

Of Cow-Ard Humans and Humane Cows: Exploring Transhumance as Cow-human Attunements in the Swiss Alps

In this article, I use an ethnographic case study of transhumance practices in the Swiss Alps to account for the intimate entanglements between human and cow lifeworlds. Through an experimental perspective on human-cow relations in two Swiss Alpine pastures, I explore the space of attentive observation, care and, affective communication that emerges during the daily, bodily intense, working engagements in transhumance practices. The field sites of stabling cows, milking, and herding cows on the pasture illustrate how specific human-cow interactions attune humans and cows rhythmically, physically, and affectively. Furthermore, they demonstrate how their affective entanglement transforms them into ontologically connected agents in ways that are not reducible to a human-centred world. Stabling shows how both humans and cows actively shape the relational encounter with cows exerting their agency and humans attuning to the cows' pace. Milking is an example of biosocial becoming in the relational process between milker, cow, and calf, in that all actors co-produce a materiality in which agency is distributed by blurring sociocultural and biophysical elements. Lastly, herd observation and multispecies care exemplify how human bodies get affected by the animals they feel responsible for. By way of these ethnographic cases, I argue that paying attention to the intimacy of human-cow encounters, reveals a transformative attunement of transhumance cowherders to the non-human beings they co-live with.

Di umani-mucche e mucche-umane: esplorare la transumanza come sintonizzazione tra mucche e umani nelle Alpi svizzere

Il caso di studio etnografico sulle pratiche di transumanza nelle Alpi svizzere dimostra gli intimi intrecci tra la vita umana e quella delle mucche. Attraverso una prospettiva sperimentale sulle relazioni uomo-mucca in due malghe svizzere, esploro lo spazio di osservazione attenta, la cura e la comunicazione affettiva che emergono durante gli intensi impegni lavorativi e quotidiani nella pratica della transumanza. Portare le mucche nella stalla, mungere e osservare i loro comportamenti al pascolo sono istanze che illustrano come specifiche interazioni uomo-mucca sintonizzano ritmicamente, fisicamente e affettivamente uomo e mucca. Inoltre, dimostrano come il loro coinvolgimento affettivo li trasformi in agenti ontologicamente connessi in modi che non sono riducibili a un mondo antropocentrico. La stabulazione mostra come sia gli esseri umani sia le mucche modellino attivamente il loro incontro relazionale, con le mucche che esercitano la loro agency e gli esseri umani che si sintonizzano al loro ritmo. La mungitura è un esempio di divenire biosociale nel processo relazionale tra mungitore, mucca e vitello in quanto tutti gli attori co-producono una materialità in cui l'azione è distribuita tra elementi socioculturali e biofisici. Infine, l'osservazione della mandria e la cura multispecie esemplificano il modo in cui i corpi umani si adattano agli animali di cui si sentono responsabili. Prestare attenzione all'intimità degli incontri uomo-mucca rivela una sintonia trasformativa dei pastori della transumanza con gli esseri non umani con cui convivono.

Keywords: cow-human relations, transhumance, affective entanglement, agency, multispecies care

Parole chiave: relazioni mucca-uomo, transumanza, intrecci affettivi, azione non-umana, cura multispecie

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1. Intimate Cow-Human Attunement

During the transhumance season in September 2019 in the Upper Valais in Switzerland, the cowherders of the *Burgeralp Gspon* lit a fire in front

of a ruined stone barn while herding the cows in the only pasture left with abundant green grass on the 2,000 m high mountain pasture. The 89-year-old farmer Hans, who for over 60 years during the *Alp* season has come to visit the cowherders al-

