Helmut Smits, Pairs

He uses double exposure to place one discarded shoe next to another.

When I saw this image, I was moved by the way technology in image-making was employed. Faced with such a vast topic, 'Position,' I found myself at a loss, trying to find some decent excuse for my creation, overlooking the fact that I chose image work precisely because of the pure joy it brings. Sometimes we can think nothing of it, just gently placing one shoe next to another in an image. It's a very pure form of care from the image. What more can images offer us? Images make us laugh, make us cry, make us say a soft "Oh", isn't that enough?

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I've always loved Helmut Smits' work, and sometimes it makes me think that the commonalities of my other favourite creators might reflect my own style. We are really similar in many ways: we both use graphics and photography as means of creation, and we both prefer not to talk too much about "meaning" but rather convey it through the images themselves.

I try to ask myself further: why do I like his work? What does technology reveal in his practice? One answer that comes to mind is that his work presents not the somewhat complicated discourse about "meaning," but rather a comfort brought by the images themselves: perhaps the significance of technology lies in allowing us to place one shoe next to another in the image.

His work makes me aware of what I want to achieve. My workflow can be summarized as: input - technology as revelation - output, which is a logic from one image to another, about the difference between "this" and "that." Technology is responsible for revealing what is inherent in an image itself, that's what I want to see. In such works, technology stays within the image, becoming part of the image, just as you realize upon seeing Helmut Smits' Pairs that he created these images through double exposure.

I believe that no one can open his website without being amazed by so many works; he moves lightly and swiftly between each work, with light thoughts and quick production (though the medium he uses for his works is mostly photography, I believe this is our difference, we speak in a similar way, but what we want to say is different). This is a firmness that comes from the verb — if feeling lost, make something; my mind and hands will tell me the answer. When my approach is visual, it's about the making itself, the verb, will give me the answer. Making quickly,

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pausing briefly, occasionally pondering what happened, it's like dancing, this is how I make things.
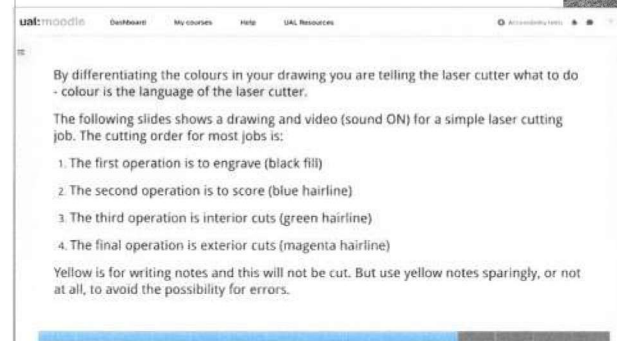
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Helmut Smits, Famous Photographers

I've always loved Helmut Smits' work, and sometimes it makes me think that the commonalities of my other favourite creators might reflect my own style. We are really similar in many ways: we both use graphics and photography as means of creation, and we both prefer not to talk too much about "meaning" but rather convey it through the images themselves.

This series of photographs is about how we take pictures. Actually, I feel that for authors like him and me, sometimes using words rather than the visuals themselves to describe our works is a kind of failure. Therefore, I attach the pictures from this series here. Take a look; images themselves are enough to explain why I refer to him.

Alexiane, Solène, Johanna and Alexiane photographed by Victor Hugo*.

* Victor Hugo was a French poet, novelist, and dramatist of the Romantic movement. Hugo is considered to be one of the greatest and best-known French writers.

Julia, Max and Julia photographed by Giacomo Bresadola*.

* Giacomo Bresadola was an eminent Italian mycologist.

Ans and Cees photographed by dwarf Happy*.

* Happy is one of the seven dwarfs in Disney's 1937 film Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Happy gets his name from his jovial and optimistic demeanor.

By differentiating the colours in your drawing you are telling the laser cutter what to do - colour is the language of the laser cutter.

The following slides shows a drawing and video (sound ON) for a simple laser cutting job. The cutting order for most jobs is:

1. The first operation is to engrave (black fill)
2. The second operation is to score (blue hairline)
3. The third operation is interior cuts (green hairline)
4. The final operation is exterior cuts (magenta hairline)

Yellow is for writing notes and this will not be cut. But use yellow notes sparingly, or not at all, to avoid the possibility for errors.

