

Signature—A speech that contextualizes the video “One Man”

PART ONE

What is Signature?

Definition—a coalescence of experience that reveals and replaces the primary identity of the maker.

It's your written name...remember learning to write in school—the difficulty in conforming and then difficulty in finding your own style...

It's your credit card.

It's your company or school logo.

It's the colour of your paper and stationary.

It's your personal choice of what to wear—your taste in fashion.

It's your website.

It's your blog.

It's how you support and hold your body through ordinary daily life, whether you are conscious of doing this or not. Signature is in your fundamental posture.

Let's do an imaginary exercise about recognition from a distance—let's close our eyes and imagine we're all bled, without clothing and a quarter of a kilometre away from each other. Still. How many persons do you think you would recognize from this distance? And now we are all moving—what does that change? Do we recognize each other better from a distance and moving, more easily than when they are being still? I certainly recognize persons better from their movement qualities than any other feature.

Signature could be the texture of your skin, up close or being touched.

It's the way you have with words. I would like to share with you the first poem I ever memorized. In my family we were given a nickel for each poem we memorized. That was not much, but it could be saved to buy 10 cents worth of chocolate peanuts...it was a tactic used by my parents to interest me in words. Here is the poem:

Loveliest of these, the cherry now is hung with bloom along the bow
And stands about the woodland ride wearing white for Easter tide.

Now of my three-score years and ten, twenty will not come again, and since to look at thing in
bloom fifty springs is little room,

About the woodland I will go to see the cherry hung with snow.

It's not the complete poem, I believe, but what I still remember of it. A. E. Hausman.

We see the cherry tree, with all its blossoms, standing growing wild in the woods, signalling spring, new growth, pristine whiteness. Many cultures associate these with new life. We hear the author's voice as a twenty year old person, reflecting on what this symbol of the cherry tree means to him. He's aware of his age, entering a period of reflection, and he realizes that the twenty springs that have passed are not the complete fulfilment of the experience of the horse back ride in the woods to see the cherry tree in blossom. So he determines to go out "and see the cherry hung with snow."

Now what could this mean? Does the author literally mean that he will go more often to see the cherry also in the winter? Or does the author mean that he will determine to go every time the cherry is hung with blossoms which look like snow? Or does he mean that he will repeat the experience more than one time each spring?

We have no way of knowing.

It's the poet's prerogative to create mystery. Magic. The unknown interpretation of the mystery that is poetry itself. The poem creates a mystery of literature, encompassing the poet's love of nature and drawing you as young people into a predicament—you do not fully appreciate the reflective qualities that are awakened as one grows older. But you are aware of the great loss and damage to nature today. Earth crust shifts, pollution—you are very conscious that such experiences of loveliness as riding a horse through the New England countryside and stopping to see the beauty of a cherry tree may not belong to your own grand children. And survival of the human species is at issue here. So I wonder at what point in time the meaning of this little poem will be an archaic memory of lost nature. And at what point in time will the musings of A.E. Hausman become totally and irrevocably alienated from human experience. Hausman's poems take on a very different significance in this time of global warming. And though he has been criticized heavily for being "romantic and even not really of his time" his poetry today rings painfully true to the innocent heart of youth as you young persons in the audience understand that you will never recover the innocence of earlier times where rarefied poets could dream and muse about the beauty of nature without suspecting that it might not go on forever.

Hmmm...Signature of the poet...

Changing times put a completely different perspective on the poetry. This poem means something different to me today.

The signature looks different too. In the fifties when I was a young child, memorizing this poem, it was really hard work. The poet was a wise man, but not anybody that I could really know. And I did not know him except by his poems. Yet, maybe his love of nature communicated something to me that has remained as a lasting legacy of the beauty and intrigue I have had with nature all my life.

I am alive in nature as nowhere else. And my work has often sought natural forms including nature imagery, and chaos. The vivid sight of a broken piece of wet wood rotting in the cold, or the smell of the Milwaukee River as I canoed near those beautiful banks will never leave my consciousness.

