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THE PROCESS

Becoming D|other: Life as a Transmuting Device

By Astrid Joutseno

ABSTRACT

This essay explores the possibilities of extending the presence of an “I” of human (and nonhuman) self on the cusp of death or extinction. Reconfiguring loss of life as a story of hope through digital archiving, and viewing life as a device of transformation, the author weaves experiences and theory of illness time together with a new concept of D|other. The author employs D|other in illustrating what is taking place with material and digital relationality.

KEYWORDS

digital life; archives; death; illness time

On Time

Living with stage IV breast cancer as a mother, doctoral student, and working artist places me on the verge of multiple edges. I hover on a threshold. This essay explores the potential of a digital archive becoming a hopeful resistance against annihilation by asking what if, instead of a finite ending, death were reconfigured as a leaving and life as a device of transformation? I portray archiving as an extension of subjectivity, a vehicle for the “I,” which travels through life, narrative, and time. While focusing on these questions through a dying mother’s perspective, I carry along a consideration for nonhuman lives on the cusp of a “double death”: extinction.¹ In order to configure the “I” slipping between material and virtual existence, this essay introduces the concept of D|other.

This article begins with *illness time* as a moment from which to reconfigure subjectivity and life. I then introduce ways of archiving as an extension of mattering. Becoming D|other imagines a digital “I” with care and responsibility for others, starting from the point where M|other turns into D|other. At the end of the essay, I discuss death and extinction with the help of D|other, as well as the notion of leaving. As part of my intersectional feminist methods, I propose that questions function as careers of ideas, possibilities or pathways which lead to yet unknown places|times,

where something remains to be shared. This method produces hope through a sharing of possible directions. As Aurora Levins Morales proposes, “questions can be as good as an answer. ... When researching the history of lives whose history is poorly documented, often all we can do is point to the gap.”²

My relationship to time is in flux. Time’s unfolding is sensed differently from the perspective of a plant, a mineral, and a human in different phases of life. In Anna Tsing et al.’s *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, the limitations of thinking of time as linear are illuminated through the example of lichens on gravestones: “Many kinds of time—of bacteria, fungi, algae, humans, and Western colonialism—meet on the gravestones of Petersham. The ghosts of multispecies landscapes disturb our conventional sense of time, where we measure and manage one thing leading to another. Lichens may be alive when we are gone. Lichens are ghosts that haunt us from the past, but they also peer at us from a future without us.”³

As the presence of lichens suggests, time is entangled in the experiences of subjects. Karen Barad works with quantum physics, Afrofuturism, and Indigenous conceptions of time to break down the notion that time is a linear construction from material birth to death. She uses the concept of the *thick now* to illustrate the present as a stretched moment which contains the past and the future.⁴ Becoming ill with what will be the cause of my time’s end—an illness that will also, until that point, define my existence—has flooded my experience of time. I have landed in the present wanting to care for it. If living is layered with roles that define desires and mark wants, then living with the acute awareness of perishing touches time with something burning cold. The concept of *illness time* suggests that it is this deformation of time that interjects into imagining the loss of self—and then the creation of self with this knowledge. Illness transforms time, reshaping its meaning, deforming hopes, and illuminating the past anew. Illness questions time as a measurement of living. Illness relocates selfhood, queering the relationship to it and material bodies. Here I am thinking along the lines of *crip time* as put forward by Alison Kafer in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Kafer points out that crip time not only flexes time to adjust to disabled bodies and their differing needs against the social norms, but changes movement in time, thus criticizing time itself, arguing for the right to be disabled, different, and ill against the compulsory norms of able-bodiedness and the striving always to *get better*. Crip time works against curative time, which is the understanding of disability and illness as a passing state from which a future time will free us.⁵

What if the now of *illness time* could be accepted as a place of knowing and insight? What if the now of nonhuman measures of time were to

be cast as a horizon of hope? The mutation that takes place on the cellular and DNA levels transforms a material experience of time, but that is not all. It metamorphoses relationships to environment, self, and other. It offers views into the vast perspectives of birds or clouds. I suggest that illness time is a *moment* from where people rearticulate perspectives to life, to the “I,” to subjectivity, as well as to posthuman lives.

