Volume 20 Issue 51
Originally issued as D3

Global Journal of human-social science: D
History, Archaeology & Anthropology
Volume 20 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2020
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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GJHSS-D Classification: *FOR Code: 060899*

ZOOTROPHY

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Zootrophy

Recursive Orientation towards the Animal World

Roberto Marchesini

Abstract- **The human interest in other animals has been incontrovertibly confirmed by anthropology and psychology: think of the animalist art of the Paleolithic age or the Neolithic artifacts, the processes of domestication or the first forms of religious expression, the cross-cultural tendency to have domestic animals or today's beneficial animal-assisted activities. The evidence and proofs of this fact are such as to justify both a descriptive research on objectively assessable signs, and an explanatory research on their possible causes. The following essay aims to analyze the most obvious evidence of the human orientation towards other species, comparing the different theories that have tried to explain this phenomenon. Furthermore, I also want to propose a new explanatory hypothesis based on a variety of motivational orientations and able to produce some flywheel effects.**

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I. Objective Proofs of the Human Interest in Other Species

The human being's orientation towards the animal target is confirmed by an indefinite number of proofs that are not always reliable and do not always have a positive emotional connotation – consider the several acts of animal sadism or the traditions justifying animal pain and torment, or again people's annoyance, disgust and fear of animals (Herzog, 2010). For these reasons, when I speak of interest/susceptibility to the zoomorphic element, I particularly refer to:

i. Its extractive importance, that is, its sensory emergence in the perceived horizon;
ii. Its emotional relevance, that is, its ability to directly arouse different emotions;
iii. Its elicitative relevance, that is, its ability to arouse different motivational behaviors.

It would therefore be incorrect to mistake animal orientation - which I here want to investigate - for zoophilia, although the latter is obviously only one of the possible expressions of this orientation. In my opinion, the incontrovertible fact is the emergence of zoomorphy: due to its phenomenic importance, its exemplifying and representational nature, the emotions and the motivational involvement it can arouse, zoomorphy is more likely to emerge than any other element within one's perceived horizon.

It is no coincidence that we give children animal-shaped toys and we tell them fairy tales in which animals are the main characters. Similarly, it is also interesting to notice that we give theriomorphic names to constellations (hence the term *zodiac*), geographical references, the first divinities, mythological creatures, aliens, fictional superheroes, the icons of most writing symbols - including our alphabet, albeit stylized – as well as heraldic, physiognomic, religious, or metaphorical symbols (xxx, 2014; 2014b). If one then considers the first representational expressions of the Paleolithic period and the shapes of Neolithic artifacts - be them trinkets, furnishing material, instruments of various kinds – one will always find an animal shape defining not only the ornament but also the intended use of the artifact itself. Animal loans can also be found throughout the anthropological scenario in dance choreograms, different forms of cosmetics (such as body painting, tattoos, neck rings, labial discs, and quills), hats and, more generally, traditional dresses in different cultures, totemism and cosmological structures, music (related to harmonics, rhythm and the construction of instruments) and, lastly, several technopoietic expressions[1].

All this evidence, however, needs to be further analysed to understand whether the zoomorphic target is indeed more relevant than any other stimulating entity. Paul Shepard's experiment "find the hidden object" (1997) aimed to do exactly this. People were given different figures in which the target was encrypted by other elements. The result was that people showed greater detection skills in a predetermined amount of time and took less time in the indefinite-time detection task, whenever the target was an animal rather than another subject. As we shall see, Shepard traced this greater salience of zoomorphy back to the human being's venatic nature. Without devaluing Shepard's work, however, further research would be useful to determine: i) whether other similar analyses conducted with different methods would confirm this test; ii)

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[1] The anthropologist Sabrina Tonutti described the ethnographic signs as «poor in describing the scopes of the human-animal relationship (in view of a high degree of animal "interactions" in all cultural contexts, both factual-imaginative and relational-utilitarian). If analysed in this perspective, some of these essays show an almost desertified view of the animal presence» (Tonutti, in XXX, Tonutti, 2007, pp. 11-12). The anthropologist Tim Ingold also highlighted this concept: «I have long been dissatisfied with the anthropological tendency to treat animals merely as the symbolic objects of an exclusively human discourse. It was clear to me that animals were sentient beings with whom we humans relate socially, just as we do with one another» (2004, p. 45).

