

Abstract

Bug is a poetic suite that discourses with the concept of “bug” through dis/ambiguations of its definitions—bug as insect, error, disease, surveillance system—to investigate the relationship of man with forces both invisible and taken for granted, such as the nature of fear, labor, ecology, divinity, and death.

Keywords

bug
insect
ecopoetry

B U G

ABNER DORMIENDO

BUG

1

Only if you view it as not a part of the inside
does the anomaly begin to not make sense,
bug, the moth realigning itself to some

constructed system, transcending its cocoon
of meaning spun by colonizers of categories
to insist its semantics on the technology

humanity has built with its prehensile limbs
to make up for its lack of antennae,
the futility of muscles in a continental

landscape connected by the most
aqueous of sinews, our attempt
to navigate the uncharted air

through fiber cables spindling like legs
of a hymenopteran, bug, that has kamikazed
into the hardware, the disruption is the design.

2

Only because the inside is not amenable
to external changes, bug, do we lose sight
Of what for the everyday was lost in sight.

For example, the windows that the sunlight
dramatically slides its back against to create
theater should be decorated this season

with moth wings vibrating like a hundred
tiny broken hearts, so the local flaneur reports.
But today that isn't the case, and the numbers

are crunched with a bit more urgency
year after year that we do not hear
our hearts break, evidence that the living

has been so graciously maintaining
that status. To see it with our own eyes
means that there are eyes intent

on seeing what used to be on hand
and then not anymore, and so it is that
the bug becomes more visible the more that it isn't.

3

Only when we begin to prevent the mind
from separating the mind from externals
can we be receptive of what is being transmitted,

bug, attuned to a certain disposition so as to
create an environment that poets sort of
legislate, as when a data of sparrows

is transmitted across the motherboard sky
that the trees in turn decode into leaf-speak.
Big clusters at first, then with diminishing returns.

There must be a connection here, as when night
has become drawn with unnatural quietude.
It isn't the wind but the idea of the wind

that makes the crickets hang their dial tones.
Who they are calling is not the question
but more to the point that the particulates

of the airspace become a factor, bug,
as to how their silence would be encoded
into the taxonomy of vanishing things.

4

Only when transmissions are not divorced
from the systems we deem “organic”
does the bug begin to sort itself out,

like metal antlering from the head of a field
to deploy infrastructure. Surely we seek
to be part of the greater schema, and we are

the manifold errata, bug, that mandible
away at the fleshy structures. We are not
the enemy we’d like to think, and we’d hate

to realize thereafter that our simian hands
are proof of what we are capable of, hemolymph
at the hem of our lab coats that should be

claimed as ours despite the coloration
or lack thereof. The clearer the blood,
the more inclined we are to ignore,

so we create heuristic mechanisms to prevent
this dismissal, bug, from pestering our view.
We are already it and what we have done too,

our wireless fidelities treated as feature,
not bug. Only then can we begin
to pull the corpse out of the microchip.

INSECT-INDUCED WORKPLACE FATALITIES

The operating manual for the forklift in our lungs
is lost in a compendium of operating manuals
we have long forgotten or have deliberately

ignored as a necessary tedium we could not be
bothered to learn. That's where they get you though,
the invisible mite attaching itself like a period

maliciously misplaced in a contractual clause,
something so malevolent in its smallness.
The idea of walking away from it all is alluring,

but we are in it now, yes we are, stinger and all,
and the more we pull away, our foreguts do as well,
a rejection of the notion of this selfsame refusal.

You should be so lucky to be part of the hive,
To be alive and writhing, and that's what matters.
Now get back to work.

CICADA AS WORKER

Tapering away the excess carapace
we proceed to evolve from one kind
of work to another. Here are my
chirps for an ounce of nostalgia. Have I
served you well? Will there be
a recommendation at the end
that would make my new exoskeleton
more bearable than the last? When we attach
our ghosts to the sensation of trees, pale
banners for the summer wind, does they scan
as festive, amicable? Are we likable
only when we are vulnerable? Will you
let our skins hang at your yard
to remind yourselves of what
a job well done looks like?
Or will you, as per usual,
when we molt—revolt
—hose us down?

OMMATIDIA

The often-smaller size of today's micro-eavesdropping devices and hidden cameras can make them hard to spot. Therefore, it's not always easy to tell whether or not you've been bugged.

As soon as you turn
 the key in its hole,
a mode of paranoia
 slicks the bleached
motel air where
 every prop both
visible and not
 is accessorial
to a crime
 as yet unknown,
though let me tell you
 that everything
is just as it was
 when you left it:
the teacup's ear
 cold from eaves-
dropping on the faucet
 crying to a basin
about the water crisis.
 The crack
on the window
 has never widened,
and the doorknob
 respects the privacy
of the hinge.
 But you won't
believe me
 even then. Who
could be there?
 Why would they care
about silly
 little you?

When your eyes
 landed on
the dead fly
 at the coffee table,
your visage
 compounded
in its dead-set
 cluster of eyes,
a centipedal fear
 began jerking
in your veins
 as for the first time
you remembered
 how it felt
to be truly
 seen.

