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Human Language, Animal Code, and the Question of Beeing

Communication, Code, and the Language of Bees: Benveniste, Lacan, von Frisch. Let's talk about bees: the honey bee and the letter *b*, literal bees and figurative bees, dancing bees and mutilated bees, *benehmen* and *benommenheit*, being and Benveniste, common nouns and proper names, language so-called and language as such. Not the first letter of the Latin alphabet, the vowel *a*, in the word *différance* (which, as Derrida says, is neither a word nor a concept[1]) and not even the letter *a* in the word "humanimalia" (which too, perhaps, is neither a word nor a concept) but rather the second letter, the consonant *b*, which in the English language provides a homophone for the word "be" (the infinitive form of the copular verb that is used to denote the relation of essence, identity, or equality between the subject and its predicative properties), as well as a homophone for the word "bee" (the colloquial name for the biological organism that is presently identified by the scientific name *Anthophila* and classified under the superfamily *Apoidea*). To be sure, what I want to talk about concerns precisely the distinction that is made by the structuralist thinkers Benveniste and Lacan between the first-tier language of humans and the second-tier language of bees, between an open language of symbols and a closed language of signals, between a language that opens itself up to an infinite series of articulations and a code that remains fixed by a limited set of combinations. To pose the question of "beeing" as I have done in the title of this paper, then, is not only to play on the apparently fortuitous association between the words "bee" and "being" in the English language, but also to broach what is considered the fundamentally human property of language within both the classical philosophical tradition of humanism and the ostensibly "antihumanist" discourse of structuralism itself.

The privileged status of the human subject in relation to being has been based primarily on the capacity for reason at least since the advent of the Cartesian *cogito* that marks the beginning of the modern European philosophical tradition of rationalism. Following this philosophical tradition, we could say that the question of being is resolved by the very existence of the thinking subject who poses this question. However, the emergence of structuralism over the course of the twentieth century provided what still remains one of the most effective critiques of rationalism today by directing our attention to the human subject's capacity for language. Rejecting the priority of the Cartesian *cogito* and following the discourse of structuralist theory instead, we would have to say that it is

not the thinking subject who poses the question of being, but the speaking subject who poses this question in the most literal sense. Structuralism thus delivered a strong rebuke to rationalism, as well as to the classical philosophical tradition of humanism to which the Cartesian *cogito* was so closely attached. Indeed, setting itself against the humanist tradition, what structuralism offered was a radical theoretical discourse of antihumanism.

And yet, although this antihumanist discourse certainly seemed to dislodge the human subject from its privileged status in relation to being, insofar as it refused to define the human being by the capacity for reason, structuralist theory ultimately reinstated the human subject's privileged status by way of language. Colluding with the classical philosophical tradition of humanism itself, the theoretical discourse of structuralism maintained a clear distinction between the human and the animal, redefining the human being, however, by the capacity for language rather than by the capacity for reason. Structuralist theory thus rendered the human capacity for language irreducible to the rational goal of communication. Inverting the philosophical terms of humanism in its classical form, the nonhuman animal was now defined as a rational being, while the human being surpassed any such definition.

In my paper, I would like to revisit this distinction between the human capacity for language on one hand and the various modes of communication among nonhuman animals on the other by talking about bees. More particularly, I am interested in the discussion of the honey bee's "dance language" in the work of two key figures in structuralist theory, the Syrian-born French linguist Émile Benveniste and the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. For it is precisely in their discussion of this "dance language" that both Benveniste and Lacan establish the distinction between human "language" and animal "code." Although Benveniste's and Lacan's ternary distinction between communication, code, and language seems to complicate any simple binary opposition between the human and the animal, then, I want to suggest that their definition of language as a fundamental property of the human being only marks the theoretical consolidation of yet another form of human exceptionalism — a new humanism in the form of antihumanism.