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whether this outcome should be attributed to an effective prototypicality of the zoomorphic target or to other intervening factors[2]. To verify these results, our institute has performed more tests – whose configuration is slightly different from Shepard's - on both primary school children and adults. These tests were based on the following evidence: i) the Gestalt reconstructions of uncertain figures, both with and without zoomorphic features; ii) the constant focus on animal targets and other subjects; iii) tachistoscope tests verifying the emergence of an element rather than others - that is, when the image showed an animal rather than other shapes. Although the results of these tests are still being elaborated, Shepard's hypothesis of a prototypical nature of zoomorphy would seem to be confirmed. However, it is still necessary to clarify whether this salience should be traced back to an innate or to a learned feature. In order to do this, one would have to work with children who have not yet been affected by the cultural stress on animal-themed objects. Finally, one should also take into consideration the absolute difference between the identification of a salience – be it a real zoomorphic Gestalt, such that one would not only discover the animal form more easily, but would also tend to see animals even where there are not any – and Shepard's explanation that traces it back to hunting.

Since the mid- 1980s, I have carried out another project involving about 30,000 children in primary schools all over Italy. Working on this project, I noticed the strongly emotional nature of any activity involving the animal theme[3]. As one can imagine, to get feedback on the emotions aroused by the animal target during an educational activity was not an easy task. One of the reasons is that although the emotional tone had clearly increased, it was impossible to find a typological homogeneity in terms of the evoked emotion, as all children and animals are unique. We thus focused on the quantitative aspect of the arousal, which had always been important. Even in this case, however, some more detailed analyses would be necessary to avoid variables such as: the novelty of the didactic activity, the laboratory nature of these projects, an operator's specific approach, the operator's very novelty, the child's biographical involvement, and so on. One could certainly affirm that these projects arouse a strong motivational involvement in children, increasing participation in the didactic activity and improving the class' integration, diligence and responsibility at all stages, as well as focus on tasks and learning results.

I will not dwell on the other evidence that, since Boris Levinson's research (1962), has given rise to the vast chapter of "Animal-assisted interventions" in the field of co-therapy, assistance, support and care[4]. These researches - though sometimes approximate with regards to both the internal validation processes (for example, the exclusion of third variables) and the sampling and control processes – are nowadays a rich literature that cannot be ignored when dealing with the involvement resulting from the animal encounter and the human-animal relationship. Although I think some more thorough validations would be necessary to claim there is scientific evidence of the benefits of this encounter, the human interest and strong involvement in the heterospecific remains clear. This is particularly relevant in children - hence the fortune of zoos, didactic farms and even animal circus.

As always, these outcomes could be traced back to a cultural character due to the representational theriomorphism that - from Grandville to Disney - has been influencing children's imagination in Western culture. Although this cultural character certainly has its importance, I am more inclined to consider it a recursion rather than an actual incipit or flywheel. The fortune of these representations is more likely to derive from their

[2] In *The Others* (1996), Paul Shepard highlights the priority of animal forms in the human perceptive- interpretative system. As some tests demonstrated, the human brain would in fact have a proclivity for zoomorphy. In 90% of the cases, the subjects could correctly identify the hidden shape whenever the encrypted image was an animal. However, the percentage of correct answers drop down to 50% with the shapes of other subjects. According to Shepard, this tendency to recognise animal shapes has an evolutionary reason as our forefathers, who lived with the constant risk of being prey to other animals, developed an excellent ability to detect animal forms even when these were hidden among the vegetation. Furthermore, Shepard noticed that the venatic and therefore hunting/eluding relationship between the prehistoric men and the great mammals of the savannah has been particularly important in refining the human ability to detect animal forms in difficult environmental contexts. (p. 17)

