

The Post-humanist Gaze: Reading Fanie Jason's Photo Essay on Carting Lives

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Summary

This article proposes a posthumanist reading of Fanie Jason's photo essay on carthorses in Greater Cape Town. When social realist photography includes non-human animals, they tend to be relegated to the margins of representation: sentimentalised, sensationalised, denigrated or ignored, both metaphorically and literally, they all but disappear. Jason's photographs, however, pose provocative questions about the carthorse body and its intersomatic connections with the human body. The horses demand attention, often looking back at the camera lens and the viewer. Conventional anthropocentric theories of photography offer nothing to a methodology which seeks to engage with the visual non-human animal, but theories of animals in art and in film contribute valuably to such a methodology. A post-humanist gaze not only subverts the human and non-human as necessarily inimical realms, but analyses how the photographs themselves extend the purview of social realist images. Posthumanism – in its denial of the exceptionalism of the human subject in relation to the non-human animal and in its discounting of the humanist preoccupation with consciousness, language and individual agency – theorises human-non-human animal relations in new ways. Thus, a post-humanist reading of Jason's photographs considers the embodied commonalities of human and horse. It eschews a humanist celebration of agency on which the notion of subjectivity is predicated, preferring instead to regard agency as relational and exterior – as Jonathan Burt suggests in his discussion of the "visual animal" (2002: 31).

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel bied 'n post-humanistiese interpretasie van Fanie Jason se foto-essay oor tuigperde in Groter Kaapstad. Wanneer sosiaal-realistiese fotografie niemenslike diere insluit, is dit geneig om hulle na die grense van verteenwoordiging te reëleer. Sowel metafores as letterlik sentimentaliseer, sensasionaliseer, denigreer of ignoreer dit hulle, sodat hulle byna verdwyn. Jason se foto's stel egter tergende vrae oor die tuigperd se liggaam en die intersomatiese verbindings daarvan met die menslike liggaam. Die perde dring aan op aandag, en kyk dikwels terug na die kameralens en die kyker. Konvensionele antroposentriese teorieë van fotografie lewer geen bydrae tot 'n metodologie om by die visuele niemenslike dier betrokke te raak nie, maar teorieë van diere in kuns en in rolprente lewer 'n waardevolle bydrae daartoe. 'n Post-humanistiese blik ondergrawe nie net die menslike en niemenslike

as noodwendig skadelike terreine nie, maar ontleed hoe die foto's self die omvang van sosiaal-realistiese beelde uitbrei. Die post-humanisme – in die ontkenning van die uitsonderlikheid van die menslike onderwerp in verhouding tot die niemenslike dier en in die weerspreking van die humanistiese beheptheid met bewustheid, taal en individuele agentskap – teoretiseer op nuwe maniere die verhoudings tussen menslike en niemenslike diere. 'n Post-humanistiese interpretasie van Jason se foto's handel dus oor die beliggaamde gemeenskaplikhede van mens en perd. Dit sku weg van 'n humanistiese viering van agentskap waaraan die idee van subjektiwiteit toegeskryf is en verkies eerder om agentskap as verwant en ekstern te beskou – soos Jonathan Burt aanvoer in sy bespreking van die “visuele dier” (2002: 31).

Fanie Jason's photo essay on carthorses and the humans who work with them in Greater Cape Town documents trans-species affiliations, contrary though some may be. The skilfully adept photographs depict a number of scenes: humans on the Cape Flats begin the day with their horses, who emerge from stables accessed through domestic spaces, and then wait quietly to be harnessed. A horse too young to be working yet is poised beside two children on a couch. In a large stable yard a woman owner, unusual in the carting industry staffed almost entirely by men, waits with her horses who will be hired out to pull the vehicles for collecting scrap. In a rain-wet scrapyard a horse turns around to look at his load being weighed. Young grooms pose alongside their charge in a stable; a lone, thin carthorse and her accompanying men trawl the streets of an informal settlement. A horse stands immobile as he is shod, with another waiting. In a moment of leisure a group of men smoke dagga, a blinkered horse in the midst of the curling smoke. Such intimacies between human and non-human are countered by portrayals of a horse straining on the edges of the freeway against a huge load, with the silhouette of Devil's Peak and the back of Table Mountain in the distance. Two photographs of a stallion being trained have human- and horse power set against each other.¹

Fanie Jason is a freelance photographer who has worked in many milieus.² Most relevantly, the photo essay on carthorses was selected for the Bamako Photographic Encounters with the theme “In and Around the City” and won him the Vodacom Journalist of the Year Award in 2006 (Jason 2014: n.p).

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1. I am very grateful to Patricia Hayes who told me about this photo essay, to Prof. Gordon Pirie, then in the Geography Department at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), for sharing it with me and to Fanie Jason for granting me permission to reproduce the images.
 2. In the early 1980s he worked for *Drum* and *Pace*; more recently he travelled to Kosovo, the West Bank and Rwanda (n.p.). Sean O'Toole dubs him a “renegade” photographer for his “visceral and paparazzi-style lensmanship” and quotes Jason who sees himself not as a photographer but as a “black photographer” (2013: 24, 26).

His photographs depict alternative and usually hidden urban spaces where horses function as the nexus of differential economic status and power, sustaining the livelihoods of people engaged within the industry: the horse owners, the scrap collectors who rent the horses for the day, the grooms and farriers. Gordon Pirie estimates that there are approximately 500 working horses in the Cape Flats carting industry which “is thought to provide support for about 6000 people” (2006: n.p.).³ Jason’s photographs of key players in this industry represent complex entanglements between horses and humans, confirming that these trans-species associations are constituted not merely by economics but are inherently ontological, and are about contemporary bodies located in urban spaces, with their apartheid histories of Group Areas Act removals.

This article homes in on representations of embodied carting lives. Quite how to do so has been problematic. To read Jason’s images entirely as evidence of equine submission in the face of human domination would be a travesty in its search for evidence of cruelty and suffering. On the other hand, to read the images exclusively as celebrating horse-human kinship would be to deny their edginess and to gloss over poverty’s effects. Interpreting Jason’s photographs via a post-humanist gaze, however, not only subverts the human and non-human as necessarily inimical realms but also taps into ways in which the photographs themselves extend the purview of apparently social realist images. Usually, when such images include non-human animals they are relegated to the margins of representation; sentimentalised, sensationalised, denigrated or ignored, both metaphorically and literally, they all but disappear. Susan Sontag, in the Urtext *On Photography*, disparages “humanist jargon” in which, she argues, “the highest vocation of photography is to explain man to man” (1971: 111), but in Jason’s photographs such explanations are not anthropocentrically framed because of the central inclusion of the non-human. Sontag’s critique of social realist documentation by bourgeois photographers as “indifferent” in a humanist way is not applicable here either. Jason is not an outside observer of human-animal entanglements in the working-class Cape Flats neighbourhoods, but an underrated photographer from Gugulethu. That horses and humans are not types but individuals in his photographs undermines the homogenising practices of the humanist gaze. In relation to technique there is a specificity about these portraits of horse-human relationships (which was Jason’s prime aim in taking these images (2010: personal communication)) which shifts any potential indifference to images of the non-human. In addition, because the urban horses lack the idealised grandeur recurrent in most conventional equine photography they never

3. The Cart Horse Protection Association has improved the lives of these working horses who now have to be licensed, with each cart displaying the license number and the horse’s name.

approximate the sublimity of wild animality. Neither glamorised nor stripped of any cultural location, they are depicted as hard-working animals living in the built environment, who cover extensive distances on bone-destroying tarmac, who live in corrugated iron shelters in yards, and who may be subjected to harsh training methods.