Benveniste presents his discussion of the honey bee's "dance language" in two of his essays, "Animal Communication and Human Language," which was originally published in 1952, and "A Look at the Development of Linguistics," which was originally published in 1963. Both of these essays were republished in the first volume of Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* in 1966. Although "A Look at the

Development of Linguistics" was originally published over a decade later than "Animal Communication and Human Language," it is placed before "Animal Communication" in *Problems in General Linguistics*, offering a very intriguing introductory discussion on the capacity for language among bees that undermines any clear distinction between the human and the animal. In the second section of "A Look at the Development of Linguistics," Benveniste begins by arguing that "[l]anguage *re-produces* reality" through its symbolic function (22; emphasis in original). He asserts that this symbolic function of language is a specifically human capacity: "[L]anguage represents the highest form of a faculty inherent in the human condition, the faculty of *symbolizing*…. [T]his representative capacity, in essence symbolic … appears only in man [sic]. It emerges very early in the child, before language, at the beginning of his conscious life. But it is lacking in animals" (23, emphasis in original). Yet Benveniste immediately goes on to complicate this distinction between the human who possesses language and the animal that lacks it:

> Let us, however, make a glorious exception in favour of the bees. According to the memorable observations of K. von Frisch, when a scouting bee has discovered a source of food on her solitary flight, she returns to the hive to announce her find by dancing a special lively dance on the honeycomb, describing certain figures which could be analyzed; she thus indicates to the other bees, who follow slowly behind her, the distance and the direction in which the food is to be found. They then take flight and go unerringly to their objective, which is sometimes quite far from the hive. This is an observation of the highest importance, which seems to indicate that bees communicate among themselves by a particular symbolization and transmit real messages. Should this system of communication be related to the remarkable functioning of the hive? Does the life of social insects imply a certain level of symbolic relationships? It is remarkable even to be able to raise the question. (24)

After noting this "glorious exception," however, Benveniste simply resumes his argument on the specifically human capacity for language, making a theoretical distinction between the symbol and the signal as if he had not only just acknowledged the symbolic function of communication among bees, and in the most enthusiastic terms at that. (It is also worth remarking here on Benveniste's attention to sexual difference among bees in this passage by his use of the gender-specific pronouns "she" and "her," a gesture that bears profound theoretical implications for any simple binary opposition between the human and the animal.)

Although Benveniste refers to the Austrian zoologist and Nobel laureate Karl von Frisch in this passage, he does not provide any scholarly citations to von Frisch's work. But in "Animal Communication and Human Language," Benveniste cites von Frisch's *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language* in particular. At the time when Benveniste would have written "Animal Communication," von Frisch was a Professor of Zoology and had served as the Director of the Zoological Institute at the University of Munich. Von Frisch had long since published his first major work on honey bees in 1927, *Aus dem Leben ber Bienen*, which was translated into English in 1953 as *The Dancing Bees: An Account of the Life and Senses of the Honey Bee*. The text that Benveniste cites, *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*, was von Frisch's first work to be originally published in English. Appearing in 1950, it was based on a series of three lectures that he had delivered on a three-month tour of the United States sponsored primarily by Cornell University during the previous year. Von Frisch had already used the German term *sprache* in his articles on communication among honey bees as early as 1923. Yet it seems to have been his use of the English term "language" in the subtitle of *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language* itself that drew Benveniste's attention to this particular text, insofar as it is his only major work on honey bees that Benveniste cites. However, in addition to the title of the third chapter, "The Language of Bees," von Frisch only uses the term "language" in two passages from the text, both of which are contained in this same chapter. Moreover, he does so without offering any definition of this term at all: "The language of bees is truly perfect, and their method of indicating the direction of food sources is one of the most remarkable mysteries of their complex social organization" (75); and again, "Twenty-five years ago I thought I understood the language of bees. But further experiments brought many surprises…" (85). Indeed, far from questioning the applicability of the term "language" to the method of communication among honey bees, von Frisch expresses a sense of awe at the complexity of what he quite happily calls their language.[2]

In his own text, Benveniste presents a much more critical discussion on the capacity for language among bees, making a theoretical distinction between language and code. He begins "Animal Communication and Human Language" by denying the capacity for language among nonhuman animals in the very first sentence: "To apply the notion of language to the animal world is admissible only at the price of misusing terms" (49). Yet he appears to make an exception again concerning bees: "The case of the bees, however, is different" (49). Benveniste proceeds to give a careful account of von Frisch's work over the previous three decades, citing *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*:

> [A]s a result of further experiments by Karl von Frisch, extending and correcting his first observations … [w]e now have the means of ascertaining that it is in fact the dance with its two variations which the bees use to inform their fellow bees about a discovery and to guide them to the spot by giving information about direction and distance. The nature of the food, furthermore, is disclosed to the other bees by the scent on the scouting bee or by the nectar which it has drunk and which they now absorb from it. Then they take wing and infallibly reach the spot. The experimenter thus can predict the behavior of the hive and verify the information given, according to the type and rhythm of the dance. (50-51)