I acknowledge the limits of my ability to understand what constitutes living, belonging, existing, leaving traces—having an impact. When time as a concept crumbles, what appear are relations—everything in between—everything that binds, knots, or breaks away. Donna Haraway addresses this relationality with “tentacular thinking.” Haraway extends her list of living tentacular animals to nets, networks, It critters, and clouds. From this perspective, life is lived “along lines ... and not at points.”⁶ This description of intense relationality and Haraway’s playful yet serious ways to combine the knowledges of the nonhuman and human guide me while I imagine life as a device of transformation. Attuned to troubles and without forced positivity, I follow Rosi Braidotti toward affirmative ethics, choosing to look for hope while acknowledging the sadness around losses in the Anthropocene.⁷ Does this signify hope in the extinction of nonhuman lives or in the death of an ill person? No. Yet hope is necessary in bearing responsibility for the impact of living. In the following, I combine Braidotti’s hope with Haraway’s embrace of playful relationality to create a method of thinking about the interconnectedness of lives as networks, even when things appear at times unpoetic, accidental, or seemingly haphazard.

Archiving as an Extension of Mattering: Talking with My Child

One morning, I was reading the news on my phone as my child prepared for preschool. I casually told her that scientists are changing their interpretations of how the Neanderthal and Denisovan humans disappeared. Through examining small pieces of bone, researchers have concluded that Neanderthals, Denisovans, and *Homo sapiens* had children with each other more often than was believed. Their disappearance may have more to do with genetic meshing and gentle caring than with violent, intentional killing. I conclude that this is the most recent interpretation. My story sparks a discussion extending into death, life, transformation, and connections to artificial intelligence. After she leaves for preschool, I remain seated, scribbling in a notebook: oxygen binds me to this planet. From the perspective of the stars, I am bound here just as fish are to water. The environment keeps me alive. After death, there is no dependency on breath. I will ascend from the Blue, pass the thin oxygen of the

upper stratosphere and go, unbound by the laws of gravity or the fragility of the body. Why do I hold on to this idea of the rise, which permeates religious imagery of death? Is the desire for artificial intelligence a secular dream of an afterlife or a desire to surpass vulnerability, a yearning to extend living and being into faraway places or different times? Does moving forward equal survival? As I narrated a story of change in time through loving “contamination” to my child, I added that her children may already be human only partly, with artificial intelligence for the other part. Her children will surpass the borders defining human and nonhuman. I sprinkle hope around. I frame the wish around the inventions of medicine as desire-to-overcome-vulnerability. (Affectively, I am tracing the path of curative time at this point.)

In our chat, we acknowledged the memories and life experiences of our great-grandparents—how they moved into the next generation through narratives and material objects that used to belong to them. We imagine continued subjectivity through machines after the human body no longer sustains life. We go further, pushing past the sadness of “what happens to bodies,” the inevitable feelings of loss. Viewed this way, my vulnerability to the uncontrollable elements—the cells in my body—does not appear as much like a tragedy unfolding; instead, it becomes a process of transmutation. I am a joint. My child and I see that although my death will be the old-fashioned kind, we are on the cusp of extended life.

In telling the narrative of the past, I am doing my work as a M|other. I pass on a thread with which to weave the now and connect what is to come. I work with time. As I mourn the limits of my imagination and inability to know how this transition of selves will take place, I celebrate its possibility. I am filled with desire to remain beyond death. I yearn for connection to others. Connection is hope.