Jason's photographs pose provocative questions about the carthorse body and its intersomatic connections with the human body. The horses demand attention, often looking back at the camera lens and the viewer. With their anthropocentrism, conventional theories of photography offer nothing to a methodology which seeks to engage with the visual non-human animal, but theories of animals in art and animals in film contribute relevantly and valuably. In *Art and Animals*, Giovanni Aloï finds that in contemporary art, "[t]he animal body, the animal voice, the animal gaze and the animal trace are ... all new questioning entities" (2012: xv). In *Animals in Film*, Jonathan Burt dismisses the relevance of the ethnographic and pornographic gaze in relation to the "visual animal" as it is too connected to the human subject. Instead he calls for "a more specific description of the construction of the visual animal, one that takes better account of the particular positionings of the animal in relation to the human" (2002: 44). While Burt is concerned primarily with representations of film animals, his comment is salutary and relevant to photography, too, in its construction of the non-human. The post-humanist gaze engages very specifically with these "particular positionings". In its denial of the exceptionalism of the human subject in relation to the non-human animal, and in its discounting of the humanist preoccupation with consciousness, language and individual agency it is well placed to theorise human-non-human animal relations in new ways. Rather than foregrounding the constantly rehearsed differences between human and non-human it stresses what we, as humans, share with non-humans, our embodied mortality. A post-humanist reading of Jason's photographs will consider, then, the embodied commonalities of both human and horse. It eschews a humanist celebration of agency, on which the notion of subjectivity is predicated, preferring, instead, to regard agency as relational and exterior, as Jonathan Burt suggests in his discussion of the "visual animal" (2002: 31).

Bodies rather than interiorities or subjectivities figure in post-humanist analysis. Cora Diamond, who has influenced two key thinkers in post-humanism, Anat Pick and Cary Wolfe, suggests in "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy" that we acknowledge our embodied mortality in relation to that of non-human animals: "The awareness we each have of being a living body ... carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them" (Diamond quoted in Pick 2011: 10, and in Wolfe 2010: 72). As Wolfe puts it in *What Is Post-humanism?* such thinking "opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy inherited from

humanism” (2010: xv). Similarly, for Pick a post-humanist strategy counteracts anthropocentrism in its consideration of “notions of embodiment – the material, the anonymous, the elemental” (2011: 6). Embodiment, in Pick’s argument, is not pre-cultural, but challenges the rigidities of speciesism as it “provides a critical space for thinking of the human outside of Cartesian abstractionism, as rigorously material” (p. 6). Significantly, Pick suggests, embodiment “makes for a different sort of ethics and aesthetics” (p. 6), one in which humans become “less human” and animals are included in apparently exclusively human notions of subjectivity (p. 6).⁴ Emphasis on the material does not, however, deny the metaphysical. Foregrounding common vulnerabilities between humans and animals gestures to the spiritual – vulnerability and impermanence are the very essence of being alive and being embodied as Pick suggests. Her “creaturely poetics” enlists Simone Weil’s collocation of vulnerability and ethics as it acknowledges animals as fellow creatures through “beauty, fragility and reality” (p. 5).

Embodied Vulnerabilities

Jason’s photographs engage with and go some way to contradicting dualistic constructions of country and city as well as nature and culture, for large animals like horses are anomalous within the urban environment. Granted, the carthorses function economically, but the photographs demonstrate that they embody more than working units and are not necessarily instrumentalised. Their embodied presences impinge on the human embodiment of those who own them and work alongside them. In her seminal essay “Zoopolis”, urban geographer Jennifer Wolch writes not only of the conventional literal lacunae of animals in the city, but of the ontological effects for urban dwellers who are bereft of connections with non-human animals, whether wild or domestic: “Corporeal identity may ... become increasingly destabilised as understandings of human embodiment traditionally derived through direct experience of live animal bodies/subjects evaporates or is radically transformed” (1998: 129). Those who work and/or live with carthorses are unusually privileged, then, in their daily interactions and cannot but be affected both corporeally and ontologically by them.

4. Pick defines “dehumanization” as a strategy to re-conceptualise the humanities and social sciences while acknowledging its venality when deployed as a “strategy of oppression” (2011: 6). In South Africa the animalising of raced subjects within apartheid constructions is, of course, all too familiar.

