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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 (hb). ISBN 978-1935408994.

Author's Response by Peter Sahlins, University of California, Berkeley

What a privilege it is to respond to such generous and perspicacious critics who have read *1668: The Year of the Animal* with great care, insight, and originality, deepening my arguments and pointing to novel interpretations. My readers in this forum now share authorship of my evolving ideas about the year 1668, and they have also made me question the kind of history I had sought to practice, and the nature of my craft. Luis de Haro (to fill in a publisher's elision) was a goshawk, but what species of historian am I? And what kind of history was *1668*? All four readers converge in their judgment that *1668* was at least a political history of Louis XIV's uses of animals in the early assemblage of the absolute monarchy during the 1660s, at a moment of diffusion and resistance to Cartesian and mechanistic thinking. All four are convinced by my argument that 1668 was a "tipping point," "*une date-borne*," a "fulcrum," a calendar year that I would describe now as both a metonym and a metaphor. It was a metonym in that most of the events recounted in the book, including its cultural products, happened in 1667-1668 or were produced in the following years. But 1668 was also an "animal moment," I argued, that was pivotal in the long process of making French modernity: it was a metaphor and microcosm of a major set of political, intellectual, and cultural transformations.

My readers disagree, however, over what in fact was transformed: was it an "ideology," a "cultural form," a "*paradigme sociétal*," an "order?" They also disagree, beyond the focus on the political, about what kind of history I wrote. What kind of historian writes "with animals, on animals, by and through animals" (although not "for animals," in the activist sense), to quote Pierre Serna's opening gambit? The immersive question has pushed me to further reflect on animals and power. Which "idiom of cultural history," I ask myself, following Oded Rabinovitch, did I actually practice? To my surprise, my readers—like outside reviews—did not identify me as engaged in the field of STS or science studies, even if the new, socially-inflected history of what used to be called "the scientific revolution" was a research field to which I explicitly sought to contribute (in my studies of blood transfusion and anatomy).

In fact, I sought to write a history that was neither scientific nor cultural, neither political nor animal, but interdisciplinary, borrowing (selectively and strategically) the methods of visual studies, animal studies, science studies, and intellectual history, among others. Interdisciplinarity is not a flag that I waved in the book, although I might have said more about the need, in the older fields of political history and in the newer fields of animal studies, for interdisciplinary methods, approaches, and research techniques.

Interdisciplinarity was a way of approaching the subject of animal-human relations from a variety of angles—political, aesthetic, literary, philosophical, medical, and more. Indeed, the subject ("animals") required an interdisciplinary perspective, especially at a moment ("in and around 1668") when animals proliferated across media and practices in and around the court of Louis

XIV. In what might be called an early experiment with the modern, animals provided the materials and medium for reconfiguring genres of literary practice, methods of natural history, styles in the decorative arts, representations in visual culture, uses in medicine, and decoration in garden architecture. Animals as historical subjects required multiple perspectives and expertise, since they appeared in all these domains. At the same time, the animals described, painted, dissected, woven, drawn, and philosophized provided the lens with which to bring into focus broader shifts in seventeenth-century France.

I chose to describe a salient shift, both in attitudes towards animals but also as an index of a changing symbolic or epistemic order, a story told with neologisms: the passage from “Renaissance humanimalism” to “Classical naturalism.” I’m happy for the opportunity to clarify my use of these heuristic devices, to acknowledge my intellectual debts and filiations, and to explain what I was after.

