Foreword

Tim Ingold

"Men make their own history," wrote Karl Marx in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* of 1852, "but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." And not just men, we would nowadays acknowledge, but women and children too! Human beings all, we find ourselves thrown into the world at times, and in places, over which we had no choice, and fated to carry on our lives from there. Yet in the things we do, purposively and often with an eye for what we imagine as the future, we lay down the conditions that generations coming after us will have to deal with in their turn. The combined efforts of historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, over the past century and a half, have scarcely improved on Marx's original insight. Yet it remains limited. For never in history has any human community existed that has not involved, in its collective life and in the reach of its relationships, living beings of various nonhuman kinds. There have always been animals around, not to mention the plant life on which all animals—humans included—depend. Thus, every community, when it comes to its species composition, is necessarily hybrid. But if that is so, then what role do nonhumans play in history? And if they are history-makers too, then whose history is it? It cannot belong exclusively to humans. Hybrid communities can surely fashion only hybrid histories.

I came to think of this as I was reading through the chapters of the remarkable book that you now have before you. Maybe you thought that its subject matter is of marginal significance in the history of the world. Pastoral herdsmen and their flocks, tucked away in borderland enclaves, are they not the peripheral cast-offs of a history that has marched onwards without them? In most contemporary societies, the migratory movements that herdsmen undertake with their animals are treated as the vestiges of a vanishing past, while countryside woven by centuries of grazing has been converted into tapestry, hanging from the walls of an architecture that has turned landscape into scenery. We tend to think of history as a uniquely

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human achievement, progressively built up against the backdrop of a recalcitrant nature. It is the story of the rise of civilization. And while this story presents herding as an advance over hunting—with the animals, now domesticated, brought under a measure of human control—it was but a small step. The land remained untamed, people still wandered, and those ties to the soil that laid the foundations for civilization remained weak. Progress depends on people settling down. And with that, pastoralism, as a way of life, is bound to disappear. If it survives at all, it will be as an object of conservation, as part of a common human heritage, to be preserved—like the ruins of ancient empires—for the instruction of the young and the enchantment of tourists.

Yet this doctrine of progress is very recent in the larger scheme of things. Originating in Europe, it has been exported in a history of colonialism that has taken it around the globe. These four or five centuries of colonial expansion, however, are a mere blip in the history of the world. And if we take a longer view, we find that for millennium after millennium, people have been living alongside herds of animals, sharing their lands and lives with them, to varying degrees of closeness or intimacy, and moving from place to place—as the animals do—in order to make the most of what a varied environment affords. Indeed, what looks marginal to us today has been the mainstream of history. Empires have risen and fallen, armies have trampled all over the earth, epidemics have swept through populations, philosophies have come and gone, but always there have been people and herds, seeking out ways to cohabit the earth. They are the one enduring constant of history. And here we are today, in a world ravaged by pandemic disease, overrun by the apparatus of war, living out our days in the shell of an imperial order that is collapsing all around us, our dreams of progress up in smoke, and looking to science for salvation. What next? Turning to the *longue durée* of history, the answer is plain. There will be people and animals carrying on their lives together, bringing forth a history that belongs equally to both.

The painful truth, now dawning on us, is that the doctrine of progress—with its corollaries of technological liberation, economic growth, rising living standards and ever-increasing longevity—is incompatible with the sustainability of life on earth. We cannot have both. This realization drives our present obsession with the idea of the Anthropocene, which pits utopian visions of an all-time geo-technical fix against apocalyptic prophecies of human extinction. Our anxiety, however, must bring relief to the animals. For animals don't do progress. Land, for them, is to be inhabited, not colonized; to be grazed, not built upon. Animals don't take chunks out of the earth to seal it against the sky, but they nibble to meet their needs, leaving the rest untouched. To be sure, theirs is neither an easy nor

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a comfortable life. There are illnesses to suffer, predators to evade, inclement weather to endure. That's been true for humans too. We thought we could escape life's vicissitudes, but now find to our cost that we cannot. No more than any other creatures do we humans have a foregone right to exist. Yet as Marx realized, there's no turning back the clock on history. We are where we are, and have to go on from here. But going on means joining with other lives in a spirit of coexistence, not supplanting them in a race to the top. It means relearning, from the animals and from those who herd them, how to become grazers ourselves. Our collective future depends on it.

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