

Theoretical papers

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Abstract

The following papers are a collection of selected theoretical works in progress and interviews about asemic writing, vispo and concrete poetry, some of which have already appeared on journals, reviews and dedicated websites. Full portfolios on my homepage.

I. ASEMIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Federico Federici in *Asemic Writing, Studi e scrittura di Poesia Visiva Sperimentale n.1*, curated by Francesco Aprile and Cristiano Caggiula, Archimuseo Adriano Accattino, Ivrea 2018.

Asemic writing points to a gradual weakening of the correlation between sign and meaning or, within the language of Biology, to contradict the 'form follows function' statement. Any textual hermeneutics based on an archaeological approach (restoration of a minimum set of alphabet signs from fragmented subsets, recovery of the original syntax from noisy communication channels etc.) would hopelessly fail. The reason for this failure is programmatic. The flux of symbols does not tend to intercept and duplicate encrypted information. It works around the uniqueness of each code by blending familiar patterns out of context, devising new ones or introducing modifications. This is one of the most subversive traits, legitimizing the paradox of *asemic communication*. There is no recognisable genome, nor any implicit one accepted by the community. Each text,

regardless of its extent, embodies the highest expression of a unique and obscure language, which constitutes its stimulus and essence. This powerful, iconic synthesis absorbs all the traditional phonic elements, turning the act of reading into a pure visual experience, contemplative, even where the persuasive sequence of figures on the page seems to encourage the recovery of possible narrative dynamics, such as in *The Giant's Fence*¹ or *Action Figures*² by Michael Jacobson.

Each asemic form is not a *statement* in itself. It's rather an *unaussprechbare Aussage*, triggering the interpretive schemes of the subconscious, making the idea of an *a priori* meaning redundant. Reading no longer consists of two contiguous but distinct phases, namely decoding and interpreting; it becomes a unique and creative activity, acted upon the free surface the text, drawing from unknown resources. The psychological effects of brief asemic activities, stimulated in individuals with schizophrenia and alexithymia, have recently been investigated³. The comparative analysis of the writings, together with the observation reports, provide documentary evidence of temporary improvements in mood and of an increased awareness of the emotional dimension, notwithstanding the onset of mild stress symptoms, following the practice requested on a daily basis.

The old semiotic triangle (signified - signifier - referent) narrows to one vertex, that of the signifier, abandoning the sign to its formal solitude and dramatically increasing

its distance from signified and referent. The elements immediately above the level of the word (periods, paragraphs etc.) are, in some cases, preserved as natural counterweights, capable of outlining a textual framework within the image.

The right/ left-handed, oblique, up/ downward linear progression gradually becomes a tangled net of vanishing points and nodes, a cross-cutting set of unstable fault planes, produced by rapid and nervous handwriting. This deformation is a way to react to the infection of the acronyms and codes of information, by erasing and almost forcibly extracting meanings to spare them the agony of language. Each asemic artist experiences the extreme condition of linguistic minorities, being the first and last native writer in a newspeak or in some dialect dying out.

The substratum of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* rests on scattered text fragments and notes from the most disparate studies. Although aimed at strongly oneiric mechanics, this approach marks a radical turning point compared with *Ulysses*, bypassing the strictly psychoanalytic significance of the stream of consciousness, as documented in a letter 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"⁴. Pages become real laboratories where to cause linguistic phenomena to occur, recording them within the natural progression of *writing from writing*; the plot, continuously folded and unfolded by the distortion of space and the dilation or ellipsis of time, reveals itself as the living expression of Minkowski's chronotope. The old meanings annihilate themselves, the linguistic particles transmute into pure sounds or mysterious crasis and some still uncertain reality surfaces everywhere, blending matter and light into one compound, indiscriminately. Some of the most outstanding and inspired narra-

tive expedients stem from adopting the same methodological approach as the new Physics, rather than from the superficial fascination of its paradoxes. In the same way as Quantum Physics no longer relegates the observer to the role of detached witness of phenomena, the reader spontaneously plays an active part while *defining* the meaning of the text, not barely recovering it.

By analogy, asemic writing requires a certain *entanglement* to be established between calligraphy and subconscious. The uncertainty of the text is the natural diffraction of meanings through a network of signs, the natural diffraction of 'reality' through the slit between awakening and dream. The written page does not coincide with the message any longer. It becomes a filter, an analyser to investigate a space which is symbolic and 'real' at once, where the pattern of signs is released from factual data. The primitive intuitions of symmetry, similarity and self-similarity acquire double significance: a psychological and a metrical one. Some new topology should thereby replace traditional hermeneutics to study such manifold structures and outline potential intertextual references.

I here draw two lines of research to address the highly non-linear and dynamic nature of this phenomenon: fractal analysis to define and extract pseudo-linguistic features (such as *dimension*); supervised scripts to generate automatic asemic writings while scanning and manipulating conventional documents.

Asemic texts are treated as snap-shots of unknown linguistic phenomena, or bidimensional sets of fuzzy data to analyse. Provided that the most suitable algorithm has been chosen, fractal dimension analysis has proved itself as a powerful and flexible tool in many fields: clustering data, detecting and extracting main features from noisy signals⁵, dealing with complex scaling laws or with chaotic dynamical systems⁶. This previously unexplored

blend of Mathematics with writing, aims at probing the bedrock of asemic texts, defining proper parameters to cluster compatible ones, hence treating them as sets of signs whose prime textual properties have been subverted.