Conceding the symbolic function of communication among bees, Benveniste announces — still somewhat surprisingly, perhaps — that the second variation of their dance, in particular, constitutes "a language in the strict sense of the term" (52). However, he quickly moves on to enumerate "the [considerable] differences between the bee language and human language," precisely in order to clarify "the truly distinctive characteristics of the latter": the former "bee language" consists of physical motion without vocalization; it relies on visual perception; it does not invite any reply or dialogue; it does not contain any linguistic information; it cannot be transmitted or relayed; it is limited to one concern, namely food; it is based on objective experience; and lastly, it cannot be decomposed into any constituent elements (52-54). Benveniste thus concludes that there is indeed what he calls an "essential difference between the method of communication discovered among bees and our human language" (54), apparently withdrawing his earlier suggestion that the bees' dance does constitute a language in the strict sense of the term:

> This difference can be stated summarily in one phrase which seems to give the most appropriate definition of the manner of communication used by the bees: it is not a language but a signal code. All the characteristics of a code are present: the fixity of the subject matter, the invariability of the message, the relation to a single set of circumstances, the impossibility of separating the components of the message, and its unilateral transmission. (54)

Following Benveniste's theoretical distinction between language and code, then, although humans and bees alike partake in the act of communication, humans use both language and code, whereas bees use only code.

For better or worse, Lacan's discussion on the capacity for language among bees displays little if any of the ambiguity or equivocation that Benveniste's discussion does. Lacan also presents his discussion of the honey bee's "dance language" in two of his essays, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," which was originally published in 1956, and "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" which was originally published in 1957. Both of these essays were republished in Lacan's *Écrits* in 1966, the same year in which Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* appeared. Likewise, although "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" was originally published a year later than "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," it is placed before "Function and Field" in *Écrits*, providing a special introductory essay to the entire volume. Lacan mentions bees very briefly in "Seminar," only to reiterate his theoretical distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary functions of communication, denying the capacity for language among bees. He does not refer to von Frisch at all, although he does refer to a certain linguist, citing Benveniste's "Animal Communication and Human Language":

> Those who are here are familiar with my remarks on the subject [of language], specifically those illustrated by the counterexample of the supposed language of bees, in which a linguist can see nothing more than a signaling of the location of objects — in other words, an imaginary function that is simply more differentiated than the others.
>
> Let me emphasize here that such a form of communication is not absent in man [sic], however evanescent the natural pregivenness of objects may be for him due to the disintegration they undergo through his use of symbols. (12-13)

Lacan also cites his own essay, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." He does discuss communication among bees in more detail in "Function and Field," but again only to elucidate his argument on the symbolic function of language. Indeed, Lacan sets out to "definitively dispel the mistaken notion of 'language as signs'," as he puts it — a notion, of course, that served as the starting point for structuralist theory itself: "I shall show the inadequacy of the conception of language as signs by the very manifestation that best illustrates it in the animal kingdom, a manifestation which, had it not recently been the object of an authentic discovery, would have to have been invented for this purpose" (245). After describing the bees' dance,[3] referring to von Frisch without, however, providing any scholarly citations to his work, Lacan makes the familiar distinction between language and code:

> It took some ten years of patient observation for Karl von Frisch to decode this kind of message, for it is certainly a code or signaling system, whose generic character alone forbids us to qualify it as conventional.
>
> But is it a language, for all that? We can say that it is distinguished from language precisely by the fixed correlation between its signs and the reality they signify. For, in a language, signs take on their value from their relations to each other … in sharp contrast to the fixity of the coding used by bees. The diversity of human languages takes on its full value viewed in this light.
>
> Furthermore, while a message of the kind described here determines the action of the "socius," it is never retransmitted by the socius. This means that the message remains frozen in its function as a relay of action, from which no subject detaches it as a symbol of communication itself. (245-46)

Although Lacan does not refer to Benveniste at all in this text, it is obvious that he follows Benveniste's theoretical distinction between language and code very closely. Yet Lacan's distinction is notably clearer than Benveniste's, insofar as he does not seem to concede any symbolic function whatsoever to the bees' dance.

