

# A Thing is Whatever This is That I Can't Say

## Exploring Aporias through Poetic Inquiry

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### Résumé de l'article

This inquiry exists because of a necklace I made but could not explain. I picked up theory and poetry and set off on a journey to answer why, and what now. How do you articulate the value of something you remain incapable of explaining? In the middle of the journey, I reached the edge of a ravine. This paper is written there, at the lip of the aporia. It is like a letter or a map. It aims to guide you to that uncrossable gap existing between thing and object, thing and us. It invites you to join me—speaking poems about and into that chasm, and hearing strange replies that might be echoes, or new verses—as I make with and despite and because of the mystery. As I inquire into and with the world, gaps and all, to approach things—that which is that I can't say.

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## A THING IS WHATEVER THIS IS THAT I CAN'T SAY: EXPLORING APORIAS THROUGH POETIC INQUIRY

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**Abstract:** This inquiry exists because of a necklace I made but could not explain. I picked up theory and poetry and set off on a journey to answer why, and what now. How do you articulate the value of something you remain incapable of explaining? In the middle of the journey, I reached the edge of a ravine. This paper is written there, at the lip of the aporia. It is like a letter or a map. It aims to guide you to that uncrossable gap existing between thing and object, thing and us. It invites you to join me—speaking poems about and into that chasm, and hearing strange replies that might be echoes, or new verses—as I make with and despite and because of the mystery. As I inquire into and with the world, gaps and all, to approach things—that which is that I can't say.

**Keywords:** poetic inquiry; arts-based research; aporia; jewelry-making



### **Start here. This is close to where I began.**

This inquiry is about what followed after the making of a necklace. At the time, I was enrolled in a doctoral arts-based research class. For our final project, we were asked to participate in what we had been studying, that is, to do artful inquiry. Because I had, moth-like, fluttered around the same questions during the course—*What makes something art, or research? What makes it both? How do you recognize art-research (by whatever terms it goes) when you see it?*—I decided to linger with them for my final project. I attuned myself to the processes of the inquiry—thinking, making, writing, and reading—and picked up *Thought in the Act* (Manning & Massumi, 2014) as a guide.

In addition to the necklace in question, I also produced several other jewelry pieces, including one that especially matters for this inquiry: a hair ornament made from two wires twisted together. It was the result of a visual inquiry into a question that Manning and Massumi (2014) posed, “But what if two made three? What-if the two, the one-two of language and movement were reset, just this way, into an inexpressible thirdness?” (p. 56). The third, that is, is a way of imagining this possibility: that when two join (into one), what happens does not have to be a reduction; it is also possible that

what emerges in the relation will be something more-than either was apart (Manning & Massumi, 2014). Not so much a one as a third. Because I have engaged with works that intertwine art and research in such a way that something more-than resulted from their intersection, altering my understandings of both art and research (e.g., Bhattacharya, 2014; Flint, 2020; Hartman, 2019; McGarry, 2021; Sousanis, 2015), I latched onto that concept. The third became a way to think about what arts-based research and other artful approaches do. It also became a way for me to think about how my artistic and scholastic identities might join, making my own sort of third-space for inquiry—a more-than-between through which I ask my questions, and find ways to answer them by using together the tools and techniques I use apart.



In this article, I use the tools and techniques—the methods—of art and research, particularly poetic and visual inquiries. This poetry is presented in both written and auditory forms.

When I talk about the third of/as arts-based work, however, I do not mean these specific methods, nor do I mean all arts-based work. What I mean is this: if methods are specific, pre-charted ways of approaching a question, the third is generated by

wandering off (Nordstrom, 2018); by making paths in the unexplored and unmarked spaces—paths of and in and with the between.

This article is about wandering (off) (these) paths. It is about what happened as I cut and folded and looped and glued, and as I began to think about arts-based research as happening between and in excess of art and research. It is about what it felt like to explore that third space, and to encounter new territories as you make with-them, the earth cooling under your nomadic feet (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2018). It is to realize that things—mundane and mystical, known and unknown—keep their own counsel.