(isn't that inspired enough?)

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Now I believe that the two most important points I have gained so far are:
1. My workflow: input - technology - output.
2. I hope that what I do can make my audience think: How did she do it? Or, the audience can immediately recognize what technology was used to create these works (and understanding this visually precedes other parts of the works).

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Susan Sontag, On Photography

In this book, Susan Sontag uses the lovely term "handmade visual statements" to describe interpretive works (such as writing and painting). To a large extent, I can say: technology is the tool that allows me to create "handmade visual statements." Most of the time, I use technology to visualize ideas that come to mind, to create examples for them. Photography is indeed a good medium for such expressions, as she says: "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge, and, therefore, like power." We manipulate the world to make manifest the relations we want to convey.

However, this also brings up my confusion: I find that the designers or artists I admire most often prefer to use photography as their means of expression. I believe that the creators I admire can in some way suggest what I want to do, so I am very eager to understand why I am always attracted to images created by this technique (even though it does not necessarily mean that photography is the medium I want to use). Or, as Susan Sontag says, paintings, drawings, and photography are all statements, it's about whether the medium presents statements or interpretations of the world. So, since we have so many ways to make statements, why do we tacitly choose photography over others?

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When I try to read books discussing the role of technology or media, the textual materials that meet my expectations are often about photography, this one is no exception. This phenomenon is not only reflected in textual materials; in fact, most of the creators I admire, whom you can see in my other references, such as Helmut Smits and Ben Denzer, share a commonality: as artists/designers with a background in graphic design education, they use images obtained through photography as their primary means of creation more than other graphic media. I don't know if this is because photographs are more powerful: "Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood." The authenticity of photographs makes them closer to people's visual experiences than any graphics created by Adobe. The timeliness conveyed by such images is so swift to the point of being terrifying; they do not require viewers to have any prior knowledge to interpret the images, and anyone can understand such images visually in an instant. I once imagined replacing the photos in their works with other more graphic content, but the result was obviously less powerful than the original works.

In their works, the communicative advantages brought by authentic images are obvious, but such an approach is not entirely applicable to my work. Personally, I prefer to maintain a bit of distance from "reality," which is actually why I chose graphic design over more direct content-based creative work such as painting or photography: the appropriate sense of distance among myself, the content, and the output in graphic design makes me comfortable. It's not as close to pure art, nor as far as the service industry, allowing me enough space and (in terms of workflow) time for reflection. Based on this, I believe that the medium I want to use is another type of image, not primarily

