
Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and Teri Holbrook
Becoming-Exiles in Shifting Borderlands

We are 'written' all over, or should
I say, carved and tattooed with the
sharp needles of experience.

(Gloria Anzaldúa,
Making Face, Making Soul)

Please
I'm anxious to talk
I hope everything is ok
I tried to call you back
Missed you again
Missed you again
I tried to call you back
I hope everything is ok
I'm anxious to talk

Please
(Jill Hermann-Wilmarth and
Teri Holbrook, "Found Poem")*

*This and other 'found poems'
included in this article are
excerpts from the e-mails
exchanged between Author
A, Jill and Author B, Teri,
between October 18, 2010 and
November 19, 2011.

We knew each other through stories long before our series of desperate emails. As graduate students together in the field of literacy education, we had created an informal intimacy around our musings on how mothering from marginalized positions informed our newly emerging academic identities. Later, as we troubled through the first years on the tenure line, we continued to talk – albeit less frequently – about mothering as a queer parent and in a family with disabilities and the effects of those complex experiences on our perspectives and practices. And then, a seismic moment for Jill – a stage-3 colon-cancer diagnosis the week of her daughter's birth – reminded her of Teri's stories of how her stable identity as an 'author' broke when she had to confront her own complicity in the cultural construction of writing disabilities.

Please

I'm anxious to talk

² See Jill Hermann-Wilmarth
and Teri Holbrook,
"Precarious Identities:
Violent Disruptions and the
(Re)constructions of Self",
*Frontiers: A Journal of Women's
Studies* (in press).

When we discuss these seismic moments – moments when the people whom we thought we were crumbled into others whom we thought we were not – our language conjures up violence.² We talk about being fractured, shattered, splintered, fragmented. We talk about fissures and gaps, about trying to hold together pieces, to reclaim a wholeness. We talk about being shoved from the center to the margins, about finding ourselves on new lands looking out over unfamiliar vistas. In short, we

talk about becoming exiles, dispersed in a diaspora of self, in which we struggle to find our bearings. But even as we finger the torn places, we recognize the privilege in assuming soundness. White, middle-class, educated, English-speaking, without disability labels, we gasped when the ground opened up beneath us. How could Jill's body betray her? How could literacy be an instrument used against Teri's family?

Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about speaking "from the cracked spaces" as she urged feminists of color to "[send their] voices, visuals, and visions outward into the world" so they may "make a home out of the cracks".³ Anzaldúa's metaphor resonated with us, and we take up the notion of dwelling in the cracks to consider the call and possibilities residing within seismic moments when identities break. How do such instances, when the soil beneath us vibrates and separates, provoke us to create? How are they opportunities to articulate need, to re-imagine connections, to become community? Once we find ourselves surprised and walking among shards, how can we find the space and energy to re-form, knowing that the ground, once disrupted, is never stable?

*I hope everything is ok
I tried to call you back*

As we considered these questions, we also considered how speaking "from the cracked spaces" might look.⁴ If we were to make the cracks our home, what form might our voices take? If we were to send our visions outward, what would make the best wings? As we wrestled with these questions, we pulled from three disparate and provocative thinkers to draft an articulation of ourselves as exiles. In the manner of careful tea makers who combine spices and leaves in hopes of a satisfying cup, we brewed the writings of Anzaldúa with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to render what we acknowledge is an impermanent and contingent articulation of what happens when identities break apart. From Anzaldúa, we rely on the construct of the borderlands and the plaintive power that can come with speaking from the cracks. From Deleuze and Guattari, we borrow the notions of becoming, nomads, territory, and what may be possible when we take up openings as active, ongoing, and communal sites. Together, these theorists helped us to conceptualize the cracked spaces as energetic and productive geographies where we might light, at least for a time, to consider and theorize the terrain before moving on.

Becoming-Borderlands

In the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa writes that "the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, ... where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy".⁵ As a cancer patient and member of a family with learning disabilities, we live in physical borderlands comprised of medicalized spaces and disciplined by diagnostic, prescriptive texts. Likewise, as tellers of theorized stories and creators

³ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Cara: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), xxii-xxv.

