WRITING THE WRITTEN

Text as a Visual Image

A Thesis

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By

Heather Marie Willems, B.F.A.

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Master's of Fine Art Examination Committee:

Robert Derr, Adviser

Michael Mercil

Jon Erickson

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
ABSTRACT

I used writing as a visual medium, time as an element, and personal experience as subject matter. In my thesis exhibition *Writing the Making*, I interpret the intricacies that compose the details of my life, such as the sound of the wind stealing breath, the taste of longing and desire, the scent of bleach and ink under the sun. The following paper explores how, the act of writing becomes visual material to create a poetic environment where the viewer becomes physically immersed in the mental state of writing.
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VITA


2000.................................B.F.A. Photography, University of Minnesota-
Twin Cities

2003-2005..............................Graduate Teaching Associate,
The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

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Image 1: Video still-frames from *Writing the Making* Performance, 2005

Under dim tungsten lights, two scrolls, blackened with handwritten text, rise up from the floor, cross at the center of the room and tower toward the ceiling. The text itself is a visual image. A wordscape, transcribed telephone calls and eavesdropped studio conversations merged with lusty unsent letters expands into the physical description of the obsessive writing body. Two women, dressed in black, independently move under and around the sculptural installation. They position themselves in the crux of the center corridor, or at the taught paper’s edge. In a moment of pause, they murmur fragmented passages from the scrolls to themselves,

"Is self the body or the mind?"
"I talk to the light and I say nothing. I listen to the sun and hear nothing."
"How does light listen?"
"The window is the train, lulling me to sleep at age 13;
  waking me at 60 with 'What Next? Now What?'"
They drift, walking slowly down and around the sculpture, absorbing and speaking the text. At a choreographed point, they stop, make eye contact, and simultaneously disappear behind the pages hanging from the ceiling. Skin to paper, their shoulders transfer their bodily energy through the sheet giving the object visual and audible life. They then pair off at opposing bases, their bare toes stop near the end of the loose white roll. In unison they crouch to the ground and tear the page free from its attachment. The unfastened pages brush across the gallery floor, echoing sound throughout the hall. The space is architecturally transformed from a sculptural installation into a stage. Stepping onto the graphite, the women physically and metaphorically now enter into language.

Like spiders they traverse the text on the newly grounded page, weaving together space and time. Each one on their own scroll, they begin reading dates and times, grocery lists, love letters, questions and solutions in no particular order. Nonsensically the performers correspond with one another. Each read from their own scroll. This interaction symbolizes the poor communication between partners in long distance relationships. Each is self-interested and neglects to listen, thus inappropriately responding to the other. The women’s vocal exchange symbolizes the disconnect of communication across a distance.

"Are you there?"
"I wish there were two of me one for me the other for me."
"I can convince myself of anything. Of course you can, of course you can."
"Are you listening to me?"
Performed on a stage of paper and graphite, the audible bodies make the mental state of writing visible. Read aloud, the texts overlap, spilling into one another between harmony and dissonance. In the sensory state of reading writing, words fight and console; they question and answer through a confusion of fragments and disjointed conversations.

Time passes in soundless pauses and elongated moments. When seconds are hours and days are years, words fail to communicate.

The women walk off behind the paper, here again their movements wave energy back into the page. Each figure moves to the base of the others' stage. They briefly linger and then in silence roll the scrolls, concealing the text, metaphorically holding time. A third architectural divide forms; like paintings, the manuscripts hang from the ceiling as wordscapes. Standing in front of the white scrolls; the performance culminates, as the text whispers to an end.

“He said I was giving too much.”
“It wasn’t my eyes closed. My blood was deprived of oxygen.”
“Halted by a kiss.”

“I fell asleep the moment I awoke.”
“Obviously it was something bigger than myself.”
“How does life live? How does light love?”
“What is it to repair?”