**No, that's not the necklace, but it was part of the journey. It's part of how I came to understand where I was, the third space.**

**This is an inquiry of the way**

This is an inquiry of the way<sup>1</sup>

further-in, over the threshold<sup>2</sup> into  
current meeting current.

(Let me tell you a story. I had a dream once of the Earth  
making and me—Land cracked open under  
the Sea and Island stepped up so there were places  
for birds to land. I saw it,  
and used a stick to sketch  
in the newborn sand a name,  
and the birds and the Sea and the Earth laughed  
at my presumption, but not unkindly;  
stringing together letters into words that don't yet exist  
is to mime the world.)

Whatever else this is—to walk towards a horizon receding—it is a poem  
if you will allow 'poem' (the word) to mean 'this' (the thing):  
the seed containing  
what-is-and-as-of-yet-still-might-be, that is, epiphany  
encased in a layer thin enough you could split it with your fingernail,  
and find inside everything: seed itself—dunes  
crumpling into dunes, and dunes folded into dunes, and  
dunes in dunes in dunes in dunes.

(I don't know how to name this: it is  
not metaphor, poem, story, fable,  
paper, necklace, dream,  
lesson, or answer.

It's something like colors bent back through a prism, a sort of light  
 made for different eyes, made when colors touch face to face  
 in new places—red to blue, yellow to violet, indigo to orange.  
 It's something like how it feels to look at something you made  
 [well, you were part of the making],  
 and it all gets stuck in your throat—  
 process and product, thing and idea,  
 explanation and phenomenon—  
 until you don't know it from the world.  
 Until you don't know what it means, this necklace,  
 or why it matters, because  
 you suddenly know you don't even know  
 its real name.)

### **Be patient. This is a winding path.**

#### If you follow me

If you follow me, this is where you'll go: around and around  
 until you find known and unknown growing together  
 on the same branch like apple and bramble (maybe, like me,  
 you'll wonder if known and unknown grow together  
 cause they cannot grow apart).  
 There, you'll find an entrance to a rift under the sea.  
 Feel it? In the gap, there is  
 the heat of all that's becoming.  
 Divergences (or poems) take you to the best places.  
 (That was the thesis, by the way).

### **Besides, here is still part of the trail, even if it's also 'before.'**

#### Speaking of, I have a theory

(Speaking of, I have a theory that we can learn photosynthesis from inside  
 the cradle of the leaf if we will make this trade  
 to be satisfied with the experience  
 and not its explanation.  
 [That, too, was the thesis, by the way]).

## How do I know the way?

We're definitely going somewhere

We're definitely going somewhere, what with all this walking.

But I have to warn you: you may not like it—  
to labor on and on and on and find it leads to this.

**Well, I don't. But, this is a way, the way I took.**

In what we can and cannot speak

In what we can and cannot speak, there are gaps, gaps gaps gaps —

The gap is a funny thing, a dividing unspoken  
by which we turn the world into words.

Tell me: what did you notice when you read that,  
imagining the gaps (silence) to make sense?

Me? It's hard to say,  
but I see something like

opening a pomegranate and finding a city.

Or, well, I feel how I think I'd feel if my body  
was woven together from fiber spun backwards  
out of a cocoon.

You know, how it feels to drink poetry  
from the frosted edge of Saturn's rings.

And seeing a gap in a hedge  
and through that gap a forest  
and in that forest a color like green  
you haven't seen since you were a child.  
(That was the thesis, by the way.)

**See? We're following those—the landmarks I set up to know  
where to go.**

Anyway, onward

Anyway, onward. We've still got a way to go, up  
these switchbacks, turning cheeks to the rough edge of wind  
that holds particles of being and touch and sound like sand.

My tongue is coated in it—substances unspoken.  
(That was the thesis, by the way.)