Since each document is a unique source of signs to thoroughly detach from the original figures of writing and merge into new alphabets, supervised image processing scripts are developed to acquire and plunge textual documents into abstract asemic spaces. The whole image matrix is morphologically manipulated with the help of routines, which combine neighbouring clusters of pixels according to certain structuring shapes (lines, squares, disks, etc.), depending on specific elements (points, centres, size, etc.) which get adjusted until a new formal equilibrium is attained.

A short introduction to the methods here exposed was filmed and streamed during the asemic artworks exhibition *Intuición Estética*⁷ curated by Michael Jacobson (Cordoba, 17.02.2016 - 06.03.2016). A theoretical paper, whose guidelines trace those in this project, has been presented during *Utsanga asemic writing exhibition* curated by Francesco Aprile, Cristiano Caggiula and Elisa Carella (Borgia, 2/12/2016 - 2/05/2017). Some artworks and preliminary results have, among others, been hosted and discussed on "The New Post-Literate"^{8 9}, "Utsanga"^{10 11} e "Zoomoozophone Review" (n.8, 2016), "Brave New Word"¹², "Asemic Front"^{13 14 15}, "Otoliths"^{16 17}, "A-Minor"¹⁸, "AOM"¹⁹, "3:AM Magazine"²⁰.

Translation

La scrittura asemica rimanda a un progressivo indebolimento del rapporto tra segno e significato o, nel linguaggio della Biologia, tra forma e funzione. Qualsiasi ermeneutica del testo di tipo archeologico (ricostruzione di un alfabeto minimo distrutto, recupero di una

sintassi frantumata ecc.) cadrebbe irrimediabilmente nel vuoto. La ragione di tale fallimento è programmatica. Il flusso simbolico non è un'informazione intercettata criptata, ma aggira l'univocità del codice rimescolando *pattern* noti fuori contesto, proponendone varianti o escogitandone di nuovi. È questo uno degli elementi sovversivi che giustificano il paradosso della *comunicazione asemica*. Non esiste un genoma riconoscibile o implicitamente accettato dalla comunità. Ogni testo, indipendentemente dalla propria estensione, incarna l'espressione massima e unica di una lingua oscura, che ne costituisce lo stimolo e l'essenza. La potente sintesi iconica operata assorbe tutti gli elementi fonici tradizionali, consegnando la lettura a una pura esperienza visiva, contemplativa, anche laddove il carattere sequenziale delle tavole, come in *The Giant's Fence*¹ o *Action Figures*² di Michael Jacobson, apre al recupero di possibili dinamiche narrative.

Ogni forma asemica non è, in sé, un *enunciato*. È piuttosto *unaussprechbare Aussage* che attiva le modalità interpretative dell'inconscio, rendendo superfluo il concetto di un *a priori* del significato. La lettura non consiste più in due fasi ravvicinate ma separate, una di decodifica e una di interpretazione, ma diventa attività creativa unica, condotta autonomamente sulla superficie libera del testo, attingendo a risorse sconosciute. Recentemente, si è anche tentata una prima esplorazione degli effetti psicologici di brevi attività asemiche, stimulate in individui affetti da alessitimia e schizofrenia³. L'analisi comparata degli elaborati, supportata dal diario delle osservazioni, ha documentato temporanei miglioramenti nell'umore e un'accresciuta consapevolezza della dimensione emotiva, pur accompagnata dall'insorgere di leggere forme di stress, a seguito dell'esercizio quotidianamente imposto.

Il vecchio triangolo semiotico (significato - significante - referente) si stringe su un solo

vertice, quello del significante, abbandonando il segno a una solitudine formale e aumentandone a dismisura la distanza da significato e referente. Gli elementi immediatamente al di sopra del livello della parola (periodi, paragrafi ecc.) sono, in alcuni casi, preservati quali naturali contrappesi esteriori in grado di strutturare nell'immagine un ordine testuale. La progressione lineare, destrorsa o sinistrorsa, obliqua, ascendente o discendente, è allora un infittirsi di punti di fuga, nodi, piani instabili di faglia prodotti da una calligrafia spesso rapida e nervosa che reagisce ai codici dell'informazione, all'infezione delle sigle, deturpando la materia scritta, cancellandola e quasi estraendo a forza i significati per salvarli dall'agonia della lingua. Attraverso la pratica asemica, ogni artista sperimenta la condizione estrema delle minoranze linguistiche, incarnando la figura del primo e ultimo rappresentante di una neolingua o di una variante dialettale in estinzione.

Nell'impegnativa stesura di *Finnegans Wake*, James Joyce inizia a lavorare su segmenti sparsi di testo, appunti di studio e letture tra le più disparate. Seppur rivolto a meccaniche fortemente oniriche, l'approccio segna una svolta radicale rispetto a *Ulysses* e permette di superare la valenza strettamente psicanalitica del flusso di coscienza, come documenta una lettera indirizzata ad 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"⁴. La pagina diventa laboratorio, la lingua fenomeno da provocare e osservare nel processo naturale di *scrittura da scrittura*; il testo, trafitto da continue ellissi temporali e deformato nei luoghi, si fa espressione viva del cronotopo minkowskiano. I vecchi significati si annichiliscono, si trasformano le particelle linguistiche in puri suoni o crasi misteriose e affiora ovunque, scarnificata, una realtà incerta che mescola materia e luce

