less attention. Feel has however been defined by some authors, in relation to both theory and equestrian practices (Dashper, 2017a, 2016; Brandt, 2004; Game, 2001; Podhajsky, 1965). Feel is considered as strongly connected to the rider’s bodily knowing and to the ability to intuitively and immediately attune to the actions and reactions of the horse. The horse has feelings and emotions of which the rider must take account during the riding experience. Some trainers in this study compared experiencing a good feel with dancing or flying (see article four). It has been suggested that equestrian feel is difficult to learn, and for this very reason, is equally difficult to teach; the “feel” is situated within the person and therefore cannot be easily detected from the outside (Lundesjö-Öhrström, 2013).

In *The Complete Training of Horse and Rider*, the famous trainer Alois Podhajsky (1965) compared equestrian feel with the hearing of the musician. This is similar to the suggestion from Game (2001) that rider and horse come to “inhabit riding through rhythm as a musician inhabits a piece of music” (p. 8). Podhajsky (1965) also writes that “many riders will develop the physical abilities more quickly than the correct feeling, which will take the longest time to develop” (p. 209–210). Podhajsky thus suggests that it takes longer to develop feel compared to acquiring a good riding technique. Dashper (2016) describes feel as “a form of interspecies communication that defies words, and is experienced through two bodies, human and equine, as a sensation of mutual understanding and collaboration” (2016, p. 95–96), and is therefore regarded as something that happens between rider and horse.

Equestrian feel requires that the rider is able to make an individual judgement that is flexible and ethically right in each and every situation. This could be seen as analogous to Aristotle’s description of the *Lesbian rule* (1980). When something is indefinite and underdetermined, it is necessary to use a measure both flexible and adaptable; as Aristotle expresses it, what is needed is a “rule [that] adapts itself to the shape of the stone that is not rigid” (p. 133). Thus, in the case of equestrian feel, there are no general rules. Instead, the rider needs to be able to make a flexible and ethically proper judgement in accordance with each particular situation and for each individual horse.
A previous study has shown that trainers aim to teach feel but often lack the methods to make this explicit to the riders (Lundesjö-Kvart, 2013). Here lies a special challenge: the rider needs to have experienced a certain feeling before s/he is able to understand what feeling to search for. The famous dressage rider and trainer Kyra Kyrklund (1996) emphasises that to be able to find a certain feeling, the trainer must first help the rider to explore what feeling s/he should be searching for. This might be achieved by choosing exercises for a given rider-horse combination that can foster the conditions under which the rider might experience a certain bodily feeling. Kyrklund states: “It is easier to let somebody taste strawberry marmalade compared to trying to explain how it tastes” (Kyrklund, 1996, p. 43). Feel is a personal experience, and for skill levels to be improved the trainer needs to know what the rider is feeling not what they think they should be feeling (Maw, 2012). This is based on the use of open ended questions and answers, for example, asking the rider how, why and what is happening. Such strategies should be used once certain skills are already in place (Maw, 2012).

As noted above, both in Europe, in general, and in Sweden, in particular, the teaching of riding has so far focused on riding technique rather than on equestrian feel; feel is an underdeveloped area in the teaching of riding. Given that feel is described as an essential part of horse-rider communication, and yet is also difficult to learn, one of the main aims of this thesis is to explore this emotional part of riding. Thus, I will explore what role emotions and equestrian feel play in my own riding. How do sport riders describe equestrian feel? And moreover, how do professional trainers see their contribution in cultivating a rider’s feel? These questions will be attended to in articles one, two and four.

Teaching in riding

How do riders learn to ride? In Europe, many riders go to a riding school or a private yard to learn the basics of riding, while others take lessons regularly with their own horses or at riding schools where horses are kept for their customers. Experienced riders often turn to professional trainers or riding teachers to improve their own understanding and performance, together with their horses. In the teaching of horse riding, there is a relationship between rider, horse and equestrian trainer that is both complex and challenging. This relationship has often been described as triangular (Lundesjö-Kvart, 2013) or as three partly overlapping circles (Carlsson, 2016). However, in this thesis, I choose to see it as a challenging puzzle with many different pieces that need to be taken into account, a puzzle that will most likely never be complete. The trainer’s role is crucial when it comes to (i) teaching the rider how to communicate with the horse and (ii) supporting the rider so that s/he can achieve a relationship with the horse that is ideally based on contact and collaboration.
One of the aims of this thesis is to investigate the practical knowledge used by skilled equestrian trainers when teaching riders how to communicate with their horses. As noted above, there is a lack of knowledge on the learning situation during riding lessons, and about the practical knowledge that skilled practitioners (riding teachers and equestrian trainers) use. In this section, I will highlight and discuss some previous research about teaching in riding that I find interesting and relevant for this study. I will also map out the roles of the rider, the horse, and the equestrian trainer respectively in the teaching (and learning) situation.

Teaching in riding involves many different aspects. These include: the personality of the rider; the personality and mood of the horse, and the personality and skill of the trainer (Lundesjö-Kvart, 2013; Dashper, 2016). All three actors within the riding lesson communicate across different spatial, temporal and sensory forms, as well as across species boundaries (Dashper, 2016, p. 92). It is however suggested that teaching in riding has so far focused on riding technique rather than on interspecies communication. Still marked by military traditions, teaching practices in riding have been criticised for being old fashioned (Lundesjö-Kvart, 2013). Communication between riding teacher and rider is often lacking and the learning situation is far from optimal. It has thus been suggested that riding teachers need more education in pedagogy and social skills (Thorell, 2018).

In relation to my research theme, I find the thesis What does it mean to teach riding? A snapshot on contemporary practices in England and Western Australia by Susan Maw (2012) of particular interest. It is one of the only texts that deals with the challenge of teaching in riding. Maw (2012) emphasises that teaching practice is often based on the trainer’s own competition riding record, and trainers thus create their own method by seeking to replicate their own riding practice. This means that teaching is influenced mainly by the trainers own riding and competing and is often reflective of how they themselves have been taught, rather than being based on teaching and learning theories. Thus, their personal choices have a big impact on both lesson-content and how they train their riders. I am interested in what systems and strategies Swedish and Polish trainers use in their teaching of riding.

The horse plays an active role in the rider’s learning, and this aspect has started to gain more attention in recent studies. Horses take part in the making of knowledge between rider and horse, where rider and horse draw on shared bodily knowledge (Birke and Thompson, 2018, p. 132). Maw (2012) points out that riders construct meaning from the sensory input they receive from the horse, and this feedback is important for the rider’s own learning process. To “listen” to the horse and to be able to interpret the signs from the horse are considered key factors in riding (Dashper, 2017b; Maw, 2012). The horse’s perspective is thus essential for a fruitful communication between horse and rider. In this study, I am interested in exploring if trainers manage to make visible to their riders the role of the horse, and thus if the perspective of the horse is taken into account in the process of teaching how to ride.
The horse is also, in most cases, attentive to the trainer. For example, the trainer uses her or his voice to either calm or praise the horse, or, even, by talking in the rhythm of the horse’s movements to help both rider and horse move in synchronicity (Lundgren, 2017). By watching the actions and reactions of the horse, the trainer interprets how the rider has apprehended and followed her or his instructions.

In a recent study, Charlotte Lundgren (2019) has explored how horse welfare is influenced by equipages’ every day training sessions in dressage supervised by an equestrian trainer. She found that trainers depart from an understanding of the horse as a subject with certain needs (cognitive, emotional, and physical), and that riders themselves must learn to consider this in the training situation (p. 217). Lundgren explains that equine welfare is dependent on the ethics-in-practices that emerge in local, contextualised interactions between horse, rider and trainer. Moreover, she suggests that equestrian federations, equestrian scholars as well as sport dressage practitioners need to engage in constructive discussions of how training related welfare for horses can be safeguarded in sports dressage.

In Sweden, the traditional focus for a riding teacher’s education has been on how to teach riders in groups. Previous research shows that riding teachers are still strongly affected by military norms, and that these professionals even help to preserve and maintain these norms (Thorell et al., 2016). Command-oriented methods, where the trainer uses one-way communication to transfer his or her knowledge to the rider, still predominate in the teaching of riding. Teaching in riding has thus not been influenced by contemporary developments and there is for instance little attention on what is going on between each rider-horse combination (Thorell and Hedenborg, 2015; Lundesjö Kvart, 2013). Neither is there time for riders to reflect on their learning nor, during the lesson, is it possible for riders to take responsibility for both their own learning process and the horse’s actions.

Susanne Lundesjö-Kvart (2019) has explored how riding teachers instruct their riders when teaching rider-horse combinations in group lessons at riding schools. She points to the special challenge that the riding teacher faces when giving instructions in a mobile situation, suggesting that this requires him or her to identify the exact moment for giving the instruction, when precisely the horse is able to perform the desired movement. The timing of the riding teachers’ instructions is of great importance since s/he needs to time his or her instructions in relation to the horses’ continuous reactions and movements. This is particularly demanding when teaching groups of riders.

Equestrian trainers are often looked upon as being the riders “eyes on the ground”; the overall picture to which the trainer has access is an important final stage of the competition preparation in sports dressage (Wolfram, 2015; Maw, 2012). Trainers are also seen as “experts”, owing to their practical experience of handling horses in different situations. Dashper (2016) suggests that the trainer “enters the communicative milieu and tries to bridge the gap between knowing what to do, feeling what is happening, communicating between horse and rider, and
producing a visually appealing performance often with the goal of sporting competition” (2016, p. 89). As the role of mediator between rider and horse, the trainer needs good knowledge about both how humans as well as horses function (both physically and mentally) and how they learn. Trainers also need to be able to contribute to the development of a rider’s technical skills (e.g. how to use a good seat, and how to use different signals). Furthermore, equestrian trainers also need to be able to teach riders to time their aids in accordance with the horse, and thus to develop equestrian feel.

Is it possible for equestrian trainers to contribute to the development of a rider’s equestrian feel? And, in case it is possible, how might this be done? Damasio (2013) emphasises that it is possible to feel a person’s body motions when watching the other person perform a specific movement. Akinleye (2017), a dance choreographer, defines “kinaesthetic empathy” as being occasionally experienced by the audience when watching a person dance. She writes that “the persons who watches dancing does none of the physical work themselves but in perceiving the performance they experience the rhythm of it as though it were in their own body” (p. 1). In the teaching of skateboarding, it has been suggested that coaches recall their own bodily knowing when showing pupils visually how to perform specific movements (Bäckström, 2014). There is however a big difference between teaching skateboarding and riding, since the latter involves communication with another living being that reacts different every time s/he is ridden.

Is it important that the trainer has felt a certain sensation of riding in her own body in order to teach equestrian feel? Nussbaum (2001, p. 149) suggests that the fact that we label our emotions alters the emotions we can have. By putting words on our emotions, we also organise them and sharpen the distinctions between them. Is it possible for equestrian trainers to make the emotional part of riding explicit to their riders? This question will be discussed in article four.

As mentioned in the introduction, the practice of horse riding has been described in many manuals written by skilled and experienced riders. West studied a trainer in the discipline of “Classical Dressage” and she suggests that the trainer could be described as an expert or “knowledge guardian” who possesses “culturally embedded knowledge about riding that has been passed on through generations through apprenticeship” (2012, p. 242). She points to the fact that equestrian sport has a strong culture as well as traditions and habits that have been shaped through the long history of riding practices. However, there is a risk that these strong traditions, old habits and taken for granted assumptions end up not being questioned, and result in the reproduction of questionable and ethically dubious actions.

In summary, teaching in riding is still influenced by military traditions. It has been shown that the perspective of the horse as a thinking and feeling individual, with her or his own will and experiences, has received little attention in the teaching of riding so far. Bearing in mind that the subjectivity of the horse is of growing interest both in theory and practice, I will investigate if the perspective of the horse
is paid attention to in the contemporary teaching of equestrian sport. This topic will be the scope of articles three and four.
Theoretical framework

This thesis operates within the research areas of practical knowledge and human-animal/equine studies. Theories of practical knowledge have thus been used to investigate how different kinds of knowledges are interconnected in riders’ and experienced trainers’ practical skills, and how the relation between rider, horse and trainer is constituted in equestrian practice. I draw mainly on the work of Aristotle (1980) and his division between different kinds of knowledges. Aristotle’s philosophy has been particularly useful as a point of departure for practical knowledge, generally, and also for this thesis, specifically. My interpretation of Aristotle has been derived from the direct translation of book VI of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, written around 330 BC. I have also drawn on a variety of other perspectives in the four articles compiled here, and so I will also turn to the specific ideas and theories I find most useful for each of the respective articles, e.g. Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Molander, and Schön. Both Dewey and Schön belong to the pragmatic tradition, according to which knowledge is built into a person’s actions. I have also drawn on music- and dance theory. Here, some interesting analogies with the act of riding can be articulated, especially with respect to embodiment, rhythm and feel (Akinleye, 2017; Åberg, 2008). The third article, which deals with how riders experience the role of their horse, builds on theories derived from posthumanism, while the fourth article is situated in practical knowledge and pedagogy. In this chapter, I will present these theories, and explain how they will be used in relation to my empirical work to fulfil the aims of the thesis, the overarching purpose of which is to gain better insight in how to understand the practical knowledge used by skilled riders and equestrian trainers.

As elaborated in an earlier chapter, this thesis is based on the assumption that riding is itself predicated on practical knowledge or knowledge-in-action that the rider acquires through practical experience. In *The tacit dimension*, Michael Polanyi argues that practical knowledge is built on “tacit knowledge” or “tacit knowing”, indicating that “we can know more than we can say”; we have much embodied knowledge that cannot (in most cases) be entirely put into words (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). A skilled person does not need to articulate what s/he is doing. Instead, it is demonstrated in the practical action. Such knowledge is thus implicit rather than
explicit, it is situated in the body rather than in a person’s theoretical thinking. There are broadly two different versions of tacit knowledge. The first is developed from the work of Wittgenstein, which centres on what is possible, and not possible to say (but is nonetheless possible to configure). This excess of the sayable is realised by dialogic seminars between researchers, professionals, authors and artists. The second version of tacit knowledge is brought explored by Polanyi. He suggests a distinction between focal and background knowledge (Gustavsson, 2000). Wittgenstein’s version of tacit knowledge produces a division between different activities and science. This is not the case with Polanyi, for whom tacit knowledge as focus and background are equally applicable to science and practical professions. For the purposes of this thesis, Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowledge will be employed. Tacit knowledge (or knowing) is common to all kinds of practical professions, in arts and in sport, and is transferred mainly through: (i) models (from master to apprentice); (ii) practice, and (iii) personal experience (Molander, 2015).

The practical knowledge of riding is to a large extent “tacit”. Even if I know how to communicate with my horse, it is impossible to verbally explain the embodied and intuitive knowledge I use while riding. This is also the reason why riding is difficult to learn and poses problems for teaching. In *The Practice of Knowing and Knowing in Practices*, Bengt Molander (2015) distinguishes between three different “senses” of tacit knowing: one is tacit knowledge that cannot be expressed in words (explaining exactly how to perform a skill); the second is tacitly presupposed or implicit (learned for instance by growing up in a certain culture); the third form of tacit knowledge is either silent or has never acquired a voice. Thus tacit knowledge about handling a young horse or the embodied feeling of performing a perfect pirouette together with one’s horse are examples of the first two senses. While to think about who and what we are when we are together with our horses might be tacit knowledge of the third kind, that is, silent and unarticulated among riders. Gilbert Ryle (1949) suggests that tacit knowing includes both intellectual and practical kinds of knowing, both knowing what and knowing how. However, never is one present without the other. As a researcher, I am particularly interested in investigating how riders describe and understand the “tacit” knowing of how to communicate with their horse during riding. This will be discussed in articles two and three.