⁴ Ibid., xxii.

⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, second edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987/1999), unpaginated.

of theorized images, we reside in academic borderlands, our work edging against and folding within hegemonic dichotomies of art/science, theory/practice, professional/personal lives. At work in the margins, we sometimes look up, disconcerted by how vast the terrain appears and how resounding the lonesomeness. But we have found in the borderlands communities of people – multiple ‘others’ – struggling to envision how to travel new paths of their own.

Anzaldúa writes, “borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.”⁶ We trouble the borders, live in them, move across them, undo them. As identity nomads – people who take up crumbled and shifting notions of identity as conditions to “[allow] thought to wander, to move beyond any recognized ground or home, to create new territories”⁷ – we are part of communities where continually (re)formed identities become safe and dangerous, understood and confused, customary and destabilized. Narrative and image drive our work, inspired by Anzaldúa’s taut and jarring scholarship. She writes, “the Border Patrol hides behind the local McDonalds on the outskirts of Brownsville, Texas or some other border town. They set traps around the river beds beneath the bridge.”⁸ Our work has shown us how the border keepers are both external and internal, and that exposure can trigger traps. But we also know that exposure invites community, and that developing communities, particularly borderland communities, creates spaces where people *without* – without connection, without steady land upon which to stand, without a way in and a way out of the borderlands – may become people *with*.

*Missed you again
Missed you again*

Anzaldúa’s call for voices from the cracked places compelled us to consider the form our articulations might take. Working in the margins, we pushed back against qualitative research-as-usual and its traditional practices of data coding and the writing of research reports. After all, we suspected such scientific practices contoured the borderlands in which we dwelled, that they were quite literally the trowel and mortar by which margins are shaped. If we were to make the borderlands our own, claim them as territories through which we could productively wander, then we would need to choose tools and expressions that would mark the soil differently. We turned to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of *becoming* to help us think through questions of analysis and writing.⁹ Colebrook expands upon the concept of becoming in her definition of the term:

The problem with western thought is that it begins in *being*, which it then imagines as going through becoming or movement. Furthermore, it has tended to privilege man as the grounding being; it is man who is the stable knower or subject who views a world of change and becoming. Deleuze, however, insists that all life is a plane of becoming... In order to really think and encounter life we need to no longer see life in fixed and immobile terms.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁷ Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* (Crows Nest, AU: Allen & Unwin, 2002), xxvii.

⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁹ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, xx.

And later in the same text:

Becoming, for Deleuze, is not a relation between two terms. Becoming-animal is not a human being impersonating an animal; becoming-woman is not a transformation to a pre-given image of what woman is or should be. Becoming is a direct connection, where the self that contemplates *is* nothing other than the singularities it perceives. (To become-animal is thus to perceive the animal as if one were perceiving 'its' world. To become-woman is to create what is other than man and fixity, or to become such.)¹¹

¹¹ Ibid., 155.

So as we look to each other's experiences as identity nomads in the margins, we are becoming-borderlands, perceiving the dividing lines, conceptualizing the keepers, living the exposures.¹² But we do so with different tools, insisting that the borderlands themselves yield to a fluidity that makes our own thinking possible. Among the tools we use in our work are images, collage, multimedia composition, and other genres and formats that allow us to scuff at the boundaries of qualitative research while articulating our thoughts concerning the disintegration of identity. In that vein, the very format we've chosen for this work is one of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari say of the arts that "singing or composing, painting, writing have no other aim: to unleash these becomings."¹³ We embrace this aim of the arts as we look to our own narratives, find lyricism in our casual writings, and create collage to help us move away from a static construct of identity/borderland communities/loneliness, and into a community where we can explore our seismic moments in ways that don't rely on explanations given to us implicitly and explicitly by medical or educational or media outlets. We enter these conversations with each other, using multiple genres in the way that Deleuze and Guattari suggest – in the middle. "A line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination A line of becoming has only a middle It is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both."¹⁴ Our genres are our becoming. They are our borderline, our Anzaldúa Borderland.

