

Notes (not only) on asemic phenomenology

Excerpt from *In the swarm* (LN 2021), scheduled for winter 2021.

FEDERICO FEDERICI

federico@federicofederici.net • home: <http://federicofederici.net>

last update September 16, 2021

A asemic writing points to a gradual weakening of the correlation between sign and meaning or, in the language of architecture and biology, to the confutation of the *form follows function* principle.

Any approach based on the restoration of a minimum alphabet from fragmented subsets, or on the recovery of some original syntax from noisy communication channels programmatically fails. The flux of symbols does not intercept and duplicate encrypted information. It works around the uniqueness of the code by blending familiar patterns out of context, introducing modifications in them, or devising new ones. This is one of the extremely subversive traits validating the paradox of *asemic communication*.

No recognisable genome exists, nor does any implicit one accepted by the community. Each text, regardless of its extent, embodies the full expression of a unique and obscure language which constitutes its stimulus and its essence. The powerful iconic synthesis thus accomplished absorbs all the traditional phonic elements, turning the act of reading into a pure visual experience, contemplative, even where a sequence of signs, apparently more persuasive, may hint at the presence of multiple narratives.

Each asemic form is not a statement in itself. It is rather an *unaussprechbare Aussage* (*unpronounceable message*) triggering the interpretive

schemes of the subconscious, making the idea of an a priori of meaning redundant. Reading no longer consists of two contiguous yet distinct phases, namely decoding and interpreting. It becomes a unified creative activity performed upon the free surface of the text, drawing from unknown resources.

The psychological effects of brief asemic practices, stimulated in individuals with schizophrenia and alexithymia, have recently been investigated.¹ The comparative analysis of the writings, supported by the observation reports, has documented temporary improvements in mood and an increased awareness of emotional dimension, notwithstanding the onset of mild stress symptoms, following the assignment given on a daily basis.

The semiotic triangle (signified – signifier → sign) narrows to the vertex of the signifier, abandoning the sign and the signified to a formal solitude of their own. The elements immediately above the level of the word (periods, paragraphs etc.) are in essence preserved as counterweights of an alleged textual frame. The handwriting tangles in a net of vanishing points and nodes. It shifts as a system of cross-cutting but unstable fault planes. Is that a way to react to information, infected with acronyms and codes, and spare the meaning the agony of language?

Each writer experiences the extreme condition of linguistic minorities, being the first

and last heir of a newspeak or of some dialect dying out.

The substratum of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* rests on text segments and notes from the most disparate studies. Although aimed at strongly oneiric mechanics, the new approach marks a radical turning point compared with *Ulysses*, bypassing the strictly psychoanalytic significance of the stream of consciousness, as documented in a letter addressed to Harriet Weaver: «[...] these are not fragments but active elements and when they are more and a little older they will begin to fuse of themselves.»²

Pages become real laboratories wherein to let linguistic phenomena occur, recording them in the process of "writing from writing". The plot, relentlessly rippled by distortions of places and dilations or ellipses of time, reveals itself as a living expression of Minkowski's chronotope. The old meanings annihilate themselves and the linguistic particles transmute into pure sounds or mysterious crases. After all, the reality surfacing everywhere in the Universe is driven by the principle according to which light turns into matter and matter into light.

Some of the most outstanding narrative expedients stem from adopting the same methodological approach as the new physics, rather than from the fascination of its paradoxes. If quantum mechanics no longer relegates the physicist to the role of detached witness of phenomena, the reader must likewise play an active part in defining, not barely recovering, the meaning of the text.

Asemic writing, in turn, requires a special *entanglement* to be established between hand and subconscious for the uncertainty of the text to be the pure diffraction of "meaning through a grid of signs". Reality always lights up the thin slit between sleep and awakening, but no factual data exist to approximately refer to. The written page does not coincide

with the message. It is a filter, an analyser to investigate a space which is symbolic and "real" at once. The primitive intuitions of symmetry, similarity or self-similarity acquire double significance: a psychological and a metrical one.

Several lines of research are suitable for dealing with the intrinsic nonlinearity that follows.

Topology-based methods could support or replace traditional hermeneutics to properly study such manifold structures. Each page, a snapshot of an unknown linguistic phenomenon, would hence be addressed as a set of fuzzy data.