What about the extended subjectivities of nonhumans? Is their relational existence over without a digital archive or an artwork left behind? Is the idea of an archive as an extension merely limited to humans becoming trans, digital, or cyber? I feel guilt over what dies to facilitate my survival, but the evolution of affective responses may be a wasted language when it comes to the extinction of animals and plants. Mourning for extinction is dependent on human definitions of worth linked to capitalist ideas of everything as a resource, and the affects may be hindering my ability to see the lingering presence of what I think is gone. Tsing et al. remind me of the ghostlike ways in which the presence of what is gone is still affecting the planet: “Ghosts, too, are weeds that whisper tales of the many pasts and yet-to-comes that surround us. Considered through ghosts and weeds, worlds have ended many times before. Endings come with the death of a leaf, the death of a city, the death of a friendship, the

death of small promises and small stories. The landscape grown from such endings is our disaster as well as our weedy hope.”⁸ Could the archive, then, be such a landscape growing out from endings into weedy hope?

Becoming Narrative

Media and technoscience are bubbling with images of the future seen through a techno-oriented late-capitalist lens, which posits development as an ideal that goes hand in hand with ownership and the resourcing of all that is living as data and capital, as Rosi Braidotti points out. Braidotti calls the focus on human DNA and gene technologies and digital extensions of life on social media a “matter-ialism.”⁹ She warns against technomysticism, saying that “projecting of the physical self into an artificial environment feeds into a dream of terminal identity outside the body, a sort of ‘cybersubject’ that feeds into the New Age fantasies of cosmic redemption through technology.”¹⁰ She underscores the futility of eternal undying subjectivity, warning against forsaking life over a fantasy of limitless existence in a material-less virtual space|time. I skirt around the danger, conjuring myself into a future—forsaking life yet going on as an “I”—both mourning the limited possibilities of existing in this body as a sick woman and imagining a material|virtual slide as resistance, which does not devalue the material and living, but redreams existence through a transmutation.

I am collecting an archive from which to burst out in ligaments of affect, thought, and expression after the material “I” has metamorphosed into another consistency. Currently, my work is to make sense of living while archiving the process. I work in multiple media simultaneously and view these strands as interlinked methods of becoming. For one, I have published an autobiography, *Viimeinen kirjani: kirjoituksia elämästä*.¹¹ Second, I am writing a doctoral dissertation at the University of Helsinki, weaving themes of mothering and illness into academic research. As a songwriter, I combine experience with poetics to explore life through music. It is through the writing and recording process of my album *From the Bed and Beyond* that I dealt with my first breast cancer diagnosis in 2014.¹² I narrated myself back into being in songs about the fear of death, sadness over what was lost, and the hope that continues to seep in. Life writing leaks into all areas of my work. As the location of “I” becomes readjusted by *illness time*, so does the political desire to keep working through this experience of living.

To theorize the “I” acknowledging the work done on digital life writing and automediation¹³ and matricentric feminism¹⁴ is to look for an understanding of multiple simultaneous forces: What if the “I” is a more resilient and lively being than material bodies? What if the green trunk in my

living room full of handwritten journals from 1989 onwards is a version of “I” that has a more persistent life than my embodiment ever will? What if my digital diaries and writing stored in iCloud will outlive their writer by hundreds of years? What if “I” is ever present and the body a faulty and transient vessel (for want of a better word, although I dislike “vessel” as it reproduces the dichotomy between mind and matter)? What if ideas of strength and weakness smudge and hide the staying power of writing and narrating selves? What if the vulnerability of bodies makes them the sacred along with the planet, rather than dirty, shameful, and exploitable weaklings? And, as Braidotti asks, what if the “I” is just passing? What if effects instead of cognition are a fruitful way of approaching the world, as Braidotti formulates: the “I” is created and sustained “through affectivity and not cognition: as singularity, force, movement, through assemblages or webs of interconnections with all that lives. The subject is an autopoietic machine, fueled by targeted perceptions, and it functions as the echoing chamber of *zoe*. This nonanthropocentric view expresses both a profound love for Life as a cosmic force and the desire to depersonalize subjective life-and-death. This is just one life, not *my* life. The life in ‘me’ does not answer to my name: ‘I’ is just passing.”¹⁵ Yes, and what if the “I” in its passing through time and material embodiment is here to stay?

