

Peer Review Article

Action Research With and For Pack Mules:

Transforming the Welfare of Working Equines in International Mountain Tourism

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Abstract

The welfare of equines working as pack animals on treks and expeditions within the international mountain tourism industry is often severely compromised. Awareness of these issues and of what prevents owners, trekking teams and the wider industry knowing and attending to the equine and to equine welfare has been advanced through a sustained research and development initiative and Action Research project focusing on the international mountain tourism industry in the Moroccan High Atlas. An approach based on Theory U and on the development of co-seeing, co-sensing, and co-creating journeys has allowed deeper levels of awareness to be accessed and developed. Shifting the quality of attention, of meeting, and of dialogue has allowed *eco-system awareness* to develop, where previously silo-thinking and ego-system awareness had prevailed.

This has allowed muleteering practice to evolve away from practices based on control and domination towards practices informed by the dialogical encounter. This paper will explore the role of Action Research in developing the awareness of the tourism industry and the communities of practice it supports. *Absencing* as a barrier to awareness and the approaches available to overcome it will be explored. A key distinction will be made between the outcomes emerging from the co-creative projects arising from genuine meeting and dialogue, and the outcomes arising from the failure to meet and dialogue genuinely, a failure rooted in the exploitation embedded in hierarchical relationships.

Keywords

awareness-based systems change; action research, working equines; pack mules; mountain tourism; theory U; one health

Structural and Attentional Violence on Pack Mule Supported Expeditions

It was morning and the African sun was making itself felt on the floor of the Aït Bouguemez (or “Happy Valley”), home to Morocco’s Centre de Formation Aux Métiers de Montagne (CFAMM).¹ The elite group of forty mountain guide students gathered in front of the national guide training school were preparing for their final assessment, a gruelling 300km expedition across the Moroccan High Atlas, from Tabant to the Djebel Toubkal. The camping equipment and supplies for the entire two-week trek were being carried out from the stores and loaded onto the backs of the waiting mules, who patiently braced themselves as their packsaddles (*burdâa*) and paniers (*chwari*) disappeared under a seemingly vast charge (Figures 1a-1b).² The mule is often lauded in Morocco as the “quatre-quatre Berbère,” capable of navigating the steep, narrow paths and rocky terrain of the Atlas Mountains (Cousquer & Alison, 2012)—an expression that can be both pejorative to the Amazigh people (Weitzman, 2011) and an objectifying violation for the mule. The muleteers³ were keen to get going and grateful for the help of the young future guides who volunteered to help with the loading, for there were 30kms of ground to cover that day. There was no time to inspect the mules’ backs or to weigh the bags, and little opportunity to ask any questions.

¹ The last intake of students at the CFAMM graduated in 2014. A new school and training programme has since been established in Ouarzazate.

² Note the wide-based stance of the mule which hints at the extent to which she is bracing herself and how hard it is to gauge the weight carried and the wear and tear sustained by the mule.

³ Muleteers is the term used here to describe the “packers” who work the mules and are responsible for moving the trekking team’s equipment from one camp to the next.

Over the next few days, however, the five instructors⁴, 40 mountain guide students, and nine muleteers gradually started asking questions as we became aware of the extent and impact of the load on the nine mules.

This year, 2009-10, was the first year that pack mule welfare had been taught at the guide school and the first time a veterinary-trained guide had worked as an instructor on this final assessment. Each night, the packsaddles came off and the backs were inspected both visually and by palpation—looking and feeling for hair loss, rubs, heat, swelling, discharges, discomfort, and pain (Figure 2a).⁵ Time was found to weigh the loads, including the pack saddles, and it was established that the loads all exceeded 150kg. To put this into context, these mules are relatively small, weighing between 200-250kg. According to Galley (2012, p. 25), a mule can carry between 40-100kg depending on the terrain, whilst Geus (2007, p. 44) suggests that mules can carry 50kg and up to 80kg over easy terrain and for limited periods. An old man with a severe limp owned one of the mules. This mule was therefore not only carrying all the equipment but also her owner. It was likely that she was carrying in excess of 250kg and, by the start of the fourth day, she was severely lame. She was treated with intravenous analgesics over the next few days, but it was increasingly evident (at least to those observing her) from the heat in her foot and the extent of her lameness that she was suffering badly (Figure 2b). Over several days it was debated among the team what to do. Arriving in Setti Fatma, on Day 10, the owner was finally persuaded to allow his mule to be evacuated to a clinic in Marrakech. At the clinic, a stress fracture of the third phalanx of the right hind limb was confirmed on X-Ray.

The students, instructors, and muleteers had received a sustained experiential lesson that they were unlikely to forget. They had managed the presenting problems, improvising solutions as best they could, but how had this situation arisen and why? How had nine mules found themselves carrying the luggage for 54 people? A detailed report was prepared for the School's administrators to help them see and feel into this grave welfare concern with a view to developing their awareness of the issues and explore potential solutions. Over the next five years of teaching, fully illustrated reports detailing the injuries and welfare concerns identified were submitted after each trek. Gradually, the number of mules supplied was increased although their loads (unridden) continued to exceed 120kg. By the end of this five-year programme of training, some 200 guides had graduated with an understanding of the primary welfare concerns (including overloading, pack wounds, tethering injuries and

⁴ Including myself in my professional capacity both as a veterinarian and International Mountain Leader.

⁵ The tissue over the withers and scapula of this grey mule is raw and weeping. The packsaddle should sit clear of the midline if pressure is to be eliminated and sores prevented, something the owner and students came to learn about as they studied the problem.

bitting injuries) that mules working in the mountain tourism industry are exposed to and suffer (Cousquer, 2011, 2014, 2015; Cousquer & Alyakine, 2012, 2014a, 2014b).

These young professionals thus expanded their awareness of the issues, however their awareness of the wider system - of which they and the mules are a part - was still developing. Mountain tourism is a multi-stakeholder (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021; Tallberg et al., 2022), multi-sited and highly complex system. The various ways that trekkers, trek agencies (both international and local), guides, and muleteers contribute to and help enact (Cousquer, 2018) poor welfare is profoundly entangled (Danby et al., 2019). This makes it very hard to clarify responsibilities, to negotiate and take responsibility, and to develop “response-ability” (Haraway, 2016, p. 16). Many of the upstream appearances (Bortoft, 2012; Cousquer, 2018) and causes of poor welfare lie hidden and few of the stakeholders pay attention. As David Fennell (2022) puts it: “It is we humans who fail to understand animal-expressed indicators, and ... ignore these indicators in the pursuit of individual and organisational interests through pleasure and profit” (p. 1). Looking beyond the physical violence of overloading injuries, there are therefore hidden causes, or forms of structural violence (Galtung, 1969) arising from the decisions and actions of those who are not physically present on the trek. There are also causes associated with failures to look, see and feel, described by Otto Scharmer as “attentional violence” (Lawalata, 2022, p. 11). There is thus a great deal of *absencing* (Scharmer, 2009, pp. 247–248). When the stakeholders responsible for welfare are spread out across time and space, significant questions arise about how such complex systems can (individually and then collectively) develop awareness of and take responsibility for the welfare of the *beasts of burden* required to carry their luggage.



