HANDWRITTEN AS AN INDUSTRIAL BODY

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Master of Fine Arts in the
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ABSTRACT

I spent much of my childhood scribbling into a three-ring notebook. It wasn't so much what I wrote, but the act of writing that consumed me. I experienced an ever present desire to translate my experiences and make sense of them, leaving traces of my internal landscape for a future self.

Moving from writing into the visual arts, I remain rooted in a constant compulsion to incorporate words and textual references into my work. Looking back over my graduate studies, some elements consistently cycle in and out of the work: the body (as its own path to knowledge), language, technology, light, and transparency.

Certain patterns follow us throughout our lives - they rhythmically move us through behaviors, actions, and our own artistic practices. We are interrupted by moments of clarity, when our discoveries are blended with a recognition of the familiar.
for my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Sam Thibault and my family for their love and support throughout my graduate studies, and my studio mate Sharon McJannet, for our incredibly valuable friendship and ongoing dialog about art and life. I would also like to thank Richard Harned, Ken Rinaldo, Ann Hamilton, Kathy Fagan, and the many other insightful and talented faculty with whom I had the pleasure to work, for their support and encouragement throughout my studies.

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CHAPTER LIST

Abstract...........................................................................................................ii
Dedication......................................................................................................iii
Acknowledgments..........................................................................................iv
Vita..................................................................................................................v
List of Figures................................................................................................vii

Chapters

Introduction....................................................................................................1
1. Knowledge..................................................................................................2
2. Action.........................................................................................................5
3. Juxtaposition..............................................................................................8
4. Relationships............................................................................................12
Conclusion.....................................................................................................21

Appendix Other Works....................................................................................35
Bibliography..................................................................................................41
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>&quot;Dissected Dream&quot; detail</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>&quot;Dissected Dream&quot;</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>&quot;Trace&quot;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>&quot;Breathing Shoes&quot;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>&quot;Breathing Shoes&quot; worn by artist</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>&quot;Columns&quot; detail</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>&quot;Columns&quot; installation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>&quot;Columns&quot; Roy G Biv Gallery</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>&quot;Columns&quot; Roy G Biv Gallery, Details</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>&quot;Ephemera&quot;</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>&quot;Ephemera&quot; details</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>&quot;Ephemera&quot; detail of pedestal</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>&quot;Ephemera&quot; details of left &amp; right walls</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>&quot;Proximity&quot; entering the space</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>&quot;Proximity&quot; detail of curtain entrance</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>&quot;Proximity&quot; details</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17</td>
<td>&quot;Proximity&quot; detail of glass key</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18</td>
<td>&quot;Proximity&quot; detail of interior room</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19</td>
<td>&quot;Proximity&quot; View of machine</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20</td>
<td>&quot;Proximity&quot; detail of machine, glass arms</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 21</td>
<td>&quot;Definition&quot;</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 22</td>
<td>&quot;Book&quot;</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 23</td>
<td>&quot;Artifact&quot;</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 24</td>
<td>&quot;Evidence&quot;</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 25</td>
<td>&quot;Letter&quot;</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 26</td>
<td>&quot;They&quot;</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 27</td>
<td>&quot;Gather&quot;</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 28</td>
<td>Body-memory training prototype</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 29</td>
<td>Prototype details with participant</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rhythm begins; the heart marks the pace of our experience, breath pushes in and out. Repetition and pattern become more complex, developing gestures, language, and expression. Our understanding, first in the internal movement of the body, moves through to the rest of our senses.

We re-create these movements, mimicking our own visceral knowledge, in the development of the machine. Even a simple action, a straightforward mechanism, produces small, intimate moments of rebellion, forming relationships, juxtapositions, and unexpected discovery. Yet, inevitably, natural variation brings us back once again into our bodies, recognizing the fallibility of expectations, the fragility of a perfect definition.
CHAPTER 1

KNOWLEDGE

The body consistently seeks to extend, projecting itself upon the world it comes into contact with. We experience the environment sensually, seeking knowledge, piecing together abstract concepts from external clues. Rhythm, beginning in breath, is continuous – a sine wave enters and returns, spiraling forward. Punctuated moments in breath become speech, stretching into familiar patterns with the intention to express. Just as the line of breath becomes punctuated, so do the lines of our experience.

