

# UC Santa Barbara

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### Title

The Asemic at the End of the World

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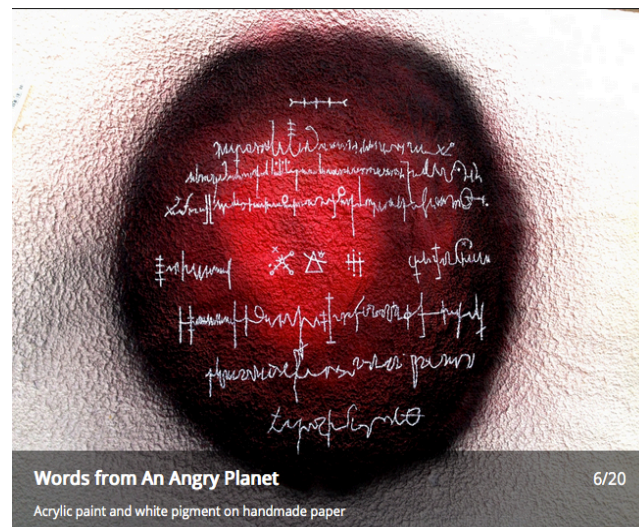
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Cited in N. Katherine Hayles, *Postprint: Books and Becoming Computational* (Columbia UP, forthcoming 2020) and Peter Schwenger, *Asemic: The Art of Writing* (U Minnesota P, 2019)



Anneke Baeten

In his introduction to our panel today, Peter Schwenger provided us with a wonderfully precise overview of the asemic as a designated art practice and hinted at its ubiquity in the present moment. And my fellow panelists (Seth Forrest and Sean Matharoo) have offered a rich historicizing of the asemic that situates it in relation to other linguistic and philosophical experiments with a-signification, with the interference and thwarting of symbolcity.<sup>1</sup> You will have grasped then that the asemic, named as such at the turn of the millennium by Tim Gaze,<sup>2</sup> and becoming increasingly prominent in both online communities and physical galleries—is that which looks like language, that which has the appearance of symbols, characters, and glyphs, but

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\*An extensive PowerPoint accompanied this text, which, it should be noted, was prepared for oral presentation in January 2017. Although the argument has evolved considerably in the past few years, placement in UC’s eScholarship Repository as a preprint for a work in progress is warranted because this version has already been cited in two academic monographs, by Schwenger and Hayles. Related presentations with slightly different titles were prepared for the following events: “The Politics of Form – What Does Art Know About Society” (Center for Literary and Cultural Research, Berlin; November 2016); “Mediating Contemporary Literature” (Queen Mary University; April 2017); “Ordinary Media” (Northwestern University; May 2017); “The Futures of Literature, Science, and Media” (Duke University; April 2018).

cannot be deciphered, much less read—the prefatory *a* in the name negating the *seme*, the smallest unit of meaning. The asemic enacts the gestures of writing, reflexively thematizing and performing inscription, subtracting thought and content, as Schwenger suggests, “in order to foreground what is habitually relegated to the background: the phenomenon of writing itself.”<sup>3</sup> Media, inscriptional surfaces, tools, and techniques all vary widely, as do traces or echoes of different symbolic systems (alphabetic or ideogrammatic characters, hieroglyphs) that might just be perceptible but are not. And although a fairly long-term genealogy lies behind the asemic, its time, I will suggest, is our own.<sup>4</sup> It is distinctly contemporary, of our moment, but also at a remove, made both possible and necessary by so-termed linguistic capitalism and semio-capital, as well as new technocultural logics of language—all the external determinations conditioning the asemic, those it expresses, and to which it responds. What I will do in my presentation then is explore the potentiality of the asemic now, to consider the force of an art practice that takes *not saying* as its principal rationale, a practice that indicates but also prevents writing in an historical moment in which, as Friedrich Kittler notably remarked, “we simply do not know what our writing does,” and to read it ultimately as a proxy primal scream of a global population whose languages seem to be, more importantly are experienced as, at risk.<sup>5</sup> We can regard the asemic then as words—or, rather, not-words—from “an angry planet” (Anneke Baeten).