¹² See Rosi Braidotti, "Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject", *Hypatia*, 8.1 (Winter 1993), 1-13.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 272.

¹⁴ Ibid., 293.

In the introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, Anzaldúa invokes a *caveat perusor*: "Let the reader beware s/he must do the work of piecing this text together."¹⁵ Doing the work – being "forced to connect the dots, to connect the fragments" — calls readers to engage their "total person" rather than to remain at a distance: "Distancing cannot be a major strategy – only a temporary breather."¹⁶ In this article, we juxtapose image and text, image and image, genre and genre, format and format, piecing together a textual tableau that we invite the reader to peruse. We do the map-making but not the navigation. In the borderlands, we move singularly together.

¹⁵ Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul*, xvii.

¹⁶ Ibid., xviii.

*I'm anxious to talk
Please*

We came to this work after sharing, over email and phone calls, how we'd dealt with our individual/intellectual crises in the moments that we were experiencing

them. For Jill, journaling, taking photos of her body, pouring over reports and explanations of the drugs that were healing/poisoning her became coping mechanisms. Teri made personal sense of what it meant to perform as a family with learning disabilities by reading, writing, walking, remixing – she read medical, educational, and philosophical texts; wrote formal and informal essays and papers; explored and photographed physical spaces that helped her theorize the sociocultural construction of disability; and composed instances of her thinking through collage. As we discussed our experiences with each other, we talked about how the given label often left us feeling outside ourselves, as if all the moves we’d made to be strong and in-control women had been erased by diagnosticians who knew bodies and minds but did not know us. We realized that the moments that did, indeed, erase the women we thought we were, nevertheless recreated the women we were (always) becoming. Our reflections as a community of women thrust into exile by out-of-our-control events became a part of the never-ending process of becoming.

We shared images, writing, thinking as mothers and friends, and, as we began to conceptualize our communications as data, as academics. Anzaldúa writes:

there are many modes of consciousness: the rational, reasoning mode, which is to me connected with the external reality, with the world that we inhabit right now; and other modes of consciousness connected with the world of imagination, the world of fantasy, and the world of images. Writers, artists, and creative scientists traffic back and forth between these worlds, switching from one mode of consciousness to another.¹⁷

¹⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, “Creativity and the Switching Modes of Consciousness”, in AnaLouise Keating, ed., *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 103.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 204.

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3.

Our data and the reporting of it represent how we move/moved between consciousnesses – our own and each other’s – in order to frame and articulate our borderlands. Art, writes Deleuze and Guattari, is “a composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation”.¹⁸ Our work, then, seeks to compose a vision of identities always on the move.

Methodology

In this work, we explore the middle points of our new spaces, and how the exploration of these spaces was a recognition of the communities to which we now belong, ever growing, ever changing, ever becoming. We see ourselves as developing community on and in the echoes of each other’s experiences. When Deleuze and Guattari write, “Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd”, we understand their assertion intimately.¹⁹ The selves we were when we wrote in our journals or took photos of our bodies or wondered about the diagnoses that were handed to us in cool offices are different than the selves we are now, just as the selves we are now are not the selves of our futures. We are always multiple selves, both haunted and projected. The community we’ve built is with multiple Jills and multiple Teris, who needed each other in order to learn that the margins weren’t lonely. Instead, the margins can be an opened space where community is fostered to inform, bolster, and create intellectual growth central to moving forward. Deleuze

and Guattari argue that “writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.”²⁰ Our writing, reading, imaging, creating do not signify our community building; they map it.

²⁰ Ibid., 4-5.

