

Critical Bibliographies

Audra Wolowiec

Poetics of Sound and Language

“Do not destroy the book. Two lives are sheltered there,” writes Edmond Jabès in *The Book of Questions: Return to the Book* (1965; trans. Rosmarie Waldrop, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983). The following list comprises writing, film, and sound from a range of authors, artists, and poets for whom the spaces between words, margins, and syllables coalesce to provide locations of communitas. The page becomes a destination, a portal, and a place of encounter. We meet there, we exchange there. Jabès continues, “Yukel, with you, the word is a voyage.”

Caroline Bergvall, Laynie Browne, Teresa Carmody, and Vanessa Place, eds., *I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women* (Los Angeles: Les Figues Press, 2012)

“I, like most poets, work at subverting the word’s transparency for its concept by stressing the ‘body’ of the word, its sound, sometimes its shape,” writes Rosmarie Waldrop in a statement anthologized here, “Some Ambivalence about the Term ‘Conceptual Poetry.’” An archive presenting some sixty writers (who often cross over into the realm of visual arts)—among them Susan Howe, Frances Richard, Jen Bervin, Cecilia Vicuña,

and Joan Retallack—and a few discoveries, especially Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, from her writing *Disease*, on a particular silence in speech: “When the amplification stops there might be an echo. She might make the attempt then. At the pause. She waits inside the pause. She takes rapidly the air, in gulfs, in preparation for the distances to come.”

Lisa Robertson, *The Weather*

(Vancouver: New Star Books, 2001)

This collection of poetry begins with a meditation on place that evokes the cadence of tidal forecasts one might overhear on the radio. Neither here nor there, a slippery sense of time allows language to wash over the reader as days of the week fade into intimate rhythm. John Cage might have unwittingly described it best, where one thought slips into the envelope of the next, when he described his collaborations with Merce Cunningham as “less like an object, more like the weather.”

Clarice Lispector, *Near to the Wild Heart: A Novel*, trans. Alison Entrekin

(New York: New Directions, 2012)

This new translation, one of four Lispector novels issued by New Directions, includes a fragmented image of the author’s glance, languidly drawing us in, from corner to page. In this space of estatic stillness, Lispector treads on the edges of language, at once tentative and seductive, her words buoyantly claiming the space of becoming. She writes, “Eyes closed, surrendered, she softly spoke words

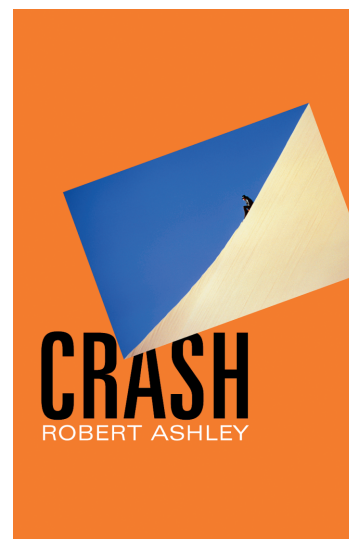
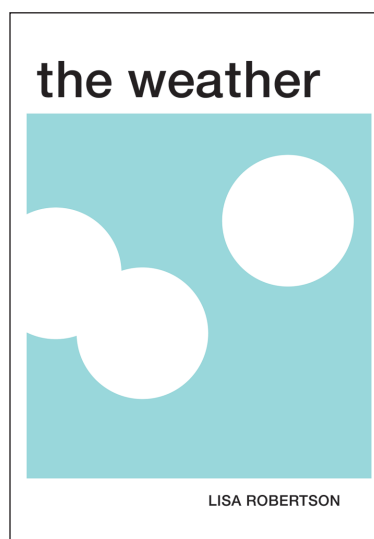
born in that instant, never before heard by anyone, still tender from their creation—fragile, new shoots.” Pages later, as if continuing the same thought, “She murmurs in a low voice, utters warm, molten syllables.”

