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Bibliophagus convictus.

(For ARTFORUM New York)

The recent discovery of a new species of insects of the order Hymenoptera is remarkable both for the insect itself and for the way it was discovered. The insect stores printed information in the collective memory of its hive, and it was discovered sitting on the brain of a writer. Of course: scientific progress has accustomed us to take new discoveries in our stride without paying much attention to them. Still: this one should be noticed.

Although the classification of Bibliophagus convictus does pose a few taxonomic problems, it is undoubtedly a kind of bee, and it could be mistaken for one, were it not for its unusual antennae. When not feeding or communicating, it wraps itself up in those antennae, and it will then look like a bit of dirt to be brushed away while reading. Which explains why it has escaped attention for so long. (The reader unfamiliar with the biology of hymenoptera in general, and of bees in particular, should consult the article on "Insects" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, where however Bibliophagus convictus is not yet mentioned.) One particularity of that species is that it feeds exclusively on printed matter: when offered a manuscript or a teletext, it will refuse it. Another particularity is that it will refuse to eat any text which had been eaten by another Bibliophagus before, even if that text were eaten in an altogether different edition or even in a different language. The physiological explanation for this oddity is this:

After having devoured a paragraph of a text, (Bibliophagus never eats single lines or entire pages), the insect chews on it. Its mouth secretes an enzyme called "criticase", which reacts with the printer's ink to form an acid called "informasis". The morcel is then rolled over and over again in the insect's mouth, until it forms a ball which is vomited into the mouth of another Bibliophagus. There the process of criticase secretion, informasis formation and mouth-to-mouth transmission is repeated, until all the members of the hive have chewed upon this particular bit of informasis. Then a messanger, (called the "mediator"), is sent to the next hive with the bit of informasis in his mouth, and thus a chain is formed which links all the Bibliophagi hives in the world.

During this process, parts of the informasis chewed are swallowed, enter the digestive apparatus and are processed in the typical insect fashion, (much as if they were pollen). In the queen, however, they penetrate the ovaries and infiltrate the genetic information. Thus each new text devoured will result in a mutation of the entire species, be it devoured by any insect whatsoever. This is why any "second reading" will result in cancerous growth within the genetic matter: "redundancy". Which poses a problem: quotations from old texts in new ones endanger the species, they threaten degeneration.

But this is not the most serious danger for the species' survival. Statistics show that the growth of Bibliophagus population exceeds the growth of printed texts inspite of the present text inflation. If one prolongs the two curves into the next twenty years, one can see that the species is approaching extinction, for lack of food. First cases of Bibliophagus cannibalism, (a sure symptom for species ex-

tinction), have in fact been observed. However, there are symptoms which point to the species' capacity to adapt to that adverse situation:

A rather obscure writer was found dead in his apartment, all the evidence pointing to suicide by poison. But the police was intrigued by the fact that the dead man had written an article against suicide, and that the article was found lying in manuscript beside the body. It ordered an autopsy which showed an anomaly in the brain, which, when examined, revealed a living Bibliophagus. This is how the species was discovered. It soon became obvious that the poison which had killed the man was informasis, which the insect went on secreting. The question which the police had to clear up was how the insect had got into the brain, and it was solved when it was found that the victim had gone through a skull trepanation. The surgeon who had performed the operation told the police, (rather reluctantly), that there were no clinical justifications for doing the trepanning: the patient had asked for it, and he had offered a considerable amount of money. The only reasonable explanation was that the insect has somehow convinced the man to have his skull opened in order to permit Bibliophagus to enter the brain. This explanation was shown to be correct after further investigation:

It was shown that fortuitous skull trepanation was not an isolated case, but part of an epidemic which spread from Manhattan to London and Paris, having at present the Franfurt book fair for its center. Most of the trepanation subjects refused to testify, until one was found who agreed to tell the story. He is a catholic theologian of those who question the official Church position. On reading his Bible he had come upon a Bibliophagus walking along the line in the text which says that it is not good ~~for~~ but man should ~~to~~ be alone, and the insect was quite obviously signalling to him with its antennae. The theologian is versed in deciphering difficult codes like Chaldean and Ugaritic notations, and he was thus capable of decoding the ~~the~~ gestures of Bibliophagus. A dialogue between himself and the insect was thus established, the man mimicking the antennae motions with his finger tips, which led to the skull trepanation and to the insedt's being implanted. The man refused to disclose the contents of the dialogue for two incongruous reasons: on the one hand he claimed that his entire testimony was not really his own but Bibliophagus', on the other hand he insisted in saying "the devil" instead of Bibliophagus. The man is now committed to an asylum.

A further important step in that investigation was made when it was found that there is an intimate similarity between the curve of Bibliophagus' population growth and the curve of the trepanation epidemic. Computers have calculated that this curve similarity being due to chance has a probability of one to fifteen thousand. We thus have to assume as a working hypothesis that the epidemic is a symptom for the species Bibliophagus' attempt to survive by incrementing text production in writers. And this hypothesis may throw a new light on the present cultural situation, by explaining why so many new texts are being printed at present.

Printing texts is no longer a useful thing to do: there are better ways to distribute information. Alphabetically coded texts are more easy to distribute

and to store as teletexts than as printed matter. The alphabet itself is no longer a useful code, and digital codes are more efficient. And if it comes to articulate, to distribute and to store information of a more complex order, audio-visual images like videos or sythetic computer images are better suited than linear notations. Thus the fact that texts continue to be printed, (and their number is increasing), presents a mystery, unless we explain it by the active presence of Bibliophagus within the printing process.

It is however not sufficient to suppose that writers of printable manuscripts and printers themselves are carriers of Bibliophagi. It must be admitted that Bibliophagus distribution is much wider. The fact that the uselessness of printing is so rarely discussed amounts to a conspiracy to silence the problem, and this conspiracy points to widespread infection of society by informasis. It may even be held that the so-called "developped" countries tend toward a situation where each and every brain will contain a Bibliophagus. And that this trend goes undiscovered due to informasis secretion. Systematic blood tests of the entire population to measure informasis contents is required.

The problem of parasitism will become central to future analysis of culture. At first sight, the symbiosis "homo sapiens-Bibliophagus convictus" looks like a case of an insect parasitizing the human body. This will not stand investigation. A better interpretation of this phenomenon is this: The printing press was invented with the purpose to feed Bibliophagus, Gutenberg's being the first brain which had a Bibliophagus implanted, and all the subsequent writers and printers being inspired by the Bibliophagus secretion. It thus appears that the entire Modern literature is a case of human mind parasitizing an insect. It should be borne in mind however that this interpretation itself was inspired by a Bibliophagus implanted within the brain of the present writer.