**Yeah—landmarks, headers, same thing.**



**See! Told you! That was the necklace. (Well, part of it.)**

For the necklace, I envisioned two related components. I would (1) invite others into the making, blurring artist/researcher and ‘participant,’ and, (2) in the process, explore the blurring of product and process. This was guided by Manning’s (2016) thoughts about making a ‘product’ that nonetheless remained open to process. She explains that “in a procedural fashioning there can be no end to the process” (p. 108). From this perspective, a third between product and process, “dress” is not the right word; “dressing” is (p. 108). Therefore, I wondered, What might happen if I thought of the necklace as necklace-ing, that is, not as object (i.e., process concluded) but as object-still-in-process-and-understood-by-process-and-even-recognized-by-that-process? What might happen if what I made wasn’t guided by the ‘form’ of a necklace (i.e., its definition as end point), but by the actions of its making, actions that remain always open to new actions, to new loopings, additions, cuttings, foldings? Or, to put it another way, what if a thing can be recognized by how it is becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2018), and not because of what it is at the end?

How to invite people into this process seemed the more obvious part—I planned to set up an unfinished piece in my exhibit with materials, tools, and the prompt to



make-think-with me. Unfortunately, however, COVID-19 moved instruction online, and with it the exhibit. This forced me to re-consider how to invite others into the making. I sent an invitation to friends and family, and asked them to select an action (e.g., folding, dyeing, knotting, cutting, adding) and a material from lists I provided (e.g., bead, stone, leather, wire, paper). From the 30 sets of directions I received, I made what became the necklace from scratch. That is, I didn't start with a circular form (e.g., the skeleton of a necklace) onto which I added pieces. By performing the actions with the things, as directed by others, I assembled piece-by-piece something that was a folding, dyeing, knotting, cutting, first and still once it had become 'necklace.' A collaborative necklace-ing.

**Be patient. The journey is the point, or the point is the journey,  
and so on.**

The making of the necklace-ing/necklace turned out to be simpler than trying to explain it, however. Try as I might, I could not explain what the necklace was, or what it meant, or why it mattered. Yet, I felt compelled to try. I could talk about it as a necklace-ing, and as collaborative, and in relation to the pandemic, but still it felt like this all was to overlook something important. Maybe that is a risk when you drench a thing in process, leaving it open to becoming (to still be available for making, folding, looping, cutting, adding—to be necklace-ing): that it refuses to sit still, even for you to pin to it value and significance. Regardless, it pulled me in and pushed me out. I wanted to explain what it was, why it mattered, or what it meant, but I could not.

The necklace had become a portal into inquiry, a threshold (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011), pulling me back into the process—the looping and connecting and cutting not just of literal materials but of the sense-making. This article is about this attempt to linger in that threshold; to allow the necklace to keep on necklace-ing, the inquiry to keep on inquiring. I tried to report what happened, to take you on the journey of process flowing into process, unknown into unknown, artful-research event into artful-research event (Manning & Massumi, 2014).



### **Look! There! That's more of it.**

I wrote this article to shut up the necklace. To make an entirely unserious joke, I found it could not be shut. This article is about that which cannot be shut, the gap that cannot be crossed by any nomad, the *aporia*. The *aporia* is the name for the “puzzle” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p. 606) that comes into being when we look at a thing-in/of-the-world and circumscribe it, that is, speak it (Schwenger, 2004). We always leave part of the thing out. The word (e.g., apple) does more, therefore, than give us a handle on the world; it also makes a division between the object—the idea of the-thing-called-apple indexed by a word—and the thing, the wholeness together of known-and-unknown, spoken-and-unspoken, that is the actual phenomenon. The thing that is, is both the known and unknowable parts—it includes and surpasses the object (Brown, 2004; Schwenger, 2004). Whether you notice the *aporia* or not—how frequently do we care to notice the aspects of things that do not serve us, anyway?—it yawns as an “impassable” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p. 606) ravine between thing and word/idea, or thing and object. In this way, the *aporia* is the product of one of the greatest possibilities

of language—naming is a sort of creation because cuts are productive (Barad, 2007)—and the sign of its abject failure. Perhaps that is why the aporia is both so hard to imagine and so alluring. As we speak it, it slides away, and in so doing draws us, hooks our curiosity. We feel instinctively that the more-than that is there in the world, that is not marshalled when we call, is the ultimate phenomenon—that the name we have used is not the ‘real’ name. So, though the gap between thing and word, thing and us, is impassable, we try to cross it, making new gaps in the process. After all, it is through trying to explain in the first place that the aporia was made. As Brown (2004) and Schwenger (2004) argue, the aporia exists because of us. It is the more-than that sits between known and unknown, word and thing, that comes into being when we split off part of the world with our words.