Robert Ashley, *Crash* (Santa Fe: Burning Books, 2014)

“This is a book. This is a film. This is night,” begins *The North China Lover* by Marguerite Duras. The most interesting parts of texts written to be performed are often the liner notes (or with Duras, the insert shots: “A blue sky bursting with light. Daybreak over the river.”). Providing context for pace and place, in *Crash*, an opera for six voices, Ashley offers descriptions to inhabit the style of the three main characters. For *Thoughts*, “as if the speaker is talking to somebody on the telephone,” followed by *Crash* “as if a certain kind of poetry is being recited,” and for *The Journal*, where “The speaker has a ‘glitch’ in his speaking: he/she repeats part of a word every sentence or so.” Here, the slippery nature of speech is masked directly in the writing, *Day for Night*, fade to black.

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975)

“If it were possible to imagine an aesthetic of textual pleasure, it would have to include: writing aloud . . . it is carried not by dramatic inflections, subtle stresses, sympathetic accents, but by the grain of the voice, an erotic mixture of timbre and language . . .



what it searches for are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh." Barthes continues, "Text means Tissue"; a close echo of *A Lover's Discourse*, from the chapter "Talking": "Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words."

Brandon LaBelle and Christof Migone, eds., *Writing Aloud: The Sonics of Language* (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, and Downey, CA: Ground Fault Recordings, 2001)

With evocative chapter headings like "Private Call—Public Speech," "Speaking=Hearing=Speaking," "The Mud of Language," and "Graphic Opacity," and slippery terminology such as "geological stutter" (as well as, revisiting Barthes, "Graffiti functions as a possible model of a loud writing"), this anthology of texts by writers and artists from many disciplines continues to provide articulation and outline for much of my work with sound, language, and site.

Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010)

This compilation of interviews with twenty-four artists spanning generations, from Pauline Oliveros, Christina Kubisch, Maria Chavez, and the charming lower-case communicator Antye Greie, a self-described "poem producer," features personal accounts

that encapsulate multidirectional approaches to working with sound including time, language, memory, embodiment, and my favorite aspect of the experience of listening to the recorded voice, being "alone together."

Ann Lauterbach, *The Night Sky: Writings on the Poetics of Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008)

In the chapter "As (It) Is: Towards a Poetics of the Whole Fragment," Lauterbach sifts through the layered meaning of an item found "as is." Her agile writing shifts from the literary to the personal, including one of my favorite quotes on the role of failure, by Barbara Johnson from "Disfiguring Poetic Language," "It is precisely out of the flaw or excess in an equation that meaning springs."

Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*, 16mm color film, 100 min. (Argos Films, 1983; DVD dist. Criterion)

This is one of the rare films I could listen to without images, not that the visual score is less than striking, but the narration read aloud as a letter reaches toward an experience that could be described as "the faraway nearby," to borrow the title of a book by Rebecca Solnit. "He wrote me: I would have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining." Like *News from Home*, a 1977 documentary film directed by Chantal Akerman, a slow personal account of her time in New York City read from letters exchanged with her

mother, *Sans Soleil* holds the viewer in a continuous invitation to travel. Perhaps the experience can best be described by the director and critic Jean-Pierre Gorin: "the film that hasn't yet finished with you."

Eric Isaacson, *Mississippi Records Tape Series* (Portland, OR, available online)

With scratchy hand-drawn inserts and titles like "I Learned It All the Hard Way," "That's My Opinion & It's True," and "We're Gonna Make It," from blues to raga to new wave, these rare mixes and analogue compilations continue to keep me company in the studio.

Audra Wolowiec is an interdisciplinary artist based in New York City. Her work has been exhibited internationally and in New York at Art in General, Studio 10, Norte Maar, Socrates Sculpture Park, and the Center for Performance Research. Featured in *Modern Painters*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Sound American*, and the *New York Times*. She currently teaches at SUNY Purchase and was the inaugural artist educator in residence at Dia:Beacon. www.audrawolowiec.com

