

‘Dissect the Insects’: Transformative experiences

Dalia Yassine
Researcher
Alfred Nobel Street, Samadi Bldg
Hamra, Beirut, Lebanon
daliayassin13@gmail.com

This research and practice looks to (re) conceptualize the relations between the natural and the social, and between the biological and the cultural. Nature, culture, bodies, texts all unravel into a limitless ‘force field of differentiation’, a complex interaction of phenomena. In consequence, I have chosen to tackle and combine the exploration of nature and technology while mainly focusing on ‘insect’ like traits and behaviours because it seems to me that there is quite an uncanny fit between the nature of microscopic mechanisms and the growth of our modern society.

Post-human research. Bodies of nature. Modern world. Multimedia installation practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

Our material world vanishes into a humanly made, abstract calculus of power and identity where we question, observe and interact with constructed worlds, and, in turn, gives birth to layers of views and responses in regards to the self, consciousness and environments.

This sort of post-structuralism pierces into a more post-human view on life, where we are drawn to highly developed, complex mechanisms and constantly pursue for more. The key is to look and penetrate into nature and its organisms in order to truly understand our changing relationship with the natural world and the advancement of technology.

2. BODY IN ITS ENVIRONMENTS

It is a known fact that environments have shaped human flesh in microscopic and profound ways. Alaimo (2010) vividly reminds us of Merleau Ponty’s observation, in which he states that “my body and natural things are not just conterminous but continuous with each other”. Such an observation pushes us to delicately review the relationship between the human body and the constant interchange with its environment. We are always, changing, evolving and ‘(re)discovering’ our sense of self and corporeality. In that logic, this human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be

composed, recomposed or decomposed by other bodies

“The vast stuff of the world and of ourselves, has been subdivided into manageable bits or flattened into a blank slate for human inscription” (Alaimo 2010), an idea which furthermore explores the interconnections and interchanges between human bodies and non-human natures, as well as the exploration of consciousness as a ‘traveling force’. As a result, it is safe to say that the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from the environment.

2.1 Trans-corporeal Beings

This overtaking idea pushes us to imagine human corporeality as trans-corporeality, a ‘body’ that is always intermeshed with the ‘more-than-human world’. Speaking from a post-human environmental perspective, could it be that genetics, evolution and environment are solidly imbricated in and affect the emergence as well as the unravelling of the human?

The recognition that the environment is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves has altered popular understandings of science and conceptions of the human self. The mere thought of cells renewing themselves and bodily interiors constantly reacting to change inside or out, and acting upon the world forms the idea of the biological body as changing and changeable. Human corporeality has been

abundantly associated with nature in Western thought and has been thought of as the 'ghost of biology' (page 5) because "we transform constantly in response to our surroundings and register history on our bodies...all bodies are shaped by their environments from the moment of conception, then there is never a time in which the human can be anything but trans-corporeal" (Alaimo 2010).

When putting into perspective the concept of the self in such cases one can't help putting into question the necessity of sensations and emotions. What is pain? And why should our body end at the skin? In consequence, understanding the substance of one's self as interconnected with the wider environment marks a profound shift in subjectivity.

Life becomes an experiment, and the body a scientific instrument. We grow to wonder more about the implications of daily life and start to ask ourselves 'what happens if I go here or touch this...?' At the end of it all, "what we 'recover' we necessarily rewrite, giving it meanings that are inseparably contemporary, giving it new discursive life in the present, a life it cannot have had before' (Alaimo 2010).

2.2 The Nature of Data and Data in Nature

Such a web of connections plays with a micro to macro structure of systems and nature. And so, as a basis, the source of my research has been aimed at insects, small organisms (animalcule) and cells, which suggest well programmed and 'more-than-human' characteristics. They 'renew' themselves when metamorphosing or transforming from cycle to cycle. They grow in quantities and spread into empires. And finally, they have survived

'Dissecting' an insect is like observing and understanding an ephemeral and complex system, where a sense of fragmentation and slight dissociation is intended. And once again, the choice of insects is due to their surreal and ever so growing traits and presence in nature that suggest minuscule forms of 'ordered consciousness'. But, on a general scope, I am looking at intricate natural organisms, 'bubbles of information', which mainly points towards the concept of nanoscale technology. In doing so, we are starting to interact with biology at its own level. And, mainly everything is moving down to the nanoscale, so how would we store information on such a small scale. To begin with, we need to look at how nature stores DNA; all spreads like a high reproductive system where consciousness travels.

In a way, the human is always the very stuff of the messy, contingent, emergent mix of the material world. This trans-corporeal outlook on people nudges us to compare it to software bugs perhaps,

'a flaw', in our highly programmed and ever-so growing system. Consequently, this 'bugged' system can lead us to behave in unintended ways when confronted with larger systems in which high '(re) productive' cycles surface. And so, these rapid alterations and transformations of the physical world give birth to hybrid ecologies, a convergence of physical and digital realms, where technology extends itself to the human condition. This forces us to no longer identify primarily with the body but with the consciousness that forms that body.

In that respect, we need to understand the latter, not as an organism or identity in itself, but as a system, or series of open-ended systems, functioning within other huge systems it cannot control but through which it can access and acquire its abilities and capacities.

Where does the body end and 'non-human nature' begin? And what ethical positions emerge from the movement across human and more-than-human flesh? Such questions arise when trying to converge into the physical and digital realms.

2.3 A Surreal Post-Humanism

Like an army of ants, we keep trying to overcome this basic human existence by constantly penetrating into new 'worlds'; worlds that are seemingly 'surpassing' our elementary nature(s) yet allowing us to constantly and rapidly investigate and utilize the forces within them.

As a result, we might have to recognize the disturbing possibility that future technological agents could disconnect us from 'usual' human life and society, which could in turn generate 'more-than-human' forms of existence that have little in common with our own.

Such a surreal and post-human extension of the human condition explores the limits of human existence and nature in the face of an 'out-of-control' technological culture, which furthermore leads to a pattern of "continual exploration and re-exploration of the possible and yet also the unrepresentable" (Alaimo 2010).

It is rather true that the natural world functions in a semiotic dimension, and from what I perceive, modern society keeps luring itself, further and further more, into breaking the 'code of meaning'. In that sense, it is nature that stays constant and culture that reveals limitless plasticity.

Data, signs and signals all make up branches of understanding(s), which leads us to convincingly believe that "world and flesh are utterly imbricated, because language and culture are not self-enclosed but are emergent within a force field of

differentiations that has no exteriority in any final sense" (Alaimo 2010).

3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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4. REFERENCES

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