Figures 1a-1b: (Cousquer, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) The mules disappear under their packsaddles, paniers, and the load placed on their backs.



Figure 2a-2b: (Cousquer, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) When the packsaddle is removed and the back inspected, a packing injury is revealed. And the lame mule has her hoof cooling in some cold water whilst an anti-inflammatory injection is prepared.

Knowing the mule benefits from a plurality of epistemic practices for there are many ways of knowing (Argent, 2022; Brown & Dilley, 2012; Cousquer, 2018) that can enrich our concern for how she fares, inviting us to take responsibility for her welfare. Responsible tourism is, according to Goodwin (2011, p. 33), predicated upon awareness raising. But what exactly is awareness raising: How and when do we come to know, to care, and to take responsibility? Who should develop their awareness? What should they be aware of, and to what extent should that awareness be developed? When provided with opportunities to suspend judgements, redirect attention, and attend to others, their awareness may be transformed. But what do they then do with this awareness? How can awareness grow and spread across a community of practitioners? How does this awareness transform those individuals and communities? Answering these questions is of vital importance if those practising tourism are to take responsibility and develop their response-ability, their capacity to respond. Connolly and Cullen (2018) propose an ethic of care framework that increases the visibility of animals within organisations, enhancing their moral considerability (p. 406). This involves the inclusion of “fringe stakeholders,” a “strategy that requires deep listening ... with those who have been previously disregarded and marginalised” (p. 416).

This paper explores the potential offered by Action Research as a tool for awareness raising and transformative change. A willingness to listen is key here for, as Argent writes (2022, p. 41), “attunement transpires when one offers awareness, attention, receptivity, and responsiveness to another’s emotional state or needs—when we listen.” This work therefore presents how transformative change can arise when we extend an invitation to equines to contribute to systems change and create opportunities for equines to be listened and attended to.

This paper is organised in four parts: Firstly, the stakeholders responsible for the welfare of pack mules working in the international mountain tourism industry will be presented in order to provide a sense of the contexts within which an awareness-based systems change programme has been developed. Secondly, some of the merits and challenges involved in developing an Action

Research approach with this community will be explored, with a particular focus on bringing the marginalised mules and their owners into the conversation (Argent, 2022; Connolly, 2020, 2022). This allows us to then shift the focus from the actors themselves to the relationships they co-create together and, in particular, the ways in which they meet and dialogue (Cousquer, 2022). Fourthly, and in conclusion, the importance of holding containers (Cousquer, 2018; Scharmer, 2001) for genuine meeting and of turning to the other as a prerequisite for genuine dialogue and transformative change will be emphasised.

Mules and the International Mountain Tourism Industry

In this first section, the interwoven narratives of the key stakeholders who co-create mule welfare are presented. We start with the mule for she lies at the heart of this problematic. The mule's supremacy as a pack animal is legendary, nowhere more so than in mountainous terrain (Cousquer & Allison, 2012; Savory, 1970). Today, mules are for this very reason much favoured within mountain tourism (Giampiccoli, 2017). Their role and utility within this industry are widely acknowledged, but this recognition masks tensions between differing ways of knowing the mule and how she fares. The various practitioners thrown together, across time and space, for the purposes of a mountain expedition,⁶ each form their own opinion of the mule's welfare. Their widely differing socio-historical and cultural backgrounds accounts for the disparate set of siloed practices in which the mule becomes embroiled (Figures 3a–3c). Considerable uncertainty therefore arises over what constitutes acceptable welfare, precisely because welfare is enacted within overlapping and often contradictory knowledge practices. In addition to questions of welfare, there are also questions of position and subjectification in the biopolitical field. Vasilopoulou (2021) examines these questions for the donkeys of Santorini, asking whether these animals are laborers, slaves, or machines. In doing so she highlights the quality of the donkeys' relation with their owners and the extent to which this is a matter of collaboration or of exploitation. Where expedition mules are concerned, Cousquer and Alison (2012) highlight that the expedition leader has moral responsibilities towards human porters and therefore to pack mules undertaking similar work. This recognition of mules represents a form of interspecies solidarity (Coulter, 2016) that recognises them not just as service providers but potentially as companions on a journey. There are echoes here of the ethics of the 1953 Everest Expedition (Hunt, 1954) in which it is recognised that the success of an expedition was dependent on the “combined efforts of the Sherpas and ourselves” (p. 230), their “unity as a party” (p. 229) and high degree of selfless cooperation that leads Hunt to declare that “it would be hard to find a more close-knit team

⁶ Within mountain tourism, the term ‘trek’ is also widely used. For the purposes of this thesis, ‘expedition’ will be retained as much of the work conducted as part of this project involved members of the Expedition Providers Association (EPA).

than ours” (p. 229). When Hilary and Tensing made their successful ascent, Hunt (1954) writes:

... the tasks of the Sherpas and Sahibs were no longer complimentary, they were identical. All were sharing the same burden, all equipped with the same aids, were sharing the difficulties of the climb and the height. (p.230)

The guide students at the CFAMM had watched the film of this expedition and studied the ethos that ensured porters and Sherpas were treated fairly. They had then gone on to study the exploitation within the international mountain tourism industry that led to the setting up of the International Porter Protection Group and to growing awareness of how those working in mountain tourism can find themselves exploited (Cousquer & Allison, 2012). This allowed them to consider the ideal team where all members are kindred spirits and to extend this vision to today’s mountain tourism industry and the question of whether mules be viewed as kin, as team members, as co-workers? Donna Haraway proposes this as a possibility in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) where dog training is presented not as an act of subjugation but as a symbiotic co-evolutionary practice.

Sadly, the reality for expedition pack mules falls short of this ideal: On expedition, the various practices and trajectories of the agency, tourist, mountain guide, muleteer and mule are drawn together, woven into “an immense and continually evolving tapestry” (Ingold, 2011, p. 9) that is suffused with light, weather, the rich aroma of aromatic plants crushed underfoot and the sound of hooves and boots moving over stony ground. Human feet carefully cover the terrain, whilst mules, on hooves perfectly adapted to rocky mountain paths, make their surefooted way from one camp to the next. Labouring to take in the sights, smells, and sounds that threaten to overwhelm the visitor, it is not always easy to spare a thought for the mules and their owners. The mules labour too: under the same sun, up the same gradients, across the same high cols and through the same scenery but under a very different load and for very different rewards. Laden high with all manner of items that the trekking team deem essential for the journey or could not leave behind, it is the mule who truly labours. Dwelling together, moving together, theirs is a shared journey; shared, but not the same.