Both Benveniste and Lacan thus readily concede that bees do have the capacity for communication, presumably sharing this capacity with many other nonhuman animals. Furthermore, they claim that bees communicate with each other by using a code that is composed of signals, constituting a complex form of communication that is perhaps unique to bees among all nonhuman animals. Nonetheless, Benveniste and Lacan also claim that bees do not have the capacity for language as such. For the human property of language is composed of symbols, remaining irreducible to any form of communication among nonhuman animals no matter how complex it may be. Benveniste's and Lacan's distinction between human language and animal code, then, is not structured along the lines of a simple binary opposition in which language and code would comprise mutually exclusive domains of communication. Moreover, both Benveniste and Lacan even suggest that bees' special capacity for communication via a code composed of signals is intrinsically related to their capacity for social life, a capacity that they do not call into question at any point in their work. Yet whereas the social act of communication between bees is limited to their use of a fixed code, the social act of communication between human beings exceeds this limit by their use of a more complicated or articulated form of language — a distinctly human form of

language that is used in conjunction with code, but not without raising this animal capacity to another level above and beyond the strictly rational grounds of communication.

Structuralism, Antihumanism, and the Question of Being: Benveniste, Lacan, Heidegger. Certainly, my interest in Benveniste's and Lacan's discussion of the honey bee's "dance language" as it pertains to the question of being in this paper might seem somewhat misguided, inasmuch as the theoretical discourse of structuralism has not only dislodged the thinking subject of rationalist humanism from its privileged status in relation to being, but also displaced the ontological question of being itself. In one of Benveniste's essays, "Categories of Thought and Language," he contends that what he calls "the whole Greek metaphysic of 'being'" was ultimately determined by the logical function of the verb "to be" that was peculiar to ancient Greek language: "The language did not, of course, give direction to the metaphysical definition of 'being' — each Greek thinker had his [sic] own — but it made it possible to set up 'being' as an objectifiable notion which philosophical thought could handle, analyze, and define just as any other concept" (61-62). Similarly, in one of Lacan's essays, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," he insists in his characteristically polemical manner that the dialectical movement of desire that is revealed in psychoanalytic practice evades the dialectical philosophy of being: "Need I now say — if one understands the kind of support I have sought in Hegel's work by which to criticize a degradation of psychoanalysis that is so inept that it has no other claim to fame than that of being contemporary — that it is inadmissible that I should be accused of having been lured by a purely dialectical exhaustion of being…?" (681). Indeed, the antihumanist discourse of structuralism has distanced the human subject from the ontological question altogether, abandoning the nonhuman animal to this immanent field of being as it were. Yet structuralist theory has nonetheless reoriented this same human subject toward another question that is ostensibly prior to the ontological question — a question that opens onto not quite a transcendental plane, but rather a more elemental ground of being, which is to say language as such.

Of course, to pose the question of being in relation to language this way is to invoke Heidegger himself. Indeed, the work of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger in the first half of the twentieth century provided a crucial intellectual source for structuralist theory in general as well as for Benveniste and Lacan in particular. Heidegger's work was marked not only by a radical displacement of the ontological question of being and the subsequent turn toward language on one hand, but also by a decisive critique of rationalism and the attendant rejection of the humanist

philosophical tradition on the other. Anticipating Benveniste's and Lacan's ternary distinction between communication, code, and language, Heidegger rejected the standard definition of language as a form of communication. In one of his essays, "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger explains that language cannot be reduced to the function of communication. He argues instead that language is what brings the human being into the openness of being itself, an openness from which nonhuman animals, plants, and nonliving beings alike are barred:

> According to the usual account, language is a kind of communication. It serves as a means of discussion and agreement, in general for achieving understanding. But language is neither merely nor primarily the aural and written expression of what needs to be communicated. The conveying of overt and covert meanings is not what language, in the first instance, does. Rather, it brings beings as beings, for the first time, into the open. Where language is not present, as in the being of stones, plants, or animals, there is also no openness of beings… (45-46)

Furthermore, in another one of his essays, "Letter on 'Humanism'," Heidegger even appears to call contemporary linguistics into question by suggesting that language cannot be reduced to the function of symbolic representation or signification, either. He maintains that language is not a biological capacity of the human organism, but is rather what places the human being into the clearing of being from which, again, nonhuman animals and plants are barred:

> Because plants and animals are lodged in their respective environments but are never placed freely into the clearing of being which alone is "world," they lack language…. In its essence, language is not the utterance of an organism; nor is it the expression of a living thing. Nor can it ever be thought in an essentially correct way in terms of its symbolic character, perhaps not even in terms of the character of signification. Language is the clearing-concealing advent of being itself. (248-49)

Heidegger's displacement of the ontological question of being in relation to language thus offered a remarkably prescient precursor to the antihumanist discourse of structuralism that would emerge over the course of the twentieth century.