[3] Together with Siua (Scuola di Interazione Uomo-Animale), I have organized courses of zooanthropological education for Italian schools since 1994. Over the last twenty years, we have reached out to about 30.000 children in primary school with different projects concerning caring, social behaviour, the meaning of diversity, games, and so on. The surveys gathered during the preliminary phase of the project show that about 89% of children had the opportunity to have a small domestic animal. Specifically, about a fifth (16,5%) of children owned either dogs or cats. These results are in line with the more recent data showing about 60 million pets in Italy and 14 million dogs and cats in about 17 million of Italian families. The results of this project were shown during the 14th IAHAIO International Conference "Unveiling a new Paradigm: hai in the Mainstream". See Marchesini, R., Adorni, E. (2016), "Pet as Safe Base New Research in the child's experiential enrichment", Paris, July 13, 2016.

[4] Boris Levinson is a pioneer in the study of the benefits resulting from the presence of a non-human animal to cure specific disturbs such as handicaps, autism, and emotional distress. He surprisingly noticed how - during a therapeutic session - the mere presence of a dog allowed the autistic child to actively react to certain stimuli. This experience - quoted in the essay «The dog as "co-therapist" » (1962) - marks the beginning of pet-therapy (the term first appeared in Levinson's essay), as a therapeutic methodology carried out with a pet, highlighting the social and rehabilitative benefits that the heterospecific can have for humans.

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consistency with the child's tendencies. A similar argument could be made for fairytales writers and the shape of toys: although the adult is the one who assembles the material, the child is the actual selector who rewards the representations that satisfy his/her cognitive palate and expectations.

Among the great achievements of humanity, one should not forget the domestication process that - according to Marvin Harris (2011) and Jared Diamond (2013) - is the foundation of the entire technological and cultural evolution of our species. If the human being had not been interested in the non-human, this process - started in the Paleolithic age – would have probably never begun. After all, even the actual presence of a multitude of domestic varieties and, within these, of races can be considered an indirect proof of the human interest in other species.

II. Possible Explanations for the Human Interest in Other Species

The human interest in animals has found various explanations throughout history:

i. Paul Shepard's proposal of a "zoomorphic gestalt", linked to the venatic behaviour of our species;
ii. James Serpell's idea of a "parental deception" (1986) developed by the domestic species;
iii. Edward Wilson's idea of an innate natural aesthetics (1985) of all natural forms defined as "Biophilia";
iv. Jean-Pierre Digard's idea of a cultural "archetypal operator" (1990).

I recognize the heuristic value of these theories, as each one considers a particular aspect of the orientation, and draw on their investigative nature - that is, their ability to bring out orientational elements. However, I disagree with these theories for two reasons:

i. Because they seem to consider their identified explanatory factor as comprehensive
ii. Because of the explanatory character itself or the character of the adduced causal relationship I will start from the latter.

Although it needs to be further analysed, Shepard's thesis seems to stand the tests of my laboratory. However, I think that the zoomorphic gestalt is not just a salience and has much more complex features such as pregnancy. Nevertheless, the connection between this prototypicality and the venatic character does not add up. In fact, if this were the case: i) it should elicit predatory behaviours, while instead it creates other motivational tendencies; ii) it should be related to the movement and the processes of elongation compared to the background, while instead it is stronger when the figure is still. If we must follow Shepard's theory on the predicate's usefulness or specificity, which raises many doubts for me, it is far more sensible to consider such monitoring as attention to a risk - that is, a predator rather than a prey. In my opinion, however, this explanation is only partial because different animal images produce different motivational effects that cannot be traced back to a single elicitative element.

James Serpell's theory of the parental factor is also interesting as it would explain many parenting attitudes towards domestic animals - such as the animal's transformation into a child - as well as the adoptive processes themselves, confirmed by our affection to puppies. As known, the parental behavior is based on a specific motivational dialectics:

i. On the one hand, there is a puppy showing pedomorphic universals - as Konrad Lorenz already claimed - and demanding care or et-epimeletic behaviours[5];
ii. On the other hand, there is a susceptible adult driven by an epimeletic motivation, who responds to those requests with nurturing, protection and so on. If Serpell's idea of a mimetic evolution of domestic animals were correct, however, there would be no explanation for: i) how this process started, as the evolution of parental parasitism requires an adoptive beginning; ii) why even wild animals - a fox cub, for example - produce the same elicitative effect of tenderness and adoptive desire in human beings.