The tourist is on holiday and their experience is all-too-easily romanticised. It is, after all, this escape from reality, this *dépaysement*, that is so eagerly sought. In appealing to the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 2002), a reality is quite literally constructed by the industry for the consumer. Sometimes this construction is a harmless appetiser to the trek itself; at other times, however, it masks unpalatable truths and harsh realities. Tourists and the wider tourism industry thus often fail to see the negative impact of their activities on local communities, whose members are both human and non-human (Hall & Brown, 2006), and the fragile mountain environment that sustains them. Fennell argues that “though we know the right thing to do whilst on vacation...we still opt for what is morally

wrong because we succumb to our selfish desires—we express a weakness of will” (2022, p. 7), which can be thought of as a reluctance or unwillingness to see and to care. The carefree thus all-too-easily become the careless or even the uncaring.

The muleteer is a *montagnard*⁷ (Debarbieux & Rudaz, 2010), whose life, by contrast, is somewhat more prosaic. The mountain environment is harsh and unforgiving and the *montagnard*'s year-round survival hard won. Mountain communities are isolated and remote; if true geographically, this also holds socially, economically and politically. To survive and fare well in the mountains presents the visitor with significant challenges, but these are short-lived and readily relieved by a return to urban living. For the locals, by contrast, they remain a lived reality, a never-ending struggle for survival. Members of these marginalised communities are all-too-easily rendered voiceless, misunderstood and maligned, their needs neglected or even denied by outsiders (Debarbieux, 2008). Mountain tourism therefore has the power to seduce the traditional agro-pastoralist with the promise of a diversified revenue stream and the possibility of a reprieve from toil and uncertainty (Cousquer, 2016; Funnell & Parish, 1999; Garrigues-Cresswell & Lecestre-Rollier, 2002); a seduction that presents age-old traditions that had evolved to cope with mountain living with new threats and challenges. The cohesion and solidarity of local communities is disrupted by the ideology of the market, fragile mountain ecosystems are despoiled and local labour, both human and nonhuman, find themselves exploited (Mahdi, 1999; Ramou, 2007). Caught up in their own cares, it is all-too-easy for these communities to lose sight of the mule and of mule welfare.

Where does this leave the mule? Invisible? Overlooked? Forgotten? How is the mule in mountain tourism rendered absent from mountain tourism? Perhaps more importantly, how amid this complexity, can different groups learn to care for mules better? Holding such questions serves as a reminder that we must not lose sight of such questions and that curiosity is the way in...

Animals, it seems, may co-habit the same spaces as humans but we somehow remain blind to them and to the ways in which we have minimised our awareness of their lives and fates. This is significant, for awareness raising is central to the responsible tourism endeavour (Goodwin, 2011). John Berger's oft-quoted line that “prophecy now involves geographical rather than historical projection; it is space not time that hides consequences from us” (1971, p. 40) challenges us to consider what spaces and spacing (or distancing and absencing) devices prevent us from seeing, and what sorts of spaces and practices might allow us to see more clearly. His reference to prophecy also provides us with an orientation towards the future that can emerge through our choices as moral

⁷ This French term, much favoured by Bernard Debarbieux and Gilles Rudaz (2010), perhaps best describes the identity, nature and character of indigenous mountain people. Where the mountaineer may visit and travel through the mountains, the *montagnard* is mountain born-and-bred. The mountains are to them birthplace, workplace and home.

agents and communities. Ways of seeing and of knowing can thus travel and evolve, especially when we suspend old ways and, in particular, “the human biases, imaginaries, fears and wishes” (Carr, 2021, p. 37) that structure our thinking, and create opportunities to learn new ways.

In attending more fully to the mule and to the quality of attention paid to mules and mule welfare, an opportunity is fashioned that allows us to better understand the contested nature of welfare, a concept that sits “uncomfortably between scientific fact, social norms and individual subjectivity” (Buller & Morris, 2003, p. 219). This opportunity necessitates an appreciation of the different worlds from which the actors in mountain tourism are drawn, arguing that this is essential to an understanding of the problems posed when differing, or even incommensurate, views of animal welfare collide. Bringing these differing welfares together and placing them under tension, renders porous the bubbles in which they each exist and challenges those involved to see more clearly (Figures 3a-3c).⁸ Elsewhere I have emphasised the value of heterogeneity and diversity and therefore choice in developing moral wisdom (Cousquer, 2018) and proposed that an awareness of the precepts of welfare born of seeing the mule more fully allows those involved in the mountain tourism industry to see their own roles more clearly. In exercising their power to negotiate ontologies more wisely, response-ability for mule welfare emerges. In essence, it is all too easy for the various actors in mountain tourism to turn their back on the muleteer and his mule and to sanction exploitation through this inattention. Developing attentional practices can ensure that intentions are clarified, and the welfare of the mule is considered and respected. To develop this further calls for engagement with ideas of collective responsibility; this commences a journey from ego-system to eco-system awareness (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Scharmer et al., 2021) and allows for the consideration of the welfare born of dialogue and community (Figure 3a). Hence the emphasis on the dialogical encounter, on systems change, and on Action Research.

⁸ Mule welfare is a heterogeneous, complex and contested concept that is enacted within overlapping practices that are brought into contact, and sometimes conflict, within the mountain tourism industry. These practices and the welfares they enact overlap are, however, shifting and emergent, as suggested by the use of dotted margins. Moving from an awareness of the welfare enacted within each of the bubbles to an awareness of the ways in which welfare is co-created requires the system to see itself and those involved to see themselves as part of that system. The welfare that emerges when all involved engage in dialogue rather than monologues and debates allows the existing impoverished welfare of mules to evolve towards a richer, more holistic welfare.

