

(In)Habitations

A Poiesis of Presence/Absence in Love and Longing

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Poetic Inquiry for Synchrony & Love: A New Order of Gravity

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Résumé de l'article

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(IN)HABITINGS: A POIESIS OF PRESENCE/ABSENCE IN LOVE AND LONGING

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Abstract: “(In)habittings” explores how the death of my father in a Japanese prison in 1945 during World War II and the recent death of my mother entangle in ways that challenge a binary conception of presence and absence as physical proximity or locatedness based on temporal/spatial constructs. The intention of this poetic inquiry is to compose *(in)habittings*: performative texts of *poiesis*, in which the data—material (memorabilia, photographs, objects, letters), embodied (sensorium, affects, (re)memberings, animate and inanimate) and multi-contextual (across temporal, spatial, subjective, and social)—are gathered to reorient time, space, and proximities to trace the intensities, contours, and resonances of presence and absence as they modulate to affect love and longing. Conceiving poetic inquiry as a space for exploring, perceiving, and imagining, I present the *poetic* (art-making rendered in lyrical-figural languages) and simultaneously the *inquiry* (the research-method) through poems, lyrical narratives, and metaphoric, speculative reveries that converge to explore the poetic, ephemeral, and shimmering data of life/lived worlds where longing—a kind of ache in both method and subject—resides in the spaces of in-between-ness.

Keywords: poetic inquiry; poiesis; entanglement; poetry; (in)habittings

For What Comes To(gather)/Together

“Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread;
remade all the time, made new.”

— Ursula K. Le Guin 2008, 159

Days turn into years, into decades of feeling my father's absence like a stone weight. Although photographs of him cover walls and shelves, fill photo albums, the narrative is of his absence, a body neither here with us nor anywhere. *MIA* (Missing in Action) is the casual classification and whispered acronym, which means neither here nor there nor anywhere to be found as a body that remains.

For the early years of my life, and what must have been, for my mother, a period where love was an ache, a longing, we were caught in a web of absences. Ursula Le Guin conditionally considered that love can be made, like bread, made new. That is, if circumstances are conducive and ingredients are present to make the bread, it can be made new. Not so if absent. The weight of absence became a part of us. Absence flashed around inside and beyond us—endless longing; absence saturated everything.

There were presences in the absences too. They opened spaces of longing—his face like a hologram across my brother's face with certain turns of the lip or curve of the eyebrow. I would catch a glimpse of him in the black irises of my mother's eyes as she stared at a photo. Opening the middle drawer of mother's/their dresser, I'd breathe deep the heather sweater, feel the tiny nubs on the boiled linen on the white pants—folded, ironed, suspended, as if ready for wearing, as if he might come home. His scent, musky, when my nose buried deep into the fabrics and breathed in, hard. I lived with the social conception of presence as proximity to the thing itself, that is, if something is present it is visible, bodied, material. I touched the stagnant boundary where presence is the opposite of absence.

Longing: A Tangential Thread of Purpose

So begins this poetic inquiry, exploring experiences of becoming in a world where absences and presences echo through and pervade the seen and felt and not-yet seen or sensed. My hope is to create spaces to linger, to feel the heart swell, and to confront the tangibles of presence and absence. I compose *(in)habitations* as performative texts of *poiesis*¹ in which the data in both matter and meaning—material (memorabilia, photographs, objects, letters), embodied (sensorium, affects, (re)memberings, animate and inanimate), and multi-contextual (across temporal, spatial, subjective, and social)—

are gathered to reorient time, space, and proximities. Renderings of the intensities, contours, and resonances of presence and absence modulate into various moments to affect love and longing².

Resisting the urge to interrupt the reading experience of these (in)habitations, I have provided explanations, definitions, and commentary on people or concepts of influence in Endnotes, unless essential to clarity or register of the performative text. My motivation is aligned not only with presentation but also with the pedagogical impulse to create a performative understanding of poetic inquiry through direct material engagement, and to allow the (in)habitations to be life/lived experiences for the reader.

Rather than offering these (in)habitations as representations of the affective dimension of this poetic inquiry, I composed them as processual—seeking the often invisible, the multi-dimensional, to make visible and illuminate affects of presence and absence. The immediacy created through these renderings is intended to provoke the nonlinguistic—mood, atmosphere, feelings, and sense of longing—that has moved from exteriority into my bones, cell work, and blood. The words of Brian Massumi (2011), as mentor-whisperer, are a reminder to be “open to rethinking the world as literally made of feelings” (85).

I draw on Barad for aspects of affect theory, but I cannot speak of them without naming Rosi Braidotti, Brian Massumi, and Kathleen Stewart as mentors-of-affect-thought who have taught me ways to be and become in the world. I credit them with terms, concepts borrowed and built on. I honor their influence but, in this moment, in this performative space, that requires a particular register, I offer brief commentary on their influences in the Endnotes³.