I am increasingly aware and intentional when I regard the archive that accumulates as I consciously exit life, while simultaneously accumulating traces, materials, digital fragments, and pieces of music. These are sensory gifts that work as threads, sewing me *here* after death has cleared away my being. I am interested in thinking through the archive as a nonhuman self—an archive of a life that relates to mine, but is not bound by material embodiment. This archive transmutes material|digital and human|nonhuman. Is there a border at which human becomes nonhuman? Is it a threshold between life and death or between material and digital?

Becoming D|other: From M|other to D|other

Anthropocene landscapes of death and extinction are ... inhabited by emergent and unexpected constellations of life, nonlife, and afterlife.¹⁶

What can it be that *lives* in the archive and is both digital and embodied? What about the trespasses I make through living into dying? Can there be voices or articulation in the unknowable? Can I push my imagination past the melancholy that comes with declaring death not as a threshold but as a finite cutting point? These questions slide from auto|bio into m|d|other.

D|other is an exercise in articulating what is taking place. Braidotti suggests that a posthuman affirmative ethics is constructed through imaginative thinking processes. She states that “transformative postsecular ethics takes on the future affirmatively, as the shared collective imagining that goes on becoming, to effect multiple modes of interaction with heterogeneous others. Futurity is made of this.”¹⁷ I say that M|other is becoming D|other.

Adrianne Rich wrote *Of Woman Born* both to highlight mothering or being mothered as a unifying experience of all and to present arguments against patriarchal motherhood as an institution.¹⁸ Since the 1970s, mothering has remained a troubling issue in feminist discourse. Becoming a mother continues to be the point at which equalities gained between gender divides become inaccessible to mothers.¹⁹ This is the context in which I suggest M|other as a shift through which to address mothering and being a mother as an empowering, life-creating position resisting institutional definitions of gender or care. Where mother is a historical material position of repeated actions and care, M|other is entangled in the changes created through uses of technology and intersectional feminist thinking practices to subjectivity, reproduction, and data mining. M|other is a conceptual tying of matricentric feminism²⁰ and new materialist emphasis on intra-actions into imagining anew the roles of gender, care, and materiality. M|other is resistance to mothering as merely “women’s work” or embodied, feminine, caring action. M|other underlines the material with the conceptual; it preserves the multiplicity of relational intersubjectivities in mothering; it acknowledges the other. M|other is becoming D|other—material mothering as care and life-giving, digital sharing, and, further still, living and creating as digital other, what has been called the cyborg or, as I will show, a D|other. By playing with this slippage and by starting with M|other, I involve the discourses and embodiments of mothers and the politics of mothering. I am thinking of being as living, existing, and being distinguishable as a subject. The other in this context is less a post-modernist concept and more a poetic expression of subjectivity defined as a technology of relating and belonging.²¹

D|other is not a concept wishing to end discussion, silence voices, or finalize debate. D|other arises like dry dust from the footprints of feminist thinking and thinkers. What foreshadows D|other and makes it possible to linger on the crossings between living and dying is what Barad calls intra-action in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. In her words, “intra-action signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies.” She claims that there are no preexisting separable agencies, but that distinct agencies “emerge through their intra-actions.” Barad continues that “agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as

individual elements.”²² When subjectivity emerges only through intra-action, it is time to think around subjectivity once again, to reconsider time and its relation to space again, as Barad suggests.²³ This emergent ontological shift calls for a leap into figuring out what might be possible and make sense in terms of posthuman ethics.

D|other emerges from the intersectional feminist insight of Audre Lorde, Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales, Gloria Anzaldúa, and the theory and methods of intersectionality.²⁴ D|other is being imagined against the history of oppression that continues to be a reality in the present and affects lives at different intersections in distinct ways. With these grounding ideas, D|other leaps from material into digital to explore the issues of mothering and care, investigating the possibility of digital lightness, contingency, and multiplicity while holding the trouble that D brings: obsolescence.