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Perhaps the preeminent practitioner of the asemic in the sense of named artist is Mirtha

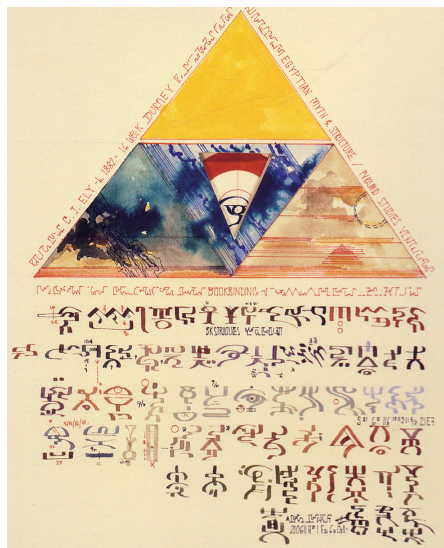


Dermisache, whose illegible script for Roland Barthes suggested the very “idea, the essence of writing”—that is, marking, scoring, inscribing a surface with communicable intent.<sup>6</sup> What so captivated Barthes about Dermisache, as he writes to her in March 1971, was the in-between, her “shapes, neither figurative nor abstract,” “nor exactly messages nor the contingent forms of expression.”<sup>7</sup> And many subsequent commentators have remarked on Dermisache’s imitation of writing in documental form—postcards, memos, folio-sized newspaper—the gesture in these material contexts invoking the presence of a reading audience, recipients who would complete and thus enact the

communication circuit.<sup>8</sup> Note then her adherence to standards of print with white space and columnar format, a spatial orientation from top to bottom, left to right, along with the dissemination of her work in books—the “communication formats,” as she says, stabilizing unstable writing, the “documental” functioning as a contrastive legible frame.<sup>9</sup> Her work’s titles, she notes, “just identify the format, i.e. they tell how to organize writings on the paper and possibly their order of appearance in a given year of production”: *Diario no.1*, *Libro no.2*, *Diez y Ocho Textos*. “You will never find any title referring to feelings or psychological dimensions,” she says—in other words, the writing is not somehow an unmediated reflection of consciousness or interiority.<sup>10</sup> “There are no secrets” in her work; everything is on the surface, unavailable for a symptomatic reading. And in her lined notebook pages, her inscriptions are consistent across pages; they are iterable, their content, their message, that of writing itself.

Dermisache’s work indeed offers a compelling thematization of the materiality of language but we can ask: why should there be a revival of interest in her work now, with ever more commentary, exhibitions, references, and now a collection of her writings, the first to be published in the US?<sup>11</sup> How more generally might we understand the relative vitality and ubiquity of the asemic as both amateur and professional activity, flying just under the radar of critical attention but noticed by cool hunters such as Bruce Sterling, who was moved to observe somewhat sardonically that the asemic presents itself as “some kind of ultimate literary frontier, a frozen Antarctica of writing entirely devoid of literary content.”<sup>12</sup> If a frontier, in what sense, and the old question: does this constitute an extension of or break from the literary domain as it has been historically understood? What, further, is the potentiality of the asemic and what is its purchase in this historical moment?

In order to see the present manifestation of the asemic as distinct, we might as a heuristic posit three periods or waves: the first exemplified by Henri Michaux’s experimentation with signs in “Alphabet” and especially in *Movements* and later works, his calligraphic-like strokes emerging from Surrealist experiments in automatic writing, the transcriptions of consciousness, bodily presence, and lived experience. This notion of the asemic as phenomenological exercise, as vehicle for accessing not just the individual mind but the whole of the visible and invisible world, “the unknown—the mystery—the openness,” persists in the present, but as I will suggest it is not the primary motivating force.<sup>13</sup>



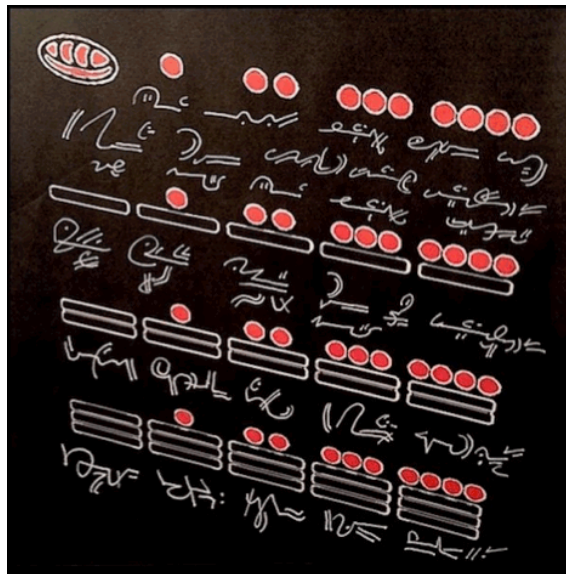
The second wave is exemplified by Timothy Ely’s self-described “meaningless scriptulations” continually pulled, to his consternation but not without reason, into the space of occult mysticism, given his full-throated engagement with alien mythologies, psychedelic fantasy, geological time, and sacred geometry. And latent in his insistence that glyphs, maps, and diagrams are “pure signal” that “resist symbolic, abstract and/or representational understanding,” is the notion that the asemic is both in-formed and de-formed by linguistic hierarchies, a means of channeling or attuning to ‘other’ cultural constellations, a “flight into Egypt” so as metaphysically to tap into standing reserves of anti-establishment energies.<sup>14</sup> Ely’s work is in part coterminous with the practice now named as asemic, though it is perhaps better understood as part of its pre-history, his account of its origins in his miming the inscription of Chinese characters and experimenting with backwards writing after the gift of a fountain pen made left-handed writing impossible somewhat at odds with the sensibility of artists who are more likely to situate their work as an extension of the traditions of visual poetry and experimental publishing, work that indicates—and paradoxically communicates—a sense of linguistic exhaustion.

