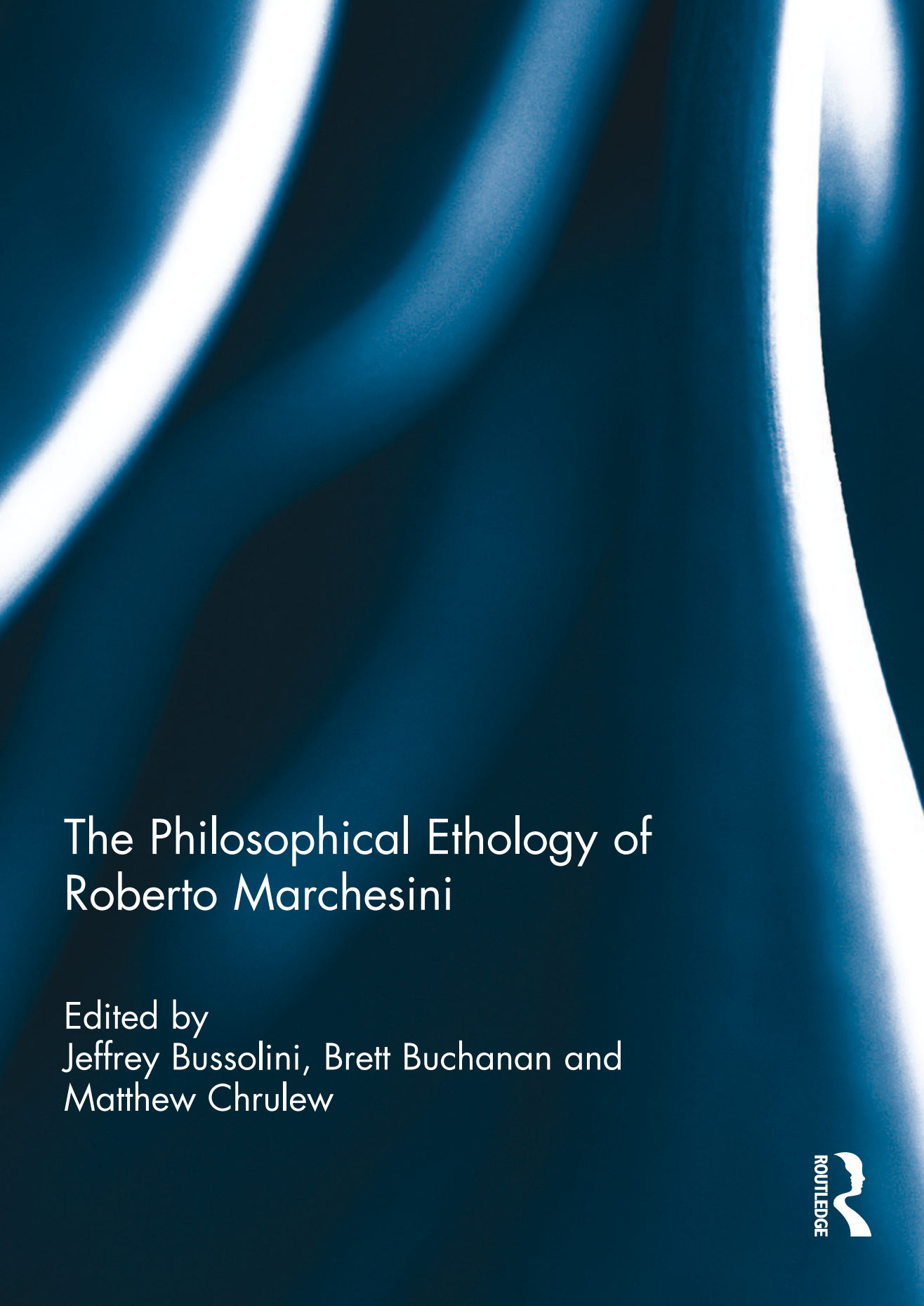
The Philosophical Ethology of
Roberto Marchesini
Edited by
Jeffrey Bussolini, Brett Buchanan and
Matthew Chrulew
ROUTLEDGE

The Philosophical Ethology of Roberto Marchesini

Roberto Marchesini is an Italian philosopher and ethologist whose work is significant for the rethinking of animality and human–animal relations. Throughout such important books as *Il dio Pan* (1988), *Il concetto di soglia* (1996), *Post-human* (2002), *Intelligenze plurime* (2008), *Epifania animale* (2014), and *Etologia filosofica* (2016), he offers a scathing critique of reductive, mechanistic models of animal behaviour, as well as a positive contribution to zooanthropological and phenomenological methods for understanding animal life.

Centred on the dynamic and performative field of interactions and relations in the world, his critical and speculative approach to the cognitive life sciences offers a vision of animals as acting subjects and bearers of culture, whose action and agency is also indispensable to human culture. In tracing the ways in which we share our lives and histories with animals in different contexts of interaction, Marchesini's cutting-edge philosophical ethology also contributes to an overarching philosophical anthropology of the human as the animal that most requires the present and input of other animals.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*.