Yet while Benveniste and Lacan would certainly have been very familiar with Heidegger's critical interventions into the question of being, they would probably not have been familiar at all with his discussion of the bee.[4] Heidegger presents this

discussion in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, a substantial text that is based on the course of lectures that he delivered at the University of Freiburg during the winter semester of 1929 and 1930, but that was only published posthumously in 1983. He does not address the capacity for language among bees in this text, but he does discuss the bee's relation to what he calls "world." While the first part of Heidegger's text is devoted to an analysis of "*profound boredom*" as a "*fundamental attunement*" of Dasein (77, emphasis in original), the second part of his text is guided by the question, "*What is world?*" (176, emphasis in original). Embarking on "the path of a *comparative examination*," as he puts it — a rather surprising move on Heidegger's part given his strong reservations concerning zoology, biology, and the natural sciences in general — he offers "three theses" on his concept of world, three theses that have recently become quite infamous within the field of animal studies itself: "[T]he stone (material object) is *worldless*; … the animal is *poor in world*; … [and] man [sic] is *world-forming*" (177, emphasis in original). It would appear, then, that Heidegger's ternary distinction between the human, the animal, and the stone complicates any simple binary opposition between the human and the animal, insofar as both the human and the animal share a "world," even if the human's relation to this world is far "richer" than the animal's relation to it. (Of course, this is to say nothing either of the binary opposition in Heidegger's theses between both the human and the animal who "have" world, on one hand, and the stone that does not have any world, on the other, or of his complete neglect of the "plant" and other non-animal forms of life.)

However, Heidegger goes on to clarify his distinction between the human and the animal in his discussion of the bee's relation to "world." Although he mentions bees at several points within the second part of *Fundamental Concepts* (see 186, 193, 230, 272, 277), he presents his lengthiest discussion of the bee in order to illustrate his own theoretical distinction between human "comportment" and animal "behavior." Heidegger argues that there is a fundamental difference between the human's essential mode of relation to world and the animal's essential mode of relation to it: "The *specific manner* in which man [sic] is we shall call *comportment* and the *specific manner* in which the animal is we shall call *behaviour*. They are fundamentally different from one another" (237, emphasis in original). He further claims that animal behavior is entirely circumscribed by what he calls the structure of "captivation":

> Behaviour as a manner of being in general is only possible on the basis of the animal's *absorption* in itself…. We shall describe *the specific way in which the animal remains with itself* — which has nothing to do with the selfhood of the human being comporting him- or herself as a person — this way in

> which the animal is absorbed in itself, and which makes possible behaviour of any and every kind, as *captivation*…. The animal can only behave insofar as it is essentially captivated. The possibility of behaving in the manner of animal being is grounded in this essential structure of the animal, a structure we will now elucidate as captivation. Captivation is the condition of possibility for the fact that, in accordance with its essence, the animal *behaves within an environment but never within a world*. (238-39; emphasis in original)

Heidegger thus retracts his previous suggestion that the human and the animal might share a world by explaining that the animal's world is not a "world" after all, at least not in the proper sense of the term.

Heidegger provides his discussion of the bee, then, as "a *concrete example*" (241, emphasis in original) of animal behavior in its essential mode of captivation. In the first part of his discussion, drawing from the work of the Estonian-born German biologist Jakob von Uexküll, Heidegger begins by noting the bee's capacity to identify specific varieties of flowers and then consume all of the honey within each flower from which it selects to feed. (Of course, honey bees do not consume honey from flowers — they consume nectar from flowers and produce honey themselves. I have refrained from correcting this mistake in Heidegger's text, since I think that this mistake is very significant in itself.[5] This is to say nothing of the significance of this mistake on von Uexküll's own part.[6]) Heidegger continues his discussion by posing the question of whether or not "the bee recognize[s] the honey *as present*" (241, emphasis in original). He argues that the bee does not recognize the presence of the honey, insofar as it remains bound by the "driven activity" (242) of animal behavior. In support of his argument, Heidegger cites an experiment that was presumably conducted by von Uexküll himself:

