

SIGN_{ATURE} LAB_{ORATOR}Y

MICHAL MURIN

*To me, Michal Murin is he, not me.
Michal Murin*

The text "SIGNature LABoratorY" explores signatures (in their Derridean interpretation) in the context of works of arts. Signatures and their integration in the artistic process—specifically, the interactive communication socioproject titled *Your Name in My Signature*—originated as a long-term philosophic and conceptual strategy exploring the relationships between words, images, visualizations and ornaments, but also between subjects and objects, between depersonalization and a humanistic reinterpretation in a gesture of appropriation, between the act of giving and its reciprocal Baudrillardian nature. Signatures as signs of civilization, in this instance works of art, culminate in the need to encompass, accentuate, define and confirm, and are reflected in the urban nature of the architecture of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Signatures; here, a civilized gesture—the act of signing in an urban environment, bears the potential for a future Foucaultian archeologization. Texts are generated as authors' interpretations of works of art, as oral history enclosed in its own archive, and therefore also serve as Derridean alibis integrated in Beuysian social sculptures.

A signature is a symbol of civilization. It is an act allied with a city but also an attack on nature by the centre. The more we sign our signature, the more profane the act becomes for the signer. On the other hand, occasional signing is moving, celebratory, sacred, and ecstatic. At this point, let us recall the act of signing with three crosses, which our ancestors used only a few times in their lives. A cross as a sign (signum) of *sácr*a (sacrum)—†††— can be a signature. The social changes that led to the elimination of illiteracy brought with them the signature, and the name became its content.

Although I myself am forty-two years old, my signature is more than 50 years old. I borrowed and appropriated it from my prematurely deceased father († 1981), who used it for thirty years and I have used it for more than twenty years. We can trace back certain shared features, for example, the characteristic arch that can also be found in the signatures of my grandfather and great grandfather. During the last hundred years, our family signature has undergone a series of changes determined by particular personalities and gestures. This cluster of signatures that has been brought together over a century has resulted in more than just the psychosocial and

[illegible]

psychoanalytical aspects of the posed problem (e.g. individual fascination, obsession, etc.).

The following questions have also emerged: is the name a text? Is the signature a visualization of the text? Is the way in which the signature is stratified a generator of images? Is it an ornament? Does the image represent a potential means for creating a text? Can we therefore recreate the image that emerges from the text? What if this text is then visualized in the same way so that every word of the text concerning the games played with the signature is again written back into the signature?

Alternative signatures

In 2003, *open personal communication and administrative process confirming a bilateral agreement* was presented to the public; the result of this was the insertion of another person's name into the "pattern" of my signature. For the purposes of authenticity, I signed the artistic object that had thus been created. The signature therefore became the only object of content and the only form. The act of signing was a gift: but like every Baudrillardian present, it awaits reciprocity. Reciprocity occurred in the act of countersigning the author's game with names and signatures, when the work, as a sign of agreement, was signed by the person whose name was found in the box, protected, and reminiscent of the calligraphied signature.

The concept of short-term and communicative re-signaturization is a projection of the humanization of communication, the sum of the interactions of individuals whose egos are temporarily suppressed, but the act of communication does not, however, mean that the two individuals come away from the meeting with a reduced ego.

Since I choose a person for an act and he or she agrees to it, we both declare a mutual respect for one another. The project, *Your Name in My Signature*, can also be interpreted as the presentation, manifestation and the storage of humanity.

Is the creation of signatures infinite? Is it hereditary? What happens if I design a signature for someone and that person then accepts it? Or, if s/he accepts a signature, which has been created by incorporating his or her name into my handwriting pattern, but using his or her name? In this way I can integrate potential signature patterns that could be widely accepted. Can we therefore talk about prolonging the life span of a signature, about its resuscitation or even about its euthanasia?

Your name in my signature is "as if" (Derrida 2002, 209). It is a utopian transgenetic modulation of resubjectivization, the unlikely outcome of sociocommunicative cooperation. Let us imagine the impact of the process of globalization on the pattern of signature— a process of RESIGNATURIZATION as a normative act—"as if" a virus existed that by making alterations could allocate the variant signature instead of any other identification code.

Just as the use of the three crosses as a signature is at the end of its lifespan, the signature as we now know it will disappear in the future: its current mass deployment (in banks, book shops, virtual e-shops, etc.) is suggestive of its demise. New methods of signing (electronic versions, iris imaging and fingerprinting, and in the future also DNA) represent a dehumanization of communication. As a consequence, the written signature will become very rare and in this way the act of signing will be made sacred. What will a signature which contains fingerprints, the image of the iris or a whole DNA sequence mean? How will it be viewed and interpreted if biometric data appear in the signature?