senza distinguerle. Alcune delle trovate narrative più sorprendenti nascono da un'identità di metodo rispetto alla nuova Fisica, più che dalla superficiale suggestione dei suoi paradossi. Come nell'approccio quantistico si era ormai superata la distinzione netta tra fenomeno e sperimentatore, al lettore non spetta più un ruolo esterno, a margine delle vicende, ma quello di chi deve *definire* il senso stesso del testo, non ricostruirlo. Per analogia, la scrittura asemica impone l'instaurarsi di un certo *entanglement* tra calligrafia e inconscio, affinché l'indeterminazione del testo sia naturale diffrazione dei significati attraverso il reticolo dei segni, naturale diffrazione della 'realtà' nella fessura tra risveglio e sogno. Non esistono solidi dati di fatto cui approssimarsi. La pagina scritta non identifica più il messaggio, ma diventa filtro, strumento di analisi di uno spazio indistintamente 'reale' e simbolico. Le primitive intuizioni di simmetria, similitudine o autosimilarità acquistano allora una duplice valenza: metrica e psicologica. Al posto dell'ermeneutica tradizionale, si dovrebbe tentare di introdurre una topologia del testo, in grado di evidenziarne strutture interne e di valutare eventuali riferimenti intertestuali, affrontando ogni pagina come l'istantanea di un fenomeno linguistico sconosciuto, uno stravagante insieme *fuzzy* da perimetrare, misurare, interpretare.

Si possono tracciare due linee di ricerca parallele: l'analisi frattale per definire ed estrarre caratteristiche pseudolinguistiche (quali la *dimensione*); lo sviluppo di *script* supervisionati, per la generazione automatica di scritture asemiche a partire dalla scansione di documenti convenzionali.

A patto di scegliere l'algoritmo più appropriato, l'analisi frattale si è rivelata uno strumento potente e flessibile in molti campi: *clustering* di dati, individuazione ed estrazione di caratteristiche da segnali rumorosi⁵, trattamento di complessi livelli di autosimilarità in

sistemi dinamici caotici⁶. Questo approccio, perlopiù inesplorato, tenta di fornire nuovi criteri formali d'interpretazione dei testi, mettendo alla prova il fondamento stesso di una scrittura nella quale il valore dei segni è permanentemente sovvertito e cancellato.

Lo sviluppo di *script*, viceversa, manipola la figura originale (schizzo, appunto, partitura ecc.), applicando alla matrice digitale procedure ricorsive supervisionate, che ne ricombinano gli elementi, sino a immergere l'intero documento in uno spazio asemico, astratto.

Una breve introduzione ai principi e ai metodi esposti in questo articolo è documentata nel film presentato durante *Intuición Es-tética*⁷ (Cordoba, 2016) e nel lavoro esposto durante *Asemic Tech* (Barcellona, 2017), entrambe le mostre a cura di Michael Jacobson; alcuni risultati, in forma ancora inorganica e provvisoria, sono ospitati e discussi su "The New Post-Literate"⁸ ⁹, "Utsanga"¹⁰ ¹¹, "Zoomoozophone Review" (n.8, 2016), "Brave New Word"¹², "Asemic Front"¹³ ¹⁴ ¹⁵, "Otoliths"¹⁶ ¹⁷, "A-Minor"¹⁸, "AOM"¹⁹, "3:AM Magazine"²⁰.

NOTES

¹<http://www.ubu.com/vp/Jacobson.html>

²<http://avance.randomflux.info/ActionFigures.pdf>

³Winston, 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.

⁴Joyce, James, *Letters*, ed. Stuart Gilbert, Vol. I, New York 1966, p. 204.

⁵Wornell, 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.

⁶Higuchi, 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.

⁷<https://youtu.be/hovsoNNiSbY>

⁸<http://thenewpostliterate.blogspot.it/2017/05/obscured-by-alphabets-by-federico.html>

⁹<https://thenewpostliterate.blogspot.it/2018/02/the-first-line-of-darkness-by-federico.html>

¹⁰<http://www.utsanga.it/federici-calligraph-and-seismograph/>

¹¹<https://vimeo.com/160367836>

¹²<http://bnw-mag.blogspot.it/2017/06/federico-federici-six-asemic-scores.html>

¹³<https://asemicfront.wordpress.com/2017/06/13/five-works-by-federico-federici-berlin-germany/>

¹⁴<https://asemicfront.wordpress.com/2018/02/04/asemic-concrete-text-hybrids-by-federico-federici-berlin-germany/>

¹⁵<https://asemicfront.wordpress.com/2018/03/09/five-new-asemic-concrete-compositions-by-federico-federici-berlin-germany/>

¹⁶<http://the-otolith.blogspot.com.au/2017/05/federico-federici.html>

¹⁷<https://the-otolith.blogspot.it/2017/11/federico-federici.html>

¹⁸<https://aminormagazine.com/2017/09/30/four-pieces-8/>

¹⁹<https://angryoldmanmagazine.com/federico-federici/>

²⁰<http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/poembrut13/>

II. IS ASEMIC WRITING A ZERO-POINT WRITING?

Federico Federici on «Utsanga», n.15, 2018.