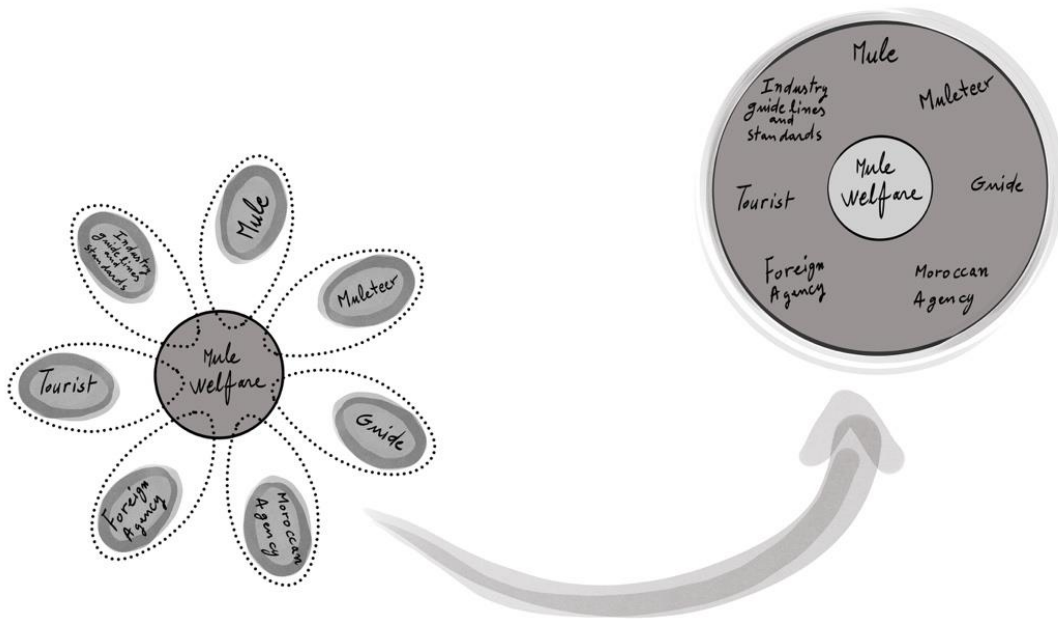
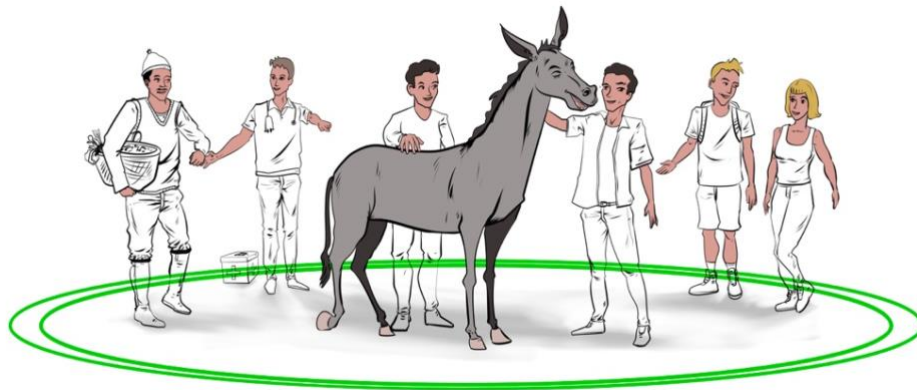


Figure 3a: (Zihounti, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) Moving towards welfares emerging through genuine meeting and dialogue.

The images (Figures 3b – 3c) capture Moroccan artist, ZiHounti's visual interpretation of how absencing arises for the visiting trekkers, the foreign and local agencies, the guide and even the muleteers themselves with the consequences weighing heavily on the mule. Abdelaziz has grown up in the south of Morocco, where mules and donkeys are very much part of the fabric of daily living. In the second image, Zihounti captures what can happen when promoting deep listening, when judgment, cynicism and fear are suspended by all involved and it becomes possible to meet genuinely, re-spect and dialogue with the mule.



Figures 3b-3c: (Zihounti, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) From turning your back on, to turning towards, the mule and to each other.

Action Research

Where the welfare of mules working in mountain tourism is concerned, there is an urgent need to understand how the practices that bind mule and man together can be improved and rendered more equitable. This represents a knowledge-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000) that calls for a methodology for action, both with and for the mule. I argue here that if dialogue between the stakeholders is achieved, it is possible to move beyond restructuring and redesigning (new structures, practices, and processes) to reframing (new

thinking and principles) and even regenerating (new purpose) and thus to self-transformation (Scharmer, 2009, pp. 27–30).

The work informing this paper developed a staged model of Action Research (AR) that moved from an understanding of the issue(s) to the transformation of working practices with new insights emerging ‘organically’ (Bisplinghoff, 1998). As part of an ongoing inquiry into how mule welfare can be better practised, the relationship and communication between man and mule was targeted and an inquiring approach adopted that allowed practitioners to develop their ability to act “awaredly and choicefully” and to “assess effects in the outside world while acting” (Reason & Torbert, 2001).

The focus on the quality of attention, dialogue and communion needed to promote awareness and action, led to the use a form of Action Research developed by Otto Scharmer and his colleagues at MIT. This approach⁹ to action inquiry, known as Theory U, was used in this study as a framework to develop and explore awareness of mule welfare and to transform the way the industry takes responsibility for mule welfare. This approach distinguishes between cycles of *absencing* from the social field through judgment, cynicism, and fear, and *presencing*—where these neurophysiological tendencies to close ourselves off from the other are suspended, creating opportunities for relational practices to be nurtured. This is similar to what Argent (2022) describes as trans-species attunement. Theory U seeks to deepen awareness by promoting open-minded inquiry and open-hearted compassion as ways to see more deeply into the social field.¹⁰ It was anticipated that this growing awareness would enter, interact with, disrupt — and in turn, transform — the practices and context(s) of the lived world(s) that the mule is subject to. This paper is thus an attempt to better understand and map what these journeys towards our humanity¹¹ might look like. It seeks to hold open the space necessary for curious inquiry and genuine and generative dialogue to take place and shape a dialogue in which all participants, *including the mule*, can start exploring and negotiating what they truly want for the future. These journeys of exploration beckon to us.

They connect meaning to action. They craft narratives that release human energy. They make new maps that guide us into places where there are no paths. As importantly, they help us to discover the courage that it takes to journey towards our humanity.
(McManus, 2014, p. 158)

⁹ Further developed by the Presencing Institute, hubs and coaching circles have been established across the world. For further information visit www.u-school.org.

¹⁰ According to Scharmer, Pomeroy and Kaufer (2021, p. 5) the social field is “the entirety of the social system with an emphasis on the source conditions that give rise to patterns of thinking, conversing, and organizing, which in turn produce practical results.”

¹¹ What Scharmer describes as our *highest future possibility*.

The tendency for the muleteer to view and treat the mule as an object rather than as an extension of himself has come to define the relationships that exist between man and mule. It is possible, however, to transcend and dissolve subject-object awareness¹² and attain a new, higher level of awareness. Both mule and muleteer grow through this transformative process (Figure 4) as they let go of the ignorance, judgement, cynicism and fear that limits who they could be.

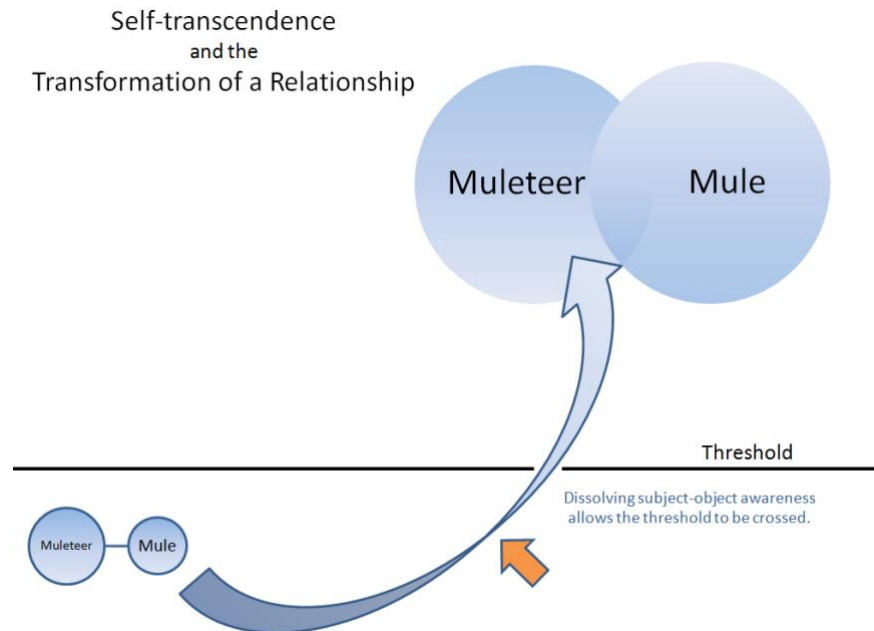


Figure 4: Transforming the self and the relationship requires us to see ourselves in the other.