Making an experience

Practical knowledge is considered to be learned mainly by experience. When researching the praxis of horse riding, I have found the theories of John Dewey (1916, 1910) particularly useful. In *Democracy and education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, Dewey suggests that learning occurs when we discover the connection between what we do and the consequences that follow from our actions (1916, p. 189). Thinking appears when a person first experiences a problem, then observes the terms of the problem. The aim is then to examine and rationally work on a conclusion,
finally trying it out empirically in the “real world”. When the rider gives a sign to her horse, she needs to be attentive to the horse’s reactions, and from this she can try out different actions. Dewey (1910) suggests that a person’s experiences influences his or her process of thinking. He defines reflected thought as “active, persistent, and careful considering of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (pp. 6-7). Reflection is thus different from thoughts we accept without any grounds. It has been suggested that learning how to ride requires experience and reflection. In this thesis, I aim to explore what place reflection has in the rider’s understanding of how to interact with the horse. This will be discussed in article one.

Tensions between theory and practice

The rider learns how to ride predominantly by riding, but there is also a need for the rider to have an intellectual understanding of what s/he performs. An educated horse has also acquired some kind of practical knowledge, and together, rider and horse thus develop a shared practical knowledge while riding. What kind of knowledge is needed to become a good rider? Or, for that matter, a good riding teacher or equestrian trainer? As earlier pointed out in this thesis, there exists a tension between theory and practice in practical knowledge. Generally speaking, theory is thinking while practice is the doing. However, there is also a division between academic theories and practices. Since practical knowledge is used to raise awareness of professionals’ own praxis, how to create a dialogue between practice and scientific knowledge is a key theme in the Centre of Studies in Practical Knowledge at Södertörn University (Hjertström Lappalainen, 2015).

Already in 1793, Immanuel Kant famously spoke of the difference between theory and practice (or experience) in the following way: “Experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play”. He suggested that there is a subject/object split, with this split being a vital part of our nature. Kant’s ideas have been discussed and interpreted by different thinkers throughout the years. In horseback riding, the rider needs for instance some basic theoretical knowledge about horses’ behaviour and how horses move in different gaits. At the same time s/he is also required to follow the horse’s movements and to adapt her or his signs to the reactions of the horse in practice. What could be the implication of this tension between theory and practice in learning how to ride a horse?

Aristotle (1980) was the first to distinguish between theoretical and practical knowledge. The first kind of knowledge is defined as episteme, and concerns knowing why. It is thus related to scientific knowledge (Aristotle, 1980). Such knowledge is unchangeable and thus cannot be otherwise, like for instance the footfalls and phases of a horse’s gaits. The second is techne or art, denoting technical knowing, that is, knowing how to make things or how to act to achieve a certain goal. Techne is realised by poiesis, (making or production), and is thus always related to practical
application. In riding, this is realised by the rider being able to perform a certain
dressage or to jump a course together with his or her horse. The prior knowledge
involved in techne cannot be called theoretical since it is acquired through experi-
ence. While the third, phronesis or practical wisdom, is the moral disposition to act
wisely and prudently (with practical common sense). It is, according to Aristotle, “a
reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regards to human goods” (Aristotle,

Phronesis is defined as a combination of intellectual and moral virtue that guides
us when we face challenges that need to be dealt with “on the spot” (Dorseth, 2016,
p. 191). It is intuitive and embodied and guide us when we decide how and also
when to act in a particular situation with a particular individual. It is practical and
learned by experience. Aristotle also defined the form of action distinctive to
phronesis as praxis or “doing” action, involving practical reasoning of what is wise
and proper to do in a given situation (Dorseth, 2016), e.g. how to act in a particular
situation with an individual horse. While techne is the technical skill of how to make
something, and aim at a certain goal, the good action in itself is the goal of phronesis
(Dorseth, 2016; Aristotle, 1980). According to Aristotle (1980), practical wisdom is
not concerned with universals only, it is practical and thus concerned with
particulars (p.146). It is intuitive reason combined with scientific knowledge, and is
thus the highest form of practical knowledge (p. 145).

What happens if we look at riding through Aristotle’s (1980) concept of phro-
nesis (or practical wisdom), defined as what guides us to make the right decision in
each particular situation? And moreover, what is the possible relationship between
phronesis and equestrian feel? This question will be discussed in the fourth article of
this thesis.

In Truth and Method, the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004)
delineates how phronesis differs both from both technical knowledge (techne) and
theoretical knowledge (episteme): Techne can be learned and can also be forgotten,
but in contrast we do not learn phronesis nor can we forget it since we are always
already in the situation of having to act. Thus, we must already be able to possess
and apply practical wisdom (Gadamer, 2004, p. 314). As Gadamer stresses:

It is obvious that man is not at his own disposal in the same way that the craftsman’s
material is at his disposal. Clearly, he cannot make himself in the same way that he can
make something else. Thus, it will have to be another kind of knowledge that he has of
himself in his moral being, a knowledge that is distinct from the knowledge that guides
the making of something. Aristotle captures this difference in a bold and unique way
when he calls this kind of knowledge self-knowledge—i.e. knowledge for oneself. This
distinguishes the self-knowledge of moral consciousness from theoretical knowledge in
a way that seems immediately evident. But it also distinguishes it from technical
knowledge, and to make this double distinction (Gadamer, 2004, p. 314).

Building on the theories of Aristotle, Gadamer (2004) also outlines his view of the
difference between theoretical knowledge and moral knowledge (phronesis) by
remarking that “knowledge that cannot be applied to the concrete situation remains meaningless and even risks obscuring what the situation calls for” (p. 310). Furthermore, Gadamer states that moral knowledge is not “objective knowledge” since the knower is directly confronted with what he sees. The task of making a moral decision is to see what is right within the situation, and to act by choosing the right means. In contrast, objective knowledge is knowledge that is unchangeable and thus cannot be otherwise. Phronesis is the knowledge and understanding in relation to “what has to be done” (Dorseth, 2016, p. 192). We do not know how we will act until we are there, meaning that we are unable to prepare for all contingencies. Thus, in the case of horse riding, an ethical disposition is already included in the rider’s action.

Molander argues that practical action, in contrast to theoretical knowledge, does not allow for any insecurity. He states that “there are many theories but only one practice” (2015, p. 21). Thus, practical knowledge is definitive and palpable, and the practitioner needs to take a stance and decide what to do. Doing is thus unitary, irrevocable and definitive, and there is no way back.

It has been shown in previous studies that teaching in riding focuses mainly on techne – on the technical part where riders are taught how to sit on the horse and how to use their aids (Lundesjö-Kvart, 2013; Maw, 2012). Episteme or theoretical knowing about riding would, on the other hand, entail how, for example, the horse functions biomechanically and the way horses learn is often not included in the practical training of riders. Finally, phronesis is the kind of practical wisdom that guides the rider when deciding how to act in accordance with the actions and reactions of the horse, and when riding different horses. It also includes a moral consideration of how to act in a way that is good for the horse. In the teaching of riding, phronesis guides the trainer in what is wise and proper to do in a given situation, e.g. when a rider or horse reacts in an unexpected way. I have reason to believe that a combination of the three approaches to knowledge is needed to become a skilled rider or equestrian trainer, and that, moreover, they are hard to distinguish when concretely studying equestrian practice.

What could for instance be the implications of how theoretical knowledge and practice are connected in riding? Alois Podhajsky (1965), one of the most prestigious equestrian trainers in the 20th century, advances his view on the matter, stating:

Theory without practice is of little value, whereas practice is the proof of theory. Theory is the knowledge, practice the ability (p. 20).

Interestingly, Podhajsky (1965) also suggests that a self-taught person can never become more than a “workman”, since riding can only develop to the realm of an art when theory and practice are combined. He thus contends that theoretical knowledge needs to be included in the teaching of riders. Furthermore, Podhajsky (1965) stresses that in the course of the centuries, several riding masters of the past have studied thoroughly the principals of practicing riding and have accumulated
experiences that will serve as instructions for the riders in contemporary society, and “prevent them from wasting their time with unnecessary experiments” (p. 30). The principles of practical riding can be written down, but there is no definite rule regarding how they might be put into practice. Even a well-trained horse can behave in unexpected ways, and there are thus no rigid rules for how to respond to any difficulty that may appear. Even if it is important for a rider to study the principles of riding, this is insufficient if one is to become a skilled rider. As suggested by Dewey (1910), the rider needs to experiment, and learning occurs when s/he discovers the connection between what s/he is doing and the consequences following from one’s actions, e.g. a rider’s reflections on how the horse reacts after s/he has used and combined different aids. I am here interested in the relation between theory and practice in the context of learning how to ride, and this will be further explored in this thesis.

As described above, I will turn to the different kinds of knowledges as defined by Aristotle (1980) to investigate the practical knowledge of skilled riders and equestrian trainers. Aristotle’s definition of *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis* will thus be used as theoretical tools, in order to try to understand the practical knowledge used by skilled riders and equestrian trainers. These issues will be further discussed in articles one, three and four.

**Embodied knowing**

Since riding involves body-to-body contact between rider and horse, I have turned to the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (2012), first published in 1945, Merleau-Ponty states that body and mind are inseparable. The body is the “vehicle” of being in the world, and a tacit bodily knowing is the basis of our practical experiences. He suggests that “I am not in front of my body, I am in my body, or rather I am my body”, as well as “I am conscious of the world by means of my body” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 84). Based on these claims, what is clear is that, for Merleau-Ponty, our bodies and consciousness are intimately connected in the learning of practical skills, the practitioner first needs to learn the “body schema” of movements needed to perform a certain skill (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). When learning a movement, it is the body that “catches and understands” the movement, and thus the movement needs to be incorporated in the human’s body (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 144). Merleau-Ponty speaks also of the importance of the body in the formation of habits: “The body has understood and the habit has been acquired when the body allows itself to be penetrated by a new signification, when it has assimilated a new meaningful core” (2012, p. 148). Thus, both riding and being around horses is an embodied way of knowing; the rider’s body needs to learn and inhabit different movements. However, in the interaction between rider and horse, there are two lived bodies, rider and horse, that need to inhabit and share a mutual motion and a mutual understanding.
In *The Thinking Hand*, Juhani Pallasmaa (2009) follows the ideas of Merleau-Ponty, remarking that a dancer or soccer player “thinks” with their body and leg. Our entire body thus participates in all processes of thinking. In riding, the rider’s experience is situated in her or his body and s/he thus “thinks” and reacts with the body during riding. According to Molander (2015), the body, culture and action could be seen as our centre for and “carrier” of knowledge, and thus, on this account, *techne* and *phronesis* are both examples of embodied knowledges. In this connection, I am interested in exploring how riders experience the means of their bodies in communication with their horses. And how do I use my own body when interacting with my horse during a ride? These questions will be explored in the first two articles of this thesis.

In *Spelrum* (*in English: Room for playing*), Swedish music teacher Sven Åberg (2008) explores the teaching of music. Here I find many interesting similarities with the teaching of riding, and these will be further explored by me. Åberg suggests that teaching music is built up by a combination of the student’s inner picture and the physical experience of “doing” when playing an instrument. He claims that a teacher in music develops a way of teaching based on his or her own personality, and that practical knowledge is demonstrated through a constant series of reflections on her or his own practice. The music teacher often offers instruction to make something happen, and then takes “a step back” to reflect over what had just happened. Moreover, Åberg (2008) suggests that metaphors and verbal pictures can be useful in a teacher’s effort to transmit a certain feeling to the student. It has been suggested that metaphors could be used also in the teaching of riding, in order to promote a rider’s feel (Swift, 1985). Even if learning to play an instrument is an embodied process, which involves both perception and action, there is a big difference between playing an instrument and riding a horse. As a large animal and a subject in her or his own right, a horse can at any moment flee from the first sign of danger (Keaveney, 2008). An instrument, on the other hand, reacts in the same way every time it is used.

**Intuition and reflection-in-action**

The ability to act intuitively is often mentioned when describing somebody that has a practical skill in his or her field. Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus (1980) describe, in their model of skill acquisition, how practical skills are developed in five steps, from novice to expert. They distinguish between a beginner that learns how to perform specific manoeuvres by following a manual or clear instructions, while an expert is defined as a person “whose skill has become so much part of him that he needs to be no more aware of it than he is of his own body” (p. 30). An expert is thus defined as a committed person that reacts intuitively in different situation. S/he is able to find new and innovating ways of solving upcoming tasks, and this action also involves moments of reflection. An experienced driver can for instance listen to music or let
his or her thoughts wander around in his or her head without ceasing to be attentive
to what is happening on the road.

In riding, a beginner starts by learning how to sit on the horse and how to start,
stop and turn following the riding teacher’s instructions. In the second step, s/he
gradually learns to communicate with the horse by adapting his or her signs in
accordance with the reactions of the horse. Nonetheless, s/he is still in need of sup-
port from the riding teacher. In the third step (competence) the rider is able to
independently plan and adapt a training session to the actions and reactions of the
individual horse. In the fourth step, the rider can train a particular horse and also
decide when it is time to increase what work and exercises are demanded from the
horse depending on the horse’s age and prior skills. Finally, in the fifth and last step,
the “expert”, the rider is able to more or less automatically adjust her or his body to
each individual horse so that rider and horse can “merge” together as one body. It is
suggested that stages four and five both incorporate the practitioner reflecting over
his or her actions (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1980). One can, of course, question if
learning any practical skill really consists in following such rigid steps.

Swedish philosopher Hans Larsson (1997) argues that acting intuitively origi-
nates from a feeling and impulse rather than a thought. When acting intuitively, we
are able to take all variables into account at the same moment and find out how
each one is connected to the other while taking a stance. This ability has also been
called “seeing with the inner eye”. Thus, Larsson (1997) suggests that when acting
intuitively, consciousness, feeling and thought reinforce each other in the process of
knowledge building. This is also in line with Nussbaum’s (2001) theories about
intuition. These various theories concerning the concept of intuition are of rele-
vance for this study; they will provide me with valuable tools when trying to shed
light on how intuition is used by skilled riders and equestrian trainers. These topics
will be discussed primarily in article one and four.

In The Reflective Practitioner – How Professionals Think in Action, Donald Schön
(1983) investigates how skilled practitioners in areas like physiotherapy and town
planning act. He suggests that a skilled practitioner exhibits a kind of knowledge-in-
action that is demonstrated in the “doing” in different situations. According to
Schön (1983), the practitioner often acts without being able to verbally explain what
s/he is doing. When my horse for instance shies for something or stops cantering
without me giving a signal to slow down, I react intuitively “on the spot”. This hap-
pens automatically, more or less without reflection. Schön (1983) contends that
when the competent practitioner is confronted with a unique and uncertain situ-
ation, s/he is able to cope by reflecting on his or her intuitive knowing in the midst of
the action. He calls this reflection-in-practice and claims that a skilled practitioner
develops a repertoire of expectations, images and techniques. S/he learns what to
look for and how to respond to what s/he finds, and therefore tends to deal with
situations tacitly, spontaneously and automatically (Schön, 1983). The practitioner
uses his or her reflection-in-action to cope with challenging or divergent situations
of practice, a phenomenon that resembles what it means to act intuitively, according to Larsson (1997). However, when a rider or horse reacts in an unexpected way, the trainer needs to change her or his instructions and to adapt to the new situation. After the event, practitioners sometimes also reflect-on-action to evaluate her or his actions (Schön, 1983). I find Schön’s ideas useful for identifying how skilled practitioners act and reflect, and this will be further explored in the fourth article of this thesis. I however believe that this is different for a new rider; s/he is preoccupied with finding out how to use his or her body and how to communicate with the horse.