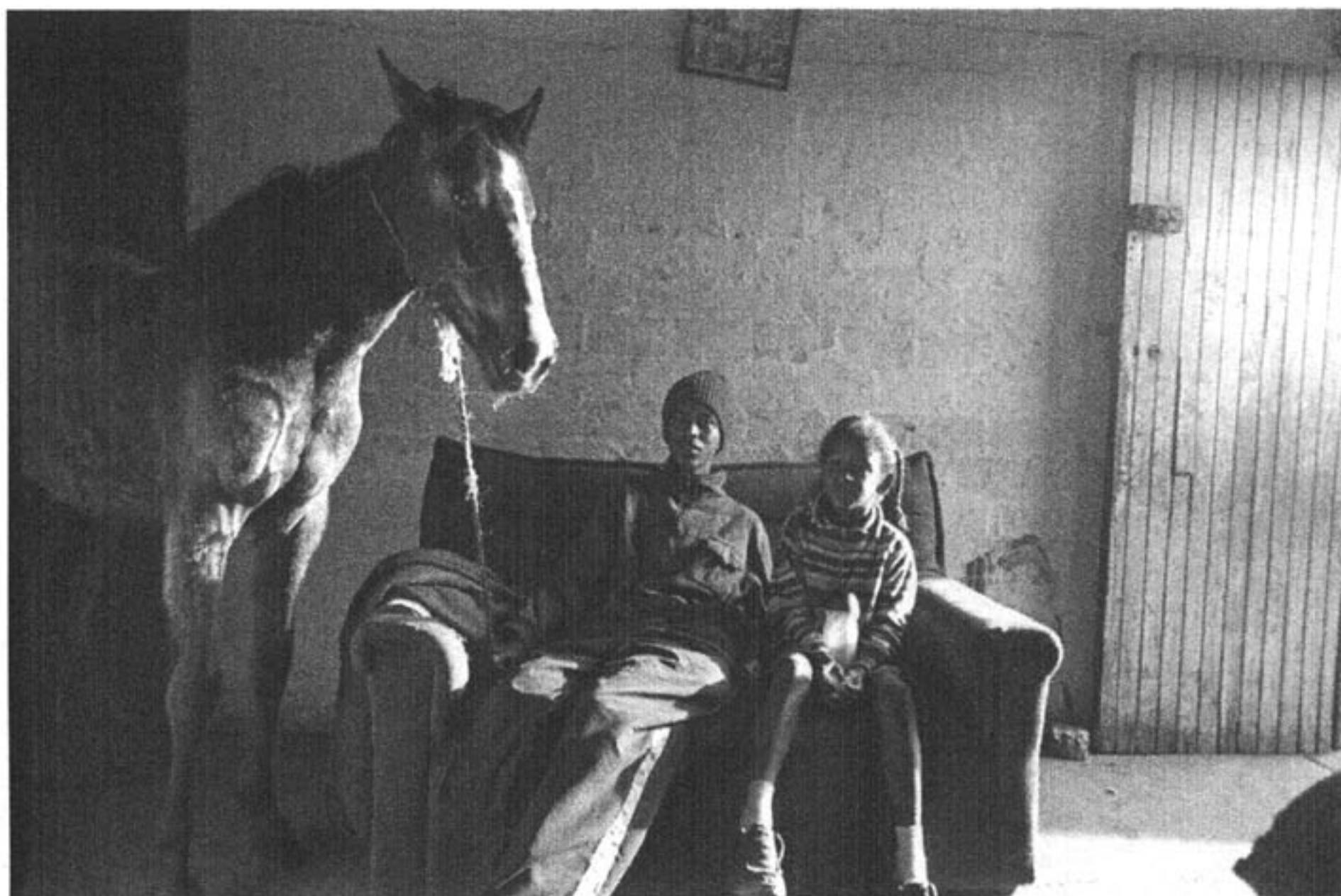


Fig. 1 (used with permission Fanie Jason)

In Figure 1, a boy and a girl sit on a couch. The boy holds, tautly, the lead rein of the horse's makeshift halter. The light slanting in from the open door casts shadows, particularly onto the horse whose hindquarters disappear into the darkness of which his body seems part. His neck and the off side of his face are shadowed too,⁵ but his visible eye and the white blaze convey a kind of luminosity, even as his eye is uncertain. In this photograph, the unconcealed eyes of the children seem to stare directly at the viewer, but the girl is distracted; similarly, the horse's attention is not entirely directed at the camera lens: the ear visible to the viewer flicks back at a noise behind him. The youth of the girl complements that of the horse – his body seems unformed, yet muscled with her bare knees mirroring those of the non-human animal. The warm clothes covering the boy's body and the beanie covering his head contrast with the girl's unclothed legs. While the boy sits deep into the couch, she is all spry plaits and poised energy, yet it is he who seems poised on the brink of adolescence as she remains a child. In this image, both humans and horse rest, for the moment, on a threshold – the door is open on the right, the slanting sun conveys a new day, but the sunlight underscores the defencelessness of the girl; her plaits catch the light, with individual hairs escaping from the severity of her hairstyle. Similarly, the horse's whiskers highlighted by the sun hint at an innocence held in too stringently by the lead rope, the escaping strands of which seem to duplicate the animal's embodied vulnerability.

5. The left side of the horse is referred to as "near", the right as "off".

Domestic space is generally not a place to encounter a large non-human animal, but many carthorses are housed in shanties in the backyard with exit and entry through the house (an earlier photograph of the same horse shows him standing untethered in a lounge).



Fig. 2 (used with permission Fanie Jason)

In a photograph of another horse accompanied by his handler (Fig. 2), the energy of the horse and the man in the living room contrasts with the stasis of doilies preciously protecting the back of the couches, the Welsh dresser with its myriad, fragile vases. The “play of agency”, to borrow a phrase from Jonathan Burt (2002: 31), flickers through these images, elementally, even superficially, as bodies and surfaces claim the viewer’s attention. The horse with his pricked ears and forward-going alertness is held by the man as though in mid-stride. Both gaze quizzically at the viewer – one head-on, the other with his head slanted, while the scene suggests an ordinariness, a quotidian routine, a moment in which horse and human pause as they leave the house for a working day.

The children and the young horse, in contrast, are immobile, even imprisoned by domestic space. The framed picture off-kilter on the wall behind them, the door stained by dirt at its base, the black mark on the wall by the door, all imply an unreliability about this threshold space: the picture has been knocked off its hook, mud has been lapping at the door, the mark has not been erased. All express a lack of human care. The very bricks of the wall seem provisional in their visibility through the paint. The performativity and theatricality of this image are arresting in their depiction

of the vulnerability of three youthful beings. The horse is too young to be doing the heavy work of pulling a cart, the girl and the boy should be at school. Philo and Wilbert's notion of agency as "relational", as "emerging as an effect generated and performed in configurations of different materials" (quoted in Burt 2002: 31), is taken further by Burt in his analysis of animals in film. For Burt, "[t]he animal body is caught up ... in a complicated system of reactions and effects which is registered as a play between the surface of bodies, but not necessarily revealing anything about the interaction of minds" (2002: 31). This photograph of the children and the young horse exemplifies this "play" between surfaces, both of the body and the built environment; at the same time, the poised stillness of the three beings seems to externalise an inner quiet experienced by all, no matter that it might only be momentary.