most every day with two bottles of homemade white wine, observes the herd from the fireplace (Fig. 1). Letizia approaches the barn and stares with a fixed gaze at the cowherders sitting around the fireplace. Letizia is a three-year-old cow, daughter of Lolita (10 years old) and granddaughter of Lana (16 years old), the youngest of a generational lineage present that summer on the *Alp*. Hans remembers how 16 years earlier, Lorena, the great grandmother of Letizia, during a similarly cold September day at the same pasture, stood just like her granddaughter in front of the barn and stared at him with identical eyes. Lorena back then was heavily pregnant. With a light smile, Hans whispers: «She looked at me and said ‘Hans, the others don’t understand me, but you need to help me. I don’t have much longer. I want to go to the valley.’ It was her gaze, the way she held her head, that said it all». Hans immediately called her owner, big Tommy (Otto’s father, Otto being the owner of Lana, Lolita and Letizia) who came the same evening – under protest – to pick up Lorena. When he checked her udders, he complained that according to him the birth was not immediate and that he could have waited a few more days for the general cattle drive down the valley. Hans proudly finishes his story with the words: «The next morning Lorena’s calf was born and they named her Lana». We stare at Letizia and wonder: «What are you trying to tell us with your insistent gaze? Are you about to give birth to your first calf?», Hans smiles and calmly says: «It won’t be long anymore but this time around, she can wait a few more days to leave the *Alp* together with the herd».

Animal stories are an integral part of cow rearing in the Swiss Alps, particularly so in the Upper Valais, where keeping the traditional Eringer breed is part of the local culture. Eringer cows, a black, heavy, and horned cow breed, are not used primarily for milk and meat production but mostly as family pets to keep the local traditional sport of cow fighting alive. Hans’ account of Lana’s birth 16 years earlier and his recounting of her generational lineage is a typical way of tracing cow biographies over time in intimate human-cattle relationships on the *Alp*. However, his overt claim about his cow whispering abilities is striking for a Swiss traditional farmer. It is one example of the countless ways in which transhumance cowherders intimately relate to their animals and, as I argue in this article, attune to the non-human beings they co-live with.

2. Contextualising Animal Geographies

This article is an ethnographic account of transhumance practices in the Swiss Alps, aiming to offer an experimental perspective on specific and «alive» human-cow relations which cannot be reduced to a human-centred lens (see Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 149). In this section, I briefly contextualise this study within the field of animal geography. Human geography has studied animals in different ways since the 19th century: from an interest in zoology (see Hesse 1924) and a focus on domestication (see Sauer, 1969; Bennett, 1960), to an engagement with animals as subjects in their own



Fig. 1. The fireplace on the Rosschuma pasture, where Letizia and 16 years earlier her great grandmother Lorena communicate with local farmer Hans.

Source: photo by Immanuel Bach, 2019, Gspon.



right, studied through fieldwork exploring animal spaces and places (Philo and Wilbert, 2000; Urbanik, 2012), their social and cultural practices (Colombino, 2020, p. 18), and bio-geographies (Barua, 2014). The field of critical animal geography¹ adds to this field by urging a radical rethinking of human-nonhuman relationships (see Gillespie, 2018). Critically assessing animal geographies has not only led to an increased interest in human-animal relationships with regards to animal welfare activism and ethical reflections with regards to the livestock industry. It has also boosted more-than-human-geographic studies (see Sellik, 2020, p. 20), which highlight the entanglement of human and animal bodies in science and technology studies, contributing to challenging and «hybridizing» binary approaches to thinking about nature and culture (Whatmore, 2002). The emergence of Actor-Network-theory (ANT), in particular, has greatly contributed to theoretically advance critical animal geographies by distributing agency also to non-human actors (Latour, 2014).

The present ethnographic study positions itself within the latest wave of animal geography as identified by Hovorka (2018) by considering animals as lively subjects beyond mere anthropocentric representations (Sellik, 2020, p. 22; Colombino and Giaccaria, 2021, p. 205). The challenge is multifaceted because this perspective seeks to methodologically and theoretically focus on the animals' own geographies (see Hodgetts and Lorimer, 2015) by highlighting animals' individualities and personalities as they emerge in animal-human relations (Colombino 2020, p. 19). Placing non-humans at the centre of geographical explorations is an effort requiring the interweaving of ethological and ethnographic approaches to studying animal lives (see Shapiro, 1990 and 2019; Hartigan, 2020; Sinha and Others, 2021) while facing the risk of anthropomorphism (Birke and Thompson, 2018; Colombino, 2020, p. 20).