D|other becomes meaningful through wordplay and storytelling, as portrayed by Haraway’s “SF”: “The tentacular ones tangle me in SF. Their many appendages make string figures; they entwine me in the poesis—the making—of speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, speculative feminism, *soin de ficelle*, so far. ... SF is storytelling and fact telling; it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here, and yet to come.”²⁵

Haraway’s “material-semiotic worlds” of SF reveal the importance of playfulness, willingness to investigate disorder, and the purposeful rearranging of thought in seeming randomness. I sketch D|other and M|other in this poetic construction:

In these names I hear the music of

mother	other
daughter	Other
material	other
digital	

I see the separation between mother	M Other	m other
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I see the differences between D Other	Daughter	Other
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D	death
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M	memory
---	--------

I am playing with transition

sensing the weight of history with Other

Considering a possibility for posthuman m|d politics

throwing out what is on the edges, the peripheries of what I can consciously fathom

making notes, first drafts, leaving traces, sharing,

taking this down now so the sketch is here for anyone to go on

So that when my last breath unites with oxygen and I ask for no more

there is something here to connect with ...

Or at least cartographies of thoughts and hopefulness to trace through while looking maybe, for the narratives of “I” or possibly theories for transmutations.

This is the poetics of seeing what is connected: the mother to the care the M|other to love manifested in life-giving but not to gender as a binary or a determiner of who should bear responsibility for this coexistence. The other to the separation of experiencing selfhood ...

D|other came to me while formulating a way of conceptualizing what takes place with mothering on mommy blogs. D|other helps in picturing the entanglement of posthuman, nonhuman, gender, self, subjectivity, identity, materiality, digitality, and life. It is a folded concept of becoming, to echo Sara Ahmed’s investment in the plurality of feminist concepts.²⁶ I am putting this in language, but you are with me as D|other. Importantly, so are the thinkers and doers of the past and this moment. And so is nonhuman life, so is what is to come, even though it has not been born, and while it exists simultaneously and does not follow linearly from the present.²⁷ D|other is subjectivity and activity which, through M|other, channels the wisdom of caring for another. It is related to Braidotti’s affirmative ethics: “the desire to endure in time and thus clash ... with the deadly spin of the present” and the understanding that freedom can be extracted “through the understanding of our bondage.”²⁸ It is an understanding in actions of the idea that there is no distinction between self and other or material and digital life. D|other is about assembling a subjectivity that is distinguished from others and relates to them in movement. D|other lives virtually; she lives in connections and ties made real through a multiplicity of condensations. She lives in archives of work, fragments of writing, affects, impacts, and code. As far as D|other is a self, she spans material life expectation, transmuting the meaning of death in its wake.

In addition to expressing deep relationality, entangled commitment to caring for others, D|other yearns for extension to go on, to relate, to matter, to be matter, to breathe. Thinking through evaporated embodiments, digitalized, reorganized positions of being, there to grasp what remains is D|other. In the case that oxygen-lung-living becomes impossible, I am following the desire to restate loss as transition. I remain hopeful for an interpretation of an ending as fluid transformation, which annihilates the possibility of remaining in familiar form. I mourn the loss of materiality and try to remove all unknowable effects of the loss preemptively. Still, I realize the futility of such a task. Underlying this poet(h)ics of D|other are connections that flow into each other, extending notions of living and mattering.²⁹