We worked with a large corpus of data. Our emails to and from each other; images (photographs and sketches) that we made of ourselves and our environments; documents and notes saved from meetings where others talked about our medicalized lives; journal entries written as long as a decade and as recently as a year ago; and a master’s thesis served as data for this work. Rather than offering a smooth portrait or a tidy text, we view our data as openings to becoming other than what we temporarily are. More specifically, for example, we look at narrative data from Jill’s chemotherapy journal; these entries were written at different points during her six months of twice monthly treatments that lasted for approximately 48 hours each, and began seven weeks after her diagnosis and surgery to remove the cancerous tumor. During this time, Jill felt desperately lonely, even in the overwhelming support of her physical community, and had an urgent, visceral need to reach out to Teri who had never had cancer. Teri had talked about the breach that occurred when, as a writer, she had to acknowledge her complicity in her own child’s marginalization as a person with learning disabilities. Teri’s sudden self-estrangement somehow helped Jill know that there would be more than empathy, more than “I’m so sorry. This must be so hard”, more than a listening ear. Complex affinity was possible.

We find that layering our work on each other’s, and, in turn, layering the work of theorists onto our data helps us to see the moments where community is possible and even necessary among those who have experienced personal exiles. The found poem that opened this work is an example of data layering, in which we juxtaposed fragments of emails. Other examples of data layering that we used are included later in this article: a ‘found’ composition – so-called in the same way that the subgenre ‘found poetry’ is called ‘found’, not because it was uncovered whole cloth but because it was constructed from existing pieces of data – and collage. These examples fold and layer images and words from our data sources with the words of the theorists whom we are using to generate our thinking. We see each of these examples as temporary instantiations, pauses in our thinking in which we combine bits of data to articulate a moment of analysis. We posit that this approach to data and analysis shows how the melding of communication and expression helps us both cross borders and create them as a community together.

In a more traditional (to our field of education, at least) academic article, the next sections of this paper would include Data, Analysis, and Discussion/Implications, reported in a linear fashion. Here, we have all of those components, but they are woven together with the thread of multiple genres. Each of the three sections – Narrative, Found Composition, and Collage – could be read without the other and still convey how creativity moves us out of a diaspora and into an exposed becoming. When read together, these three expressions of data show different snapshots of our moments of becoming. As the words of theory and experience, scientific data and personal reflection mingle with snapshots and collaged art, this multi-genred

text becomes data and analysis, and informs discussions and implications. We invite you to read/look/delve linearly or not, but with a mind open to becoming.

I'm anxious to talk

Please

Narrative: Jill

A few weeks after my surgery, I took my dogs for a long walk in the hot June sun. We were slower than my regular pace, but faster than I'd been walking in April and May due to my advanced but undiagnosed anemia that was caused by the cancer lodged and growing in my cecum, through the walls of my colon, and into the surrounding lymph nodes. I was proud of myself, even with my still swollen surgery scar and still visible stitches, for walking BOTH dogs at the same time, rather than just one as I had been, and for even being out on the road less than a month post operation. I got to thinking about how, aside from the pesky cancer, I was a really healthy person. I was a decade-long vegetarian. I was a regular runner of half marathons. My brain began to travel down a road where I questioned everything about my cancer diagnosis. How could I – I – have colon cancer? I belong to the 5 a.m. crowd at the gym! I was 34 years old! And, nobody – nobody – in my family had ever – ever been diagnosed with any kind cancer. This diagnosis could not be true.

Anzaldúa states: “And there in front of us is the crossroads and choice: to feel a victim where someone else is in control and therefore responsible and to blame ..., or to feel strong, and, for the most part, in control.”²¹ In this out of control, this without my choice, this space of feeling victimized, I needed a way to undo the oppression that someone and no one had put on me. I was in the crossroads of my pre-cancer and cancer and post-cancer selves, not knowing which one I was, which one to pick. Not understanding how to live in the new self. So, I denied the self that I was becoming and that was to come. I didn't want it, didn't know how to live in it, felt alone and exiled from my body. How did that cancer get there? Who let it in? Because, it wasn't me. I had done everything right. The cancer was, of course, removed – sent into its own exile, along with the other surgically removed parts. But that which was exiled made *me* exiled.