The (in)habitations, composed in poems and lyrical narratives from the data—set off with asterisks (* * *) to signal their beginning and endings and as renderings of *poiesis*—are the central performative acts of this poetic inquiry. There was an enticing urge to work chronologically but, to be true to the process, my commitment was to follow the lines of inquiry I am becoming. In doing so, the temporal and spatial slip away as the mind-in-motion takes over. The threads of longing are like membranes that encircle everything like a halo, a glow—arriving in dreams, in the opening of iris, or as I stare out the window. In letting the inquiry follow the willful mind, I determine an overriding structure intended to highlight a particular emphasis in each (in)habitation that I hope will assist others who might engage in similar inquiries. And, more than all else, I hope the (in)habitations of this poetic inquiry bring solace, animate powers of presence/absence, and serve as a reminder of the gravity of love and longing that is a gift, a promise, and fraught with social constructions.

Come with me now into the (in)habitations. Imagine corridors of time and space crisscrossing, fluid, then flattening out only to hatch cross again and slip into shadows.

Longing As In-Between-ness: Inhabiting Presence/Absence

Follow the words as they bend, curve, stutter, and sometimes break in attempts to convey what is felt in bones, heart, blood, and cell work. Feel the pulsing desire, the sustaining threads of wonder that vibrate in the in-between of presence and absence, in their net-webs of felt-sense. Poetry is the song; inquiry the seer.

* * *

I cannot look away from my mother's handwriting—a whisp of swirl on the “h,” a curling arch completes the “y,” a bold crossed “t”—right to left. Periods—defined, definite. The question mark with only a hint of a dot to push the curve of query. I stare until the letters fuzz, feel a tingle on fingertips, touching ink, her.

My tongue flicks against teeth with the word “delight,” the “l” higher than the vowels that hold it on the page. Eye curves to the upmost tip of her “t.” Eyebrows knot—caught in the swirls and sharp edges of her left-handedness, moving a fountain pen across paper and yet never a smudge. Her letters, her words, her hand with pen, penning letters—rhythms that compel me to hear my mother's mind-in-motion and read again, feeling the stronger tug of her absence—or is it presence?

my hand tensing as if the pen in my hand were
in her hand offering into mine looking now
at her last un-finished letter I catch

little edges of stutters her un-stead-ier hand
hand writing and the almost smudge near-hidden
in her signature (sign-a-ture) letters.

how did I miss

the quiver of hand unsteadiness of her
hand writing in that year that year that
year of Raven emerald and yellow silk scarf
nest bridge ping of hairpin?

* * *

Like traces of DNA, my mother's handwriting is present everywhere—on the back of photos, notes left in drawers, old ledgers, legal papers, birthday and recipe cards, and letters, all these letters. She is present/absent in the most unexpected places and times, me/her caught in an in-between-ness that creates and modulates as presence and absence.

Traces of legibility (re)compose her. She gathers as materialities—handwriting, pen, silk scarf, Raven, bridge, hairpin. The loops and curves of her handwriting begin this (in)habiting, and then the poem takes over as the underlying sonics cascade and nearly demand poetic devices where repeating undulations, tumbling murmurations, and unsteadiness are sensations felt in the body. Embodied presence and absence shimmer in a mother's hand/my hand, her/our self-ness, self-less-ness in which my/her/ourselves echo in live/d/fe worlds. Silences surface in the poem through the spaces left open between words and lines—the tearing wind of grief, the hiss of memories, the fertile earth for imagining bridge, Raven, nest. The resources of silence assist here—line breaks, broad strokes of blank space between words, and *caesura* (the gaps in the middle of lines)—in “holding still” the moments, as if the mind, tongue, hand cannot speak or write what comes next.

how did I miss?

A question from longing—hungering, thirsting, yearning to feel the magnetisms of urge, itch, and a relentless desire to know. The impulse to grip the visceral in my fist and pause with each embodied sensation⁴.

These threads of presences and reminders of absences co-join as ephemera, and, in an uncanny way, disrupt the distinction to converge into a more poignant *presence/absence*. An epiphany? Maybe, but a shadow crosses the window and tempts me to leave the question behind. I catch sight of a Heron, her wings flutter as she lands. I take care not to disturb her as I move from writing desk to dock.

* * *

The ground swells and thrumbs beneath my bare feet. It is dawn; Heron steps to the water's edge. She preens feathers with her middle talon. The Hudson River whispers; Heron wades, belly deep, eye on a nursery of fish. The river swells—its whispers contrapuntal in this river that flows both ways:

*We are Mahicannituck We are here I am near
named*

*Muh-he-con-neo: people of the waters
never still*

*Mahicannituck renamed Hudson
They are there We are here*

The ground swells beneath bare feet

*beneath Heron's talons beneath the nursery of fish
at river's bottom*

every essence

has a name a lineage of names

*We are I am Heron is
part of these Waters*

ancestral homeland for Heron for Lenni-Lenape

*For Munsee I acknowledge I hear
the hum of voices Whispers water moving*

whispers whispering

Heron Lenni-Lenape Munsee

mother's voice reminding me: take time to hear Take time

river laps echo echoing

Heron waits watches

mother earth mother

waits

** * **

(In)habitations of Heron, river, mother, the ground and waters whispering, with Heron, with mother, with the people of the waters that are never still, the hairpin, Raven—the spaces between and among presences/absences overflowing, entangling.