And in the present, what I would regard as the third wave, the historical processes, the external determinations by which the asemic becomes such, are those that have also led to the pronouncement of the end of writing itself. Vilém Flusser, for whom the informatic revolution, the moment of the apparatus, has made print, and the alphabet, “superfluous,” poses a question: does writing have a future? He answers in the negative, with a fable. “As the alphabet is surpassed,” he predicts, “thought will liberate itself from speech, and other, nonlinguistic thought (mathematical and pictorial, and presumably completely new ones as well) will expand in ways we cannot yet anticipate.”<sup>15</sup> Alphabetic writing, which in its advent negated the sacralizing tendencies of the traditional image, substituting “anti-magical” formula, causal arguments, and historical consciousness for a kind of mythic deification of the sign, has in turn given way to the technical image, with its enumerative, calculative logic. If, “in the recent past the codified world was dominated by the linear codes of text,” in the present “it is [now] dominated by the *n-dimensional* code” of non-linear, ubiquitous surfaces, which he explains “irradiate messages,” informing us about “the world and our situation within it.”<sup>16</sup> The asemic may thus indeed be

“some kind of literary frontier” in our moment, as Sterling suggests, in the sense that it evokes the limits of certain epistemological domains: the end of language as we know it, the end of communication. “Text,” Lawrence Lessig proclaims, “is today’s Latin.”<sup>17</sup>

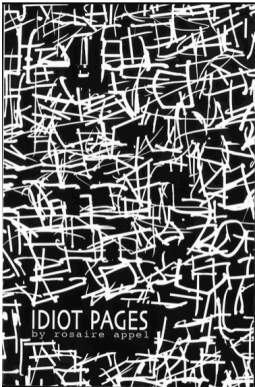
It is a short step from these poetic, quasi-mystical, and technocratic conjurings of natural language death to texts such as Ben Marcus’s *Flame Alphabet* and *The Silent History*, and to the classificatory schema of the Endangered Languages Project.<sup>18</sup> Throughout, the dominant paradigms are loss, risk, and extinction. The fall of the word and the rise of picture languages: emoji, gifs, video. Even a work such as Shelley Jackson’s *Snow* gestures toward a moment not just when language disappears with the melting snow, but also to a moment when the environment can no longer support it (there is no snow and the data centers are no longer sustainable).<sup>19</sup> So too the reiterative pronouncements of the end of language attend upon speculations about the possibilities of empathic technologies transmitting thought nonverbally, as with Mark Zuckerberg’s fantasy of an “ultimate communication technology—a communication without communication, which is to say no channel, no encoding, no lag.”<sup>20</sup> If for *Blade Runner* the language of the future was Cityspeak, mishmashed gutter talk, the contemporary corollary to the cinematic dream of a linguistically hybrid cityscape is a think piece about a world without any language at all.

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Ricardo E. Gonsalves, NeoMaya

It is important to emphasize that alphabetic scripts claim no a-signifying priority for the asemic and indeed more than one practitioner will speak in general terms about the dream of a “truly universal language”<sup>21</sup> and a “global post-literate writing culture.”<sup>22</sup> The expressed fantasy behind the “global post-literate” is of a transcultural, transhistorical writing available to meanings as varied as the subject positions of its readers. As Dermisache says of her writing, “anyone can read it as well as anyone”—implicitly, it requires no translation, no specialized language training, certainly no aesthetic education or school.<sup>23</sup> Tim Gaze says “book learning” is of “little use” in interpreting asemic writing.<sup>24</sup> Rosaire Appel frames her work in terms of “idiot pages,” “idiot in the sense of being located outside of our common languages,” with all of the attendant mechanisms for instituting standards and cultivating a common voice (though not in T.S. Eliot’s sense of a common word “exact without vulgarity”).<sup>25</sup> There is then a certain imaginary of asemic writing as “raw and unspoiled” as another practitioner has it, putatively uncontaminated by a knowledge economy—no associated jobs, no courses, no prizes.



