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A Difference in Potentiality Without a Hierarchical Structure

“Nature is the way of life” is the consistent undertone of the film, *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo*, a documentary revealing Japan’s captivation by nature’s insects. Operating primarily under the beliefs of the Shinto religion, it is believed that “all beings share the same potentiality” and that “nature is indifferent to man” (*Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo*). But this is a view that is in stark contrast to the concern for animality that philosopher Martin Heidegger presents in his book, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, where he states that animals are “captured” by their environment. Heidegger argues that animals are “poor in world” and therefore are “deprived” access to other “beings-as-such.” But while each view seems to differ on whether all beings possess the same potentiality, they both seem to somehow agree that there is not hierarchical structure that exists.

When it is said that, “all beings have the same potentiality,” the film seems to be reminding humans that they do not have superiority over nature, or specifically, superiority over insects. In the film, insects are shown to play a subtle but significantly equal role to humans in nearly all of modern Japanese technology, from the ergonomic design of the beetle vendor’s sports car, to the popular video game “MushiKing.” Each of these technological objects is representative of the insect, given the car’s hard outer shell and headlight eyes, and the very content of the MushiKing game. These faint references seem to imply that, without the insect as

the inspiration, humans would not be as technologically advanced and efficient as they are today. It is as if humans are borrowing their ideas from the beetles.

The way *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* presents this “same potentiality” of beings, also implies the there is no hierarchical structure of beings that are present in the world. The practicing Shintos believe that, “man is indifferent to nature” and that “the ideal life is in harmony with nature.”

Heidegger, on the other hand, presents the opposing view that animals do not possess the same potentiality as all other objects in the world. He argues that while there is not a hierarchy of beings in the world, there still exists three different modes of being. The distinction of these modes is as follows: “1) the stone (material object) is a thing, “present-at-hand” and *worldless*; 2) the animal is equipment, “ready-to-hand” and *poor in world*; 3) man is “dasein” and *world-forming*” (Heidegger 177). By “world,” Heidegger is not simply referring to “an environment” or anything of the sort. While he does not give a specific definition for the term, he seems to hint that it is a sort of “totality,” “set,” or “series” of beings.

With this “definition” of “world” in mind, the mode of being for the stone can best be understood as not having any being at all, lacking any potential to ever know any other beings (or, as Heidegger says, “beings-as-such”) as well. The animal, being “poor in world,” is considered “deprived” in that it is “captured” by its environment and lacks the capacity to possess “world” or “being.” This understanding of “poor in world” is not to be misinterpreted as being less-than the “world-forming” man, but rather, it should be viewed that the animal possesses a “not-having.” This can be expressed by the idea that the animal is “open” to being “taken-by” its environment. The third mode of being, man, is considered by Heidegger to be “world-forming” and “dasein.” The German word “dasein” is derived from two German terms,

“da” meaning “there,” and “sein” meaning “being.” When put together, the word translates to English as “there being” or “being there.” A more thorough explanation of “dasein” is provided in *Being in Time* when Heidegger writes, “Dasein is essentially an entity with Being-in, it can explicitly discover those entities which it encounters environmentally, it can know them, it can avail itself from them, it can *have* the ‘world’” (Heidegger 84). The “dasein” mode of being is unique to man, but again, is not to be seen as a hierarchical position, but merely just a difference in the mode of being from the stone or the animal.

This idea of different entities working together as a whole is also illustrated in Jussi Parikka’s article, *Politics of Swarms: Translations between Entomology and Biopolitics*. Parikka offers a concern of animality that proposes that, “like nature, the reality of modern technological society was to be structured according to rational management.” This “rational management” implies that “everyone has his or her own duties, instructed this order, where happiness is due to understanding one’s place in the whole” and is synonymous with how insect swarms function as a whole (Parikka 114). Similar to Heidegger’s three modes of being, Parikka’s “swarm intelligence” seems to be arriving at the same conclusion, that there is no hierarchy of being, just merely different “modes” of being working together as a series of beings.

Given these three accounts of animality, it somehow seems possible for all of the parts of the world to work together in a non-hierarchical way to form a whole. “Parts,” in this sense, refers to the different types of being in the world. *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* and *Politics of Swarms* both seem to classify humans as being “captivated” by insects, while Heidegger, on the other hand, argues that it is animals who are captivated and man that is not captivated. Parikka does not seem to speak of captivation, but rather he speaks of the society of man being dependent on the way of insects, similar but in a more extreme way than *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo*.

But even with these differences in mind concerning the details of animality, all three accounts agree that all of the parts of being are working equally to make up the whole or the “world.”

Works Cited

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