> A bee [is] placed before a little bowl filled with so much honey that the bee [is] unable to suck up the honey all at once. It begins to suck and then after a while breaks off this driven activity of sucking and flies off, leaving the rest of the honey still present in the bowl…. Yet … if its abdomen is carefully cut away while it is sucking, [the] bee [simply carries] on regardless even while the honey runs out of the bee from behind. This shows conclusively that the bee by no means recognizes the presence of too much honey. It recognizes neither this nor even — though this would be expected to touch it more closely — the absence of its abdomen. There is no question of it recognizing any of this[;] it continues with its driven

> activity regardless precisely because it does not recognize that plenty of honey is still present. (242)

In the second part of his discussion, drawing from the work of the Czech biologist Emanuel Rádl, Heidegger addresses the bee's capacity to return home to its hive after foraging for food. Noting that the bee orients its flight in relation to the sun, he cites a series of experiments that were communicated by Rádl. First, a hive is placed outside, and after it has been adopted by a swarm of bees as their home, it is moved a short distance away; the bees return to the initial location of the hive before they are able to find it in its new place. Next, a bee is captured while it is foraging and held in a dark box for a few hours; when the bee is released, it flies to the precise location where its hive would have been found had the position of the sun in the sky not changed during the period in which it was held in the box before it is finally able to return home. A similar reaction is observed when the dark box in which the bee is held is moved, and then the bee is released, unless there are prominent objects in the surrounding environment that the bee can use as landmarks in order to find its hive. Heidegger maintains that these experiments all confirm his distinction between human comportment and animal behavior: "[The bee's] flight back to the hive is just as captivated as [is] the [bee's] sucking[;] it is merely another form of captivation, i.e., another case of the bee's behaviour" (243). He thus concludes his discussion of the bee in *Fundamental Concepts* by declaring that "captivation is the essence of animality" (248). Needless to say, the disturbing irony of Heidegger's conclusion — the irony that the animal's state of captivation is produced by the human who holds the animal in captivity, whether to observe it after deliberately disorienting it or to feed it while methodically mutilating it — is lost on Heidegger himself. Indeed, the sheer violence of his entire discussion — the violence of the experiments that he describes, the violence of treating the bee as if it were not part of a swarm or collective community of bees,[7] the violence of discussing the bee in general without reference to any particular species of bee, the violence of using the bee as an "example" of animal behavior or "animality" as such — is overwhelming.

Although Benveniste and Lacan would not have been familiar with Heidegger's text, the theoretical distinction that they make between human language and animal code might certainly seem to reiterate Heidegger's distinction between human comportment and animal behavior. However, what interests me in this paper is the way that Benveniste's and Lacan's distinction between language and code diverges from Heidegger's distinction between comportment and behavior. For, whereas Heidegger's distinction is structured in the simple form of a binary opposition, Benveniste's and

Lacan's distinction is structured in a much more supple form. It might seem that Heidegger's ternary distinction between world, behavior, and comportment is basically replicated by Benveniste's and Lacan's ternary distinction between communication, code, and language. In Heidegger's work, while both the human and the animal sustain some mode of relation to world, the human sustains a relation of comportment to its world whereas the animal sustains a relation of behavior or captivation to its own world or environment. Human comportment and animal behavior thus comprise mutually exclusive domains of being. But in Benveniste's and Lacan's work, while both the human and the animal possess the capacity for communication, the human and at least one kind of nonhuman animal — the bee — are capable of communication by code or a system of signals whereas the human alone is further capable of communication by language or a system of symbols. Human language and animal code, then, do not comprise mutually exclusive domains or capacities.

To put it another way, within the antihumanist discourse of structuralism, the human and the animal are distinguished not along the lines of a simple binary opposition but rather in the more flexible terms of an "exception" — a singular emergence or vital upsurge from the immanent field of being that radically displaces or fundamentally transforms the human's relation to being itself. Of course, Heidegger's work provided an important precursor to structuralist theory, insofar as he similarly called Dasein's relation to being into question. Yet while Heidegger thus posed a formidable challenge to Cartesian rationalism, he remained bound to — if not "captivated" by — the classical philosophical tradition of humanism, inasmuch as he maintained a strictly binary opposition between the human and the animal. In contrast, structuralist theory challenges Cartesian rationalism as well as the humanist tradition by accepting the biological classification of the human as a kind of animal on one hand, while maintaining the exceptional status of the human in relation to the animal on the other. The structuralist distinction between the human and the animal is supple enough, then, both to accommodate any evidence of the capacity for language among nonhuman animals and to maintain the presupposition of human exceptionalism at once.