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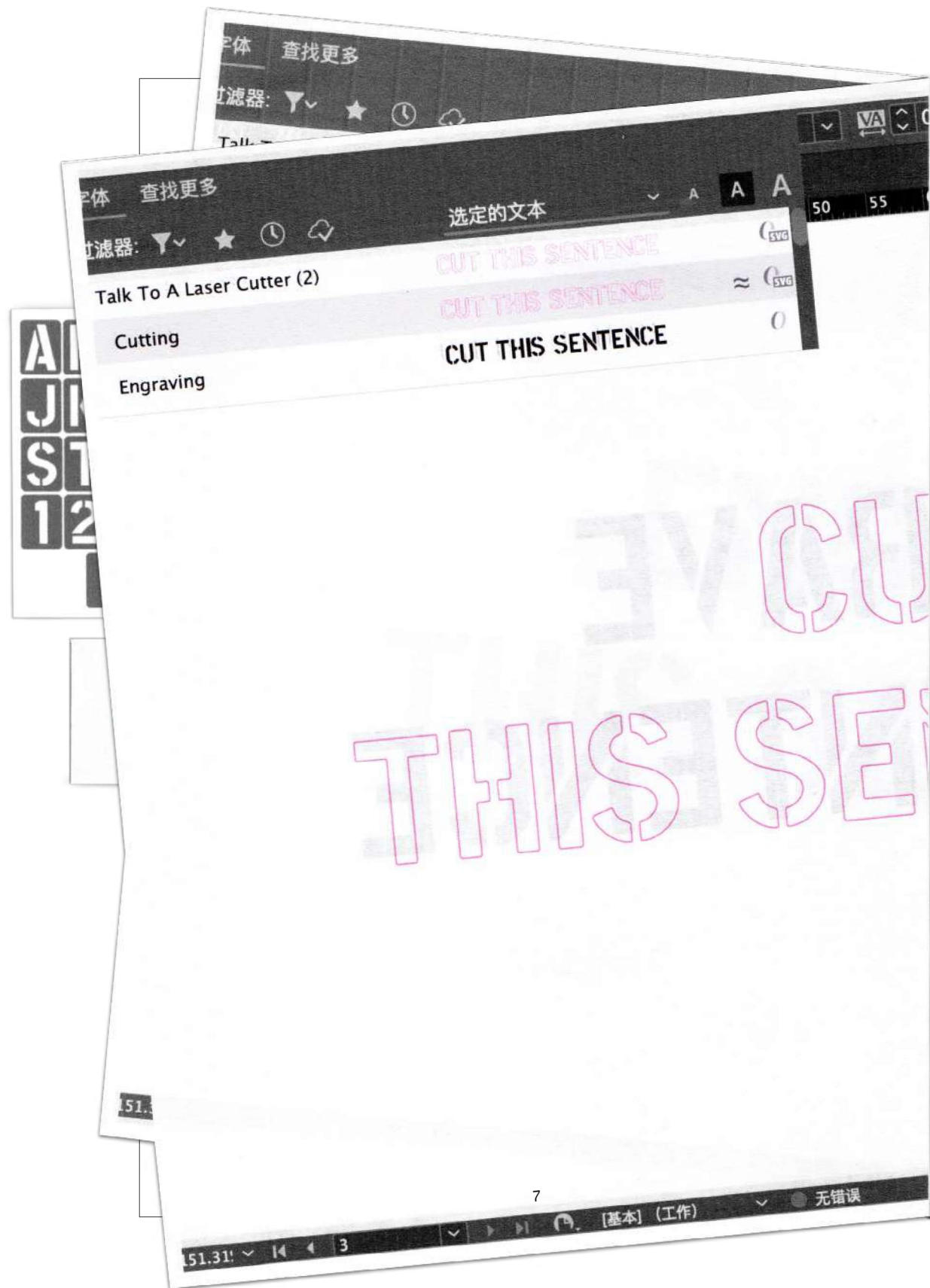
based on photographs, but broadly defined images in the field of graphic design: fonts, posters, web pages, photographs, and so on, are all images to me. For me, an image is something to be viewed. "Handmade visual statements", back to the word again, handmade, visual, statement, for us living in 2024, using Adobe or C4D is certainly a form of handmade, right?

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Michel Foucault, The Order of Things

Benjamin was adept at raising reflections on technology itself, or rather, using technology as a tool for reflection. For example, "Whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art?" The advent of photography technology brought about a crisis for the most commonly used technique in art at the time—painting. When human figures disappeared for the first time in photography, it showed us something new. We began to shoot empty landscapes, no longer limited to taking one photo at a time, but attempting to take many in succession. Thus, technology brought about expression, and the world began to unfold with the human eye (if the lens is seen as the photographer's point of view) as the starting point.

In fact, the emergence of new technologies always forces creators to think: If the existing content that this technology can produce could be replaced by another more convenient way, what else can this technology do? Or, in other words, new technologies always compel us to rethink the uniqueness and singularity of old technologies through updates and replacements, thereby changing the development purpose and direction of existing technologies, which is what I want to explore in practice: technology as revelation.

But to be honest, despite having read so many related discussions, I feel like my exploration is still stuck at this point. I know

what technology can reveal to us and how it can do so, but I still lack clues about the next step. For a topic like this, answering the "What next?" behind these revelations is undoubtedly very difficult, and summarizing it in language is even more challenging. This may be due to the nature of language; unlike images, when practice is condensed into language, something akin to definition or summary inevitably emerges. The moment language appears, all meanings seem to be frozen, making it difficult for me to advance it with language.