The entanglements with all these forces (memories, imaginings, objects, acknowledgments, human and more than human intra-actings) become ambient, vibrating and vibrant through unexpected flows, an immersion through detailed attentiveness that might be described, with the help of Seigworth and Gregg (2010), as “singular attempts to address what transpires in the affective bloom-space of an ever-processual materiality” (9). Blooming, blossoming toward affects such as loss, mourning, longing, perhaps the edges of grief—these (in)habitations are an attempt to capture the mind/heart/spirit-in-motion, expose unexpected horizons of presence/absence that exist across perceived temporal or spatial constraints.

Barad enters here, unexpectedly, as Heron did. Barad’s (2007) description of mattering as “iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future” (ix), is what I have come to understand with presence/absence. In practice and method, the intention is to disrupt relations of proximity to selves, bodies, memories, felt-senses, and temporal and spatial dimensions, as these entangle and roil the boundaries from presence and absence to presence/absence.

I begin to recognize something akin to presence/absence as affectively present within the body—sometimes as light as a touch or sound vibrating off skin, a whisper; at other times, a pulling gravity, weighting, weighing down, and creating a vertigo of dislocation. With dis-location, an embodied longing arises, as proprioception, out of the traces of writing that produce the longing. I shimmy across a transversal thread and encounter him—a husband, a father, my father, a near-child, a pilot, a prisoner, known and not known, MIA, the designated acronym of the war machine’s understanding of absence, embodied and corporeal—all these coalesce in mind/body/spirit of this thread/weave.

* * *

dream an absent sky soaked
with waves cracked off

clouds dangle and drip
waxen wings above the air

so many waves so many
 waxen wings
 too little path of sky

A creak of dresser drawer. Under the heather sweater, a small sketch book, the smell of leather, pungent still. On every page:

There are birds—pencil sketched, labeled by name in block letters. Birds—hundreds of birds, wearing membrane wings, in flight. Birds at water's edge, nests filled with eggs, color-penciled in shades. Birds. His hand sketching birds, my hand turning pages—birds sleeping, in shadows, on tree branches. Bird by bird sketched into hundreds of birds—details of talons, wings,
 fly Flight Flying.

When I think of him, I think of birds—how he lay in the sun, gazing at birds in flight, like Da Vinci, sketching trembling wings, delicate structures, shimmering feathers until his own yearning to fly, flight, burned deep. He is ten—imagining, sketching, observing, constructing, already dreaming of flight.

Flocks of birds, turn into planes, to a B29 over Tokyo. Fly. Flying. Flight. Turn back. Veer West. Turn back, turn back. Look to the sky.

Remember Icarus falls, flocks of birds, of planes flying. Diving down, hundreds of birds, of planes diving down, waxen wings melting, trailing fire against the darkening sky.

* * *

This sketchbook, his love of flight, of birds co-mingling with Heron, the river moving, Lenni-Lenape, mother's hands as hologram on his hands, mine. Presence and absence in this (in)habiting may emanate from ideational concepts, but exist more in moments, in the haze of images, events, or objects that inhabit the (in)habitations (textures, smells, flight, flying). I am suddenly aware of the magnetism to Heron, to the river on this morning of writing mourning. Attention, objects, sketches, flight, and images seep one into another. Boundaries in my thinking are becoming visibly, unexplainably porous.

Longing As Gravity: Inhabiting Intra-Relational Bodies/Embodiments

That morning, her final morning, started with the routine of so many other mornings. My mother had gone for a walk—leaving a note on her writing desk intended for me. Written with fountain pen, on linen paper, something like:

* * *

I think of you today, teaching with chalk dust
on the moons of your nails, you in the midst
of asking a question. Will you, will you ever
find time for a morning walk?

I am going out now, to look high into Raven's
nest in the spruce near the old bridge to see
if I can catch a ride on her morning flight. And,
you, should come, to feel the ruffle of feathers,
to hear her wings trap currents of air—mid-flight.

Slow slow down. Slow to feel Raven's
breath. Slow to ask: Where will Raven fly
today? Slow slow down.

Pulling her close through her words, my words, but it isn't the words, it is the gravity of a question: Did she know she would not return from the bridge that morning?
I wonder:

“What now?”

“...to see if I can catch
a ride on her morning flight.”

Longing is the gravity that pulls her to me now, searching, until I catch sight. It is her younger self, running through lawn sprinklers in summer sun, my brother behind, naked, grinning, squealing. She opens the door to the house, motions us in with a nod, scruffs us dry with towels. Her soft hand brushes hair from my eyes. In this moment of writing, I feel her skin on my skin. The palm of her hand, the lifeline bold, distinct, long—longing, dwelling, the image traveling the lifelines of my body/her body into the spaces

between words and into the jagged corners of silence and the absence/presence of her presence/absence.

She is (in)habiting this house of me, this dwelling of us, as I inhabited her house—uterus, placental cushion, the protective habitat, the primacy and intimacy to gather/ together. M-other and Raven take over, and I give in to the magnetisms, to the hunger of the beating heart, the ache of longing that resides in the porous spaces where heart conjoins with hearts into heart, with Raven to Heron to the small sketch book, to river touching the rough planks of the old bridge and feeling the scruff of towel, her touch on his hand, my hand writing these words, opening the dresser drawer—taking flight, fly, soar, flutter of wings, placental cushion to gather/together.