A asemic texts seem to constantly rely on the reader's canny clairvoyance to disclose their meaning, not to leave him standing before the melancholic contemplation of its loss. For this reason, they may appear as a radical, conceptual research into the nature of language, which intentionally drops the contents of experience and hides behind the mimicry of well known languages, institutionalizing text falsification. While writing is always the starting point, asemic writers express themselves on the edge between pure literature and visual art, often insisting on the original, innate characters of handwriting, rather than on traditionally text-based works: every dot, every stain or even every single digital bit in an image is as real as a consonant or a vowel. They often behave like smugglers, creeping along the guarded frontier of meaning, with their bags crammed with some-

what secret or confidential schemes, scripts, preparatory notes or sketchbooks. There may no longer be codes to draw signs from: language restlessly reinvents itself in the common forge of form and meaning. Since the writer gives up his status of *deus ex machina*, the reader/viewer loses a steady point of comparison. As before a paper of jurisprudence, where «La place que le mot y occupe est une place nette. L'ambiguïté du Droit tient sans doute à l'interprétation du texte; à l'esprit et non à la lettre»,²¹ the power of imagination must again be set free to interpret the text not barely as a dumb archive of recovered artefacts, even more so when all conventions are cancelled out. With these premises, some have started questioning themselves about whether asemic practices may be associated with a ground state of writing, a sort of language zero-point, where all meaning ceases and words come to rest, blurred within a fairly random net of signs. Shouldn't we instead rephrase Heisenberg uncertainty principle and state that, though classical texts can always be brought to full meaninglessness, the same does not work for asemic ones, which always tend to exhibit a zero-point meaning? When all textual conventions are so stripped down that the whole page consists of either subtly scattered/stacked text-based elements, or of a mere repertory of independent fragments, the whole meaning gets absorbed into the intrinsic void of deconstruction. Early and late experimental writings have often tried to work around this problem by loading the language with overly conceptual aspects, resulting in necessarily unfulfilled expectations: «[...] it is very difficult to modify our language [...], for words can only describe things of which we can form mental pictures, and this ability, too, is a result of daily experience. [...]; for visualisation, however, we must content ourselves with [...] incomplete analogies [...]».²² In asemic scripts, on the contrary, signs

and meanings have been superseded by the pure notion of asemicism, wherein the writing itself becomes a delay in meaning. After all, the unification of the concepts of space and time almost one century ago has not been integrated within classical physics by means of slight adjustments: it has reframed physics all the way through. Under this perspective, asemic writing can be addressed as the culminating act which has torn down the ultimate barrier, potentially returning traditional writing to its flawless meaningfulness.

Translation

Il testo asemico sembra confidare in una sorta di chiaroveggenza del lettore per svelare il proprio significato e contrastare la malinconica contemplazione della sua perdita apparente. Per questa ragione, l'approccio asemico può apparire una radicale indagine concettuale, che punta alla natura stessa del linguaggio e ai suoi rapporti con la realtà, sfidandone i contorni in un continuo mimetismo con le forme note, rendendo sistematica la falsificazione testuale.

Pur riconoscendo nella scrittura il punto di partenza, lo scrittore asemico si pone in bilico tra pura letteratura e arte visiva, spesso preferendo i tratti originali e innati di un manoscritto ad approcci testuali più convenzionali: ogni punto, ogni macchia, persino ogni bit in un'immagine digitale possono caricarsi di una notazione quasi alfabetica. Come un trafficante sulla frontiera sorvegliata del significato, egli contrabbanda schemi segreti, riservati, bozze, copioni, schizzi.

All'inaridirsi dei codici da cui attingere, il linguaggio risponde reinventandosi nella forgia che accomuna forma e significato. Venendo meno lo scrittore nel ruolo di *deus ex machina*, il lettore/spettatore perde un punto di riferimento consolidato e, come di fronte a un atto giudiziario in cui «La place que le mot y occupe est une place nette. L'ambiguïté

du Droit tient sans doute à l'interprétation du texte; à l'esprit et non à la lettre»,²¹ deve riguadagnare la libertà della pura immaginazione per dare del testo un'interpretazione non riduttiva, non limitata allo sterile recupero di dati noti, ancor più dove tutte le convenzioni sono state erose.

Con queste premesse, alcuni hanno iniziato a chiedersi se la pratica asemica si possa assimilare a uno stato fondamentale, un grado zero del linguaggio, in cui il significato è temporaneamente sospeso e la parola si decanta nell'offuscamento di una rete di segni alquanto arbitrari. Non si dovrebbe, viceversa, affermare, parafrasando Heisenberg, che mentre un testo tradizionale può essere completamente spogliato del proprio significato, altrettanto non può dirsi di uno asemico, che tende invece sempre a significare nel profondo? Quando tutti gli accordi testuali sono sovvertiti e l'intera pagina è ricoperta di elementi residuali, raggruppati o sparsi secondo uno schema non immediatamente esplicito, o consta di frammenti slegati, l'intero significato si riassorbe nel vuoto stesso della decostruzione.

Antiche e più recenti esperienze di scrittura hanno tentato di aggirare l'ostacolo caricando il linguaggio di eccessivi risvolti concettuali, col risultato di innescare aspettative poi disattese: «[...] it is very difficult to modify our language [...], for words can only describe things of which we can form mental pictures, and this ability, too, is a result of daily experience. [...]; for visualisation, however, we must content ourselves with [...] incomplete analogies [...]».²²

Nel copione asemico, viceversa, segni e significati tendono a essere rimpiazzati dalla pura nozione di asemicità, nella quale la scrittura stessa diventa un'esitazione di significato. Dopo tutto, all'unificazione dei concetti di spazio e tempo, più di un secolo fa, non sono seguiti leggeri aggiustamenti della Fisica

Classica, ma una riformulazione dell'intero paradigma geometrico dell'Universo. Allo stesso modo, la scrittura asemica può essere indicata come l'atto estremo che abbatte l'ultima barriera, restituendo potenzialmente le forme più tradizionali di scrittura alla pienezza del loro significato.