If school instruction has historically functioned as a means of linguistic engineering, with dictionaries, grammars, and assessment procedures pressed into service for the purpose of retarding processes of linguistic change, that managerial function has now been outsourced, not to extra-institutional learning aids, but to algorithms. Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey, in the context of their analysis of evil media studies, argue that “the policing of language that has historically been accomplished by specific norms of rationality and the institutions in which they are staged and advanced, is today accomplished more and more frequently by specific technological apparatus.”<sup>26</sup> Character limits are a primary technique for the algorithmic management of language, limits from text field controls to messaging prodding the user to shape her language in accordance with presets, externally imposed constraints that operate according to logics of bureaucratic rationality. The elements of style now: more than a seemingly arbitrary number of characters would be unnecessary, excessive, unruly; and typographic symbols such as colons, semicolons, and dashes are decorative embellishments hindering the smooth functioning of plain text. The policing of form extends to design—optimal line lengths, article containers, templates, all “specific norms of rationality” enforcing consensus about linguistic and communicative standards, proper forms of expression that function under the alibi of “readability.”

Such is our “linguistic performance made compatible with the global linguistic machine,” as Franco Berardi suggests.<sup>27</sup> Even the “social circulation of language,” he reminds us, has been impoverished by norms, habits, specified forms of address. Once language became a fundamental structural part of the economy, he explains, it became “defined and limited by its economical exchangeability.”<sup>28</sup> Fredric Kaplan makes this argument more concrete and explicit in his account of the new formation of linguistic capitalism, which emerges not only from the calculation of the value of keywords but also and perhaps more importantly from the business of mediating expression through text-transformation algorithms: autocorrect, autocomplete, autocompose. The goal in this “new economic game,” Kaplan says, is not to capture our attention but to capture our language.<sup>29</sup> To extend this line of thinking would be to note, as many have, that our communicative capacity has been claimed as a new site for labor and the production of value—innumerable sponsored posts, product reviews, curated profiles, all flitting about the aether.<sup>30</sup> Language has now in effect been formatted, reduced to information, and functionally incorporates what Berardi terms “techno-linguistic automatisms.”<sup>31</sup> Such automatisms are scripts, organizational templates that instantiate habits and practices, program social relations, and bend language to systems and environments. Even emoji, after all, prescribe and enact a certain type of communicative performance, however much we might imagine them to operate outside of linguistic constraints.<sup>32</sup> And here we might think of post-industrial ideologies of flexibility and adaptation, the structuring of linguistic life according to socio-technical systems. The techno-linguistic consensus has been shaped by specific techniques of automatism and



automation, from Search Engine Optimization to text spinning engines, Donald Rumsfeld’s “message force multipliers,” proxy speech, and ‘staying on message,’ whereby repetition produces a kind of operative truth. So too the channeling of messages through multiple media such that the replication and dispersal produces a truth of circulation. As the title to Nico Vassilakis’ series has it: “Language is hell.”

In response to the capture of “the cognitive-linguistic capacities of humanity” by capital, Paolo Virno locates political potential in “idle talk,” ordinary communicative acts that are generative precisely because of their vacancy and



transitory nature. For Berardi it is poetry and irony, for him “the ethical form of the excessive power of language,” “the infinite game words play to create, disrupt, and shuffle meaning.”<sup>33</sup>



Irony is the means by which to violate the conditioning habits of the techno-linguistic order, to “untangle language, behavior, and action” from prescription, to re-format language so that it is no longer compatible with the terms and conventions of the “global linguistic machine.” What, we might ask, seems to be less responsive to the machine, to the

apparatus, than the asemic, and here we should take note of its ironic refusal to abide by the norms of paradigmatic documental structures—note these examples of the mailing label, the calendar, the invoice, the bar code—all of which we might especially contrast with Dermisache’s relatively proper population of the text fields from a folio newspaper. There is an even more ironic non-conformity in rendering bureaucratic documents and product codes unreadable, or to counter-frame the response to the injunction to “fill in” the box with the pronouncement, ‘it’s poetry’.