Signaturized words and signaturized signs

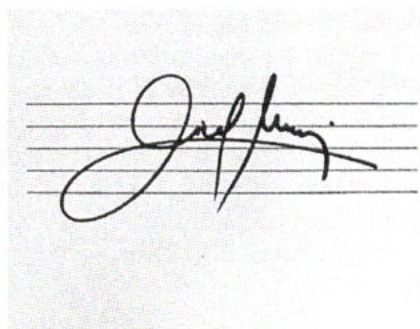
In accordance with Sol LeWitt's thoughts on conceptual art

...illogical judgements lead to new experience. Perception of ideas leads to new ideas. If words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, they are art and not literature, numbers are not mathematics (Sol le Witt 1969, 11-13).

I inserted single words, and later whole sentences, to follow names: signatures thus became manuscripts, signaturized writing. The incorporated text thus took on another layer of interpretation with regards to the actual act of selecting and incorporating these elements into the pattern. Writing contents (words) into a signature is full of interpretative potential and the act of signing means fixing and legitimizing the selection of that particular word and thus also shifts the interpretation of its meaning. What tension arises here?

The text in a signature. The words in a signature. The signature in a signature. A signature carries characteristic gestures of rapprochement, embracement and appropriation—words needed for imparting, articulating and defining the contents. Before the writing was begun, when the paper was blank and nobody had any idea of the sequence of this content, the problem was unknown. Now we should ask what happens to the text when it is in my signature instead of the name? What meaning does it convey? Is the meaning of such a word subjectivized? Calligraphied? Ornamentalized? Is it still a manuscript? What kind of writing is it? (Barthes 1967).

What happens, however, if a punctuation mark finds itself in the signature? A question mark? Is it a questioning of the signature, of the self, or of the actual act of signing? Is it an appropriation of the question mark? Does it introduce self-doubt? Or, insert an exclamation mark into the signature! Put a full stop at the end of the sentence. Or the symbol of mantra Óm, etc. And how would the symbol & in my signature be interpreted? Does & lie between me and its content? What about the sign of femininity ♀? What if we place a mathematical equation in the visual pattern or pre-print? Does it alter the meaning? And what about placing a variable in the equation in my signature?



Figures 1 and 2: Michal Murin: Signature, visual score and its music interpretation, 2001

$$E = m \cdot c^2$$

$$E = m \cdot \varphi^2$$

The act of rewriting a coherent text¹ or the act of writing a text, where every word or sentence is put into the pattern of signature, is its authentic and subjective enunciation. But how does it relate to the text if the act of re-writing is done by hand and, moreover, every word gives it a characteristic visuality based on its own “civic” signature? The insertion of words into a signature is a visual encoding as part of an aestheticized cryptosystem.

The iterability (Derrida 1971, 307-330) of a signature is a necessary precondition, and its alterity is determined by graphomotorics; it can also be affected both psychologically and sociologically. The temporality of a signature is also influenced by the time required for it, determined by stress (modification of the code) or, on the contrary, by the quietness (narrativized signature—narrating the legible name) as well as by the length of the text inserted into the signature. While the writing of the

¹ Re-writing the words of John Cage’s mesostic in musical note form so that each word of the mesostic is inserted into the pattern of Murin’s signature or the resulting visual score serves as a musical interpretation. Or re-writing part of Roland Barthes’s text from his book *Writing Degree Zero* and Derrida’s *Signature, Event, Context*.

text and word into a signature is addressed to an absent person, writing the name into the visual pattern of my signature is a personal relationship. The author represents the (p)re-scriber/(p)rescribing the name, s/he who prescribes (determines or orders) the type of signature. Acceptance, that is the countersigning, is an act of conceptual communication, where the imperative or order becomes a humanity “that favours legal communication and sociability among men” (Derrida 2002, 219).

A writing that was not structurally legible—iterable beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing (Derrida 1971).