Survival Is Not a Theory³⁰

Material bodies that do not conform to a norm become visibly troubling. Brownness and blackness continue to trouble white institutions. Disabled bodies wreak havoc with ableist structures. Academic systems and political and social orders continue to churn out normative whiteness and heterosexuality. Institutionalized whiteness requires that those not inhabiting norms become visible—"sealed by whiteness," as Ahmed describes the dynamic.³¹ Ahmed also points out that "those who do not quite inhabit the norms of the institution are often ... given the task of transforming these norms."³² I write about D|other not as another colorless, bodiless contortion of a white hallucination, but as a colorful, wide-eyed, spilled-open, and leaky concept for something on the move. D|other is about reaching toward, connecting, and sharing, not so that those already marginalized share, give, and justify their positions, but so that entangled politics of living (in time, location, and human as well as nonhuman forms of living) propel those with privilege toward action and empower those without it. Lorde wrote in the 1980s about the need to move conceptually toward a more unified but nuanced understanding of difference: "Can any one of us here still afford to believe that efforts to reclaim the future can be private or individual? Can anyone here still afford to believe that the pursuit of liberation can be the sole and particular province of any one particular race, or sex, or age, or religion, or sexuality, or class? Revolution is not a one-time event. It is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change in established, outgrown responses; for instance, it is learning to address each other's difference with respect."³³

It is frustrating that despite changes in the constitution of everyday communication practices (in the northern hemisphere where the Internet is most prevalent) and the overbearing advancement of late capitalism, the strides made toward Lorde's vision have been elliptic and slow (also disrupted and obscured, particularly in terms of the global digital divide). Digital identities do not make discrimination and racism disappear. Transmutations between material and digital depend on the material embodiment. The digital "I" is inherently entwined to it, as Lisa Nakamura illustrates in *Cybertypes* in her discussion on cyber identities in films.³⁴ D|other is no quick fix. My aim is that it becomes a practice, a tool with which to hold the particularity of life in color, resisting and against norms, while honing in on a movement or a transformation, or a wiring through which to breach the disturbed fracturing of memory boards and neural paths, the separation of the living based on skin colors and power distribution or class, but also the kinds of organisms and arrangements that other lives and matter have. Posthumanist thought,

with its language of instability and fragmentation, combined with late capitalism is instigating dangerous articulations of insecurity which drive those with power toward separation. Identity politics becomes a game over who deserves to live. This is the creation of extinction, genocide, war, murder, violence, death, and silence. This is the regurgitation of arguments for white power or men's superiority over women, and the persistent misconception of trans identities as dress-up games and the neurotic fight to distinguish between living matter that is human and nonhuman. This is the compartmentalized map of "living things" which does not allow for the memories of those lost, the recognition of ghosts and those who have no voice, or those who had a voice but who suffered erasure.

One aspect of D|other is thinking about the role of archives, both in digital formats and otherwise. In 2017, bell hooks placed her archives at Berea College, Kentucky, in The bell hooks Institute.³⁵ She chose this home for her life's work (writing, papers, talks, and acquired works of art, but also artifacts) to make sure that it does not disappear at her life's end. She is acting against the historical fact that black women's bodies of work slip into obscurity quickly. hooks is imagining ahead, thinking as a D|other with respect and love for her value and contribution in life, extending its reach beyond her personal gain or control. This is a key aspect of D|other—an ethics of care extending beyond the "I," rather than the wish to have power to control an outcome.

Archives of women artists and writers have a history of disappearing. Even those who have had moderate to big success in their lives have become a target of erasure after their material life has come to an end. These disappearances take the form of publishers who decide to press a title no longer, institutions such as universities that forget to mention a researcher's contribution or stop teaching her in their syllabus, record labels that stop rereleases, and art institutions that forget to include works in exhibitions. They may also be the result of an email account becoming inaccessible or a digital archive disappearing. The disappearances go unnoticed and the narrative gives in: suddenly it is unclear why a woman's work mattered. *Who was this mother of three? Who was this brown transwoman? What was the context of her life's work?* Women's archival disappearances constitute relatives who do not value their loved ones' legacy or feel shame, jealousy, or ambiguity toward their perspectives. Documents get lost, misplaced, or badly organized, or maybe they have never been ordered but made sense to the living creator|artist, yet now appear a mess with no clues to what relates to what.

Rather than a conscious malicious erasure, it is an accumulation of non-actions that constitutes extinction and leads to voicelessness and lack

of traceable genealogies. Scientists such as botanists and zoologists have used archives as survival strategies for extinct plants and animals, the nonhuman lives unable to download themselves into a digital memory or arrange for a library to house their story. But the archival survival of nonhumans is mediated by humans, thus becoming survival through human affects. I reside with contradictions. I grieve the losses of lives, voices, and narratives. Who let go? Who could afford this loss? Who took their place? I cry over my sense of limited time.