Although Serpell correctly focuses on the parental affiliation, I think he makes two mistakes, when claiming:

i. The uniqueness or completeness of this causal factor.
ii. The very development of the causal link.

It makes more sense to hypothesize a strong epimeletic development in the human being that, in turn, caused a side effect (epiphenomenon) of increased susceptibility towards the other pedomorphic universals of the heterospecifics. Why do I claim a tendential increment of the human being's epimeletic motivation? The answer could be linked to some factors of adaptive relevance:

[5] Konrad Lorenz (1980) has spoken about "Kindchenschema" (baby schema) to highlight the neotenic morphological characteristics of mammals (i.e.: big eyes, round face, prominent forehead, puffy cheeks) able to stimulate interspecific epimeletic instincts. The American ethologist James Serpell, in line with this interpretation, developed his own theory of domestication, defined in terms of "parental deception". This highlights how, throughout the evolutionary process, animals plot a real trap for humans (as it were a host/parasite relationship), thus using to their own advantage the human natural predisposition toward the animal's neotenic features. According to Serpell (1986), certain species were therefore able to strengthen some neotenic inclinations by currying favour and creating a sort of interspecific mothering with humans. The biologist Stephen J. Gould (1979), instead, noticed how Walt Disney used this schema to create their characters and fascinate a public inclined to childlike animal forms.

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i) the immaturity of the newborn human is much more significant than the immaturity of the anthropomorphic species and requires a strong parental attention and dedication; ii) the developmental age of our species, in line with the timing of primates' development, but even more emphasized. Domestic animals did not develop forms of parental parasitism. On the contrary, humans developed a heightened epimeletic motivation in response to their puppy's growing needs and became very susceptible to pedomorphies, including those expressed by heterospecifics. For this reason, transpecific adoption - rarely present in nature - is institutionalized in the human being. Wilson's theory of biophilia could be considered somehow specular to Digard's cultural theory: the former believes in an innate aesthetics towards natural forms; the latter considers the cultural factor as the very origin of our orientation toward other species. Wilson certainly re-elaborates and broadens the traditional ethological theory of the founding fathers, tracing the a-priori back to the species' heritage – that is, considering them as phylogenetic a-posteriori. Although I could agree with such an approach, it still does not explain our particular interest in animals. Furthermore, I do not think that this tendency towards the zoomorphies must necessarily refer to the condition of beauty or expectation, as this is a bucolic vision unconfirmed by the facts. Yes, some animal expressions may appear beautiful to us - like the sinuous movement of a feline or a bird's singing - but to extend this answer to all animal referents would be absolutely wrong. Nevertheless, even when the animal causes discomfort, disgust, alert or fear, what one notices is pure and simple orientation.

Similarly, the cultural dimension has used the animal predicates as colours on the palette of its representational inspiration. However, the reasons for this are unknown: why did the human being, among all the available references, chose to focus on the zoomorphic target? If we admit a primary orientation towards the zoomorpheme, then we can presume these signs could become categorical operators. Digard's hypothesis could help one understand the transition from a first to a second degree of orientation by introducing it as a recursive factor. It is far more likely that the human being first addressed the animal counterpart - through an orientational and identifying projection - then elected it as source of inspiration and, lastly, used it as exemplifying reference. I will explain myself better:

i. First comes the wonder for the flight of birds;
ii. Then comes the revelation that it is possible to fly - that is, that an existential dimension exists;
iii. Then, and only then, comes the exemplifying research - that is, an attempt to learn the secrets of flight or to structure some categorizations of worlds.

Wilson's and Degard's theories also focus on some interesting aspects of the human-animal relationship – and I am sure there might be many more. However, they ultimately miss their target for three reasons:

1) They seek an idiofunctional causal factor specifically developed on the basis of that function;
2) They claim that the causal factor could exhaustively explain the orientation towards other animals;
3) They do not consider the recursive nature of the relationship between the human being and the heterospecifics.