This article will not actually cross the aporia. Solving the “puzzle” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p. 606) is not the purpose of this article (nor its deliverable). Instead, this article is about “living the questions” (Visse et al., 2020, p. 1). Visse et al. (2020) describe this type of approach as apophatic inquiry and conceptualize it as a “a way of non-knowing that points towards the phenomenon, [but] never fully expresses it” (emphasis in original, p. 2). Doing apophatic inquiry, therefore, disrupts the assumptions of much of research. You ask questions you never expect to answer. It is thereby “a praxis of relating to ‘that which we cannot know about but are called by’” (Visse et al., 2019, p. 11). Thankfully, poetic inquiry is a helpful way to navigate uncertain spaces (Faulkner, 2019; Visse et al., 2019, 2020). With poetry, that is, we approach the un-understandable by crafting into lines our experiences in/of/with experience itself (Freeman, 2017; Visse et al., 2020).

So, let us go to the edge of the ravine, and “lea[n] towards” (Visse et al., 2020, p. 2) the mystery. Let me show you what I saw so you also can look over into it, into the expanse.

### **Keep walking. We’re getting nearer still**

#### Whatever necklacing is

Whatever necklace-ing is, and what it means, and why it matters, that would be the endpoint, or like it.

Remember what you learned

in literature classes: when something is like a thing, it is also not that thing. Similes (and metaphors) are what we get instead of the thing:

almost it,

part of it,  
a trail to an overlook  
when what we wanted  
was to cross the gap.



**No, really, almost there. See?**

To explore the aporia, I have chosen to use poetic inquiry. This may seem an odd choice, given that poetry—whether written or spoken—is a linguistic art form. How can words be used to understand the problem they create, to approach a sphere of being where they fail? Despite this—or perhaps because of it (e.g., Visse et al., 2019, 2020)—poetry has several strengths that make it suitable.

First, to think poetically is to simultaneously draw together and push apart experience and understanding (Faulkner, 2009; Freeman, 2017). Faulkner (2009) describes writing poetry as “learning how to use language to describe the ineffable, to say the unsayable” (p. 70). This paradox is accomplished in part because poetry conveys “embodied experience” (p. 88). A good poem, Faulkner argues, “make[s] the audience feel with, rather than about a poem, to experience emotions and feelings in situ” (emphasis in original, p. 90). Freeman (2017) explains that poetry enables us to “penetrate the felt and difficult-to-grasp regions of experiential life” as well as “reach beyond meaning and keep understanding in flow” (p. 86). To think poetically, therefore, is to use one’s experiences to make sense of the world while avoiding settled and certain interpretations. It is to press what can(not) be understood against what can(not) be said, and in so doing, to “see something familiar in new ways or ways that may be surprising...[and to] learn something about the human condition and ourselves” (Faulkner, 2009, p. 91). Maybe the aporia—with its unknowability and inarticulable more-ness—is not just a good subject for poetry; maybe it is the subject of poetry, or its

substance, or its proper sphere (Visse et al., 2019). Maybe the aporia is the paradox that gives poetry its “slipperiness and ambiguity...precision and distinctiveness” (Faulkner, 2019, p. 209).

Second, like the necklace, poetic inquiry hovers between product and process. In poetic inquiry, poetry is conceptualized “both as a method and a product” (Faulkner, 2019, p. 210). That is, like narrative, poetry is both a phenomenon and a method (e.g., narrative inquiry; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), a result of and path for inquiry. The relationship between what is said and how it is said multiplies meaning, opening inquiry into more-thans that might be pursued into infinity.

