CARTOGRAPHIES OF MEMORY AND AFFECT: NOMADIC SUBJECTIVITIES

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Abstract: This visual essay maps an event, the lines of affect produced through the interconnections between memory/time, space/place, and the virtual/actual. The assemblage begins in the middle of these interconnections: lines of text interwoven with intensity and affect. As posthuman theory urges researchers to consider subjectivity as unbounded and nomadic, a process of becoming with the world, this article takes up arts-based methods to map and inquire into the flows between death and becoming as a generative, embodied, and productive process. This article suggests the methodological possibilities for arts-based analysis and inquiry to engage the entangled materiality of the posthuman present.

Death is the event that has always already taken place at the level of consciousness. As an individual occurrence it will come in the form of the physical extinction of the body, but as event, in the sense of the awareness of finitude, of the interrupted flow of my being-there, death has already taken place. (Braidotti, 2013, p. 133)

Sunday.

I was enveloped in blankets.

I remember dreaming, falling.

my hand reached for the phone through tangled sheets,

voice
cracking
with
morning
Dad.

your mom.

she…
…in the night.

he'd called an ambulance,
they were on their way.

He had to
go.

I laid back down. I'd never gotten up. I pulled on clothes or something I must have
because I left.

Outside.
It was cold for April.

My cheeks tingling,   hands bare.

The ground was hard, crunchy.
Black, the cat slinked by.

I don't know what to
do.

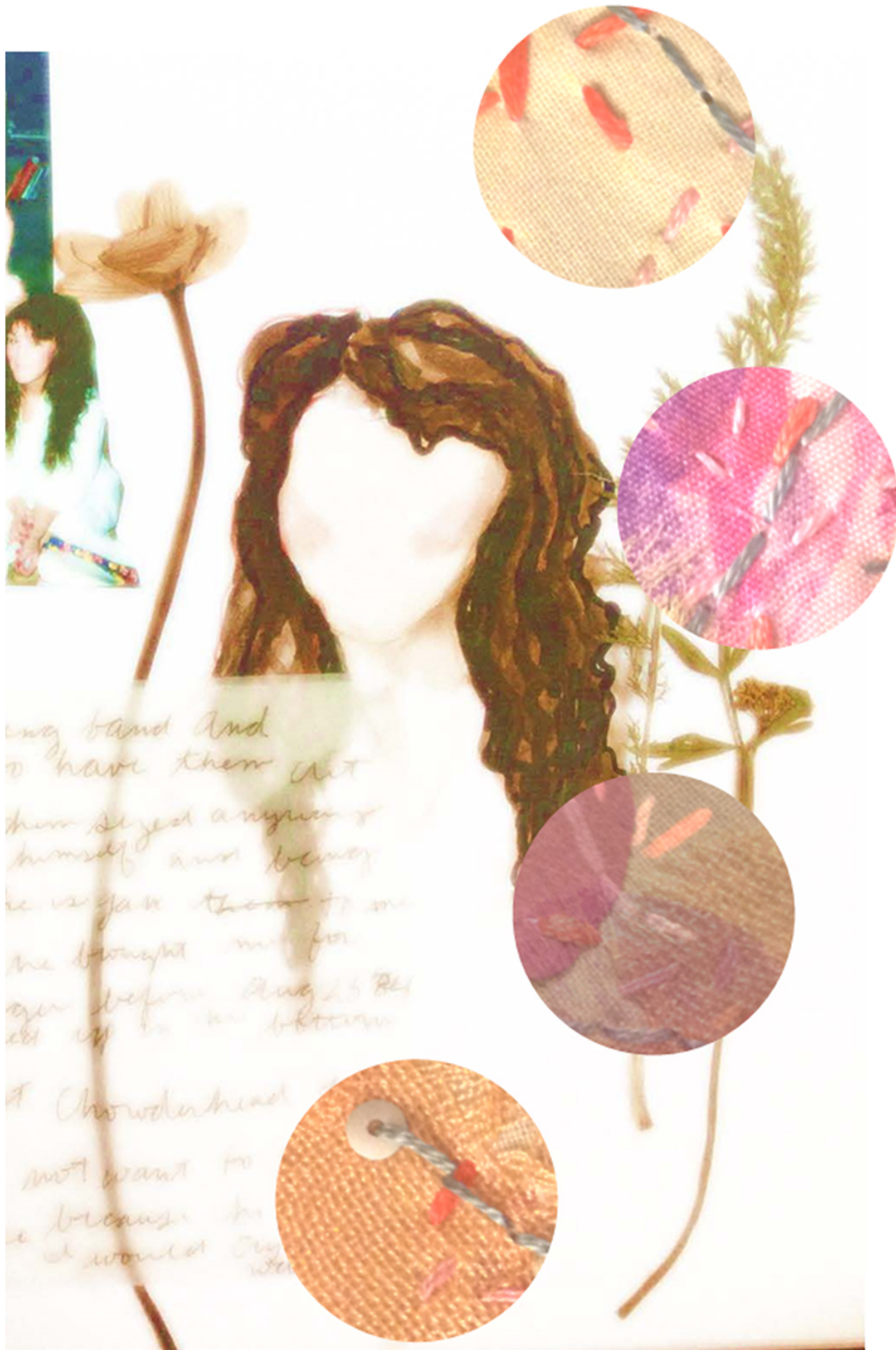What are you supposed to do?