Jeffrey Bussolini is Associate Professor of Sociology-Anthropology at City University of New York, USA.

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Brett Buchanan is Director of the School of the Environment and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Laurentian University, Sudbury, Canada. Among his writings, he has authored *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze* (Albany: SUNY, 2008), translated Vinciane Despret's *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), and co-edited three *Angelaki* issues on philosophical ethology. He has recently been a visiting researcher at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. He can be found @brettbuch and https://laurentian.ca/faculty/bbuchanan.

Jeffrey Bussolini is Associate Professor of Sociology-Anthropology at the City University of New York, USA; and Co-Director, with Ananya Mukherjea, of the Center for Feline Studies of the Avenue B Multi-Studies Center, which has conducted etho-ethnographic study of feline–human interactions since 1995. He appeared as 'Feline Sociologist' in the VICE Media/Tribeca Film Festival film *Lil Bub and Friendz* in 2013. He has written 'Recent French, Belgian and Italian Work in the Cognitive Science of Animals: Dominique Lestel, Vinciane Despret, Roberto Marchesini, and Giorgio Celli' for *Social Science Information*; and 'Toward Cat Phenomenology: A Search for Animal Being' for *Found Object 8*. He has also translated Dominique Lestel's *The Friends of My Friends: On Animal Friendship*, forthcoming from Columbia University Press.

Matthew Chrulew is ARC DECRA Research Fellow in the Centre for Culture and Technology at Curtin University, where he leads the Posthumanism-Animality-Technology research program. His current research focuses on the history and philosophy of ethology, zoo biology and conservation biology. Recent publications include the edited books *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death and Generations* (Columbia University Press, 2017, with Deborah Bird Rose and Thom van Dooren), *Foucault and Animals* (Brill, 2016, with Dinesh Wadiwel), and *Animals in the Anthropocene* (Sydney University Press, 2015, with the HARN collective). He was Associate Editor of *Environmental Humanities* journal from 2012–2017.

Sarah De Sanctis is a Doctoral Research Student at the London Graduate School, UK. She collaborates with the University of Turin and manages the UK branch of LabOnt (Laboratory for Ontology) of the university's Philosophy Department. She also works as an academic translator specializing in philosophy. She has translated Maurizio Ferraris' *Where Are You? An Ontology of the Cell Phone* (2014), *Introduction to New Realism* (2015), and Roberto Marchesini's *Animal Epiphany*. She co-edited *Breaking the Spell: Contemporary Realism under Discussion* (with Anna Longo, 2015) and, together with Graham Harman, is the editor of an issue of *Methode: Analytic Perspectives*, dedicated to the Realist Turn. She is the organizer of the "Realisms New and Old" series of lectures.

Roberto Marchesini is Director of the Scuola di Interazione Uomo–Animale and the Centro Studi Filosofia Postumanista in Bologna, Italy. He studied ethology, veterinary science, philosophy, and philology at the University of Bologna, and collaborated with Giorgio Celli and Margherita Hack. After practising as a veterinarian, he redirected his focus to philosophical ethology, bioethics, zooanthropology, and posthumanism, in an effort to better comprehend human–animal interactions. He links science and the humanities, practice and theory in researching real-world relations between humans and animals, as well as philosophical studies of the far-ranging influence of animals on human identity, culture, and being. He has been a prominent voice in the development of zooanthropology and posthumanism in Italy, and teaches human–animal interactions as dialogues between minded interlocutors in courses around the country. He has written or cowritten more than thirty books (some of which have been translated into Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English), and has frequently collaborated with artists such as Karin Andersen.

Elena Past is Associate Professor of Italian and Associate Chair of the Department of Classical and Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at Wayne State University, USA. She studies Italian literature and cinema, ecocriticism, environmental humanities, ecomedia studies, posthumanism, animal studies, crime fiction and film, and ecomafias. She is the editor of *Thinking Italian Animals: Human and Posthuman in Modern Italian Literature and Film* (with Deborah Amberson, 2014), in which they translated a piece by Roberto Marchesini on "Mimesis." She has published numerous articles and chapters on animals and Italian literature and film, and is the author of *Methods of Murder: Beccarian Introspection and Lombrosian Vivisection in Italian Crime Fiction* (2012).

Boria Sax is a pioneer in the field of animal studies who has approached it via literature, myth, and philosophy. He teaches literature at Mercy College, Sing Sing Correctional Facility, the University of Illinois, and he blogs at *The Huffington Post*. He founded the organization Nature in Legend and Story, and he has been a long-time interlocutor of Roberto Marchesini, whom he has written about many times, including in *Humanimalia* 1.2, in which he also translated Marchesini's piece "Alterity and the Nonhuman." He is the author of many books including *Crow* (2003), *Animals in the Third Reich* (2013), *Imaginary Animals: The Monstrous, the Wondrous and the Human* (2013), and *The Mythical Zoo: Animals in Life, Legend and Literature* (2013).