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Anonymous, Pie Chart Pyramid

In layout design, the negative space left by subtracting graphics from white builds the frame. When the frame comes before content, the layout process shifts from designing the frame for content to content for the frame.
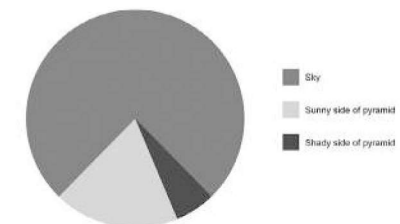
The Pie Chart Pyramid is a perfect example of content matching form. This anonymous author transforms a table into an image by finding suitable graphics for the existing frame. What I was doing in the first week can be summarised as "making frames for images", in the second week I flipped it around and tried the logic of the pie chart pyramid: making images for frames – I made a poster with only the frame, devoid of content, as my tool, then started to make images happen in the frame as much as possible by manipulating the real world (not photoshop).

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René Magritte, The Treachery of Images

Magritte's work inspires me to think about the relationship between visual experience and images (text is also a type of image). The image of a pipe was first painted on the canvas, and then, the inserted text negated the content of the image, creating a conflict between image content and visual experience. This work questions the conventions of language and visual representation, which I believe relates to the "fundamental question" of digital image-making that I want to explore: going back to a part of the image that our experience takes for granted, such as the white layer at the bottom of a Photoshop file. I hope to, like this work, clearly and accurately find one or multiple visual means that can instil doubt in people about the nature of digital images.

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Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology

Heidegger said, "Technology itself is a contrivance—in Latin, an instrumentum." For modern graphic designers, most of the time, our tools are the software technologies provided by Adobe. These new software bring about new modes of image making, which in turn affect our perception of images. For example, when we open Photoshop, there is always an initial white layer lying quietly at the bottom, and our task is to overlay various images on top of it; we would consider the grey and white grid to represent "transparency." For these technologies, I want to ask some very basic questions: Why create images by overlaying on white? Why does a grey and white grid represent transparency?

"Modern technology too is a means to an end. This is why the instrumental conception of technology conditions every attempt to bring man into the right relation to technology." What I want to do is something like reading the user manual for a newly purchased juicer for the first time after bringing it home. I want to read the manual carefully, see what this tool is made for, what it can do, how to do it, and how I will actually use this juicer: What is the difference between juicing one fruit and mixing several fruits? How many fruits can I put in at most? Can the juicer be used to make other drinks?

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Jörg H. Gleiter,
Ornament Today: Digital Material Structural

Joerg wrote in Ornament Today, "...from an epistemological point of view, the principal question is not what ornament is but how something becomes ornament." I believe a similar structure can describe what I aim to do: I seek to explore not what these digital images look like once completed, but rather how they are produced.
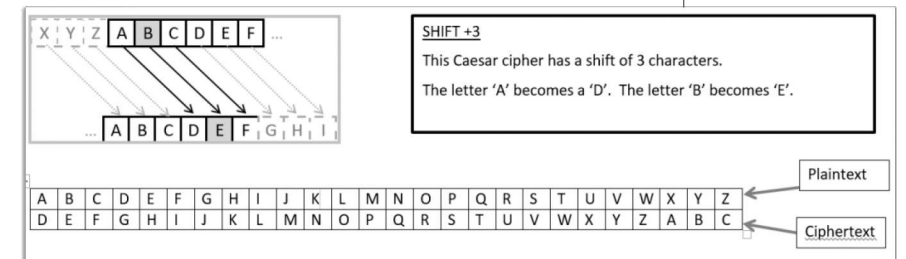
Such work is based on the technology of making, and I believe that technology-based practice should be propelled through multiple light, swift cases. This is because I need, and have to, maintain a subtle distance from technology, to ensure that I am not led astray by it. Therefore, I need to continuously create small cases for my research, or "dots," which will make something visible. "It says nothing, but shows something."

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Kenneth Goldsmith,
## Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age

The most inspiring part of this book is the author's use of clever examples. In Kenneth's narrative, digitization brings about new images: "You see a digital elevator button displaying a question mark instead of a number, ATMs in reboot mode, subway advertisement signs with 'out of memory' error messages, and flight arrival boards punctured by Windows desktops." It suggests to me that digitization not only brings new methods of image making but also new content—images that can only be presented by interfaces and should not appear in other traditional media, generated by new technologies. This leads me to contemplate (to their carrier mediums) what images are new and what images

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are old, which might also be a characteristic of the digital image worth exploring.