How do you begin?

As though part of a dream, an injured bird against the brown dirt and grass.
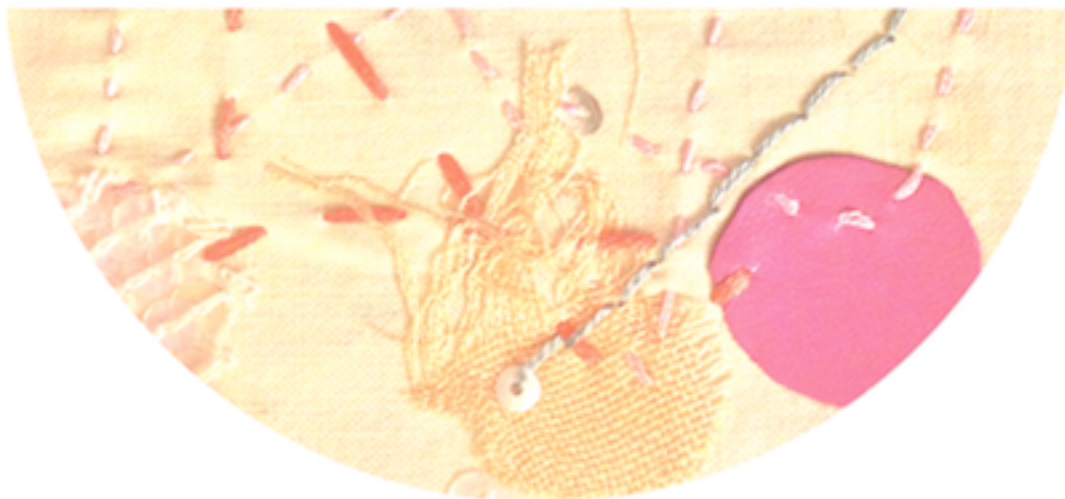Fragile, shivering, it lay on the ground. Cupped in my hands.
The cat.
Overlapping of life and death and death and life.

A string of words, particular words, an encounter with a configuration that produced an event, embodied through shaking hands, quiet tears, an urge to write—to create. Reading Braidotti's (2013) words about becoming-imperceptible, about death, shot through me, lines of affect pulling me to the computer. The encounter of a configuration of text and bodies, past and present, began a movement through complex and layered cartographies, unpacking the non-linear connections and interrelations between entities and becomings (Braidotti, 2013). Zigzagging between writing and artmaking, this article continues in the middle, mapping the entangled relations and lines of intensities produced through this encounter. Massumi (1995) explains these intensities as affect, the emerging action and expression of potential, "where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness, where outsides are unfolded and sadness is happy" (p. 91). Mapping produces a rhizomatic cartography, moving from intensity to intensity, a geography of relations that exceeds the limits of temporality to produce new time zones in which this creating/thinking takes place.