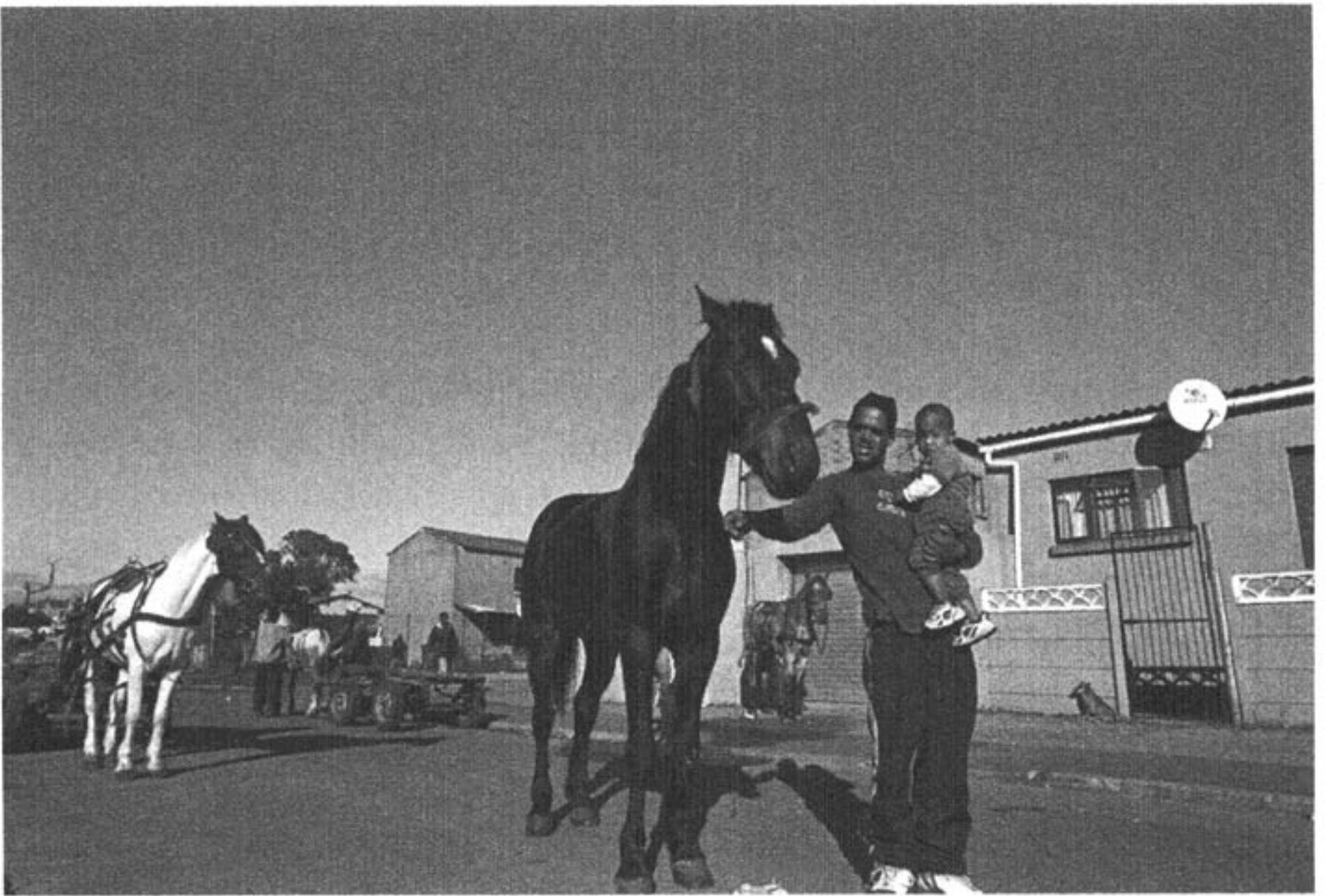


Fig. 3 (used with permission Fanie Jason)

Moving from these enclosed spaces to photographs of the street brings relief to the viewer. Still, if the horses have been released from their overnight stables, they do not have access to paddocks but are constrained by their training and discipline or confined by the yokes of the cart. Together with their humans they embody a sense of purpose as they engage in a community of carting practices. A man with a toddler on his hip stands in the foreground with an untethered horse (Fig. 3). He gestures communicatively to the horse's chest as he leans towards the animal whose ears are partially back, signifying some possible displeasure or detachment. Even so, he is aware of the man's physical presence as a familiar, just as he is

regarded as a trusted, creature who is permitted proximity to the child. Ralph Acampora's neologism "symphysis" refers to a "jointly held form of bodily consciousness" (2006: 114) between human and non-human. He is quick to emphasise that "separation" is key in "an ontological and moral dialectic of difference and similarity" (p. 115), denigrating "romantic models of fusion" (p. 114). The man with his gesture, which could be seen as proprietorial even as it is communicative, the horse with his acceptance of the man's proximity, even though he is not directly relating to him, illustrate such a dialectic incorporating ontological tension and cohesion.

Horses, unlike dogs, are not necessarily demonstrative in their affection for humans. Horses' almost continual vocalising in films is pure fiction. Many of Jason's photographs represent a trans-species rapport, however: the photograph of the street has the horses and humans symphytically aware of each other. The harnessed roan on the right stands calmly against the garage door; the piebald on the left leans into his harness, and in the centre back a grubby grey is being tacked up. Horses and humans share an embodied consciousness which extends to the dimensions of the carts themselves. To what extent the men in the equine street would define themselves ontologically in relation to these horses is speculative, but the man in the foreground has the authority of a horse owner, which is signified, surely, through his proprietorial gesture.

The animals, at least in Jason's photographs where they are immobile, are never merely the observed, but, as strong presences, look back at the viewer. Burt argues that we humans can never appreciate the substance of the animal's look, and John Berger writes of zoo animals: "[Y]ou are looking at something that has been rendered absolutely marginal; and all the concentration you can muster will never be enough to centralise it" (1980: 22; italics in original). Jason's carthorses suggest otherwise, however; they are not, of course, "absolutely marginal" but involved in daily interactions with humans. The power of the equine gaze in Jason's images is determined by the affective responses of the viewer. Elizabeth Edwards, for whom photographs depict a kind of theatricality, a "representation, heightening, containment and projection" also emphasises the significance of the viewer; for her, photographs are "a presentation which constitutes a performative or persuasive act directed towards a conscious beholder" (2001: 18). For A.H. Skabelund, photographs specifically depend on "the actual physical presence of real animals. As a result they enable animals to go beyond being mere passive objects of discourse, serving in effect as active co-producers in shaping human discussions about them" (2011: 16). Skabelund's notion of co-production is useful for my purposes in that it does not reify animal agency as evidence of subjectivity but foregrounds animal presence in a way which incorporates the "real" animal and the photographed image.