Transhumance practices offer an apt platform to study animals – in this specific case-study, cows – beyond their mere economic value as livestock to be transformed into commodities. In recent studies, animal geographers have considered «cattle to play an active role in making places and landscapes» (Sellik, 2020, p.20), paying attention to the interwoven relational space between cow and human lives (Meini and Petrella, 2023). Portraying cows as active subjects in transhumance practices as they engage with human agents in stabling, milking, and herding activities allows for novel ways of co-becoming to emerge (see Colombino and Giaccaria 2021, pp. 195–196). Moreover, attun-

ing into multispecies lifeworlds through the study of intimate cow-human relationships serves as an opportunity to further explore the methodological approaches that a less-anthropocentric geography may require.

3. A Transhumance Ethnography

In Switzerland, between the end of May and mid-June, once the weather becomes reliably mild in altitudes above 1,000 meters, 700,000 animals travel yearly from the valleys up to the mountain areas. The heavily state subsidized *Alp* practices offer an opportunity for Swiss traditional farmers to pursue their labour under the guise of «preservation of cultural heritage» and «conservation of mountain landscape for tourism», to maintain a space where cows and humans can intimately co-exist. Nowadays, foreign employees are also needed in running family-led *Alps* over the summer months. This is how I came to spend sixteen months working in the Swiss Alps as a cow herder on dairy farms and together with a cheese maker, becoming responsible for leading and managing cows. I draw upon my working experience at two Swiss Alps, the *Burgeralpe Gspon* (Canton Upper Valais) where I spent four months in 2019 and *Alggi Alp* (Canton Obwalden) where I spent four months in 2016, to explore the ways in which cow and human lives are entangled in transhumance practices.

Besides the cows I intimately engaged with, my human informants include the *Alp*'s owners who I worked for; the cow farmers who sent their cows to graze on *Alggi Alp* and *Alp Gspon*; the neighbouring farmers; and the local community closely interacting with the *Alp* through frequent visits and material and moral support. In both field sites I took field notes, closely observing cows' behaviours and studying human-cow interactions.

In this article, I document several ethnographic instances in which the interminglements between cows and humans attune humans to cow lives and cows to human ways of living. During daily cow-human engagements and the intense intricacies of their bodies in the practice of transhumance, a space of attentive observation, care and affective communication emerges between the cows and the humans who feel responsible for them. Their ontological entanglements arguably transgress rigid human-animal divides and transform humans and animals into ontologically connected agents who together compose naturecultural knots of relations (Govindrajana, 2018; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; see also Barad, 2007).

The paper is structured into three sections focusing on the practices of stabling, milking and herding. In the first section, I use the instance of stabling cows to disclose the human pace attunement cows require to become tamed collaborators in the *domus*². In the second section, I highlight the practice of milking as an instance of biosocial becoming of milker and cow through an affective entanglement distributing agency between cow, milker and calf. In the third section, I look at the ways cow herders on the *Alp* tune into cow sociality by observing their herd on the pasture and how this shapes the co-becoming of their bodies. I outline how emphasising relational linkages help do greater justice to the intimate entanglements at play in human-cow relations and how the cohabitation of cattle and humans translates into practices of care and a sense of response-abilities for each other. Through these ethnographic cases, I argue that paying attention to the intimacy of human-cow encounters allows for an attunement of humans to cow lifeworlds and vice versa. Transhumance is a useful showcase for recognizing «the entangled more-than-human webs that enable and are affected by different forms of action» (McGregor and Houston, 2018, p. 13; see also Saltzman, Head and Stenseke, 2011). Looking at cows and humans as co-domesticated and co-evolved beings explores agency as emerging from relations between things (Latour, 2004 and 2014) and that arguably «we become-with life as it is manifested through the body of another» (Wright, 2014, p. 280).