BUG

We were infected by what we couldn't anoint,
An injurious germ that descended among us.
We were sick; the sickness was the point.

It entered our systems, it ached in our joints,
Something burned inside, which turned to numbness.
We were infected by what we couldn't anoint,

By what we could not name, creating a disjoint
Between what we knew and what we thought bound us.
We were sick; the sickness was the point.

Or was it? We were ready to disappoint
Everyone who, in search of answers, sought us.
We were infected by what we couldn't anoint,

But we tried anyway and found ourselves conjoined
By the hip by the very thing that confounded us.
We were sick; the sickness was the point

Till it was lost on us, the meaning purloined
By those who sought through illness to destroy us.
We were infected by what we couldn't anoint.
We were sick; the sickness was the point.

THE GADFLY REPORT

If you kill a man like me, you will injure yourselves more than you will injure me.

1

The gadfly reports that nature is under siege. Ongoing losses have been clearly demonstrated for better-studied groups of organisms. Terrestrial vertebrate population sizes

and ranges have contracted by one-third, and many mammals have experienced range declines of at least 80% over the last century. They have printed this out in several publications,

paywalled to ensure the replenishment of funds to secure the future of knowledge. A conglomeration of gadflies would like to know what it is that could be done,

but the wildebeests refuse to acknowledge this call unless it was that a certain amount is paid by a currency of the vertebrate's invention. They do not have the need

for outer shells no matter how dazzling they could get, three thoraxes unable to outweigh the mass of a sternum. They do have a heart, the gadflies insist, which must

mean something to a race of animals who prides themselves to be warm-blooded. The vertebrates agree, hold their hooves for a handshake, which almost squashes the gadfly.

2

The gadfly, in its pondering, sees the mountain's face
carved off like a flank of lamb. The vertebrates
chew on its nickel bones, its gravelly marrow.

Two things the vertebrates love: metal and concrete,
both a provision of the mountainous terrain.
The vertebrates use it for shelter, for passages,

guns and tanks and spaceships to escape in
when they have fucked up the earth for all its worth.
Being last on the priority list, the gadfly

has some strong opinions on the subject,
gathers all the flies in the vicinity. He realizes
there is not enough handcuffs to shackle

all the insects in the world, if they are only
resolved enough to get together, but the rest
are too busy despairing over the mountain's face.

3

The gadfly is restless at the tail end of the buffalo
swinging its appendage as the fly reports to the vertebrate
how the mud sings of sinkage, but he wouldn't listen.

It is only natural for the earth to accommodate
an existence the size of an overland mammoth.
That's how you know you are lord: the footprint

you leave must form its future crust. You, gadfly,
are nothing but a tiny silver cursor hovering in the air.
So it finds another rump, round as charred planets,

to inhabit a platform where declarations (more
like threats) can be made, or a section where
creatures of every kind intersect, a marketplace

of ideas drowned out by a courthouse of mating calls
or a beast catcalling the sun to disappearance,
the sky immolated from shame. The gadfly feels the same.

What to do in a world so embarrassed by its inhabitants?
And in a deeply fearless act of compassion to bring
attention to the climate crisis, the gadfly sets itself on fire.

4

The gadfly community has made clear that the scale and speed of necessary action are greater than previously believed. There is little time left

to avoid setting the world on a dangerous, potentially catastrophic, climate trajectory. It is the policy of the vertebrates that climate

considerations shall be an essential element of foreign policy and national security. The vertebrates will work with other countries and partners,

both bilaterally and multilaterally, to put the world on a sustainable climate pathway. The vertebrates will also move quickly to build resilience, both at home

and abroad, against the impacts of climate change that are already manifest and will continue to intensify according to current trajectories. And so on and so forth.

The gadfly takes these to mean: Go fuck yourselves.

MANTIS AS GOD

Where terror arises, so must awe.
In your language you call it sublime.
You must know this from my lime-
green face, emerald mandibles, raptorial
legs drawn together in benevolence:
I am your deliverance. Ask, prey,
and you shall receive. Pray,
and I'll show you my countenance—
but then I must take your head.

Notes

The title of “Insect-Induced Workplace Fatalities” comes from an article in *The Atlantic* by Joe Pinsker, where he reports that “bees account for the majority of on-the-job deaths involving bugs,” <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/08/insect-induced-workplace-fatalities-rare-but-real/375961/>.

“Bug” (“Only if you view...”) comes from the story of the first computer bug found on September 9, 1947 by a team of engineers: a moth stuck inside the hardware of a Mark II, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/sep9/worlds-first-computer-bug/>.

The epigraph for “Ommatidia” comes from an online article by Spycentre Security titled “How to Tell If Your House Is Bugged,” <https://spycentre.com/blogs/news/how-to-tell-if-your-house-is-bugged>.

The epigraph for “The Gadfly Report” comes from a quote attributed to Socrates. Different lines from the poem partially come from:

- “Insect Decline in the Anthropocene: Death by a Thousand Cuts” by David Wagner, et al., <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7812858/>.
- *The New York Times*’ report on Wynn Bruce’s death, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/24/us/politics/climate-activist-self-immolation-supreme-court.html>.
- “Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad”, from The White House’s website, published January 21, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>.