Susan Stewart in Poetry and the Fate of the Senses states that “Writing is reading and reading is rewriting or revising in the sense of unfolding. There is no ‘all at once-ness’ under which a revelation appears.” Similarly photographing is seeing as writing is reading. Making a photograph records moments of visual detail and time; the act of writing records the details of our thoughts and environment in an abstracted symbol structure. Reading is rewriting like viewing artwork is analyzing or identifying with a piece. Viewing/reading the artwork/text provides an experience, which influences the reinterpretation of our own environment outside of the work. I use a pencil like a
camera; it is a tool for deciphering, recording, question ing and unfolding. I use both pencil and camera as a means for mapping inquiry and discovery. Like all art forms, this development takes time. There is no “all at oneness” to a work’s revelation. The impossible is attempted and success is found in the failures.

To complete Writing the Making as a visual piece, it was necessary to unfold and question materials, thoughts, and concepts through the process of inscription. I used writing as a visual medium, time as an element, and personal experience as subject matter. Throughout the writing I interpret the intricacies that compose the details of my life, such as the sound of the wind stealing breath, the taste of longing and desire, the scent of bleach and ink under the sun. The following paper explores how, in Writing the Making the act of writing becomes visual material to create a poetic environment where the viewer becomes physically immersed in the mental state of writing.

Writing is the visible recording of language that enables the transmission of ideas over distances of time and space. As in intimate handwritten letters, passionate e-mails, and mundane text messages, writing functions as a primary source of correspondence in my long distance relationships. It validates thoughts and acts as a tool for personal expression. In my artwork, my writing style responds to critical readings, artistic forms, personal narratives, and the environment surrounding me. I write to describe and record situations, events, or emotions. But, I treat written text as a visual medium, revealing personal intimacies in the social space of the gallery. Here my stream of conscious thought is made visible in the forms of drawings, installations, performances, and videos,
I began this process of art making with a question: Can writing and personal narrative exist as both the subject and object of my art? The works of many artists and writers have stimulated me to unfold the answers to this question.

Helen Cixous is one writer whose style has been tremendously inspirational to me. Cixous loves writing. It flows through her. It fulfills her like a lover and nourishes her like food. She draws from life for her texts and it gives her life in return. She describes the act of writing as a pulse that drives her until death. In *Coming to Writing*, she states that it gripped her, “around the diaphragm, between the stomach and the chest, a blast dilated my lungs and stopped my breathing.” Writing seized her like a lover, like birth. It is her love and life. Can one write love? Can one write life? Cixous’ intensity challenges and encourages me to work from and through such passion on a daily basis. It is not the sun that wake me in the morning, but Helen Cixious’ teasing me, threatening me… “Are you going to write me or not?”

Through Cixious’ intimacy with her own writing, self-consciousness is lost and we as readers form an intimacy with her. She expresses both her personal strengths and weaknesses with frankness and honestly. She eloquently admits her humbleness to writing itself. “Writing begins, without you, without I, without law, without knowing, without light, without hope, without bonds, without anyone close to you.” Writing IS, and we enter into it. It exists and we get lost and lose ourselves. As artists, our work

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2 Cixious, 34.
3 Cixious, 9.
4 Cixious, 10.
wakes us from our sleep, uninvited but welcome...like the sun. It bridges the unconscious and conscious. It whispers, “Write me."

I write not to ward against forgetting or misremembering but to describe time, to record life, and create artwork. Writing is a silent correspondence between the page and me, the page and the other. Whether it is read or unread, writing validates thought as a testimony to the act of making and the act of living. For nineteen years I have kept journals of my experiences, detailed descriptions of a place, or of my emotions. These journals became the source material for my first pieces, leading up to *Writing the Making.*

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5 Cixious, 5.

Hours before leaving for The Ohio State University I went into the dark basement of my Minneapolis apartment complex. *Opening* door 612A-South, I drug a soggy chest into the amber light. Over the course of my lease, the neighbor’s bathtub had been slowly dripping onto nineteen years worth of my journals. Like a family photo album lost in a fire, chronicles were ruined.