Starting exactly from these three points, I will present my theory of zootrophy as the human being's orientation toward and involvement with whatever is animal-shaped or animal-themed.

III. The Theory of Zootrophy

I propose a theory of orientation able to explain the multifaceted human interest in other species - that is, the various forms and ways in which it manifests itself. Furthermore, in this theory the attraction to and appeal of the zoomorphic target - as well as the human sensitivity towards it – are not broken into several separated, non-convergent and somehow unconnected pieces. In fact, the orientation has multiple manifestations - some prefer an aesthetic perspective, some an epistemic or epimeletic one – but also presents homogeneity. This is just one more reason why I believe the word zootrophy to be correct - from "zoo" = animal, and trope = "turn towards". In this perspective, zoothropy thus takes on three basic values:

i. The prototypical character of the zoomorpheme;
ii. The emotive nature of the animal phenomenology;
iii. The elicitative or productive character of the human-animal interaction. The orientational meaning can therefore be attributed to different qualities of the zoomorpheme such as salience, pregnancy, emergence and, in particular, the emotional and elicitative value. I believe this orientational significance - that is, the attractiveness of the zoomorpheme - should be attributed to the overall significance of the animal target rather than others. In fact, the animal target is mobile (unlike everything else), has a binding interveniency in the dialectics of risks/opportunities, and is probably not a human specificity.

The zoomorpheme is perhaps more likely to emerge in the human being because of the strongly empathic and projective endowments of our species, which are translated into an actively identifying tendency. Although anthropomorphism is not a cultural deviation, it might become one because of its non-cultural foundation. This is exactly what happened with fairy tales and animal- themed toys. On the other hand,

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however, I am mostly interested in the proactive outcome of the orientation - that is, the tendency to translate this first appeal/involvement into a real behaviour. This specific point is what distinguishes my theory from the others, as I believe that:

1) Once the human being's attention has been drawn, the orientation determines a motivational elicitation that depends on the human's characteristics, which are obviously different from one person to another
2) This elicitation is not specific - which would lead one to hypothesize a "zoophile motivation" conflicting with Darwin's theory - but rather an epiphenomenon, that is, a collateral effect of motivational overabundances.

The motivational overabundance arises when:

i. The species develop a strong inclination (i.e.: cats' predatory nature) in which all the members of a species may be susceptible to similar targets (which is why cats chase balls and wires);
ii. The subjects of a certain species, bearer of specific motivations, are in a condition by which the need is fulfilled in another way – i.e.: since the bowl is already full, the cat uses the predatory motivation within a ludic frame strongly brought to generalism, fiction, free expression.

Therefore, the epiphenomenon is more likely to arise whenever there is a condition of motivational overabundance in one of the two cases above. Now, epimelesis arose in accordance with Darwin's laws of fitness, in the sense of bringing a replicative advantage and, in this specific case, taking care of one's own children. However, a motivational directive such as epimelesis then gave rise to behaviors that appear to be in contrast with these laws - for example, to adopt and take care of puppies of another species. To understand how this was possible, it is fundamental to resort to motivational characteristics.

The motivational tendencies are:

1) Specific orientations and sensitivity to certain stimuli, such as movement in the predatory directionality
2) Inclinations to implement certain behaviors, such as chasing and grabbing in the predatory case. These species were particularly prone to these dispositions because of their replicative advantage (fitness) compared to other parameters of adaptive configuration. Therefore, the predatory motivation (to orient oneself and run toward what is moving) is the correlated need in species strongly dependent on meat, such as felines. Similarly, the epimeletic motivation – that is, the benevolent disposition to pedomorphies and the tendency to express care behaviors - will be an essential prerequisite in case their offspring presents a severe functional immaturity at birth.