Extinction Is Not a Metaphor

Leaving

It has been argued that death signifies the end of agency and the possibility of communication, as there have been no messages from those who died. Is this so? What constitutes a message? Does it necessitate an intention from the sender? Does it matter when the message was stuffed in the bottle? What is the role of the delivery method? Can “I” not exist if my impact and voice are still carried? What about the effects that the lived past continues to have—the ghost winds that keep haunting the present, as Tsing et al. name the presence of nonhuman and human lives past?³⁶ I am thinking of lives that can still be experienced, remembered, thought, felt, and heard after death, often in surprising ways. What if a nonsecular understanding of dying was reconsidered as leaving? *What if the D is for death?*

Leaving has its own poetry. It is not as final sounding as extinction and death. Leaving suggests volition. It contains agency. I imagine death as a leaving, after which an archive becomes a presence. It becomes a life in the sense that it extends the time of the subjectivity entwined with others. It is another articulation of being D|other—being *here* and *doing time* in more ways than one. It is an active exit, constructing an entry. D|other becomes a process of dying and becoming, a transmutation, from M|other to D|other.

Not only do archives produce existence as D|other, but grief also conjures up the existence of what is already gone. Here I use “conjuring” not as a term suggesting a magical level of metaphysics, but to point out that, as part of this discourse, D|other invites the language of magic to reflect on lived life. Then, in a visceral manner, the goneness of what has left becomes questionable.

In this way of seeing, nothing appears as it used to. Life is no longer the value itself, the late-capitalist currency of choice. Life becomes a device through which “I” transforms and takes new shape in both material and virtual forms. Humans and nonhumans pass through life. Life

becomes a vehicle, the vessel with which existences intensify and die down. Grief begins to transform. Attachments appear differently. The elusive “I,” like a diva on a corner stage of a smoky bar, becomes the center of attention.

Extinction

As a creative writer, I know that the story of something broken becomes something whole.³⁷

Residing in this M|D slippage is about locating narratives of what living means in the Anthropocene. It is a landscape where distinguishing between human-made disaster and natural disaster is exceedingly difficult.³⁸ The blurring of lines between selves and others is messy, while past and future times haunt the present. What needs to be extended are capacities of imagining, dreaming and hoping with intention, and looking back, or discussing the affects curling around exits and extinctions—embracing death and illness time as a painful but vital potency of transformation through resistance and feeling because what reaches over time and space creates openings for unexpected yet unimagined (but imaginable) others. This creates possibilities for ethical action.

D|other rises from the ashes of burnt thought and the inflamed relationality of what once appeared stable. It is born from lost life, material and virtual. Extinction is not an equalizer, as death at this point still is. We are all going to die, but not all of us are going to be extinct. Nils Bubandt describes what is at stake: “In the Anthropocene, life is already geologic. In this geological ghost vision, the present proceeds from the future, because the possibility of co-species survival depends crucially on what we humans are going to do now, in the midst of an increasingly given fate of ruination and extinction.”³⁹ This perspective toward the present moment produces a need to act.

Extinction affects peoples, organisms, and species differently. My mourning the nearing end of a personal life is not comparable to the experiences and threat of extinction which continue to annihilate the life of thousands of species and indigenous peoples, or the threat to and killings of black, brown, trans, and queer people. Again, the question of human-made disaster versus natural biological failure reaches me like an echo. Yet, living with an incurable illness drives me toward acute awareness of the slippery edges of societal norms, and of dying as a part of living. The cost of avoiding this awareness in Western culture at large manifests in mass killings and the unethical, uncaring treatment of the living as an exploitable resource.