Attempting to recover the stories from my journals, both readable and unreadable texts became the subject for a series of videos. The *Mildews Memoirs* drew excerpts from the journals to create a series of twenty thirty to ninety-second videos. Visually descriptive narratives and unrelated video-footage shot from the first-person perspective are juxtaposed to represent the viewpoint of one caught in a daydream. Visual shots range from an endlessly cycling ceiling fan to an abstract pulsing light form. The video
images seemingly take on their own biorhythms when viewers reach a state where their sense of time is altered and they become lost in it trance-like state.

An installation entitled Palimpsest, also emerged from this seeming disaster. In the chest, years of inks bled together in the molding water. Pinks blend with blues and blacks in a colorful mélange of purple, green, and brown spores between the pages. Some pages grew together and waterlogged covers were reduced to a pulp.

In the gallery installation Palimpsest the mildewing pages are bleached and pinned sequentially to the wall, and collaged with affected photographs depicting events described in the entries. Most of the ink had dissolved or had been washed away with the flood of bathwater but the graphite retained in its original disposition. People could piece together entries with fragments of the mildewy text and photos but the full narrative was essentially indecipherable. By including the gaps devoured by the mold, the story left space for the viewer to fill in their own experience (consciously or unconsciously.)

Stepping back to view the installation as a single piece, the pages have a quality of a drawing or a watercolor painting of ink, mold, and memory.

Tom Friedman’s piece Everything exhibits handwriting as a visual material and it takes on an object status of its own. Like Palimpsest, Everything functions as a drawing, a system of line, tone, and texture. In his own written script, Friedman transfers every word in the Webster Dictionary onto a single piece of drawing paper. Unlike several of the process artists of the 1960’s who were increasingly interested in the act of making rather the finished art piece, Friedman’s process art generates a product.

6 Molsworth, 101.
Friedman gives form to time and thought. In a 36” x 36” two dimensional plane he records his interpretation of the gross amounts of information taken in on a daily basis. Friedman surpasses the rapid trafficking of information by spending time in the studio to create the obsessive piece. In his monograph he relates this to the work, “As the velocity that information is presented increases, one’s ability to process that information shuts down, and just the texture of the information is perceived.”

*Everything* reaches a point where the words become overwhelming and the drawing shifts from text to abstracted tonal shifts.

*Writing the Making* possesses similar qualities but on a monumental scale. My words are not confined to a two dimensional page under Plexiglas, but massive scrolls that divide the space and take on an architectural presence. In *Writing the Making* the act of writing becomes a process in which objects, the scrolls, are created. Like Friedman’s afore mentioned piece, the scrolls represent my everything, everything that was thought over the hours spent making the piece.

Due to the text’s magnitude, actual reading may become overwhelming. Instinct leads the spectator not to read what is written, but rather, see the entire piece as a drawing. Lines trace across the page creating various tones, textures, and patterns. Similar to cloud gazing, recognizable shapes begin to appear, aerial views of an irrigation field, a patchwork quilt, or a system of rivers and valleys.

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7 Hainley, 34.
Image 4: **Process.** Artist's studio during *Writing the Making.*

*Writing the Making* is an artifact of the private performative act of writing. The process of making, the acts of writing, is significant to the production of the work. Initially, a loose structure was laid out. Decisions were made about writing material, the layout of the text, and the emphasis of certain phrases. To create tonal shifts I ritualistically chose different grades of graphite during the formative process. I hand-sharpened each pencil and meticulously arranged them out on the desk from longest to shortest. The pencils were selected according to length and worn down to the pencil’s wooden casing. When all of the pencils were dull they were sharpened again to a needle-like point.
The paper was set up on a 10’ X 3’ table in my studio. I began the process by sitting at the left end of the table and created a relationship between my body and the piece by writing as far as my arm could reach. With an outstretched arm, I documented each segment with the date and time, not as to reference a journal entry, but to record time. I continued to write to the end of the section of the table. When my hand met the bottom edge of the table, I moved my chair to the place where the first line ended. I reached across the page, marked the time and continued. I allowed the writing to follow the movement of my body. The stretch of my arm determines the form of the text. When my arm formed a ninety-degree angle with my torso, I was able to reach further, thus breaking the geometric shape of a solid textual block. Due to this process, sections of the text organically overlap. At the end of the table, I unrolled a clean pallet from the scroll to repeat the progression.

