

A Reflection on the Material World

—From *The Primitive Handprint To The “Dispossessed Signature”*

Looking at those ancient cave handprints all over the world ... there are several questions on my brain: Who made them? What are their intentions? It is astonishing that those prehistoric physical realities have been carving into stone for a very long time, remaining a rough outline without personal features, such as lines on the palm of the hand.

Is this an ancient mystical ritual? Or is it the possession of the material?

Sometimes I feel that I receive letters from the distant past, in which the handprint like the signature, I can touch them, feeling pulse and finding emotion. I would like to call “extension transference”, mistaking the symbol for the thing symbolized while endowing the symbol with properties it does not possess, in which I may extend a sense of presence from an imagined body to its signature, but this illusion is somewhat anachronistic in the context of material exchange

The fear of signature has not disappeared in the author’s mind.

In 1506, Dürer won a case in Nuremberg against a local publisher who had published copies of his woodcut prints without permission. A year later, in Venice, Dürer discovered that many of his engravings had been copied and sold by other artists.

Currently, the dispute about the attribution of Disco Elysium, a successful single-player computer roleplaying game, is still continuing between ZAUM and its former employees.

Reviewing a period from no signatures to the explosion of signatures, there was a significant shift in the way that authorship was conceptualized and valued. In the pre-modern era, works were often anonymous or circulated without attribution to a specific author. The author function was not yet established, and the focus was on the content of the work rather than the individual who produced it.

However, confronted with a large amount of signatures, “Who is the real author? Have we proof of his authenticity and originality?” Doubts raised by Michel Foucault’s What is an Author? return to my mind again.

Compared with the current signature, the primitive handprints still preserve certain operations: the similarity of form and repetition of operations forces the viewer to remember them. Although the general concept of autograph usually indicates alphabetic combinations in modern society, I would describe the signature in a broader sense, such as any specific or abstract material traces made by our body. The distinct label can only exist within the collective understanding and regulation of those terms, so seals, autographs and handprints are sites of consensus: they delimit the signifying element, an iterative form. On the other hand, an extension of the ego flows from the body, much like blood. It is a mark of personal identity that is imprinted on different objects. Its uniqueness reflects individual characteristics such as strength, shakiness, and spread, which are influenced by physiological features. These distinct traits in a signature can provide insights into an individual’s personality, physical health, and even emotional state at the time of signing. However, as societies transitioned from hunter-gatherer lifestyles to agricultural civilizations, this intimate connection between the body and personal identity was replaced by the attribution right. The emergence of trade networks and private ownership led to the accumulation of debt and the need for formalized systems of identification and ownership. This, in turn, led to the development of formalized signatures and other means of identification that continue to evolve to this day.

In modern society, we often overlook the physical extension of our signature, which was once a part of our body, due to constraints and regulations of society. Therefore, the operation of society has completed its first deprivation of names before we are even aware of it, leading to a disconnection between our physical identity and our signatures. The signature is tied to the desire for the material so that we cannot escape from the shadow of the “deprived signature”

Fingerprint technology gives a new meaning to our physical features, but the prehistoric behavior of leaving a physical imprint as a mark of personal identity is not as prevalent.

Nowadays, it is only commonly practiced by some celebrities who leave their handprints in wet cement for people to admire. I remember the first time I saw this practice was at the Avenue of Stars in Hong Kong, where I was excited to see Bruce Lee’s memorial plaque, but the significance of the handprint has been diminished by the presence of the celebrity’s signature beside it. Then I saw a bizarre scene that tourists, who were attracted by signatures and put onto handprints of those celebrities, would take a picture and pretend holding hands with them.

Anyway, on this material world, who cares what kind of hands he has?

He Zhang

Artistic Exploitation



Where does the production of art begin, and where does it end? How many hands and minds, if any, must an idea or manifestation pass through to be considered true?

This elusive and, often, esoteric nature of creative practices cunningly warps perceptions of participants to accept exploitation as an ingrained, historic, and necessary function of production.

This cycle of exploitation is living, propelled by power and the friction produced between those who hold it and those who seek it, evolving alongside the world, its culture, and its technology. It is these evolved technologies which prompt us to wonder whether the application of Artificial Intelligence reflects a positive movement away from human exploitation, or merely reflects its development, a new, twenty-first century iteration.

Its villainy, and strong potential for disruption, having been driven into our shared cultural consciousness- by films like Terminator and Blade Runner- places Artificial Intelligence in a position worth investigating.

Within this zine you will find a collection of observations, experiences, and notions – in both visual and written forms- curated by a group of art students. Several aspects of exploitation are covered: ranging from human to machine. Emphasising the industry’s power structures, interviews with artist Hu Logxiang and the chief editor of Zurnal Zine provide insight into forms of create exploitation and its relation to technology; with another set of interviews which, alongside portraits, provide perspectives from the queer community, highlighting marginalisation within these structures.

This work acts as a small cross-section of the complex relationship between people, production, and their tools within the sphere of creative production; aiming to provoke thought and to call attention to a universally ignored reality within the art industry.

Editorial by Sofia Wang

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