The other colon cancer patients receiving treatment with me were decades older than I, none were queer like me, none had active first-grade children or needy newborns like me. And, nobody in my chosen, wonderfully supportive and caring and kind community, had cancer. Members of those groups welcomed me into their folds, but I had nothing to say any more, or at least at that moment. I was the silent watcher knowing too much about this life or too little: a rhizomed Jill – one that didn't know which direction my shoots were heading, and unwilling to explore those roots in old places.²² I was in denial that the cancer was/had been there. I was in denial about what it did/does to my body, to my brain. But, there is data – medical, scientific, accepted data – that shows that the cancer was, indeed, real.

²¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 43.

²² See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Even today, as I look at my pathology report and I see my name on it and I know that it's about me, I still have some of the denial that I had then. I feel disconnected from it, from this body that is described. Sitting here two years later, typing this data/narrative/analysis of this artifact of me, I'm connected to this body. My surgery scar is itchy yet numb today. My feet hurt because I ran 11 miles on Sunday. My belly is churning because I ate corn, a food that, since this surgery, is hard for me to digest, but I don't care because corn is good and I want to eat it and denial denial denial of food for too long might make my physical body feel better, but it messes with my brain. So, I know that it happened. I know they took something out. But, it is hard to imagine how that something even got there, that my body – my healthy, running, active body – had fed that something, and that as that something was becoming so, too, was I, even without my knowledge, with my passive/active participation.

Tumor size:
a. gross length 4.5 cm.
b. gross width 5.1 cm.
c. gross depth 2. Bern.

I can't even imagine what that looks like. And yet, there it was growing inside me. Causing me pain daily. Extracting iron and vitamins from my blood. Making me weaker and weaker and weaker. It had to come out. It was killing me. Killing me. I was 34. I can still not imagine this.

Received is a right hemicolectomy specimen consisting of terminal ileum, cecum with attached appendix and proximal colon.

I am a specimen. Or, parts of me are. Were. Is everything that my surgeon left in me a specimen? Am I a body filled with specimens? When do I stop being Jill and start being a specimen? Or, am I always a specimen? The specimen named Jill? Named Jill's colon? Or, just Received? For Anzaldúa,

in trying to become 'objective,' Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence. Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes.²³

²³ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 59.

The detached staring at my body through the lens of a camera, at my reports with my eyes but not my brain or my heart, at the descriptions of parts of me that were no longer parts of me felt out of control. This was the space in which I needed community, needed someone who knew that out-of-control feeling. Understood the fleeting image of a former self. Knew what it meant to grasp at that image.

I'm anxious to talk
Please

Found Composition: Teri

An Artist's Statement

I will come clean: I was not anxious to talk. I wanted to talk to Jill about her treatment, about what she was going through, about the cancer. And I wanted to talk about broken identities, about living in the margins, being a nomad. But I didn't want to talk about the stories, to share the narratives that I had written over the years about being in a family with learning disabilities, about believing your family to be fine, healthy, happy, and having to confront individuals and institutions who insisted it was not. The stories, these tellings were personal, raw, and besides, as a family we were moving on. I didn't want to look back.

And yet, I knew I looked back daily, maybe second by second. A professional writer, I had often relayed how, when the label of learning disability had been applied to my family, my whole world shifted, cracked. Where I had once believed in the power of words to heal, I now saw their power to harm. Where I once saw the identity of writer as honorable, I now saw it as dangerous. I turned away from words, wanting to resist them, to find ways to put them in their place.²⁴

As the conversations between Jill and me developed, changed, became more than friends talking and turned to academics wrestling, this resistance to looking back at my words showed up in likely and unlikely ways. To continue this work, I needed to go through the journals and the writings and the papers and the documents, but I found that I had (intentionally) made such scavenging difficult. Personal essays were dispersed across multiple computer hard drives, which were in turn dispersed through multiple rooms; journal entries were hidden in filing cabinets with lost keys; photos and collages were packed in boxes in the basement. Little was easily accessible; nothing at the fingertips. I made excuses to Jill as she pressed forward with her own, more recently written reflections. *I'll collect them, I'll pull them together, just a little more time.* Finally, I did as I promised. I went into the hard drives and transposed obsolete digital writings into new formats, opened the boxes, found the keys. But as I looked at the old writings around me, I found that I couldn't create from those scattered fragments a whole I was willing to share. The Teri(s) in those writings were no longer accessible, even to me. I couldn't hold her, form her, present her. Instead, she moved around me as emotive fragments that defied musculature. She couldn't be edited together into an easy and palatable read. Instead, she dwelled in the cracked spaces between the journal entries, in the selvages where one photo collided with another, in the murky landscape where theory was the air.