Ezra Li (previous); Ali Znaidi (above)

So too an asemic Facebook status update with individual characters presented as images rather than machine-readable text is a pushback against techno-linguistic automaticity, against the extraction and transmutation of individual affect into mere information, but one that has to

announce the incompatibility of the gesture with the text field controls regulating input through representational means. The asemic, Marco Giovenale professes in a different context, “cuts off the very idea of a decipherable message and of shared codes. But in this attitude, it clearly is an act of sabotage.”<sup>34</sup> If there is a decipherable message, though, it is that there is no message. What one can see in catalog after catalog, post after post, is the aspiring toward, or the becoming, asemic: lines crossed back over lines, overwriting, smudging, a kind of inscriptional occlusion—the urge is to negate, to evacuate semantic content, to resist codification by the apparatus of linguistics; that is, to invoke writing so as to destroy it, to use “writing-against-itself.”<sup>35</sup> This is at least one response to the machine among many alternatives, many possible techniques of jamming, circumventing, or otherwise disturbing the ordinariness of the linguistic protocols we no longer see operating in the background, their self-evident rightness pre-reflexively accepted as such. A gesture of refusal perhaps, or more modestly a thumbing of the nose at a system of technological rationality.

If language is to be evaluated in terms of its economic exchangeability, in contrast the asemic bears no real exchange or use value. It is claimed as “useless, mutant writing,” and it is not for nothing that the practice has so far proven relatively resistant to monetization.<sup>36</sup> Notwithstanding the handful of self-printed collections for direct sale by the artists, it is for the most part “free of ownership,” as Giovenale claims, insofar as direct management of intellectual property is given over to the creative commons and digital platforms such as Issuu and Scribd.<sup>37</sup> In this self-described gift economy, to each artist her own production, calculus, and debt obligations. Rappel’s marks, for example, are “made against the desire to make something add up.” Even her *Morpheme Pages* cannot easily be abstracted into information; they are “un-words resisting wording” and to be protected against “regulation,” “conformity,” “professionalism and perfectionism.”<sup>38</sup> They are, further, “un-codified marks on paper”<sup>39</sup> that “resist patterns and rhythms”; they are “not easily reproduced by hand, not easily recognizable, unsystematic.”<sup>40</sup> The a-semic, then, is also and importantly a-grammatical: grammatization as Bernard Stiegler describes it, “a process of discretization—for example, of the flow of speech, or the flow of gestures of the worker’s body,” or we might say of letters or characters, making discrete as the condition of possibility for “technical reproducibility and thus...control.”<sup>41</sup> Discretization within asemic practice, the isolation of component parts—strokes, morphemes, glyphs—is almost always self-reflexively unstable and un-systematized. Internal errors abound and the codes are not



shared. On this point consider Jeremy Badius' asemic typewriter, which thwarts the expectation that it be a proper instrument, with an instrumental code, its absurdity all the more apparent with a spacebar transliterated into a continuous line, so too with the inked cursive script on a page presented as output, neither the signs nor the medium corresponding with the typewriter keys.

Within a socio-technical milieu that prioritizes technical reproducibility, one dominated by competing symbolic systems—not just technical images, but code—the asemic might seem to stake a claim as the last vestige of ‘authentic human creativity’ through its insistence on the non-machinic—forms made as the editors of a handwriting anthology tell us, “by leaving a mark on a surface applied by movements of the hand.”<sup>42</sup> The material presence of the human in the moment of production is registered through handwriting, calligraphic scripts, and collage and scrapbooking aesthetics and it traces a grand arc of human history, as in these examples, from stone tablets to the book. A proposition, then, one that will break down but that we might initially consider as an insight into the governing assumptions behind algorithmic authorship: machines can write but they cannot write asemically, at least insofar as they cannot articulate and then negate intent. In other words they cannot produce “intentionally illegible” content.<sup>43</sup> The asemic seems to offer a paradoxically human signature; it may be without interiority but it is not without presence. It serves as a guarantor that a human was behind the writing—“I am a scribe,” not a bot, not an artificial intelligence.



Lucinda Sherlock, “I am a scribe”

But of course even the asemic can be automated because even handwriting can be made discrete, learned, and then copied. Witness what we might call the algo-asemic from So Kanno and Takahiro Yamahuchi, machine learning algorithms that learn the shapes and patterns of various written languages and reproduce them as pure form.<sup>44</sup> [video shown here] Creative experimentation and advances in neural net research aside, the specific domain of machine writing is fundamentally about the automation of labor. Algorithmically generated content is now pervasive in our media environments: automated reporting bots, so-termed robo-journalists, produce narrative content about financial markets, sports events, homicides, and earthquakes; a patented automated writing system issues technical reports, medical treatises, crossword puzzle books, dictionaries, and genre novels on demand. The *Asemic Languages* project, in contrast, is decidedly non-instrumental. If writing machines externalize thought, if messages can be transmitted from point A to point B without ever being processed by a human consciousness, the algo-asemic, with its lines that ‘look like letters,’ mimes monastic copying, a quasi-mechanical transcription, but does so while preserving the gesture of handwriting as embodied and therefore conscious activity.