In retrospect, in response to Sarah Cohen, I probably ought to have either chosen a better title for the kind of modernity that was born of 1668 than “Classical naturalism,” or at least have made the book a little longer in describing what I meant. My mistake, following Cohen, lay in evoking the specter of “Classicism,” long an unfashionable term and foremost, an aesthetic concept of visual culture and literature, born with the end of the “Renaissance” or perhaps the “Baroque.” I should instead have insisted that my reference to the “Classical Age” was in dialogue with Michel Foucault’s work on madness and on the natural and human sciences, and that it was coterminous, at its birth, with the advent of Louis XIV (r. 1661-1715). As a mode of knowing (an epistemology), a political regime, and a set of cultural practices, *L’âge classique* took shape in what Foucault understood as an “epistemic break,” when Renaissance notions of similitude were replaced with a “Classical” (in fact, modern) understanding of representation. Pierre Serna and Mathew Senior both understood the reference. I’m especially grateful to Serna for underscoring my engagement with the Foucault of state politics, who treated the early reign of Louis XIV as the laboratory of what would become, in the later eighteenth century, a disciplinary society. The “Great Enclosure” of madness in the Salpêtrière Hospital (1656), built eight years before the Versailles menagerie (by the same architect, Louis Le Vau), was an inaugural event of the Classical Age. Senior underscores the birth of natural history at this moment (1657) as part of the emergence of the Classical Age, described in *The Order of Things* (1966), as the “dominant *epistème* that defines the conditions of the possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in theory or silently invested in practice.”[1] My project was to extend and amend and at times to contradict Foucault by looking at an epistemic mutation that took place a little later, “in and around 1668.” And, as Senior points out, I sought to extend Foucault’s *epistème* to include shifts in fields of knowledge (philosophy, natural history), political institutions (the court and the royal academies), and cultural production (tapestry, painting, garden sculpture). The epistemic shift of 1668 towards a naturalized, mechanized, and de-valored (and totalized) “animal” was an *hommage à Foucault*, but it also found grounding in anthropologist Philippe Descola’s schematization of cultural “ontologies” (notably of animism and naturalism, which he associates with Descartes) in the symbolic ordering of the human-animal divide.[2] In my adaptation of the concept of these symbolic systems or “epistemic orders,” at the risk of a kind of holism (the “total history” to which Serna alludes), I sought to include at once the world of knowledge about nature, especially animals; the practice of absolutism, especially under Louis XIV; the social foundations of authority, which Serna brought

forcefully to the fore); and new philosophical and “scientific” thinking about mechanism and movement (most notably by Descartes, but also more broadly).

My project was thus something more than “a certain idiom of cultural history,” nor did I spend time delineating “the morphology of specific cultural forms” that formed “patterns” or “worldviews,” to use the terms of Rabinovitch. 1668 was more than the history of an “ideological” shift glossed by Cohen (although it was ideological “au sens propre du terme, une idée en image,” following Serna, citing a book about Versailles that had escaped my gaze). Its debt was to Foucault, whose own ideas about animals and animalities I hope to have troubled, but also to an interdisciplinary commitment to the study of historical change.

Rabinovitch suggests that my search for changes in “cultural patterns” fails to highlight the social shifts that I seek to document. He is too modest about his own achievements in the just-released work, *The Perraults: A Family of Letters in Early Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), which stresses the kinship networks and the social relations in the world of letters that helped explain the emergence of new genres of cultural modernity. He offers a fascinating contribution to the study of seventeenth-century modernity in its various iterations, from natural history to the birth of the fairy tale, described through kinship and social networks center on the Perrault family. Such a social history of cultural change can certainly account for features of the animal moment of 1668 that had escaped me—notably, the exchanges of ideas and the bonds and rivalries among the three Perrault brothers themselves.

Rabinovitch faults me for not relying on a “more socially-inflected approach to the production of meaning.” Although I hardly delved as deeply as Rabinovitch into the social, I was attentive, especially in my chapters on science and medicine, to adopt newer methods of studying the “scientific revolution,” ones that grounded the pursuit of science in a set of social relations. I was able to note that the human actors of the Year of the Animals (apart from Louis XIV and Descartes) were mostly born between 1607 and 1620 and formed a generational cohort, although I might have said more about how the “animal moment” was not a product of youthful enthusiasm. More importantly, I stressed how individual (human) actors in 1667-68 lived through an epistemic shift without ending up on one side or another.

