

There Is A Light That Never Goes Out

by

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A thesis exhibition and supporting paper presented to the  
Ontario College of Art & Design  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design Program

Board of Directors Gallery  
1086 Queen Street West  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
May 13 – 23, 2010

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Interdisciplinary Master's of Art, Media and Design  
MFA 2010  
Ontario College of Art & Design

ABSTRACT \_\_\_\_\_

*There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* is an installation of four interrelated works that reflect on the ineffability of experience, of time and of intimacy. By representing the corporeal residue of memory through the gestures of writing, touching and breathing, these works are the traces and reflections of what remains after an intimate relationship has ended. Both the material and metaphorical dimensions of these traces are manifest as corporeal, as form, and as sound. This work evokes the possibility that the body's intrinsic link to language and sensual experience can illuminate how intimacy is remembered and embodied.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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With sincere thanks to my Principal Advisor Ginette Legaré, for her generosity, remarkable insight, and dedication to the development of my work. And, with gratitude, to advisors Barbara Astman and Dot Tuer who have given thoughtful guidance and encouragement throughout this process.

I want to also acknowledge that the title of my thesis, *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out*, is a song title from the band The Smiths. Though I am a fan of The Smiths, my decision to appropriate this song title was not because of the song, its lyrics, or meaning, but rather the fact that the phrase itself offered a poetic metaphor as the title of my thesis project.

Many individuals were especially supportive and significant in my journey through graduate studies. Though there are too many to name here, I do want to acknowledge the colleagues, artists, faculty, friends and family who believed in me, encouraged this exploration, and who made this experience so meaningful.

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All images are works by Danielle Bleackley unless otherwise noted.

## PREFACE

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Writing, for me, is a way of recording what I want to remember, a way of sorting, understanding, and opening up my ideas and experiences. The daily and insistent practice of my writing is connected to both my artistic concerns and my personal life as I create an archive of process, questions and experience in words. Like a photograph records a moment visually, I put words to paper in an effort to remember with language, and with the expectation that this act might allow me to hold onto an aspect of an ephemeral moment or idea years later. Like looking through a photo album, when I revisit these words I am, in some sense, able to return to that day, to my version of that moment and to what I felt. As my graduate work evolved, I recognized connections between my body and language, and the potential that I see in terms of writing as artistic process and form.

My artistic practice has always been concerned with the body's responses to - and negotiation of - events that have been experienced in the past but are no longer manifested in the present. I had been working primarily with color photography, but as I began my graduate work, I became interested in introducing tactility and materiality into my practice. With this new work I also wanted my body, as an artist, to be in closer contact with materials, to have my making hand somehow present in the work. The thought of working

hands-on with material was invigorating. In graduate studies this began as I experimented with the process of felting in my studio work in the winter of 2009 (fig. 1). Along with this shift away from photography, I became increasingly interested in the materiality of clothing and textiles as connected to memory, the body and to intimacy. With a focus on the invisible traces that the body retains and stores from lived experience, I have created works for this exhibition that meditate on the ineffability of experience, of time and of intimacy; revealing what cannot be seen and saying what cannot be said with words. My graduate thesis exhibition *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out*<sup>1</sup> launches my practice into new territory that takes into account the bodily dimension and consciousness of touch and sound both in the making of the work, and in the viewers' reception of it.<sup>2</sup>



FIGURE 1: untitled felted object, grey and oatmeal corriedale wool, 1 x 1 x .5 inch, 2009

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<sup>1</sup> *There Is a Light That Never Goes Out* is a song by The Smiths, written by Morrissey and Johnny Marr. It was originally featured on their 1986 album *The Queen Is Dead*. (see acknowledgements).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Horne, "Acting On: Acted Upon" *Caught in The Act: The Viewer as Performer*, 97



Chapter 1  
INTRODUCTION

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I. THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT

*There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* is a project born out of one significant relationship that I was involved in for eight years and that ended in 2004.<sup>1</sup> When this relationship ended, the companion body, voice, and touch that had been embedded in my everyday was suddenly gone, physically absent. My body struggled to catch up to the reality of the situation but I was emotionally overcome in negotiating this absence in my life. The physicality of the relationship was - all at once - gone. Years later we accidentally ran into each other. I was with someone new and so was he. And even though we had both moved on, I felt an indescribable sensation on that chance meeting - it was as though an invisible cord connected us. Through all of the years that we had spent together, so many of our shared experiences, words, and touches were embodied in me. Seeing him ignited questions in me: How do these felt and lived experiences of intimacy continue beyond the physicality of the relationship? How do I translate these felt experiences and embodied memories into language or form? How could I engage my practice in new ways and with new considerations for material that would address these questions?

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis is not about my personal relationship, rather here I want to acknowledge the end of it, and the subsequent encounter, sensations, and questions as the origin of, and initial motivation behind this work.

Artist Doris Salcedo, in an interview with Charles Merewether, spoke of “the possibility that an intimacy develops in a human being when he or she receives something of the experience of another.”<sup>1</sup> Salcedo was speaking of the opportunity art provides for encounter between two distinct realities. I began to consider intimacy as something that might be transferable, whether in a relationship (body to body) or, as Salcedo suggests, in an art gallery (work to body). This was a significant shift in my investigation, and from this point on I came to a clearer understanding of intimacy and memory as it related to this work. For my thesis, a trace remains inside the body that is the memory of intimacy, or, as the title of my thesis suggests, the light that never goes out.