In contrast, to Schön’s concept of reflection-in-action, Molander (2015) emphasises that to be able to reflect, it is necessary to take one step back in order to get a better perspective on the situation. This is not possible when one is fully occupied in the action. However, there might be time for the trainer to take a short moment to reflect before acting.

In this chapter, I have presented the theories that will be used as theoretical tools to describe and analyse the interaction and practical knowledge between rider, horse and equestrian trainer in sports dressage with special emphasis on embodied and implicit knowledge.
Materials and methods

In this chapter, I will present the methodological disposition and the material used in the thesis. This includes the viewpoints adopted for the study as a whole, the research methods employed and a description of the data corpus. As part of this, I will reflect on the very methods used as well as present how the analyses were accomplished. At this chapter’s end, I shall address the ethical considerations concerning the study.

This thesis is to be considered an ethnographic study. Ethnography is an especially fecund research orientation, providing the researcher with the possibility of systematically studying and exploring cultural phenomena. As has already been discussed in earlier chapters, in this study, I aim to explore the interaction between rider, horse and trainer in an educational setting. Traditionally, ethnography requires that the researcher spend a longer time in the environment. Certainly, I have visited each of the training premises a few times to carry out the video recordings and interviews, of added significance, though, is that I have spent my whole life in the equestrian world; my experiences from several different equestrian practises have been harnessed during my work with this thesis. Ethnography requires a self-reflective approach (Schmidt, 2013), and I have sought to adopt throughout the research process an ethos of self-critical awareness. In this section, I will make explicate my choice of theories and methods, and describe them.

The approach to my empirical material is twofold. In my work, I first describe, interpret, and analyse, what is happening between rider and horse as the riding is underway, using my own experiences of how to communicate with my horse as further empirical material. Secondly, I investigate how riders describe and understand their own communication with their horses using in-depth interviews and video recordings of training sessions. This part will also contain in-depth interviews with professional equestrian trainers, in order to try to unfold what methods they use both to support and to facilitate a rider’s communication with her or his horse.

In order to answer the research questions posed, a body of empirical material has been gathered from both Sweden and Poland. This study’s focus is on equestrian sport, and particularly on the practice of sports dressage. The main aim is to describe and analyse the interplay between rider, trainer and horse focusing on
exploring the lived experience of these riders and trainers, as well as to consider the types of practical knowledge each draws upon. A further aim is to develop some theories of practical knowledge in the area of teaching riding, and thus contribute to theorising the relation between riders, horse and trainer.

During the study, I have attended a number of clinics with skilled trainers and have performed informal discussions about the communication between rider and horse with riders of different levels of competence, as well as with professional trainers. Moreover, I have also given some clinics and courses of my own for riders at various levels. This ensured that at all times of the research process a connection was maintained between the practical knowledge of riding and training riders and the theoretical concepts that I bring to bear in interpreting situated practical knowledges, as well as between my own role as a practitioner and a researcher.

The advantage of using video recording in combination with in-depth interviews is the possibility this affords to “go back” to particular events and incidences and look at the video recordings as well as to listen to audio recorded interviews on multiple occasions, in case a nuance or detail was missed. As a researcher, it provides a good overview and detailed documentation of what happened in the practical training sessions. A further benefit is how, on multiple returns to the recorded material, new questions can be posed while parts of the existing material are open to revisiting and reinterpretation as new things come to light. Furthermore, the combination of interviews and video recordings gives the researcher the possibility of examining any discrepancies between what the respondents are saying and how they act in practice.

My regret is that I only visited each stable a few times. If I had conducted observations for a longer period, and filmed more training sessions with each equipage, more knowledge and a broader view of the field studied might have been obtained. Video recording is however itself time consuming, and I feel I did as much as possible in the time available to me.

During my field studies, I was surprised by how similar the training sessions in sports dressage were organised and carried out between different training centres and, for that matter, between training centres in Sweden and Poland. Given the significant differences between the two countries in terms of history and culture, I was expecting a greater degree of disparity. Even if unable to understand the Polish language, I was able to follow most of the instructions after having watched a few training sessions performed in Polish. I observed the rider-horse combinations, listened to the trainer’s comments and instructions, and noted what happened in the actions of the equipages. The fact that there were some profound overlaps and resonances between the two countries indicates the strong international culture of training in sports dressage that presently exists, along with the strength of the traditions that broadly define discipline of equestrian sport. Riders in both countries also appeared to resemble one another, both in terms of appearance and behaviour. Even if riders varied in age and experiences, they had similar ambitions and goals, as well as similar ways of communicating and relating to their horses. I had the
same feeling of familiarity when sitting in the tack rooms interviewing riders in Sweden and Poland; the differences were not as significant as I had expected.

Article 1

In this article, autoethnography was used to systematically describe and express the interspecies relations between rider and horse, focusing on a rider’s feelings and how a rider experiences his or her own, as well as his or her horse’s, bodies and minds. To this end, I turned my own experience as a rider into a topic of investigation. The autoethnographic method is combined with a methodological approach of an experienced-based research method applied at the Centre of Studies in Practical knowledge at Södertörn University, closely related to autoethnography. It builds on the use of concrete narrative experiences written from a first person perspective. The experiences are investigated and then tied to abstract reasoning and theories that seek to complement the professional’s reflections by making their experienced based knowledge more visible. The professionals use an active and critical approach to their own practice (Alsterdal, 2016, p. 402–403). The entire process can be imagined as a spiral or loop, where there is a continual interplay between concrete experiences and abstract reasoning.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method in which the researcher seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experiences (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). According to Cooper et al., (2017), autoethnographies fit within reflexive ethnography. It contains rich narratives that evoke emotion from the reader and should involve a level of critical self-reflexivity. It is an analytic approach and form of writing that explicitly connects a researcher’s lived experiences and perspectives to the social and cultural world in which they exist. It is suggested that autoethnographies afford the possibility of exploring some of the complexities, contradictions and gaps in knowledge and understanding about others as well as about ourselves (Ellis, 2004). This method has gained in prominence during the last two decades in social research. It has been used, for example, in sport studies (Cooper et al., 2017) and in health care (Chang, 2016). Dashper (2013) describes the complex interaction between gender-and sporting identity in an autoethnographic article using her own experiences from a horse-riding injury.

Theoretical concepts from the field of practical knowledge have been used to explore the praxis of horse riding from the “inside”, using my own experiences from many years of riding and teaching rider-horse combinations.

The original idea was to describe my experience as a riding teacher and to focus on the relation between rider, horse and trainer. After a few attempts, I realised that this triangular interaction was too difficult to describe since so many different factors are involved. Instead, I decided to start by exploring my own personal experience of riding my horse Darwin, and how I experience my communicative
relation with my horse. I found it necessary to “take one step back”, starting from my experiences as a rider rather than as a riding teacher.

When collecting my material, I recorded my own description of actions, feelings and reflections during riding. For this purpose, I used a small microphone and a Dictaphone, and immediately afterwards wrote down my experiences, supported by the recording. Using an autoethnographic approach has hopefully contributed to a better understanding of myself and “the other” – my horse, thus helping me to bridge the gap between the theory and the practice of equestrianism.

I believe that autoethnography and narratives, which describe and express personal relations between riders and horses, and which focus more on feelings and on how riders experience their own as well as the horses’ bodies and minds, are themselves useful pedagogic tools, complementing general instruction manuals that focus exclusively on the technical part of riding.

It has also been suggested that autoethnography is challenging, both in terms of crafting the stories and reflecting on personal experiences. Such a process can be at once therapeutic and unsettling, since authors need to look deeper into themselves, their thoughts, actions and relationships (Dashper, 2013). In exploring different aspects of my own relationship to my horse while riding was often revelatory, opening up for a deeper relation between my horse and I. As a researcher, I have tried my best to give my horse a voice, and to include also the riding experience from my horse’s point of view. The obvious problem here, of course, is that horses are unable to speak with words and thus have no voice of their own. Even if horses and humans are both mammals, and thus share constitutions, horses function differently and, as suggested by Keaveney (2008), would think differently from humans. Haraway (2008) claims that the posthuman condition “urges us to think critically and creatively about who we are and what we are in the process of becoming” [in relation with animals]. As emphasised by Birke (2009), animals cannot report back to us about how they experience different things, and so it is impossible for me as a researcher to “speak” for the horse. Here it is a matter of being careful and circumspect regarding my own interpretations of what the horse thinks and feels when I attempt to describe and interpret our interspecies interaction. Nonetheless, we can attempt to try our best to give the horse a voice. I hope that, in some modest way, I have explored such possibilities in my autoethnographic article (article one).

**Articles 2, 3 and 4**

In articles two, three and four, I have gathered a body of empirical material consisting of video recordings of training sessions and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with riders as well as trainers. In studies of practical knowledge, qualitative interviews and observations are regularly used. In these three articles, the communication between rider, horse and trainer is thus investigated from the “outside”. However, even if these
articles are primarily based on an outside perspective, I have again used my own experiences from riding and from teaching how to ride as a supplementary layer of empirical material. Articles two and three in this thesis are built on data used to investigate how riders express themselves about their communicative relationship with their own horse during riding. Article two includes interviews with Swedish riders, while interviews with both Polish and Swedish riders are analysed in article three. The aim of both articles is to gain an in-depth understanding of how riders view and understand the communication between themselves and their horse in sports dressage. However, while the second article focuses on how the riders describe the communication between themselves and their horse, the third article explores and analyses how riders view the role of their horses.

The fourth article in this thesis aims to investigate how equestrian trainers use their practical knowledge to support and improve communication between rider and horse. My aim here has also been to investigate whether there are any national and/or cultural differences related to the practice of rider-horse training in sports dressage. The study was originally designed as a comparative study between trainers from Sweden and Poland, but as no clear differences were found between the two groups of riders, the comparative aspect has been included only in the third article and otherwise has been omitted. Since all three articles are closely connected, the methodology will be described in a way that applies to all of them.

Selection

Nine professional trainers (five Swedish and four Polish) were invited to take part in the study. All trainers were educated either as riding teachers or as sport dressage trainers, in accordance with the educational systems of the Swedish and Polish Equestrian Federations, and all participants had at least ten years of experience of teaching rider-horse combinations. Firstly, I selected five Swedish trainers with different backgrounds and education. All trainers selected were unfamiliar to me. The goal was to elicit different perspectives rather than trying to find a consensus or a general view of teaching in riding. Two trainers first agreed to participate but later withdrew due to a lack of time. They were later replaced by two others. For practical reasons, all Swedish trainers were working in a training centre in the area around Stockholm, mostly situated in the countryside. The disadvantage here is that these training centres most likely had similar traditions and cultures. It would have been interesting to include riders and trainers from different parts of Sweden. The Swedish trainers were invited for a lunch where they were informed about the study. They were presented with a written document outlining the study that they could read and later give to their riders. I visited each of the Swedish training centres once before the video recording took place to familiarise myself with the facilities, and to work out where the cameras should be placed. I also met some of the riders during this first visit.
The Polish trainers were selected from a list of well-established accredited trainers who were able to speak English. This list was obtained from a person working at the Polish Equestrian Federation. The fact that the trainers were highly qualified and known by the Polish Federation could have affected the results. I contacted the trainers by email, briefly describing the study; two out of five trainers accepted to take part. Both trainers worked close to Warsaw. After my first visit in Poland, each of these two trainers suggested a colleague that would later be contacted, both of whom would agree to participate in the study. One trainer worked close to Warsaw while another was located in a large town in the central part of Poland. The Polish trainers had different educational backgrounds and also at least ten years of experience from teaching rider-horse combinations. Two of the trainers had worked for a period abroad while the other two had worked solely in Poland. I sent a more detailed document with information about the study by email, so that they could share it with the participating riders.

Each trainer was asked to recruit three riders at varying levels and ages. The only condition stipulated was that all participating riders had to have been in regular training with the trainer for at least half a year. The focus was on functioning communication between riders and horses rather than communication problems caused by, for instance, misunderstandings between trainer and rider. Therefore, rider and trainer pairs were selected that had already built up a functioning relationship and communication. All participating riders agreed to take part in the study, and were told by their trainers that the purpose of the study was to explore rider and horse interaction and communication. All human participants have given their written consent.

Riders were all experienced amateur riders (as opposed to professional riders) mainly interested in the discipline of sports dressage. Most rode their own horses, while a few were riding horses they did not themselves own but they were nonetheless riding them on a regular basis. The trainers were asked to choose adult/mature riders, since the methodology required riders with an ability to reflect over and describe their views on how they communicate with their horses. Most riders had been riding since they were children, and had participated in competitions of elementary to medium level. The majority described themselves as leisure riders, participating in a couple of competitions each season as a way of setting goals for their everyday training. The horses were Swedish or Polish bred Warmblood horses, of different ages and sexes. The interviews with the riders were held in direct connection to a specific training session that had taken place at the riding establishment where they normally train. The aim of the training was mainly for the rider to get the horses supple, balanced and to move with self-carriage\(^1\) using subtle aids.

\(^1\) Self-carriage is the horse’s ability to properly ‘carry himself’ on his own. When moving in self-carriage, the horse is responsible for his own body position and does not rely on the rider keeping the horse in a proper position with his/her hands.
Moreover, the goals for most training sessions were that the equipages trained to perform specific exercises that are part of the performance in sport dressage. The different training sessions with the riders were thus individually planned and unique for each rider-horse combination. Each training session lasted about 45–60 minutes and was video and audio recorded. All sessions (except for two) took place inside the riding halls and two cameras were placed on a stand on the short side of the riding hall. Two sessions took place in an outside arena. Trainers and riders were asked to ride in front of the cameras with one camera following the rider while another followed the trainer. The zoom on the cameras were used to record the riders when they were in the far end of the hall. Trainers used the same loudspeaker provided by me. This was fitted around the waist of the trainer to make it easier to hear and for me to accurately record the instructions. Riders wore a small microphone and a Dictaphone that recorded the riders’ communication with the trainer. Field notes were also written during the field work.

Data collection

The data analysed for article number two consists of transcribed interviews with 15 Swedish riders practicing sports dressage at an intermediate level. The data for article number three consists of transcribed recordings of interviews with in total 27 amateur riders (15 Swedish and 12 Polish). They were all women aged 16–61. The data analysed for article number four consists of transcribed recordings of interviews with in total five Swedish (four female and one male) and four Polish (female) trainers. In Sweden, 85 percent of the members of SEF are females, and thus the number of female and male trainers in this study mirror the general distribution in equestrian sport. It has also been indicated that most trainers in Poland are female (Kovak, 2018).

The empirical material gathered for this study is built on qualitative, semi-structured in-depth interviews with riders and equestrian trainers. This means that they all, to some extent, followed the themes of an interview guide. Qualitative interviews aim to explore, discover and understand conditions and characteristics of something particular (Svensson and Starrin, 1996). The aim of the interviews was to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the riders experience the communication between themselves and their horses. Each interview with riders lasted between 20 and 45 minutes, and were audio-recorded. Interviews took place in cafeterias or tack rooms at the premises where the training took place. In my role as a researcher, I was very open with why I was there and with the aim of the study. The riders were informed that I was a rider and a riding teacher. This made it easier to have an informed conversion with the riders. In order to strengthen the reflective skills of the riders, a brief section of the filmed training was shown to riders just before the interview took place. This research method is called “stimulated recall” and is used
to stimulate the cognitive process, allowing the respondents to recall their current thinking about an event that had just taken place (Lyle, 2003).