* * *

A morning and mourning, water moving, Raven, the feel of her hand on skin becoming our skin—make porous these proximal senses (textures, smells, images) and the sense that presences/absences are pulling of gravity of one into the other until they are inseparable. This house of me is a porous passageway mediating presence/ absence and absorbing affects of longing⁵.

In the simultaneity and porousness of perceiving, feeling, and longing, there are other proximal senses in motion. The affective intensities move squarely into the body and fire neural pathways, opening nearly electric currents through the body and into embodiment.

Longing As Whispering, Trans-versing: Inhabiting Membranes of Neural-Markings

We are bodies embodied in bodies of embodiments—connected by threads of neural-markings—nodes of sensory, sonic, motor, (re)memorying, imagining—traveling, raveling, unraveling neural passages and pathways. Neural networks, as with spider webs, visualize as a net of threads with intrinsic spatiality and multi-framing threads, loops, connectors—each trans-versing, gluing, knotting, refiguring over and again, just as with this poetic inquiry as it unfolds⁶.

* * *

What now with/without you to remind
 me that Raven waits? The bridge I almost
see almost catching a near glimpse of you

walking your mind set on Raven. I pull
 you back seeing you eyeing the sky that morning
 raven blue blackness of your scarf threads
 of silk emerald willow leaves near the nape of
 neck. Your words your voice linger shift
 sigh loop looping into words my hand
 in yours sharing the pen as we
 trace neural knots to write
 that morning mourning

At my window this morning, a slant of light stirs the lilac blossoms to float their scent into the room, over the lines of this poem and into these sentences. In the stillness, a neural network is throbbing, whispering through my blood, bones, fingertips.

She touches my cheek, wipes away the tears, and cradles three lilac florets into my hand as her hand encircles mine. “These lilacs have traveled a long distance to be in our hands today,” her palm wipes away the last trace of tears—a tingle at her touch. “Syrinx,” she says in a whisper. “Syringa—the Greek name for lilac. The wild little god Pan chased Syrinx and she turned herself into a lilac bush. Pan broke off her branches and, in grief, he kissed those branches. Pan’s breath made a beautiful sound, and we hear Pan’s breath every day you play your panpipes.”

She laughs as I laugh. Her breath mingles with lilac’s breath, with Pan’s breath, and, in this moment, deep in my/our neural network the smell in the folds of her neck, verbena and white sage. I cannot resist holding still the writing, to take the dusty panpipes from the shelf, smell the wood, finger the cracking leather straps, breathing deep the stale air left behind in my neglect of nearly fifteen years. I swallow. The pipe cold against my lips. She is there standing behind me, her mouth near my ear, hand on shoulder, the smell of lilac, verbena. The first semitone—a vibration, a caught-between sound of C toward its flat side opens neural pathways of air, breath, breathing into song.

* * *

A knotting of images—bridge, Raven, leather, lilac, emerald. A crosshatching of images refasten, fray, and slip in the stuttering spaces of irregular lines and breaks between words, sounds, and silences. Creating a rhythm of varying tempos and durations and spaces of silence, too, that emphasize the uncertainty and irregularity of thought and the inability to find language to express the neural sensations. I am not trying to capture “what was,” to replicate an experience, but to illustrate how experiencing, how creating the *poiesis* constitutes who I am becoming through the writing.

The writing shifts from poem to narrative in the gradually accruing nodes—scent of lilac, Pan, panpipes, verbena, the cleansing power of white sage. The narrative unfolds along a neural network of sonics, smells, invigorating affect. Kinetic energy flows in multi-directions—especially into the sonorous sounds of the panpipe. And, mother, me, we are becoming again—diverging, converging, intersecting. In a vital embodiment and performativity of presences and absences, I attempt in this (in)habiting to reach toward love and longing. I wonder as with presence/absence, so with longing/loving—these are not separate affects left behind from encounters but are continuously in-the-making as sensorium evokes memories and story.

To keep the neural networks in motion requires an architectonic of tension to hold together and outperform language's limitations. *Tensegrity*, the blending of tension and integrity, is the architecture I imagine suspends the (in)habitations, the multi-verse *in tension*—pulsing, throbbing with slight shifts between ambiguity and possibly but never fully landing on stable ground. Suspended in mid-air, mid-thought, mid-sentence—a creative tension to keep the inquiry moving.

Longing as a Field of Tensions: Inhabiting Tensegrities⁷

It would not be. Not that morning. Not finishing the letter. In spaces of silence: a knock on the door. “Your mother,” our neighbor gasps. I already know in my bones. I hold tight to steady myself.

“Your mother. . .”

No need to say the words that have already been written. . .

* * *

the smell of the folds of your neck, verbena
and white sage, near that nape where a scarf—
raven black and emerald knot—is untied *as if* to give
you unbound space to breathe. Breath breathe
but you resist, leaving what is unfinished in
my right hand from your left hand

On your desk the letter fountain pen
Uncapped black ink Raven

I walk to the bridge. Raven watches me watching

only her eye moves. Stillness—except for the flicker.