I use arts-based methods to map an affective assemblage of media: text-photographs-sequins-thread-cloth-watercolor-ink, an assemblage that together aims to illustrate the process of becoming-nomad, the generativity of intensities and affects, and the event of the encounter. The process of creating art embodies shifts and movements towards transformation and complexity, enacting nomadic becomings that embrace multiplicity and relationality (Braidotti, 2006). Arts-based research aims to expand representation through non-discursive means, using multi-sensory and aesthetic methods to deepen and complicate our understanding of states of affairs, experiences, and conditions (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Artful practices afford an embodiment of posthuman theories,[1] an entanglement with materiality and affect that establishes empathy, alters perception, or disturbs the status-quo (Barone, 2008). Through artful and aesthetic methods, this cartography enacts a performative becoming that has the

"potential to produce evocative, ethical, and failed practices that result in a telling with the potential to open the gaps and produce different knowings" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 314).

This is a cartography of memory, an arts-based mapping that artfully explores the connections and intensities between bodies-materials-texts-memory, taking up the unlikely connections between a paragraph, typed on a page, a memory, burbling up unexpectedly, and the body, movement-expression-action. By engaging these connections, I inquire into the possibilities for posthuman research, playfully experimenting with notions of truth and knowing through artful mapping, juxtaposing and layering materials and texts. Methodologically, mapping aims to create the lived event with an attentiveness to relations and interconnections of my embodied becoming-in-the-world. Moving with and through concepts such as mapping, tracing, and becoming imperceptibly brings forth aesthetic moments that spark and glow, connecting to unexpected encounters and possibilities in arts-based and post-qualitative inquiry.

Events

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe an event as a disruption, a dislocation of thinking, a product of a synthesis of forces that signify and point to the dynamics and intensity of interactions and relations. An event is not a particular state or happening, but something made actual through relations, the potential immanent within a confluence of forces. Zigzagging across modalities is an event, a coming together of forces, intensities, flows, that overlap time, space, and place to becoming something different (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Thus, the memory of my mothers death itself is not new, but what it produces, through interaction with text and body, is a becoming. Becoming was embodied in the forceful movement of hands on keyboard as I felt compelled to expel, to confront this moment that had been caught in my consciousness. The lingering affect of this moment in the days and weeks after found its way into sketch memos and collages, resonating, and becoming. There was something specific about *that* moment that produced these affects/intensities. I read the same passage now, and the event does not repeat itself, it is not a reflex or recognition of passage-memory in a linear pattern. Indeed, I cannot, months later, identify what particular piece of the configuration (text-keyboard-body-time-space) produced such a reaction.

MacLure (2013) urges us to think beyond representation, to pull apart the sense-making structures that gird and structure language and research. The immanent, always-already-ness of death leads to recognizable and repeated sense-making practices: scheduled casserole and hot dish deliveries, dividing up the objects left behind. Words masking, softening, and striating affects, towards a sanitized and