*There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* was presented at Board of Directors Gallery in Toronto, Canada. Briefly I will introduce each work and an in depth discussion of the work in connection to theory and method will follow in this supporting paper. The works in my thesis exhibition are: *Obsidian*: ink writings on tracing paper hung on the wall, *Spark*: a sound piece presented through headphones; *Ache*: a digital video projection on a white wall and *Amaranthine*: a work involving several wool blankets attached to the gallery wall, with contact microphones, speakers and an amplifier.

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos Basualdo, Andreas Huyssen and Nancy Princenthal, “Charles Merewether interview with Doris Salcedo” *Doris Salcedo*, 137

## II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can I evoke the invisible sensations and felt experiences of the body that we remember from the experience of intimacy using visual, aural and tactile materials and processes in an art installation?

This work engages with the bodily gestures of writing, touching and breathing. How can these gestures of the body, that are intrinsically linked to language and sense experience, explore the ways that intimacy is remembered, embodied and remains as trace?

## III. SHIFTING MY PRACTICE: Considering The Viewer

*There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* expands my practice in new directions involving video, sound, writing, and textile. As I moved from making photo-based work displayed on a wall into an expanded site of three-dimensional space in the gallery, and from the photographic to working with sound, silence, and tactility both as material and gesture, I also began to question how the body of the viewer experiences my work.

This project initiates a step away from the making of work based strictly on the visual, into a terrain that takes into account the bodily dimension and consciousness of touch and sound both in the making of the work and in the viewers' reception of it.<sup>2</sup> In Stephen Horne's catalogue text *Acting On: Acted Upon* for The National Gallery of Canada's exhibition *Caught in The Act: The Viewer as Performer*, he considers the works of exhibiting artists Mowry Baden, Jana Sterbak and Max Dean as successful in challenging the isolation that conventionally exists between viewers and works of art.<sup>3</sup> Employing various strategies, these artists strive to involve the body of the viewer beyond the visual. Horne goes on to

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Horne, "Acting On: Acted Upon" *Caught in The Act: The Viewer as Performer*, 97

<sup>3</sup> Horne, *Caught in The Act*, 97

unravel a history here that credits Fluxus, Minimalism and Neo-Concretism as significant in the introduction of this participatory impulse. He writes: "These artists emphasized that the viewing of art is situational, the focus of the art "experience" is on the experience of one's body-self in a reciprocal relation to the work, rather than on the isolating "optical" (and controlling) surveillance of it."<sup>4</sup> As my practice shifted, this new consideration and thought that I dedicated to the viewer was important. Reading Horne's text was significant in my thinking with regards to the negotiation of the viewer and artwork relationship. As my studio work progressed, I considered what materials and strategies I might employ in these works to best ignite Horne's theory of reciprocal relation.

#### IV. INTERDISCIPLINARITY: New Languages

The question of how my work operates as an interdisciplinary practice is related to the significant material shifts that have occurred in the movement from the photographic to the current installation-based work. From working with the camera and the photographic print I shifted my practice to involve writing, video, textile and sound. The knowledge that I brought from photography and its inherent characteristics and processes, facilitated my engagement and interaction with the new materials. In this supporting paper, I discuss and demonstrate the shift that I have made into interdisciplinarity. In my conclusion I further reflect on my trajectory from the photographic to the current practices, connecting the visual and material languages that might seem disparate but, as I demonstrate, are very much related.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 104

## Chapter 2 METHODOLOGY

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In this section, I first define how my research used reflexive methodology and then demonstrate how this methodology has informed and supported the theoretical and practical components of my thesis. I have included a diagram (see fig. 2, page 10) that provides an overview of my experimentation, collaboration, interpretation and reflection, and that indicates where each area of research has interacted with another. This diagram documents the methods involved in my research, and the meaningful engagement that I maintained with the process.

According to Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg, reflexive methodology in art practice constitutes an “open play of reflection across various levels of interpretation” and emphasizes a broad, multilevel area of reflection in research. Important here are their distinctions between reflexive and reflective. “Reflexive” indicates that levels or areas of research are reflected in one another, and they also affect and interact with each other.<sup>5</sup> For example, my research into memory as embodied is reflected in my sound experiments that subsequently led to the creation of *Obsidian*. On the other hand, “reflective” consists of focused reflections on specific methods or levels of interpretation. Alvesson and Sköldberg are interested in this contrast: the focused and often specialized nature of reflection and the multidimensional and interactive nature of reflexivity. Also important to this methodology is interpretation, which here implies that there are no self-evident, simple or unambiguous

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<sup>5</sup> Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg, *Reflexive Methodology*, 248

rules or procedures and that the crucial ingredients are the researchers', or in this case the artists', intuition, judgment, ability to identify, and a more or less explicit dialogue with the research subject, the researcher, and the reader.<sup>6</sup> Alvesson and Sköldbberg summarize reflexive methodology:

Reflexivity arises when the different elements or levels are played off against each other. It is in these relations and in the interfaces that reflexivity occurs. This approach is based upon an assumption – and implies – that no element is totalized; that is, they are all taken with a degree of seriousness, but there is no suggestion that any one of them is the bearer of the Right or Most Important Insight.<sup>7</sup>

As demonstrated in figure 2, over the course of my research I have employed a number of what Alvesson and Sköldbberg consider “different elements or levels”<sup>8</sup>, and using arrows I demonstrate that these elements have been reflected in and affected by each other. When working with this reflexive methodology it should be noted that no element of my research was totalized. In other words, I do not claim to know everything there is to know about embodied memory, or contemporary video practice, or of intimacy. Rather, by working with a reflexive methodology, I have interrogated and engaged creatively with facets of these disciplines in pursuit of discovery, and the making of new forms.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 248

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 249

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 249



FIGURE 3: *bricoscope* (installation view), found object, itouch, speaker, digital video and sound, 5.5 x 9.5 x 11 inches, collaborative work with Sean Procyk, 2009

Though evidenced in fig. 2, further mention should be made with regard to two specific facets of my research that, when considered within this reflexive methodology, have been integral to the successful interrogation of my research questions. Both my consideration for the body of the viewer in relation to the work of art, and my collaboration with other artists have been vital areas of research. For example, the collaborative work that I engaged in with colleague Sean Procyk involved working through and reflecting on material, image and the ways in which to involve the body of the viewer in an installation (fig. 3). As the artworks for this thesis exhibition developed, it was essential to continually return to and examine reflexively these facets of my research as part of my methodology. With this, I remained aligned with my aim to involve and engage the viewer using the visual, tactile and aural.


| Figure 2: Methods & Process: THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT |  |  |   |  |   |  |                |
|---|--|--|---|--|---|--|----------------|
| AREA OF RESEARCH  | Fall 2008  Spring 2010 |  |   |  |   |  | FINAL ARTWORKS |
| Sound   |  | Thinking about recording the sounds of the body: heartbeat, breath, blinking.  | Record sounds to experiment with accompanying the video works.                                  | Record the sound of my voice whispering – this recording is used in <i>Minus One</i> video.                  | Want to move away from literal voice/language. Record the sound of the pen as I write on paper.               | This recording when listened to in headphones enters the viewers body, it is felt in the body. | Spark          |
| Video   |  | First videos shot (collaborative). Begin working with textile/light/fan/performing fabrics for the camera: <i>gravitational constant</i> completed | Continued to make videos with textiles & clothing/light. <i>Studies in Intimacy</i> made.       | Decision to focus on individual body/gesture. <i>Minus One</i> completed (with sound of whispering)          | Reflection on video work concludes that these body/gestural videos are too literal.                           | Create video with ink soaking clothing. Body is revealed as ink saturates fabric.              | Ache           |
| Writing   | Silkscreened personal texts onto clothing/word lists   | Ongoing written notes kept and thoughts indexed throughout process   |   | Personal texts on vinyl placed in public spaces. Question remains: How to include text in the final work(s)? | Layered writing begins (after sound recording) on large paper. Decision to write off of the edge of the paper | Use of ink in this work leads to thinking about ink as material to use in video.               | Obsidian       |
| Textile   | Felting small objects  | Textiles used in video & video projected onto fabric   | Videos with clothing & light. Thinking about textile as intimately placed onto or next to body. | Still invested in material of felt in the context of the thesis. (what I felt vs. the material of felt)      | Grey blankets as intimate in relation to the body, and as the material of felt.                               | Attach microphones to blankets and amplify sound of viewers touch.                             | Amaranthine    |
| Theory  | Love/Personal Narrative: bell hooks, Roland Barthes, Laura Kipnis, Alain de Botton, Rilke.               | Considering the body of viewer in the works: Stephen Horne   | Intimacy: Doris Salcedo   | Language: Elaine Scarry, Susan Stewart.  | Body and Sensation: Susan Stewart, Diana Taylor   | Memory: Roland Barthes, Diana Taylor.  |                |
| Artists   | Sophie Calle, Felix Gonzales-Torres  |  |   | Leon Ferrari, Mira Schendel, Lani Maestro.   | Ann Hamilton, Mira Schendel, Lani Maestro.  | Ann Hamilton.  |                |

Figure 2: Methods and Process: In this diagram, levels of my research are chronologically catalogued to show major steps and considerations leading to the final artworks. Arrows indicate where discoveries in one area have informed, influenced or driven others, or, where reflexivity has occurred.