Raven repositions talons on the branch
 wing-edges shutter. A *pinging* at my feet—
 my mother's hairpin the emerald green
 of tree Raven's eye caught in prisms
 of tiny moonstone settings.

Love is connected in the way small moonstones refract to un-self the selves. Or is it un-self (ish)-ness? To love someone or something is to know how fragile, how easily it disappears, how ephemeral the longing that comes as if emerging from sleep to find an absence beside you. The world blinks and tilts. Bone, blood come together and break apart—surging, seeping, subsiding—as if a pause might bring relief.

Then you come to me again. One morning in the kitchen, making oatmeal. I am five. I reach toward the stove. Your hand grasps mine—too tight. An unexpected sharpness in your voice. “Baby—no, not ever. Do NOT reach.” The voice changes, wistful but the grip tightens. “My Daddy—” a catch in her throat. She lifts me to her, face to face. I feel the warmth of her breath. “I tipped over a pot of oatmeal big enough to feed all twelve of us. Right down the front of me. I could feel the heat seeping in, moving onto my skin. Daddy grabbed the scissors. Cut off my clothes, one long cut straight down the front of me. ‘Skin the rabbit,’ he said softly. Me naked; him holding a cold towel compressed on my chest.”

The tears flow. “Daddy whispers. Never ever. Do NOT Reach . . .” Her voice trails off. I am in the tight grip of her arms as if she is cradling her own terror and relief. I melt my chest into hers, the heat oozing in, and I remember how many times, undressing me, pulling shirts and sweaters over my head I heard her soft words: “Let’s skin the rabbit.” And, me to our children, “Skin the rabbit.” And they to their children. Memory holds in tightening chords—suspending and trans-versing the tensegrities of longing.

We hold our breath the skin between us
 Transparent a quiver of relief my arms her
 arms entangled in need of each other fear
 in us elemental pulsing beating my heart
 cracking into moonstone prisms refracting across
 oceans of memory oatmeal skin the rabbit all tumbling
 unpredictable gleaming holding together

* * *

As intensities of affect tighten in the body, so too, a tightening in the opening poem of this (in)habiting. Threads of acknowledgment swirl in its vortex—her smell, breathing, Raven, scarf, bridge, handwriting, and hairpin—an attempt to hold them in the unsteady moments of (re)remembering, of imagining but contrapuntal in images, objects, effects and affects from the earlier (in)habittings. Consider how all bodies from hairpin to Raven, from mother to Daddy to bridge to stove—all—weave through a somatic field of tensions to create movement and find expression. A poem is a somatic field—sounds-silences, visual-verbal, speakable-unspeakable—in tension. Tension holds *longing* in its grip, shimmers—the multi-threads held together in a geometry of tensegrity.

The unspoken (breaking rhythms, dashes, lineation, blank spaces) inhabits where language cannot speak and tensions overflow. Poem gives way to narrative as the story told across generations of fathers, daughters, mothers suspends the gravity/tensegrity of longing and love until caring bursts from the gyres of intentions. Trying to work these dimensions simultaneously offers a way of building and interlocking sensation and affect. And yet, there is one more dimension of longing to explore in this inquiry. Perhaps the basics of sensorium—the body's responses caught in webs of the sensory, of sensation—produce the most intimate forms of longing and love.

Longing as Embodied: Inhabiting Sensorium

The moonstone hairpin, the one I now learn my father gave my mother, catches moonlight through the window, glows, deepens blue-black as I stare into its prism of colors.

“Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka) has the finest moonstones,” he writes. I long to hear these words in his voice, but it will not be. He was shot down, imprisoned, suspended for a lifetime as MIA. I found this letter today—this day, February 15, 2022—in the box of 778 letters he wrote to her, to us between the middle of 1941 to early 1945, while he captained a crew that flew first in the African campaign and later in Tokyo bombing raids. Upper right-hand corner in his distinctive loops and curls: “Ceylon September 7, 1943.”

The brief lifeline of theirs together—creating my brother and me—in remnants of clothing, sketchbooks, photographs, stories, and just now the recognition of why my mother was never without the moonstone pin gleaming from her hair.

* * *

Wear these moonstones in your auburn hair
 until I see you we will dance
 again. I will weave moonstones into you
 your beautiful curls burrow my nose
 into your hair how I yearn
 to breathe you in
 to me

A shudder. Wings flutter over and inside me, hover—a deep pit of longing tripwires the beat of my heart. Moonstone—orthoclase and albite, stacked layers within—fabled to be created from moonbeams.