The orientation and elicitative sensitivity toward some signs of the world caused a motivation to conjugate the individual and the external reality based on the eligibility of the connection. At the same time, this motivation makes the subject vulnerable, prey to Gestalt entities-events or prototypical predicates able to act as a key-signals. However, it is also clear that the motivations – which are tendencies or proactive dispositions - define some "languor of doing" that is not the mere outcome of an elicitative action. Indeed, they also create a sense of restlessness and frustration unless an expressive agibility related to subject's motivational structure arises. The motivations' languor thus depends on some physiological internal variables and some elicitative external factors, a state of activation that fulfills itself in the expression, defined in this case as "behavioral consummation". Driven by an expressive languor, the motivated individual goes in search of a specific target. At the same time, however, he is susceptible to other targets with similar characteristics and finds it rewarding and fulfilling to express the action on the surrogate.

As I have already argued in other essays, the human being seems to be predisposed to a transpecific relationship because of some motivational tendencies:

i. The epimeletic motivation, particularly emphasized, leads her to adopt cubs of other species, not only because they can be identified as cubs but also because they can satisfy her strong parental desire;
ii. The mimic motivation leads her to observe and imitate other species, learning from other animals but, more importantly, letting her existential dimension be hybridized;
iii. The competitive motivation transforms her into a great emulator prompted to confront herself with the performativity of the animal world;
iv. The projective motivation makes her inclined to identification and incorporation, by externalizing her functions through instruments and introjecting what surrounds her;
v. The collecting motivation - typical of gatherers - leads her to acquire and collect anything, to be fascinated by diversity and, consequently, to classify and catalog the biodiversity;
vi. The collaborative motivation facilitates the construction of partnerships and tends to create alliances and pacts beyond the infrahuman relationship;
vii. The exploratory motivation leads her to the pleasure of knowing and to the aesthetic taste;
viii. The social motivation supports different areas of affiliation - including conviviality, affectivity, ludism and the feeling of the cosmos.

These motivations – which orient our gaze toward other species, sometimes individually but more often together - produce a proactive approach towards the animal as collateral process, that is, as

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epiphenomenon. This approach is not only attention to the zoomorpheme but results in a multiplicity of animal-related behaviours able to transform the animal into a motivational target that gives rise to:

i. Events of gratification - that is, fruition-related pleasure of the target, even if only affiliative;
ii. Processes of fulfillment, as it allows one to express and therefore curb the motivational languor.
iii. Three key aspects of zootrophy can therefore be delineated:
iv. The epiphenomenal character, that is, the non-explicability in terms of specificity;
v. The causal and therefore expressive multiformity;
vi. The dynamism or recursiveness of this tendency, which can be attributed to the gratification and fulfillment or, more specifically, to the shifts produced by the relationship with other species.

The human being's tendency to orient himself toward animal forms leads him to consider animal otherness as his "main reference" in the world - a sort of compass, epiphany, or medium that allows him to face reality through other species. The referential nature of the animal otherness can express itself in different ways, serving as:

i. "threshold", to understand the external phenomena affecting his interiority;
ii. "epiphany", annunciation of other possible existential dimensions available to the human being;
iii. "example", conveying new life strategies, expressive styles, and models of interaction;
iv. "archetype" or conceptual operator to create classifications, examples, metaphors and symbolisms;
v. "dimension" of fulfillment and motivational gratification.

Because of its proactivity, therefore, the motivational orientation does not only create distance and subrogation, but also projects the human being into the animal otherness or some sort of bodily possession of the latter. Because of the strongly identifying character, the human being - by watching the flight of a bird - is or imagines to be catapulted into the bird's body and thus experiences that existential dimension.

The animal is therefore transformed from "other-than-self" to "other-in-self". I refer to this transformation as referential shift: the human being not only learns from her conspecifics but also assigns a masterful role - I would say even "inspiring" and "annunciating" - to other species. Therefore the human goes from an identifying development strongly connected to the species tradition (ontogenesis) to a development that is freer, hybridized with loans from other species and therefore not fully comparable with the phylogenetic identity (ontopoiesis). Most of the cultural dimension is nothing more than an ontological shift from the dimension of species - a reinterpretation of the connotations of ontogenetic translation. Consider the movement and organization of physicality in other choreograms in dance; the transformation of the somatic phenomenology in tattoos, the incorporation of objects; the use of skins; the assimilation of non- human vocalizations in prosody, the construction of bird-calls or whistles; or again, the assimilation of Epimetheus' virtues through the Promethean *techne*.