This is the first of three special issues of *Angelaki* devoted to the writings of Dominique Lestel, Vinciane Despret, and Roberto Marchesini, respectively. All three are important Continental thinkers who have contributed heavily to the emergence of philosophical investigations into the relationships between humans and animals in their cultural, material and symbolic dimensions. Loosely defined under the umbrella of "philosophical ethology," each offers much to the question of the animal and related problematics in posthumanism, animal studies and critical theory by engaging human/animal relations not merely as textual plays of language but as domains of bodily comportment and conduct.

But though all three have published numerous books, and though their work holds close ties with other Continental thinkers who are better known to English-speaking audiences, their writings have remained largely untranslated. Their voices have thus been rarely heard in contemporary anglophone debates to which they are, nonetheless, extremely relevant – whether as contributions to the ongoing critique of Cartesianism in the philosophy and science of animality, rehabilitations of neglected phenomenological approaches to animal subjectivity and meaning-making (anticipating, for example, the resurgence of interest in the *Umweltlehre* of Jakob von Uexküll), or, most basically and broadly, as responses to the most pressing and fundamental questions posed by the contemporary world and its intensifying and increasingly destructive interpenetration of humanity, animality and technology. These special issues will provide comprehensive introductions to the work of these philosophical ethologists.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

brett buchanan
jeffrey bussolini
matthew chrulew

PHILOSOPHICAL ETHOLOGY

Following on what Dominique Lestel calls the "ethological revolution" of the last thirty years, which he equates in importance to the quantum revolution in physics in the early twentieth century and the molecular revolution in biology in the second half of that century, there has been an intense burgeoning of philosophical and social scientific interest in understanding animal life and animal interactions. This interest is, in turn, not entirely new nor only derivative of developments in biology, but itself a continuation of earlier currents of philosophical anthropology and phenomenology that have grappled with the status of animal life and our interactions with living beings. It is not an exaggeration to say that our knowledge of

animals, including ourselves as human animals, is undergoing a renaissance, and that many of the shibboleths have been cast aside in light of new discoveries and perspectives.

Major issues subject to reinterpretation in regard to animals include culture, cognition, meaning, subjectivity, friendship and history. Almost every discipline that engages with animals, from biology to anthropology, from philosophy to literature, is in the midst of a crucial reconfiguration of concepts and operating assumptions about them. This is part of the reason for the importance of philosophical ethology: philosophy's traditional roles of criticism and scrutiny have and ought still to contribute valuable insight in the formulation of research questions and the interpretation of contexts of interaction. There is much to be gained from a mixed-methods approach that incorporates ideas from across the traditional divides of the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. One significant aspect of approaches from eco-, cognitive and ethnoethology to more recent discussions of ethoethnology and multispecies ethnography, among others, is that they leave behind the older models of the science wars and create or recuperate vital crossovers between these disciplinary areas. Philosophical ethology also revisits the lineage of philosophical anthropology, taking up its questions and methods again with the guiding problematic being an investigation of human *animality* rather than human exceptionalism.

To take up Foucault's language, philosophical ethology responds to the problematization of behavior, and seeks to problematize that problematization in turn. In the animal sciences, as in the human sciences, the *behavior* of certain bodies and populations has been constituted as a domain of knowledge, power, and intervention. Politics remains haunted by its zoological – and ethological – exclusions and inclusions. Ethics, too, can hardly remain unaffected by this rethinking of the animality of *ethos*. Deleuze tells us, following Spinoza, that ethics is an ethology, a matter of affecting and affected bodies. Yet the questions remain: what then becomes of animal bodies, and of ethology, the science of their behavior? What can ethology say about this reconceived ethicopolitical domain that includes a multitude of nonhuman others along with the animal human? Not too long ago, such a question had rightly become verboten – burdened as it was by reductive characterizations of animality offensive to humanist norms and intersecting with racial and patriarchal ideologies. Yet renewed, thoroughly non-reductive attention to the ethological domain of human/animal relationships, communities, cultures, histories and futures not only allows but enables and demands that these matters be addressed, today, by a speculative philosophical ethology.

It is such resources and provocations for thought that Lestel, Despret and Marchesini provide. Must the worlds of animals be forever cast outside of human knowledge, or are there overlapping ways of knowing – empirical, phenomenological, ethnographic, otherwise – that prove insightful regarding other forms of life, and indeed transformative of our own? Animal studies and posthumanism seem now to require engagement with such spheres in their specificity. What path can be taken that accepts neither biological continuism nor human exceptionalism, without simply giving up on the demand to think and respond to the different differences of the forms of life that confound us? These thinkers stay with, and think in, the domains we share with animals, divining the lessons of the messes we make there. Their many and varied works include important dimensions of critique, particularly of the history of animal philosophies and sciences that have reduced animals to machines and mimics, that have pretended to the invisibility of the observer, and that have enslaved animals to bad ideas, situations and economies. Yet they also offer crucial positive dimensions, elaborating new methods, concepts and questions, while also accepting the constructive element of the zoopolitical task that faces us: how best to build lives in common with other living and non-living beings.