Third, literary devices such as metaphor, imagery, diction, puns, contrast, and juxtaposition allow the poet and reader to play on the edge of the un/known, so that the poem simultaneously asserts and “resists itself” (Longenbach, 2004, as cited in Faulkner, 2009, p. 16). Literary devices allow the poet to say and not say at the very same time, and in so doing, to “sho[w], rather than tel[l]” the mystery of the gap between thing and object (Faulkner, 2019, p. 209). This is especially evident with the line break, one of, if not the, defining feature of poetry (Longenbach, 2008). In prose, the author does not consider where words are in relation to the end of the line, other than spatial fit. Lines in this context are the product of space and size only. In contrast, line breaks in poetry are made, even when produced in relation to a structuring genre (e.g., a sonnet). They are, therefore, meaningful. Furthermore, because the line is not the only unit of meaning, thoughts frequently stretch beyond a single line, and themes might be explored over the entire poem. The resulting interplay between interpretations—between what individual lines suggest in comparison/relation to larger units of meaning—help to keep understanding flexible.

### **Okay, okay, we’re here!**

What follows is the place where the inquiries, that is, the trails, intersect. Up to here, we’ve been trying to understand the context of the making of the necklace and to describe the feeling that there was more to explore. Now, we explore that more-than. Like what has come before, this part of the journey is a collection of poems and reflections. They will take you to the edge of the aporia, where you can look over into the gap as I did. But, before you go, I must tell you this: understanding the aporia remains still as impossible as reading the necklace. But, that is okay, because maybe we can now walk (off) this path with the thought that understanding might not be the only valuable result of inquiry.

That's part of what I'm considering

That's part of what I'm considering:

how making a way, even one that won't take you  
where you want to go, might be part  
of the point of it all: cavorting where land crumbles  
into rifts tumbling into the sea that's swallowed  
by its own depths.

In the wide, wide, wide wideness of it all  
there might be space still for a thing  
you can't make into a summary. A datum. A fact. A prize.

(And what a prize that then is—

if what glows does so [like stars] because you can't explain them<sup>3</sup>;

they won't spill the secret, no matter

how nicely you ask.) I suspect this is a generosity:

to find that inside of what we name

and think we know

there might be a gap

(and in it a gap and gaps breaking forth within gaps): a place

where inquiry keeps its own questions

and getting lost is the only way to move forward.

**That's the necklace. Ta-dah!**  
**Oh, you wanted more than just to see it? Me too.**  
**Go on, keep walking. I'll meet you further in.**

---



I'm trying to find the between

I'm trying to find the between growing beyond, or through,  
word and thing—to map  
the stretch like the universe.

Have you ever thought that the first map was made  
by getting lost in the unsayable—because can you say where you are  
if there is no map to name it? To tie place and space together,  
to find or to make (perhaps it is always both) is first that:  
sowing lost into the soil with pencil and paper.



Reflection: The word significance has stalked me for a long time—between chemistry and poetry classes, philosophy seminars, and classes I taught. When asked about my interdisciplinarity, I usually say one thing or another about how I like the contrast, or how they are more similar than you might think. But, in the recesses of my backpack along with a dried-out highlighter and loose index cards, I hide the deeper questions: What is significance? Does all this need to be significant, and if so, why? If it's not significant, then what? What does that mean, and does it matter?

This necklace is made from this history. It is a metonymy, a piece standing in for a whole, and I address it, pore over it, as if it could speak for the world and for me.

----

What is it that keeps in play

What is it that keeps in play<sup>4</sup> the unsayable between  
time or space or mattering? It's like a friction—  
this meeting of idea and thing—if friction is what the world is  
that we can't say, the art and science  
of hawks and mushrooms, and whatever philosophy the rocks  
discuss when we aren't there to hear.  
I gather a collection of small wonders—  
coppered coins and sketches of scissors,  
a vertebra bleached by the sun, and beads faceted  
as if they could tell your fortune. I lay prepositions—  
between, through, around, across,  
beyond, among, along, within—  
in the crevices, like paper or wool  
to keep it all from shattering.

Reflection: Why can't I make the necklace make sense? Why can't I make sense out of my need to make it make sense? Am I asking the wrong questions? Is there something I needed to read that would make it all connect? That would give me the words?



----

Do you pick them up, too, prepositions

Do you pick them up, too, prepositions,  
when you find one glinting in tall grass and light?