## Chapter 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW and PROJECT CREATION

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#### I. PERSONAL NARRATIVE

In the research for this project I have spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on the role of my personal narrative and the subjective nature of intimacy in reference to this work. Much of this reflection has been couched in research that examined the work of artists Sophie Calle and Lani Maestro. In an interview with Renée Baert for her *Quiet Rooms* exhibition catalogue at Galerie de l'UQAM in Montréal in 2001, Lani Maestro talks about her position with regard to negotiating the personal experiential sources of her work. She speaks of the narrative in her later work as finding “How to be able to tell without telling because telling itself was not enough or too much.”<sup>1</sup> Maestro’s words acknowledged the fine line that I needed to address with regard to the inclusion of my personal narrative in this work. There was a need to retain elements of the original narrative that rooted the work, and yet I wanted to move forward from that point, to find a way to “tell without telling”. Maestro continues: “My works often come from an occasion or source but then lose any explicitness along the way either through conceptualization or giving up to the process completely.”<sup>2</sup> In speaking about specific individuals who had been important to the works, she continues: “Those individuals are invoked to help me with the work. There are certain gestures, sensations, flickers; the work begins.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lani Maestro, *Quiet Rooms: Lani Maestro*, 90

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 91

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 91

Artist Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain* takes the experience of heartbreak and places it into an art installation. As a way of dealing with her own pain following a breakup, Calle asked friends to describe a personal experience of suffering with a short narrative and image. In the installation, images are paired with a narrative, first Calle's (the hotel room where her story took place) and a narrative outlining the day of the heartbreak. Alongside this is a different story of pain unrelated to the artist, then Calle's, then someone else's story and so on. In each subsequent reading of Calle's story of heartbreak the text shortens, and darkens, blending into its surface, eventually leading to a short three line narrative ending with "enough": Calle is finally done with her suffering.<sup>4</sup> In comparing her suffering with that of others' Calle eventually deals with and moves forward from her heartbreak, as well as initiating the sharing of these stories with both the participants and the audience.

As I endeavored to translate my private and personal experience into the public space of an art gallery, looking at Calle's *Exquisite Pain* was valuable. Writing on this work, Yve-Alain Bois turns to Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and his discussion of the "wound".<sup>5</sup> Barthes believes that there is no wound for someone else when looking at a photograph of Barthes' own personal experience, and that to others it will be perceived as "ordinary".<sup>6</sup> Calle sees the notion of the wound quite differently: in sharing her experience of heartbreak (in her

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<sup>4</sup> *Sophie Calle: M'as tu vu(e)?*

<sup>5</sup> Barthes' wound refers to the 'punctum' of the photograph or, that which pierces the viewer in poignancy. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 73

work, a version of the ordinary), Calle speaks of the wound as a commonality, and something that can be shared through artwork.<sup>7</sup>

My exploration of Lani Maestro's process, Sophie Calle's work and Bois' insight assisted in the trajectory that I took with regards to the personal narrative that started this thesis, and how best to translate it into artworks that would resonate with the viewer beyond my personal experience. Nearly everyone has experienced intimacy and the loss of it, but finding a way to share this experience with the viewer that emphasized the commonality of it was my challenge. I did not want this narrative to be strictly autobiographic.



FIGURE 4: *Obsidian* (installation view), ink on tracing paper, 36 x 64 x 1.5 inches, 2010

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<sup>7</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, "Paper Tigress" *Sophie Calle: M'as tu vu(e)?* 30

*Obsidian* is the work in my exhibition that holds the most personal trace. On white tracing paper, *Obsidian* (see figure 4, page 13) hangs along one wall of the gallery. Black ink marks the paper with cursive script that, with two thick layers, has become tangled and illegible. One sentence on top of another obliterates comprehension or clarity and creates an indecipherable form that unfurls across the paper forming a horizontal black shape. In the making of *Obsidian* ink dripped onto the floor, slowly seeped into the skin of my fingers, each word, each scratch of the pen on the paper is made by my hand, my gesture, and seen by my eye. Here, my writing, or rather, the insistence that I maintain in terms of the act of my writing as a form of setting down memory, works its gesture into my artistic work. The creation of this work was a contemplation involving my body, and required a repetitive and insistent gesture, allowed time for introspection, and provided the opportunity for physicality while making. Here, my body's involvement in making assisted in reaching an understanding about how my narrative is embedded in this work in ways that are not explicit to the viewer but are suggested.

## II. LOVE

My initial research focused on love and relationships and, uncertain of what questions I wanted to propose, I looked for texts that examined love from a critical and theoretical point of view in order to gain insight into the field. In her book *All About Love: New Visions* bell hooks identifies a consistent dialogue on love that dominates primarily as fantasy in

popular culture<sup>8</sup> and attributes this to male-dominated literature on the subject.

Associations with the sentimental, irrational and hopelessly romantic are often made when women speak about love.<sup>9</sup> These insights from hooks were invaluable in terms of the initial development of an informed position from which to move forward in this project. With my work I want to contribute to a dialogue that moves beyond this stereotype of sentimentality. In this section I will demonstrate how this early research into love paired with my ongoing studio based practice, lead to a concentration on intimacy as trace and the creation of a body of work that explored how the experience of intimacy becomes embodied memory.

Continuing to read through the writings and works of Alain de Botton, Roland Barthes and Rilke – I began to narrow and formulate my questions and objectives for the thesis. Taking my own personal experience with intimacy, the loss of it, and the traces that lingered as a starting point, I read Alain de Botton's *Essays In Love*. Blending narrative with philosophy, de Botton critiques and analyzes the emotions and experiences of being in a relationship from initial infatuation to heartbreak. In his analysis, de Botton distilled to clearer categories what I was struggling to critically address within my research. In the following passage de Botton likens the inevitable encounter with an ex-lover to the overwhelming experience of just seeing an emotional play:

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<sup>8</sup> bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, xxiii

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii. hooks refers here to the female romance novelist whose writings she referred to as the only domain in which women speak of love with any authority.