The wordscape of Writing the Making expresses longing and desire as well as strength, endurance, and perseverance. Sections of the text itself are layered with lyrical physical and obsessive emotional yearning. Other sections transcribe dramatic stories told to me by friends in my studio. The endurance of physical adversities from blisters to carpal tunnel syndrome are described in the inscription but is also implied through the persistent writing over a four-week period.

As the piece developed I broke the simple structure described above to allow my intuition to take form in the construction of the visual image. Periodically self-conscious sections were written tightly with a hard pencil and small script, camouflaging into the mass of graphite. Occasionally, I would go back in to more revealing sections to modestly cross out and erase phrases, obliterating them partially or completely. When
gestating over a thought, I would linger with the sentence, tracing over it repeatedly. At
sometimes the meditative action eclipsed the thought in graphite. At other times, the technique
was use to highlight clause of interest. These acts visually enhanced the section not only
with tonal value, texture, and readability but they also referred to the act of my obsessive
mind.
Erasure, rewriting, and accelerated penmanship left many sections of *Writing the Making* quite unintelligible. Attempting to keep pace with fleeting stream of conscious thought, my racing hand often produced a script resembling letters from the English alphabet but remain illegible in terms of literary significance. *Writing the Making*’s pages are written in the artist’s private script. In a shorthand that is (at times) mysterious even to myself, lines and abstract symbols represent the intensity and excitement of a given moment and the brevity of passing thought.

*Writing the Making* refers to the act of writing versus the act of reading. Walking into the gallery, viewers notice the penmanship on the scroll, acknowledging the time it took to craft the piece. Viewers can maneuver themselves up and down the pages, to find legible islands of banal and intimate thoughts. However, as the legibility of the script
breaks down, the information disclosed to the reader is suppressed. In this way the piece questions the practice of reading and the effectiveness of written communication.

Xu Bing’s installation *A Book from the Sky* (1988) has a similar intent. Bing’s work investigates the function and meaning of language in written culture. He hand carved 4,000 print blocks with intentionally false letter blocks similar to Chinese characters. With these blocks, he traditionally printed 400 handmade books and several volumes of wall and ceiling scrolls. Bing’s work, like my own, acknowledges the importance of process. All of the materials used to produce the work follow the traditions of classical Chinese typesetting, printing, and bookbinding. His installation lampoons ancient Chinese printing and questions viewers understanding of literacy. Like *A Book from the Sky*, my scrawled gestures themselves may not have literary meaning, but there is meaning in the gesture.

Although undecipherable, the gestural marks on the page connote meaning. The illegibility of the text reinforces that the piece is a drawing, the trace of emotion and human presence. The artist’s intimacy and attention is present in the tens of thousands of lines that draw from one end of the scroll to the other. Whether the mark is dark, soft, constrained, or fluid, it conveys to the artists presence in the emotion driving the line.

Emma Hauck is present in the fibers of her drawings. As a psychiatric patient who’s work is part of the Prinzhorn Collection at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, her letters, *Letter to husband*, *Sweetheart come*9, and *Come*,10 create an image, not

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9 Brand-Claussen, Jadi, and Douglas, 94. *Sweetheart come* (Letter to husband), 1909 Pencil on writing paper, 16.4 x 20.9 cm.
10 Brand-Claussen, Jadi, and Douglas, 95. *Come* (Letter to husband), 1909 Pencil on document paper, 16.3 x 10.6 cm.
perceivable on the page, but hidden in the obsessive mark making. Looking at the letters written in 1909, Hauck’s presence becomes apparent. Through the compulsive lines of writing, you imagine her body hunched over the institution’s wooden desk, her eyes focused on nothing other than the graphite, and her longing for her husband.