Michael Jacobson, one of the asemic’s more active practitioners, advocates, and curators has said that in his view asemic writing “captures the techno-anxiety & information overload of a post-literate culture better than traditional forms of literary expression.”<sup>45</sup> As such it expresses, as you can see in these two works, “scattered thoughts” rather than normative attentional behaviors along the “disinformation highway.”

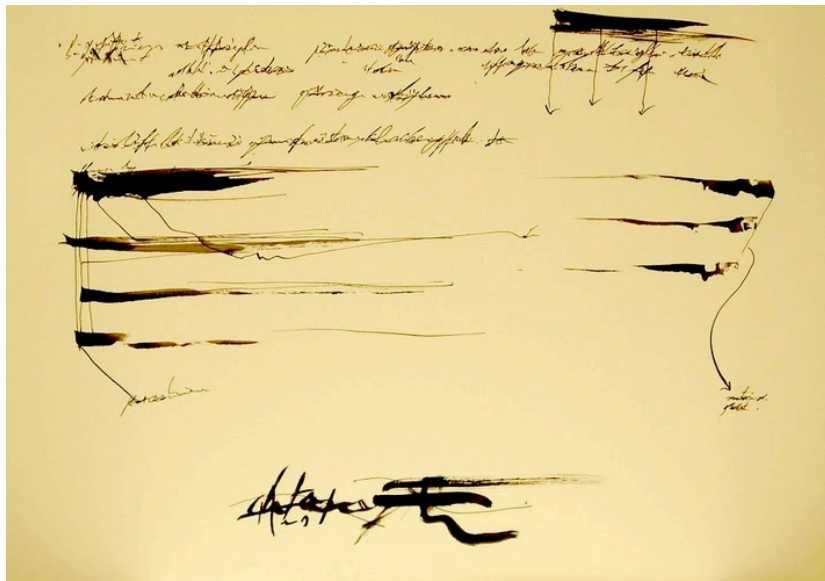


Shloka Shankar, Scattered Thoughts



Mark Fisher, Disinformation Highway

So too does it punctualize, and thereby facilitate our recognition of the status, function, and significance of human languages within media environments constituted by scripts for which we, humans, are not the primary addressee. The challenge of the contemporary is to allow for, and even cultivate, a mode of opting out of a regime of techno-linguistic management—a kind of disciplining by algorithms—that neither romanticizes refusal nor relies on notions of individual choice and juridical contract in the form of end-user agreements. In this regard we might simply read an asemic practice as a failure to manifest ideal linguistic behavior, a failure, that is, to properly inhabit the global linguistic apparatus. It makes perfect sense then that the asemic would be cultivated—and curated—as a quasi-liberatory form of writing that casts its lot with material intensities over signification; its symbols do not mean but rather “dance.”<sup>46</sup> Marco Giovenale, to close, with a provocation: “Is asemic writing the last and glowing/glorious twist of human speechless codes a few moments before the final crash? Sort of premonition? I don’t like the idea, and I hate pessimism. So I don’t want to think so. And I’ll drawrite asemics ‘as if’ we (as a peculiar species of animals) deserved a future.”<sup>47</sup>



Marco Giovenale

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Humans have, and have had, many ways of producing gibberish, both by accident and by design. Within the broad category of unintelligible speech alone one could situate glossolalia and echolalia, the rhythmic incantations of self-stimulatory behavior, along with popular media forms such as the accent video, the performative miming of the rhythms and intonations of languages not one's own. Here one could trace a line from Adriano Celentano's imitating for an Italian audience the sounds of American English (1972) to Brian and Karl's 'Skwerl, how English sounds to non-English speakers,' along with many others. Brian & Karl, *Skwerl* (2011), <http://brianandkarl.com/SKWERL>

<sup>2</sup> The term asemic, however, was used in 1981 by Barbara Johnson in her English translation of Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination*, the "supplementary mark of the blank" here described as "asemic spacing" (258). The term was used as well by Richard Howard in his 1986 English translation of Roland Barthes' *Rustle of Language*—Barthes here describing words produced by typographical mistake, e.g. offiver instead of officer, as asemic, as signifying "nothing," without "textual contour," a code "simply interrupted," one open to the play of phonism but not available for interpretation (323).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Schwenger, "Asemic Writing: Backwards Into the Future," *Marshall McLuhan and Vilém Flusser's Communication and Aesthetic Theories Revisited* (Video Pool, 2015), 187.