3.1. Co-domestication in the *Domus*

At the beginning of the summer on *Alggi Alp*, the stabling of the animals – the very act of admitting them into the *domus* – is a delicate moment which needs to be handled with care to prevent stress within the herd. The cows have to feel welcomed to leave their comfort zone of the pastures to be milked and spend the night chained in one confined spot of the barn. Cows are peaceful creatures, but they are very large and heavy animals, therefore they are not easily manageable by force like goats, for example. When twenty cows enter a confined space that does not correspond to their natural habitat, they easily get nervous. «The task of the herder is to convey to them a feeling of tranquillity while firmly insisting that they go to their spot and not to the one of their biggest rivals, just to annoy her», the 80-years old neighbouring farmer Werni confides with an amusing smile on his weather-proven face. Loss of patience and control by the cow herder will result in vain attempts to

forcefully move several hundred kilos of animals/body mass. Approaching a «bullheaded» cow with friendly manners by, for instance, gently caressing her nose, will more likely achieve the desired effect. This is how Shila, a cow refusing to step forward while stubbornly occupying the entire corridor in the middle of the stable, finally moves her massive body effortlessly – almost gracefully – to the assigned place when receiving a relaxing gesture from me, the human interested in milking her.

By allowing cows into the *domus*, cows and humans co-domesticate each other and co-evolve in a process which requires an intense attunement of humans to their domesticates, deeply encroaching on human activities, work and life modes. Extending their attentiveness to other beings, humans are forced to give up the illusion of control over the cows who do not passively conform to stabling but play an active role in inhabiting the co-created space. In human-animal studies the social agency of animals has been exhaustingly theorised (see Birke and Thompson, 2018, p. 42; see also different perspectives from ANT, for example Nimmo, 2011; Sayes, 2014). The stabled cows are actors, not only because they take action in choosing their place in the stable, at times also against the will of the milker. They may also demonstrate agency by reacting against their subscribed roles and by rebelling against power inequalities, such as being chained by the milker in a place in the stable where they do not have desire to be (see Colling, 2021 on animal resistance). While ANT emphasises the importance of the network of human, nonhuman, animate and inanimate actors, it is the cows' individual agencies – concretely their abilities to actively shape the relational entanglements with the human in the stable – that shapes the quality of the encounter (Birke and Thompson, 2018, p. 43). By attuning to the cows' calm pace and rooted movement, herder and cow co-produce a certain way of inhabiting the stable, which favours a peaceful atmosphere. Cows and humans co-become actors in their stabling endeavours by playing active roles in exploring their manoeuvring possibilities in their interactions with the other. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa reminds us that attuning to the pace of those we care for involves a lot of «hovering and adjusting to the[ir] temporal exigencies» (2017, p. 707). Rather than stubbornly persisting on our exigency to extract the maximal benefit in the most efficient way, the logics of care seek to maintain a web of relations between carer and cared for. In the case of responsible livestock husbandry, this web of relations relies on establishing a daily routine, governed by repetitive work and task reiteration (see Mol, 2008; Mol,



Ingunn and Pols, 2010; Singleton and Law, 2013) to incorporate each individual cow's varying temper. Stabling cows in a traditional fixed stable invokes an attuning to the cows' pace. By sheltering animals, humans also invariably change in that they have to intensively adapt their movements to the required pace of the animals and train their sustained attentiveness.