Indeed, the antihumanist discourse of structuralism offers a more precise form of "human exceptionalism" as such. If the human being cannot be called a rational animal anymore, it is only because the human being must be properly called an exceptional animal. Even if the capacity for language among nonhuman animals is eventually accepted by scholarly or public opinion — if it has not been accepted already — the human being would nonetheless retain its exceptional status. The animal may very well think, communicate, and even speak, but the human thinks, communicates, and speaks all the more. What I am suggesting, in other words, is that although structuralism has

set itself against the philosophical tradition of humanism, this antihumanist discourse is perhaps the only form in which humanism itself can survive in a post-Darwinian world, where the human has been placed squarely within the biological realm of the animal. Whereas Heidegger's discourse presented an anti-Darwinian humanism that remained incompatible with any biological theory of natural selection or evolution, structuralist theory presents a post-Darwinian humanism — a new form of humanism that is not hindered at all by the biological classification of the human as an animal.[8]

It might seem safe to say that this more current post-Darwinian form of humanism manages to avoid what I have called the sheer violence of either pre- or anti-Darwinian humanism. It would certainly be fair for us to say that the violence that marks Heidegger's discussion of the bee is largely avoided in Benveniste's and Lacan's discussion of the honey bee's "dance language" — even if only because Benveniste's and Lacan's work draws from the work of von Frisch himself, who not only called the complex method of communication that he found among honey bees a "language" as such, but also appears to have at least limited his own acts of violence mainly to the maintenance and observation of beehives. However, the seeming benevolence of our post-Darwinian humanism is marked by another sort of violence. We could say that if the bee's essential mode of relation to its world was once "captivation," then the bee's essential mode of relation to its world is now "collapse." Our violence against honey bees in particular threatens to exceed, in terms of its sheer force, all prior human acts of violence against them, insofar as the variously damaging effects of our contemporary industrial food production system have resulted, however inadvertently or not, in the mass death of honey bees on what has become a regular basis over the past decade.[9] Of course, there are many writers, philosophers, and animal studies scholars before me who have pointed out the paradox of living in a post-Darwinian world where the human is so readily identified as an animal, and yet such massive forms of human violence against nonhuman animals are not merely possible, but moreover increasingly commonplace. To pose the question of "beeing" is thus to broach the fundamentally humanist presuppositions that continue to inform even the most radical discourses of antihumanism today, as much as it is to dare speak an impossible language that might touch the very being of the bees themselves.

Notes

1. See Derrida, "Différance," 3, 7, 11.

2. Von Frisch would eventually qualify his use of the term "language," though, in another major work on honey bees published in 1965, *Tanzsprache und Orientierung der*

Bienen, which was translated into English in 1967 as *The Dance Language and Orientation of Bees*. In his preface to the text, von Frisch addresses those critics who would object to his use of the term "language" in describing the method of communication among honey bees:

> Many readers may wonder whether it is proper to call the communication system of insects a "language." The use that is made here of this word must not be misunderstood, as though what bees inform one another of were to be regarded as the equivalent of human speech. In its wealth of concepts and its articulate mode of expression the language of man [sic] stands on quite a different plane…
> Through their precise and highly differentiated sign language the bees are unique in the whole animal kingdom in regard to their ability to communicate. The use here of the term "language" is intended to give emphasis to what is extraordinary in the realm of animal behavior. (v)

Strangely enough, von Frisch's claim on the "extraordinary" language of bees in this later text recalls Benveniste's "glorious exception" concerning the symbolic function of communication among bees. Furthermore, placing "language" within quotation marks throughout the remainder of his preface, it even seems that von Frisch may have coined the term "dance language" in this text at least in part to distinguish it from human language.