"Dissected Dream"

This installation uses light and shadow to communicate the fragmented and temporary way in which we formulate meaning. 2000 glass slide covers are mounted directly on the wall, layered in places with phrases and words caught in between the thin planes of glass. Glimpses of some former cohesive narrative, these fragile shelves carry the remains of a story, dissected for examination.
Although words layer and gather in places, the examination is an unfulfilled task – the underlying connections are unreachable. Even the physical entities themselves are fleeting, shifting between tangible objects and light drawings on the wall.
"Trace", one of several translucent vellum books, builds intersecting narratives within a single linear text. A story takes place along a timeline, where events accumulate in a past-present-future narrative. Perpendicular to that movement lies the simultaneity of sensory experience, allowing separate sensual streams build upon one another.

Within "Trace", the reader encounters the book along a pair of crossed paths: first the traditional, left to right, top to bottom, a linear narrative structure. This is familiar, comfortable, mimicking the journey through life over time. The second path is enabled by the translucence of the vellum – text bleeds through into the layers above, creating relationships between different periods of the story. Not only does a phrase's position within the order of the narrative become important, but its location on the page determines what other words, beneath and above, it will be linked to by their proximity.

Figure 3: "Trace" (2004) presented as an element within the installation "Proximity"
CHAPTER 2

ACTION

Through action we become aware of our body – its limitations, tensions, and sounds. Our sense of hearing blends with an internal awareness as the audible rhythm of breathing overlaps the sensation of our chest heaving up and down. The internal awareness of the constant body process of breathing fades in and out of our consciousness.

"Breathing Shoes"

Figure 4: "Breathing Shoes" (2004)
The "Breathing Shoes" are designed to be strapped on to a participant's feet, becoming both a performance and a personal experience. Their form is based upon a Japanese woodblock shoe, a straightforward design that severs the wearer's body with a direct connection to the ground. The shoes constantly make one aware, through the hardness and height, that body movement has been altered. They do not attempt to blend in with the body, instead demanding that the wearer alter body movement that is normally instinctual, subconscious.

*Figure 5: "Breathing Shoes" worn by the artist (2004)*
As the foot is raised within the rhythm of walking, the electronic sound of breathing begins. This audible other presence incorporates someone else into your own body – their body’s rhythm and knowledge becomes your own. The pattern of walking interrupts the audio rhythm, and by the transfer, your own breath is interrupted as well. You know the ground and the stability as both a connection to the earth, something solid and separate from yourself, as well as the moment when you are alone with only your own breath once again. By hearing a sound we normally associate as accompanying an internal body process, we tune and adjust our own rhythm to suit what we hear, absorbing the piece and becoming more aware of our own body.
CHAPTER 3

JUXTAPOSITION

A sentence with its nouns and verbs, subjects and punctuation, functions as a machine, a body. The elements within the greater whole each have a location and a responsibility. The spring, like a word within an essay, serves a function, an understood purpose with a designated action.

"Columns"

Figure 6: "Columns" Detail (2003)
Within "Columns" knowledge requires no actual language, but uses the visual reference of text to locate meaning by the altering of an external physical form. The disturbance breaks the line, a interruption within a set of ordering to form a human pattern.

Figure 7: Installing "Columns" at Roy G Biv Gallery

The columns of springs on the wall are the width of a sheet of typing paper, the most familiar format for the act of writing. At the left the column the beginning of a gesture, the outline and plan with an expectation present. The middle column is caught between breaking down and tightening up, open to both disintegration and building. In the last column the springs are the most
structured, forming lines of text, sentences. Though relating to language, they dissolve into simply the implication of an effort to communicate. In our environment we are constantly confronted with text, and we recognize visual efforts to communicate before we recognize the individual meaning.

Figure 8: "Columns" installed at the Roy G Biv Gallery 
Columbus, Ohio (2005)
The springs vibrate in places, an intimate moment that is only recognized upon close examination. Nouns, adjectives, verbs – like the varying roles within a sentence, here are moments of action, and moments of stillness.
CHAPTER 4

RELATIONSHIPS

During the second year of my graduate study I completed two large scale installation projects. Both exhibitions explored relationships between space, sound, light, movement, texture and the body. The pieces are meant to envelope the viewer, playing to all of the senses. Although little actual text exists within the works, the works evolved from examining the human processes that surround language - its formation, comprehension, and loss.