NOTES

²¹Broodthaers, Marcel: *Art poétique in Broodthaers*, (ed. B. H. D. Buchloh), Cambridge 1987, p. 16.

²²Heisenberg, Werner, *The Physical Principles of the Quantum Theory*, transl. Eng. C. Eckhart, F. C. Hoyt, Chicago 1930, p. 10.

III. ALPHABETS (SEEN IN PROFILE)

Federico Federici, submitted, 2018.

According to Marcel Broodthaers, «since Duchamp, the artist is the author of a definition»²³, i. e. a calculated shift of the object from its original context to establish new interpretive paradigms. This thought process, continuously submitted to interpretation, also addresses the need of making the inquiry into the nature of art explicit. The statement appears to openly contradict those positions rejecting any definition, whether it is meant to draw Art closer or farther. The methodological approach of proceeding by definition entails the capability to select signs or objects and manipulate them not as bare finds, but as the original, specific elements of the relational perspective to build.

In *One ball total equilibrium tank* (1985), Jeff Koons encased a basketball at the centre of a silicon sealed glass tank filled with distilled water. The outstanding realism, inspired by the real object replacing its representation, is counterbalanced by the absolute neutrality of the context. To all appearances, this work comprises several heterogeneous motifs: the aesthetics of Geometry with its exaltation of the

full and the empty; the invisible force fields of Physics; the ordinariness of playful childhood called to mind by the ball itself with its unique dark grooves; the socio-economic implications epitomized by the *Official Spalding* brand and the role of basketball in social emancipation. This *stand-alone* artwork didn't conform to the savage neo-expressionist painting dominating in that time, but the matter couldn't be settled once and for all within the *en vogue* remake of Ready Made Art: the deceptively simple arrangement actually implies quite a complex project, from both a practical and a philosophical point of view. The gravitational field was to be perfectly balanced without introducing further hydrostatic drifts, to express that purest, unperturbed status of the spirit attaining a perfect balance between aspiration and reality. The fact that the ball was not asymptotically stable at the absolute centre of the tank is, from my standpoint, an enrichment rather than an issue. This sort of counter-futuristic effect addresses both Man's substantial ineptitude at the purpose and the fuzziness of that «[...] point of intersection of the timeless/ with time [...]»²⁴ which the seeming one frame shot of a bouncing ball would tend to exclude.

The process of search, displacement and redefinition has often been a latent stimulus to re-code quotes from one text into another, hence Literature from all times has served as a proper written matter from which to pick plots, sentences or lines to reframe into an entirely new context. The broadening of contemporary perspective has gradually included the internet as a huge trading area, engendering artworks which exploit networks as relational devices and merge logos, slogans, acronyms or shreds of files into powerful markers of a new slang. As of the early 21st century, *Flarf* poetry has explored algorithms-aided writing techniques (such as *googlism*) and «*simulated multiple authorship*»²⁵ to sample and manip-

ulate ready-made text-objects. In that connection «[...] whatever-what may be art, or more precisely that whatever-what may become art, is decisively distinct from the notion that everything is art.»²⁶

The practice of asemic writing sets itself apart from this. While not entirely defying the rules of language, it insists on their being implicit and hints at them. Despite it sometimes subsumes obfuscated letters, numbers or other recognizable symbols, it doesn't barely consist of blurring meanings under the syncopated rhythm of handwriting. It is a pretended act of enunciation whose meanings remain beyond reach, undeciphered and to not decipher. Asemic writing naturally expresses a lack of a kind of realism, for the symbols in that polysemic spectrum are not elements of reality. Writing doesn't predict the outcome of reading: its an ongoing negotiation. Borrowing the terms from the debate on the so-called Copenhagen interpretation, underlying meanings are the hidden variables within the quantum state of the text. This is not a question of definition, though. The asemic writer *is not* the author of a new definition, nor is he skilled in drawing new alphabets of symbols generating meaning according to certain shared rules. He is not essentially and functionally interested in meaning which, in the breakdown of the hyper-connected society, tends to be the dregs of the permanent production and consumption of second hand information.

The more the traits of meaning are paired down, the more asemic writing becomes a pure experience of aesthetic value, though watching is in no way compensatory to reading. It's rather a new experience in itself.

Upon a closer look, seeing comes before speaking, objects before words, drawing before writing ever since Palaeolithic graffiti. In traditional texts, written words are both a landscape and a soundscape. This duality can no longer be maintained, to make room to

experiences of the textual stimulus out of interpretive schemes and conventions in general. While the whole language is squeezed and the semantic, phonetic, orthographic terms are overcome and melt into the asemic compound, the whole text is charged with a veiled semantic value which startles the reader and conveys a sense of ultimate spiritual unity. Every piece of asemic writing is original, in the sense that it may be at the origin of a set of signs which will not further be manipulated or used elsewhere. No convention is established between the writer and the reader to fulfil textual expectations, no matter whether the starting point is a low resolution dot printed document or a stained paper rip. Every technique of unpredicted scrambling or disruption in the flux of meanings offers an environment of permanent creation, wherein to take to the extreme or to turn around the words of the american anthropologist and linguist Edward Sapir: «no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached».²⁷

Marcel Duchamp once stated that «as soon as we start putting our thoughts into words and sentences everything gets distorted, [...] we never understand each other».²⁸ At this stage, asemic writers don't actually distrust language. They address the linguistic turn from a different perspective, weakening the hitherto often tacit idea that reality is either a language habit or a legacy. Words and sentences are not their aim, they focus on non-linear patterns. The occurrence of repeated clusterings or of stronger marks may deceptively suggest the presence of rigid hierarchical structures, but the word-sign duality never gets solved. No syntactical residual points to a precise language and the edge between meaninglessness and meaningfulness is al-

ways missed.

