

Jonathan Baron

Like Insect

In response to the topic of this class, I wanted to look further into what it meant to “become insect” on an experiential basis. Although Hegel would suggest non-humans do not have *Dasein*, or existence and determinate being, this class gave me merit to imagine if they did and execute the hypothesis. Working with inspiration from Vilém Flusser and Louis Bec’s book *Vampyrotuethis infernalis*, I began with the premise that bugs experience existence, and that I could tap into that experience in some way. I developed some exercises and thought experiments to practice this idea to see what the outcome would be. Ultimately the work emulates Flusser’s serious phenomenological investigation, which has the underlying idea that we can never really understand some other being’s experience.

My inspiration for conducting the experiments started from researching ecologist Rafe Sagarin who utilized the decentralized nature of bugs like ants to strategize US military troops¹. Considering Teju Cole’s concept of the “affordances of terrain”², or a theory of design that guides us to certain places, I began to explore my environment like a bug. Like an ant would follow pheromones to decide upon its next task, I chose no specific task but to navigate the environment to look for a task or something to achieve. This led to the creation of routes on a map which were obscured from the context of

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/rafe-sagarin-who-merged-ecological-thinking-with-national-security-dies/2015/06/04/de90e3b8-0ac6-11e5-a7ad-b430fc1d3f5c_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.fd2877986ca6

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/27/magazine/take-a-photo-here.html>

GPS and photographic coordinates to emphasize the unclear direction of the experiment. While it seems counterintuitive to present a map that has no reference points that represent the real world, I chose to abstract them to extend the imagination of spacial navigation to focus on active spacial knowledge³. Furthermore, I wanted to emphasize the idea that spacial knowledge is something insects are experts in, but that we in many ways lack. It was a meditative experience, leaving me to focus entirely on the world around me.

I continued these experiments with dance and a thought exercise in simple phenomenological investigations. The dance was inspired by bug “dances”⁴ and bug movement in general, primarily channeling insect behavior in various states of distress, pleasure, and intrigue. This was particularly invigorating, because it allowed me to bypass my primary motivation for movement and experiment with movement that I have never done before⁵.

These experiments were put together and curated in a zine outlining their motivation, direction, and results. The zine was created using an inkjet and Risograph printers to create a simple, minimalist design to focus on the obscurity of the content. Having the project exist in this format allows viewers to spend more time with the work for longer than exhibition, as well as being easy to distribute to other viewers. I believe the zine contains the ideas needed to understand the complexity of phenomenological investigation into non-human being.

³ <https://aeon.co/essays/how-ant-societies-point-to-radical-possibilities-for-humans>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7ijl-g4jHg>

⁵ Link to dance video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KdM6Bb0qygE&t=17s>