To define and extract pseudo-linguistic features such as dimension, fractal analysis might be implemented. Provided that the most suitable algorithm has been chosen, this tool has proved to be powerful and flexible for clustering data, for detecting and extracting main features from noisy signals³ and for dealing with complex scaling laws or with chaotic dynamical systems.⁴ This rather unexplored blend of mathematics with writing might define unprecedented and more convenient interpretive techniques to probe works whose textual traits have permanently been subverted.

Alongside this investigation, dedicated routines can be developed to plunge conventional documents into pure asemic spaces, rearranging clusters of pixels according to precise shapes (straight line, square, etc.) and parameters (centre, diameter, etc.). Undergoing morphological manipulations, each scanned image evolves through different stages towards a new formal equilibrium. Such procedure has been fully tested with sheet music in *Stuttgarter Strukturfonien* (Federico Federici, LN 2019).

Another approach, quite distinct from pure code poetry, paves the way to books whose content is never definitive, but continuously

modified by means of sensors. *The Way I Discovered The Berlin Wall Has Fallen* (Federico Federici, LN 2017) is a project in which data from a TMP36 temperature sensor, driven by Arduino, are fed straight into the LaTeX code designed to output the textual elements to be printed.⁵

STUTTGARTER STRUKTURFONIEN

Each document is a unique source of signs to be merged into new alphabet-like traces within a simulated writing.

Dedicated supervised image processing scripts were developed to acquire and plunge sheet music into abstract asemic spaces. The image matrix is morphologically manipulated with the help of routines, which combine neighbouring clusters of pixels according to certain structuring shapes (line, square, disk, etc.) and depending on specific elements (point, centre, size, etc.) to be adjusted until a new formal equilibrium is attained. All code segments have been developed, tested and run within Linux GNU Octave.

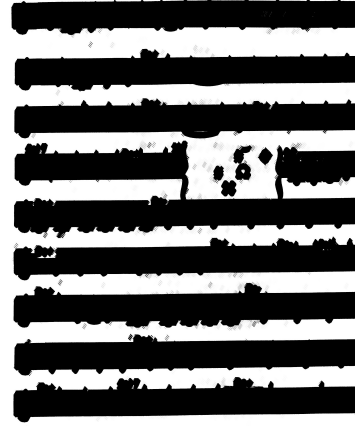
Preliminary image analysis benefited standard ImageJ plug-ins.

code sample

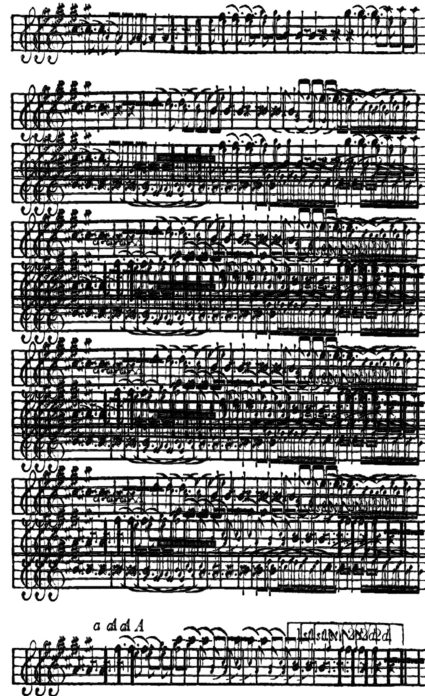
```
x = imread('im_original.jpg');
E = 2 * rand(1);
SE5 = strel('arbitrary', E);
V = [2, 3];
SE = strel('periodicline', 1, V);
SE1 = strel('line', 1, 1);
SE3 = strel('square', 1);
NHOOD = [100000011110, 1000101010110111];
SE4 = strel(NHOOD);
OFFSET = [10, -18];
SE2 = strel('pair', OFFSET);
A = imerode(x, SE1);
A1 = imerode(A, SE4);
A2 = imerode(A1, SE3);
A3 = imerode(A2, SE);
```

```
B = imerode(A3, SE5);
imwrite(B, 'im_saved.jpg');
```