Methodology for Action

According to Reason and Bradbury (2008), Action Research is “not so much a methodology as an orientation to inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity, and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues” (p. 1). It brings together a range of “practices of living inquiry,” “engaging those who might otherwise be subjects of research” in “more or less systematic cycles of action and reflection.” These cycles integrate knowing and action, “responding to a desire to act creatively in the face of practical and often pressing issues” and open new “communicative spaces in which dialogue and development can flourish” (p. 3). Action Research “draws on many ways of knowing” and is “values oriented, seeking to address issues of significance concerning the flourishing of human persons, their communities and the wider ecology in which we

¹² This involves a letting go of the illusion of the separate self and a shift into “interbeing” (Hanh, 2021).

participate” (p. 4). Perhaps most importantly it is a “living, emergent process that cannot be predetermined but changes and develops as those engaged deepen their understanding of the issues to be addressed and develop their capacity as co-inquirers” (p. 4). In this body of work, it was therefore assumed that stakeholders were on a journey where learning opportunities born of listening arose and could be integrated into practice. It was also assumed that judgement, cynicism, and fear would recur and interfere with the learning for these habits are deeply ingrained in our ways of being and doing and entrap us, denying us “the freedom that allows us to hear, and to see and to just be” (Hanh, 2015, p. 5).

Mules as Members of a Community of Inquiry

Debra Merskin’s seminal paper on the promise of participatory action research for animals argues cogently that “working toward a level of mutuality with other-than-human-animals benefits us all (2011, p. 150) and that our ideas of research, communication, and community must be revised. I have argued elsewhere that the mule is a member of the trekking team (Cousquer & Allison, 2012). The mule is therefore a community member, a being with whom we communicate and negotiate; a participatory intelligence with big ears whose ability to co-sense, co-author and co-create the World we live in is only now being recognised.

Our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships that we co-author...A participatory worldview places human persons and communities as part of their world – both human and more-than-human – embodied in their world, co-creating their world. (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 7)

I have therefore developed an action inquiry *with* mules rather than *for* mules. This steps over the threshold that has been reified by the mule’s perceived linguistic limitations and our own uncertainty when it comes to deciding whether we are *advocating for* or, indeed, *dialoguing with* the mule. In considering this question, we are led to consider the underlying purpose of this inquiry. Is it purely *instrumental* in the sense that it yields improvements in practice? Is it *interpretive* in the sense that it aims to inform the wise and prudent decision making of practitioners? Or is it, in fact, emancipatory in the sense that it seeks to emancipate people from “determination by habit, custom, illusion and coercion which sometimes frame and constrain social and educational practice” (Kemmis, 2006, p. 95)? I believe that it can be all three and could even prove to be emancipatory for the mule.

An emancipatory view recognises the need to improve our self-understanding and address collective misunderstandings about the nature of mules and of muleteering practice, and how both have been constituted, shaped, and re-shaped culturally, socially, historically and discursively (Geiger et al., 2020; Vasilopoulou, 2021). Developing the latent potential for travel and tourism to facilitate change is thus a disruptive force that can be harnessed wherever there is a willingness to surrender into listening. The project’s emancipatory aims

function in the same way that the political dimension of Action Research asserts the importance of “liberating the muted voices of those held down by class structures and neo-colonialism, by poverty, sexism, racism and homophobia” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 10), this research project gives voice to the mule and allows that voice to be heard and respected.

The mule has so often been maligned and excluded from narratives and negotiations. Our understanding of the reasons for this become apparent as we start to see how we absent ourselves from the mule and the resulting gaps in our awareness through which the mule disappears. There will be those who state, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, that even if mules could talk, we would not be able to understand them. This idea emanates from the divisions and distinctions that language and reason allow us to make (Carr, 2021; Venegas & López-López, 2021). But, as de Fontenay and Pasquier (2008) point out, if God speaks to us by the prayers that we address to him, where the language of animals is concerned, perhaps it is sufficient simply to speak to (and indeed with) them. Merrifield (2008) similarly highlights the importance attached in the Quran to the prophet’s ability to speak to and with donkeys. According to de Fontenay and Pasquier (2008), the ability to commune with those who are silent to us, whether they be animals or those we have lost, is not granted to all. They suggest it is, in fact, a gift of translation.

In describing the person who can speak (or whisper) with animals as sharp of hearing or graced with the gift of translation and understanding, the status of animals as dumb or silent creatures is questioned. The metaphors used to describe the ways by which we can break into this mysterious 'other world' include 'remedies', passwords, rituals, and shibboleths.¹³ Humankind has thus always wrestled with the challenge of breaching these barriers of incomprehension. But how is this to be done? How can one address what Pierre Enoff (2014) has called “the silence of horses” and appreciate what we humans have inflicted on all equines by our reluctance and inability to commune with them?

That no one has yet dared to undertake Action Research with animals reflects perhaps the uncertainties and tensions raised when viewing them as subjects with something to say. I argue, however, that any interpretation of a mule’s experiences is not meant to be definitive or absolute. It is proposed,

¹³ "on découvre en effet, chez Virgile et Michelet, dans le lien que l'historien entretient avec le poète, l'évocation d'une secrète analogie entre les animaux et les à demi vivants que sont pour nous les morts. *Autres* qu'il est difficile, voire dangereux d'approcher. Avant de les rencontrer, il faut se munir d'un mot de passe, d'un *schibboleth*, d'un rituel, d'un instrument orphique, ce qui n'exclut cependant pas l'effort et l'endurance. Ce pouvoir énigmatique, on peut le nommer indifféremment, finesse de l'oreille ou don de la *traduction*. La grâce est accordée à certains et refusée à d'autres, qui permet d'entendre et de comprendre le parler des à jamais silencieux, et d'administrer un remède à cette immémoriale séparation entre les bêtes et les hommes qu'on nomme pompeusement la différence zoo-anthropologique." (de Fontenay & Pasquier, 2008, pp. 20–21).

instead, as a question for curious exploration and deliberation, an opportunity for us to examine our own sources and determine where we are operating from and how we are impacting on the mule and on mule welfare. I argue that we realise this when we learn to see ourselves mirrored in the mule. The mule thus has the power to transform those of us who are willing to listen and worthy of her trust by dint of the “re-gard” or “re-spect” we afford her. As Thich Nhat Hanh (2021, p. 142) asserts: “right action is the kind of action that goes in the direction of understanding, compassion and truth. It is the kind of action without discrimination based on the insight of interbeing.”