The interviews with the riders were conversational. This format generated detailed descriptions of the riders’ views on how they communicate with their horses. Riders were also asked about how they perceive and understand the role of their horse in the context of sports dressage as defined by the National Federations in Sweden and Poland and the FEI. The questions were open-ended and remained so, in order to facilitate exploratory discussions. Riders were asked to focus on the training session that had taken place prior to the interviews, but they were also encouraged to describe their view on the communication between themselves and their horse in general. The interviews focused on four areas: i) Riders’ descriptions of how they communicate with their horses; ii) Riders’ descriptions of their horses’ responses (or lack of responses) to their aids, and how they act when their horse does not respond as they intended. iii) Riders’ descriptions of the timing of their aids and reflections on their equestrian feel, and iv) Riders’ descriptions of the role of their horse in interspecies interaction within sports dressage.

The interviews with the equestrian trainers aimed at getting a better understanding of how the practical knowledge of horse riding is conveyed from riding teacher to rider. Each interview with the trainers lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews took place in the informants’ work environments directly after one of the training sessions. The same method of “stimulated recall” was employed. This involved showing a brief section of the lesson that had taken place prior to the interview. For this purpose, though, I selected footage that had specifically followed the trainer. Interestingly, the trainers were generally less attentive to the video recordings, preferring to share ideas about their respective training systems. The interviews were again both qualitative and conversational in character. This approach generated general descriptions of what strategies and methods the trainers used in order to teach riders how to communicate with their horses. These interviews focused on three areas: i) Trainers’ descriptions of how to support and enhance rider-horse communication; ii) Trainers’ methods and their contributions to develop riders’ timing of their aids and their equestrian feel, and iii) Trainers’ strategies and methods and their contributions to the riders’ understanding of their relation with the horse. In a qualitative interview, the respondent and the interviewer are understood as co-creators of the results obtained from the interview (Svensson and Starin, 1996). Trainers in this study took an active part in how our conversations were created and how they proceeded.

All interviews were recorded digitally and were partly transcribed. Interviews with the Swedish riders were carried out in Swedish (the riders’ native language) and were transcribed by me. I have only translated those parts of the interviews I have cited in the articles. In order to increase readability, I have edited the riders’ and trainers’ quotes slightly and reformulated them. I also conducted all the interviews in Poland. While most were performed in English, a few of the interviews
with riders were conducted in Polish, with a person immediately translating the rider’s answers into English. One of the Polish trainers performed the teaching sessions in Polish, and a translator was standing beside the camera and immediately translated the trainer’s instructions into English. These translators were not professionals, though they were fluent in both Polish and English, as well as familiar with the specific riding context. The translators were kindly on hand at the different training centres I visited. The participating riders’ identities are kept anonymous and have been given pseudonyms when quoted in the articles.

The video recordings have been analysed on the basis of the themes addressed in this study. A few comments generated from the video tapes and from field notes have been included in the articles. Most of the analysed data, however, is based principally on the interviews. My impression is that what is shown in the video recordings is in accordance with what the riders’ express in the interviews; there was little discrepancy between what they expressed in the interviews and how they acted during the training sessions. The case is not the same with the trainers, however. Here, some slight but interesting differences between what the trainers discussed in the interviews, and what could be observed on the video recordings. For example, in conversation trainers explained they preferred to have a two-way dialogue with the riders and that they gladly used metaphors. But neither of these things could be readily noticed in the filmed training sessions.

Reflections on the methods used

As a rider and riding teacher researching my own practice, I am involved in the traditions and culture of equestrian sport, and in this study I intentionally drew upon my own experiences from many years of riding and teaching in riding. The problem here is the fact that I am embedded in the culture and traditions of the West, and thus have looked at the culture of equestrian sport from a partial standpoint. Cognisant of the drawbacks, there are nonetheless a couple of advantages of being aware of one’s embeddedness within a particular tradition of practicing equestrianism and understanding that very practice. One advantage with this is that my prior experiences could themselves be used as part of the empirical data, as demonstrated in my autoethnographic article. Another advantage is the fact that I was already familiar with the terminology used in the two contexts under study, and this enabled me to formulate relevant research questions. My prior expertise also made it easier to gain access to trainers and riders, as well as to talk with the informants about the specifics of sport dressage practice.

There are, however, several risks involved in the use of autoethnography, as well as in conducting interviews in other equestrian practices and contexts within my own area of expertise. One issue is the difficulties of distancing oneself from one’s own practice, and furthermore to extricate oneself from socially shared frameworks and cultures. A further difficulty is that I already have much of the knowledge I am
trying to unfold and understand from my informants; respondents might have told me things I already knew, and this could have contributed to the fact that riders’ tacit knowledge was not properly disclosed. As discussed in the chapter about practical knowledge, a metareflective perspective is necessary. In ethnography, one needs to ask how the researcher (as well as the methods used) have influenced the results. This has been highlighted for instance in an article by Turner (2000). Given that the respondents knew that I am both a rider and riding teacher, there is the risk that the interviews became more conversational compared to what can be considered as “traditional” interviews.

Since knowledge has a high status among riders, my impression is that the respondents wanted to show that they were able to give the “right answers”. Arguably, this could have generated, especially among the younger riders, some performance anxiety when recording the training sessions. Many of the riders were, though, used to being video recorded during training, and it seemed that they quickly forgot the camera. Similar experiences were reported in a study by Carlsson (2017).

During the interviews, it seemed easier for the riders to explain what they were technically doing while riding, compared to elucidating why they acted in a specific way. Similar experiences were observed in a study by Lundesjö-Kvart (2013) where riding teachers were asked to express their views on how they teach in riding.

Due to my own pre-conceptions, there is a risk that I was unable to detect taken for granted assumptions and blind spots. As someone brought up within the military context, and educated during the time when this was evident in equestrian practices, my interpretations may have been affected, influencing how I viewed the communication between rider, horse and trainer, and how I come to reflect on the horses role in society today. Even if I am deeply involved and invested in the culture and traditions of horse riding, I have tried to be attentive to these. Engaging in discussions with colleagues who are not familiar with equestrian cultures and sports has been helpful in this regard.

What could I have done differently? Instead of asking the trainers to choose three riders with whom they had built up a functioning communication, it would have been interesting to ask them to choose one rider-horse combination that was not familiar to them. This might have contributed to a better insight into how a trainer initiates and slowly builds up their communication. Quite early on, I made a choice to focus on the material collected through in-depth interviews (as opposed to the video footage). However, it would have been interesting to have used the video analyses of the recorded training sessions in a more rigorous and focused manner. This, however, was beyond the scope of this study.

What is the voice of the horse in this thesis? Even if experienced riders and trainers are in some way able to “read” the horses’ responses and behaviour, a horse cannot tell us exactly what they think or feel. We can, however, interpret their feelings, at least to some extent. When trying to explore horse-human interaction, we need to make a real effort to include the horse’s perspective and viewpoint. Moreover, as suggested by
Birke and Thompson (2018), we need to constantly ask ourselves: What is in it for the horse? Thus, when conducting studies that concern and involve horses, the aim of making life better for horses should always be primary.

Analyses

Qualitative analyses of the transcribed interviews have been undertaken based on the fundamental ideas of ethnography. In articles two and three, the focus is to explore how experienced amateur sport dressage riders describe and understand their own communication with their horses. Since the interviews were wide-ranging, various descriptions were captured. The results were organised around central themes. These themes have been compared, in order to identify similarities as well as differences. Riders’ experiences have been analysed on the basis of theoretical concepts drawn from the academic field of practical knowledge.

In the fourth article, the focus is on the trainers’ descriptions of how they facilitate communication between rider and horse. Also, in these interviews, a number of themes emerged. For the purpose of this article, I focused on elements that illustrate various strategies and methods the trainers use to support riders’ communication and performance together with their horse, as well as how they contribute to improve a rider’s equestrian feel. Furthermore, I have also placed emphasis on how trainers contribute in rendering more visible to their riders the role of the horse. Theories of practical knowledge have been used to analyse and interpret these results.

Ethical considerations

The video recordings were performed at the riding establishments where the riders normally train. It was thus a familiar place for both trainers, riders and horses, and contributed to a relaxed atmosphere. The video recordings were undertaken by me and another colleague; we both made an effort to ensure a friendly and relaxed attitude. I personally transcribed selections of the interviews, and the material has been kept in such a way that only the researchers involved in the project have had access to the video footage and the audio recorded material. The informants have been made anonymous, and in the articles are given pseudonyms. All relevant ethical questions were considered, and the guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (Codex, 2016) were faithfully followed. As explicated above, all human participants gave their written consent to participate in the project. However, horses taking part in competitive sport or in daily training sessions have little opportunity to give their consent as to whether they agree to take part. This is an important point made by Dashper (2017a). This was not possible in the case of the video recorded training sessions for this study. It is nonetheless vital to reflect upon how a power asymmetry always exists between horse and rider. For the horse does not choose freely to participate in training that are defined by two humans (rider and trainer). Having said this, the horse has always at least some possibility to have a
say, since he or she is a large and strong animal that can choose to resist or withdraw from the training session.

During the interviews, it was essential to be aware of how as a researcher I related to my respondents. I approached the interviews in an open manner, giving enough space for my respondents to express their views. I refrained from interrupting or filling in words when one of the participants seemed to hesitate or not find the words. It is important to be calm and relaxed, and moreover to encourage the respondent to talk by keeping an open body position. In order to initiate conversion before starting with the actual questions, I would start by asking the respondent to talk about themselves and their horses. This was also done in order to create a friendly atmosphere.

The role of the horse during training was an essential part of this study, and thus the trainers’ and riders’ ethical approach to the welfare of the participating horses was important. In this study, we could however not influence the general welfare of the participating horses, for instance the housing systems or the feeding regimes. Most horses were kept in paddocks, at least for part of the day. However, some horses were stabled all day. The rider-horse combinations that took part in this study were wearing their normal equipment, some had a normal bridle while a few were equipped with a double bridle. Most riders wore spurs and a long whip, often used by sport dressage riders to encourage the horse to activate his or her hind legs, and not to punish the horse. However, wearing a whip can be seen as an underlying threat of violence in situations where the horse does not obey the rider. Departing from my interspecies ethical commitment as seeing the horse as a social actor, I struggled in a few situations where a participating horse expressed discomfort during the training session. Sometimes this was caused by the trainer and/or rider applying pressure on the horse, in order to make him or her perform a certain desired movement (for instance, piaffe). I believe that the trainer’s actions and reactions during training are important for the horse’s welfare in general, since it has a potential to influence how riders act in other situations, and how they view and relate to horses in general. It would be interesting to compare how trainers and riders describe the role of the horse respectively, to explore if the rider is influenced by his or her trainer.

What responsibilities, then, do I have as a researcher for riders’ and trainers’ ethical approach to the welfare of the horses that I have studied? I think that my role is to contribute to a critical view on what is happening in equestrian practices and to the many norms and taken for granted assumptions among horse people. This means that I should not shy away from pointing towards alternative practices. My hope is that I will contribute to discussions among horse people and riders that will, in the long term, lead to improved conditions for horses undergoing training. However, I believe that this is best done in the long term and from the “inside” by contributing to riders and trainers re-examining their own training methods. There are examples of how scientific studies have contributed to a transformation in
equestrian and riding practices; for example, research surrounding the effects of noseband tightening on horses’ behaviour and eye temperature (e.g. McGreevy, 2011; Fenner, 2016). Some national equestrian federations have recently established new regulations about the prescribed distance between the noseband and the horse’s nose during competitions.
Main findings

In this chapter, I will summarise the findings of each of the four articles that are included in this thesis. Moreover, I will give an overview about how each article can be said to relate to the others. The articles can be read in isolation. However, together they form a coherent picture of the complex and challenging puzzle making up the interplay and communication between rider, horse and equestrian trainer.

The Praxis of Horse riding – An Autoethnographic Study  
(Article 1)

In this article, I describe, interpret, and analyse my own experiences of what is happening between rider and horse during a ride. Theories of practical knowledge have been used to explore the praxis of riding. This study was motivated by the fact that manuals describing the practices of riding mostly focus on technical descriptions while I suggest that emotions and feelings play an important role. Autoethnography has been used to systematically describe and express relations between rider and horse, focusing on riders’ feelings, and on how riders experience their own as well as their horses’ bodies and minds. I do this by turning my own experiences as a rider into a topic of investigation. The experiences are investigated and tied to abstract reasoning and theories, as suggested by Alsterdal (2016). This form of writing is used to explicitly connect the researcher’s lived experiences and perspectives to the social and cultural world in which they exist. The collected material contains my own recorded descriptions of actions, feelings and reflections during riding.

The study is based on the assumption that interaction between rider and horse is built on “tacit knowledge” or “tacit knowing” and that we humans have a lot of knowledge that is embodied and which cannot (in most cases) be fully expressed in words (Polanyi, 1966). For instance, an experienced rider reacts immediately and intuitively to the signs and movements of the horse without being able to exactly tell what s/he is doing. In this study, I used as theoretical tools the understanding of three of the approaches to knowledge defined by Aristotle in book VI of the Nicomachean Ethics (1980): Episteme is theoretical knowledge that concerns knowing why, techne or art denotes technical know-how. Thirdly, phronesis or practical wis-
dom guides us when we decide how and also when to act in a specific situation with a particular individual. *Phronesis* is the moral disposition of how to act wisely and prudently (with practical common sense) and thus includes a moral consideration, e.g. how to act in a way that is good for the horse. A combination of the three approaches to knowledge as defined by Aristotle is needed in order to become a skilled rider, and empirically they are hard to distinguish from one another.

Results show that interaction between rider and horse is a constant communication involving the bodies and minds of both actors. Rider and horse are both embodied subjects taking part in an active process of “becoming with”. The rider “thinks” and reacts with her or his body, and body and mind are thus inseparable. An experienced rider experiences the horse through her or his body and the horse thus becomes like a “second skin”. As a result of the interaction, both parties change and adapt to each other, thereby resulting in a shared practical knowledge.

Most riding manuals focus on *techne*, describing technically what signals (aids) to give to the horse to receive a certain response, and how to perform specific movements. Much is based on stimulus-response, as suggested in the behaviouristic approach. To build a trustful relationship during riding, there is a need for the rider to take into account the horse’s emotions, consciousness and intelligence. It is important that we humans should be aware that the relation between rider and horse is always asymmetric, since an exercise of power over the horse is always present in the riding experience.

Based on the results, I propose that when riding and teaching riding, more emphasis should be placed on how to interpret and attend to the horse’s behaviour, body language and reactions. What is the horse trying to tell us? I believe that the need to build a good relation based on trust and partnership between human and horse must be better highlighted. *Techne* always precedes *phronesis*, meaning that the rider first needs to learn how to use his or her body language and signs to communicate with the horse. This is to say, *phronesis* requires experience and reflection. Thus, the rider is required to interpret the horse’s actions in order to find out what actions are suitable in a given situation.

The results suggest that there are two different kinds of equestrian feel. One is connected to the rider’s feeling of the horse through her body and includes the rider’s reflections. A second kind of equestrian feel is experienced when the rider feels the horse’s movements in her or his own body. This could be interpreted as a kind of “inner” equestrian feel, like a centaur when rider and horse move as one body. The feeling of the movement is anatomised and is situated in the “backbone” of the rider. This could be comparable with “flow” or “optimal experience” as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1997). I suggest that this “inner” equestrian feel could also be seen as an expression of *phronesis*, since it guides the rider in how and when to use the different signs. However, it is important to note that *phronesis* requires that the rider exhibit moral responsibility towards the horse. The feel used in riding
could also be identified as “tacit knowledge”, meaning that it is situated in the rider’s body and feeling.