Unwilling to craft a smooth story about disability, we opted for a jagged text about resistance. What follows is a found composition, a juxtaposition of the photos Jill took of her body during chemo, the emails we exchanged as I went through the process of excavating the past, and Anzaldúa's words. It is "an ordering of chaos",²⁵ an attempt to momentarily articulate sense in the disorder that is made visible in sudden disintegrations of identity.

²⁴ Teri Holbrook, "An Ability Traitor at Work: A Treasonous Call to Subvert Writing from Within", *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16.3, 171-183.

²⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 9.

Fragmented Exposures



Fig. 1: J. H. Wilmarth — T. Hobrook, *Untitled* (Photo). Courtesy of the authors

It feels vulnerable to look at these
[photos/words].
I cannot even imagine
putting them together.



*I shouldn't have sent the email
that just laid my doubts out bare.
I was so gullible then,
naïve, stupid
And so more hardened now
[but softer, too, like an old floor
that gives under the weight]*

Fig. 2: J. H. Wilmarth — T. Hobrook,
Untitled (Photo). Courtesy of the authors

²⁶ Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Cara*, xviii.

Anzaldúa writes of
“maps, blueprints, guidebooks that we need to exchange
*in order to feel sane, in order to make sense of our lives.”*²⁶

Medicalized bodies are maps,
test results are guidebooks,
but they belong to other people’s
sense making, not mine.



Fig. 3: J. H. Wilmarth — T. Hobbrook, *Untitled* (Photo).

Anzaldúa also writes: “The world knows us by our faces,
the most naked, most vulnerable,
²⁷ *Ibid., xv.* *exposed and significant topography of the body.”*²⁷

But our faces are not our most vulnerable typography.
I can mask my face, compose the muscles.
I cannot take back the thoughts I have committed to paper.
Shattering/shredding/rereading — old writing can be shocking.
Your photos/my words shouldn’t have thrown me for a loop.
But they have.



Again we turn to Anzaldúa,
filled with doubt...

Fig. 4: J. H. Wilmarth — T. Hobbrook, *Untitled* (Photo).

*"In attempting to work out a synthesis,
the self has added a third element
which is greater than the sum of its severed parts."*²⁸

So that is it.

As we try to [re]make ourselves whole,
we add ever more elements,
each in themselves a severed part.
That is what makes us different than
we ever could be.

*In any case, it is all hard.
So I cannot even imagine
putting them all together
[in a story or a body
that isn't fragmented and torn].*

*Please
I'm anxious to talk*

Collage

Deleuze and Guattari define the characteristics of a rhizome: "unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even non sign states."²⁹ Collage as we use it here speaks to this rhizomatic way of thinking, and of making connections across margins and borders. For us, collage has become a visual articulation of the work that Anzaldúa writes of for people straddling the borders, "forced to become adept at switching modes".³⁰ The work of creating the art is collaborative here – a layering and juxtaposition of dialogue between the two authors, the photographs of Jill, and the ways that Teri's experiences in exile provided links to Jill's crisis.

²⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 101-102.

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21.

³⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 59.