Opening ourselves to feedback and, in particular, to the feedback the mule is offering and the mirror the mule is holding up to us can lead to revisioning, reshaping, and regenerating the relationship forged between humans and non-humans.¹⁴ These are creative processes of “becoming with” that demand practical engagement to evolve and direct our skilful being in the world. To explore how this can be realised, we now introduce the specific Action Research approach that informed and structured the co-seeing, co-sensing, and co-creating journeys that allowed awareness of the mule and mule welfare to emerge and alternative futures to be explored.

Theory U

This approach pioneered by Otto Scharmer and his colleagues at MIT as a way of exploring and supporting change in people, organisations, and society (Senge et al., 2004) builds on the work of reflective practitioners (Schön, 2016) and the action and reflective turns in social science. It proposes an “advanced social sciences methodology that integrates science (third-person view), social transformation (second-person view), and the evolution of self (first person view) into a coherent framework of consciousness-based action research” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 16).

Theory U’s merits lie in its emphasis on awareness raising and dialogue and on helping individuals and complex systems see themselves as co-creators of the many problems we face in today’s globalised industries. Co-seeing and co-sensing journeys are integral to the change inquiry advocated by Theory U, which provides a structure to address the invisibility of the mule and of mule welfare within the mountain tourism industry. By promoting curiosity and compassion, cognitive and emotional energy is released that can fuel transformative change. A shift in the source of our attention and therefore how we attend to the world arises when we allow ourselves to see (opening our minds) and to sense (opening our hearts). According to Buber (2000), these represent first a relational shift into technical dialogue (*I-It*) and a deeper relational shift or turning (Cousquer,

¹⁴ and specifically, in this case, the gendered relationship between man and mule.

2022) into genuine dialogue (*I-Thou*), characterised by a quality of mutuality and reciprocity that leaves us changed by the encounter.

The Role of Dialogical Encounters in Deepening Awareness

The previous section has outlined the theoretical merits and challenges associated with bringing the mule into a process of lived inquiry. In this next section, we focus on how seeing and sensing feedback loops were established between the mules and the various stakeholders represented in Figure 3 so that the system can come to see itself and negotiate better mule welfare. The quality of encounter and exchange are thus prioritised. Before moving into the reciprocal exchange (dialogue born of compassionate sensing), curiosity has to be elicited so that the stakeholders are drawn in and start to see with as little judgement and as much patience as possible.

These feedback loops have to be grown organically: The guide students on expedition would not usually have walked over to the mules and inspected their backs at the end of the day. This was now part of their training, and they were learning that there is little difference between interesting ourselves in the state of the clients' and indeed their own feet (which suffer from ill-fitting walking boots) and the state of the mules' backs (which suffer from ill-fitting pack saddles). The pathology of pressure points and friction rubs is very similar. Having the students examine the backs allows the rubs, the hair loss, the heat and swelling and any associated raw wounds to be observed visually and palpated topically but also and perhaps most significantly, felt (Figures 5a-5b). A pain response can be read; the mules can speak of their pain. As Fennell (2022, p. 7) acknowledges "animals do in fact speak for themselves through their emotions, preferences, behaviours, and physical state, and we have simply avoided their "voices" because of ignorance and self-interest." Attending to the mule's experience presents us with choices. The causes of the rubs can be sought out in collaboration with the muleteers and addressed, as communities of practice and learning (Cousquer & Alyakine, 2014b) emerge from this shared reflection on experience (Scharmer, 2001). It also becomes possible to engage the mule in this process of research and inquiry for they will typically demonstrate avoidance behaviour such as dipping the back if there is a pack sore, when they are loaded, indicating that they are not consenting to being worked. This thus raises the possibility of "animal informed consent providing guidance" (Fennell, 2022, p. 8) to the trekking team.



Figure 5a-5b: (Cousquer, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) The author, the mule owner and one of the guide students examine¹⁵ a mule's withers at the end of day 10 of the "Grande Traversée de l'Haut Atlas". Wounds are cleaned and dressed by the students before assessing how to eliminate pressure points and rubs between the pack saddle and the midline.

The communities of inquiry established on the trek are only able to deal with the presenting problem and the immediate causes. The root causes associated primarily with overloading, with poorly fitted and adapted packsaddles and with the absence of a collaborative preventative approach (Blakeway & Cousquer, 2018) are not touched, however. To bring these into view requires us to extend the conversation to the wider system, to identify other key decision makers and stakeholders and to recognise the various ways in which the problem statement is incomplete because of the failure to recognise these inter-relationships (Senge et al., 2008).

Bringing the trekking clients and the trekking agencies both into the conversation and, ultimately into the same shared space, was not easy. Awareness raising initially consisted of a range of initiatives to disseminate information about the various welfare issues in the popular mountaineering (Cousquer, 2014, 2015; Schmidt, 2015), professional mountaineering (Cousquer, 2014, 2015) and veterinary press. The provision of CPD courses for International Mountain Leaders built on this awareness raising and elicited an unsolicited inquiry from the owner of a British company running expeditions for schools who wanted to develop policy and practice within their own organisation but also saw the opportunity to extend this to members of the Expedition Providers Association¹⁶ (Cousquer, 2018). Such interest and deep-seated commitment to addressing a common concern is of critical importance if communities of commitment and creation (Scharmer, 2001) are to emerge and sustain themselves. The company hosted a series of meetings in the UK to engage other providers working in the sector and raise awareness of the welfare concerns. This ultimately led to the creation of the EPA Mule Welfare Charter (Cousquer, 2018); visions of a positive future thus established a creative tension with the truth

¹⁵ The back is both examined visually and palpated. The mule's discomfort comes to be not just observed but felt.

¹⁶ See <https://www.expeditionprovidersassociation.co.uk>

about present reality (Senge et al., 2008). This represented a shift from explicit knowledge about the problem into the co-initiation of a process of sustained, iterative learning as the industry explored how to implement these commitments on the ground. Mules were present throughout this process, even at a distance, for their documented lived experiences lay at the heart of the initiative. The timeline for this process is shown in Figure 6, illustrating how the initiation of these meetings provided a space for individuals to see and feel the impact of their consumption of muleteering services on the mule and muleteer. Turning away from the “will to profit and to be powerful” (Buber, 2000, pp. 48–49) and attending to the mule and muleteer as *I-Thou* thus has the potential to be transformative.

June 2014	Initial contact made by Chris.
July 2014	Chris visits the Donkey Sanctuary in Sidmouth to learn more about mule welfare; further meetings held at his home.
July 2014	Development and publication of Leader Checklist
September 2014	Mule care on the agenda for EPA Meeting, hosted by FFE.
October 2014	Mule Care Initiative Workshop for FFE school group in Morocco.
October 2014	Retirement of aged mule, named Betty.
November 2014	EPA Working Mule Care Initiative Workshop (UK)
March 2015	Ground handlers Working Mule Care Initiative Conference and Workshop (Morocco).
April 2015	First Mule Welfare Audit undertaken for FFE.
May 2015	Charter for Care of Working Mules issued.
June-October 2015	Further Mule Welfare Audits undertaken for EPA members.
June-October 2015	Training expeditions for muleteering teams undertaken.
March – May 2016	Training workshops for World Challenge.
September 2016	Drafting of EPA Technical Guidance Document on Pack Mule Welfare on Expedition.
February 2017	Training workshops for PEAK (World Challenge’s ground handlers in Morocco)’s guide team and muleteers.