3. "It is now generally recognized that, when a bee returns to its hive after gathering nectar, it transmits an indication of the existence of nectar near or far away from the hive to its companions by two sorts of dances. The second is the most remarkable, for the plane in which the bee traces out a figure-eight — a shape that gave it the name "wagging dance" — and the frequency of the figures executed with a given time, designate, on the one hand, the exact direction to be followed, determined in relation to the sun's inclination (by which bees are able to orient themselves in all kinds of weather, thanks to their sensitivity to polarized light), and, on the other hand, the distance at which the nectar is to be found up to several miles away. The other bees respond to this message by immediately setting off for the place thus designated." (Lacan, "Function and Field," 245)

4. The situation remains largely the same within the field of animal studies today. Heidegger has received a great deal of critical attention within this field, far more attention than either Benveniste or Lacan has received. However, while much of this attention has been focused on Heidegger's discussion of the nonhuman animal in

relation to his concept of "world" in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, there are only a few texts in which his discussion of the bee is specifically addressed: see Matthew Calarco, "Heidegger's Zoontology," 24-27; David Morris, "Animals and Humans, Thinking and Nature," 59-65; Brett Buchanan, *Onto-Ethologies*, 78-88; Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 197-98. (Oliver seems to have already beaten me to the punch line in *Animal Lessons* by playing on the homophonic association between the words "bee" and "being" in the title of her chapter on Heidegger, "The Abyss Between Humans and Animals: Heidegger Puts the Bee in Being.") It is also worth noting here that although Derrida critically attends to Lacan's discussion of the honey bee's "dance language" in both *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (see 123-24) and *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Volume I (see 116-18), he does not address Benveniste's discussion in which the distinction between language and code is first established within structuralist theory and on which Lacan's own discussion so clearly relies.

5. Buchanan also calls attention to "this seemingly small oversight" in Heidegger's text and makes a very compelling point: "[I]n calling nectar 'honey', Heidegger is in fact saying that the bee relates to an absent presence!" (*Onto-Ethologies*, 80-81).

6. This mistake within von Uexküll's work itself might play some part in a future critique of his decidedly teleological concept of *umwelt*, a concept that has been taken up very widely — and far too eagerly, it seems to me — throughout the field of animal studies.

7. Morris also criticizes Heidegger's reliance on experiments and field observations that "isolate" the individual bee from its hive and asks the question: "[W]hat if we talked about bees rather than a bee?" ("Animals and Humans, Thinking and Nature," 60; emphasis in original).

8. Richard Iveson also broaches the problem of what he calls "post-Darwinian humanism" in relation to Bernard Stiegler's work:

> Il problema di Stiegler, nella sua forma più semplice, è quello che affligge inevitabilmente ogni umanesimo post-darwiniano: come spiegare l'emergere dell'umano sia in quanto *proveniente dall'animale* e tuttavia in quanto essere *non più animale*. È il problema, insomma, della "creazione *ex nihilo*" che, una volta esclusa la possibilità di un divino Creatore, diventa particolarmente difficile: come può "l'uomo" *essere* e allo stesso tempo *non essere* "animale." [Stiegler's problem, at its most basic, is that which

> inevitably plagues every post-Darwinian humanism: how to explain the emergence of the human as both coming *from* the animal and yet *no longer* being animal. It is the problem, in short, of "creation *ex nihilo*" which, once the possibility of a divine Creator is ruled out, becomes particularly tricky: how can "the human" both *be* and *not-be* "animal."] ("Derrida e il desiderio di porre fine a ogni vita" ["Derrida and the Desire to End All Life"], 101-102; emphasis in original).

Thanks to Iveson for providing me with his own translation of this passage, as well as for providing me with an unpublished draft of this article in English. Cf. Richard Iveson, "Being Without Life": "Today's humanist descendants of Darwin … lacking the fallback position of a divine Creator, must nonetheless be able to account for the emergence of the human as both coming *from* the animal and yet no longer *being* animal" (n.p.).

9. The somewhat clinical term "Colony Collapse Disorder" (CCD) was coined in 2007 to describe the mass disappearance of honey bees on the East and West Coasts of the United States the previous year. CCD has since been observed throughout North America and Europe, and its emergence linked to current industrial beekeeping practices as well as other industrial farming practices, especially the agricultural use of systemic pesticides such as neonicotinoids or "neonics." See CCD Working Group, "Fall Dwindle Disease"; George Langworthy and Maryam Henein (dir.), *Vanishing of the Bees.*

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