In the movement from Renaissance humanism to Classical naturalism, dramatically articulated in 1668, the individuals who authored the cultural products and who orchestrated the spectacle of animals lived their lives and took their inspiration from across the epistemic divide. The best example is Jean Denis, an avowed “Cartesian,” and thus exemplary of the paradigm of Classical naturalism, but whose belief about the moral superiority of animals was a pedantic and impoverished version of Montaigne’s humanism. Such slippages were widespread, even normal, including among the Perrault brothers, whose thinking and writing often incorporated materials from both “old” and “new,” the ancient and the modern, as they assembled an array of cultural products with animals, from folktales and fables to dissections and treatises. It is important, in this sense, to distinguish the epistemic shift itself from the experiences of individuals who lived through it and who produced assemblages--*bricolages*, to borrow the well-worn idea of Claude Lévi-Strauss--that borrowed from both sides of the epistemic divide.

The situation is made even more complex, as Senior suggests, by the fluidity of labels like “Cartesian” during the late seventeenth century. Indeed, one of my central concerns was to show how such attributions, what it meant to be a Cartesian, depended on context. As I documented, most salon-goers and courtiers pushed back against the “animal-machine” thesis that became quickly attached to Descartes, while at the same time they were enthralled by roving lecturers who dismantled their Aristotelian assumptions of vital matter in the cosmos and replaced it with vortexes, while mechanists like Claude Perrault could reject Descartes’s idea of the soul but borrow heavily from Descartes’s physiology.

Take the case of the disturbing physiognomic portraits of animal-men that were the subject of chapter 6, and on which Cohen (and many others) have written.[3] Ingeniously, she links these figures to John Locke’s philosophical musings on “changelings” and thus underscores Le Brun’s interest in a sensationalist animal psychology (inspired by the work of the philosopher and physician Martin Cureau de la Chambre). I emphasized instead the “Cartesianization” of these animals, especially in contrast to the Renaissance humanimalist physiognomy of Giovanni della Porta (1586), but I also recognize the continuing sensationalist psychology implied in his triangulation. I do underscore, though, the ways in which Le Brun’s work, whether in designing *Les Mois* at the Gobelins Manufactory or in his lectures on physiognomy, both in 1668, signal the shift, without ever completing it, in the devalorization and naturalization of animals, in conjunction with a renewed emphasis on the animality of man—the movement as Serna nicely puts it, from “nous, les animaux,” to “nous sommes des animaux.”

The debasement and devaluation of the human in these animal-human figures derives from their identification with the lower social orders, faces of peasants and artisans. “Tout à coup, les animaux servent à classer les humains :” Serna makes much more than I do of this social dimension. True, I had identified the new epistemic order with a conjoined debasement of animals and the (re)discovery of what Serna calls the “*animhumains*,” and which I will offer in English as “*anihumans*.” (Thus the revised neologism: from “Renaissance humanimalism” to “Anihumanism of the Classical Age”). But Serna, historian of the French Revolution, insists more than I do on this social dimension and on the capacity of animals to speak the political. Not only do the working-class figures make up only a small portion of Le Brun’s several hundred sketches (his seventeenth-century PowerPoint that survives in the Louvre Museum), but these grotesque, bestial humans—men who look more like animals than their animal counterparts in Le Brun’s drawings look human—do *not* make an appearance in Le Brun’s painted *oeuvre*, as Cohen notes. And why should they? Le Brun was experimenting with animals in his 1668 lectures, and there is no reason to suggest he would have eschewed the rules of Classicism, including in the expression of the emotions, but also in the evacuation of animals—“bizarre creatures,” he writes of camels, with horses and hunting dogs excepted—from the tenets of Classicism. Thus Poussin’s elimination of the ten camels in his *Eliezar and Rebecca* (1648) and the debate that it engendered twenty years later, in the Year of the Animal, which I take up in the book’s conclusion.[4]