Image 6: Husband Come, Emma Hauck

In Come, she writes and rewrites the title a thousand times, blackening half of the composition. On the other half of the page, in perfect attentive script is the date, her husband’s name and address. Studying the texture of the drawing and the fragments of legible text, we are aware of Hauck’s loneliness and feelings of abandonment. It is not the narrative in the letter but the intimate layering of the line and tonality that provoke questions. Was her loneliness relinquished? Were these desires delivered? Where is the receiver? Was the letter created to inform the reader or to validate an obsessive thought?

Hauck’s letters intrigue me. At first glance I am drawn to the various visual textures, rhythms, and patterns. Then, looking closer, I see that the German script is

11 Brand-Claussen, Jadi, and Douglas, 96. Letter to husband, 1909 Pencil on Paper 16 x 10.3 cm.
12 http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/reviews/karlin6-22-00.asp
obsessively repeated. I think of her time, dedication, and longing for her husband. I question her motivations for writing the letter. Is it an intense longing for her husband, or a desperate cry for rescue? Looking closer at the copy of her letter, I examine the pencil line, which lightens and darkens with her apparent fervor. It begins thin and crisp, then dulls and softens only to be sharpened again in a tireless cycle, indicating the passage of time. Although coming from a healthier mental state, I relate to her longing for a distant lover. I also find some similarities to my own work. Similar to Hauck’s pieces, in my thesis exhibition handwritten characters flow over the extensive pages. In the sea of graphite one is aware of the weeks it took to fill the page. Writing the Making could be interpreted as an extraordinarily long letter. But who is the recipient? A distant lover? The self? The audience? If received, would the text be read? Or like Emma Hauck’s letters, would the communication be read through act of writing?

The performative act of writing first occurred for me during my endurance performance, Writing to Experience the Having Been Written. In it, I perform the act of writing and un-writing from sunrise to sunset at a small wooden desk in front of Gallery 448’s open window. Similar to Writing the Making, as a document of stream of conscious thought, political, cultural, environmental, and personal regrets etc. are written in journals. Upon filling the book, the individual pages are removed from the binding and are meditatively washed in bleach water. The ink on the individual pages fades to white, and then I hang the pages on lines stretched horizontally across the room from floor to ceiling. When I finish this process, I returned to my writing desk to begin a new book. With each journal, a wall of wet pages and vanishing ink rises between the viewers and myself. By the end of the sixteen hour performance, I imprisoned myself behind the
wall. As an artifact of the performance, the pages were re-bound implying that they will be written on again.

Image 7: **Time and Intimacy.** *31 Unsnt Letter #2, 2004*

Time, like writing is an important element in my art making and viewing experience. Intimacy is not only shared in the content of the paragraphs but in the marking of time. In a conversation with Michael Mercil he commented *that*, through time intimacy becomes possible. A viewer’s intimacy with a work is accessible when the
artist's intimacy with the piece is apparent. Like Emma Hauck's *Husband Come*, my 31 *Unsent Letters* series traces time through the writing and unwriting of obsessive love-letters never sent. The hours spent with the page are a replacement for my desired human interaction. Here emotionally charged words are repetitively written and erased on pieces of mulberry stationary to the point of the papers disintegration. Aesthetically, the series consists of remnants of graphite and eraser shavings pressed between broken paper fibers. The torn surface symbolizes the disconnection in communication with a distant lover. It is an example of uncertainty that exists in long distance relationships.

*31 Unsent Letters* are the embodiment of the constant debate that occurs among the id, ego, and super ego. Without taking the recipient’s response into consideration, the id’s basic needs are meet in the outpour of unbinding fervor and desire. By erasing the letter the super ego removes the evidence of the id’s emotionally irresponsible behavior. The incessant act of writing and erasing is the ego’s appeasement to the situation. The information is inaccessible and therefore “protects” the recipient; the id has an emotional conduit. Like Hauck’s letters, the message is not in the language but in the artist’s intimate repetitive gestures on the page developed over time.
Image 8: *Time and Experience*. Installation shot from *Writing the Making*.