The conclusion is that there is a need for new teaching strategies in riding where more emphasis is placed on equestrian feel and on how riders’ experience their own as well as the horses’ bodies and minds. A riding teacher or trainer needs to be able to recognise the subjects of both rider and horse, taking into account the rider’s ability to feel her own and the horse’s body; the trainer must be able to support each individual rider-horse combination’s active process of “becoming with”. This could be done for instance by the trainer posing questions that encourage the rider to be attentive to how s/he experiences the horse’s bodily and emotional actions and reactions.

Riders’ Perceptions of Equestrian Communication in Sports Dressage (Article 2)

In the first article, I describe, interpret, and analyse, what is happening between rider and horse during riding, using my own experiences as empirical data. The aim of the second publication is to enhance our understanding of how sport dressage riders describe equestrian communication, and to relate these descriptions to current research on human-horse communication. Interviews with 15 Swedish amateur sport dressage riders have been analysed, and a qualitative approach was adopted. Riders were asked to describe equestrian communication, and how they experience the horse’s response (or lack of response) to their aids. Moreover, riders were asked to describe how they act when the horse does not respond as they had intended. Our results show that riders describe their horses as having different personalities and temperaments. Some riders experienced that their horses have good days and bad days, and thus differ in “mood” (with respect to their physical and mental status) from day to day, as well as within the very same training session. Some riders were sufficiently attentive to check the daily status of their horse.

Self-blame was one of the main themes to have emerged from the interviews when riders were asked to reflect on equestrian communication. Riders took for granted that the human participant is responsible for taking the initiative during training, and is thus responsible for the training session as a whole, especially in terms of rider’s own satisfaction, horse welfare and achievements. The riders highlighted their need to “give horses clear aids”, and to “time” their aids. They thus understood equestrian communication as signal based, as described in the research area referred to as equitation science (ES). Riders also discussed how the horse could choose to “listen” (or not listen) to the rider. Thus, the horse is expected not only to pay attention to the rider, but also to accept the rider’s leadership.

Riders connected equestrian feel to the feeling of being “one with the horse”. This is in line with the description of the “centaur feeling”, according to which rider and horse “merge as one”, as Podhajsky describes the phenomenon (1965). This
The centaur metaphor has often been used in the literature associated with human-animal studies (HAS) (e.g. Game, 2000; Maurstad et al., 2013). It seems that the riders perceive the boundary between their own bodies and the body of the horse as somewhat fuzzy. All riders described how they rewarded the horse either by praise or by removing pressure (from a leg or the reins) to let the horse know that the rider is satisfied.

Interestingly, riders in this study had somewhat inconsistent views about their own interaction with their horses. A rider’s understanding of rider-horse communication should not be reduced to something signal-based, as assumed by ES. But nor can it, with any consistency, be said that the riders understand their horses as competent agents, as portrayed in the traditions of HAS and other qualitative traditions. What the second article does show is how riders reflect on and discuss their communication with their horses both with their peers and their trainers, as they understand that interspecies communication is at the core of riding.

The article also notes that all the riders interviewed for the study were well aware of the basic principles of learning theory (i.e. how horses learn). This finding is in contrast with McGreevy and McLean’s (2010) claim that riders generally lack basic knowledge in learning theory, the implication of which is that horses suffer from behavioural problems, jeopardising thereby their welfare. The group of riders participating in this study were however amateur riders that regularly took part in training and competitions, and could thus not be seen as average riders. In Sweden, a behaviouristic understanding of learning has, for a long time, been the dominant paradigm for horse training. Along with the basic aids as they are explained in the German Equestrian Federation’s manual for riding (1997), behaviourism is a key fundament upon which riding technique has been taught in Swedish riding schools. However, we believe that this situation is liable to change as modern views on learning, teaching and interspecies communication have started to permeate the field. Until recently, teaching riding – both in Europe, in general, and in Sweden, in particular – has focused on technique rather than equestrian feel.

Most riding manuals describe a perfect rider-horse combination, and address neither the individual differences in temperament of horses nor variations in the personality of riders. This perspective remains absent in the literature, and yet it appears to be very clear to the riders, who describe the mental and physical states of both horse and rider, and openly acknowledge that each fluctuates on a daily basis. Results from this study motivated me to explore further how riders in sports dressage understand the role of their horse in communication and training. This was the purpose guiding publication three.
Rider’s understanding of the role of their horse in sports dressage (Article 3)

My third study aims to explore how riders express and understand the role of their horse in the context of training for equestrian sport. The wider background for this article is the fact that animal involvement in sport raises significant ethical questions. Indeed, the discipline of sports dressage has in recent years been exposed to heavy criticism, both in social media and by political movements (e.g. animal rights movements) (Smith, 2014). Thus, the horse’s role has become a source of dispute, raising a series of ethical dilemmas. In this article our aim has been to also explore whether there are any visible national or cultural differences related to the practice of rider-horse training in sports dressage. The data consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 27 amateur riders (15 Swedish and 12 Polish) practicing sports dressage at intermediate level.

Previous studies have shown that even if horses are today mainly used for leisure riding or competitions, military norms and traditions still exercise their grip over the teaching and practicing of riding (Thorell, 2017). These norms are built on the perception that the horse is a tool or instrument in need of instruction from the rider, rather than as a sentient being with its own desires and consciousness. Recently, new theoretical trends (e.g. cognitive ethology and posthumanism) have introduced a view of horses that differs from traditional conceptions; new theoretical perspectives acknowledge that non-human animals have cognitive capacities, and that their emotions and intelligence need to be taken into account in their interaction with humans (Birke, 2007; Savides, 2012; De Giorgio, 2014).

The point of departure for this third study is that riding is built on practical knowledge. This mode of knowing is acquired by the rider through practical experiences. Molander (2015) stresses that practical knowledge is a form of attentiveness in action and is learned mainly by models or exemplars, through training and personal experience. Molander distinguishes between three different “senses” of tacit knowing: one is tacit knowing that cannot be expressed in words, the second is tacitly presupposed or implicit while the third is “tacit” knowledge that has been silenced or that has never acquired a voice.

Our results show that riders had difficulties to describe the role of their horse in rider-horse communication. Direct quotes from the riders reflect a tension between, on the one hand, the way riders have historically perceived the role of the horse as predominately a tool or instrument, and, on the other, contemporary attitudes that consider animals as having their own mind and consciousness. However, some riders pointed out that horses could themselves guide or educate the rider. This was especially the case when a rider wanted to improve her performance together with the horse. Horses, then, are described by the riders as having their own practical knowledge that is communicated to the rider. To help us explore these issues, we
turned to Aristotle’s two perspectives on practical forms of knowledge. This was useful, since Aristotle allows us to define and explain key differences between modes of knowing (see *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1980). *Techne* or technical knowing can be regarded as the kind of knowledge represented in the military. Here, the mode of communication involved is the rider giving orders to the horse. Alternatively, *phronesis* or practical wisdom could be seen as the kind of embodied practical knowledge that the rider uses to listen to and try to understand the horse, suggested for instance in posthumanism and cognitive ethology.

The study shows that equestrian trainers have an important role in the learning process of the rider. We interpret that in the training sessions trainers focus on the performance and riding technique rather than on understanding the individual horse. Even if there are signs that new teaching methods are beginning to emerge, to talk about the horse as a subject and as an active participant in rider-horse communication has, as our results reveal, so far not been built into the system of educating rider-horse combinations. It seems that this kind of knowledge has never acquired a voice and is thus presumed and implicit rather than explicit and expressed.

The results do not reveal any national or cultural differences among sport dressage riders, despite the historical and cultural differences between Poland and Sweden. This points to the strength and coherence of the horse culture and traditions of equestrian sport, and that traditions and habits in sport dressage seem to influence the way riders view their horses.

Riders emphasised that the body is considered as the main tool in communicating with the horse. Since several studies have shown that horses have highly sensitive bodies and are excellent both in reading riders’ body language and in using their own body language, the rider needs to be open with both body and mind to the “otherness” of the horse. It is suggested that the communication between rider and horse would be improved if riders further acknowledged horses as subjects and active partners in the communication process. Thus, training and teaching methods would likely be improved if they were better adapted to the sensitivity of each horse and the personality of individual riders. Our results reveal that equestrian cultures are in transition and that traditionally rooted systems in training and teaching rider-horse combinations are now being challenged. However, military norms still seem to predominate. The use of horses for sport raises ethical questions, and we suggest that it might be time for sport riders to seriously re-examine and re-evaluate the relation between themselves and their horses.

Teaching horse riding: feel as a central concept?

*(Manuscript, Article 4)*

The focus for the second and third articles was to investigate how riders practicing sports dressage describe the communication between themselves and their own horses. Given that the equestrian trainer has an important role to support riders’
communication and performance together with their horses, the aim of this fourth article is to investigate what strategies and methods well-established professional equestrian trainers use in the context of sports dressage. This study also aims to contribute to the development of theories surrounding practical knowledge in the practice of teaching riding. As mentioned in the introduction, there is a complex and challenging relationship between rider, horse and trainer in the teaching of horse riding; how do trainers adapt their teaching to each rider-horse combination? And how do trainers view their contribution to develop riders’ “equestrian feel”? And furthermore, do trainers help to make visible to their riders the role of the horse? The data analysed consists of transcribed recordings of interviews with in total nine professional trainers in sports dressage, five of whom are Swedish and four Polish.

As discussed, earlier in this thesis, horse riding relies on embodied and implicit knowledge. This, however, is difficult to convey, since it cannot be completely expressed in words (Zetterqvist Blokhuis, 2018; West, 2012). Teaching in riding comprises interspecies communication, and involves many different aspects, like, for instance: the personality and physical abilities of the rider; the personality and mood of the horse, as well as the personality and motivation of the trainer. Moreover, the horse is a living non-human animal with his or her own mind; with the use of his or her highly sensitive body, a horse takes an active part in the communicative process with the rider (Despret, 2004).

What kind of knowledge is needed to become a good rider, or a good equestrian trainer? In this article, I draw on the theoretical work of Aristotle, Dewey, Molander and Schön, since I consider their work to be especially productive when exploring different aspects of the complex and challenging interaction between rider, horse and equestrian trainer. Starting with Aristotle (1980), I turn to his two perspectives of practical forms of knowledge. I find the Aristotelian distinction between poiesis and praxis useful for defining and explaining different approaches to riders’ practical knowledge. When the rider works towards a special goal – for instance to ride a certain dressage program – it is realised by what is defined as poiesis, that is, as a making or production (Aristotle, 1980). Praxis, on the other hand, is defined as “doing” action, and defines the distinctive form of phronesis or practical wisdom. Phronesis involves both practical reasoning and moral consideration of what is wise and proper to do in a given situation, where the good action in itself is the goal. In the case of riding, then, praxis could be for instance how to understand the relation with each individual horse.

The results show that trainers in this study seem to have developed a “training philosophy” from many years of riding and teaching rider-horse combinations. This they have actively brought into their teaching practice. In the beginning of the riders’ education, trainers focus on teaching riders how to use their aids and thus on poiesis. Here, trainers use mainly concrete instructions. The next phase is for the rider to become an “independent rider”, and this includes learning to decide when and with
what intensity to use different aids depending on the actions and reactions of the horse. The trainers were mainly to serve as a support for the rider, and thus facilitate riders’ *praxis*. In this phase, the trainer is required to make explicit to the rider what s/he sees and feels. This is occasionally done by the trainer using a two-way dialogue, and sometimes also by metaphors, to trigger the rider’s fantasy and feel.

Equestrian feel is considered difficult to express in words and thus difficult to teach (Daspher, 2016; Lundesjö-Kvart, 2013). To be able to cultivate a rider’s feel, it seems important that the trainer can recognise this sensation her or himself. Since the dialogue between rider and horse is mostly transmitted bodily, there is reason to believe that the trainer needs empathic skills, in order to “take in” the body of each rider-horse combination and provide the rider with the relevant instructions.

What role does reflection have in the training of riders? Trainers used their own reflection-in-action to deal with challenging situations, as suggested by Schön (1983). However, time for riders to reflect on or evaluate their learning during (reflection-in-action) or after the sessions (reflection-on-action) seems not to be afforded. Learning horse riding requires a combination of practical experience and reflection, and to reflect over one’s performance is likely to be necessary for the rider to gain independence, that is, fostering an ability to take decisions when the trainer is absent.

Trainers in this study seemed to be adept at dealing with upcoming problems during the training sessions, and had developed a “good eye” and reacted “on the spot” using their kinaesthetic empathy, and had thus developed *phronesis*. However, it seemed that trainers had difficulties to explain why they acted as they did, and did not manage to make explicit their “tacit knowledge” to their riders. Thus, equestrian trainers need to improve their skills in making explicit to the rider what they see and why they chose to give a certain instruction. This could be done for instance through two-way dialogue, where trainers point out what they experience and why they acted as they did. Moreover, riders should also be encouraged to pose questions to the trainer. In doing so, a rider’s own practical knowledge would be further developed.

The role of the horse in the process of communication between horse and rider did not receive much attention during the training sessions, and was thus in many cases not expressed, showing that the recognition of the horse as a sentient and thinking individual seems not to be built into existing equestrian teaching practices. It might be that the trainers themselves had not reflected enough over the role of the horse in the communication with the rider. On the basis of the results, I suggest that trainers need to make more visible the role of the horse to the rider. More focus should be put on the perspective of the horse, and trainers need to recognise both rider and horse as subjects taking into account the rider’s ability to feel her own and her horse’s body during the training sessions. Teaching methods would likely be improved if riders were encouraged to use their embodied practical knowledge to
listen to and try to understand the actions and reactions of their horse, and thus developing their *praxis*.
Discussion and conclusions

In this thesis, I have explored the practical knowledge between rider, horse and equestrian trainer. The three approaches to knowledges (episteme, techne, phronesis) as presented by Aristotle’s in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (1980), resonate well in exploring this complex and challenging interaction. In exploring communication between rider and horse, particular attention has focused on how riders and trainers describe the role of their horse in equestrian practices. Moreover, the strategies and methods adopted by trainers to develop riders’ equestrian feel, identified as one of the most challenging skills in riding, have been investigated. Video recordings and in-depth interviews were conducted in two different countries, Sweden and Poland, in order to explore if there are any visible national or cultural differences related to the practice of rider-horse training in sports dressage.

How I look at the interaction with my horse

I have explored the “tacit” knowledge present in my interactions with my horse, as well as the role that both emotions and equestrian feel play in my own riding. As elaborated in my autoethnographic article, I regard interaction with my horse as based on trust and mutual understanding. Moreover, I suggest that attention is a key concept in my riding – a concept key for practical knowledge, more generally construed (Molander, 2015). To be attentive means that I need to be present and to listen to my horse, trying to take into account the lived experiences of him as a thinking and feeling subject with his own consciousness. I have also realised how important it is to be attentive to my horse’s emotions and feelings, and to make an effort to try to understand his perspectives. By turning to the theories of Merleau-Ponty (2012), I have gained a better understanding of how my body learns to adapt to my horse as part of my practical knowledge, and I have also discovered how I more or less automatically adjust my bodily movements as well as my way of talking and my mode of comportment when being around horses.

Since riding involves a living non-human animal that cannot verbally communicate, I believe that as a rider I have a moral responsibility for the horse, and should thus always act on the basis of what is good for him. Thus, a rider needs to develop
all three knowledges defined by Aristotle (1980), with *phronesis* as the most awarding since it includes the rider’s ability to act wisely and prudently in each particular situation and with each individual horse. This said, I still regard the relation between rider and horse as one predicated on asymmetric power, and thus we humans need to closely observe the horse’s body language and signs, and ask ourselves: What is he (or she) trying to say? When, for instance, I collect my horse from the field I need to be attentive to what he is showing with his body. Does he approach me with his ears pricked forwards? Is he tense or relaxed? I also need to be aware of the way I am acting, ensuring that I remain calm and relaxed. In the encounter between rider and horse, it is necessary to make visible the horse as a competent agent with an active role in the relation between human and horse. We need to be open to the otherness of the horse, and constantly ask ourselves how the horse perceives our relationship in order to create a “becoming with” together with the horse.