In my opinion, the recursive development of the zoothrophistic orientation does not allow one to analyse it only as "causal predisposition and verifiable effect". The projection into animals and the technological development have the same effect: they change the human being's perception of the self, of development, of social constitution and performative horizon. Borrowing Baron Jakob von Uexküll's concept (2010), one could say that this reference changes the umwelt of one's species. If the elicitative or implementive aspect of behaviours directed to the zoomorphic target is associated with the perceptive and emotional orientation, the existential horizon is inevitably transformed. One could evaluate this process synchronously, by referring exclusively to the ethological outcome of the human being. In my opinion, however, this approach would be wrong, as this process is both recursive and diachronic.

When one talks of orientation towards other species, one must not and cannot forget that a large part of our cultural references – which we have had since prehistoric times - is based on the zoomorpheme and the outcomes of this process are strongly hybridized with animal otherness – that is, they are teriomorphemes able to reorient or reactivate the process. When I say that we must consider zootrophy also as a historical process, I am particularly referring to the process of domestication, a prime example of the recursive nature of zootrophy. Domestication must not be explained in a performative sense - since the performance cannot precede the domesticating act itself – but rather in an orientational sense. Moreover, the domestication implements subsequent orientation processes by creating proximity, affiliation and referential loans. The most striking example is probably the alliance between human beings and dogs as outcome of zootrophy but also as a driving force of the zootrophistic orientation.

Dog domestication – an ancient practice able to influence one's entire life - has been of paramount importance in the history of humanity and created the anthropological dimensions of breeding that started during or after the Neolithic revolution. In my opinion, this event is as important as the evolution of the chopper, the conquest of fire, the structuring of language and writing. Because of some sort of anthropocentric chauvinism, however, it has been largely ignored. The domestication of wolves that began

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about 40,000 years ago - the first remains date back to 33,000 years ago – was undoubtedly encouraged by an ecological coexistence (sinanthrophy) and a parental adoption (epimelesis). Later, however, it became a mutual socialization and caused an ontogenetic shift in those humans growing in a society of both people and wolves. The close and intimate partnership-such as to make the wolf-dog a safe base and proximal growth zone - has undoubtedly transferred the behavioral models and non-human experiential spaces within anthropo-poiesis.

According to the theory of zootrophy, human beings and the other species would therefore be strongly linked to each other. This connection, however, is not based on an ancestral membership or homology – that is, the forefathers' common heritage – but rather lies in the cultural dimension. To quote Helmuth Plessner (1928), once an animal has been elected as inspiring and masterful reference - that is, once it can create new ontogenetic directions and new desirable existential dimensions – an eccentrative path characterizing the human condition opens up. In this sense, the cultural dimension should not be understood as element of disjunction between human beings and other species, but rather as the result of a conjugating and hybridizing process: the different expressions of human culture could be referential loans that the human being borrows from species. Hence, the recursive nature of the orientation. In fact, the human being mainly connects with the animal otherness in this cultural dimension and takes on existential dimensions that are not strictly human (in the sense of phylogenetic heritage). By doing so, however, he also becomes increasingly dependent on these contributions to fully achieve his anthropo-poietic dimension.

IV. Conclusions

The theory of zootrophy is characterized by the following assumptions: i) the currently available findings predict a sort of prototypicality of the zoomorpheme - which is salient compared to the other targets, rich in Gestalt capacity or reconstruction skills, and able to become an emotional stimulus; ii) the zoomorphic sign is also able to act as elicitative element for several motivational tendencies, transforming the orientation into a translation of behaviors directed to the animal target; iii) these motivational structures should not be explained as the outcome of natural selection with the specific purpose of enhancing zoophilia, since their productive nature must be considered an epiphenomenon; iv) the motivational dimension of animal-directed behaviors is based on a plurality of motivational elements such that the interaction is always multiform; v) the encounter with animals causes some shifts on the human being that strengthen his/her need to turn to animal otherness, and therefore takes on a recursive character.

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