Time is present in many phases in *Writing the Making*. Hours and weeks are present in the text. *Writing the Making* is written in actual time. The work is literally the transcription of stream of conscious thought and conversations passing by the hour.

Entering the gallery, one is instantly struck by the scale of the scrolls. While traversing through the space one’s pacing changes moving. Strides relax when walking under the billowy page and amongst the overwhelming amount of text. It changes again when one passes carefully between the two scrolls and through the tight center corridor. While attempting to decipher the handwriting, the reader’s tempo is altered. The reader must slow down their natural reading speed in order to decipher the text.

Time is experience as a medium in *Writing the Making’s* performance. The event is in real time. Gravity pulls paper across the floor. The performers articulate
fragments from the scroll. Rhythms are created through the performers repetitive
enunciations of dates, hours, and minutes. Words are simultaneously declared, clash, and
fall to silence. The clarity of the written word and performer's interaction with one
another determines the pulse of their lines: "One, Two, Three.........I love you." Like a
credulous relationship, the performance is ephemeral; the experience is to be had in those
fleeting moments.

Generally speaking, artists ask people to give us their time. I invite people to take
time. In a discussion with Mowry Baden, he spoke about the gallery space. Quoting from
an interview he stated, "The gallery is a destination. A space designed specifically to
frame the artist's ideas and the viewer goes there to deliberately receive those ideas. The
viewer can come and go, or if she chooses, can stay and stay." I appreciate what Baden
says in that we as artists invite patrons into the gallery, offering them our thoughts and
ideas. The onlookers can view the work in a moment, or they can relax and breathe with
the piece to have another kind of experience. Some viewers who took time with my
piece found themselves in the text and evaluated their emotional status. An anonymous
statement noted in the comment book (a remnant from the endurance performance
Writing to Experience the Having Been Written) reinforces this statement.

"The question "'When is alone, lonely?''' struck me and stood out on the
page, probably because that is what I am feeling at this moment. My mind
pulled your thought and related to it without me even knowing. Whether
we realize that we are alone abruptly or slowly, if situated in absolute
social solitude, the feeling of loneliness will eventually seep in. I don't
know what the time line is, but my answer to the question posed is:
inevitably."

13 http://aggv.bc.ca/exhibitions-archive.asp
This comment reinforces that the piece was successful in achieving my artistic goals. I aim to create an environment that invites people to take time for themselves. Even if only for a moment, I strive to alter the meter and perceptual atmosphere of a viewer's day.
About a week into my graduate study in photography, my camera was stolen. I took this inconvenience on as a challenge, and began working with video. As mentioned above, I began working on *The Mildew Memoirs* narratives; they have distinct beginnings and endings. I grew interested in the notion that one could view a photograph, read the narrative, walk away and upon returning, the piece remains unchanged. Adapting a composition from Bill Brandt’s *Belgravia, Londres, 1951*, and the text from Cat Power’s cover of “Wild is the Wind,” *Three Attempts at Seduction* forms new contextual meaning through a disconnection between a sung text and an unchanging video image. The run of the video is a 60-minute loop in which I hold a pose for an hour while attempting to make a video a photograph. Like a photograph you can come and go as you please, those who stay with the video hear the vocal improvement and the breakdown of the model’s pose from a series of muscle twitches to the out stretching her leg to a more relaxed pose.

As mentioned earlier, I want to give people a reason to take time, slow down, and change the pace of their day. *Three Attempts At Seduction* was my first effort in achieving
this goal with video. I tried again with *What if Here Were Now?*, in this video loop, the camera is fixed on a corner with two windows just before a storm. The open windows dressed in lace curtains read as a set of lungs, or two pages of an open book. As the wind blows moving the curtain, a bodiless voice inhales. When the wind leaves the room it takes the breath with it. Throughout the 15-minute loop, the pattern repeats.