The role of the horse is not expressed

One of the most interesting results from this study is that riders had difficulties to describe the role of their horse in the communication between rider and horse, and obviously had not reflected over this matter. Some riders were unable to describe the role of their horse at all. Thus, it seems that the role of the horse is not expressed but is rather presumed and thus remains implicit. This kind of tacit knowledge might be identified as “tacit” knowledge that has never acquired a voice, unarticulated. Riders’ quotes varied from viewing their horse as a tool that should respond to their signals, towards an understanding of the horse as an active and influential partner, of equal importance as the rider. Thus, there seems to be a tension in contemporary societies between the way riders have historically perceived the role of the horse in equestrian sport as predominantly a tool or instrument, and the attempt by posthumanists and cognitive ethologists to see horses as subjects and sentient beings, who are able to take an active part in the interaction with their riders. These so-called “new” perspectives can however be associated with much older traditions when horses, used in agriculture and forestry, for example, had a central role to play in society. Historical documentation attests to how men working in forestry viewed their horses as workmates and experienced a reciprocal relation between themselves and their horses.

Interestingly, some riders remarked that a well-educated horse is able to guide the rider by showing if the rider does “the right thing”. On the contrary, if the rider gives a sign that the horse does not understand, the rider needs to adjust his or her aids until s/he gets the reaction that s/he expected. A horse that has learned to perform specific movements in dressage (e.g. the half-pass or flying changes) has a practical knowledge of performing these exercises that can guide a less experienced rider in the learning process, by letting the rider experience how this movement
should be executed and felt in the rider’s body. Experienced show jumping horses
are able to approach a fence by adapting their strides to the distance to the fence,
and thus “help” the rider to clear it. Also, a well-trained riding school horse can take
initiatives and decisions while being ridden by novices. Thus riders may train horses
but horses also have embodied knowledge that can be used in order to train riders.
This is in line with recent studies within the human-animal/equine sciences. Such
studies show that horses are active parts in the interaction process between human
and horse. Horses are able to influence the movements of humans and directly
affect human bodies. So, in the communication between rider and horse one can
ask: Who teaches whom? This is one of the most challenging questions to have
emerged from this study.

Horse riding as a combination of art and sport

Horse riding is characterised as both an art and a sport. Art is generally defined as a
creative activity without a predetermined goal. In sport, on the other hand, humans
(or teams) compete against another, taking part in activities with well-defined goals.
Is there a tension between the two? As explored earlier, in my personal recollections
of being around horses, dressage can be sensual and beautiful when rider and horse
move together in a synchronised and harmonious way. The opposite also applies:
dressage can be ugly when communication between rider and horse breaks down.
As described by Thompson (2019), dressage is subject to aesthetic and ethical inter-
pretations, and these two orders of interpretation are not always consistent. Thus
different ideas about what is “good riding” and what we humans experience as
beautiful can change over time, as well as differing between groups of riders from
different equestrian practices. For example, what we consider as a horse having
beautiful gaits has changed in recent years. Many horses in dressage competitions
nowadays show gaits in which their forelegs are lifted high from the ground. To
some people this looks beautiful while to others it looks artificial and unreal; a topic
much disputed among horse people.

Some authors point to how the dressage horse is supposed to be controlled and
submissive (Smith, 2014; Patton, 2003). Significantly, riders and trainers taking part
in this study talked about the importance of being attentive to the horses’ behaviour,
and sought to create a dialogue between themselves and their horses. Birke and
Thompson (2018, p. 126) have advanced that horses have a capacity for social
encounters with humans, and that riders can potentially foster the conditions in
which horses can “flourish” as co-agents. Thus, there are clear indications that the
way in which horses are viewed today is undergoing reinterpretation, with respect
to both theoretical concepts (such as posthumanism and cognitive ethology) and
equestrian practices. I believe that this development has also been instigated by
general discussions surrounding horse welfare in society, as well as by strong criti-
cisms against equestrian sports.
Put in its starkest terms, one might choose to follow Birke and Thompson (2017), and ask: what’s in it for the horse? Do horses enjoy working in equestrian sport? It is widely accepted that riders can experience horses enjoying certain things while disliking others. In general, sport riders often stress that horses enjoy training and do not mind travelling to competitions. But is this really true? Human-horse relations are human-centred, and therefore horses do not have a say in whether they wish to perform in competitions – nor for that matter in training. Therefore, the relation between rider and horse is marked by asymmetric power. Savvides (2012) points to how riders in her study experienced that taking part in competitions sometimes put horses under pressure. This can have a negative impact on the relationship between riders and their horses. However, several riders in this study gave examples of how they strive to forge an equal partnership with their horse. I believe that riders have a moral responsibility to always ensure their horses’ wellbeing, even if doing so renders it impossible to achieve a competitive goal.

What could be the practical implications of how sport riders’ view the role of their horse? There is reason to believe that how riders think and act has a direct impact on horse welfare. A rider who uses his or her horse mainly as an instrument to achieve good results in competitions is likely to approach and communicate with the horse in ways that differ from a rider seeing the horse predominantly as a subject and an influential partner. Thus, as Lundgren (2019) points out, there is always an ethical component to riding. Accordingly, it is appropriate to speak of how the rider’s actions are an example of an ethics-in-practice. The big question here is whether it is possible to take into account the horse as an individual, with his or her own consciousness, and yet still compete at a high level in sports dressage? Is it possible to place emphasis on the ethical treatment of horses in sport – accordingly adapting existing regulations and further including assessments based on welfare parameters – rather than an exclusive interest in performance? These are questions which call for attention.

Given how the role of the horse and its related ethical questions regarding their equitable treatment have become a source of dispute, it might be time for sport riders to seriously re-examine and re-evaluate their own relations with their horses with respect to how this affects the horse as a conscious and sensitive animal. None of the riders or trainers in this study seemed, for example, to question the ethics of using horses for sport; indeed, the use of spurs and the whip seems to be normalised within traditional equestrian cultures.

I have recently started to re-examine the relation to my own horse. This includes questioning how my horse perceives our relation. In earlier days, I looked upon my horses as a partner but also as a tool helping me to fulfil my goals. Today, I have revised my views, and sometimes I ask myself: Who is Darwin (my horse)? And what does he try to say? I have started to seek a more equal relationship with him, and I hope that I am more willing to listen and more attentive to his existence. I enjoy training my horse and to engage in exercises that are included in the per-
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formance of dressage, but the communication between my horse and I takes precedence over performance. I have stopped using a double bridle, and I do not get upset if my horse sometimes wants to use his own initiative, like, for instance, showing me that he wants to canter instead of trotting; or if he “tells” me that he is a bit lazy and not up for any advanced work. On the one hand, I enjoy watching high class sport dressage, but, on the other hand, I am upset when I see a rider-horse combination struggle, that is, when it is obvious that their communication is not working. Or when people handle horses in an improper way.

So, is horse riding an art or a sport? When watching a rider-horse combination moving together rhythmically and synchronized, it as an artistic performance. But when an equipage shows signs of discomfort, it is not. As a sport, riding is when the equipage performs a predetermined dressage test or jumps a certain course. However, I suggest that if horses are to be used for sport, there needs to be a change in the use of inappropriate equipment (sharp bits and extra reins) and harsh training methods. My ambivalence about sports dressage is likely to mirror the ongoing transformation within and around equestrian cultures.

The relation between theory and practice in horseback riding

Aristotle’s (1980) approaches to knowledge have been fruitful as theoretical tools for identifying different kinds of knowledges used in the practice of riding, and in the communication between rider and horse. A principal area of interest here has been to investigate what happens if we look at riding by using Aristotle’s concepts of techne and phronesis (or practical wisdom). In my first article, I suggest that techne symbolises the technical description of the communication between rider and horse as based on stimulus-response, as emphasised by behaviourism. Moreover, I interpret techne as a form of knowledge that captures the military tradition’s way of communicating with the horse, predominantly by giving orders and placing emphasis on the achievement of external goals and rewards. In contrast, phronesis can be identified as augmenting a relation of trust between rider and horse, including a moral consideration regarding how to act in a way that is good for the horse. Thus, phronesis or practical wisdom could be seen as the kind of embodied practical knowledge that the rider uses to listen to and understand the horse, as explored in recent theoretical tendencies like cognitive ethology and posthumanism. For practical wisdom, the good action is itself the goal. The results in the four studies reveal that theoretical knowledge (episteme) about the biomechanics of horse and rider, as well as how horses learn, were, in most cases, not incorporated in the training of riders. I believe that to develop phronesis there is a need to include episteme in the rider’s education. To be able to act in a way that is good and wise when communicating with one’s horse, a rider requires theoretical knowledge about the nature of horses and why horses sometimes react in ways that differ from humans.
In chapter five, I described my theoretical framework. There, I traced a tension that sometimes occurs when theoretical and practical knowledge face one another. What could be the implication of this tension when learning how to ride a horse? And how might we begin to overcome these tensions? Practical knowledge is learned mainly by experience, it is gained in the very “doing”. For this reason, it is impossible to learn how to ride a bike just from reading a manual. Instead, you need to get on the bike, find out how to use the pedals, and how to balance when cycling. Here, there are several similarities with learning how to ride a horse. You need to try out how it feels to be on top of a horse, and how to get the horse going, turning and stopping. This is learned mainly by trial-and-error, as described by Dewey (1916), a pragmatist for whom knowledge is built into a person’s very actions.

However, when one is seeking to learn how to ride a horse in balance and harmony – as required in dressage – or how to jump a course, one needs to think about what one is doing and also gain some theoretical knowledge, for instance, about the horse’s movements and the character of the horse. Aristotle (1980) spoke about self-awareness being an important form of knowledge, and since a person needs experience in order to act with practical wisdom, “a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found” (p. 148). Thus, Aristotle (1981) accounts for how episteme and techne can be learnt by youngsters while phronesis cannot; “it is the length of time that gives experience”, as Aristotle writes (p. 148). Following his theories, I believe that a rider or trainer needs to gather multiple experiences before knowing how to act in a given situation; for example, to decide what one can expect from one’s horse on a particular day. It is a well-known fact that many top sport riders are middle aged or even older. The question, however, is how trainers can foster a rider’s phronesis by making tacit knowledge more explicit to their riders.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, academic work within human-animal studies (HAS) has often been conducted in close collaboration with horse practices. One can ask how these studies have contributed to the transformation of equine cultures. And how do these two perspectives, academic and practical, interact? I believe that in many European countries – and in Sweden in particular – an important aspect is the pressure on the horse industry from the general public to address horse welfare. The most influential Swedish horse sports magazine has for instance recently started to include articles that specifically address horse welfare, and in the beginning of this year there was even an article promoting 2019 as “the year of horse welfare” (Tidningen Ridsport, 2019). Moreover, the Swedish Equestrian Federation has set up a “Horse Welfare Board” responsible for initiating actions addressing horse welfare issues. Recently, at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), a scientific Council for Animal Welfare was also founded to identify, compile and evaluate scientific research on animal welfare. According to their mission statement, the council shall provide decision makers with scientifically sound documentation for different types of policy decisions or regulation changes (SLU, 2019). Policy and regulations have a direct impact on animal practices. The interaction between horse
practice and research also works in the other direction; which is to say, issues and questions emerging from equestrian practices are picked up by researchers resulting in the initiation of new academic work.

**Equestrian feel as a central concept in horse riding**

One of the most challenging aspects of riding is equestrian feel. Riders in this study described feel as the hardest yet the most rewarding aspect of interspecies communication. Informants spoke of how they found it difficult to time their aids in accordance with the actions and reactions of the horse. Feel is a complicated and elusive concept. Is it to be located in the rider’s body, or is it a strictly relational phenomenon, forged out of mutual collaboration with the horse? It has been suggested that, on the one hand, feel is a direct bodily emotion experienced by the rider, and yet, on the other, it includes a cognitive content. Equestrian feel can be regarded as an expression of *phronesis*; it guides the rider in how and when to use different signals. It is however important to note that *phronesis* is a combination of intellectual and moral virtue, and thus includes an ethical aspect, for it requires the rider to act in a way that is good for the horse.

The ability to react intuitively was mentioned several times by both riders and trainers who took part in the study. What role does intuition play for the riders? In the first of the articles presented in this thesis, I write that “my body reacts immediately and intuitively to the signs and movements of the horse” (Zetterqvist Blokhuis, 2018). As an experienced rider, I do not need to think about what I am doing on horseback; instead, I intuitively adapt my actions to the actions and reactions of my horse. What is the possible connection between acting intuitively and equestrian feel? Here I agree with Larsson (1997), namely that acting intuitively includes a person’s consciousness, feeling and thought. A rider needs to have gained a theoretical base of knowledge about horse’s needs and perspectives. Such a base can be used in combination with one’s feeling about how to act in a specific situation. Thus, I suggest that there is a possible relation between acting intuitively and acting with practical wisdom (*phronesis*). When I intuitively adapt to the actions of my horse, I use my experiences from riding different horses mixed with the theoretical knowledge I have gained from studying the theory and biomechanics of horse riding. Thus, feel also includes an experience based knowledge. In summary, I suggest that learning to act intuitively requires a combination of thought, feel and consciousness. But, it takes time before a rider or trainer is able to act intuitively, that is, until this necessary practical knowledge becomes the rider’s very “backbone”.

How do trainers contribute to the cultivation of a rider’s feel? Trainers in this study used different methods, and they even disagree whether feel can be taught to riders. For, is it not something that riders must learn by themselves? If it can be learned, then trainers must use their own corporeal and sensory perception, and thus their own bodies, in order to teach feel. Riding is strongly embodied, and I
believe that a two-way dialogue between trainer and rider, where riders are required to attach words to their feelings, could be a way to encourage them to become more conscious of their feelings (and bodies), and thus to make the tacit knowledge of riding more explicit to their riders.

One method that could be used to cultivate the rider’s feel is if the trainer starts from his or her own kinaesthetic experience, followed by the trainer creating a situation (in the form, for example, of an exercise) in which good communication for a given rider-horse combination can be achieved. The trainer gives concrete instructions and observes when both rider and horse start to move “as one”, and then goes onto give immediate praise when s/he experiences this happening. Finally, the trainer interacts in a two-way dialogue with the rider by asking him or her to attach words to his or her feelings. The trainer could also ask the rider to “store” this kinaesthetic feeling in his or her body and mind, so as to make it easier to find this feel in future training sessions.

The video recordings compiled during the entire study reveal that the training sessions focused more on teaching techne or technical aspects than on equestrian feel. I believe that in all likelihood this reflects how most instruction manuals focus on riding technique rather than feel. One cannot deny the importance of technical aspects in the training of riders, but if riders assert that feel is for them an important asset in riding, then I contend that it should have greater prominence in educational and training programmes. Both riders and horses are emotional and affecting beings. Therefore, feel needs to be taken into account during interspecies interaction. However, today there remains a lack of pedagogical engagement with how the emotional part of rider-horse communication might be taught and learnt, including the rider’s ability to pick up and interpret the reactions and actions of his or her horse. Narratives describing and expressing personal relations between rider and horse that are emotion-led might be useful as a complement to general instruction manuals, which principally focus on riding technique.