We have been very fortunate to engage with these thinkers and their work in the last few years, and hope to do so for many to come.

While they have various earlier origins, many of these discussions emerge out of two international symposia convened by Matthew Chrulew in Sydney in 2011 on the history, philosophy, and future of ethology, with the support and solidarity of leading environmental humanities scholar Deborah Bird Rose. The breadth and depth of the conversations there fostered a number of interdisciplinary collaborations, and contributed to an overarching and ongoing dialogue about ethology and animality. It was in their wake that we committed to editing three issues that would make available in English a synoptic yet comprehensive cross-section of research by these major French, Belgian, and Italian thinkers. Each issue includes translations of sections from each of their major works, as well as a preface by a scholar acquainted with them and their writings, an expository essay, an interview, and a previously unpublished essay by each philosopher. Each translation is preceded by a brief translator's foreword that situates it in the context of the source book's argument. Each issue also contains artwork created, curated or inspired by each of these thinkers. We hope they will be of interest to scholars working in the fields of posthumanism and animal studies, as well as to philosophers, ethologists, social scientists, anthropologists, cultural and literary theorists, and anyone else besides. We would like to thank the translators who have worked so carefully on this project; the *Angelaki* editors for their support, faith and patience throughout this process; and Dominique Lestel, Vinciane Despret, and Roberto Marchesini for their enthusiasm and helpfulness in working with us to bring these issues to fruition.

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INTRODUCTION

jeffrey bussolini
brett buchanan
matthew chrulew

ROBERTO MARCHESINI

This special issue of *Angelaki* – the third and final on the theme of "philosophical ethology" – is devoted to the work of Roberto Marchesini. It follows two earlier issues of *Angelaki*, 19.3 (2014) on Dominique Lestel, and 20.2 (2015) on Vinciane Despret.

Marchesini is an Italian philosopher, veterinarian, and ethologist who has been writing about the relations of human and animal for almost thirty years. He is director of the School of Human–Animal Interactions (SIUA) and the Center for Posthuman Philosophy in Bologna, and teaches in a number of departments at universities across Italy (including, for instance, the University of Milan). He studied entomology, ethology, and veterinary science at Bologna University (before later returning there to study philosophy and philology), has undertaken field studies of animals in Bologna and Emilia-Romagna, and has been an invited guest at numerous international universities.

Marchesini is the author of a large number of books in Italian on cognitive ethology, human–animal relations from the animal industries to urban cohabitation, nature in pedagogy and subject formation, animal rights, zooanthropology, biotechnology and posthumanism. He has collaborated over many years with renowned astrophysicist Margherita Hack and prominent entomologist Giorgio Celli, among others. He plays a prominent role as an Italian public intellectual, whose applied concepts and remedial practices have had a real impact on the lives of domesticated animals and their carers. Yet his prolific writings have only recently begun to be translated into English.[1]

This issue thus aims to provide a broad introduction to his work. It consists in the main of translated excerpts from many of Marchesini's published books: *Il dio Pan* (1988), *Il concetto di soglia* (1996), *Animali di città* (1997), *La fabbrica delle chimere* (1999), *Post-human* (2002), *Intelligenze plurime* (2008), *Il tramonto dell'uomo* (2009), *Modelli cognitivi* (2011), *Fondamenti di zooantropologia* (2014), *Epifania animale* (2014) and *Contro i diritti degli animali?* (2014).[2] We also include a new piece by Marchesini extracted from his very recent book, titled (we are pleased to note) *Etologia filosofica*; a preface by Boria Sax; an interview with Marchesini; and an expository essay introducing some key ideas of his philosophical ethology.

We are pleased to include art images curated by Karin Andersen, a longtime collaborator with Marchesini. They authored the 2003 book *Animal Appeal: uno studio sul teriomorfismo*, an important exposition of the concept of theriomorphism in culture and art, and Andersen's images have frequently appeared as covers or internal artwork in his books. Much of her art is theriomorphic and deals with the hybridization of nonhuman and human animals. Images by Andersen and other artists such as Daniel Lee and Michele Mariano are central to the presentation of *Animal Appeal*. She uses a variety of media such as digitally manipulated photographs, painting, costumes, drawing, prostheses, and composed environments in combination to envision a theriomorphic future, present, and past. The images in this issue come from several of her series including: *Umweltgymnastic* ("about life in weird environmental conditions"), *Studies in Art History*, *Angelus Novissimus*, *Hollow Nature* ("metaphysical voids created to give space to our imagination"), *Nouvelles études sur le magnétisme animal* ("a study on hybrid creatures and the environments and atmospheres they live in"), *Sozialtiere*, *Z Movies* ("Where places, objects and characters live up to elements of imaginary episodes of fiction"), and *A trip to Astra Raslovo* ("imaginary eco-systems hosting a peculiar species of humanoid insects") (karinandersen.net/images).