disembodied death. Through sense making the affect of death is lost, much like the word death or dying is lost. A call and response: "she passed away" – "I'm sorry for your loss," propositions that slip around the edge of death. This series of propositions situates us further from the intensities of affect reflexively, separating affects and intensities from the immanence of the event of death (Braidotti, 2013). Through these practices, death mythologizes the being-that-was:
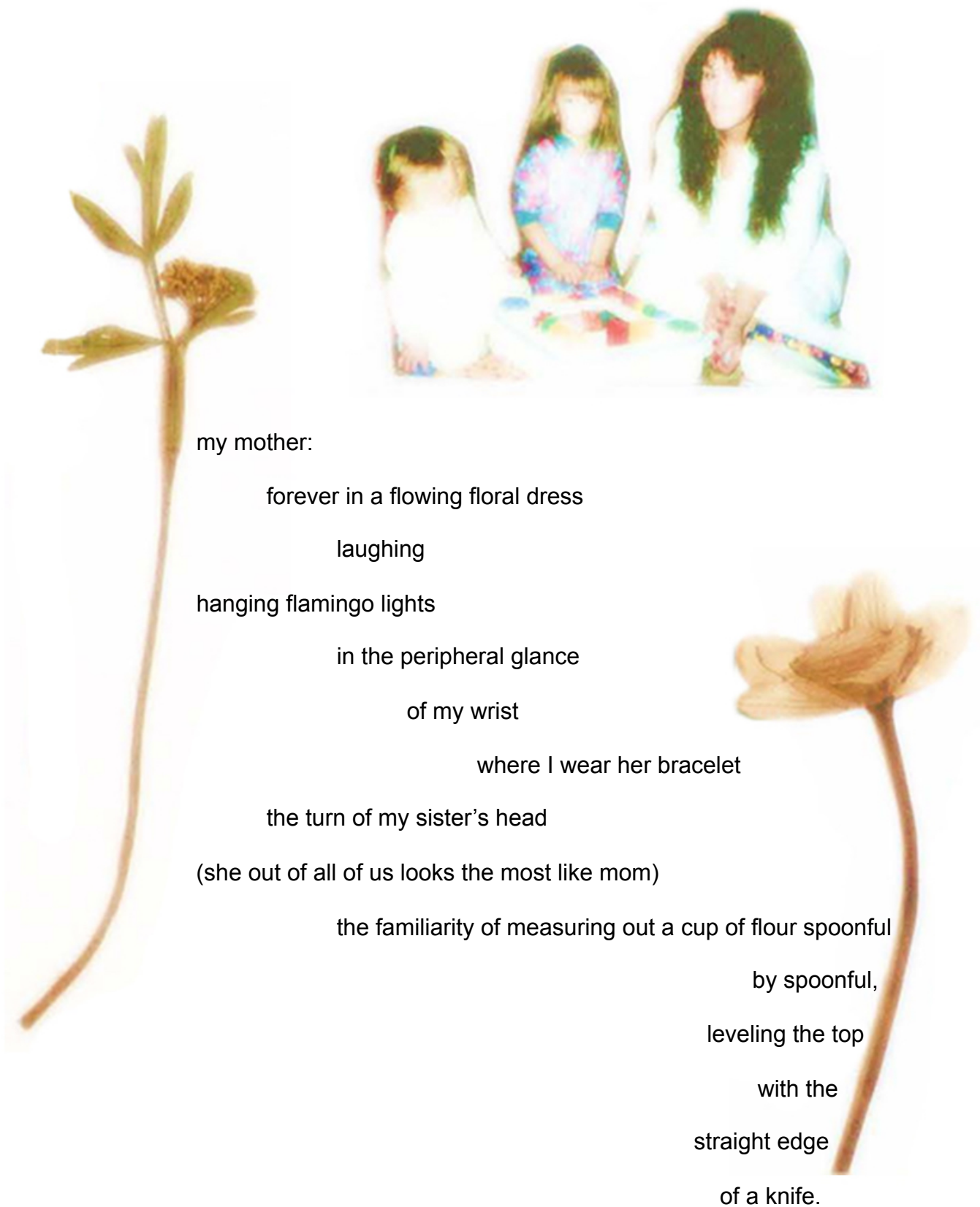
my mother:

    forever in a flowing floral dress

      laughing

hanging flamingo lights

      in the peripheral glance

        of my wrist

          where I wear her bracelet

   the turn of my sister's head

(she out of all of us looks the most like mom)

      the familiarity of measuring out a cup of flour spoonful

         by spoonful,

       leveling the top

       with the

     straight edge

      of a knife.

Through the striations of these patterns a smooth space is created around death, a rhizomatic series of connections, intensities, affects, and flows that make possible the embodied viscerality of memory in some other configuration of place and time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Becoming Imperceptible

Through this rhizome—an ever-variating and expanding series of connections and intensities—the atomized self is disrupted, becoming imperceptible (Braidotti, 2013). In this embodied event, place and time are disrupted, folded and made flat, making possible new relations and becomings. I become imperceptible, "merging into this generative flow of becoming… evanescence of the bounded selves and their merger into the milieu" (Braidotti, 2013, pp. 136-137). The event of remembering, of being moved to remember, produces the body differently in the world. Through a series of connections and flows what it means to be/belong in the world is expanded beyond the body, beyond a bounded moment of a particular time and place. Turning to memory as unbounded and ever flowing through space and time makes possible movements of exploring and experiencing connectedness and relations with the world around us, an ecology of belonging.

The ecology of belonging produced through these connections and relations, through my writing-creating, maps an embodied and artful way of knowing and being in the world, a reflective and interconnected rhizome that folds and flattens. Braidotti (2013) reflects that "memory works in terms of nomadic transpositions, that is to say as creative and highly generative inter-connections which mix and match, mingle and multiply the possibilities of expansion and relations among different units or entities" (p. 167). Writing with affect, following these interconnections and intensities, tracks Braidotti's urge to map nomadic subjectivities beyond simple linear cause and effect towards the interconnections of life, death, and being/becoming.