We would be like an audience emerging from a heart-wrenching play but unable to communicate anything of the emotions they had felt inside, able only to head for a drink at the bar, knowing there was more, but unable to touch it.<sup>10</sup>

Similar to my personal experience, de Botton's characters find themselves without words to claim the feeling or sensation that they are experiencing. That this intensity of feeling might be articulated in the characters' silence reiterated what I was interested in and strengthened my impulse to explore the possibilities of translating this interior sensation into something tangible.

My interest in textiles and cloth links to the body: to clothing and bedding, to comfort and a material that is intimately placed onto or next to the body. I am interested in the power of textiles as something so known, and familiar that can be evocative of the body and intimacy. This led me to experiment with the process of felting, a process whereby raw wool is transformed into felt through manipulation by the hand (see fig. 5, page 16). A felted object is literally a tangle of thousands of individual threads bound together to form one piece. Once felted together, raw threads of wool are forever entangled, and impossible to completely disengage or pull apart; traces from one will always remain with the other. I was also curious about how this process and the material of "felt" might inform and illuminate my investigation of "felt" experience.

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<sup>10</sup> Alain de Botton, *Essays In Love*, 168



FIGURE 5: untitled felted object (detail), grey and oatmeal corriedale wool, 1 x 1 x .5 inch, 2009

These early explorations with felting informed my decision to incorporate grey wool blankets into the installation.<sup>11</sup> These wool blankets are machine felted and reference an intimate bodily space, a material that we encounter in bed and that is connected to the body: blanket as warmth, as something that covers and holds the body, but also something that in intimacy is shared. In the installation of *Amaranthine* the blankets are folded into halves length-wise and pressed together, then lifted up and pinned in a stack to the gallery wall (fig 6). Contact microphones with cords are attached on the surface of the blankets. These cords are visible on top of and within the wool layers, drape down towards the floor, and indicate the possibility of sound. A small amplifier and speakers sit on the floor in front of the work, and as the viewer touches the blanket, the sound of their hand touching the fabric is gently amplified and projected.

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<sup>11</sup> I am aware of and acknowledge artist Joseph Beuys' work with felt and felt blankets. Though my use of felt has intentions and associations that are different than Beuys', I do appreciate his regard for the material of felt as healing, absorbing and insulating.



FIGURE 6: *Amaranthine* (detail), grey wool blankets, contact microphones, amplifier and speakers, earth magnets, 82 x 31 x 5 inches, 2010

In her book, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, Susan Stewart writes: “of all the senses, touch is most linked to emotion and feeling”.<sup>12</sup> In *Amaranthine*, touch is essential in order to involve the body of the viewer and in relation to the pursuit of my research questions. In most instances, touch is inextricably tied to the experience of intimacy and in the context of this work it is important that the body of the viewer engage in touch.

To be in contact with an object means to be moved by it – to have the pressure of its existence brought into a relation with the pressure of our bodily existence. And this pressure perceived by touch involves an actual change; we are changed and so is the object.<sup>13</sup>

*Amaranthine* explores the possibility that touching something might move or change the body of the viewer, and that contact and pressure with an object, in this work the blanket,

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<sup>12</sup> Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 162

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 164



brings the individual body's existence into relation with itself. As Stewart writes, the pressure perceived by touch involves an "actual change". *Amaranthine* considers the language and gesture of touch, and the possibility that a "change" might occur, or rather, that sensations from past experiences of intimacy might be elicited in the viewer during the point of contact.



FIGURE 7: *Amaranthine*, grey wool blankets, contact microphones, amplifier and speakers, earth magnets, 82 x 31 x 5 inches, 2010

In *Amaranthine*, this mnemonic activity of touching involves the body of the viewer in a capacity that the visual cannot. The point of contact between the viewer's body and the blanket enacts a reciprocal relationship between artwork and viewer that has been one of my objectives with this thesis. As Stephen Horne suggests, the focus is now on the experience of one's body-self in a reciprocal relation to the work, rather than on the isolating "optical" (and controlling) surveillance of it.<sup>14</sup>

### III. MEMORY AND INTIMACY

Diana Taylor's *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* and in particular, her definition of memory and repertoire have been essential in the research and development of my project. Memory, for Taylor, is embodied and conjured through the senses.<sup>15</sup> This definition of memory and its relationship to the body is central to my research in that it focuses on the body's role in memory, in gesture, and in language and has helped to frame my research questions and how the works in this installation engage the body. Taylor's theories on memory, when paired with my desire to move into installation works that involved tactility and the senses, opened up possibilities of engaging the body of the viewer, as well as my body as it performed in the work. As stated in my research questions, I want to make tangible something as abstract as the remembered experiences of intimacy. Reflecting on Taylor's theory that memory is evoked

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<sup>14</sup> Horne, *Caught in The Act*, 104

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, 82

through the senses, I continued with my production and as I worked, these ideas slowly became integrated into the material and formal directions that my practice was taking.

