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Peter Sahlins, *1668: The Year of the Animal in France*. New York: Zone Books, 2017. 491 pp. Plates, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$34.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 13: 9781935408994

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By 1668, the Versailles menagerie, of which the central pavilion and separate animal enclosures were completed in 1664, was rapidly filling up with animals. At first, these were mainly exotic birds such as the “royal” crown-crested crane and demoiselle cranes, but later, foxes, civets, an elephant, lions, leopards, and gazelles appeared, eventually reaching a census of over three hundred species of birds and mammals. The poet Jean de La Fontaine visited the menagerie, observing, “So many species of bird are multiplied from a single species . . . the artifice and diverse imaginings of Nature are revealed in animals as they are in flowers.”[1] Current day readers are familiar with the striking design of Louis XIV’s zoo because Foucault included an image of the Versailles menagerie in *Discipline and Punish* and speculated that the structure may have inspired Jeremy Bentham. As Foucault famously pointed out, “[t]he Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man, groups of species by single individuals, and the king by the machinery of a furtive power.”[2]

Peter Sahlins’s *1668: The Year of the Animal in France* begins with an evocation of the Versailles menagerie, and like Foucault’s, Sahlins’s reading of the classical age and its animals is founded on a series of ruptures in the political and epistemological order that extended into the aesthetic and affective domain as well. For Foucault, the construction of the menagerie in 1664 marked the beginning of a new mode of surveillance and control over animals and humans. An equally important date in Foucault’s version of the classical age, outlined in *The Order of Things*, was 1657, the year of the publication of *The History of Quadrupeds* by the Scottish naturalist John Jonston. This work marked, for Foucault, the emergence of a new paradigm in natural history based on strict observation and classification; on a deeper level, it also signified a shift from a Renaissance model of thought and language based on resemblance to a classical model on based representation.[3] Sahlins’s 1668 mirrors Foucault’s 1657 in its emphasis on the shift towards the new natural history, but Sahlins’s 1668 constitutes a broader category, including literature, art, philosophy, and codes of civility. Above all, the year of the animal is a political concept. All of the animal phenomena linked together by the year 1668 were activities supervised by royal institutes and patronage systems, and they signaled profound changes within absolutism. As Sahlins notes, “the Year of the Animal was something of a tipping point in the mechanization of nature (and animals) and in the making of the absolute monarchy [A]nimality became . . . a political requirement of absolutism, where only the king could impose order on the animality of (human) nature” (pp. 362, 363). For Sahlins, these fundamental changes in the French monarchy amount to a move from “Absolutism 1.0” to “Absolutism 2.0.”

The Versailles menagerie thus signifies Absolutism 1.0, a moment at the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV when the young king chose to rule by means of dazzling spectacles and artistic persuasion rather than with an iron fist and spectacles of animal violence typified by the bloody animal combats that had been staged at the chateau de Vincennes. At Versailles, a seductive array

of exotic birds gracefully enacted court hierarchies and *civilité*: “If not exactly a modern prison, following Foucault’s genealogy of Bentham’s Panopticon, the Versailles menagerie was nonetheless an allegorical site of beauty and freedom restrained—a perfect metaphor for the courtiers themselves, although we will never know if the metaphor was a conscious and deliberate one” (p. 90). *1668: The Year of the Animal* concludes with study of the definitive symbol of Absolutism 2.0: the “anti-menagerie” of the labyrinth of Versailles, completed in 1674. In this dark tree-lined enclosure, filled with over three hundred highly naturalistic animal statues illustrating Aesop’s *Fables*, a brutal order of nature was represented. Animals sparred with one another verbally, often as a preliminary to eating or being eaten by other animals. Such a state of nature justified the intervention of an absolute sovereign who would put an end to this generalized state of war. For Sahlins, the years between the menagerie and the labyrinth mark a political shift, as Louis XIV moved from a more optimistic, theriophilic (animal loving) view of human nature and government, exemplified by the menagerie, to a more pessimistic, mechanical view of humans and animals, which entailed the banishment of animals and a darker, calculating politics. Sahlins explains, “[t]he labyrinth was thus less a microcosm or a paradigm of the gardens than its essential and constitutive Other: a site of natural disorder and chaos encompassed in the greater geometric symmetry and mythological order of Versailles” (pp. 315, 317).

In the intervening chapters, between the menagerie and the labyrinth, *1668: The Year of the Animal* examines in great detail other animal phenomena linked by royal patronage: the life-like paintings and drawings of animals by the Flemish painter Pieter Boël, animal-to-human blood transfusions conducted by the avowed Cartesian Jean Denis, animal dissections conducted by Claude Perrault at the Academy of Sciences, Charles Le Brun’s *Conference on the Physiognomy of Man and its Relation to that of Animals*, the publication of La Fontaine’s *Fables*, and Madeleine de Scudéry’s *History of Two Chameleons*. Boël revolutionized human and animal portraiture, his technique consisting of rapidly sketching animals in the menagerie, capturing, in proto-cinematic fashion, their ever-changing movements and facial expressions. Since, according to Cartesian theory, animal behavior was dictated by the passions, devoid of all reason, their poses and facial expressions could serve as pure representations of the passions—the same passions that flickered across the faces of human actors in the violent battle scenes and other historical dramas Le Brun favored. We don’t know the extent of Le Brun’s adherence to the theory of the animal machine. Sahlins detects in the work of the king’s great painter a downgrading of animals, a cold, analytical approach that contrasts with the earlier theriophilic sentiment in the portraits of humans and animals by Giambattista della Porta. In Le Brun’s work, only “inferior” humans—peasants, criminals, beggars, and the insane—have animal traits. Sahlins probes with great subtlety the complexities of the human-animal divide within classical naturalism. Animals are downgraded, in concert with Descartes’s *bête-machine*: they are separated, globally, as never before. “Indeed, it could be argued that the foundational modern distinction of ‘human’ and ‘animal’ as incommensurable and totalizing categories was born of 1668, or at least of the mid-seventeenth century,” he theorizes (pp. 26-27). However, at the same time, within 1668, humans are also downgraded and, again, animalized as weak bestial creatures subject to their passions. The sharp line between humans and animals seems to fade as soon as it has been redrawn.