Tracings

Mapping in the middle of these interconnections leads to other assemblages, different relations and intensities of memory, death, and affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). A segment of this multimedia map traces to vellum shaky handwriting from a small envelope that tells the story of my parents' engagement. In another encounter, this envelope held the wedding band from the story, a wedding band that sits on my hand as I delete and add words to this article, this mapping. This tracing (of words, of layered memories and affects) plugs into the encounter of the memory of death and Braidotti's

text, and through this entangling, becomes differently. It transcends its role as a container to pass on an object, and the story it tells, resonating in the encounter of text and becoming. It maps onto the event, creating ripples and texture of subjectivity, of daughterhood, motherhood, womanhood. Becoming-woman, emitting particles, intensities, and movements of nomadic subjectivities that produce a molecular woman (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Following the lines of this event deconstructs bounded subjectivities and knowings, illustrating subjectivity as nomadic, flowing, complicated, and nuanced. A line of text leads to a visceral memory of movement, cupping a tiny shivering bird, the bite of cold in the air, tracing handwriting, a different series of connections and memories that becomes possible through arts-based inquiry. Garoian (2013) describes art as producing liminal spaces, making visible what could previously only be imagined, a transgressive and transformative practice. Art is the prosthesis, the extension of our always incomplete bodies, that make the resonance of these affects possible in a way that is unknown through text alone (Garoian, 2013). Art produces an emergent space of affects, where disassociated bodies and materials (text-memory-body-envelope) are brought together in juxtaposition. Through art, these relations and connections pick up texture, they become dense, they resonate with greater pressure in the world, the fleeting immanence of a memory becoming actual, producing a different series of affects (Garoian, 2013).

Rearranging the Map

Braidotti's words sparked the creation of a cartography, a string of text connected to an assemblage of affects and intensities. I return to them to put their tracing back upon the map that has been created through this inquiry. Putting the tracing back on the map offers a methodological entry point for transformation; how has the tracing made new lines with the map? How has the tracing-map led to new assemblages and new maps? How have we rearranged the map in process? (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Mapping through text-image-writing-creating cultivated methodological possibilities of approaching the event of my mother's death that led to new assemblages and new maps. Thus, turning to the arts allowed me to follow the fleeting resonances and possibilities of this encounter, pointing outwards through visual methods. Just as death/grief/mourning transcends language, artful practices offer the possibility to explore "potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance" (Stewart, 2007, p. 3). The cartography created through this inquiry illustrates the possibilities of arts-based

analysis to create connections and relations not possible through text alone, to rearrange the map-in-process.

Arts-based inquiry illustrates the deconstructed subjectivity of the posthuman researcher, demonstrating how we might "transcribe [the] cosmic intensity" of post human nomadic subjects, and offer possibilities for new becomings and new entanglements with the world (Braidotti, 2013, p. 166). This deconstruction is made possible through an analytic process where subjectivity transcends the boundedness of language through an entanglement with bodies and matter, embodying our ethical entanglement with the posthuman present (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). The arts-based analysis of this inquiry exists in tandem and entangled with the text, suggesting artful practices as a legitimate method for inquiry and/as analysis. Artful inquiry makes possible a posthuman methodology that looks to textures and vibrancies, evocative glowings of encounters and events, not because of some definable essence of the human condition, but because of the connections they produce and what they make possible.

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ENDNOTES

1. This visual essay takes up posthumanism as described by Braidotti (2013) following Deleuze, who describes the critical posthuman subject as relational, multiplicitous, and internally differentiated, all the while remaining grounded and accountable to particular places and times. Braidotti's posthumanism seeks to respond affirmatively to the present through embracing the asymmetrical starting locations of embodied and embedded subjectivities through collectivity and relationality, a "politics of location" (p. 51). Posthumanism, following Braidotti, is less about rejecting humanism (moving away from an anti-humanist position) and instead seeks to create affirmative cartographies that recompose material and vital bonds between bodies (human and nonhuman alike).