Figure 6: Timeline of initiatives that allowed awareness of mule welfare in the expeditions industry to be developed across EPA companies over a two-year period from 2014-17, from the point the owner of Far Frontiers Expeditions made contact.

Creating further ways of seeing and sensing into the lived experience of the mules and muleteers working for several international travel agents and the local agents who acted as their “ground handlers” started with systematic mule health and equipment checks on their muleteering teams with detailed reports being compiled that showed:

- The mule’s biographical history (age, gender, duration of ownership)
- The body condition and conformation of the mule
- The presence of old and new injuries (packsaddle, tethering, and bit-related)
- The condition of the equipment and the likely causes of any pack wounds
- The weight of the pack saddles
- Key recommendations where changes should be made

These insights then served as initiators of an iterative series of ongoing discussions that sought to develop co-creative solutions to address these concerns. It was soon realised that writing animal welfare into the contracts between the international and local agents would not solve very much as each welfare issue arose through a collection of interdependent elements, including equipment, training in the use and maintenance of the equipment, training in muleteering practice and many other factors. Each issue had to be explored, whilst recognising they may be interdependent. Here we will focus on overloading as a welfare concern: On the surface, it might be assumed that overloading can be addressed by setting weight limits. A weight limit cannot simply be imposed unilaterally. The audits had established that the pack saddles typically weigh twenty kilogrammes and so any weight limit would need to take this into account. Bags would need to be weighed and total loads checked (but how, with what, and by whom?). It was recognised that the number of mules provided by a ground handler needed to grow; however this came at a cost. The muleteer salary could not be squeezed as a way of managing costs for the muleteer is, in turn, responsible for covering the costs of feeding and equipping his mule and must do so year-round with little work available during the winter months. In the absence of skilled muleteers capable of training and managing a pack-mule train, it is currently not possible for the number of mules to be increased without this adding to the number of muleteers employed. The muleteers also had their own concerns and priorities. In many cases they did not have the means, equipment, knowledge, skills, authority and even motivation to address many of the welfare issues identified. They thus needed to be supported in prototyping and developing their muleteering practice. These realities confronted the international and local agencies with the reality that the muleteers had historically been viewed as independent contractors, contracted in to provide a service. In many cases they were recruited from poorer, more remote

valleys as the muleteers from these valleys would typically accept lower wages (Figure 7a). It soon became apparent that muleteers had never previously been invited to team meetings or provided with training in the way that guides are. A shift into an eco-systemic view (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013) was therefore needed for the system to start to see and sense itself with agencies recognising how they were responsible for the poor welfare of mules through their exploitation of muleteers. This was made possible when a conference was organised by EPA members, in Imlil, for their ground handlers, muleteers, and local guides as well as other unaffiliated stakeholders. This meeting provided an opportunity for deeper listening (Figure 7b).



Figure 7a-7b: (Cousquer, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) The muleteers pictured riding their heavily loaded mules are working for 70-80 dirhams per day.¹⁷ As part of a two-day workshop, muleteers, guides, local trekking agents and international trekking agents gathered together with mules to learn about how mule welfare issues could be addressed collaboratively.

Muleteers evoked the poor pay and seasonal employment low status of the work as issues of concern that resulted in posts being filled with young muleteers who did not care about the mule and viewed the work as temporary. One of the local company owners summarised this:

There are two parts to the problem – a financial part and a personal part. Where loads were concerned, services are provided according to the size of the group but this could be difficult in a competitive market. Then there was the new generation of muleteers who did not care about their mules as their fathers had done. They were more likely to get on the mule because it was not their mule and not their investment. These boys often just viewed the mule as a tool of work. (Quotation from Research Participant)

One of the guides further expanded on the role and impact of competition, saying:

¹⁷ They are from a more remote area and the lack of respect afforded to them cascades falls on the back of the mules. The passing muleteer on the right is on a training trek with another agency and this encounter provides rich material for discussion when the root causes of exploitation are discussed that evening.

There is competition between companies in Morocco...they have to remain competitive. This means they will often refuse to help or listen to muleteers. Muleteers' work is undervalued and little appreciated. It is only when they are not there that you realise how important their role is. Everything is getting expensive – 125 dirhams a day is nothing!...Companies are just concerned about their benefits.(Quotation from Research Participant)

This represents a radical insight for it highlights that exploitation of workers, both human and other-than-human, can be systemic, cascading down through a hierarchical structure. It is striking how few opportunities existed for foreign companies to meet the mules and their owners and inform themselves about how both fared. They are all-too easily forgotten. In 2015, Hicham Houdaifa published a small book on exploited workers in Morocco, many of whom are women. Tellingly, the book's title was "Dos de femme, dos de mulet: Les oubliées du Maroc profonde,"¹⁸ drawing a telling parallel between the burdens carried by women and mules and how they are forgotten. Exploitation is made possible when it is rendered remote, not brought into view and held up to scrutiny. In the months following the conference, muleteering teams were therefore provided with paid¹⁹ training treks to bring their practice into the light.

Taking small groups of muleteers and their mules away specifically to learn to work the mules in head collars provided "holding spaces" (Scharmer, 2009) for the muleteers to embody a different way of working and relating to their mule. Their wider practice was observed, filmed, viewed, and reviewed by the team at the end of the day. This, perhaps more than anything else, allowed the mule to hold a mirror up to the muleteer and for awareness of the gaps to be explored—between theory and practice, between policy and policy implementation.

The detailed training reports allowed the mule to hold that same mirror up to other stakeholders and rendered visible a host of realities that had, until then, remained hidden. They had not previously been reflected back into a space, and then reflected on. These realities were no longer private matters and could not be dismissed as such, for the structural and attentional violence was now being attended to. Each muleteer's equipment, the condition of his mule, and the way he worked and related to her was no longer his private affair. It was visible, made public, compared to that of his colleagues and with the norms set out by EPA (Cousquer, 2018, pp. 349–354). These realities then become the shared responsibility of those actors in the supply chain who employ the muleteer and his mule and who oversee the work. When the pack saddle is taken off, the back examined, the correspondence of wear to the pack saddle and to rubs considered,

¹⁸ Translated as "On the backs of women and of mules: The forgotten of deepest Morocco."