As I considered how to include the wool blankets in the installation I began to think about the following: the absence of the other body or touch in the context of remembering intimacy, the amplification of sounds or gestures that are not normally noticed or acknowledged and, what touching combined with hearing could evoke in the viewer. Andra McCartney's *Soundscape Works, Listening and the Touch of Sound* examines how amplification translates the subtlety of touch into an audible play with surfaces and textures.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the blanket, something generally without sound, or only heard in private when close to the body, can, through amplification, contain or emit sound. In *Amaranthine* the viewer touches the wool and the speakers project the sound of a hand on a blanket. McCartney discusses the traces of tactility that are embedded in sound works, and that act as a link or trigger to distant and everyday places.<sup>17</sup> This was key to the way that I thought about *Amaranthine*. Could this act of touching lead the viewer into reverie? With its engagement of these senses in the viewer, *Amaranthine* becomes a mnemonic instrument that evokes sensations remembered from intimacy.

Taylor's discussion of the terms "archive" and "repertoire" also assists my research by distinguishing modes for remembering and accumulating knowledge. Taylor's "archive"

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<sup>16</sup> Andra McCartney, "Soundscape Works, Listening and the Touch of Sound" *Aural Cultures*, 185

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 185

constitutes enduring materials such as literary texts, bones, buildings and letters; items that work across distance, time and space and that are material. The “repertoire” encompasses the ephemeral: embodied practices, performance or dance, experiences and knowledge that are non-reproducible. What I am most interested in here is Taylor’s definition of the repertoire - the “live” experience, the gesture, the voice, the body in a specific place and time - as this definition relates to my thesis.<sup>18</sup> Taylor’s “repertoire” assists in clarifying what I mean when I refer to remembered experiences of intimacy, or experiences beyond words. In intimacy there are gestures and events that occur that have no archive attached to them: these become the repertoire. This non-archival knowledge that we gather from these experiences - a touch, a voice, or a scent - becomes embodied as a repertoire of the experience of intimacy.

For Roland Barthes, the photograph is, in essence, tautological, and sits as evidence that something or someone has been.<sup>19</sup> Barthes writes: “the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially.”<sup>20</sup> These observations about the traditional nature of photography are inextricably tied to loss and absence. Similar to how the viewing of a photograph delivers a sense of loss, and a longing for a moment that cannot be repeated, the works in this installation use non-photographic materials to affect emotions of loss. In other words, the viewing of an illegible stretch of writing or the experience of an

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*, 19-20

<sup>19</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 5

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. Thirty years has passed since Barthes claim, and I acknowledge that this can now be disputed with the advent of digital technologies and manipulations in photography. However, for this thesis I would like to confine my argument to traditional theories of the photograph.

enveloping sound heard through headphones here evokes what Barthes indicates exists in the photograph. In *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* language and the body are referenced in an endeavor to trigger this same sense of loss and lead the viewer back to another person or time, as Barthes' claims the photograph does.

Much of my studio-based work in graduate studies has involved video and, in tandem with my analysis and exploration of Taylor's study of memory and performance and Barthes writings on loss, I was influenced to make *Ache*. *Ache* is a video that is projected on the gallery wall and, because of its starting point as a white image it appears as though there is no projection at all (see fig. 8, page 25). Not until the black ink appears within the frame does the viewer become aware that this is a body. Echoing a wound that is bleeding, the dark ink drips down the frame transforming the image from its stark white origins. As the clothing absorbs the ink and as the movement of the breath becomes apparent we arrive at the body, slowly breathing and stained. It is as though the body writes, or performs the repertoire. The wound cuts across the frame, and the body is revealed through stain and breath.



FIGURE 8: *Ache* (digital video still), dimensions variable, 7.13 min., 2010

## V. LANGUAGE AND SENSATION

In her book *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* Susan Stewart examines poetic forms that arise out of sense experience and, as they make sense experience intelligible to others, produce intersubjective meaning.<sup>21</sup> My research questions are concerned with evoking sensations that are remembered from intimacy using visual and tactile means and forms, and Stewart's theory of poetic forms and her close analysis of the senses and the body in both the conception of artworks and their reception informed how I handled these questions. Stewart's theory supports the genealogy of this work, the notion that sense experience can give way to form, and to evoking something in the viewer. Stewart primarily deconstructs written and spoken poetry in her book, but using her framework I have

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<sup>21</sup> Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, ix

reconsidered my materials and that, by involving the sensual, the questions put forward in my thesis might be further opened up for scrutiny.

Stewart writes: “Like the reception of visual phenomena, the reception of sound might be framed as a feeling; we receive light and sound waves as we receive a touch, a pressure. They touch not only our ear membrane but also the entire surface of the skin.”<sup>22</sup> In *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* a sound piece, entitled *Spark*, is presented through headphones. *Spark* is the recorded sound of writing, literally the sound of the nib of a pen and ink marking the paper, with intermittent pauses of silence. The slowed and amplified sound is projected through headphones into the ear and, with the assistance of vibration, into the body of the viewer. Though *Spark* is the sound of pen writing on paper, it is not immediately evident as such but, in its cadence it rubs and digs into the body. Its pace is like that of writing, or of speaking, with pauses, yet it remains muffled. Listening to *Spark*, the viewer is hearing another body as it transfers thought onto paper with writing. Insistence, gesture, and the weight of memory are here presented through sound and silence. With *Spark* I want to rouse the body of the viewer, and by directing the sound, open up the possibility for a path into sensations or traces of past experiences.