"Ephemera"

Figure 10: "Ephemera" (2004)
The installation Ephemera juxtaposes the phenomena of light, magnetism, and movement. It begins with the line, a thin steel wire spiraling around a hollow center and creating volume - the spring. The cam shafts perform similar magic tricks, but they break at corners, hard right angles. Preserving a broken but consistent core, building again along the spiral, they create volume out of the

Figure 11: "Ephemera" (2003), Details

line. Arcs of thin red fishing line stretch between the two elements, linking them visually and mechanically. The lines define and divide the space, a third drawing that spans the room, enveloping viewers.

Figure 12: "Ephemera" (2003) Details of pedestal
Converging at waist height upon a small pedestal, the cams and springs were connected to create two opposing sine wave patterns, forming a sort of flat, undulating double helix. The springs stretched from thick solid coils the writing, endlessly composing and erasing.

On the walls are three dimensional objects - glass, magnets, bits of metal, that protrude from the flat space of the compositions. These sculptures in turn flatten visually, becoming drawings, sinking to line. Left and right were opposing fields: to the right the work "Dissected Dream" fluctuated between light, drawing, and texture, while the opposite wall concealed a layer of magnetic primer, bearing a composition of magnets, springs, and other small metal objects that became gesture drawings of some science experiment under a microscope.

*Figure 13: "Ephemera" (2003) Detail of left wall, "Dissected Dream", and right wall with magnet and spring*
"Proximity"

The installation "Proximity" was completed as partial fulfillment for a Master of Fine Arts degree program. The central element of the exhibition was a fourteen foot high room created from sheets of feathered plastic. Walking into the space the enclosure seemed massive, but the plastic floated above the ground, allowing movement and a certain lightness despite its overwhelming visual weight within the space.

Figure 14: View of "Proximity upon first entering the gallery space"
A monument, an object on a stage lit by a series of spotlights, the curtain became a body. To the side of the enclosure are two wall-mounted lecterns, holding a pair of layered vellum texts. The lecterns serve as reminders of the human scale within the room, while the texts acknowledge the presence and absence of language within the installation. The words overlap and fade in and out of view, mimicked by the sounds present within the room.
Along the walls of the room sit three glass telegraph-like keys, alternately tapping out rhythms of punctuation from Morse code, hitting only the air but on the down stroke emitting different sounds appear to come from the keys themselves. The sounds they emit progresses as you move from one key to the next: the first is a heavy breathing, the second a faster repetitive scratching, and
the third a constant high tone. The movement of the keys releases the sound, creating the rhythm of the Morse code punctuation by breaking the rhythm of the underlying elements.

Like a body, from the outside the structure is an object in an external environment, a thing, while from the inside it is a room, a space. As we pass into the curtain, the plastic holds the light, translucent like glass or water, and the open ceiling allows the space to carry upward. The walls are tangible, they are the cilia of a lung, breathing and moving in response to the movement of a body. The curtains edges are softly defined, with a texture present but not consistent. The glass fades in with the background wall of plastic, the light catching them and making them barely visible upon first entering. Only the metal of the machine is stark and distinct within this soft atmosphere.

Figure 18: "Proximity" (2004) Inside the curtained room with the lower corner of the machine in the background
Figure 19: "Proximity" (2004) View of machine inside curtained room

The machine on the inside rises in the space, raised as an altar. The machine relates to the body but transcends it, unable to be physically possessed because of its height, and visually placed in a position of power. The machine's arms are places just at or above eye level, making the movement of the glass, although slow, confrontational and dangerous. However, in those places where variation in movement occurs, the machine becomes the body, grounded in an imperfection that connects our own fallibility to that of the machine. The glass rods are a loom, and keyboard, while curved as long, reaching fingers. Both cam
shafts influence the same individual rods. The pattern is one of interference, where two parallel waves traveling at different speeds affect the same rods, and cause a movement that is both predictable and not immediately perceivable.

Figure 20: "Proximity" (2004) Detail of moving glass arms on the machine

This installation, as with much of my work, began in words. Within the curtain, written language becomes unnecessary, it is left behind and light takes its place. On the outside the language remains, in the forms of the book and audible code, revealing our own physicality through our interaction with them. Proximity is an exploration of continuous and broken rhythm - the machine as body, and the word as machine.
CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the thesis is a sculpture, a facsimile of an unbound layered vellum book.
Growing up I spent much of my childhood constantly scribbling into a three-ring notebook. It wasn’t so much what I wrote, but the act of writing that consumed me. I experienced an ever present desire to leave some trace of my internal landscape for a future self, but it was the ritual of moving a pen against a pad of paper, pushing and scratching, in which I ultimately found fulfillment. Moving from writing into the visual arts, I remain rooted in a constant compulsion to incorporate words and textual references into my pieces.
the act of writing
to leave some trace
moving a pen against
pushing and scratching
from writing into the visual arts