¹⁹ This aspect was not funded by the trekking agencies but made possible through funding obtained from an animal welfare charity.

when the muleteers learn to assess whether the pack saddle sits clear of the midline, they start to take an interest in, care for, and take pride in their mule and their work. If their proficiency is not seen, appreciated, and rewarded, however, it can become harder to sustain this level of attention and care. The guide as the representative of the agencies on the ground has a crucially important role to play in ensuring mules and muleteers are not othered, and are valued and that their welfare is not compromised. They must be able to listen to the mule and to the muleteer and to advocate for them when liaising with the agency. This was evident when one of the ground handlers organised a workshop for their guides, in 2017, followed by a three-day training trek for some of their muleteers (as shown in Figure 6). The Adventure Travel Trade Association,²⁰ of which the ground handler is a member, promote professional development through their international Guide Standard.²¹ There is thus a further mechanism through which expedition standards are being promoted by ensuring guides receive training in this area and come to understand their responsibilities to human porters and pack animals. Such training, if systematically undertaken, provide opportunities (holding spaces) for a holistic approach to be taken with the potential to ensure a successful expedition is had by all members of the trekking team.

This approach's transformative potential derives from its focus on the field structures of awareness and how these affect the quality of attention, dialogue and encounter. These, in turn, determine the constitution of the collective (or community) and the future that emerges through collective action around common intentions. Enabling shifts in the field of awareness allows stakeholders to engage in technical dialogue and, in many cases, genuine dialogue and, eventually, generative dialogue. This work recognised early on the need to engineer situations that gave rise to reflective inquiry, dialogue, and generative flow. Failure to do so simply gave rise to polite or defensive answers²² rather than deep reflection and creative thinking. In other words, the low-energy interactions characterised by *I-in-Me* and *I-in-It* field structure of attention (Scharmer, 2009, pp. 237–238) gives rise to rule reproduction and rule contextualisation. This is unhelpful because it does not expose and explore hidden assumptions and habits of thought and does not therefore allow welfare and exploitation to be considered in a deep, critical, collaborative, and meaningful manner. When operating from an *I-in-You* or *I-in-Now*²³ state, by contrast, one starts to relate to and connect with the field; a higher energy state is reached that gives rise to rule evolving and then rule generating behavior.

²⁰ <https://www.adventuretravel.biz/>

²¹ <https://learn.adventuretravel.biz/guide-standard>

²² That curtail inquiry resulting in a “shallow dive” that only travels so far down the U.

²³ This occurs when operating from beyond one's periphery or from a place in which one is able to permeate all of one's open boundaries.

Conclusion: Turning to the Other

This paper has provided insights into how both pack mules and muleteers can be brought in as members of a community of inquiry to explore more equitable and respectful ways of meeting and working together. This process must be facilitated for it is dependent on holding spaces being created in which the quality of listening and attending (Scharmer et al., 2021) deepens, such that awareness develops and feeds action for societal transformation. Despite the asymmetry of the relationship between other-than-human-animals working in tourism and the human stakeholders (Fennell, 2022), the mule is able to hold a mirror up to those willing to look into that mirror and can thereby highlight the structural and attentional violence that underlies their exploitation and poor welfare. This mirror is always available but our willingness to look into the mirror, to listen and change, will always be a limiting factor.

This paper has highlighted that mules are easily overloaded in terms of what they physically carry and over-burdened with the costs of poor welfare practices. These consequences are easily ignored through the system's failing to see and feel into these lived realities. The mule's burden is further magnified by that of their owner who is all too easily exploited (with impacts felt in terms of inadequate nutrition and inattention to the mule's body and packsaddle) and given little opportunity to voice these concerns. The ability of concerned tourists to advocate for animal welfare and to complain about failures can, however, be leveraged as a disruptive element that can lead to international and local trekking agencies inquiring into the systems that give rise to poor welfare. This is possible when they or the guides see and report back; it remains somewhat ad-hoc, however. A more systematic and thorough auditing system of mule welfare would take this to the next level — where seeing and sensing are undertaken systematically before, during, and after every trek and these findings used to review and improve practice (Blakeway & Cousquer, 2018). This requires space and time to be created for such encounters. A key question to consider for the future is how these inspections will be conducted and whether the industry can develop enough expertise to undertake them internally.

The merits of Theory U's approach, with its focus on seeing and sensing as key thresholds to be crossed in order to develop awareness of the health of the whole, have been shown to allow the mule to hold up a mirror to exploitative practices (Figure 8). And by prioritising deep listening, it becomes possible to hear the voices and concerns of mules. Furthermore, this has also allowed the concerns of their owners to be heard. Key to this understanding is an appreciation of the quality of listening and therefore of dialogue this gives rise to. Scharmer (2009) argues that we absent ourselves from the other when we fail to suspend judgment, cynicism, and fear. The mule has a long history of being misjudged and maligned; they are also viewed with fear. The importance of curiosity, kindness and courage in Action Research with mules should not therefore be underestimated. Suspending judgment, cynicism and fear, staying mindful, present to the other and to the moment gives rise to genuine meeting

and transformative change. This represents a shift from ego-system to eco-system awareness (Scharmer, 2009; Scharmer et al., 2021). Parallels in this work can be drawn to the wisdom offered by John O'Donohue (1988) for whom, turning from *I-It* to *I-Thou* is part of the battle between the ego and the soul:

In a certain sense, the meeting with your own death in the daily forms of failure, pathos, negativity, fear or destructiveness are actual opportunities to transfigure your ego. These are invitations to move out of the protective, controlling way of being towards an art of being which allows openness and hospitality. To practice this art of being is to come into your soul rhythm. (p. 262)



Figure 8: (Zihounti, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) The mule is able to hold up a mirror to their humans and help them to free themselves from the absencing that arises when they judge the mule (closed mind) and then slide into uncaring cynical attitudes (closed heart) and start fearing the mule and abusing her.²⁴

²⁴ These aversive pathways give rise to absencing. Presencing becomes possible when judgments are suspended and encounters promoting curiosity and compassion encouraged. The human can then find themselves exploring the left side of the U and opening up their creative rather than aversive pathways.

If there is one thing to emphasise to anyone interested in applying an Action Research approach to the transformation of human-equine relationships, it is the need to focus on our openness and the need to be more hospitable to ourselves and to others. Hospitality, however, is an under-rated virtue. To become more hospitable can help us to discover our soul rhythm and can transform the way we listen to, meet, and dialogue with the equine. Hospitality also relates to our ability to gather together, to listen, and to develop common intentions. For pack mule welfare in mountain tourism to continue to improve, it is essential that holding spaces are provided that allow the key stakeholders meet regularly and in which the mule and muleteers' concerns are heard and their burden shared. Such hospitality will allow us to seek and ask better questions, of ourselves and of each other. Our society is accustomed to asking blunt, materialistic, capitalist questions, but unfamiliar with the moral questions of how we will be to each other. These are questions we must live our way into, and that will help us to appreciate that the shared burden is one of responsibility and response-ability. The trekking agencies and tourists have for too long exploited muleteers and mules in invisible ways; this represents a structural violence. The attentional violence arises through absencing, when we fail to open our minds and hearts to the impact of the burdens we place on the mule and fail to care for our own deep discomfort when we realise that we have failed to re-spect the mule, to look them in the eye and meet with them genuinely.



Figure 9: (Zihounti, 2022, CC BY-NC-ND) Genuine meeting arises when we look deeply into ourselves and into the eyes, minds and lived experiences of our common mortals.

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