In a critique not unrelated to Rabinovitch’s claim that I neglected the social dimensions of cultural change, Cohen suggests that I—like authors of studies about Louis XIV’s absolutism in dance and literature, garden history and visual culture—fail to take seriously the “actual, sensual *experience*” of courtiers and elites, especially those who walked through the Versailles gardens and the Royal Labyrinth, fully populated with animal sculptures by 1674. Was the Labyrinth (which forms a structural and historical pendant in the book with 1664, the year that the Royal Menagerie was

finished, but not yet populated) really that different from the other garden groves of Versailles? That the groves were like “so many labyrinths” was first noted by the royal publicist, André Félibien in 1674, a position reprised by garden theorist Allen Weiss in 1995, who identified the labyrinth as one of two opposing “models” or “cosmological paradigms” at Versailles: “the labyrinth as closure, and the gardens, with their perspectival use of the vanishing point, as an overture to infinity.”[5] In fact, thematically, the Labyrinth and the groves of Versailles were linked. As I discussed in the book, the Versailles gardens were a “moralized landscape” that include statuary and monumental references to the costs of disobedience, whether in the Fountain of Latona or the Python Fountain. The Labyrinth itself told fables of ruse, deceit, and combat in elaborate fountain sculptures set in a towering maze of hedges. The only garden grove populated with animal fountain sculptures (and especially non-mythological ones), the Labyrinth expressed symbolically and figuratively the world of violence, disobedience, and treachery (see esp. pp. 324-26).

Cohen and I disagree about the combative nature of the Labyrinth. She reads the Labyrinth as a maze where “painted lead creatures...discuss, rather than fight out, their competitions, disagreements, and resentments,” where I view it more darkly as a Hobbesian university of predation and competition in which words are weaponized and collective violence (“warfare”) central to the maze (Fountains 1 and 12). Thanks to its digital reconstruction, readers are invited to “experience” the Royal Labyrinth themselves, to “play at home” much like seventeenth-century readers played a parlor game using the guidebooks and maps.[6] “Experience” is an historical category, not a category of historical analysis.

Just as Rome was born of animals—a she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus—so French modernity (of the Classical Age) took shape during an animal moment in and around 1668, in the explosion of animals but also their containment, entrapment, dissection, and visual displays in life and across a variety of media. The epistemic shift of naturalizing, mechanizing, and devalorizing animals, combined with the rediscovery of the beast at the core of the human, involve a neo-Foucauldian disciplining and immobilization of animals, one that went beyond the inevitable fixation of animals from life to drawing, painting, or weaving, as Cohen suggests. But such an immobilization was never totalizing or complete. As I suggested, “Classical naturalism” (or “anihumanism of the Classical Age”) bred its antithesis, in the salons, directed against the “Cartesians” (call it now, after Senior, humanimalism 2.0). More, the defense and critique of Descartes’s beast-machine continued to resonate long after 1668. Is it really surprising, following Rabinovitch, to find in the eighteenth century, at a moment when a world of mechanistic reactions had given way to sensibility, Le Roy’s return to and update of humanimalism (version 3.0)? This was, after all, the moment approaching the birth of animal rights in the 1780s, albeit not yet in France. Yet anti-Cartesianism, despite its many iterations, never became the dominant *epistème* in France—even though in 2015, the parliament amended the Civil Code to change the classification of non-human animals from “moveable property” to “living beings gifted with sentience.”[7] Echoes, til this day, of Montaigne and Madeleine de Scudéry.

NOTES

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1973), 168.

[2] Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2013), especially chapter 4, on the relations between the four ontologies (naturalism, animism, totemism, and analogism).

[3] Sarah R. Cohen, "Searching the Animal Psyche with Charles Le Brun," *Annals of Science* 67 (2010): 353–82.

[4] Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun's Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994).

[5] Allen S. Weiss, *Mirrors of Infinity: The French Formal Garden and 17th-Century Metaphysics* (New York, N.Y.: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 72.

[6] Copper Frances Giloth of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and Jonathan Tannant in France have digitally reconstructed the Versailles Labyrinth as both a gaming platform and, once on site in the current *Bosquet de la Reine*, a virtual reality landscape: <http://www.labyrinth-of-fables.com/en/>.

[7] <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/france-animals-granted-new-legal-status/>

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