This piece evolved from the video into an endurance performance of the same name. Sitting in the gallery from sunrise to sunset, I face a fifteen foot curtained window. I wore a hidden lavaliere microphone, which amplified my voice in the space. With a sign left on the door “Enter / inhale/ Exhale/ What if here were now?” viewers were encouraged to join in the process by sitting in front of one of the other two windows. As Baden’s statement suggests, some viewers came in, observed the environment and left, some returned throughout the day to observe the affect of the changing light, while others stayed for as long as an hour.

Through these pieces, I aim to create a comfortable environment that encourages viewers to take time for observation and personal reflection. Though I experiment in different mediums and with different notions of time, the results of my research led me to the decision of creating the space of writing, one of calm and creativity. Because of my personal desire to reconfigure my own sensitivity to time and space, I attempt to create an environment that will not only aid my own perception of these elements but also the perce of the viewer. I took these time, space, and light into consideration in the planning of the *Writing the Making’s* installation.
Image 12: Material. Four video still-frames from Writing to Experience the Having Been Written, 2005.

In Matthew Goulish’s book 39 Microlectures, he discusses studying under Irene Fornes and the impact it had on him as an artist and teacher. Goulish quotes from Fornes’ approach to teaching:

“There is something about the atmosphere in a room full of people working. Each person’s concentration gives you something...there is an exchange of energy and you know the other writers are not there for you to chat with. No one is waiting for you, distracting you, and yet others are
there. It has all of the advantages of being alone, without the isolation. People who come to visit The Lab are always amazed by its peacefulness and the beautiful quality of light.”

Matthew Goulish and The Goat Island Performers have adopted this as a model for writing exercises in their collaborative performance workshops. Through participating in the workshops both at The Ohio State University and The Chicago Institute of Art, I experienced the energy that Frones described and carry that tranquil productive energy with me today into the studio.

With several of my pieces, particularly Writing to Experience the Having Been Written, What if here was Now? and Writing the Making, I recreate this serenity and light quality in the gallery space. I believe that lighting is an interregnal part of the immersive experience. It has a dramatic capacity to alter one’s mood upon entering the space. The video version of What if Here was Now? was my first attempt to create an immersive experience in the space while incorporating the experience of the act of writing.

Form grows from writing. Using What if Here was Now? as an example, I write the description of the page, then the desk, the room, and the light. My writing finds the negative space inhabiting the crack in the windowsill and traces the wind as it breathes life, in an exchange of memory and time. From this comes a video: a conversation between light and wind, spirit and breathe. In the piece, curtains are manipulated by the wind, and my hand is manipulated by thought. In both the video and performance of What if Here was Now? I allow the wind to control my breath. In this way I am relinquishing the control of my bodily functions to the wind, to something greater than myself. The refracted sunlight that fills the room mirrors the light that exists within me.

14 Goulish, 80.
created by writing. Like the exchange of energy in the Lab, I exchange energy with the wind. I am caught in a trance of concentration, with others entering in and out of the room, and I have all of the benefits of being alone without the isolation.
Over the past few years, I have kept a list in my studio of “Sounds on the Verge of Extinction.” "Graphite on paper, a rotary phone dialing," and "a pencil sharpener sharpening" is listed at the top. I chose to use pencil as my material for it’s aesthetic and nostalgic qualities. Often it is easier to find a computer, a blueberry, or a cell phone than to locate a pencil. Our eyes have become so accustomed to LEDs and PPI that I feel the aesthetic of lush graphite needs to be reclaimed. Digital technology is replacing the tactile experience we once took for granted. I experience a certain nostalgia touching the smooth yellow paint that coats the pencil. An odd satisfaction occurs when I hear my teeth break the even surface and press deeply into its soft wood. The sound of graphite on paper returns me back to my third-grade desk writing love letters between math problems. I lose such tactile experiences when sitting at a computer.

A ritual surrounds my use of a pencil. The eraser needs cleaning and the lead needs sharpening. Time is made present in the pencil itself: in its tip and length, the line on the page transforming from crisp thinness, to a soft darkness. I appreciate the aesthetics of the graphite’s tonal range, it’s smudges, and the residual marks it makes
even after being erased. In the end, the lead is sharpened and the cycle starts again, from sharp to blunt.