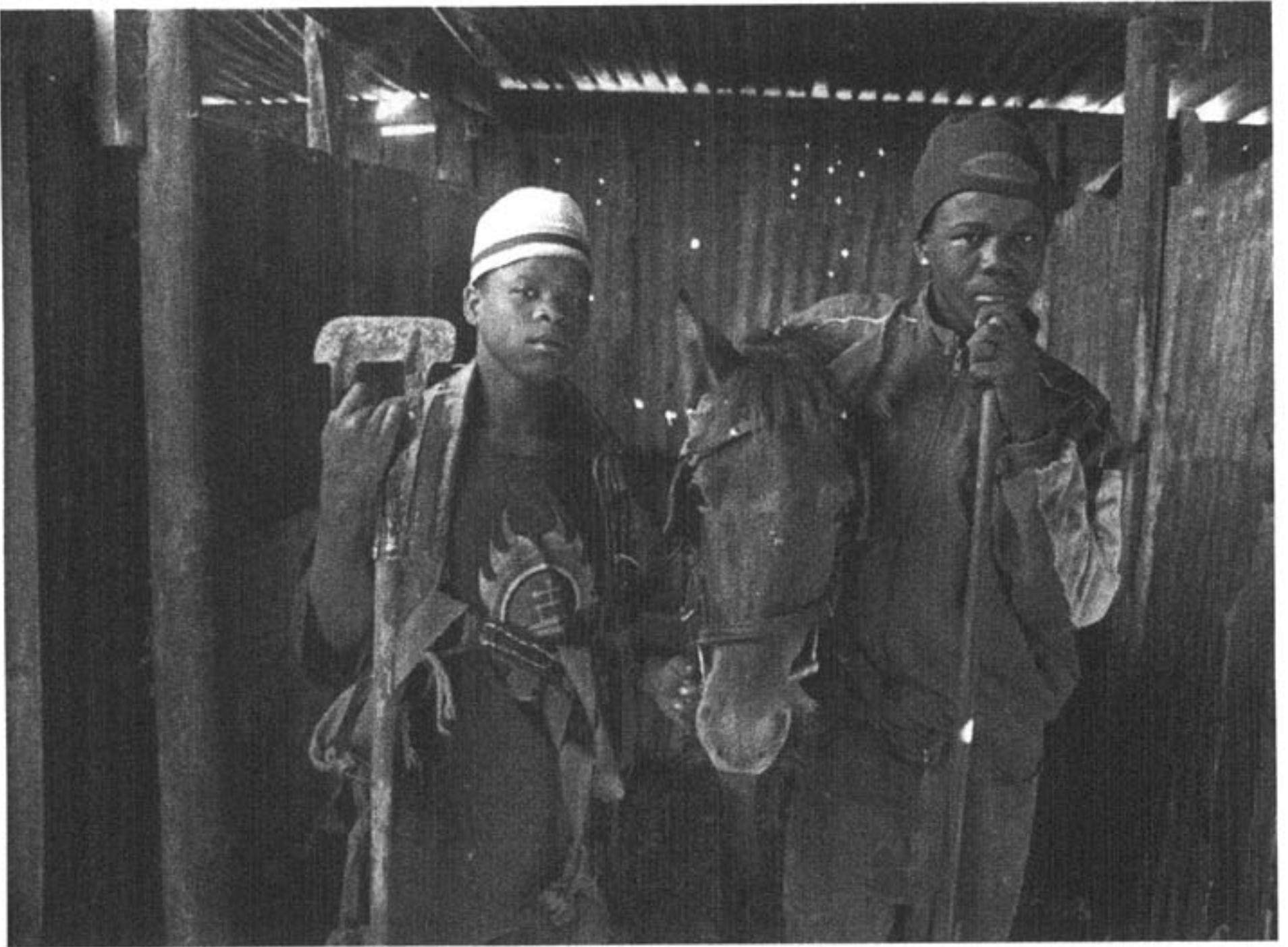


Fig. 4 (used with permission Fanie Jason)

In a photograph by Jason of two grooms flanking a pony (Fig. 4), all three embody a strong trans-species awareness and all three gaze, with varying degrees of confidence and directness, at the camera lens. Grooms occupy a lower place in carting hierarchies than horse owners as two photographs of grooms attest (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5), quite disturbingly. In the first photograph, the groom on the viewer's left stands confidently, his right hand on a hoe, his left through the pony's bit. The dark bay and the groom on the right, however, are more attuned ontologically. The pony hangs his head in an ill-fitting bridle, the brow band dropping over his off eye. The groom is uncertain too, his gaze faltering vulnerably, his hand partially covering his mouth. For solidarity, perhaps, he hugs the pony. His clothes, like the bridle, are ill-fitting, his unguardedness mirroring that of the pony as both seem depressed in their lack of vitality. His human companion, on the other hand, carries a harness over his shoulder and wears a leather apron which approximates those commonly worn by farriers – both of which suggest more authority. Ironically, the fiery symbol reproduced on his T-shirt also gestures to a kind of strength.

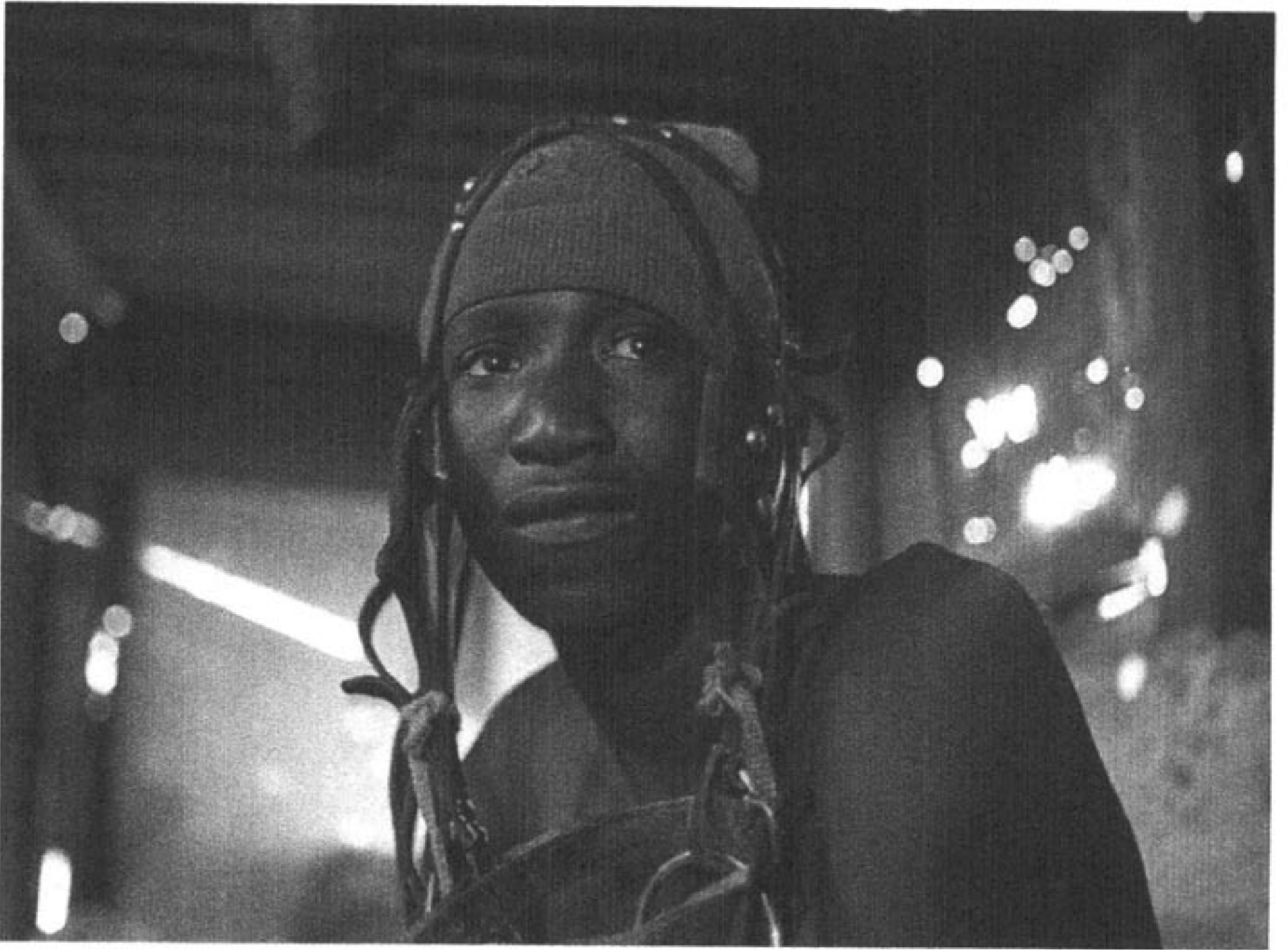


Fig. 5 (used with permission Fanie Jason)

In another image (Fig. 5) which extends pony and groom's torpor into tragic effect, a young man wears a bridle on his own head. Wolch's celebration of "corporeal identity" in relation to animals in the city is contradicted here. In its mocking of a groom's employment and its concomitant constraints, the image displays the groom's animalising of himself, dramatising an unhappy similarity between him and his charges, with the image redolent of slaves being bridled for misbehaving. Jason's portrait has compassion, however: the young man's tear-filled eyes are arresting as he gazes beyond the camera lens. Behind him the blurred lights of the background intimate possibilities of the sublime, seemingly inaccessible to the subject in the foreground. The predominance of the human eye in this photograph underscores the human gaze, blurred through tears though it may be. Sight has, of course, always been valued at the predominant human sense as these photographs of the grooms and the pony exemplify – the directness of the human gaze versus the blinkered gaze of the pony with her lowered neck.