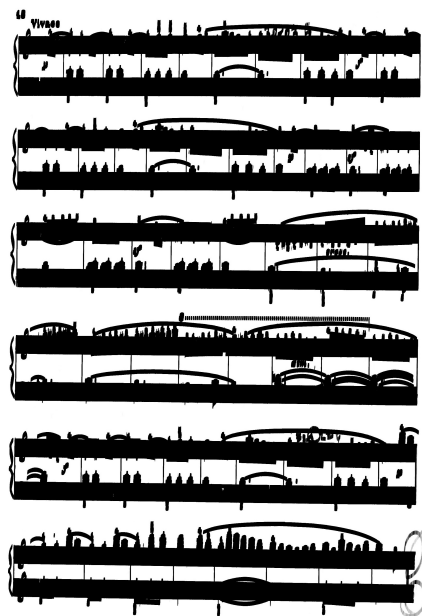
Struktur_01:



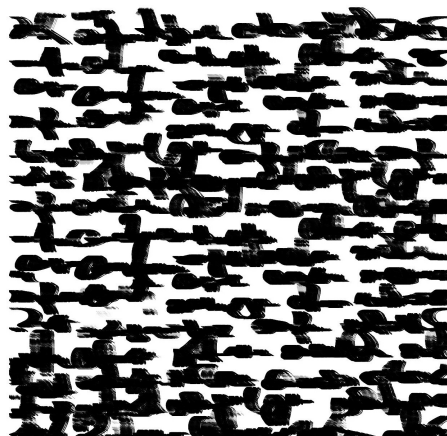
Struktur_02:



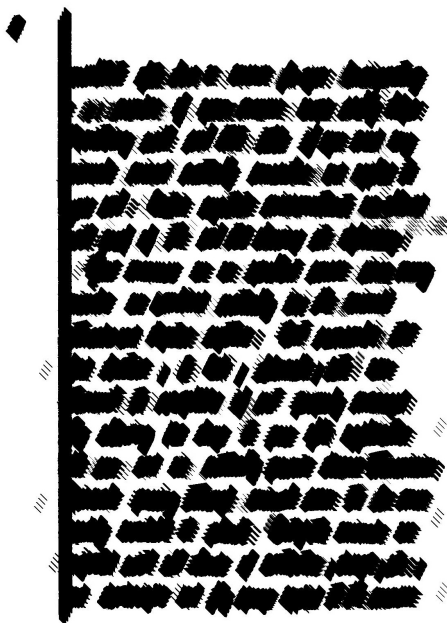
Struktur_03:



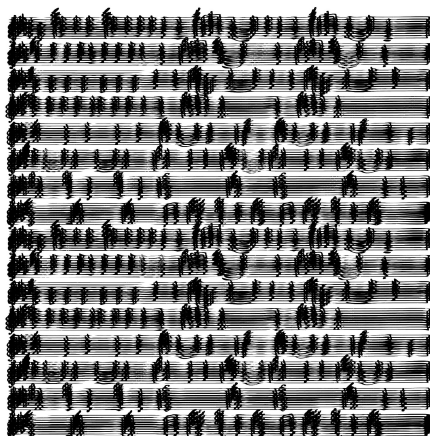
Struktur_26:



Struktur_30:



Struktur_04:



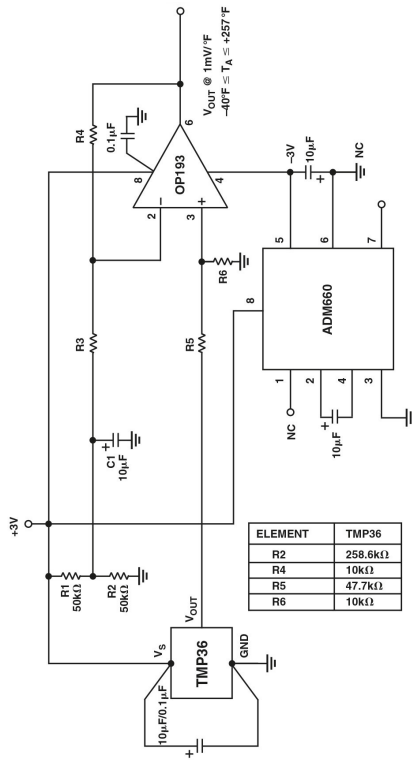
THE WAY I DISCOVERED THE BERLIN WALL HAS FALLEN

This book does not exist

L^AT_EX is the most flexible and popular typesetting system for the production of scientific documents, based on the *what-you-see-is-what-you-mean* idea.