3.2. Intimate relating as Biosocial Becoming

Milking is an exemplary showcase of biosocial becoming in the relational process between milker and cow. According to Gisli Palsson, «human becoming is a thoroughly relational, biosocial phenomenon, collective history embodied» (2013, p. 40). Milking illustrates how milker and lactating animals coproduce a materiality in which agency is distributed by blurring sociocultural and biophysical elements. The actors involved in the milking process are no longer defined by who they are but what they do. One morning on *Alggi Alp*, I asked the young farming neighbour Reto to assist me in milking Santia, a fierce cow who had an injured teat and, suffering from pain, repetitively kicked me to the point that I became too afraid to milk her. Reto confidently approaches the cow, pats her on her chest and without the cow rebelling once, he milks her. I was startled and he explained that, with the patting of his hand, he simulates a calf's tail hit-

ting the cow's body, an instinctively tranquilising gesture for the cow. Milking is thus a simulation of the calf stimulating milk production which I suggest can be seen as an experimental practice with varying intensities of contact. Getting involved in the event of motherly nourishment, milkers participate by reconstructing themselves as «children» (see Hustak and Myers, 2012, p. 90). The fact that mother cows respond so well to this simulated stimulation process, can be seen as a testament to their high response-ability (see Bulliet, 2005).

A few weeks later, on *Alggi Alp*, I followed neighbour Reto in his stable during milking time and I noticed some calves moving freely in the stable and sucking onto some cows' udders while Reto was milking with the machine. Responding to my surprised gaze he explained: «the calves know best what udders need. Plus, they are the cheapest mastitis prevention». Reto massages the udder and stimulates the nipples, helping the calf's mouth to get a better grip before letting the calf empty the udder to avert the risk of inflammation that he must have alerted (Fig. 2). It dawned on me that even though Reto was surely a pragmatic traditional farmer unaware of anti-speciesism, veganism or animal welfare activism, previous experiences of unhealthy udders taught him to recognise milking as a delicate, care-deserving intimate affair in the triangular relationship between milker, cow and calf (Gillespie, 2018, p. 6, 7). This ethnographic instance illustra-



Fig. 2. Udder stimulation.
Source: photo by Leonardo Cini, Alggi Alp, 2016.

tes how the production of milk for human purposes exceeds Reto's control and relies on the distributed agency (see Singleton, 2010) of the necessary milk triangle, deconstructing domestication as based on human mastery (Anneberg and Varst, 2018, p. 97). The cow-milker-calf interaction becomes a space in which the cows co-condition their own domestication (Anneberg and Varst, 2018, p. 110) by actively enacting the interdependent multispecies care that milker, cow and calf engage in. Farmer Reto plays by the cow and calf's rules, by submitting himself to them and adapting his interests to the predetermined relational dynamics of the mother-calf bond, in the interest of udder health and sustainable milk production. Of course, this interdependent relationality is not equally distributed, nor free of tensions, contradictions and power dynamics. Yet, attuning to the cows' needs exceeds a merely human-centred perspective on milking.

In her work on *Matters of Care*, feminist philosopher Maria Puig de la Bellacasa theorises care as a threefold practice involving concrete maintenance work with a strong affective implication, which has vital political consequences in interdependent worlds (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 5). By describing the material and affective involvements of everyday mundane and repetitive care practices such as milking, the ontological plurality of agents involved in multispecies care practices allows for a finer attunement of humans' and cows' needs (see Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 204 and p. 206). The milker's involvement with the cows is intensified through the relational attunement to the cow-calf bond and by repetitively assisting their nurturing exchanges. This co-envelopment fosters the milker's attentiveness to his already existing interdependency in the mother-calf relationship (see Hustak and Myers, 2012). Of course, the risk of glossing over the inherent power dynamics in interspecies encounters increases in narrations of multispecies intimacy, whitewashing the asymmetrical redistribution of agency between humans and animals (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.40). Yet, Reto's inclusion of the calf is a form of multispecies care that responds to his material obligation of ensuring udder health, which in turn, distributes his agency to the calf and to a cow-calf equilibrium beyond his control. Milking on *Alggi Alp* is a form of biosocial becoming of the involved actors which allows for an intimate attunement between cows and humans.