Five images from Mark Roth's *Grazer's Gaze: The Grass Paintings* series are included here alongside Marchesini's description of the grazer's "paintbrush stroke like" perspective on the landscape ("Plural Intelligences"). These paintings are an ethological aesthetic exercise in imagining the grazing animal's gaze upon the world around it – which has been a shared and abiding concern of Marchesini's. They are also meditations on rewilding. Many paintings in the series contain grasses that were thriving in pre-Columbian North America that have become rare. Roth's use of older painting styles in new contexts, from abstract expressionism to color field, "rewilds" painting as well. The grasses, and the geysers he painted previously, offer the opportunity for a point of convergence between the naturalistic depictions of the Hudson River School and the abstraction of the New York School (tinsquo.com/archives/000666.html). The paintings here are in dialogue with the gestural, abstract, yet also organic, lines of Joan Mitchell and the cross-hatching (reminiscent of neural nets and social networks) of Terry Winters (which Roth says "succeeds in short circuiting its own imagery, becoming a field of communicative touch") (tinsquo.com/archives/2003_12.html). Roth fostered the "Chiacchierate Newyorkesi" between Marchesini, Eleonora Adorni, Boria Sax, and Bussolini under the auspices of the "Adjacent to Life" Gallery and Ninth Street Espresso.

The cover image is "Angelus Novissimus" by Karin Andersen, from a series of digital images for the performing art project *Angelus Novissimus*, 2013/14, with Alain Béhar, Vincenzo Valentino Susca, and Compagnie Quasi, Languedoc-Roussillon, France. Susca describes Andersen's image as a trickster, and we could compare it to the generative figure of Camille whom Donna Haraway writes about in describing Vinciane Despret's work in the previous "philosophical ethology" special issue (Haraway, "A Curious Practice").

notes

1 A number of essays have been translated into English, including the pieces translated by Boria Sax in *Humanimalia* 1.2 and Elena Past and Deborah Amberson in their book *Thinking Italian Animals*, articles in *Philosophical Readings* ("Different Levels") and *NanoEthics* ("Against Anthropcentrism"), and a translation of *Epifania animale* by Sarah de Sanctis is forthcoming (a chapter of which is included in this special issue).

2 Not excerpted in this issue are some of Marchesini's other books, namely *Oltre al muro* (1993), *Natura e pedagogia* (1996) and *Io e la natura* (1998).

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Fig. 1. "Heinakuhi," Karin Andersen, 2008, courtesy Guidi & Schoen Arte Contemporanea, Genoa, Italy.

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PREFACE

boria sax

ZOOTROPIA, KINSHIP, AND ALTERITY IN THE WORK OF ROBERTO MARCHESINI

As one confronts a mantis, the boundaries between both individuals and species seem to fall away. This sort of experience, which is the foundation of Marchesini's work, may not be universal, but it is probably not very unusual either, and I suspect that something of the sort is experienced by almost all beekeepers and falconers. Given the current state of scholarship, it is difficult to talk about such encounters without making them sound overly exotic or worse. Many would describe them as "mystical," but, like Marchesini, I generally prefer to avoid that word, which is conducive to either casual dismissal or uncritical acceptance.

At the core of Marchesini's philosophy is what he calls the "theory of zootropia." In ways this resembles theories of "biophilia" or "zoophilia," which posit an innate affinity between human beings and other creatures. Marchesini, however, distinguishes his model from those ideas by saying that it entails not attraction to ontologically separate beings but, rather, a more profound union (Marchesini and Andersen 52–54). It has an even stronger resemblance to "totemism," but that term is difficult to use outside of a purely anthropological context. Marchesini's theory holds that animals embody the alterity, with respect to which human beings define themselves, on both collective and individual levels. We, as human beings, derive our character from them, and we are, therefore, not autonomous (25–26). In his words, "The reference to animals is not a product of human culture, but, rather, its primary origin" (55).

distributed consciousness

These ideas of Marchesini are entirely in harmony with many recent developments in anthrozoology. Faced with the impossibility of measuring or accurately comparing the interests of animals and human beings, considered as atomic individuals, thinkers have invoked various conceptions of distributed consciousness. In a remarkable, though still largely unnoticed, instance of convergence, several theorists have separately concluded that people derive their identities mostly from other creatures. The idea, though formulated in differing ways, appears in the work of, among others, Paul Shepard, Temple Grandin, Donna Haraway, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Vinciane Despret, Marshall Sahlins, and Jocelyne Porcher (Shepard; Grandin and Johnson; Haraway; Deleuze and Guattari; Despret; Sahlins; Porcher, *Vivre*).