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**Michel Foucault,
The Order of Things**

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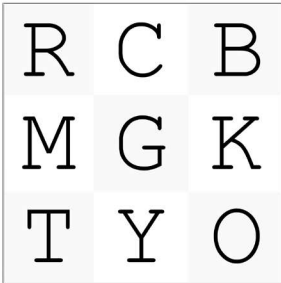
This book's most inspiring part for me lies in its discussion of the relationship between things and concepts. Often, I feel that my work is related to cognitive science, about how we perceive things (through technology as revelation). In the preface of "The Order of Things," Foucault attempts to explore the relationship between things and concepts.

At the beginning of the book, Foucault quotes Borges' example from a certain Chinese encyclopaedia: "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies." This is certainly a way of classifying animals, an extremely absurd method. This example emphasizes to me the possibility of establishing connections between things through its absurdity: if there are now points A and B, how many paths are there from A to B? What are the differences between each path? What tools should be used to reach them? What tools can be used? Let's return to the connection between cognitive science and my work. In cognitive science, the concept of "universal cognition" is important because this universality represents how most people will go from A to B. But this does not mean that we can only go from A to B; I believe that this is my part, I want to try those untried lines, try to see what these new connections can bring us.

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**Walter J. Ong,
Orality and literacy: the
technologizing of the word**

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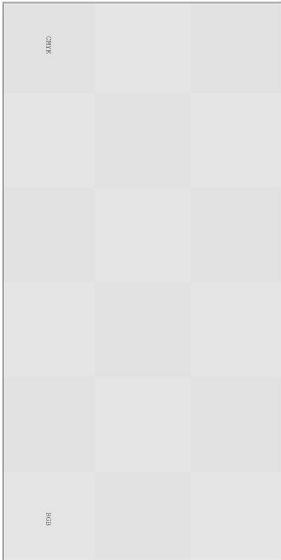
This is the first article I read. I attempted to unravel the relationship between writing and my practice through it: What do I need to gain through writing? Or rather, what is the relationship between my work and its textual component? Here, the textual component refers to any written description beyond verbal narratives, as stated
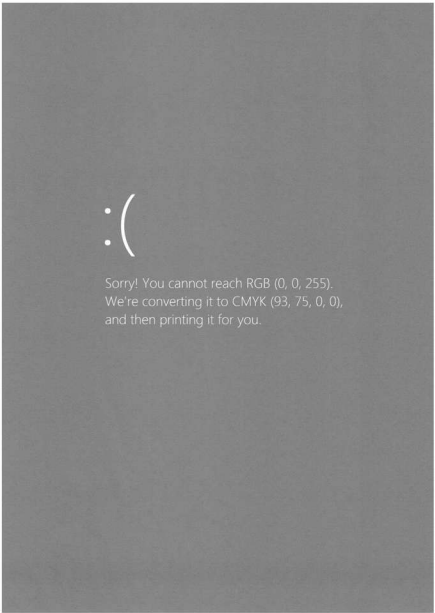
in this book, writing is a way of thinking, an organizational language that differs from verbal expression.

I believe Ong's summary of the characteristics of written writing has helped me explore the relationship between writing and my practice to some extent. Firstly, written writing is linear, and this linear arrangement makes

writing suitable for logical reasoning and conceptual construction. Therefore, this time I want to try placing writing before practical work to see how it can guide practical work. Secondly, the personal nature of written writing: Ong emphasizes that written writing is a relatively private act, allowing individuals to express thoughts and opinions without direct communication. This characteristic enables me to independently advance my work and "dialogue" with other people's work through text.

Based on the above points, my stage conclusion about what I need to gain from writing is: writing is not a mere appendage to the work, but rather a tool to help me advance my practice. If writing occurs before creation, then writing becomes a form of guidance; if it occurs after creation, it serves as a form of summarization; if it happens during creation, writing becomes a tool for me to organize my thoughts, much like commas in the article, briefly pausing to look at what I'm doing and where I am.

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Yuqing Lei
17 May, 2024

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