I do: tuck them away with adjectives swollen for birth  
and nouns I chipped off rock, and verbs I dug out of their sleep in burrows.  
They can only approximate the world. But isn't that still amazing—  
how they situate us? How we navigate by them like they were stars  
and we were sailors, bewildered by foreign waves and the flashing of fish scales  
just under the surface—a code, a map, a solace  
if only we could understand?

I pile them behind my door and spread them across  
the arches of gates like I was a druid.

I tip them over to collect worlds  
of pollen, and dew.

Reflection: The necklace is both thing and object, and that's why making sense of it feels like I'm trying to make fabric out of black holes.

If objects are what you imagine make up the world (soap bubbles, sticks, pens), things are everything that actually make up the world. There is always more, between and beyond what we mean when we say "necklace." Brown (2004) explains it this way: whatever else the thing is, it is that which "lurk[s] there after the subject and object have done their thing" (p. 3).

If so, is thingness the reason why the necklace eludes me? Is my problem that I keep feeling the magnitude of existence that was there beyond me, that's still there, after I try and say what the necklace means?

I think so. I wanted to be able to explain some part of the necklace that is unexplainable.

I want to know it, to speak it, to approach the wildness where its thingness dwells. It's the simultaneity of known-and-unknown, sayable-and-unsayable, thing-and-object that draws me.

----

If we are quiet and move carefully

If we are quiet and move carefully and put the veins in our arms  
up to the soft skin of a leaf, we might feel it,  
the careful exchange between  
by which one becomes two or three or more, or one. Connectedness<sup>5</sup>  
(: a metaphor) is a relation that limits and seeds and exceeds itself.  
It's all more and less than its shape in clay, more and less  
than its shape in the mouth.

Reflection: This is a little epiphany for me: what I want is a paradox. I want to speak the unspeakable part of the necklace, the thingness. But speaking would make it object. Or rather, in speaking, I can only talk about the object. How to explain the thing if I can't speak it? How to address the dark side of the moon when I've never seen it? I think about how MacLure (2013) talks about data that glows—moments that beg an interpretation while providing none. What a beautiful metaphor, for an infuriatingly fascinating impossibility.



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What keeps me from the curve of red

What keeps me from the curve of red

in watermelon growing in dark soil,

even if I draw it or define it or salt it and eat it?

I take curiosity and compulsion in their braid,

and wind it around my fingers until they turn red with my blood,

preparing the world

like it was a yarn for knitting.

The gap between what can and cannot be said is

unimaginable, yet also here it is! Right here! In the swelling in my hand,

and in the fibrous fullness protected

by a tough shell,

in the hidden sugary heart.

Reflection: The aporia is that which comes into being when we split off part of the world with our words. How do you speak the gap then, if to speak is to be a knife? When I call it 'gap,' don't I slice it further still? After all, I call only the part that answers to that name. (There is still more to the gap, more than I could imagine—a thing, a thingness.)

But wait—how can a gap even be a thing?  
 And wait—when I say "thing," I'm referring to, at best, an object?  
 How can I even think about a thing—let alone talk about it—when I don't know  
 the word for it?

Schwenger (2004) gives this tip: the aporia reveals itself when we try "to think within the space of their difference," (p. 138) between object and thing, word and world.

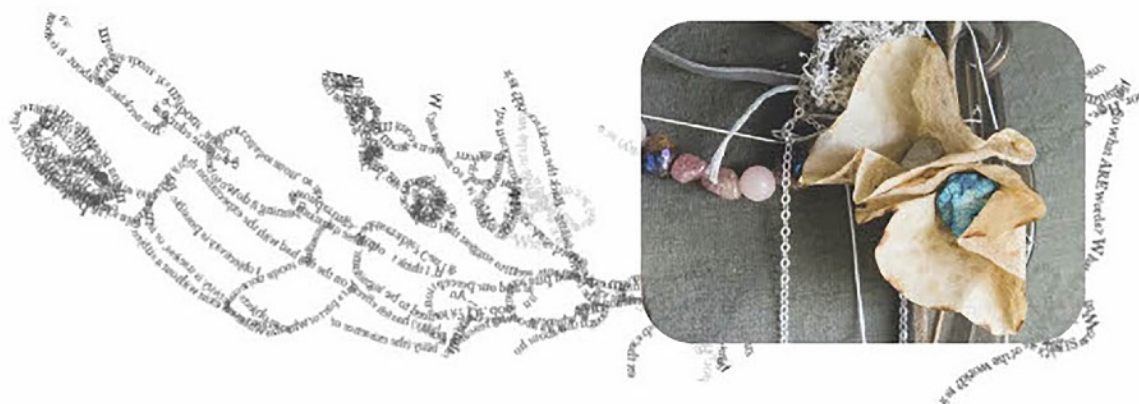
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### Can I join