3.3. *Affected Bodies in the Pastures*

Over the course of an *Alp* season, it is striking to

notice the development of the relationship between cows and cow herders by spending time together on the pasture. What starts off as a standard «speciesist» interaction where the herder considers the herd as an indistinguishable bunch of creatures recognisable only by ear tags, slowly transforms into a growing attentiveness to the particular modes of being of individual animals. On *Alp Gspon*, part of the job is to supervise thirty Eringer cows, the above-mentioned traditional cow variety from the Valais, which is selected for its combat features. Eringer cows frequently engage in fights to establish their hierarchical order. Whilst confrontations between two cows is desired and encouraged by owners interested in «traditional» cow fighting competitions³, the cow herder is in charge of avoiding injuries and identifying at the end of the season the strongest cow, the «Transhumance Queen». This is how I came to spend a significant amount of time on the pasture studying the herd hierarchy and practicing the art of observation.

I started spotting the differences between individual animals, in both aspect and character. First, I learned to distinguish cows according to their different fur colour, size and particular body features and marks, such as a ripped ear tag, scratches on the back or a particular horn shape. Furthermore, fine-tuned herd observations gave me important insights into the wellbeing of individual animals. For instance, I learned to understand Gisela's strikingly long chewing of one grass batch as a sign of healthy rumination or Debby's yellow eye discharge as a possible protein overfeeding. Moreover, by attuning to aspects of cows' socialisation in the attempt to loosen the species-lens, I started seeing the animals as individual social subjects. My *Alp* field diary resembles an ethological notebook, describing herd dynamics, indicating which cows graze together, and exclude those lower in rank or rivals.

For example, the herd's collective response to cow Alexa's alert gaze and subsequent directive to flee an approaching dog, pinpointed her as the matriarch of the herd. Such insights into the group's hierarchy⁴ allowed me to identify with one glance the three senior cows (Liviana, Lana and Lisa) who get to stand under the only shady tree during the hot hours; or to promptly recognise cow Paulina as a low-ranking individual due to her back being turned on the herd⁵ (see Ott, 2016).

These attempts to tune into cow sociality, recognising them as individual social subjects with personal names, on the one hand, surely open an engagement of affective care by genuinely increasing intimacy between farmers and their herding



animals. On the other hand, describing animal behaviours based on a human understanding of social codes, may reduce their sociality to a functionalist reasoning of dominant hierarchies. Giving cows names and identifying affiliative behaviour in terms of friendship may be fraught with anthropomorphism and anthropocentric perspectives (see Hartigan, 2020, p. 19; Birke and Thompson, 2018, p. 36). Yet, it is also a way to partly step out of human subjectivities to get insights into those of others. In her article «Witness: Humans, Animals, and the politics of becoming», Naisargi Dave (2014) discusses the fine line between anthropomorphising attitudes of animal-rights activists (in speaking for the animal) and their occasional successes in becoming with the Other. Often, the activists actually hyper-embodiment human intentions rather than reducing species distance/difference. Yet, at times, the space that opens up between a cow and a human body in their encounter in the stable or on the pasture may allow for an affective attunement to each other's lifeworlds. Caring, as a selective mode of attention that directs action, affection and concern (Hustak and Myers 2012), acknowledges the myriad of connecting elements that transform animals and humans into «participants» in an evolving way of life (Van Dooren, 2011, p. 27).

Through the continuous practice of observing the herd, human bodies get trained to be affected by the animals they feel responsible for. This is how farmers come to see faraway objects (broken fence strings or fallen posts) in the twilight, mist or rain; become capable of spotting the height of grass from many kilometres away to assess the next feeding grounds, and are able to differentiate the tracks of their run-away calves amongst thousands of hoof prints (as I have been able to witness in months of accompanying farmers in the search of lost cattle in the mountains). Over time, transhumance farmers have come to inhabit a visually complex world. The sensitisation/attunement of their bodies to register their environment in a new way has led to the progressive acquisition of a «new» body (Latour, 2004, p. 207).