Returning to read the beauty of Wordsworth's nature poetry or William Blake's nature poetry as I have done many times in my life, is always a joy, though entirely different from the joy of reading Hausman. Same subject, but entirely different signatures. Each of these will resonate forever in my memory.

Signature.

Signature is also the essential radiance of your being. How many of you have ever seen auras? You don't have to answer the question, because if you have, you are aware that this makes you strange, even to yourself. And you may not wish to reveal this as part of your signature. (short story about Lama Chimi Rinpoche). On first seeing this venerable person, I witnessed a huge glow about his body—How's that for Signature?

We hunt for friends and we hunt through identities of others to find companionship. And this hunting is notified by signs, signals, indicators, in a landscape of experience. We collect for ourselves these indicators and decide which we like, which we remember, which we follow, and which we attract. This is the process through which Signature works.

Signature...

This is one of the fundamental reasons why art exists today. Humans wish to have the ego fulfilment of participating in and creating images for themselves to find the sanctuary of identity in objects and perceptions. The artist stands as an icon representing a point of view that is her or his signature. Others may attract this signature to themselves through participating in the experience of an art work. Having had the experience, audience members are changed and develop themselves as they choose, extending their perceptions beyond their boundaries as previously set out. The artist notifies society of potential identities and identifications. She/he creates models for existence and models for survival through making her or his Signature available to others. As artists ally themselves with imagery, creating individual models and forms that re-present society to itself, artists produce for society new challenges for perception.

As a result of doing this, the artist and society may have a relationship based in alienation. By creating models that are in any way new, the artist disturbs the status quo of society. The artist may be, or may become unpopular. Most artists are unknown and unpopular for at least part of their lives.

The Blues industry in Austin Texas, the home of the white boy's blues—where I visit frequently—has lost some great figures in the last few years, through a spate of suicides, accidents and illness related deaths. This conforms to the high rate of death for artists in the US, many of whom do not survive middle age. They die from drugs, from disappointment and a loss of identity resulting in the loss of the will to live and the desire to leave this life. When one's signature is not recognized in direct proportion to desire, productivity, creative ego, will and professional influence, the artist can become despondent and the identity crisis that follows can be deadly.

Signature.

Identity

Affiliation with groups.

Alienation from other groups.

Signature includes the possibility for painful alienation so be ready for great upheaval and some disappointments as an artist. The more unique your identity becomes, the greater is the potential for success and also the greater is the potential for disillusionment. And as you become bigger, some of your fellow artists withdraw support through their own jealousy and envy. It's helpful to develop a strong ego formation so that one can withstand the pressures of both success and failure.

As your signature becomes recognized, please be advised that generosity towards your fellow artists will allow you to go on through your life with a minimum of conflict, envy, and distrust. Signature invites competition.

To conclude this part of the lecture on the definition of Signature, let me say that the source for Signature as I know it is found in the specific forces of body-mind-spirit that come together within an individual artist, creating a magnetic, electrical driven, biological synapse that reveals one's own inner consciousness to the Self and to Others. In this revealing of one's own consciousness to the self, identity is created and then when exposed to form and the reception of formal presentation, the artist is recognized and her or his signature becomes apparent, like a living, functional entity.

Usually it is with some recognition, that the artist is fully able to create her or his industry through logo, corporate identity, critical acclaim, use of the press, publishing, and the distribution of a symbolic Signature.

Creating Signature is similar to the process of creating a work of art, but it is seen in evidence throughout all your produced works, and within individual identity and choices.

Your consciousness of signature, because of being kept clear, running like a pure mountain spring, direct into form—whatever that form may be—will put the stamp of your own life experience and essence into your works as an artist, dancer or choreographer, and from there you will be known. Signature.

Signature continues to be a driving force of your identity.

Part Two: How do we know when Signature is present?

We will know this through a reconciliation of the following elements into a symbolic language that is reflected in art or theatre products that include:

--personal experience

--adaptability

--social relevance

--retrieval of past identities that you have experienced within the creative process

--a reservoir of dream and fantasy

--driving forces that push identity towards change

--personality factors of conditioned behaviour

--the urge to communicate from individual resources

--and ecology of mind within an individual sphere—getting specifically and economically tuned in on the right channels for one's own identity fulfilment, resulting in production that meets with a world view perspective

And what is the process for arrival at Artistic Signature?