Can I join in this necessary and im/possible task,  
 to know the world as it knows itself?

Reflection: To call the aporia aporia, and thing thing, is the same as calling a problem problem. The aporia, the thing, have no specific names because names would cleave them. Make them objects. Make them known. The thing and the aporia are before names and will be beyond names, the excesses that exceed our words, our knowledge. Every time I write thing and aporia I'm writing only part of them; I am writing the objectness of them. They are like the play of light disappearing when you turn to look. They are like the flash of thought or feeling of an epiphany—less words than a block of color, your body plugging itself into the world.

Thing, gap, aporia—their thingness is the substance of metaphor, of all metaphors. They are the more-ness-between that we try to touch in writing poetry, an almost instinctual recognition that there are depths in depths in depths in love and a leaf.



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What of a dropped acorn

What of a dropped acorn, a residue of the wind, the tree, the years,  
 or a dive into water<sup>6</sup>—the very real confronting us  
 with the very real possibility that this puzzle<sup>7</sup> wasn't made  
 with any sort of purpose for us to open?

Reflection: I had set out to translate the necklace, or my desire to translate  
 it, and I found a thing that couldn't be said. I was rebuffed by the space between  
 thing and object, the sayable and unsayable. I wanted to part the oyster shell of the  
 world or the space between legs and satisfy myself. Oh, to have some way to  
 answer my own questions!  
 I laugh, not unkindly, at myself.  
 I opened the shell and saw only more shells that could never be opened. I  
 parted legs and found the walls of a womb.

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If I like poetry

If I, like poetry, push meaning into things,  
 do I not live as the world does? By tying on  
 and trimming and rooting drafts into the womb, the skin, the heart,  
 of the apple tree? (Drafts and grafts are the same,  
 I'm saying. And not. I mean both. That is what it is to think  
 metaphor: to stand at the edge of the gap and look  
 down until you see shadow fall into shadow, and to walk across  
 on a swinging bridge with hope  
 that it will be, if not what you think it is,  
 enough alike to hold.)

Reflection: The necklace was a tying together of what could and couldn't  
 be said—matter and meaning and history and bodies and questions and so very  
 many between. Maybe this is part of why it matters, or what it means, or why it  
 is significant. I still can't say which is the right word, by the way—matter or  
 meaning.

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How could you define art

How could you define art if not as how the bird nests,  
pulling straw and discarded thread and the grey hair of wolves  
out of the world to make a place  
to land?

Reflection: Barad (2007) says the world is material-discursive. I get that—with the object and idea. But, if the thing (actually the thing; not the object that the word thing indexes!) is that which remains unable to be said or thought, then what is it? Is it some strange remnant, a fossil, the world-before-and-somehow-still, both inside and beyond the assemblage?

Whatever 'thing' is, then, it's a paradox.

It is somehow made by the cut of our attention, our naming, but it escapes naming.

It is carved off the world, off the object, by the knife of intra-action, like the fat.

Or maybe it is still material-discursive, but of a form of discursivity that cannot be said, or thought, with words. Maybe it's just possibility without limit.

Maybe that's all the same.