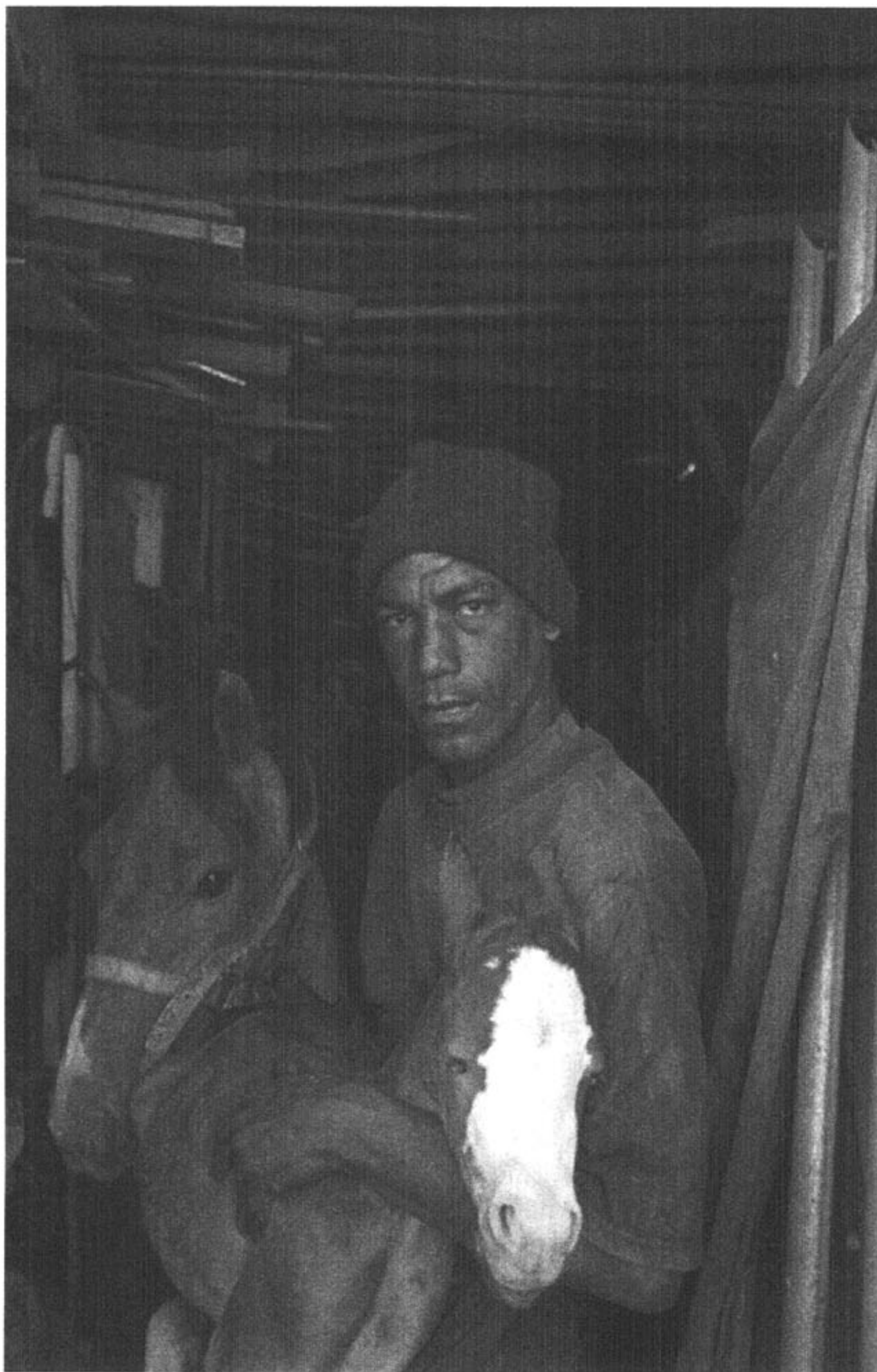


Fig. 6 (used with permission Fanie Jason)

Other photographs tell a different story, however. The visible eye of the horse in the lounge gazes at the viewer, but due to the position of the horse's head the animal's look is more slant – and partial. Horses' brains are divided hemispherically so that the equine brain will register separately what each eye sees. The slanted gaze of the horse finds an echo in the gaze of the girl,

whose interest is not the photographer but an event or person at his side, whereas the boy stares directly at the camera lens. Jonathan Burt writes:

The image of the animal's eye reflects the possibility of animal understanding by emphasising animal sight. This does not mean that the eye gives any access to what is understood but it does signal the significant participation of the animal in the visual field.

(Burt 2002: 71)

In another photograph – that of a mare and foal with a man carrying the foal – the mother's eye (again, only one is visible) dominates the image (Fig. 6). Burt is too dismissive of the image of an animal's eye not being a potential conduit to her/his understanding. In my reading of the photograph, the mother's embodied response (we cannot interpret the eye without recourse to her corporeality) is coiled anxiety. The worry lines over her eye, the tautness of her body and the way she seems to be hustling the man who gazes at the viewer, apparently oblivious or indifferent to the mare's emotions, all dramatise her response to the event: the man carrying her foal from a dark enclosure into the sunlight. The mare's unease seems, uncharacteristically, not to have transmitted itself to her offspring who has closed his eyes, either against the sun or in acceptance of being held tightly in human arms. While the horses are potentially vulnerable here – and the mare certainly enacts this physically – the calm strength of the man carrying the young animal appears entirely benevolent. Still, the discrepancies in power between human and horse are undeniable. The horses seem all vulnerability – the mare in her anxiety, the foal in his immobility, whereas the man embodies stability and a masculine strength which surely seeks to belie the ultimate vulnerability of the human body.

Here, as in other photographs, Jason constructs the viewer's gaze as witnessing a moment or an event. We are not voyeurs but involved, even integrated, as the humans and horses return our gaze in the images discussed so far. That both human and non-human animal are able to participate through their looks in what Burt terms "the visual field" is made possible because the images focused on have been of stillness with most of them possibly posed, which heightens their performative elements. Giovanni Aloï critiques wildlife films for their fascination with dramatic animal action while acknowledging that this is what entertains the viewer. For Aloï, the animal is misrepresented by appearing to be a creature of constant action. He suggests that quiet, still moments are "the most emblematic ones ... in which the animal most vividly escapes the clichés and stereotypical entrapments of representation" (2012: 14). While many of Jason's photographs feature horses in action: pulling carts, sometimes with huge loads, on unforgiving tarred roads or on dirt tracks between shacks in informal settlements, the images which are replete with meaning and the potential for the viewer to respond to the animal gaze are those which depict

the animal in a state of quiet, even if s/he is arrested only momentarily between actions.