--Magical synapses of mine-body experience—this means being an artist of life

--Information filtering, analysis of belief systems

--and Artistic Maturity.

Part Three, An example: the video of One Man and Two Others

This video piece you are about to see comes from a small desert which I have visited many times, just North of Arnhem, NL.

The process of getting there is difficult because I find myself often lost on the way.

Once there I observe changes in the desert.

I have on one occasion re-discovered my own footprints frozen in the winter sand.

A number of different people have accompanied me on his journey.

I have vast memories of feelings and sensations experienced there.

It is exceedingly difficult to return home.

Yet, always there is tiredness, along with pleasure at being home.

So, what happens in that desert?

--Awakening of professional desire through the beauty of the landscape

--Witnessing changes in the landscape

--The desire to preserve the beauty of nature

--Attachment to wooden structures and sand hills

--Seeing trees die as the desert grows and covers more of the landscape

--And there's the exhibition where you may see that most of the East Netherlands looked like this desert at one point in time

--The fear of the coming disaster—loss of wildlife and foliage as the desert spreads

Visions: Wildness of nature that matches the inside of me

Fascination: With the materials found there, and dragging home bits and pieces

Lying on the sand and watching insects

Nearly being attacked by two hunting dogs

Being alone there, and being with others there

The washing of my soul in nature...

Comparison with another place, Start Point in Devon, England—where I also returned habitually.

So what did I want to do there? I wanted to create a deep and personal memory of this place, where I lose myself in nature repeatedly. And to share this with others.

I got a group of people together who could help me with this.

This need was answered by three dancers and one camera person.

Strangers walked through our images in the distance and we just shot the images again.

Clouds coming through the scenes brought shadows and impending rain.

We shot all the footage in one weekend, and went directly into the studio after one night of my looking at the rushes.

In the Blue Studio here at ARTEZ we shot the special effects the second day.

We did all the first editing on the third day and then the project stayed unfinished for some months while the music was being written.

Final editing occurred recently.

And then there was the eventual awakening of the imagery at the last editing session, with the addition of music.

Now we could see the video, One Man and Two Others

VIDEO AVAILABLE to be seen
ON WEBSITE:

www.releasedance.com

After seeing the video:

As I see the video, it reflects my love of nature and is symbolic, but can be read on several levels as follows:

--One Man being the outsider to society, the different person, the artist or the human who expands and lives in the context of freedom in nature, the seeking one who becomes despondent and disturbed when in doors, contrasted with a couple who are domestic and comfortable

or:

--One man being maybe a loner, the two being a couple

or:

--One man taking risks, being adventurous and fulfilled, the couple being cautious and fulfilled

or:

--One man being a desert-living, nomadic person, with the others being Western, living in their comfortable small house

or:

--the difference between celebration of freedom through individuality and sharing with another person

The task of this creation was huge, converting the immediacy of my own personal imagery as experienced into a video product.

The need to persevere was extreme—

Not having a camera

Not being technological

Not having an editing studio

It would have seemed impossible, but it wanted to be done.

So...what is success?

Completion is success. When you make something that in many ways matches your desire for creation, this is success.

Success is never ultimate.

It is never totally complete. You could always do more or better. It is necessary to attempt to arrive at products that reflect entirely your artistic perspectives, desires, and values and to find satisfaction within what is possible.

For me, this video is important because it opened the way to a video language for my work that I have always wished for. As well as capturing a little bit of my essential love of nature and the body in nature, the video brings great depth and colour to my own experience as an artist.

This work will form one part of a trio of pieces, all including video, that I hope to perform in several places in the near future.

Maybe you wish to ask me something about Signature or the Video as an example of my Signature related to my identification with nature?

Are there any comments or questions specifically about the video? Or, as time for this lecture is now over, --please feel free to approach me with your thoughts at another time today.

Thank you.