Fig. 5: J. H. Wilmarth – T. Hobbrook, *Shoulder* (Collage). Courtesy of the authors



Fig. 6: J. H. Wilmarth – T. Hobbrook, *Scar* (Collage). Courtesy of the authors

Teri played with two images: the photo of Jill's shoulder with the chemotherapy port, and a mannekin photo that she enlarged to fill the canvas. She wanted to work with segmented body parts, to remind herself that bodies, like collage, are fragmented, and the mannekin came pre-segmented. As she glued, she kept being drawn to an old pink ribbon that tied up print ephemera – old documents, no longer useful – she had collected. The ribbon – faded, pressed in places so hard it looked broken – reminded her of the anger Jill had expressed over the dominance of breast cancer within the cancer universe and all that its dominance implied: sexism, sexualization of cancer to make it palatable, the ignoring of other cancers. Teri placed the mannequin on the far left of the canvas and covered it with black tissue paper until only portions showed: the legs (cut off at the crotch), the hip, a bit of outstretched arm. She glued the pink ribbon on top of the black paper so that it dangled over the mannekin's legs, reminiscent of a skirt. At the top of the canvas she affixed two old documents – a Hartford Trust Company check and a license to operate radio receiving equipment, circa 1931. These two documents attracted her for a couple of reasons: 1) the multiple meanings of the word *trust* (to rely upon or to have faith in; a vehicle to hold something precious for the future) and the trust in bodies and words that we felt had been decimated; 2) the connection between the equipment (port) on Jill's body and the permit's official sanctioning of equipment use. The paper in this collage is intentionally wrinkled and folded, like skin, like relationships, like theory.

When she first printed out the photo of Jill's scar, Teri was struck by how much it reminded her of a Renaissance painting, the ones where the artist had studied musculature and emphasized his observations in paint. She wanted the photo to stand out, so as with *Shoulder*, she covered most of the canvas in black tissue, urging the paper to fold and wrinkle. Here, too, a ribbon factored into the collage, a red gossamer that echoed the scar. The collage *Scar* echoes and speaks to *Shoulder*. The documents are old, with the exception of a ripped page from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, centered on the canvas.³¹ Above the ripped page is the fine print of a contract's "terms and conditions", which are binding but also subject to human vagaries. In the bottom far left hand corner, a lading form, dated 1930, reminds trustees of what is and isn't 'non negotiable'.

Reading across the two collages, trust is an implied distrust. The scar is both a healing and a reminder of broken assumptions. The things the authors held in faith (bodies, language) became something else in the transaction. In *Shoulder*, the wound is open but covered; in *Scar*, the wound is closed but uncovered. We can decide what to reveal, and then again, we can't. Jill can show the scar but must hide the wound. Teri can hide the documents but is called again and again to inscribe words; when she does, she sees that her reluctance is the scar.

*I'm anxious to talk
Please*

³¹ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Becoming-Nomadic within the Cracks

³² Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Cara*, xxii.

The collecting, the writing, the reading, the viewing of this work is a part of the becoming of who we are at the moment we send final edits to the editors. Each time we return to this work, or we reorder the images and words, or we think about how another image/narrative/report/theory would have shown our becoming differently or more effectively, our becoming continues/shifts/complicates. The landscape of the ‘cracked spaces’³² from which we are working moves and resettles and moves again. This highly theorized and, to borrow a buzz word from policy makers, data-driven work shows that non-traditional forms of expression are both a) academic in nature and b) a part of the work of women in exile. Dwelling in the intermixed borderlands where we find ourselves because of these identities exposes how our seismic moments and our academic selves inform each other. This work becomes a way we articulate within that ongoing borderland.

Within cracked spaces, neat and easy binaries lose footing. Traditional notions of data, analysis, implications often suggest An Answer to A Problem; therefore, they can serve as stoppages to ongoing complications of thought. In this piece, we collapse all of those dichotomies within this borderland in which we move. In so doing, we create spaces for becoming within theory and experience, scientific data and composition. We find this collapsed space to be one of creative and intellectual productivity.

Finally, our aim was to respond to Anzaldúa’s call “to [send our] voices, visuals, and visions outward into the world” so we may “make a home out of the cracks”.³³ While we are not settled in the cracks and never can be, the voices, visuals, and visions in our work articulate a moment of becoming. This moment is an invitation, a welcoming, a showing of our spaces. Cross the borders. Come in. Shift this crack again. Please. We are anxious to talk.