This human-horse immobility opens up the potential for representing a trans-species “conviviality” to borrow a term from Acampora (2006: 78). Even where such ease is lacking, as in the photograph of the anxious mare and her foal, the images studied so far exemplify an embodied neighbourliness between horses and humans: the young horse in the lounge with the children, the pony with the grooms, the untethered black horse beside father and child in the street. All these images portray moments in daily embodied experiences in which humans and horses are familiar with each other, even family. Cary Wolfe posits the notion of a “shared trans-species being-in-the-world” (2010: 141) in relation to a human who is differently abled and her guide dog and within which “complex relations of trust, respect, dependence and communication” (2010: 141) are inherent. The relationships Jason depicts could be said, on the whole, to approximate such intertwined connections: humans who drive carhorses move through the environment like such “shared trans-species being[s]” for example, but other photographs suggest the opposite of kindness, or a mutual sense of reliability or confidence in each other and in which trans-species sharing is never feasible.

Embodied Asymmetries

Horses are prey animals. That equitable relationships can be nurtured between them and predatory animals (i.e. humans) attests to horses’ adaptability to compassionate training methods. Such ideal methods are rare, however, prompting Paul Patton to ask whether “training of any kind is an indefensible form of co-optation of the animal’s powers” (2003: 95). In addressing his own question he maintains, via Monty Roberts and Vicki Hearne, that only if we regard the animals we train not just as “interlocutors” but as “moral beings” (2003: 95) do we recognise “ethical relations and obligations toward other beings” (2003: 95). Such relations and obligations are both embodied and metaphysical, but too often training relationships are asymmetrical and, as Burt observes, “[h]orses fulfil a ... satisfying sense of mastery” (2002: 57), a state that Plumwood finds replicated in dualistic attitudes to nature generally (1993).

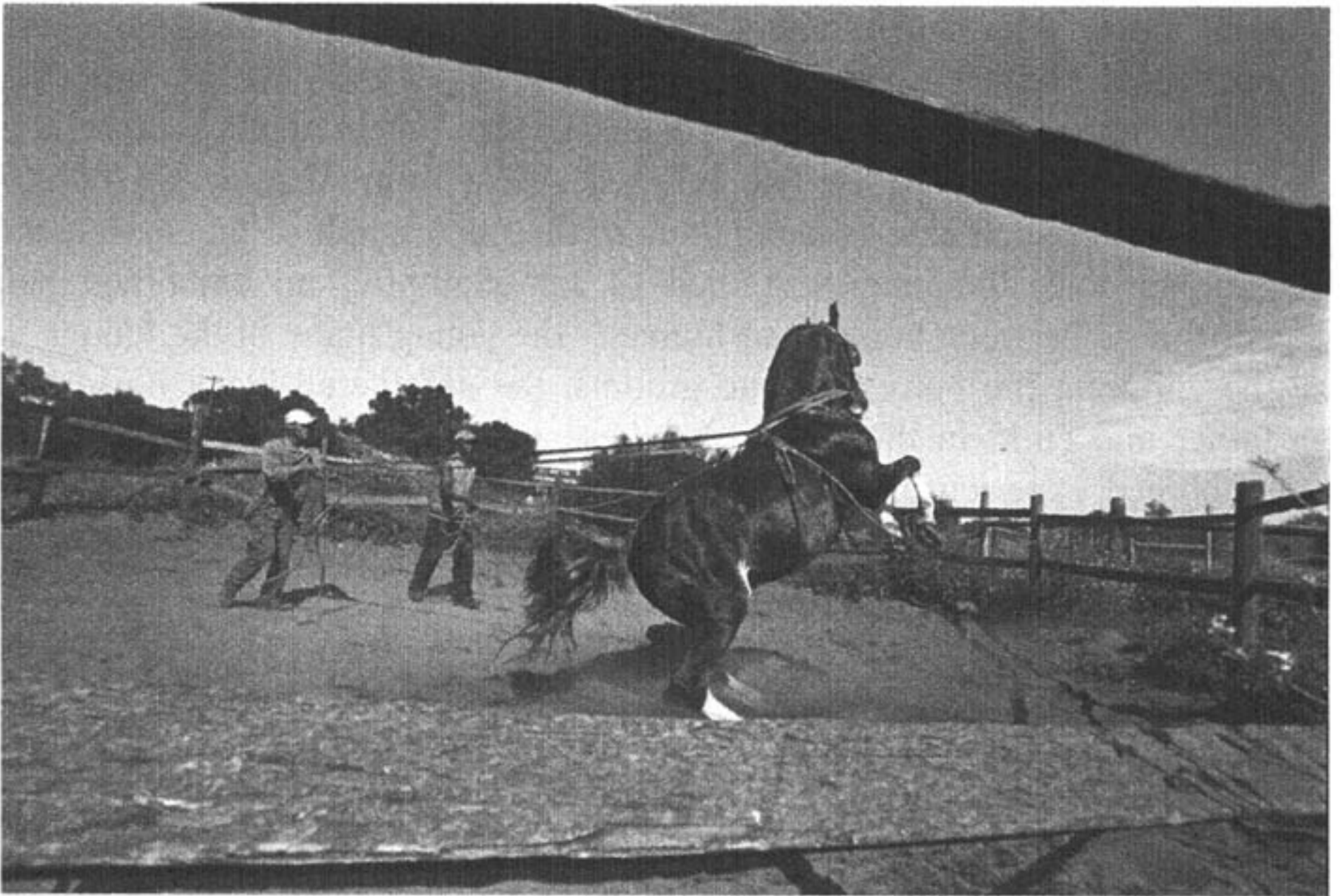


Fig. 7 (used with permission Fanie Jason)

Two photographs by Jason depict training relationships in which human domination of the animal body is paramount. In the first image (Fig. 7), two men are using methods of maximum control on a rearing stallion. The man on the left has double lunging reins extending from the horse's bit, which is common lunging practice, but these reins are attached to the surcingle around the horse's belly and are thus deployed to fix the horse's head and neck carriage unnaturally, winching in the neck into a tight arch, redolent of a stallion asserting himself. The attachment of the rope carried by the man on the right is obscured, and he could be sporting a whip. The stallion is blinkered, disadvantaging him even more in this masculine contest of humans versus equine. Presumably the stallion is fighting back because of the imposition not only of the lunging reins and ropes but because of the ropes from the surcingle attached to his hooves. These ropes are designed to force him into a high-stepping, showy action which is highly unnatural but which is performative of a certain style and of human mastery over the non-human.⁶

This photograph of the stallion's training is particularly theatrical, even as it captures the trauma that the horse endures. The viewer as a "conscious

6. Sandra Swart notes, in a parallel case, that the popularity of the Saddle horse in Afrikaner culture "provided a space where man, horse and power formed an axis that pivoted on display, predicated on upward mobility and competitiveness" (2010: 183). Even the Saddle bred for its high-stepping showiness has to be trained for two years in the slow gaits (p. 180).

beholder” (Edwards 2001: 18) can surely only respond with distress and discomfort at the cruelty, framed here by the fence of the lunging arena; yet the “affective tone” of the image celebrates equine power, no matter that it is trammelled and reined in. Contradictorily, while the agency of the stallion’s body is immense – his rearing hindquarters and his arched neck epitomise strength – he is entirely disempowered and rendered vulnerable to the pain of draconian training methods. That we view the image of the horse between poles dramatises his entrapment as does the position of the body with his neck bending away from the viewer’s gaze even as he is refusing to submit to the men’s directives. The men, attempting to attain supreme mastery over an animal, are indifferent to the camera lens. Nobody looks at the viewer who cannot be integrated into the image, as she was in the earlier portraits.