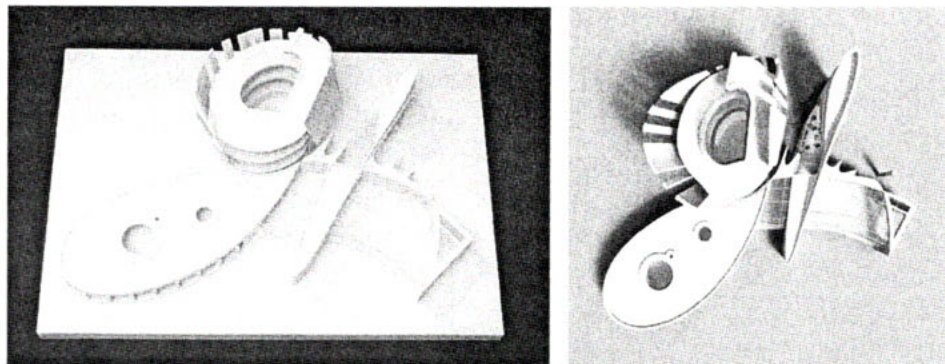
However, the text in my signature is legible. For those, to whom it does not seem legible, there is a code, generally accessible in a readable form, which can be used as the basis for its iterability—thus confirming Derrida’s argument that “there is no code—an organon of iterability—that is structurally secret” (ibid.). Derrida also says that a signature is a statement. The words and sentences placed into the pattern of my signature are then subjectivized statements and such a signature is then individual, constant and repetitive, confirming its authenticity—biometric and verifiable.

I borrowed the sentence “How to do things with words” from the title of the well-known book by John L. Austin to add weight to the creation of objects, where the words were shaped by hand. I created artwork by writing down names and words² in a process called the “/dra(w)riting” of an object. This was achieved by making a signaturized gesture as if writing, while polyurethane foam, which after some time increases in volume, was expelled from a can. This then “became the object”. Other means of signing, for instance, in the sand are, by contrast, ephemeral in time. If we were to pour or write with plaster in the wet sand, the act of writing would be fixed—we would be repeating the signing by pouring the plaster, and thereby repeating the gesture, the signature.

The opposite of this kind of object signing is dra(w)riting with paint in the air—contrary to Derrida’s assumption of legibility. The paint is sprayed and an aerosol cloud of paint particles disperses creating an ephemeral, illusive signature to be immediately caught on canvas. Text and signature should not just exist, but should also be seen. Capturing the diffuse misty signature on a surface (picture) makes it readable, visible.

The display of my work with signatures and the way in which they “become objects” is a project of the corporeal architecture of my own signature. The possible architecture that originally has no declared purpose, first of all becomes a possible spiritual space, then the *Museum of Contemporary Art in Signature*, then a warehouse of the documentation of the ephemeral undertaking of my creations and finally also e.g. the *Museum of Possible Art*.

² I wrote the names of musicians and composers with polyurethane foam into my own signature and thus prepared the piano, on which was the interpretation of Cage’s mesostic that I had previously signaturized. See footnote 1.



Figures 3 and 4: Michal Murin: Museum of Contemporary Arts in Signature, computer animation of digital architecture, 2003, cooperation HNZL

Philosophical counselling (Višňovský 2004) or self-counselling in terms of the interpretation of a series of work is a creative process parallel to the artistic creation. Interpretation can take place in various ways: a semiotic interpretation of the signature based on the variability of the sign in a pattern, by observing paralinguistic attributes that are not expressions of a signature but are indications of the text within, a Wittgensteinian interpretation of the signature-language game,³ the interpretation of taking part in an imaginary interpersonal event by inserting *Your name in my signature*, a semiotical analysis of music and the notation system⁴ and other similar interpretative processes. The author's interpretation of the work of art is a text or *oral history* and as such, it is a statement that generates an archive (Foucault 2002, 121-201). Neither the interpretation nor the archive are provocations, they can however be *alibis* or be *no alibis*, sometimes they are even *too many alibis* but, sometimes, *too few alibis* in all their "*différence*". They demonstrate the deconstruction of the omnipresence of alibi (Derrida 2002, XV) as the confirmed (signed) context given *elsewhere in another place*. An alibi is not this text, an alibi is a text that exists as a potential alibi elsewhere. Is this alibi Wittgenstein's way of asking and answering, when he says that

When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. The riddle does not exist. If a question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it. Doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists,

³ In his Brown Book Ludwig Wittgenstein says that if instead of words „-... „-... „-... were used, these could be named patterns. Wittgenstein replaced these variables with words, not with symbols or signs. I replaced them with signatures or with spaces.

⁴ When just the signature itself was contained in a system of a five-line stave, and the visual score was interpreted on the trombone and cello.