Perhaps the most explicit formulation of all is in the work of the anthropologist Sahlins, who holds that, for human beings, kinship is "mutuality of being." When indigenous people, for example, speak of being descended from a beaver, they are not speaking of what we consider a biological line of descent. According to Sahlins, chimpanzees have the sort of self, centered unequivocally in the body, which we usually think of as "human," but people actually have a far more fluid sense of self (Sahlins 40–42). The thinker who has done most to explore the practical implications of shared consciousness may be Porcher, who has argued that joy and sorrow pass, through intersubjectivity, between animals and the people who work and live alongside them, eventually impacting the entire society (Porcher, "Relationship"; *Vivre*; "'Work'"). All of these thinkers attempt to circumvent many of the conventional ways in which we divide experience into units of subjectivity from distinct individuals to species.

But, although they work from premises that are very similar to Marchesini's theory of zootropia, these thinkers go on to startlingly different practical conclusions. They are opposed to factory farming, mostly with great passion, but that is where their solidarity appears to end. From their common foundation, Shepherd derives a defense of hunting, while Porcher advocates traditional farming. Grandin takes what is conventionally called an "animal welfare" position, while Marchesini derives, in practice if not in theory, something like "animal rights" (Marchesini, *Contro*). Haraway, Despret, Sahlins, and Deleuze and Guattari are mostly descriptive, and their recommendations are less easy to summarize.

What is one to make of these discrepancies? It may be that even such profound theorists are, with respect to human–animal relations, so caught up in their own experiences that they have difficulty recognizing those of others as authentic. At the very least, they all, including Marchesini, make several unstated assumptions.

My own view, which may be controversial, is that, contrary to what Marx and many others believed, philosophy cannot "change the world," at least not in any direct, linear way. There is, in other words, no unambiguous link between theory and praxis, and our relationships with animals are governed far more by intuition than by any doctrine. To know that somebody is, say, a Kantian, a Utilitarian, or a Deconstructionist tells us, in practice, nothing at all about what that person will do in a given situation. When it comes to practical and political issues, reconceptualizing the nature of the self is unlikely to settle anything. But how are we to explain the lack of even a comprehensive discussion of the practical and ethical dimensions of intersubjectivity among such philosophers? At present, we do not even have a widely accepted conceptual framework or vocabulary that would enable them to engage in such a conversation.

Marchesini's could prove an important step towards gaining recognition for shared consciousness across the human–animal divide in scholarly communities. His work is possibly the most ambitious, comprehensive attempt that we have to systematically unify these developments in anthrozoology.[1] He describes in detail the mechanism by which people construct their identity through identification with animals and other entities, and offers at least a provisional terminology for it. But to enable more probing discussion, he will need to find an idiom that is flexible and expressive enough to accommodate many points of view.

pre-cartesian humanism

Marchesini differs from many post-Humanists in that he does, even while placing human autonomy in question, seem to make an unequivocal distinction between human beings and animals. Other creatures are not incomplete or modified people, but they are bound to us precisely through their alterity. The closest correlate to this perspective may be pre-Cartesian or early Humanism, where there is not a very sharp division between subject and object. This is most easily apparent in regards to style. Like many philosophers and poets of the Renaissance, Marchesini writes in a manner that is often almost technical, yet pervaded by

mysticism. It is intricate and systematic, yet at the same time very suggestive, and often filled with a sort of muted lyricism. It is fascinating, yet always a bit elusive, and often exists in a sort of twilight area between science and art. There is also an at times nearly ecstatic celebration of endless possibilities in his writing, which is rare among our contemporaries but common among pre-Cartesian Humanists. He comes across more as a Renaissance magus, seeking the truth within himself, than as a conventional scientist of the twenty-first century, taking part in a collective endeavor. Finally, like the early Humanists, he shows a preference for imagery that features fantastic composites of animals and human beings, as well as of similarly hybrid environments (Marchesini and Andersen; Aromatico).

It is harder to say how much this stylistic similarity extends to content, since that may depend on nuances of meaning. It appears to be a result of convergence, rather than any direct or conscious influence. Marchesini himself has written in *Epifania animale* [*Animal Epiphany*] of Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), the manifesto that launched the Humanist movement, "The liberation of man from the theocentric oppression demanded a sacrificial victim in ontological terms," and that casualty was the animal, reduced to the status of "brute" and kept at a distance. He adds that this cosmocentric view expressed by Pico led inevitably to Cartesian dualism and, thus, to modern Humanism (*Epifania* 42). But this is taking in isolation a single facet of Pico's complex, multifaceted work — belief in a hierarchic order. Another aspect, developed by later figures such as Paracelsus and Leonardo da Vinci, was the idea of an organic cosmos.