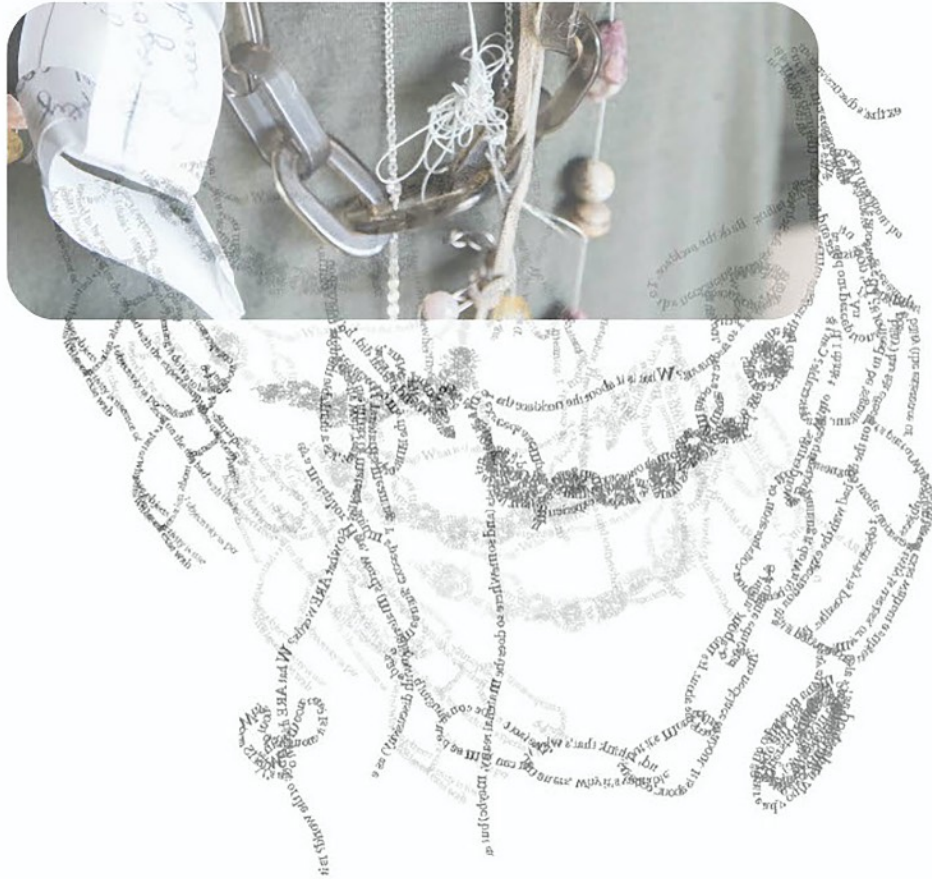
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How do you name this poem

How do you name this 'poem'  
if not how the spider draws from its body  
line after line, spinning from strands a net  
of the self and desire and dust?

Reflection: I don't know if this necklace matters, what it means, or if it is significant. I don't know if the article matters. I don't even know for sure what either of them is. If this is art, or research, or art-research, that miraculous third that Manning and Massumi (2014) talk about—itself a more-than-between. What I can say is that I'm trying to feel the weight of aporias and trying to make them felt in turn. I'm layering it all together with an almost instinctual belief that there might be power in gathering them, stringing them together like beads—the almost-said, almost-seen, almost-understood.





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**Great—you're here! Sit as long as you like.  
If you want to lean over and look into the rift,  
I'll hold your shirt so you don't fall in.**

Gap is the function, not the name for the aporia. We call "aporia," but nothing answers. We say, "thing," but thing is not a name (and is a name [sort of—is almost a name for that which is beyond a name]). So, nothing responds.

The necklace never gave up its secrets. So, I have written a poem as a place for me to land. If you will indulge me, pretend with me that the necklace is the speaker, laughing (but not unkindly) and explaining:

The word thing is merely the sound  
The word thing is merely the sound

of breath escaping your bewildered throat.

It is the way matter settles—

the shape this body takes in repose—

when I do not have to answer to you.

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## ENDNOTES

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1. Manning (2016)
2. Jackson & Mazzei (2011)
3. MacLure (2013)
4. Lather (2001), p. 482
5. Koro-Ljungberg (2010), p. 606
6. Kohn (2013)
7. Koro-Ljungberg (2010), p. 606