Writing Aloud: Theories of Sound and Silence

Course Description

Here form is content, content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read—or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.

- Samuel Beckett (writing about James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*)

I write before my self by apprehension, with no comprehension, the night vibrates, I see with my ears, I advance into the bosom of the world, hands in front, capturing the music with my palms, until something breathes under the pen's beak. (I've just written these lines eyelids closed as usual, because the day and its huge light keeps us from seeing what is germinating.)

- Hélène Cixous

One by one.

- Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

There is no silence. Your mind makes noise.

- Bruce Nauman

A course tracking the sonic *in* and *through* writing as it is invoked and deployed by writers, artists, and theorists. The sonic functions as an amplification of the word in its role as a wager of presence. The word and its rhythmic materiality; its negotiations between the formal and the formless; its exponential xeno-embodiments; its lawfulness and its unruliness; its precision and its poetic slippages—all examined through the filter of the *sonic* word (including the unspoken, or as Beckett put it, the *unword*—its attendant specter) and in particular how it functions as a paradigmatic manifestation of the pervasiveness, persistence and proliferation of the performative. Silence as experienced by John Cage, passivity as activated by Maurice Blanchot, nonperformance as articulated by Fred Moten will all come into play via the expanded notion of
the sonic that will be explored in this course. Noise, voice, orality, glossolalia, listening, mutism, mistranslations, stutterance, soundfullessness, non-cochlear sound (Kim-Cohen), parasitology (Serres), syncope (Clément)—an incipient list of known terms and neologisms that exemplify the range of connected divagations the course will attempt to trace. Daniella Cascella in En Abîme: Listening, Reading, Writing considers "writing as the other side of sound. Instead of looking for answers it echoes questions with questions, riddles with riddles, it adds complexity to complexity. Writing sound traces the shifting in the tuning of my words, of my questions, of sounds drifting." Questions will undoubtedly abound, and we will be posing them aloud: How does one approach a writing that includes sound within its core constituency? What does such a writing sound like? What are the social and sensorial stakes of such sonophiliac theories and practices?

Bibliography