Body-to-body communication between rider and horse

How do riders experience their bodies as means for communicating with their horses? As an experienced rider, my practical knowledge is in my body, and through my body I communicate a wide range of emotions and desires to my horse. The theories of Merleau-Ponty (2012) about tacit bodily knowing being the basis for our practical experiences have been useful for me when trying to understand how we learn to ride. I have come to realise that it is my body that needs to learn and understand specific movements on horseback, such as the half-pass. Thus, there is a relationship between my body and what I want to achieve while riding. As pointed out by Pallasmaa (2009), as a rider I “think” and react with my body. However, my horse Darwin also uses his body to communicate with me, and I need to be attentive to his body by letting my own body follow his movement and to trust him. Riders in
this study considered the body as the main tool to communicate with their horses. However, several riders reported (see article two) that they had difficulties to control their own bodies. Learning how to ride requires athletic skills, e.g. balance, strength, suppleness, body symmetry, and body control. It is however generally accepted that many riders are stiff, unbalanced and lack body control and this can result in the rider being unable to ride the horse with good balance, thereby jeopardising the welfare of the horse. It has been suggested that dismounted exercises can improve the physical abilities of riders, and thus improve both the performance and welfare of horse and rider alike. Riders in this study also expressed that they had a mental connection with their horses. Thus, I think that a more holistic view of riders, where both physical and mental aspects are accounted for and worked with, is to be encouraged. This viewpoint was also suggested by one of the trainers as something that would benefit rider-horse communication. Basic physical training as well as mental training is built into most other sports but is in most cases missing in the training of riders.

Being attentive and the role of reflection

To develop practical knowledge in horse riding and to acquire the ability to communicate successfully with one’s horse demands attention. Rider and horse are constantly “talking” to each other in terms of their bodies, and thus the rider needs to be open and “listen” to what the horse is trying to say. Since horses are very good at reading human signals, I trust that it is very important for us riders to be equally attentive to what horses communicate through their bodies. It is for instance necessary to reduce potential stress before entering the stable or field, and to take time to focus on the horse during handling and riding. Otherwise there is a possible risk of missing what the horse is trying to tell us through her or his body language and body position. High performance sport riders have generally spent a large amount of time in the stable and in riding arenas, and have gathered considerable knowledge and skill. They have watched famous riders and have worked with many individual horses with various personalities. In contrast, most riders taking part in this study had one private horse, and also limited time to spend in the stables. It has been noted by other researchers that many sport horses suffer from injuries or problems like lameness or back problems (Engell, 2018). One reason could be that horse owners and riders spend limited time around horses, and this could increase the risk of keeping and training horses in a suboptimal way. I suggest that there are two possible reasons for these health problems in horses. The first is ignorance; riders see their horse mainly as a tool and thus are not sufficiently attentive to the welfare of their horse. The second reason could be that riders and horse owners lack basic knowledge about a horse’s needs, feeding regimes, and how to train horses. What is missing, therefore, is theoretical knowledge (episteme). Both horse keeping and riding require a lot of knowledge, and there is a general opinion that this is
sometimes lacking among riders and should thus have greater prominence in the training of riders.

Dewey (1910) claims that learning occurs when we discover the connection between what we do and the consequences that follow our actions. A rider tries her or his knowledge-in-action during riding, and reflects on how these actions work out in practice; the rider’s knowledge is enriched or revised depending on the results of his or her actions. Learning how to ride must include time for the rider to think about what s/he is doing. I personally believe that reflection helps the rider to understand certain movements or exercises, and that this is likely to contribute to an improvement in the rider-horse combination. The deeper the process of self-reflection, the higher the likelihood that a given rider-horse combination will perform in a more coordinated way. There can however be a conflict between thinking and feeling. In my first article, I describe how focusing on a specific detail can negatively affect my feel, since doing so results in me over-thinking, fighting against my body instead of letting my feelings guide me in communicating with my horse. Thus, I agree with Larsson (1997), that when acting intuitively, our consciousness, feelings and thoughts are equally weighted in the process. Having said this, since riding is above all embodied, feelings have an essential role to play in this process.

Teaching methods and strategies

Results show that all trainers reflected over their teaching strategies and methods and were also able to articulate these. Moreover, I was impressed by the trainers’ practical skills of adapting the exercises and instructions to different rider-horse combinations. Trainers had themselves developed “a good eye” and were skilled in seeing how and when the rider should act. Thus, trainers demonstrated their *phronesis*. However, even if trainers contributed to solving problems in the communication between rider and horse, they often neglected to tell the rider why they acted in a specific way and thus missed important opportunities for the riders to deepen their own learning, and thus to further develop their individual *phronesis*. Janik (1996) states that practical knowledge is based on examples of actions, but in my experience, it is more usual in the teaching of riding that the trainer creates a situation (for instance a specific exercise) that has as its aim good communication between rider and horse.

The horse plays an important role in the communication between rider and horse, but this did not receive so much attention during the training sessions. This could be the reason why riders in this study had difficulties to describe the role of their horse in the communication process between rider and horse, in contrast to what they were technically doing. Is it at all possible to be more receptive to the horse’s voice in training and riding lessons? As discussed earlier in my text, sport horses are today generally more sensitive and attentive to human signs. Thus, the horse is a competent agent in constant communication with the rider, and I suggest
that to talk about the horse both as a subject and as an active part in the commu-
nication process should be better integrated into the riding-teaching system. The
cognitive and emotional abilities of both rider and horse should be better taken into
account in the learning process. This could be done for instance by both trainer and
rider discussing the personality of each horse; the trainer could invite the rider to
show more attentiveness to the horse’s body posture, to his body language and
mood, as well as making suggestions how to build a good relation together with the
horse. Phronesis includes a moral disposition to act wisely and prudently in each
particular case, and I believe that communication between rider and horse might be
improved if the role of the horse was better expressed in the teaching sessions. More
effort should be put to develop riders’ practical wisdom, so that riders are en-
couraged to use their embodied practical knowledge to listen to and try to under-
stand the actions and reactions of their horses. Teaching should, then, be built not
solely on a dialogue between trainer and rider, but on a three-way dialogue between
rider, horse and trainer.

Certainly, the equestrian trainer has an important role in supporting riders’
communication and performance, together with their horse. Moreover, I believe
that the trainer has a very important role as “expert” and role model, and thus needs
to adopt an ethical approach to training that can contribute in developing the
ethical aspects of riding and handling horses. This includes, for example, how the
trainer acts when a horse decides not to perform a specific exercise. Trainers also
have a moral responsibility to adopt a holistic view about the welfare of horses
during training. Unfortunately, trainers are generally not involved in what happens
before and after a training session.

Trainers are knowledgeable professionals. For this thesis, though, the analytical
focus was on practical training, and not on the use and transmission of theoretical
knowledge (e.g. how horses should be housed or how they learn). There is none-
theless the impression that riders are responsible to gain this knowledge inde-
pendently. The training sessions themselves did not include any horsemanship or
handling of horses on the ground. Greater integration of theoretical knowledge
(episteme) into both training schedules and the general education of riders may
ensure better horse welfare and horse health.

There is also the general problem of the trainer giving instructions to rider-horse
combinations. This problem can be broken into smaller parts. One part of this issue
is that the verbal instructions given by the trainer often come too late. The trainer
first observes what the rider-horse combination does, and then transforms his or
her observation into a verbal instruction. When the instruction is given to the rider,
the rider first needs to process this instruction, only then transforming it into an
action. Once the rider is ready to give the appropriate signal to the horse, it is often
too late, for the moment has already passed. There is also a risk that if the trainer
gives too many instructions, the rider loses his or her focus on the actions and
reactions of the horse and thus lapses into inattentiveness. Here I suggest that
innovative teaching methods – like, for instance, demonstrations and video recordings – should be more commonly used.

National similarities and differences

To my surprise, the overall results of this study did not reveal any national differences among riders despite the historical and cultural differences between Poland and Sweden. These findings illustrate the strength and coherence of the culture and traditions of equestrian sport, and furthermore how traditions and habits influence the way riders view their horses. This is more likely influenced by the strict rules and regulations presided over by the FEI, and that apply to all countries. The global standardisation of educational levels within equestrian sport, developed by IGEQ, is also to be regarded as a determining factor why many similarities exist between Swedish and Polish trainers and their training sessions. When spending time in a specific culture, we grow into that culture and it is this contextual rootedness that helps us to construct our knowledge. This point is made, for instance, by Molander (2015) as well as by Lave and Wenge (2001). By spending time in equestrian communities, riders and equestrian trainers grow into habits and reproduce taken for granted knowledge. This is probably the reason why military traditions and norms still seem to have a powerful position in equestrian practices. As elaborated upon in an earlier section, there are strong norms in sport dressage, for example the fact that riders are required to wear spurs and horses are expected to be equipped with a double bridle during competitions in sports dressage. I suggest that these norms need to be questioned and better investigated from a horse welfare perspective. This work is slowly starting to be done.

Interaction between rider, horse and equestrian trainer
– a challenging puzzle

The interaction between trainer, rider and horse has sometimes been described as triangular, or as three circles partly overlapping one another. I interpret this interaction as a complicated puzzle containing many different pieces that need to be fit together. There is a multispecies relation, where not only must the rider communicate with the horse and the trainer, and the trainer with the rider and the horse, but, vitally, the horse with both rider and trainer. Rider and trainer both educate the horse, while the trainer and the horse educate the rider. When the trainer for instance wants the rider to activate her or his horse’s hind leg, the trainer will give an instruction to the rider to perform a motion in his or her own body, thereby affecting the movements of the horse. Or when the trainer instructs the rider, the horse reacts and so the rider learns from the horse’s own reaction. Moreover, how rider and horse move together gives the trainer a “receipt” regarding how his or her instructions and feedback have worked out.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The interaction between rider, horse and trainer can be studied interdisciplinarily, for it includes many different aspects (e.g. the body, mind and emotions of all three actors, riding technique biomechanics, communication, pedagogics and didactics). Moreover, this complex interaction contains three individual actors, all with their own unique personalities, with different viewpoints that need to find a way to interact. Most of the knowledge involved in the teaching situation is tacit and implicit, and all three actors have their own practical knowledge that they need to share for the equipage to be able to move together in a rhythmical and harmonious way. Thus, each one of the pieces in this complicated puzzle is dependent on the other, and most of the time one or more of the pieces is missing, or another is positioned in the wrong place. The puzzle's pieces are constantly shifting and there is always the potential risk that one of the pieces is mislaid. From my own experiences – and the results from this thesis would support the view – only in short and rare moments do all the pieces fit together. This makes the teaching of riding extraordinarily challenging.

I began this thesis with a short epigraph of me as a trainer facing Anna and her horse Spirit, I then went on to pose some questions that arise from this challenging situation when rider and horse are both tense, and where the communication between them does not seem to work. Under these circumstances, how am I to act as a trainer? Where do I start? There is no general manual about how to approach this kind of rider-horse combination. Instead, I need to be attentive by “taking in” both rider’s and horse’s bodies and minds, using a combination of kinaesthetic feel and prior experience from other rider-horse combinations I have met during my time as a trainer. I need to participate in an embodied meeting by listening to what Anna and Spirit communicate in terms of their bodies by using my own body and gaze. Furthermore, I must enter into a dialogue involving both Anna and Spirit, exploring how the two of them experience one another. While talking to Anna, I pay attention to what Spirit is telling me through the position of his body and his body language. My task as a trainer, then, is to be a mediator between the two.

Most of the time, trainers seem to know automatically what to say and do when working with a rider-horse combination. They think about what to do during the action and thus act in a spontaneous and automatic way. Such a view is consistent with what Schön (1983) has to say when he discusses how practitioners reflect in and through action. However, when running into problems, the trainer needs to try to imagine, relying on earlier experiences not only to visualise a possible solution but also to anticipate what might happen when s/he gives a specific instruction. The trainer has to fully accept that every rider, every horse and every rider-horse combination is different and thus s/he must be open to experimentation, seeking to find a good way of approaching a specific equipage in a particular situation. It is by comporting oneself in this way that one acts on the basis of phronesis. Molander (2015) emphasises that the skilled practitioner learns how to reflect, experiment and improvise, and that, at one and the same time, this is a kind of “artistic knowledge”
and a creation of knowledge. This knowledge-in-practice is demonstrated in the practitioner’s “feel” for different situations. The trainer is required to try to act on the basis of her or his feel for the present situation, and thus solve problems in the “here and now”.

The importance of dialogue between trainer and rider was highlighted by some of the trainers in this study. A two-way dialogue usually takes place face to face, as described by Redmalm (2019). However, riding entails a dialogue that is transmitted bodily. In teaching how to ride, I suggest that it is essential that both rider and horse are involved in an I–you relation, as suggested by Buber (1923), where both parties engage in an open and honest meeting. Once the equestrian trainer has also been added to the equation, all three actors should take part in a three-way dialogue. In riding, it has often been suggested that the rider has to act as a leader, and since the horse is a large and potentially dangerous animal, humans are required to handle horses in a way that does not jeopardise their own safety. However, since it has been shown that it is questionable whether horses do include humans in their social hierarchy, I suggest that, if riders and trainers want to include the individual horse’s consciousness, emotions and intelligence into the riding experience, then dialogue is a better notion to describe the relation between rider and horse.

In summary, then, and on the basis of the results, I suggest that trainers need to be attentive to (that is, listen to) each rider-horse combination; they need to reflect over what is happening in the interspecies and embodied communication between rider and horse, and create a three-way dialogue involving all three actors, not least by actively bringing the horse into the interactional process.

Contributions to knowledge

Throughout this thesis my primary focus has been to investigate how different kinds of knowledges are interconnected in riders’ and experienced trainers’ practical skills, and how the interaction between rider, horse and trainer is co-constituted in equestrian practices. To this end, I have employed theories and ideas from the field of practical knowledge. I have also sought to contribute to the development of theories surrounding practical knowledge in the practice of teaching riding. Special emphasis has been placed on exploring equestrian trainers’ “tacit” and implicit knowledge and how this can be made more explicit to the riders. I have pointed out some of the ongoing changes in equestrian cultures and particularly how traditionally rooted systems in training and teaching rider-horse combinations are being challenged by new ways of viewing human-animal relations in general, and human-horse relations, in particular. I believe that this change is influenced by a combination of new theoretical tendencies, ongoing changes in equestrian practices, and the impact of social movements and political protest groups. Furthermore, these changes depart from ethical questions, frequently raised today by the general public, concerning the treatment and training of animals. The view of the role of the horse
has undergone a recent transformation; from the perception of the horse as a tool, “placed at the humans’ disposal”, as described in the German handbook (1997, p. 124), towards seeing the horse as a sentient being and a social agent actively involved in the riding experience.

Why do we need to study the interaction between the rider, the horse and the equestrian trainer? Many people in Europe ride, and in Sweden horse riding is the second largest sport among children and youngsters. The relation between rider and horse differs from other sports (and from relations between humans and other non-human animals), since the rider is sitting on the horse’s back. Moreover, it is also considered to be a dangerous sport with recurrent accidents involving both riders and horses. As mentioned in the introduction, there is still a lack of knowledge about the complex and challenging learning situation during riding lessons and about the practical knowledge that skilled practitioners (trainers and riding teachers) use. Horse riding and the teaching of riding is an unexplored field. The practice of riding is built on traditions and long-established knowledge that today can be regarded as old-fashioned (Thorell, 2018). The riding manuals, which still today are both in circulation and in general use, were written during a distant time: when the main goal was to transport a group of soldiers from one place to another. Moreover, there are many taken for granted assumptions about how to ride and about the best way to train a horse. People will often speak of “good riding”, forgetting though that such a claim is always dependent on who you ask and in what context. In this connection, it is interesting to note that horse riders in a recent study conducted by Marlin et al. (2018) seemed to overestimate their horse knowledge. One reason for this complacency could be the lack of scientific work being conducted in this field.