<sup>4</sup> And, indeed, from scribbling on test sheets in art supply stores to conceptual writing, there are a number of precursors and corresponding practices with a family resemblance to the asemic, among them grunge typography in graphic design; glitch aesthetics; and overprinting or overwriting, producing optically dense textual layers with reiterative inscriptional processes or through digital design. I would be remiss too if I did not mention the embrace of "perplexia" in electronic literature and the many varied experiments with text generators. To continue along these lines would be to note that invented scripts—fake writing, imaginary languages—are themselves not new to the 21C, though it is not incidental that the more well-known among them, the Voynich manuscript and Luigi Serafini's *Codex Seraphinianus*, should be framed as cryptographic puzzles, holding out the promise of a future in which a lost alien language or particularly complex system of encryption might be deciphered. Closer in spirit to the asemic would be the Python-based Procedural Language Generator for strange tongues—magnificent, noble, wondrous, "conlanguages" as they are termed, complete with glyphs, phonemes, famous places, and sample vocabulary. Chris Bissette, Procedural Language Generator (2016), <https://lang-gen.appspot.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Kittler, "There Is No Software," in *Literature, Media, Information Systems: Essays by Friedrich A. Kittler*, ed. John Johnston (Amsterdam: G&B Arts International, 1997), 148. It is specifically the introduction of assembly and machine codes, the backgrounding of code, that for Kittler alters our capacity to grasp the entirety of our writing practices, the sum total of actions initiated and completed by a single keystroke. Trace this back to Heidegger on the typewriter, which "veils the essence of writing and of the script. It withdraws from man the essential rank of the hand, without man's experiencing this withdrawal appropriately and recognizing that it has transformed the relation of Being to his essence." *Parmenides* (1942-43), trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1992), 81.

<sup>6</sup> Mirtha Dermisache and Jorge Glusberg, *Mirtha Dermisache En Arte De Sistemas En Latinoamérica = Mirtha Dermisache in Art of Systems in Latinoamérica: Internationaal Cultureel Centrum, Antwerpen, Belgique, Abril-Mayo 1974* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Roland Barthes to Mirtha Dermisache (March 28, 1971), available [http://artforum.com/uploads/guide.002/id16435/press\\_release.pdf](http://artforum.com/uploads/guide.002/id16435/press_release.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Geoff Huth, “The Importance of Documental Structure to Asemic Composition,” *dbqp: visualizing poetics* (February 3, 3005), <http://dbqp.blogspot.com/2005/02/importance-of-documental-structure-to.html>

<sup>9</sup> P420 interview (2011), available

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140911105452/http://www.p420.it/?p=art&v=dermisache&l=eng>

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Owen and Lisa Pearson, *Mirtha Dermisache: Selected Writings* (Catskill, NY: Siglio Press, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, “Sintonías,” curated by Olga Martínez, Fundación PROA, <http://proa.org/eng/exhibition-sintonias-mirtha-dermisache-1.php>

<sup>12</sup> Sterling, “Web Semantics: Asemic Writing,” *Wired* (July 13, 2009), <https://www.wired.com/2009/07/web-semantics-asebic-writing/>

<sup>13</sup> Josh Medsker, “Talking about Asemic Writing (with Michael Jacobson),” n.p.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy C. Ely, “Signal to Noise,” *Collection Management* 31:1-2 (2007), 199-205. Ely describes a reading session/encounter with a new age therapist and her client who claims to channel an alien intelligence as a means of deciphering his scripts. The client finds herself inadequate to the task: “it was revealed to me,” he says, “that I was in communication with entities from the 39th density.” Also see Ely, *The Flight into Egypt: Binding the Book* (1995).

<sup>15</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 53.

<sup>16</sup> Flusser, *Post-History*, trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013), 91.

<sup>17</sup> *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 68.

<sup>18</sup> Here too we might consider András Kornai’s research on the digital divide as “death machine” for linguistic diversity, which finds through an analysis of online community forums that the majority of language populations (8000+) are “digitally still,” or quiescent, which is to say on the threshold between life and death. “Digital Language Death” (2013), *PLoS ONE* 8(10): e77056. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0077056

<sup>19</sup> Shelley Jackson, *Snow* (2016 - ), <https://www.instagram.com/snowshelleyjackson/>

<sup>20</sup> William Davies, “Mark Zuckerberg and the End of Language,” *The Atlantic* (September 11, 2015), <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/09/silicon-valley-telepathy-wearables/404641/>.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Jacobson, interview with Lynn Alexander, *Prate* (August 2009), <http://www.fullofcrow.com/prate/2009/08/michael-jacobson/>