Pick’s sense that paying attention to embodiment “makes for a different sort of ethics and aesthetics” (2011: 6) recurs here in my critique of this image’s depiction of a practice which is entirely lacking in symphysis. In the play of bodily surfaces, the intersomaticity of horse and human is dramatised in the pent power of the stallion’s hindquarters and neck generating a human response. The tense and rigid arms of the principal trainer function as extensions of the taut reins, with the mobility of his lithe body contradicted by the tension in his jaw, which seems to metonymise his harsh tactics.

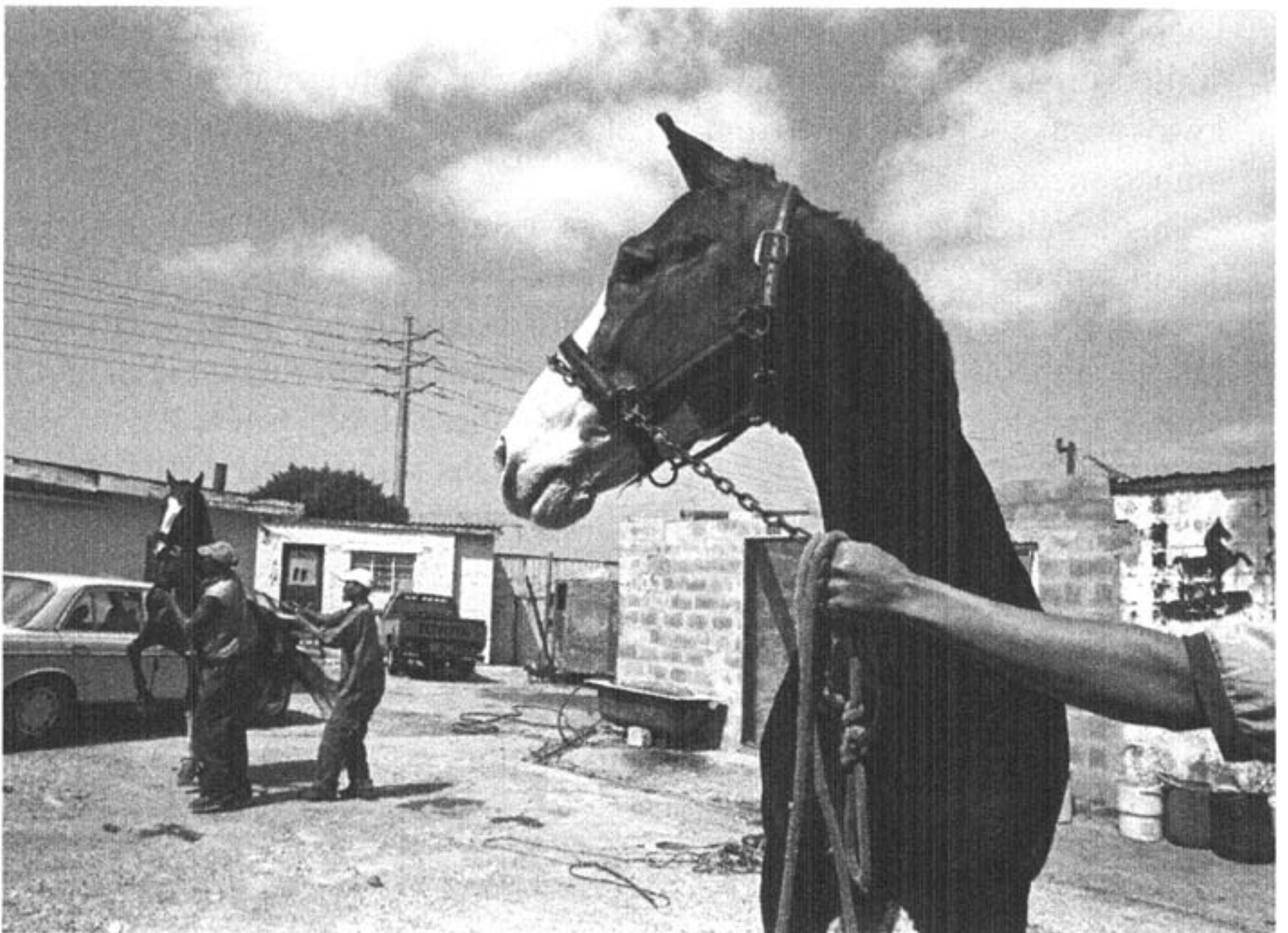


Fig. 8 (used with permission Fanie Jason)

A second photograph of the training of this stallion (Fig. 8) represents the performance of masculinity at even closer quarters in this particular training geared “to satisfy culturally acquired desires” (Patton 2003: 95). The rigidity of the muscled forearm in the foreground continues into the tightly held chain fitting closely over the horse’s nose, one of the most sensitive parts of a horse’s body which is, generally, acutely responsive to touch. The alert gaze of the horse in the foreground is directed at something or someone to the left of the camera lens. For the moment he seems unfazed by the disciplining of the stallion behind him. The same two men are disciplining this horse, now making him trot on the spot. The man in front of the horse keeps him from moving forward. The man on the viewer’s right holds the ropes with all his strength. The stallion is behaving more co-operatively, perhaps after he was forced to concede victory to the men in the lunging arena.

An outline of a horse etched on the wall of the shed to the right illustrates the silhouette the men are forcing the horses into – unnaturally high-stepping with a head carriage that results in the horse having to flatten or hollow his back. The male human bodies (or visible parts of them) are ranged against the horses who are subjected to ultimate control. The parallel electric lines in the background seem to symbolise the rigid boundaries within which the horses can move, the straight lines of the carts to which they will be harnessed, the training conventions they are subjected to. The further background of clouds in the sky suggests unattainable spaces beyond this walled-in stable yard. Perhaps the horse in the foreground looks wistfully away from the yard and from all it signifies for the policing of his own embodiment.

This article, due to spatial constraints, cannot do justice to the entirety of Jason’s photo essay, yet these few representative images demonstrate not only the sensitivity of his framing of horse-human embodied relationships, but the imperative for the viewer to be attuned to the visual animal and how s/he is constructed within a post-humanist gaze. Even where asymmetry is paramount, as in these last two photographs considered here, embodied commonalities are undeniable. The beauty and vulnerability of both horses and humans persuade the viewer of an ethics which foregrounds the body and the potential for a shared bodily consciousness. The images gesture doubly to impermanence – in themselves the photographs have captured moments which have long since passed, while the beings in these images will have shifted in their embodied fragilities since featuring in Jason’s portraits of intersomatic affiliations.

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