In her introduction to the collected essays *Literature and the Body*, Elaine Scarry positions the body as vulnerable and fragile, yet capable, powerful and intrinsically tied to language,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 100

to the voice and the written word.<sup>23</sup> Taking into consideration the importance to my research of memory as embodied, Scarry's writings on the inherent connection of the body to language assisted me in clarifying how to best execute and address the issues and questions of my work. I shifted away from using language as legible and considered also how the body communicates without the use of speech or writing. We cry tears to express emotion, blood is taken to gather information on our health, we sweat to calm and cool our bodies, and breath continually enters and exits the body to keep us alive. Concentrating on these expressions of bodily language, and contemplating what comes from the body as holding an imprint or trace, I began to experiment by using ink in the construction of *Ache*. With *Ache* I am interested in the body as it attempts to articulate through modes that don't involve language in the literal sense, but rather through the physical body. The ink becomes a lasting mark, embodying a trace that appears to come from the body, remembered. For Scarry, the human voice and the written word are continually regulating the appearance and disappearance of the human body.<sup>24</sup> When I was making *Ache* I was thinking about this observation. The body appears as the clothing becomes stained and yet, despite the fact that the body appears through ink and breath, it simultaneously disappears as the black stain creates an empty space.

*Tangled Alphabets*, a retrospective exhibition of the work of artists Mira Schendel and León Ferrari at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2009 was curated by Luis Pérez-

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<sup>23</sup> Elaine Scarry, "Introduction" *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, vii

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, ix



Oramas and my research into these artists' practices and the accompanying exhibition text has been invaluable in thinking about the ways that I reference, extend and implicate the body and its connection to language in my work. Curator Luis Pérez-Oramas writes of Mira Schendel's oeuvre concerning the body as the single link through which we understand the world, and insightfully describes Schendel's practice as a "ceaseless effort to understand".<sup>25</sup> In order to make *Obsidian*, my thoughts and words are written on the page, only to be erased and destroyed by my next thought or sentence. The content is not planned in advance, contains introspection, reflections on my practice as well as arbitrary notes. It is often fragmented and repetitive, and what the words are actually articulating is not relevant. Rather, it is the gesture that is important. And yet, in its indecipherability, it is also an acknowledgment of the inability to put words to the experience of intimacy or loss; and, in its unyielding gesture, *Obsidian* represents the insistence and endurance of memory. This work's title refers to a glasslike volcanic rock that forms in the absence of crystallization. In other words, *Obsidian* is without clarity, a dark shape that is formed when released from the body. From the gesture of my hand the language remains illegible, without literal crystallization but becomes a form on the surface of the paper.

Art historian and critic Andrea Giunta writes on Ferrari's use of language in his works as referring to a "...subtle perception, a loving feeling, or a polemical idea through volume,

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<sup>25</sup> Luis Pérez-Oramas, "León Ferrari and Mira Schendel: Tangled Alphabets" *Tangled Alphabets*, 13

cadence, or apparent disorder.”<sup>26</sup> Ferrari’s works abstract and distort his own writing on paper in an attempt to make understandable what is not accepted, understood, or easy to express.<sup>27</sup> Giunta suggests that this disruption and disorder of language that Ferrari enters into is a field of floating meaning – meaning that emerges from writing as visual form.<sup>28</sup> Giunta’s observation is compelling to me when I think about *Obsidian* and *Spark*, the two works in my installation that explicitly involve language and that, with layers of words, erode content or readability from language. In removing legibility these tangled writings then acknowledge the inability to succinctly articulate sensations of intimacy and loss through the use of ordinary writing.

Peréz-Oramas writes:

To touch things – with language – seems to me one of the endeavors in the work of Ferrari and Schendel. It is not a question of simply naming or repeating; it is a question of using the word as a voice, a gesture, of inventing gestures as words, touching words as stigmata of silence, indexing with the mute body the thing that cannot be named.<sup>29</sup>

The written script of *Obsidian* indexes the body and the hand that scripted it, the hand that was compelled to insistently compile these words. As the script meets the edge of the paper and appears to overflow, it is as though this writing is without end, and unfolds a space of contemplation with regard to what this seemingly endless gesture might suggest.

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<sup>26</sup> Andrea Giunta, “León Ferrari: A Language Rhapsody” *Tangled Alphabets*, 47

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 47

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 50

<sup>29</sup> Pérez-Oramas, *Tangled Alphabets*, 42

Elaine Scarry's consideration of the body's relationship to language has informed *Ache* and *Obsidian* and the attempt to express embodied memory and loss by using and indexing the body. Continually opening and closing with speech and silence is demonstrated through a tangle of writing in black ink. Once readable and open as legible language, this work closes in on itself with insistence, layers and eventual obliteration. And, in *Ache* the body moves with breath while slowly being stained with black ink. As Elaine Scarry articulates, the body is constantly adjusting itself, absorbing and emptying itself of material content.<sup>30</sup> Language, in its many forms, emanates from the body to touch another surface or another person and is guided back to the body through experience, through more language. These works are made using words, and the traces of language and experience and I endeavor to, as Pérez-Oramas suggests: index the silent body, the body that is unable to articulate and identify the ineffability of embodied memory.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Scarry, "Introduction" viii