<sup>22</sup> Medsker, “Talking about Asemic Writing (with Michael Jacobson).” Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* is often tagged as asemic, but the practice and the communities that self-identify as such do not generally incline toward either systematization or self-contained world-building—producing not a complete set of characters for the generation of a discrete text, not a set of phonemes that constructs an imagined people (the Falub), but rather singular works that can be shared, contributions to a conversation and an online community that is also “offline and in the gallery,” as it has been in shows from Smolensk to Minneapolis.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Durgin, <http://jacket2.org/commentary/witness-mirtha-dermisache>

<sup>24</sup> Tim Gaze, *Conjectures* (Slova#6—2009), quoted in exhibition catalog for the first asemic exhibit in Russia (2010), <https://www.scribd.com/document/30488056/The-First-Asemic-Exhibit-in-Russia-2010>

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- <sup>25</sup> Rappel, *Idiot Pages* (Press Rappel, 2013), n.p.
- <sup>26</sup> Fuller, "Towards an Evil Media Studies," *The Spam Book*, eds. Jussi Parikka and Tony Sampson (New Jersey: Hampton Press, forthcoming), <http://www.spc.org/fuller/texts/10/>
- <sup>27</sup> "Running Along the Disaster: A Conversation with Franco "Bifo" Berardi," *e-flux* (June 2014), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/running-along-the-disaster-a-conversation-with-franco-%E2%80%9Cbifo%E2%80%9D-berardi/>
- <sup>28</sup> Franco Berardi, "Emancipation of the Sign: Poetry and Finance During the Twentieth Century," *e-flux* 39 (2012), reprinted from *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Semiotext(e), 2012), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/emancipation-of-the-sign-poetry-and-finance-during-the-twentieth-century/>
- <sup>29</sup> Frederic Kaplan, "Linguistic Capitalism and Algorithmic Mediation," *Representations* 127.1 (Summer 2014), 57-63.
- <sup>30</sup> Jodi Dean has written sharply of what she terms "communicative capitalism," which captures our affective social networks, relying on "the marking, adding, forwarding, and circulating of messages not because doing so 'means' something but simply to communicate." "Affective Networks," *MediaTropes* 2.2 (2010), 27.
- <sup>31</sup> Berardi, "Emancipation of the Sign: Poetry and Finance During the Twentieth Century," *e-flux* 39 (2012), reprinted from *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Semiotext(e), 2012), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/emancipation-of-the-sign-poetry-and-finance-during-the-twentieth-century/>
- <sup>32</sup> Alex Clark, "Emoji: The First Truly Global Language?" *Guardian* (August 30, 2014), <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/aug/31/emoji-became-first-global-language>
- <sup>33</sup> Berardi, "Emancipation of the Sign: Poetry and Finance During the Twentieth Century"
- <sup>34</sup> Giovenale, "Answers to Ekaterina Samigulina's questions," *Asemic.net* (August 14, 2015), <https://asemicnet.blogspot.com/2015/08/answers-to-ekaterina-samigulina.html>
- <sup>35</sup> Jim Leftwich post to the Post-Literate Facebook group (September 16, 2015)
- <sup>36</sup> Jim Leftwich, "Useless Writing," in *Things Rescued From Eternal Non-Existence* (Charlottesville: xtantbooks, 2001).
- <sup>37</sup> SJ Fowler, "An interview with Marco Giovenale," *3:AM Magazine* (June 14, 2011), <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/maintenant-65-marco-giovenale/>
- <sup>38</sup> Rappel, *Morpheme Pages* (NY: Press Rappel, 2008), n.p.
- <sup>39</sup> *Home & Elsewhere (Poems)* (Press Rappel, 2014), n.p.
- <sup>40</sup> Quotes from *Idiot Pages* and *Morpheme Pages*.
- <sup>41</sup> Stiegler, "Teleologies of the Snail: The Errant Self Wired to a WiMax Network," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (March/May 2009): 40.
- <sup>42</sup> Gaze and Michael Jacobson, eds., *An Anthology of Asemic Handwriting* (Den Haag: Uitgeverij, 2013), a collection of handwriting styles from Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) to the present.
- <sup>43</sup> Medsker, "Talking about Asemic Writing (with Michael Jacobson)."
- <sup>44</sup> So Kanno, *Asemic Languages* (2016), <http://kanno.so/asemic-languages/>.
- <sup>45</sup> Michael Jacobson, interview with Lynn Alexander, *Prate* (August 2009), <http://www.fullofcrow.com/prate/2009/08/michael-jacobson/>
- <sup>46</sup> Medsker, "Talking about Asemic Writing (with Michael Jacobson)."
- <sup>47</sup> Giovenale, "Answers to Ekaterina Samigulina's questions," *Asemic.net* (August 14, 2015), <https://asemicnet.blogspot.com/2015/08/answers-to-ekaterina-samigulina.html>