

SignWriting Symposium 2014

Presentation 40

ABSTRACT

“40 Years Writing Sign Languages: Evolution of SignWriting 1974-2014”

by
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Inventor, in 1974, of
Sutton Movement Writing
which includes 5 sections: SignWriting,
DanceWriting, MimeWriting, SportsWriting
& MovementWriting for Gesture Analysis
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In February 2014, Sutton Movement Writing is 40 years old. This paper will summarize what the system is used for, its early background and history, who uses SignWriting around the world, and how SignWriting has evolved and changed over 40 years.

Introduction

Sutton Movement Writing & Shorthand is a large writing system for recording all body movement.

It includes five sections:

DanceWriting for writing dance choreography

SignWriting for writing sign languages

MimeWriting for writing classic performance mime

SportsWriting for writing sports, and

MovementWriting for writing studies on gesture analysis

February 1974

Sutton DanceWriting began officially with the announcement of its first book

February 1974

The non-profit organization that supports Sutton Movement Writing was founded in Southern California, USA

October 1974

Three sections of the system: Sutton SignWriting, MimeWriting, for writing classic performance mime, and Movement Writing for gesture analysis began in Copenhagen, Denmark with three separate and concurrent projects in 1974.

The non-profit organization behind the system was first established in February, 1974, under the name “The Movement Shorthand Society”, in Newport Beach, California. Later the name changed to “The Center for Sutton Movement Writing. It is now located in La Jolla, California, and provides free services to the world on the web.

Early Background

The system actually began in 1966 as my personal notation system for writing dance. I was 15 years old, in professional ballet training, and I needed a way to write my own choreography, and to notate what I was learning in dance training and rehearsals. I was inspired by a stick-figure dance notation system by Friedrich Albert Zorn from the 1880s. I love stick figures. Who doesn't? They are visually-appealing at first glance and seem easy to read. There are many stick figure notation systems in the world, but Zorn's system, which is no longer used today, seemed particularly charming to me.

I became quite inspired with writing dance, and my writing evolved into my own stick figure dance notation system that was different than Zorn's. I never dreamt at that time that writing body movement would become my life's work. Nor did I know anything about deafness or sign languages. There is no deafness in my family. I was truly fascinated by gesture analysis and the animation and reading of movement with stick figures on a five-lined staff. I kept writing and writing. I loved writing dance. I would place stick figures on individual cards and flip them to make them move like an animated film too, or in the corner of the pages of a thick book. I found it amazing to see my writing move that way.

At age 19, I traveled to Denmark to study ballet briefly with the famous Nina Belikova from the Kirov Ballet in Russia, who was visiting Denmark at a seminar in the summer of 1970. While there, I also studied with teachers from the Royal Danish Ballet, and I fell in love with the beautiful dances of August Bournonville, the famous Danish ballet master from the 1830s. I

was surprised to learn that no one had recorded the Bournonville dance tradition, and so I made it my goal to write down and publish the Bournonville Schools. I lived in Denmark from 1970-1972, working daily with Bournonville expert Edel Pedersen to record the Bournonville Schools. I also wrote other styles of dance briefly in Portugal. I returned home to the United States at the end of 1972 and began writing my first textbook on Sutton DanceWriting.

At that time, the system was called Sutton Movement Shorthand. My first book was published in December, 1973, entitled "Sutton Movement Shorthand, Book One: The Classical Ballet Key". The book was officially announced in February, 1974.

I was invited to teach DanceWriting to the Royal Danish Ballet in September/October 1974, and so I returned to Denmark in the summer of 1974, because I also had engagements teaching DanceWriting at Tivoli Garden, at the request of the Tivoli Ballet Company's director Neils Bjørn Larsen. While teaching the dancers of Tivoli Ballet, in beautiful Tivoli Gardens, the dancers and I sat on a "raked stage" during the time when there were no performances and the dancers had time to learn to write dance. Later, I incorporated the concept of a "raked stage" into Sutton DanceWriting, to write movement depth.

In Autumn, 1974, in Copenhagen, I was invited to present to a group of sign language researchers at the University of Copenhagen. Lars von der Lieth, at that time the director of the Audiologopaedisk Forskningsgruppe at the University, invited

me to work with them on a special research project. They needed a way to write down the gestures of hearing people, and compare those with the gestures of Deaf people signing in Danish Sign Language. I was delighted and that was my first introduction into the issues of deafness and sign languages.

In this paper, I will detail SignWriting history and the evolution of SignWriting writing styles.

Managing this SignWriting Symposium is such a pleasure! We did not expect 40 presentations, and it has taken longer than I realized to design and post all of the 40 supportive web pages for each presentation. Rehearsing the presenters in Google Hangouts has been a hoot (smile). It is like a great big party on the internet!

So this is my poor excuse for not having completed my own written paper yet - ha! But it is coming ;-)

I look forward to sharing my past, present and future with you, and to show you how a true writing system, if it is to be truly used by generations to come, must be flexible enough to allow for the natural evolution of writing styles by the thousands who write with SignWriting everyday, from so many countries. Most people around the world still write SignWriting by hand, even after 30 years of ongoing software development...

I feel my job is to document how the signwriters of the world write, so we all can learn from this natural evolution - It is fascinating to watch this unfold before our eyes. This has never

happened before quite like this in history...watching a writing system begin to spread around the world through the internet. The internet has changed everything. If there were no internet, I would have sadly not known the majority of the 42 presenters in this Symposium! We have learned from each other because the barriers of distance and language have been erased, and we come together to share our SignWriting projects online LIVE on YouTube and Google Hangouts July 21-24, 2014. Come join us! Here are the links where to go, to watch on YouTube:

TO VIEW THE SYMPOSIUM:

Watch on a computer, tablet or phone:

VIEWING SCHEDULE OF PRESENTATIONS:

http://www.signwriting.org/symposium/2014/HOW_TO_WATCH.html

DAY 1, JULY 21 ... To Watch go to:

<https://plus.google.com/u/1/events/cvsqb9iol3gro90gvjpb0vm1m5k>

DAY 2, JULY 22 ... To Watch go to:

<https://plus.google.com/u/1/events/cd0m19049dsuv3g5oaouvs37m1k>

DAY 3, JULY 23 ... To Watch go to:

<https://plus.google.com/u/1/events/c127tc0ip6qe42fusb7nd5d9igc>

DAY 4, JULY 24 ... To Watch go to:

<https://plus.google.com/u/1/events/c8oi8bdd2sia6gaoe21m95no5b8>