Image 14: Installation shot from *Writing the Making*, 2005

If Helen Cixous’ writing inspires me to use writing as a personal form of expression, while artist Jenny Holzer’s work has inspired me in another fashion. I walked into the space Jenny Holzer’s *Selections From the Living Series* (1989). In the Minneapolis, Minnesota, Walker Arts Center Sculpture Garden, Holzer placed twenty-eight white granite benches carved with cryptic, often contradictory, aphorisms at the parameter of a square. As a young student I spent hours with the work. In the garden, I would fill my journals, creatively responding to her text, the environment, and the experiences of others in the space. With my pen and paper, I recorded the piece as it
unfolded before me. Readers play duel roles in Holzer’s piece as both the audience and the performer in the outdoor arena.

Image 15: Jenny Holzer. *Selections From the Living Series* (1989.)

This piece inspired my thesis work on many levels. First, I became physically engaged with the piece as I moved over the grass from one bench to the next. I became aware of my body, hunching over to read the text, straining my eyes as they fight the sun’s reflective glare off the white surface. I felt uncomfortable but engaged in the text. The text itself is nonsensical and I strained to relate to it. My favorite bench, for example reads, “Even with eyelids closed your shadows on my eye.”¹۵ Sitting on the bench Holtzer encourages me to decipher the nonsensical text, draw from my own life to fill in the gaps. As I sat there thinking, I observed others around me, noticed their postures, and their conversations as they shouted to their partner across the square, or take someone’s

¹⁵ http://www.garden.walkerart.org/artwork.wac#head.html
hand to pull them to a quote. Some people read the text and laugh aloud while others in their solitude contemplate it in loneliness and absence.

I tried to incorporate elements present in Holzer’s Selections From the Living Series into Writing the Making. Aside from using text as a visual medium, I divided the space. Two scrolls created traversable paths, which encouraged movement. At the beginning of the performance of Writing the Making, the anonymous performers moved through the space reading the text. They did not interact with other readers and their presence was felt not as a viewers but as a performers. In this situation one’s awareness of their own presence was heightened and the audience members played duel rolls as both viewer and performer. Lastly, I created a space of both isolation and community through the architectural divide. Audience members could choose to isolate themselves behind one of the scrolls or interact with others in the open space. Some may feel comfortable approaching a performer in the space and others will avoid that interaction.

The space is divided to allow the viewer to move into and around the piece, a metaphorical entrance into language. Accessibility to the text occurs at several points. Reading from the bottom of the scroll, one must lower his or her body into a crouching position on the floor. At this low vantage point, the wave of handwriting rises above and over the reader. From here one can move in multiple directions to access the drawing: from the edges and the reverse side of each paper sheet, down the center passageway and between them (measuring the width of my shoulders) or through the corridors beside the painted gray walls. The tungsten light diffuses warming the underside of the page.
Image 16: Conclusion. Installation Shot of the underside of *Writing the Making*.

My work is in a constant state of becoming. Each answer produces another question. A piece is only completed when one concept takes a new form. My artistic practice starts with writing that responds to a change of environment, a scholarly essay, or to the pressures of my internal narrative. Through this process of writing I question the disconnection of correspondence, of time in relation to my making and the experiencing of each artwork, and my transformation of a personal experience into visual form.
When does the writing begin? When will it end? Helen Cixous may be right when she says that writing begins with life and ends with death. It begins with a piece and ends when that is presented, only to begin again, taking the trace of what was discovered in that process and developing it into the next.

Through my research, I have found a way to bridge my love for writing and visual art. With *Writing the Making* and projects prior to it, I offer viewers an experience. I invite them to ask questions of their own lives. I create a poetic environment to change their day’s pace and provide a space for personal reflection. In my work *Writing* has become both visual image and material, shaping a space, affecting the perception of time.

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16 Cixous, 2-5.
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