This series of poetry slabs exists as a super-vised L^AT_EX code only. No one of the works has been produced, scanned and laid out on a page: images are automatically generated while the source code gets compiled.

L^AT_EX built in routines and mathematical functions have been combined to design each page, setting properly up a certain number of morphological parameters – mostly scaling, rotation and shift factors.



TMP36 circuit diagram

To make the entire procedure potentially self-generating and let the book interact with the environment, a cheap temperature sensor (TMP36 driven by Arduino) has monitored the room over fixed time intervals, processed the data and passed the corresponding rounded value to one of the functions.

```
% code fragment
\thispagestyle{empty}
\newcommand{\rand}{\rand\arabic{rand}}
\forloop[I]{k}{1}{\value{k}<tmp}
{
\hspace{-0.85 cm}
\vspace{-0.016 cm}
\rotatebox{\value{k}}{\rand\roman{rand}} $\square$
}
\newpage
\facitabianca
```

Here is how much of TeX's memory you used: 29245 strings out of 493013, 657395 string characters out of 6133343, 1188180 words of memory out of 5000000, 32218 multiletter control sequences out of 15000+600000, 25248 words of font info for 99 fonts, out of 8000000 for 9000, 1141 hyphenation exceptions out of 8191, 62i,8m,103p,1366b,609s stack positions out of 5000i,500n,10000p,200000b,80000s
{ /usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/enc/dvips/cm-super/cm-super-tsl.enc
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmbx12.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmcscl10.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmex10.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmmi12.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmr10.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmr12.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmr17.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmr7.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmr8.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmti10.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/cm/cmti12.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/euler/eufm10.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/euler/eufm12.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm10.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm12.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm14.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm16.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm18.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm20.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm22.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm24.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm26.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm28.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm30.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm32.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm34.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm36.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm38.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm40.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm42.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm44.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm46.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm48.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm50.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm52.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm54.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm56.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm58.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm60.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm62.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm64.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm66.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm68.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm70.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm72.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm74.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm76.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm78.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm80.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm82.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm84.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm86.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm88.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm90.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm92.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm94.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm96.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm98.pfb>
</usr/local/texlive/2016/texmf-dist/fonts/type1/public/amsfonts/symbols/msbm100.pfb>
Output written on Concrete_PRINTED.pdf (44 pages, 707848 bytes).
PDF statistics: 236 PDF objects out of 1000 (max. 8388607), 167 compressed objects within 2 object streams, 0 named destinations out of 1000 (max. 5000000), 13 words of extra memory for PDF output out of 10000 (max. 10000000).

The aesthetics of the wall

Over the almost three decades the wall stood in Berlin, it was referred to as *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (antifascist barrier) by the authorities of the German Democratic Republic, a legitimate concrete curtain incubating the socialist state. While the eastern side soon became the dull edge of the death strip, the western one often served as a natural urban canvas for politically engaged graffiti, claiming freedom for all.

Some remains still stand around the city,

but a considerable number of slabs have been shipped around the world for educational or even commercial purposes, actually overturning the original anti-capitalistic significance of the building.

During my first stay in the city in 2001, I started studying and collecting evidences about the controversial evolution of the street art concerning the wall. In the first place, I concentrated on the juxtaposition of old and new graffiti obfuscating one another. The wall gradually turned out to be an open and unguarded archive of outstanding symbolic significance, the harsh legacy of two longtime theses conflicting about social order, without the hope that any balance, if only utopian, would some day be attained. A double row of cobblestones and other plaques today trace most of its original route across the city to politely emphasise which ideology has prevailed.

With this in mind, I have been led to compare the rather loose traits of concrete poetry with the wall envisaged as a diffused totem.

Upon the crumbling of language, each printed page gathers heaps of unusable typographical elements and becomes the site of a former text and of a non-text at once. While some readability seems, at least in principle, recoverable, the attention refocuses on the most purely visual elements.

Like the surface of a concrete slab covered in tags, lettering and cartoons, each page in this book embeds nested graphemes from different alphabets (Latin, Greek, Cyrillic, etc.), numbers or other computational symbols shifted from their native context, and combined into pseudo-textual layers.

