

Life to Life  
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Suppose that there is an entity called 'life', which does not care about who you are, what you think, what you say, what you do, how you feel, how you love, how you live. Life that does not care about your life. Such an entity, or phenomenon, has been a source of inspiration and curiosity for humanity's activities throughout history, variously formulated as mythology, religion, humanities, sciences, art, technology and so forth. This is a conception of life that goes beyond the individual; life that does not coincide with who you are and what you do; life that cannot be acknowledged as such.

Understanding the human in a chain of relations between different systems in a wider environmental context, is an idea which has in recent years been challenging various fields of sciences and humanities that have historically revolved around the anthropocentrism, i.e. the idea of the human as the superior mind positioned above the world (typically seen in the Enlightenment and its related fields of study such as taxonomy). In the latter half of the twentieth century, so-called 'posthumanism' – the idea of radically going against anthropocentrism – emerged from the fields of philosophy and social science later incorporating scientific discourses in biology, physics, mathematics, cybernetics, neuroscience and so forth, bringing about a major shift in approaches to the question of the human. Now, the debate concerns how we can unfold the figure of human being as a consistent, seamless entity and dissolve it into a chain of reactions and relations to other creatures, environments or phenomena participating in the dynamism of molecular activities. The question is, how can we think of life in a way that does not distinguish human beings from all other phenomena in the world?

Nonetheless here one might see humanity's age-old desire for something that is disinterested in the individual life saturated with earthly concerns and sufferings; it is another call for a fabulous yonder, for a transcendental entity/state that can ease our everyday concerns as well as the horror of mortality, the idea of the end. Behind the posthumanist passion, there is an incessant endeavor to decompose the contours of the limit of human life into the endless motions of a microscopic world that appears more and more complicated along with newly developed technologies. Here, it becomes all the more obvious that the two streams of thought, beyond/below, visible/invisible, here/there, are persistently lurking in the form of an aseptic curiosity towards molecular phenomena, and towards invisible, minute life/non-life, from bacteria and viruses to genetic agents. The desire for delving into the invisible world of viruses replaces the ascensional desire for divine entities conventionally seen in a religious belief system. Ascending to the metaphysical world, descending to the minute world of matters and creatures, these two modes of thinking eventually bite each other's tails.

The urge for transcendence is the characteristic of humanity's intelligence and curiosity that inevitably conceives life as detached from itself. It is the desire for pursuing something that does not coincide with oneself, that goes beyond/below the individual being, the desire for illuminating the complicated networks of the unknown system of forces that interweave with human life. This urge can not stop looking at the world from the perspective of the transcendental eye, either of god or of virus, or

even of community or society, if I may define transcendence as a phenomenon oriented to surpass a singular mode of existence.

There is 'life' that does not concern us, but also there is life that does concern us, thriving on the singularity of the individual interior world – emotion.

In the face of 'life' driven by transcendence, twisted into the complicated relations of matters and forces, what we call violence does not exist. Or at least, violence is not an incidence to single out among all other phenomena in the world. Violence can be identified as such only when moral judgment is brought in, which is a system of thinking unique to the human. To put it another way, the judgmental criteria such as good/bad, rational/irrational, constructive/destructive, harmless/harmful, is nothing but an archive of stories that constantly looks for the consistency of what holds together the figure of the human; whether you call a certain phenomenon violence, love, affection or hatred is as fictional as literature, and nature has different archives of its own stories, we too narrate our lives and the world in our own grammar.

But this does not mean that nothing is taking place in this place of fiction. In an attempt to name a certain phenomenon, create a narrative around it, and experience it as a distinct state, something is certainly taking place. Violence as such does not exist in light of the wider systems of nature where the figure of the human is constantly to be decomposed into relations and forces. For nature, violence is just a distortion oozing out of a system that informs us of possible movement and transformation. However, violence comes to exist in an experience of narrating it, of isolating it from other phenomenon, because it provokes an emotional reaction from a certain creatures, including human beings. Whatever the definition of violence is, it is, for nature, one type of force; for the human, it takes shape as an emotion.

The question of violence inevitably relates to the issue of emotion and feeling, and the issue of empathy – the transmission of one thing/state/motion to another. Emotion is one of the most powerful carriers of a certain state from one place to another, whether in the form of anger, pleasure, love or boredom, in the kaleidoscope of the human's psychic world. For nature, emotion is a tool of the transmission of forces which appears to us as an unbearably painful phenomenon. Emotion, which apparently seems to be interested and engaged in the personal life, is the very driving force that realises transcendence through the promise of something being transmitted into somewhere else. The world is nothing but a part of this contagious process between different entities and modes of being, constantly looking for the carrier of forces. Through emotion, the individual human being comes to be incorporated into this contagious cycle of life.

Philip Hale's works deal with 'life' that engulfs violence in the form of emotion, transforming it into the force of transmission. His paintings consist of layers and layers of fragmented images taken from the reservoir of his visual experiences in contemporary society. In his sombre collages of grey images, one might see any violent circumstances of natural/man-made disasters, attributing them to some specific events in warfare, social and political conflicts or accidents. Violence, as a sign of distortion in systems that formulate our society and world, is a guide for his visual layering. In crashed cars, a blob of deformed male bodies and animals, decomposed buildings, which seems to signify the breakdown of the masculinity of

our persistently anthropocentric mind, Hale accumulates distortions, compresses them into a stratum, then cracks open again, layers another images and shapes, until the significance, or the narrative of each layer, disappears into another. Rather than coming to a collage that expects a 'new' meaning emerging out of the juxtaposition of different visual orientations, his painting looks for the disappearance of one image into another, one narrative into another, one system of seeing into another, being haunted by the desire to move away from what it is. As a result, Hale's images throw us into an accumulation of ambiguity and plausibility. In the endless reflections of resemblances, they evoke in us an obscure feeling of anxiety that makes us long for meanings and stories behind the shapes.

As a study of image, in the last few decades, art history has employed psychoanalytical narrative for excavating complicated images, lush with moss of stories. It is an effective methodology to demonstrate in an image the intricate stratum of simulacra of stories, formulated in relation to various things and events in personal, social and historical sphere. On the other hand, psychoanalysis is nothing but a form of literature in a strict sense because it can hardly pin down an object of study that is physically measurable. The psychoanalytical urge is an urge for stories, and it is the desire for going beyond what appears, leaping to the bigger narratives that can encompass broader events in the physical and psychological world. After the layers of stories are peeled away from an image, what remains there is neither truth nor origin, it is merely a fantastic energy of the human life that has been yielding countless numbers of stories throughout history, disinterested in their truthfulness or goodness. Here life reveals itself as a force of narration that never stops wanting to connect/transmit one thing to another.

Hale's ominous images, prone to violence, invokes in us of this unquenchable energy of life that continues to render us emotional and disfigured; departing from what is told, what is seen, what is, for the sake of an ever-receding transmission and transcendence.