Moonstone feminine lunar cycles
 waxing and waning moons Did he know? Did she
 know? Moonstone third eye heart chakras
 Moonstone shimmers shifts colors with
 Moon phase
 Moonstone pinging

I hold the stones to my lips—a coolness vibrates. A full moon tonight. Moonstone's glorious purpose—uniting lost lovers. He held me when I was born, for three days, and then he was gone. I cannot hear him speak these words “my love” to my mother, hear him say, “I yearn to breathe you in to me.”⁸

I know him, know him only through the words of his longing, sense his senses through his words conveying all he sees, touches, and feels in the chaos of war. I know him through the curves and swirls of his careful hand. I know him only through pictures of him, never growing old—my father, my friend, my lover, my child, and now the age of our grandchildren. I finger this letter that illuminates the ping of moonstone hairpin, my fingers touch his invisible whorls and merge into my mother's whorls, knowing she read this letter over and again, reaching up, caressing the pin in her hair. I am leaving fingerprints on fingerprints left behind seventy-seven years ago. I see her fingers on his as she reads what he writes of moonstones and desire, mine now caressing them both, the DNA of three on paper, ink, the longing to dance, to breathe. I take a deep breath—a hint of sage and verbena lingers, but something more—musky like morels found deep in the woods, fertile, damp, waiting to be found.

“Wear these moonstones in your auburn hair until I see you and when we dance again, I will weave moonstones into you, your beautiful curls, burrow my nose into your hair and how I yearn to breathe you in to me. . .”

Moonstone, hairpin, Raven's talons, ping. Pinging—the gravity of materiality pulls me toward what is insufficient to say, to think in words, to (re)search.

In the fullness of sensorium—(in)habiting this moment of presence/absence—another refiguring of moonstone:

“The moon is blue cheese,” my mother says, beams of full moon sharpen her smile as her hand flashes another push of our granddaughter into the night sky. Who goes to swing—at midnight—except my mother when a great granddaughter asks?

The swing cuts through air, suspended. Glistening against moonlight—our granddaughter's auburn curls wave, glow. A tingling hum of chirping in the distance. Up she goes again. Back and forth, back and forth, against the creak of swing.

At three, she reckons with blue cheese, swirls the idea in her mouth and frowns. A long silence. “The moon is stone, Nana.” Her voice cuts through quiet air—gently, without grievance. A faint star shimmers like jelly. I can almost hear its laughter.

“The moon is a rock, Nana,” she thrusts her toes toward the sky and tips back far enough to see Nana behind her, waits for silence to cut air illuminated with the full-of-moon sky. Nana moves her lips, melts explanation into spinning declaration, “I love you.”

For a moment nothing matters as her words catch corners of wind.

If you saw them now, the younger flying, the elder feet planted firmly as she steadies herself for the next push, your eye might catch the brief touch of hand to hand forming an arc of balance in their banter. You might hear Nana say, “the moon must be a stone.” You would see

the same crooked curve of smile on each face and be

dazzled by auburn hair, a flash of shooting star. Hear the younger whisper, “Yes, Nana, moon stone.” And just then you might see the glow of moon and from the corner of your mind’s eye, see the moonstone hairpin in my father’s hand, him whispering, “Weave this in your beautiful auburn hair until I see you again.” Back and forth, back and forth the push of hand and creak of swing.

A breeze through the screen shutters a spider web alive on the window casement, releases a moth carcass, tiny crackling husk steadies itself on the window ledge. I see an egg sac, silken, shimmering on the central thread—a womb, this incubator glistening, alive, close to the husk of moth whose scale wings are perfectly intact, diffracting light through the beautiful architecture of a thousand scales now dried veins with hardened layers of chitin. Spider sucked the moth dry and left this beautiful mummification. Sustenance for Spider to spin, lay eggs. Egg sacs hum, pulse, alive. Spider is inhabiting a world made from her own spinning and foraging—precision in placement and timing. The world is in and out of whack. Beautiful is life, is death, is foraging, and is being foraged. Sense building is the work of sensorium.

* * *

Attending to sensorium in *poiesis* is like infusing living energy, a constellation of affects, into the (in)habitations, but first I must attune, pay attention to sensorium as I write—to feel in and of the body how the senses wash over to compose experiences. The texture of letters, the shimmer or moonstone, a nose buried deep into the neck, the moon and auburn hair, glistening, and the sounds of voices intermingling are the stuff of sensorium and permeate the body.

The extra sensory is also the work of *poiesis*-in-the-making. Sound (the absent sound of a voice, the ping, creak, banter) tunes the ear, images animate the eye and third eye (moonstone, auburn hair, a stack of letters), and touch channels textures (moonstone, full moon, jelly, the night sky). These and more capture in writing what I would liken to the brushstrokes of a painting, or the moment when we hear a bow touch strings on a viola—felt, seen in the body first. I find myself listening for the sonic richness of experience (sounds, alliteration), dense *figura* of a near over-telling of moonstone, repetitions—all intended to provoke embodied knowing and feeling. In this inhabiting, the materiality is the medium and needs to be distinguished from infusing the materials with meaning or significance.

The epistemological point hovers over the sensorium—feeling and affect are almost beyond reach. We (re)search, see ourselves making sense over and again into *sense-ness* but always left with the longing of not fully knowing or understanding.

Longing to Learn: A Poiesis of Pedagogical Possibilities

A delicate balance resides in spaces for discovery—knowing and not-knowing, feeling and not knowing how to feel at the faltering edges of unspeak-ability, bewilderment, recognition, and longing. Poetry and poetic inquiry have opened up infinite possibilities for researchers to engage the polyvalence and spaciousness of poetic inquiry in exquisitely and inquisitively rendered projects. I suspect Monica Prendergast, et. al. (2009) expressed best what I have not quite found the words to say: “... to engage in poetic inquiry is as much a calling as it is a method; a calling between the I and the Other, a call-and-response, a song that is sung, a voice that wills itself to be heard, in many spaces, both private and public, whispered (or shouted) in multiple ears” (xxxv).

