



FIELD GUIDE TO BUGS & METAMORPHOSIS: GLITCHING PHOTOGRAPHY

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I have never been afraid of insects. My nickname was 'wasp girl' at school because I would usher them out of the classroom while the teachers flapped. In our home, insects were creatures to respect, not to fear. Later in life, I learned more about the vital roles insects play in our increasingly fragile ecosystems. I try to teach my son the same lessons of care and respect. Then, within weeks of moving to our new family home, the ladybirds came. Swarming on our patio, they scared my child and made my skin crawl. They went from the children's illustrator's favourite bug to an infestation that was definitely not welcome in our back yard. They crunched underfoot. We swept them away. And then, just as suddenly, they were gone.

Swarms and insects are a lesson to us in the power of the many, of ecological power and fragility, and the limits of our own tolerance. It was an uncomfortable masterclass that the ladybird swarm gave me. *Field Guide to Bugs & Metamorphosis: Glitching Photography* has a similar aim. It presents artworks and essays that mobilise bugs – as insects but also as digital glitches – as indicators of ecological, technological and ontological disturbances. 'Learn to read and live with them', the introduction to urges us. The book, along with the exhibition it accompanies, expands glitch art into the ecological realm of bugs. In terms of a digital error, the opening essay explains, 'bugs' are more systemic than 'glitches' and as such make useful entry points for transformation and resistance.

Reading a guide to an exhibition can feel like reading a play. Through the words, you build the space in your mind. Stage directions, no matter how exhaustive, remain suggestive. The reader can dip in to find a favourite passage, or be introduced to the work for the first time. There is ample drama in the artworks included in this book, although its structure is rhizomatic not narrative. Casts of nine fingered hands stretch out in concrete; deepfake faces of drag personas melt into one another; rapacious flowers snarl. The essays that comprise the latter third of the book are equally dramatic. A half-frozen ant screams during a child's experiment; teenagers swim deep in the ocean currents.

Resisting the large format books often published alongside exhibitions, this is a pocket book. From its trim size and dust jacket to the layout and the colour images accompanying the descriptions of each artist's work, the book is a conscious reworking of the Audubon Field Guides. This is a clever reflection of the book's 'buggy' subject matter. A key outlines the main themes – Ecology,



Decolonial, Insects, Photography/Technology, Queer – and each work is tagged with the relevant symbols.

Introductory essays orient the reader in the legacies and innovations of glitch art, photography and theory, and the transformative power of bugs. From analogue photography, painting and sculpture, to algorithmically rendered images, multimedia works and screen-based installations, the artworks offer diverse takes on the questions of errors, glitches and bugs. Accompanying essays, written by artists and critical media theorists, are a valuable addition. A shared ethics and politics across essays and installations is the use of 'buggy art' to question categories of control and to reveal the ontological and ecological damage wrought by a society that is seemingly replacing the ecological with a digital world built on binary structures and codes.

Far from a consolation prize for those who missed the exhibition, *Field Guide to Bugs & Metamorphosis* works as a standalone book. The book does assume an academic reader, ideally one versed in new materialism. Be they based in interspecies entanglements or cyborgs and machinic ontologies, the goal of disrupting assumed categories is a consensus, even an academic norm among critical theorists. The risk of falling into clichés, of looking for 'just another binary notion to overcome' is, in this book, avoided by the sheer quality of the artwork and writing.

While the ladybirds swarmed on the patio, another swarm hovered in the apple tree – a slice of the pastoral idyll, I thought, when we bought the house. The codling moth took over the tree, wrapping apples and leaves in webs. Caterpillars dropped from branches on fine threads. The apples hold tunnels bored by hundreds of *Very Hungry Caterpillars*. A sign of healthy biodiversity, I read. If possible, tolerate some loss of the crop. My son shows my mother the apples over FaceTime. 'A caterpillar can't eat a whole apple,' she tells him, her face pixellated as the bandwidth drops. We cut around the caterpillar tunnels and eat the rest. More apples fall on the lawn and by morning there are tiny baby woodlice crawling in and out of freshly nibbled holes.

— Julia Tanner