4. Conclusion

In this ethnographic account of transhuman practices in the Swiss Alps, I argue that humans and cows attune to each other's lifeworlds in their intimate encounters in the stable; while milking; and during herding time on the pasture. The ethnographic entry of Hans' cow whisper-

ring introduced the climate of cow-human interaction on the *Alp*, to set the path for a field site filled with stories about the ontological entanglements between cows and humans and the intense intricacies of their bodies.

In the first section, the ethnography demonstrates how affective communication attunes humans to cow bodies and highlights pace as a key feature of co-domestication. The second section deals with milking as a biosocial becoming transgressing rigid human-cow-calf divides by describing instances of their intricate entanglement in milk production as a form of distributed agency. In the third section, I explore the space of attentive observation on cow sociality and care driven by curiosity and a desire to take part in their social worlds. The focus on the intimate enmeshment in human-cow relations brings to the fore practices of multispecies care and attuned interspecies response-ability. Such affective modes of relating allow for situated knowledge and posthuman encounters within the ontological turn in the social sciences. In these intimate multispecies entanglements, humans continuously labour their relationships with animals, dividing and reconciling differences through ways in which they approach animals, such as stabling, milking, herding them.

Ethnographic research, in geography and other cognate disciplines, should no longer focus on «what other species mean to humans but thrive for a deeper understanding of how humans and animals co-constitute the world» (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017) and meet in a «rewilded mutual becoming» (Spannring, 2019, p. 91). Taking time to observe and be with cows, is a practice of other ways of being and attending to other kinds of living beings (Kohn, 2013, p. 14). Attempts to go beyond anthropocentrism and speciesism challenge habitual projections of who and what other beings are and are supposed to be (doing) and require a political process acknowledging and opposing the interconnections of violence against nonhuman animals (Spannring, 2019, p. 90). Surely Hans' cow whispering capacity is arguably a clumsy and anthropomorphic approach to interacting with cows, yet it entails an authentic quality of encountering the nonhuman in an intimate way with real life repercussions for the human in charge of the cow. Indeed, 16 years ago big Tommy changed his plan as a consequence of Lorena's interaction with Hans and brought her down to the valley earlier than planned. Did Human Hans attune to Cow Lorena's language – or did the Cow and her calf Lana in her womb attune to Hans and Tommy's expectation?

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Notes

¹ Critical animal geography contributes to human-animal studies, a growing field of research that combines academic research with political activism, focusing their studies on human-nonhuman relations, on intersectionalities, and animal liberation, aiming to challenge anthropocentric perspectives by putting ethical issues at the centre (see Colombino and Bruckner 2023; Nocella and others, 2014; Best and others, 2007).

² Term borrowed from James Scott (2017) to designate the household assemblage hosting domesticated species in an anthropogenic environment (see Chapter 2 «Landscaping the World: The Domus Complex», in James Scott's *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*).

³ Over the last hundred years, in the Valais region a cow-fighting tradition has been cultivated for which cows' high combative traits are selected in the old local breed called Ehringer. Every spring in the Valais there are fighting competitions which are not only a major tourist attraction in the Canton, but they also offer high prices to the owners of winning cows, providing an incentive to keep Ehringer cows as a secondary occupation. During the competition, the cows are divided into five weight classes and the fights are monitored by *rabatteurs*, so-called beaters, who are in charge of avoiding other cows entering a two-cows fight.

⁴ Narratives on dominant hierarchies and resulting rank positions as social feature in herding animals are widespread in lay and ethological discourses on cow sociality but merit being carefully re-examined. See for example Hartigan's theoretical and ethnographic contribution to the concepts of dominant hierarchy in his study of feral horses in Galicia, Spain (2020); see also Birke and Thompson (2018), p. 52–56; Lucy Rees contribution on deconstructing hierarchy narratives in wild horses by revisiting affiliate behaviour (2017).

⁵ Cow farmer Martin Ott's writing on social herd behaviour in domestic cows analyses herd exclusion dynamics in terms of social hierarchy. His work is to be understood as an ethnographic contribution representing certain Swiss Cow farmers' approaches to understanding cows, but it must not be read as ethological research.