Rather than the total equilibrium envisaged by Koons, asemic texts undergo a permanent brownian motion, which inhibits sharp trajectories while unfolding subtler perspectives. Primary signs may find themselves merged with already informed ones, as if ground by some uncalibrated machine of enunciation. The strong relational force between the signs themselves tends to shift the focus from orthography and syntax to almost topology, plunging asemic texts into metric spaces. No longer does the artist act «[...] like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing».²⁹ His invasive surgeries cut the stirred nerves of communication, dissect texts and layouts against the backdrop of intangible digital languages, crammed with jingles and banners, dovetailed into a strategy of osmotic capitalistic propaganda. As opposed to this micro-textual assembly line, asemic texts are flickering pointers, muted enunciators, not oriented semiotic segments, challenging the reader to renegotiate an active relationship with the text itself, hanging in the balance between reading and watching but contrasting both. Meanings are compressed tree rings within the text, whose presence is intensified, but not resolved, by an all-pervading bark of signs. Unlike Pierre Huyghe's *Timekeeper* (1999), where a series of concentric paint layers reveals the timeline of the gallery wall, the asemic coating of the texts prevents the corrosion of meaning. Huyghe's procedure, which may recall Mimmo Rotella's *décollage*, naturally lends itself to multiple authorship and to the paradox of generating multiple distinguishable copies of the same artwork, as much as «asemic writing is somewhat like dramatic writing and even entertainment script forms [...]»³⁰, a persuasive flux of characters into which «each reader-writer-viewer breathes unique life [...] and individual signs like ac-

tors». ³¹

Without an univocal message to barter, the gap between authorship and beholdership is left intentionally vacant.

NOTES

²³Haidu, Rachel: *The Absence of Work. Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976*, Cambridge (MA) 2010, p. 183.

²⁴Eliot, Thomas Stearns: *The Dry Salvages* (V, vv. 18-19), in: *Ibid.*: *Four Quartets*, New York 1943.

²⁵Mohammad, Kasey Silem, online, (13/11/2016).

²⁶Kyndrup, Morten: *Art and the Enunciative Paradigm. Today's Objectual De-differentiation and Its Impact on Aesthetics*, in: «Nordisk Estetisk Tidsskrift», 25-26, (2002), p. 30.

²⁷Sapir, Edward: *The Status of Linguistics as a Science*, in: *Ibid.*: *Culture, Language and Personality*, (ed. D. G. Mandelbaum), Berkeley (CA) 1958, p. 69.

²⁸Duchamp, Marcel, cit. in: Tomkins, Calvin: *Ahead of the Game*, London 1968, p. 34.

²⁹Duchamp, Marcel: *The Essential writings of Marcel Duchamp*, (ed. M. Sanouillet and E. Peterson), London 1975, p. 138.

³⁰Jacobson, Michael: *SCRIPTjr.nl Interview Conducted by Quimby Melton*, in: *Works & Interviews*, Leipzig 2016.

³¹*Ibid.*

IV. MY EXPERIENCE WITH ASEMIC WRITING

Federico Federici, Artist Talk, Berlin, 14/07/2018.

Q.: *Asemic texts appeared often here and there over the course of the 20th century. Then, at the very beginning of the 21st, it seemed that a consistent part of artists/writers, all over the world, started focusing on it. It isn't the occasional appearance of asemics in a wider context of art, but it seems now a specific practice or current. Do you agree?*

A.: I do agree with you. Despite asemic writing is still part of a wider context of text-based art (concrete poetry, vispo and so forth), it has developed its own peculiarity because of its sprouting at the

crossroads of consciousness and unconsciousness. If you think of more or less recent experiences involving supervised or unsupervised algorithms to improve machine learning performance, asemic practices seem to insist on the subtle capability of human brain to intercept seemingly familiar symbols, text-segments, scribbles and reinterpret them into new original contents. In my opinion, this may be a contemporary approach to most topics appeared here and there over the course of the last century.

Q.: *Do you think that in the foreseeable future the level of reflection on the existence of asemic writing will increase significantly? On what do you base your answer?*

A.: It will, as you have properly pointed out. The proof of this may lie in the increasing number of both electronic and traditional publications dedicated to asemicism. The gap between visual experience and reading experience, in both the real and the virtual world, needs to be conceptually reframed and filled.

Q.: *What general themes or topics runs through your portfolio and why have you chosen to address these themes or topics in your asemic art?*

A.: All series fall within one general issue: language as a boundary zone; even more specifically, language as a habit of reality. Different themes are sort of pretexts to investigate it. As of now, I have been working with SJ Fowler on a liner note sketchbook for Charles Mingus' *Pithecanthropus Erectus* jazz suite.