Le Brun’s comparison drawings, thus, like many of the phenomena Sahlins describes, are indicative of a paradigm shift that can be usefully characterized as a movement from Renaissance “humanimalism” to classical naturalism, but one could argue that classical naturalism gave rise to

new forms of animal fellowship and proximity. Sahlins has certainly identified a shift between an earlier modelling of the human and animal in Della Porta and that of Le Brun, but a shift that does not so much definitively separate humans from animals as it re-maps their relationship according to the new, visible, measurable co-ordinates of Cartesian geometry. This re-mapping, however, leaves open the possibility that animals could have degrees of consciousness and reason—a reason, it is true, that had been narrowly defined by Descartes as self-awareness, abstract calculation, and a reflective use of language.

The same ambiguities and complexities arising from a simple chronology of advancing mechanism and theriophobia surface in one of the best chapters of the book, which analyzes the accounts by Claude Perrault and Madeleine de Scudéry of two pairs of chameleons, both of which lived short lives and ended up as anatomical exhibits. Perrault considered the reptiles in his possession to be extremely ugly, while Mademoiselle de Scudéry refused to classify her beloved pets as reptiles. Sahlins considers Scudéry's love of her pets to be a throwback to Renaissance theriophilia. He notes however, that despite their differing degrees of admiration for their chameleons, both the academician and the novelist were indelibly marked by the mechanistic turn: "Perrault and Scudéry's direct and relatively unadorned observations fit generally with the spirit of the Cartesian method and the style of the *Lettres* and the *Discours de la méthode*, despite their explicit opposition to Descartes" (p. 295). Despite and perhaps because of her hedged mechanistic view of her pet chameleons as both anatomical machines and as beings equipped with a degree of human knowledge, language, and emotions, Mademoiselle de Scudéry invented a new kind of theriophilia, a post-Cartesian Theriophilia 2.0, as it were, in which animals, like humans, evolved in a dualistic state, moving and acting mechanically, with occasional outbursts of emotions and rare experiences of psychosomatic unity. Sahlins notes the contradiction in Scudéry's account of the chameleons, who are initially described as totally lacking in emotions: "I saw no evidence that this animal could have very strong passions" (p. 298). According to Scudéry, color changes in the chameleons did not proceed from strong passions. The animal initially seems remote and mechanical—like its human owner, in the new order of things. However, and in concert with this change, the animal later exhibits extraordinary feelings, triggering new sensations of love between animals and humans. When the male chameleon's female companion is accidentally killed by a courtier, the surviving animal is distraught and attempts repeatedly to commit suicide. Scudéry also notes that the two animals "were always holding each other with one of their little hands" (p. 299). She names the surviving chameleon Méléon and concludes: "He came to love me, to know me, to hear his name and to distinguish my voice" (pp. 298-299). The flourishing of pet keeping in the age of Descartes may have harkened back to earlier humanimalism and theriophilia, but its intensity and its modalities were new and forward looking, as humans experienced, in the company of their pets, and in the spectacles of free and wild animals, new kinds of animal catharsis that restored psychosomatic unity.

1668: The Year of the Animal in France, as a work of careful archival history, does not indulge frequently in such poststructuralist animal-studies speculation. Foucault and Derrida are cited sparingly. Foucault's interpretation of the menagerie as a locus of natural historical vision is questioned, in favor of the author's reading of the menagerie as a spectacle of *civilité* (p. 77). Derrida seems to be wrong for having identified the sovereign as the beast (p. 357). On other occasions, however, *The Year of the Animal* confirms Derrida's theses, such as the idea, cited above, that Western philosophy has insisted on an absolute distinction between man and animal.

As noted throughout this review, despite a difference in interpretation about the menagerie, the historiography of Sahlins's work is profoundly Foucauldian, with its emphasis on epistemic and political ruptures. Where Foucault would probably insist that seventeenth-century controversies were guided by deep structural agreements about the terms of debates, however, Sahlins emphasizes the mixed positions of intellectual and cultural opponents such as Claude Perrault and Mademoiselle de Scudéry. For Sahlins, Perrault and Scudéry retain planks of Renaissance humanimalism and theriophilia in their platforms, whereas Foucault would argue that both parties' mechanism is evidence that a fundamental epistemological shift has occurred, and both are debating and thinking from within the new *épistème*.

1668: The Year of the Animal in France unearths and reconstitutes the history of the major and minor animal controversies in seventeenth-century France with remarkable clarity. On the subject of Cartesianism, for example, it outlines in wonderful detail the complexities and contradictions in fortunes of a philosopher who was, at once and in succession, the subject of papal condemnations, rejected by the Jesuits and the court of Louis XIV, opposed by Gassendi, Perrault, Cureau de la Chambre, Madeleine de Scudéry and others, yet, globally triumphant by the end of the century. This masterfully written and illustrated work will serve as an essential reference for early modern animal studies for years to come. Like another exquisite Zone book, Lorraine Daston and Katherine Parks's *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (2001), it will be underlined, photocopied, added to syllabi, put on reserve, read and re-read avidly by scholars, teachers and students around the world.

NOTES

[1] Jean de La Fontaine, *Œuvres Complètes*, 2 vols., Pierre Clarac, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 2:128.

[2] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, N.Y.: Vintage, 1979), 203.

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1970), 54-66.

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