Pico held that humans were wondrous and praiseworthy. This was not, however, because of any innate qualities or abilities that they possessed, but, to the contrary, due to a lack of them. Humans, according to Pico, were unencumbered by any distinctive nature, and therefore able to adopt that of other entities. He who "vegetates" becomes like a plant, while he who behaves "bestially" is an animal. But, through the use of reason, man can become divine like, and perhaps even more exalted than, the angels and archangels (Pico della Mirandola 11–14). Pico's exaltation of man, however, was at least partly a rhetorical defense against frequent suspicions of paganism and heresy. He was engaged in a syncretic revival of the old Chaldean, Persian, Greco-Roman, and, most importantly, Egyptian deities, many of which had hybrid or zoomorphic forms. Pico retained, of necessity, the cosmological imagery of the Middle Ages, but placed it in the service of a more pantheistic conception of God, a Deity that was immanent in the natural world.

Pico and his followers shared the late Medieval and Renaissance love of ambiguities, mysteries, and dialectical reversals. The idea of a human being as a microcosm, in many ways, moderated the collective arrogance of the claims made on behalf of humanity, as well as his own hubris, since it rendered human identity elusive almost to the point of disappearance. In addition, the special status of humanity was seemingly contradicted by Pico's view that all things in the cosmos possessed mind and soul (Ebeling 66). A human, in other words, might be a microcosm, but so was everything else. The military harshness of the cosmic ranking was softened by the use of animal imagery to describe the esoteric ascent to Divinity.

For Humanists of the early Renaissance, the cosmos itself was an animal (Merchant 100–17). Pico himself spoke of nurturing the divine part of one's soul as "feeding the cock" (Pico 22). For those in the tradition of Pico, Divine wisdom might be a dragon, sphinx, serpent, lamb, or other creature. The Evangelists Luke, Mark, and John were at times represented, on the model of the Egyptian deities, with the heads of animals. Hermes Trismegistus, whom Pico considered a sage comparable to Moses, was identified with the ibis-headed Egyptian god Thoth or, occasionally, the jackal-headed Greco-Egyptian god Hermanibus. The biblical story of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), a version of the Egyptian Apis Bull, was, as traditionally interpreted, probably the best-known parable against idolatry. Nevertheless,

Pope Alexander VI, a defender of Pico, commissioned pictures by Pinturicchio depicting worship of the Apis Bull among the religious artworks in his apartments in the Vatican, for he considered the animal a predecessor of Christ (Yates 113–15).

A final feature that ties Marchesini to the early Humanists is a drive to create that constantly pushes boundaries. Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Giordano Bruno were all pious, devout Christians, yet they perpetually challenged the limits of orthodoxy, especially by attempting to incorporate Egyptian religion and other forms of paganism. The eventual martyrdom of Bruno, burned at the stake for advocating the heliocentric cosmos as a confirmation of Egyptian sun-worship, shows what they were up against.[2] In an analogous way, perhaps, Marchesini challenges what we think of as science. His work is scientific in the emphasis on precise, detailed description, yet it is almost entirely theoretical and has very little empirical content.

pushing the limits

Evidence for the theory of zootropia is very extensive yet circumstantial. An identity as "human" is indeed too amorphous to satisfy just about anyone. Most of us appear to crave a further differentiation in terms of ethnicity, gender, calling and so on, which, in turn, often goes back to associations with landscapes and animals. Animals are ubiquitous in the images that pertain to group identity, such as the heraldic arms of nations or the myths of origins.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how the theory of zootropia could be either definitively falsified or confirmed. It has, so far as I am able to tell, virtually no predictive power. It may, in fact, be less a "theory" than a way of thinking about the world. But science itself has changed greatly over the centuries, gradually abandoning most of its early claims to absolute objectivity. In some ways, science may be more cyclical than linear, and perhaps a new "revolution" (understanding the word in a relatively literal way) may be returning us to foundations of the past.

Is hybrid identity itself a uniquely human characteristic, or is it perhaps shared by other creatures, at least to the extent that the term "identity" is applicable to their view of the world? And, if this is a uniquely human feature, when and how did it develop in human evolution? Is it necessarily characteristic of all human beings, or just a significant percentage? If indeed such an identity is characteristic of human beings today, can we anticipate that this will still be so in the indefinite future? The challenge, and much of the excitement, of such investigations is that they lead us to, and perhaps even beyond, the very limits of language, where all of our categories become precarious. This has always been the terrain of our most adventurous poets, cosmologists, and philosophers.

the study of human–animal relations

Just as with organisms in an ecosystem, life can be pretty complicated for a scholar in academia who has not found a "niche." The study of human–animal relationships has been growing steadily in academia over the past several decades, but, for better or worse, it has never had a very cohesive foundation, and it seems to be fragmenting today. A decade or two ago, scholars often regarded "Anthrozoology" and "Animal Studies" as near synonyms, but they have drifted apart. Anthrozoology increasingly emphasizes quantitative methods, while Animal Studies remains based in traditional philosophy. Sub-disciplines such as post-Humanism and Critical Animal Studies endeavor to incorporate the high theory of the late twentieth century in the study of animals.