Q.: *How different is the process of creating asemic writing to the creation of traditional writing or art?*

- A.:** The main difference lies in the fact that you have to be meaningful, while dropping conventional signs. In some respect, it's like writing a sheet music for people who do not know how to play it, in such a way that they can experience some musical feeling.
- Q.:** *What specific influences caused you to develop your particular style of asemic writing?*
- A.:** During the '90s, at University, I was fascinated by both certain weird error-pages printed by old dot matrix machines, and the noisy patterns produced by atomic force microscopes? if you check my portfolio, you find works which might be mistaken for images of surface scanned samples. Then I started studying both Henri Michaux's narrative lines and Marcel Broodthaers' conceptual targeting, trying to combine them into what I often label 'asemic interferences within concrete structures?.
- Q.:** *In what ways can attempting to classify asemic writing as a new type of visual poetry provide an interesting perspective on studying the history of visual practices and reinterpreting this heritage from the asemic point of view?*
- A.:** New interesting perspectives may be opened up by the development of entirely new theoretical tools, in the same way as Literature benefited from the advances in Physics and Psychoanalysis at the beginning of the last century. The recent investigation of the psychological effects of brief asemic activities, stimulated in individuals with schizophrenia may be quoted as an example of what I mean. But even more amazing, though outside the asemic context, is the case of some medieval novels about journeys to the afterlife which, interpreted by the light of Einstein's Relativity, revealed unexpected clues within the original plots.
- Q.:** *Some authors think it can be said that something like an actual asemic 'movement' is growing. Do you think so? Or do you think there's simply a wide constellation of different individuals, far from being defined a movement?*
- A.:** Since this wide constellation of artists is more and more organizing itself on the net, through groups, platforms, journals and blogs where images and theoretical papers are shared (The New Post-Literate, Brave New Word, Utsanga, Internet Void, Asemic Front, Nokturno, Otoliths, A-Minor, AOM, Zoomoozophone Review, Asemic Magazine, just to name a few ones), a real movement may be finding its own way.
- Q.:** *Are you planning any exhibitions in the near future, if so, where and when will the exhibition be held?*
- A.:** At the moment, I am just working over new pieces, showcasing them through *Behance* and *Saatchi*, publishing them in print and online journals. I have just taken part in a couple of exhibitions in Rome and Turin. Though I am not planning anything in the near future, my studios, in Italy and Germany, are open to visitors interested in seeing the works in real and talking about art.
- Q.:** *How would you personally define asemic writing through your experience with it?*
- A.:** Over the last couple of years, I have addressed the core of asemic writing from quite different perspectives. I would here quote one of the most stimulating: the outstanding realism of language is replaced and neutralized by the absolute equilibrium of hand/type-writing. Think

of staring at a landscape in the fog: at first glance, you guess birches, roofs and so on. As you look back, after looking away, what was a birch may have become a beech, what was a roof may now look like the back of a wolf and so forth.

Q.: *What were the circumstances that introduced you to this art form and what drew you to become involved with it?* A With the worsening of my calligraphy taking notes at University, I got attracted by that misleading net of signs my papers were slowly turning into. I realized I could get to the bottom of what was written there, just because I somehow *knew* what I was writing about. Yet, the overall impression of those sheets crammed with lines led me to think that they might have been much more meaningful than I could decipher. That was probably one of the starting point.

Q.: *Why is it that asemic writing cannot be defined as either visual art or writing?*

A.: Think of the boundary between noise and music: where would you put the chirping of cicadas? Some say it's music, some say it's noise, but they must both agree that it's a sound wave. This is asemic writing: some sort of semiotics vibration.

Q.: *When completing your pieces, what emotions or thoughts envelop you when seeing its finished state for the first time?*

A.: What fascinates me the most is to feel as a bystander before lines and fragments which still retain some narrative, though reshuffled into macro-structures.

Q.: *Which of your projects are you personally the proudest of and what can you share in relation to the creation of it?*

A.: Instinctively, I would say the project exploring asemic interferences within concrete structures, because of its cross-genre approach: asemic writing is somehow forced to cope with or work around more recognizable patterns.

Q.: *Anthologies, exhibits and web pages collect very different kinds of asemic works. Some of them resemble scribbles and calligraphy, so they fit the definition of 'writing?'. Others do not, since they include recognizable letters and symbols, or abstract art. Do you think asemics can include these areas or not? Why do you say so?*

Q.: Although purely asemic works do not usually include recognizable symbols precisely to avoid misunderstandings, primary signs may occasionally find themselves merged with already informed ones, as if partially ground by the same machine of enunciation. In any case, the strong relational force between the two sets of signs is predominant and shifts the focus over the thing to be subtly 'communicated?.

Q.: *What are your thoughts on the political potential of asemic writing?*

A.: Like most languages, asemic writing is not politically engaged by its nature. Nonetheless, one might devise how to encrypt messages and bypass censorship, for instance.

Q.: *What are some of the misconceptions people have about asemic writing?*

A.: Asemic writing's detractors often insist on the seeming randomness of the collapsed writing. Details seem to get blurred, the old automatic processing of symbols fails. Asemic texts are flickering pointers, muted enunciators, not oriented semiotic segments, challenging the

reader to renegotiate an active relationship with the text itself, hanging in the balance between reading and watching but contrasting both.

Q.: *In what ways is the practice of asemic writing different from visual poetry?*

A.: From a historical perspective, visual poetry was the natural outcome of concrete poetry, in the same way as asemic writing may stand one step beyond visual poetry, without breaking with it, though. In my opinion, the most distinguishable trait is the focus on retaining the textual impact of the macro-structure, rather than developing substantially independent patterns.