My calling and method take form as (in)habitations whether the subject is autobiographical, dilemmas of teaching, ecological knowing, poetic imaginaries, or narrative inquiry. Many have influenced my thinking about poetic inquiry and remind me that we make the practice by doing, imagining, and experimenting. They deserve mention and gratitude.⁹

(In)habiting Poetic Inquiry

What concerns me more than finding guidance and helpful suggestions for engaging in poetic inquiry or offering forewarning of the pitfalls, are two or three dispositions that served me well as provisions for the journey into terrains of poetic inquiry.

First, it is important to slow down, live in, and capture moments of becoming. This counters the logic in research traditions of fast production—quickening the mind toward findings and implications. Poetic Inquiry nurtures reflexive and recursive thinking, makes visible searching, imagining, and attuning the porous skins of sensorium. Tracing movements of thought by weaving together various subjects, objects, and felt-senses compels the inquiry to deepen, finding new relational connections and providing further elaboration. Poetic inquirers probe; they do not prove.

Second, *poiesis* IS art-making. The challenge in crafting poetic inquiry is how to compose (in)habiting spaces, or whatever the individual method might be called, with resonances that are in motion, as if the reader enters with and beside the poet/

researcher, experiencing the ever-in-the-making as the inquiry unfolds. It begins in *poiēsis* (the making of something that did not exist before) but combines with *aesthesis*, a “taking in, breathing in, a gasp” of recognition in the affect of awe and longing. The point of linking *poiesis* to poetic inquiry is that it takes seriously the role of un-masking, of un-concealing, of revealing the hand, heart, and mind of the creator in the act of inquiring and producing knowledge and affect.

Third, poetry teaches us to take notice of the details of the world around us in ways that inform our actions, communications, and understandings of the ontological and material, the cosmic and ecological systems—from moon and moonstones to birds in trees from shooting stars to auburn hair. I hope these entanglements nudge you, as they did me, to notice, to respond to the world, and to inform actions, communications and understandings. Ahmed’s (2010) elaboration on *sensual proximity* is similar to what seems an ultimate goal of any research—composing the research journey through all the in-between-ness of sensations and sensibilities that lead us to participate with heightened awareness of the organic and inorganic worlds, the corporeal and (in)corporeal, and an ethics of living and longing.

There is No End to the Longing

There is no ending to this inquiry. The material, the mattering, the *poiesis* continue. On the day after the original submission of this article on February 28, 2022, I received an email from The US Department of Army Human Resource Command with the Subject line: *Tokyo Prison Fire Unknown Graves Disinterment Status*. To place this email in perspective, I have never before received an email on my father’s status as MIA. The message was terse and simple, asking for my DNA as the “closest” living relative. The remains of thirty-seven from the Tokyo prison fire were found buried in the Philippines, disinterred, and taken to a forensic lab in Hawaii for processing. Yes, this might be a long wait or a dead end, but my DNA would “speed up the process” of identification. My mind tracked to dresser drawer filled with his DNA, the photo albums of the African campaign that he had carefully curated—small black and white photos, annotated, black triangle edges glued down with his saliva, holding his documented experiences as a slice of that long war and my longing.

For seventy-eight years they have been searching; for seventy-eight years we have been grappling with presence/absence. What mysteries are there to be discovered? Synchronicities? I stare at the moonstone hairpin, look out to see if Raven or Heron await. I feel the need to bury my nose in the heather sweater where now I’ve placed the emerald silk scarf, the color of Raven’s eyes. To what ends this inquiry, this search, this longing?

Come With Longing; Come Hungry

I suspect for many of us inquiry starts in yearning, in longing. Let me share a parting word of advice directly to you, dear reader.

When you are ready, you will find the road; you will find the bridges; Raven will point a way forward. At times, the river will be overflowing with desire and curiosities and other times run at a trickle, nearly bereft of possibility. Moonlight will guide you. Something catches to nourish the longing you are incubating. You may find yourself scratched, scuffed, shuffling along the tender threads of inquiry, but, above all

Come Hungry. Hear the hum of bird's eggs vibrating pulsing. Come hungry to find a way to weave live/fe-worlds anew. The body will always return to blood the beating heart.

Find pleasure after long rains, dewdrops glisten, sensing sounds underground, roots tangling murmuring in the spruce grove of memory. Come Hungry.

Discovery IS the cutting edge of experience, longing, long-ing for more than findings, more than knowledge. Come hungry. No, come hunger-ing—reaching into the darkness, washing into your felt-senses, laughing when words fail, and mining the data of your choosing and what chooses you. Let something as simple as a moonstone hairpin, a letter, a visit from Raven, or an email send you to the high wire of inquiry.