<sup>31</sup> Pérez-Oramas, *Tangled Alphabets*, 42

## Chapter 4 CONCLUSION

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With this exhibition and supporting thesis paper, two years of research and studio-based experimentation have culminated in an installation of artworks that address the multidimensionality of intimacy, memory and loss. Informed by Stephen Horne's writing, this body of work challenges the isolation that traditionally exists between viewers and works of art.<sup>32</sup> By creating situations for the viewer that involve touch or listening, I focus on the viewer's experience of their body in relation to the work, or what Horne calls a reciprocal relation.<sup>33</sup> My early research into the concepts of love, and my engagement with the felting process in my studio, coupled with reading artist Doris Salcedo's insights into how intimacy is transferred, led to an understanding of intimacy as it pertains to this project, both in the context of body to body (relationship) and work to body (gallery). Diana Taylor's writings on memory and repertoire coupled with Roland Barthes' writings on the photograph, assisted in clarifying my theoretical questions, and refining my material experimentation and reflection in the studio. Finally, Elaine Scarry and Susan Stewart provided insights that assisted in establishing the importance of language and sensation both in the materials that I used, and in the ways that I thought about the works as related to their making, and to the body of the viewer. Weaving this together, a reflexive methodology allowed for a productive reading of theory in tandem with my studio-based research in order to inform the creation of *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out*.

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<sup>32</sup> Horne, *Caught in the Act*, 97

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 104

Having finished this body of work, I now can identify in these new works implicit connections to my photographic practice. By using sound, video, textile and writing, I drew from the language of the photograph in order to realize my concepts in these new forms. In traditional photography, light is the material that generates an image, and now in three of the four works in this installation, ink generates the image: in *Obsidian* ink is applied to tracing paper, in *Ache* the ink bleeds over the body, and in *Spark* the sound is literally pen and ink marking paper. In *Obsidian* if I continued to write, the white paper would eventually become black. This process operates much like photography. Film can become overexposed and blackened with too lengthy an exposure, and an excess of light, or information renders the exposure unreadable.

I return to Susan Stewart's insights into poetic form. She writes:

...poetic form relies on effects of meaning that, in their metaphorical and imaginative reach, cannot be taken up completely in any single moment of reception. The semantic dimension of poetry is an open unfolding one, stemming from both conception and reception.<sup>34</sup>

By engaging with the body of the viewer through touch and sound, these works evoke and emphasize the viewers' experiences and sensations of remembered intimacies. Exploring the ways that the work is received beyond the visual, these artworks make their way, as Stephen Horne writes, into or onto the viewer.<sup>35</sup> Both Stewart and Horne point out the reach and affect that works of art are capable of. It is my intention that the works in my installation resonate within the viewer long after the moment of reception in the gallery

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<sup>34</sup> Stewart, *Poetry*, 12

<sup>35</sup> Horne, *Caught in the Act*, 112

space. By involving the body of the viewer, *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* acknowledges the capacity of the body to remember and preserve traces of intimacy, while recognizing the significant role that language and sense experience play in the ways that intimacy is remembered and embodied.

To conclude, I would like to end with a quote from Rilke. For Rilke, the progression from feelings through experiences through memories through forgetting brings one to blood remembering.<sup>36</sup> With this progression, memory and experience become absorbed and inseparable from the body.

And still it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the great patience to wait until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves – not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> John L. Mood, *Rilke On Love and Other Difficulties*, 111

<sup>37</sup> Rilke, *Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties*, 112

## Chapter 5 CONTRIBUTION and FUTURE RESEARCH

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Artists Sophie Calle and Lani Maestro work from their personal experiences as a starting point to generate works of art that share something of that experience with the audience.

*There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* contributes to this ongoing discourse in contemporary art by presenting works that originate in personal narrative, and then unfold to include the viewer, reiterating the body's role as fundamental to experience, memory and intimacy. Through an engagement with language as form, my thesis exhibition endeavors to articulate concepts that are often difficult to put into words. In this way, my work also shares an affinity with León Ferrari and Mira Schendel. These artists have chosen to use language as a material or gesture that then becomes form, in an effort to make visible or understandable, invisible, or abstract concepts. *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* is an affirmation of art's potential to share, exchange or evoke intimate experiences with the viewer.

My experimentation and the discoveries that culminate in *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* inform the directions that my practice will take in the future. The diversity of materials that I use in this exhibition significantly affects the approach that I will take with my future projects and research. I will continue to pursue writing as form, and as a gesture that is evocative of the body. Linked to this I want to pursue sound as it connects to writing and the ways in which the immateriality of sound can take on a physical presence, whether in headphones or in an ambient installation. Video projection, like *Ache*, as a method of

presenting, or revealing form is another process that I want to investigate further. Areas that emerged during my graduate work that I want to return to in the future include: hand felting, working with the materiality of 16 mm film to create films without the camera, and recording and translating into textile or language, the sounds of the body's heartbeat and breath. Ultimately, this research and new body of work affirms the grounding of my practice in photography. And with this, I intend to take this new perspective on the language of the photograph into future artistic projects.



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