Q.: *Do you expect that a reader's sense of meaning will be derived intuitively when he or she read your writings?*

A.: With asemic writing, authors become antennas scanning noisy signals, wherein meanings tend to interfere destructively. The combined role of viewer and reader will eventually lead to some unprecedented deconvolution later on.

V. A NOTE ON FEDERICO FEDERICI'S PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS

SJ Fowler in *Liner notes for a Pithecanthropus Erectus sketchbook* by Federico Federici, lulu.com, 2018.

My feeling on the poems is that they are a cohesive set, yet each has its own identity. How much time the reader spends with each is up to them, but they might spend hours, or seconds, with each or with all. How rare is a clear control of the pansemic aesthetic? Essentially it seems as though Federico's poems are often the evocation of a structure evading itself, an exact match to what Mingus declared his piece was

about ? a ten minute tone poem. Certainly in terms of actual construction Federico is also providing a score, a rescoring of that which been unscored. Here is metaphorical language without semantics. Ambiguous detail activating the poetic. The work is remarkable precisely because it works in a graceful, familiar space to do often stark and unfamiliar things. Like jazz that absorbs sound. This feels to me a faithful act towards listening and the intention towards possibility and inspiration. The roll, the smudge, the dead signature. The cut in the scrawl. The squig. The line, cards and bled ink. Sounds on paper.

VI. ASEMIC-CONCRETE TEXT HYBRIDS

Sloan De Villo on «Asemic Front», 04/02/2018.

Asemic writing and visual poetry are inherently connected, and the relationship is symbiotic. Thus it is not at all surprising that typewriter-generated concrete poetry (ironically considered by some to be obsolete) is re-emerging in new forms and with considerable vitality in the asemic writing movement.

Federico Federici is one of the master practitioners of this interesting sub-genre. (He is also contributing to my long-held theory of Neo-Concretism.) That contemporary asemic writers and artists should benefit from the triumphs of the "Golden Age" of concrete poetry is, after all, an indication of healthy cultural evolution: a balance of tradition and the iconoclastic.

Working in the context of concrete poetry, Federico Federici uses type-overs (as well as some calligraphy) to generate asemic symbols and structures. I believe this is one of the most promising possibilities for the use of concrete poetry in the asemic realm: The generation of symbols and structures.

Federici also interjects words - mostly

nouns - to allow for some degree of "reading" and association. A nature theme emerges: "TREE", "weed", "wood", "leaf", "deer", "stone", etc. The work can be read, but not strictly in a conventional sense. For instance, traditional syntax is lacking yet the sign-system is intact for individual words. Poetically, the work presents a severely fractured pastoral lyric that is neither highly Romanticized nor parodied.

The typewritten structure suggests linearity; however, I believe the piece requires a "depth-of-field" reading. (Both asemics and vispo require new kinds of reading.) One is directed to look into and through the dense layering (not across).

Federici's asemic-concrete composition implies, I believe, that a "text" is a dense field of accumulated meanings. Meanings can be distorted, obscured or disrupted by others. Emotional response competes with rationality. Linear (conventional) reading is misreading and misleading. True understanding of the text involves seeing into its depth and layers of possibility. The play of these layers of meaning, in turn, creates new meanings.

Federici's work, indeed, uses a randomness principle. The precise geometry of concrete poetry obscures the randomness and creates a deconstructive tension in the work. The asemic text demands a new kind of "reading" and finding meaning. Federico Federici's work helps open new possibilities.

VII. L'ESORCISMO CONTRARIO

Prof. Tom Konyves in *Approaching Videopoetry: Origins, Constraints, Categories - Evaluating Videopoetry: Selection, Modification, Juxtaposition*, IULM, Milan, 06-07/06/2018.

THE success of *L'esorcismo contrario* by Federico Federici is in the determined representation of the "event" (the exorcism)

as indirect: the breath of the speaker(s) is the only trace of their presence at the event - the candle responds to the breath, "referring back" to the event taking place.

The work is successful because the "selection" of the image - a candle responding to the breath of the speaker - establishes the indirect presence (visual absence) of the speaker but also (as a sign) contains numerous additional meanings; of life, of the impermanence of life, as well as memory, memorialization of the dead, light, the light of knowledge (but also the incompleteness of knowledge), etc.

All this is contained in the premise of the exorcism event, which refuses to be represented in the conventional "cinematic" narrative.

VIII. CONCRETE ASEMIC POETRY!

Michael Jacobson about *The way I discovered the Berlin wall has fallen* by Federico Federici, lulu.com, 2018, on «The New Post-Literate», July, 2018.

Federici has written a text of concrete poetry that extends itself all the way into asemic writing. Ultimately this book shines a light on the collapse of words and verbal communication, as if the concrete and the asemic were a swirling binary code unto themselves, living as a poetic thing, never dead but constantly being altered and altering the other. Yes walls collapse and so do languages. Writing systems disappear. Graffiti is painted over. The Berlin wall itself being the ultimate page and scar, leaving us with the question of what comes next now that the page is gone, and the asemic and concrete have run their course. Federici's book suggests that after the wall comes down we are left with a poetry heavy with mashed up typography and information. These are beautiful poems searching for freedom, and they document the duality of the physical natural world becoming digital echoes written on a computer. I am glad this

book is a physical book; it gives me hope that writing will continue to strive for new forms of expression yet not forget its history and where it came from. I recommend this book to poets, artists, typographers, cryptographers, and anyone with an interest in asemic writing.

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