I hope that this thesis will contribute to a deeper understanding of how riders experience the unique relation that is born from each individual rider-horse combination. And moreover that unfolding the practical knowledge used by professional trainers in equestrian sport will contribute to improved teaching strategies and methods and thus promote better welfare for horses and riders alike. The users or readers of this doctoral thesis will hopefully be in educational contexts of their own, perhaps undertaking an education in equestrianism. If so, then I hope to have made a useful contribution to the academic field of human-animal/equine studies.

I hope that this thesis will serve as inspiration for other doctoral students seeking to unfold the practical knowledge within different interpersonal professions (e.g. pre-school teachers, medical doctors, and teachers). There is reason to believe that this thesis also contributes to a better understanding of other fields of practice in which “tacit knowledge”, feelings and emotions play their part.

Horse riding and equestrian sport is fantastic, but I believe that it should be built on mutual understanding between rider and horse, and thus a nice experience for both parties involved. We as riders need to learn to see the horse as a subject with her or his own mind, consciousness and emotions; we must value the fact that the
The horse has an active role in communicating with the rider. Furthermore, we need to be mindful and alert to the horse. A good place to start would be to ask the question: what and who we are to the horse: I certainly welcome the ongoing transition in equestrian cultures, and that traditionally rooted systems in training and teaching in riding are being challenged. Moreover, I suggest that it is necessary for riders as well as equestrian organisations to have a more critical view of how horses are used for sport in general. Maybe it is time to be seriously open to the rising concern about the welfare of horses participating in equestrian sport. To paraphrase the Swedish show jumper Peder Fredriksson, we need to be grateful every time we mount a horse and appraise what these beautiful and humble non-human animals are prepared to do for us.

Suggestions for future research

What practical implications might follow from the way in which riders view the role of their horses in sports dressage? In this study, my aim was not to investigate whether riders’ perceptions of their horses impact on how they approach, and communicate with, their horses during training. This is a salient point that would be interesting to investigate in the future. Since riders taking part in this study were primarily amateur riders, it would be interesting to also investigate how elite riders view the role of their horses in sport. Moreover, even if the focus for this study has been on equestrian sport, an interesting future study could be to explore the wider social roles the horse is given in cultures where they remain integral to daily work.

The training sessions recorded in this study focused on riding and not on other aspects, e.g. the handling of horses from the ground or in the housing systems. It is common that education in equestrian sport is mainly related to riding performance, and does not address the rest of what is happening in the lives of riders and horses. A general grounding in “horsemanship” is absent and not generally discussed, and this would be another interesting area to study. What would, for instance, happen to a rider’s learning if, as part of the basic learning, attention was placed on how to build a good relation and communication with the horse from the ground was part of the basic training?

As mentioned earlier in the text, riding teachers and equestrian trainers have an important role as mediators between riders and horses and for safeguarding the welfare of horses in sport. Results from this study indicate that trainers see riding and teaching as intertwined, and that the main focus of trainers and riding teachers’ education is on riding rather than teaching skills. Thus, it would be interesting to explore whether the addition of a humanistic approach to teaching in riding would contribute in opening up discussions about, for example, the ethics of using horses for sport as well as about the many taken for granted assumptions that seem to be deeply rooted in equestrian cultures.
It would also be interesting to further explore what would happen if the perspective of the horse was better addressed by trainers and riding teachers in the teaching of riders. What would happen if the role of the horse as a subject and a social actor was made more visible? Would this affect the trainer’s professional gaze? And would it contribute to better interaction between rider and horse? It would also be interesting to explore how we might come to know more about how horses experience their riders. What does the relation between horse and human mean to the horse? This could be done for instance by using tests where horses’ behavioural and physical parameters were registered, e.g. Proops et al., (2018) who conducted a test into how horses react to human face expressions.

Since learning how to ride is a complicated skill that takes a lot of time and effort, it would be interesting to try out in practice whether the inclusion of innovative teaching methods – e.g. video recording, training diaries and/or watching other riders under supervision – would facilitate riders’ learning processes. There are some teaching devices that have recently appeared on the market, such as an app called “Ridesum” where riders can record their training and send the film to their trainer in order to receive feedback. There is moreover a device called “RideQHead” that encourages the rider to keep his or her gaze up while riding. There is a saying among riders that it is only the hours in the saddle that count. However, since practical knowledge includes both experience and reflection, it would be interesting to explore if riders’ learning would be promoted if reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (as suggested by Schön, 1983) were used as recurrent moments in the teaching of riding.

What might the practical implications be for teaching in riding school environments? Teaching in riding schools often include group lessons where each rider-horse combination is required to perform the same exercises. From my own experience, not much consideration is taken to riders’ and horses’ individual personalities and prerequisites. Thus, I believe that it would be possible to develop teaching methods where an understanding of each individual horse was seriously undertaken. Moreover, in my experience, the teaching often focuses on teaching the riders’ techne or technical skills. What would happen if greater emphasis were placed on theoretical knowledge (episteme) and phronesis? This could be done for instance by including more knowledge about horse behaviour and learning in the riders’ education, and also by encouraging riders to be more attentive to each individual horse’s actions and reactions, as well as making riders aware of the value of building a good relation together with the horse. Apart from riding, riders also need to spend time around horses to get to know them. It is also likely that there are people who wish to handle horses without riding them.

This thesis has explored many aspects involved in the relationship between rider, horse and equestrian trainer, with several other interesting aspects calling for our attention. Accordingly, I believe that there is a need for the further use of interdis-
ciplinary methods, where new and innovative forms of teaching and learning could be tested and evaluated by a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.


Doseth, Mariann. (2016). *En analyse av Aristoteles kunnskapsbegreper (Teacher’s practical judgement)*. Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universite, Avhandling for graden


**Internet**


Svensk sammanfattning

(Interaktionen mellan ryttere, häst och tränare – ett mångfacetterat pussel)


de populäraste sporterna i Sverige, saknas djupare kunskap om inlärningen under ridlektioner, och om den praktiska kunskap som skickliga ridlärare och tränare använder.


Resultaten från artikel nummer två motiverade mig att närmare undersöka hur sportryttare uttrycker sig, och förstå, hästens roll i ridträningen, och den frågan sök-


Resultaten visar att samspelet mellan ryttare och häst består av en konstant kommunikation där båda är kroppsliga subjekt som deltar i en aktiv process och skapar ett *sam-blivande* (becoming with). En erfaren ryttare ”tänker” och reagerar genom sin kropp och hästen upplevs som ryttarens ”andra skinn”. Både ryttare och häst förändras och anpassar sig till varandra genom samspelet vilket resulterar i en *gemensam praktisk kunskap*. Ryttarens praktiska kunskap utvecklas genom en kombination av praktisk erfarenhet och reflektion över erfarenheterna.

Ryttarna i studien beskrev hästens roll i kommunikationen med ryttaren på olika sätt, vilket pekar på en spänning mellan att ena sidan hur hästen historiskt har uppfattats som ett verktyg, och att andra sidan modernare attityder där hästen betraktas som kapabel till eget tänkande och egna känslor. Det fanns även motstridiga uppfattningar om detta inom respektive ryttarens beskrivning. *Techne* (tekniskt kunskap eller konst) kan ses som den typ av kunskap som finns representerad i militära traditioner, medan *fronesis* (praktisk visdom) kan ses som den kroppsliga, praktiska kunskap som ryttare använder för att lyssna av och försöka förstå hästen. Några av ryttarna i studien betonade att en välutbildad häst i vissa fall kan guida och hjälpa ryttaren att presteras bättre och att hästar därmed har en egen praktisk kunskap som de kan kommunicera till ryttaren.
Kroppen ansågs som ryttnas mest värdefulla verktyg i kommunikationen med hästen, och de flesta ryttna upplevde att de hade svårt att kontrollera sina kroppar. Hästar är känsliga djur som har god förmåga att både läsa av ryttnas kroppsspråk och att använda sitt eget kroppsspråk, och därför borde mer tonvikt i ridundervisningen ligga på att rytten lär sig uppfatta och tolka hästens kroppsspråk och reaktioner, och på vad hästen försöker förmedla till rytten. Och på hur han eller hon bör handla i varje specifik situation.


Tränarna i studien var även skickliga på att lösa uppkomna problem under träningen. De hade ett "bra öga" (good eye) och reagerade direkt genom att använda sin egen "kinestetiska empati", och hade därmed utvecklat en god frōnēsis kunskap själva efter många år som rytter och tränare. Tränarna hade dock svårt att förklara *varför* de handlade som de gjorde och lyckades därför inte tydliggöra och överförna den tysta och underförstådda kunskapen fullt ut till sina rytter.

*Ryttarkänsla* är ett komplicerat begrepp som dels upplevs som en direkt kroppslig känsla av rytten, medan vissa studier pekar på att den även kan ha kognitiva inslag. Den vägleder rytten att avgöra hur och även när han eller hon ska använda olika hjälper, och kan därför ses som ett uttryck för frōnēsis. Det verkar även finnas en relation mellan att handla intuitivt och frōnēsis. I början av ryttnas utbildning fokuserar tränarna på att lära ryttern att använda sina hjälper (*poiesis*) och då använder de mestadels konkreta instruktioner. Nästa fas består av att tränarna bidrar till att utveckla ryttnas rytarkänsla, och då behöver ryttern lär sig att anpassa sina hjälper till hästens handlingar och reaktioner. Tonvikten i utbildningen ligger då på att stödja ryttna och bidra till att de utvecklar sina praktiska färdigheter till att bli självständiga rytter (*praxis*). För att lära sig rida krävs en kombi-
nation av erfarenhet och reflektion, och att reflektera över sina erfarenheter är nödvändigt för att ryttaren ska utveckla sin förmåga att ta egna beslut även när tränare inte är närvarande. Resultaten visar dock att tid till reflektion under eller efter ridpasset inte finns inbyggt i ridutbildningssystemet.

Studiens resultat visar inte några nationella olikheter mellan sportryttare i Polen och Sverige, trots att de båda länderna har åtskilliga historiska och kulturella skillnader. Det pekar på att det finns en stark och väl sammanhållen internationell hästkultur och att traditioner och vanor inom sportdressyren verkar påverka ryttares syn på hästen.

Avhandlingens slutsatser är att det behövs nya undervisningsmetoder där mer fokus läggs på att utveckla ryttarnas känsla. Tränarna behöver bli bättre på att synliggöra hästens roll som subjekt och aktiv part för ryttarna, och på att stödja varje individuellt ekipages aktiva process för att få ett bra samspel. Bättre hänsyn borde tas till ryttarens erfarenhet och att känna både sin egen och sin hästs kropp under träningspassen, och till både hästens olika känslighet och ryttarnas olika personligheter. Träningsmetoderna skulle förhoppningsvis förbättras om ryttare uppmuntrades att använda sin egen praktiska kunskap för att lyssna på och försöka förstå hästens handlingar och reaktioner, och därmed utveckla sin fronetiska kompetens. Ryttare behöver även få chans till både reflektion-i-handling och reflektion-över-handling för att utveckla och fördjupa sin inlärning.

Tränarna inom ridsporten behöver bli bättre på att explicitgöra för ryttarna vad de ser och varför de väljer att ge vissa instruktioner, för att bidra till att utveckla ryttarens egen praktiska kunskap. Tränare behöver vara uppmärksamna (och lyssna) på varje ekipage, reflektera över vad som händer i den kroppliga kommunikationen mellan ryttare och häst, och skapa en tre-vägs-kommunikation där alla tre parter, ryttare, tränare och häst, involveras.

En mer holistisk syn på ryttare där deras fysiska och mentala förmågor får större utrymme skulle kunna öka ryttarens och hästens prestationer och välbefinnande. Hästhållning och ridning kräver massor av kunskap, och det anses allmänt att den kunskap saknas bland många ryttare och hästägare. Därför borde episteme (teoretisk kunskap) ingå i ryttarnas utbildning för att säkerställa en god hästvälstånd.

Studien förväntar sig bidra till en djupare förståelse för hur ryttare upplever den unika relationen mellan människa och häst, och leda till förbättrade undervisningsstrategier och metoder därmed en bättre välfärd för både ryttare och hästar. Kulturerna inom ridsporten är under omformning och traditionellt rotade tränings system utmanas av nya idéer, men de starka, militära normerna spelar fortfarande en viktig roll. Att använda hästar för sport medför etiska överväganden, och därför borde ryttare inom ridsporten reflektera över hur deltagande i sport påverkar hästen som känande och tänkande varelse. Min förhoppning är att avhandlingen också kommer att bidra till ökad förståelse för andra områden där den praktiska kunskapen är
central och där känslor spelar en stor roll, som exempelvis inom mellanmänskliga
yrken.
Riders’ perception of their communication with the horse

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IKZ Equitation, Sweden; 2Lundping University, Sweden

Introduction
This study is part of a project with the overall aim to improve riding education through a better understanding of the interplay between rider, riding instructor/trainer and horse. The current work aimed to describe and analyse the rider’s perceptions and views on the communication between rider and horse. The rider influences the horse through a combination of rein, weight and leg aids together with the voice.

Material & methods
- 5 experienced instructors/trainers trained 3 experienced riders of intermediate level in dressage each, all female.
- One training of each rider was video recorded. Directly after the training, the riders watched 10 minutes from the video recording (stimulated recall) followed by semi-structured in-depth interview.
- The riders were asked to give a general description of how they communicated with their horses.
- They were also asked to describe how they interpreted the horse’s responses to their signals and how they acted when the horse responded or did not respond.
- Results were analysed using a phenomenographic approach.

Results
- All riders were well aware of the importance of giving clear and precise signals to the horse and to remove a given signal (aid) as soon as the horse responded.
- Most riders (12 of 15) agreed that it is essential to check that the horse responds to the rider’s basic signals in the beginning of each training session.
- Riders pointed out that it is important to adjust the aids to the character of the horse and to the current physical and mental status of the horse.
- Most riders (14 of 15) blamed themselves when the communication with the horse failed.

Conclusion
The riders seemed to be aware of the awareness of the need to improve the relationship with the horse.

[Image of a horse and rider]
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This thesis examines the complex and challenging relationships between rider, horse and equestrian trainer in the context of teaching horse riding. What strategies and methods do equestrian trainers use to support the riders’ understanding of, and performance with, their horses? What role is the horse assigned in this form of interaction? Operating at the intersection between practical knowledge and human-animal/equine studies, the thesis adopts an ethnographic approach, and seeks to develop theories of practical knowledge in the practice of teaching riding. Special emphases is placed on embodied and implicit knowledge.

The results show that, as a subject and as an active participant in rider-horse communication, the horse is not directly addressed in the current education of rider-horse combinations. It is concluded that new teaching strategies are required, so that greater emphasis is placed on “equestrian feel” and on how riders experience their own as well as their horses’ bodies and minds. Furthermore, equestrian trainers need to improve their skills to further develop riders’ practical wisdom (phronesis).

Equestrian cultures are in transition, according to which traditional systems of training rider-horse combinations are being challenged. The use of horses for sport raises ethical questions and it may be time for sport riders to seriously re-examine and re-evaluate the relation with their horses and how this affects the horse as a conscious and sensitive animal.

Mari Zetterqvist Blokhuis is a professional riding teacher and holds a BSc in social science. For many years, she worked as head teacher in pedagogy at the equestrian centre in Strömsholm, Sweden. Since 2014, she has been a doctoral student at the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge within the research area Critical and Cultural Theory at Södertörn University. Mari has a special interest in the interaction between rider and horse and how to teach the practical skill of horse riding.

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