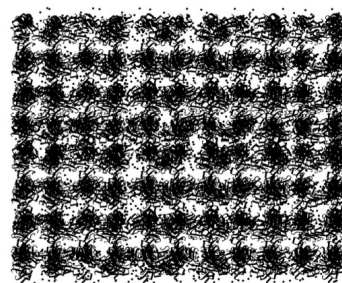
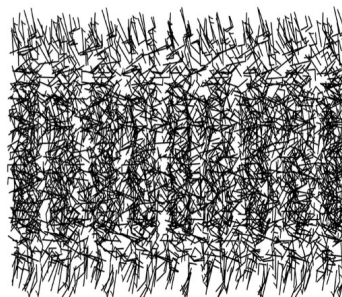
Each "poem" obeys an implicit rule, synthesized by the segment of code generating it. The choice of constraining the signs within the thick frame designed by the margins, beside duplicating the process of graffiti

layering in a more abstract space, depicts the reciprocal siege of the two ideologies and the ultimate success of one over the other. No word could express the urge for a plurality of political aspirations in the confinement of the former German Democratic Republic. Despite preserving its bent for iterated slogans, the art of propaganda is here deprived of its most effective tool: a shared and recognizable language.

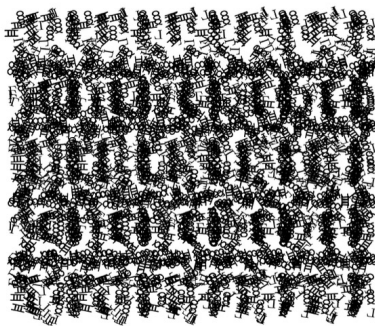
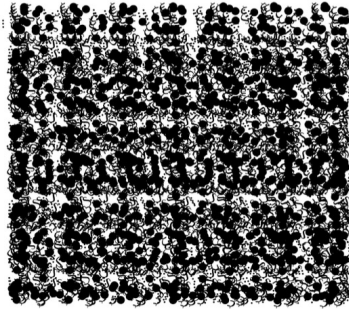
The \LaTeX code the book consists of arranges bare textual units into a potentially unlimited and indecipherable wall. It exploits the layout to parody political designs. It sets forth a form of resistance against conventions and dominant structures. While every ideology needs some vision of the world to be conveyed, these pages state a well pondered sense of annihilation rather than of revelation, avoiding any rhetoric about icons in mass culture.

The debris the wall nowadays consists of are the latest generation of the wall itself.

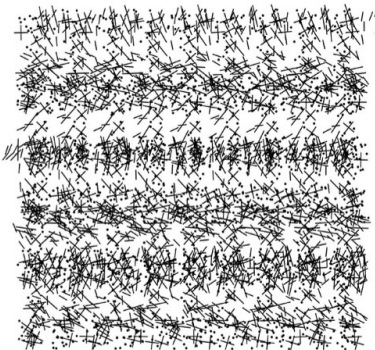
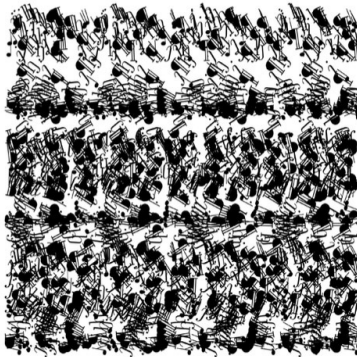
Slab I-II



Slab III-IV



Slab IX-X



NOTES

¹Winston, Christiane/ Mogrelia, Nazneen/ Maher, Hemali: *The therapeutic value of asemic writing: a qualitative exploration*, in «Journal of Creativity in Mental Health», 11(2), London 2016, pp. 142-156.

²Joyce, James: *Letters*, ed. Stuart Gilbert, Vol. I, New York 1966, p. 204.

³Wornell, Gregory W./ Oppenheim, Alan V.: *Estimation of fractal signals from noisy measurements using wavelets*, «IEEE Transactions On Signal Processing», Vol. 40, n.3, 1992, pp. 611-623.

⁴Higuchi, Tomoyuki: *Approach to an irregular time series on the basis of the fractal theory*, «Physica D: Nonlinear Phenomena», Vol. 19, n.3, 2005, pp. 659-674.

⁵Artist talk during the exhibition *Intuición Es-tética* curated by Michael Jacobson in Cordoba (2016). <https://youtu.be/hovsoNNiSbY>