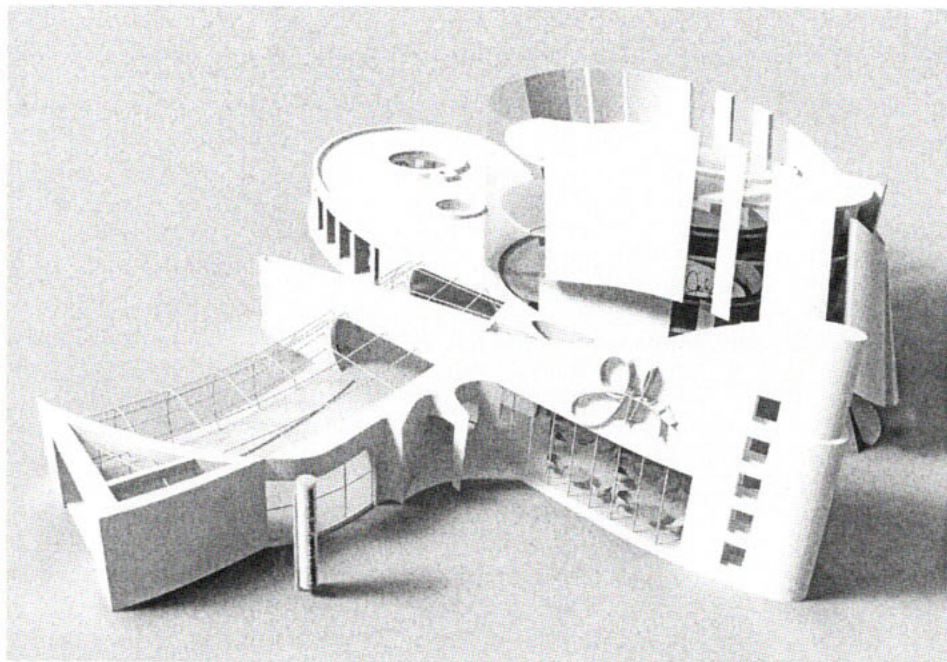


Figure 5: Michał Murin: Museum of Contemporary Arts in Signature, object, 2003.

and an answer only where something can be said. There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical (Wittgenstein 1961, 6.5, 6.51, 6.522).

A name in a signature, a text in a signature, and even a signature in a signature is a question of that which can be shown and as such, it is only answerable to, amongst other things, another showing. Possibly through architecture, or an urban object (library, internet, bar, exhibition, concert, view of the city, etc.) into which we can place anything that has gone through the selection process. *The Museum of Contemporary Art in (my) signature*, which is one such kind of architecture, is (so far) a virtual setting and its most elementary potential is to become a real urban object, to become the product of a gesture of civilization—signing—in a metropolis, to become a potential for its future archeologization and thus to become (almost) part of the history of ideas (Foucault 2002, 205- 212).

Archeological recollection as a means of uncovering the memory of the past does not proceed in global transversality but, quite the reverse, in a randomness conditioned by partial probes—holes. Their findings fill the hole in our memory. The fact that they are not revealed, although more substantial, is constantly present and so they are prepared for an unveiling as well as for a “rewriting of history” thus

triggering the process of filling the computer bin—a quasi-replica of Bachelard's *Museum of Errors* (Nida-Rümelin 2001, 60).

References

- Barthes, R.** *Writing Degree Zero*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.
- Derrida, J.** *Signature, Event, Context*. A communication to the Congrès international des Sociétés de philosophie de langue française. Montreal, August 1971.
- Derrida, J.** Provocation: Forewords. In J. Derrida, P. Kamuf (Eds.). *Without Alibi*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Derrida, J.** The University Without Condition. In J. Derrida, P. Kamuf (Eds.). *Without alibi*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Foucault, M.** Výpověď a archiv. In *Archeologie vědění*. Prague: Hermann & Synové, 2002.
- Nida-Rümelin, J.** *Slovník současných filosofů*. Prague: Garamond, 2001.
- Sol LeWitt.** Sentence on Conceptual Art. *Art and Language* I, 11–13, 1969.
- Višňovský, E.** Filozofické poradenstvo ako forma filozofickej praxe. In E. Višňovský (Ed.). *Filozofia ako problém?* Bratislava: Kalligram, 2004.
- Wittgenstein, L.** *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. Prague: OIKOYMEHN, 1993.
- Wittgenstein, L.** *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. C. K. Ogden Trans. London: Kegan Paul. D. F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, trans. London Routledge, 1961.

Academy of Arts,
Faculty of Creative Arts,
Jána Kollára 22
974 01 Banská Bystrica
Slovak Republic
E-mail: michal.murin@ths.sk