A strong anglophone bias persists in all of these areas, as researchers constantly invoke British, American, and Australian history and ideas. One of Marchesini's strengths lies in going beyond those sources, even while also drawing on them. A parallel discipline to anthrozoology, *zooanthropologie*, developed in

France during the 1980s largely around the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss and is now, through the writings of Bruno Latour and Philippe Descola, beginning to have an impact in the anglophone world (Latour; Descola). Marchesini and his interlocutors have been active in developing the thinking and practice of *zooantropologia* in Italy since the 1990s, and as such their work is poised to make a larger impact in anglophone scholarship. But human–animal relations are now evolving at a rate far beyond the power of any academics to register, much less to analyze, in more than very general terms. Like software, our theoretical analyses start to become obsolete even before they are published.

The study of human–animal relations is now sufficiently enough of an academic discipline to offer rather comfortable niches to some people, but much of the most lively interesting work continues to be done on their fringes. This is, for the most part, where Marchesini has been situated, a location that has given him maximum freedom to develop his ideas, but shielded him from criticism as well. For a scholar who is content with very circumscribed aspirations can generally choose an established role,[3] but one whose scope is larger must develop it through interaction with peers. This is what Marchesini is now attempting, as he takes his work out of a purely Italian context, and the publication that you are reading is part of that endeavor.

In reaching out to an international public, Marchesini is likely to encounter difficult cultural barriers, even within Western nations. In the land of Virgil, Dante, and Michelangelo the past tends to overshadow, and even dominate, the present in ways that can be at once oppressive and inspiring, and which few Americans (or Australians or Canadians) can understand. The Italian engagement with the past, in consequence, takes on a greater intensity, whether for traditionalists, revolutionaries, or those who, like most of us, are a little of both. Many people throughout the world are trying to move beyond anthropocentrism, but anthropology strongly suggests that even casting aside our illusions of human superiority will not produce any utopia. When Marchesini describes this movement euphorically as "liberation," he strikes a note that seems to resonate in Italy, but elsewhere may appear anachronistic.

To my mind, there is something attractively old-fashioned about his systematization of research in human–animal relations, revealing, as it does, a sort of ambition that is more characteristic of the nineteenth century than of the twenty-first. It presupposes a sort of historical order in which eras are governed by dominant paradigms, articulated by seminal thinkers and separated by momentous events. But, with respect to animals, our era, like every other, has been a blend of many paradigms, none of which approaches being universal.[4] We have never been unequivocally anthropocentric.

Anachronistic or not, the format chosen by Marchesini enables him to add high drama to his study. It unfolds a bit like a Russian novel, perhaps Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Here I must ask, with full sympathy, what just might be a painful but inevitable question, one which also comes up in respect to Pico della Mirandola. The Renaissance thinker was, as I have already noted, in many ways one of the least anthropocentric thinkers of his day, yet his legacy ultimately led to an anthropocentrism that went beyond anything before. Perhaps that quality lay less in his ideas than in his example, in the hubris running through his work. Unless we felt that human beings, ourselves very much included, are special indeed, how could we attach such momentous significance, for good or ill, to the work of a Descartes or a Nietzsche? Or a Marchesini?

William Faulkner believed that it was necessary for a great novel to fail, since the pathos lay in what was attempted. He repeatedly referred to his masterpiece, *The Sound and the Fury*, as his "most splendid failure" (Wolfe). Something of the sort, arguably, might be said of Marchesini's works as well. As is probably the case with all of us, Marchesini's faults are tied closely to his virtues. Our task, fortunately, is not to judge but to learn and to enjoy, and his writing affords us plenty of opportunity for both.

Marchesini, at his best, is a philosophical poet of human–animal relations. At times, he has an ability to look beyond convention, revealing startling, new perspectives. How his work will fit into the growing body of scholarship on human–animal relations is a drama that will unfold in the years to come.

notes

1 This applies particularly to Roberto Marchesini's book *Post-human: verso nuovi modelli di esistenza*. In subsequent work, Marchesini has narrowed his scope, in order to focus more sharply on aspects of human–animal relations.

2 Copernicus also references Hermes Trismegistus on the sun as a deity in *De revolutionibus orbius caelestium* of 1543. The astronomer could have been inspired in part by Hermes, but may also have been aware that the association of his theory of the heliocentric universe with the Egyptian sage could invite charges of idolatry. See Yates 153–55, 68, 94, 208–15, 35–56, 447–51.

3 This is what I believe that Marchesini may have been attempting with his book *Fondamenti di zooantropologia.* Here, Marchesini's sheer scope conveys excitement. At the same time, at least outside of an Italian context, it is idiosyncratic. For all the learning that went into this book, many important thinkers, perspectives, and concerns are not addressed, while controversial ideas are accepted uncritically. Despite the fact that about a third of species are now threatened with extinction in the coming decades, there is, for example, almost nothing in the book about environmental problems.

4 For a criticism of this perspective on history, see Latour.

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Fig. 2. "Office," Karin Andersen, 2013, courtesy Traffic Gallery, Bergamo, Italy.