One purpose of grief and sadness is to agitate toward change. Remembering is key. Morales underscores the role of memory, telling stories of fiction, and imagining the future: “Our job as people with memory, as participants in this moment in time is to keep looking for and examining the implications of the stories we are told.”⁴⁰ Her words highlight the role of life narratives, of telling about pain, and the importance of listening, archiving, and reading. Braidotti suggests that much of contemporary (advanced-capitalist) discussion and feminist discourse around pain is stuck in a mode of claims and compensations which glorifies suffering. This means that “pain within a discourse and social practice of suffering ... requires rightful compensation.” With her creation of affirmative ethics, Braidotti swims upstream to discover alternatives to the discourse of compensation. She suggests that “ethics consists in accepting the impossibility of adequate compensation—and living with the open wound.”⁴¹ It is my understanding that this living with the wound produces narratives of life. Braidotti imagines an ethics which respects pain and acknowledges it as real and hurtful as well as unjust, but which instead of compensation and retribution seeks hope: “Accepting the impossibility of mutual recognition and replacing it with mutual specification and mutual codependence is what is at stake in postsecular affirmative ethics. The ethical process of transforming negative into positive passions introduces time and motion into the frozen enclosure of seething pain. It is a postsecularist gesture of affirmation of hope, in the sense of creating the conditions for endurance and hence for a sustainable future.”⁴² I add that to visualize a life without “me,” a time post “I,” is part of the beginning of an ethics of sustainability, which I imagine as a route elsewhere from violations (if not healing, because it is not always the goal) or acceptance of the story of the “I” with its fragility.⁴³ And which, from this perspective, produces grounds for earthly sustainability—that is, the continuity of life in ever-transforming shapes. Considering life as the vehicle for subjectivity, for the “I” in passing, helps to dislodge this emergent ethics from the blame|compensation discourse and the unsettling grief over death through focusing on life as an instrument of this transformation. With hope located in intentional imagination, I write in the present time, holding both grief and joy, feeling connected to past and future times and places.

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Notes

1. Rose, “Shimmer.”
2. Morales, “Aurora Levins Morales.”
3. Tsing et al., *Arts of Living*, 10–11.

4. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*; “Karen Barad.”
5. Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 28–29.
6. Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking,” 32.
7. Braidotti, “Politics.”
8. Tsing et al., *Arts of Living*, 6.
9. Braidotti, “Politics,” 202.
10. Braidotti, “Politics,” 202–203.
11. Swan, *Viimeinen kirjani*.
12. *From the Bed and Beyond* was released on the Soliti label in 2017.
13. See Poletti and Rak, *Identity Technologies*.
14. See O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*.
15. Braidotti, “Politics,” 210.
16. Bubandt, “Haunted Geologies,” 137.
17. Braidotti, “Politics,” 216.
18. See Rich, *Of Woman Born*.
19. O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*, 2.
20. O’Reilly, *Matricentric Feminism*.
21. See, for example, Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography* and Poletti and Rak, *Identity Technologies*.
22. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.
23. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33–34.
24. Lorde, *Your Silence*; Morales and Morales, *Getting Home Alive*; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Lykke, *Feminist Studies*.
25. Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking,” 31.
26. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*.
27. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* and Braidotti, “Politics.”
28. Braidotti, “Politics,” 215.
29. Further along the way (but not in this article), with this M|D slippage, I wish to account for and create language for witnessing and experiencing such extensions of life and living that transform what constituted previous definitions of life and death, human and nonhuman, or posthuman.
30. See Lorde, *Your Silence*.
31. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 133.
32. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 135.
33. Lorde, *Your Silence*, 127.
34. Nakamura, *Cybertypes*, 43–54.
35. See <http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com>
36. Tsing et al., *Arts of Living*, 1–2.
37. Morales, “Aurora Levins Morales.”
38. Bubandt, “Haunted Geologies,” 126–136.
39. Bubandt, “Haunted Geologies,” 136.
40. Morales, “Aurora Levins Morales.”
41. Braidotti, “Politics,” 212–213.
42. Braidotti, “Politics,” 214.
43. Braidotti, “Politics,” 212.

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