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ENDNOTES

1. I use the term *poiesis*, etymologically derived from the Greek “to make or create,” to emphasize that poetic inquiry is a performative text rather than representational one, which might be closer to Tuckwell’s explanation of *creative poiesis* than *poiesis* without qualification. See Jason Tuckwell’s (2017) article for explanation and exemplification.

2. *Affect* as used throughout the manuscript is most often associated with Affect Theory in general although I want to account for a variety of definitions. I lean toward *affect* as felt-experience with emphasis similar to Massumi’s (2002) distinction that *affect* is a condition that results from encounters with the world (exteriority) rather than from interiority. He suggests that emotion and affect “follow different logics and pertain to different orders” (27).

3. For the purposes of this project, I want to identify particular commitments to Affect Theory that inform my thinking and practices. In general, I focus on embodiment, sensation, porosity, and materiality in ways that Cartesian dualism have rejected. I draw inspiration from Barad’s (2007) focus on the dynamism of matter and mattering, where performativity and material-discursive practices reveal intra-relationality and intra-acting agencies in movements, entanglements, and social processes (2007). Massumi (2011) problematizes the production of binaries of human/non-human, mind/body. His attention to intensity that precedes feelings and emotions have been particularly helpful in ways I have come to understand longing as a bodily response. A third influence is Kathleen Stewart’s (2007) exploration of bodies’ affects, one on others, to generate intensities of affect. Certainly Rosi Braidotti (2019, 2022), whose powerful and elegant articulations of a post-human ethic, affirmative resistance, and concerns of living in relation to others, tinges my reading of the binaries of presence/absence; the forms of ethical caring relationality that weave through my inquiry are strengthened by her guiding voice.

4. I am deliberate here in the use of embodied sensation and not embodied affect. Sensation is immediate and neural resulting from the circular interaction between affective qualities or affordances. Bodily resonances result from intra-action with the environment and shape perception. Immediacy is what distinguishes sensation from affect in the *poiesis* of their compositions.

5. I am reminded of Brian Massumi’s (2002) articulation of fluid movements where familiar modes of inquiry begin in stasis, with identifiable positions taken rather than processes opened to how inquiry might be shaped. How might writing encode the intensities in our affective relations, offering us both a record of these intensities and a process that links us to account for how affective connections—between and among subjects and their environment and memories—are intra relational?

6. Each type of neural net may have a different behavior, but the behavior of one entity in the network will have an effect on the others depending on the proximity and strength of connections. So, I visualize it in this way: threads traverse, cross spaces, threads come together, settle in, spin out another thread from stored raw materials, traverse, over and over again as the same strands and new ones are created, suspended, adjusted and, *finally, woven anew* which is a reminder of how (re)searching using old and new materials spins, weaves, over and again.

7. *Tensegrity*—tension and integrity. Buckminster Fuller (1961), an artist, inventor, and mathematician described tensegrity as a form of self-tensioning that has rigid structures and cables that force compression as tension. Fuller emphasized that tensegrity is found in the biological material of living creatures in combinations that allows for motion. Think how all bodies from leaf to hummingbird, from beetle to human—all—weave through a somatic field of tensions to create movement, to act and react, to find expression through living and moving. A poem is a somatic field as well—sounds-silences, visual-verbal, speakable-unspeakable, in tension. In the web of my (in)habitations, tension holds *longing* in its grip. I continuously compose threads that project, circle back, vibrate, traverse—held together in geometries (an orb-web) of tensegrity. All are continuously catching, stitching new neural networks in the spaces of in-between-ness, of felt-sense, the not-quite-knowing. Poetic inquiry works by tension/counter tensions that attempt to articulate, express, and order the (re)searching.

8. Moonstones are highly valued by monks, shamans, spiritualists, and devotees from various religions. Moonstones from Sri Lanka (Ceylon for my father) are particularly prized because of their deep blue coloring. Purported to have the power to nourish, heighten passion, and awaken feminine energies—moonstones’ power changes with the

waxing and waning of the moon. Moonstones evoke tranquility, exude vitality that can re-energize the mind and body and are fabled to protect night travelers, voyager at sea, mothers in childbirth or with child.

9. Where to start with an accounting of influences on the ways in which I come to and engage with poetic inquiry?

My first teachers were poets which led me to imagine ways to engage in poetic inquiry as a complex gesture of negotiating the distance from an impulse or intention through to some realization of something beautiful and necessary. If I had space and time, I could explain how Carl Leggo (2007), in all his poems and poetic inquiry, and Monica Prendergast's (2009) deep thinking and exemplification of poetic inquiry have carried me to the heart of poetic inquiry, and given me the heart to trust ways forward because they are doing the poetic as well as the inquiry. Two poets/scholars gave new energy to a future project of (in)habitations that I am conjuring now. Read these, please, if you have not, and I suspect, like me, you will be drawn into a new vortex of imaginings. Maya Borhani (2021) takes Prendergast's categories of *Vox* and expands these in subtle and enlightening ways. It was thrilling to read how she is pushing at boundaries; her *Vox Orphic* is a stunning piece of scholarship and poetry. A mainstay for me is Lyn Hejinian (2000), all her work of course, but, as I dream the next inquiry, I am taken back to *The Language of Inquiry* for sustenance—flour, water, and yeast for imagination rising.