Certain patterns follow us throughout our lives – they rhythmically move us through behaviors, actions, and our own artistic practices. Looking back over my graduate studies, I locate moments of continuity (clarity?), where recognition and discovery overlap. The body as its own path to knowledge, language and text, technology, light, and transparency cycle in and out of the work. I am interested in the path knowledge takes, moving between individuals and objects into bodies and minds.
an ever present
self
pushing and scratching

throughout our lives
our own artistic practices
locate
The body

moving
and

making visible
P. von Schiller explained synesthesia as the result of corresponding physiological excitations that transfer across sensory sectors. In synesthesia, "excitations brought about by disturbing stimuli in the acoustic or tactical sector, affect—chemically or electrically—the optic sector, thereby causing a modification of optical impressions.
The possibility that synesthesia is exercisable, that it is some sort of 'symbolically sensitive sensory muscle' is alluring.

Dissected Dream

moments of clarity

- the underlying connections are unreachable. Even the physical entities themselves are fleeting, moving between tangible objects and light drawings on the wall.
a small light moment of potential
going

...assuming that what the synesthetic senses is real

Dissected Dream

making visible gestures of light

although words layer and gather in places, the examination is unfulfilled

glimpses of some former cohesive narrative dissected for examination
exploring light and energy and movement amplification to something loose
gathering the lines to break the boundary between drawing and three-dimensional space.
a stretched spring

the fragmented and temporary way we understand and recognize meaning

the moments are transitory
texture and pattern
gather denied a mechanical purpose

handwritten as an industrial body

"The written sign is absent from the body but the absence is already announced within the invisible and ethereal element of the spoken word, powerless to imitate the contact and movement of bodies"

touch and recognition
Jascom insisted that lived experience of the body, what he called “somatic praxis,” has precedence over any conceptualization.
is continuous
pattern and
infinite intimacy

the machine as body
the word as machine
APPENDIX A

OTHER WORKS
Figure 21: Layered vellum book entitled "Definition", composed of an underlying page of text listing definitions of the body. Words and phrases with no connection in the base page are revealed in phases, creating new relationships based on proximity and the surrounding layers.

Figure 22: "Book" - industrial springs bound in resin
Figure 23: "Artifact"

Figure 24: "Evidence" series details
Figure 25: "Letter" Full view and detail

Figure 26: "They" is a collaboration with artist Sharon McJannet. The work is made up of blown glass, fur, and surgical tubing.
Figure 27: View of "Gather", one of a series of wall installations created with mylar and mounted gears. The mylar catches the light, reflecting light and creating shadow to form ethereal lines drawings on the wall.
Figure 28: View of prototype built for testing body memory training. The concept was based around learning through experiencing movement through the body, as opposed to solely reading music and translating the written notes into hand movements. The device utilized the Max/MSP Jitter software, as well as the TELEO circuit.

Figure 29: View of prototype with participant. The device would hold the hand suspended until the TELEO activated the solenoids below. When a solenoid was triggered, the finger would be drawn rapidly down to the base, mimicking the movements involved in typing and playing the piano.
The following quotes are from the conclusion.

PAGE 26
"The possibility that synesthesia is exercisable, that is some sort of 'symbolically sensitive sensory muscle' is alluring."

PAGE 27
"Assuming that what the synesthete senses is real"

From a paper entitled Synesthesia by Omar Kamel (1996)
http://www.adi.com/viral/what/synes2.html

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PAGE 25
"P. von Schiller explained synesthesia as the result of corresponding physiological excitations that transfer across sensory sectors. In synesthesia, "excitations brought about by disturbing stimuli in the acoustic or tactical sector, affect – chemically or electrically – the optic sector, thereby causing a modification of optical impressions." (pg 15)

PAGE 29
"The written sign is absent from the body but the absence is already announced within the invisible and ethereal element of the spoken word, powerless to imitate the contact and movement of bodies."(pg 13)

PAGE 30
Jascom insisted that lived experience of the body, what he called “somatic praxis,” has precedence over any conceptualization. (pg 28)

Word and Light: Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse by David Chidester
University of Illinois Press (September 1, 1992)