

# A Review of Mirtha Dermisache: Selected Writings

written by Joseph Houlihan | November 12, 2018



*Mirtha Dermisache: Selected Writings*

by Mirtha Dermisache

Edited by Daniel Owen, Lisa Pearson

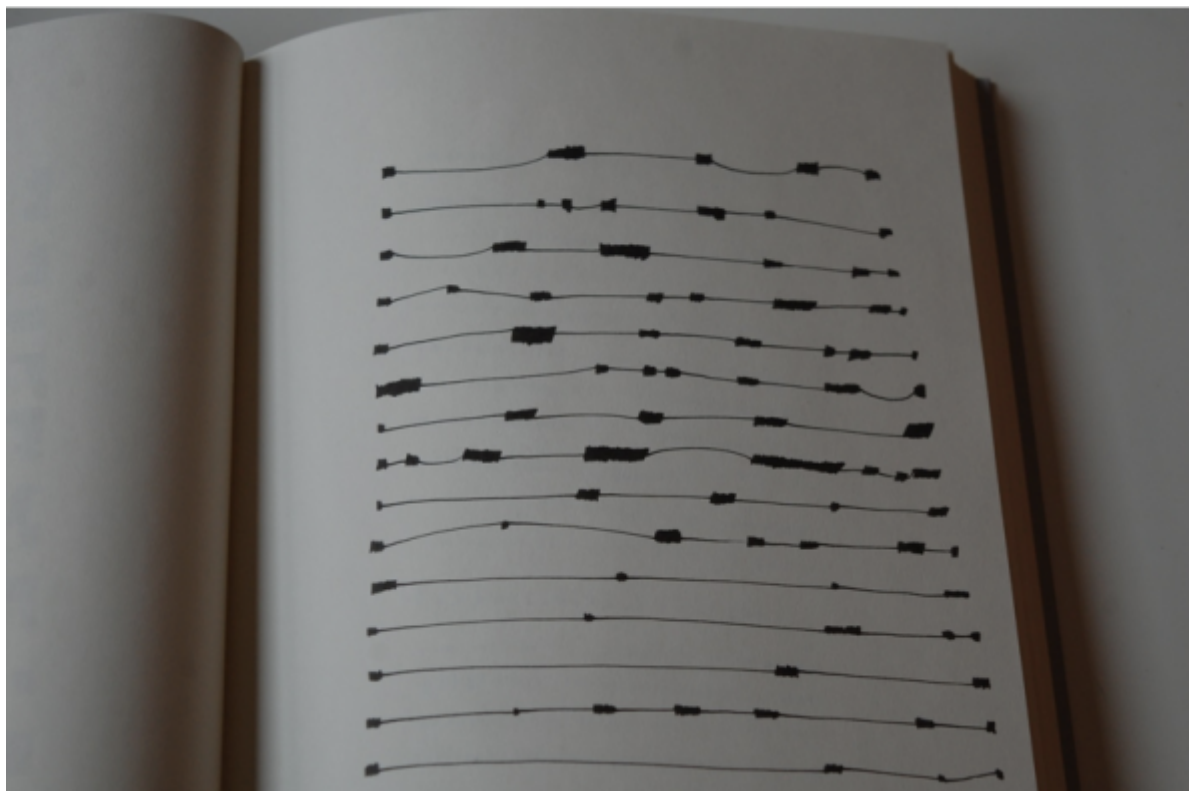
Ugly Duckling Presse, March 2018

128 pages / [Ugly Duckling Presse](#) / [Amazon](#)

*Mirtha Dermisache was born in Argentina in 1940. And she first came into prominence during the late 1960s. In 1972, she contributed to a show at the Centro de Arte Y Comunicacion in Buenos Aires. Upon viewing that show Roland Barthes commented that Dermisache captured the essence of writing. This new collection of her conceptual texts, called asemic writing, engages with lexical games, journals, and the process of sharing written documents. The book is a collection of ink drawings, manifested as a projective language.*

*From the website of Ugly Duckling Presse: "Using ink on paper, Dermisache invented an array of graphic languages, each with their own unique lexical and syntactic structures. Some resemble a child's scrawl while some feel like nets or knots or transcriptions of seismic waves. Some resemble maps of archipelagos while others look like scores for inscrutable performance. What they all have in common is their remarkable clarity as texts."*

## **I. Notes on Encountering Mirtha Dermisache**



## 1. The Everyday

The loveliness of these markings comes in the sense of distributions and serialism. She draws pages of box plots, or pages of distributions; data groups distributed across the page. And in this, Dermisache also illustrates the sense of bodies that group into distributions and lives lived within a common distribution. Bodies perform actions within a shared vocabulary, and lives are lived according to generalized patterns; think *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels*, or *Walter Mitty*.

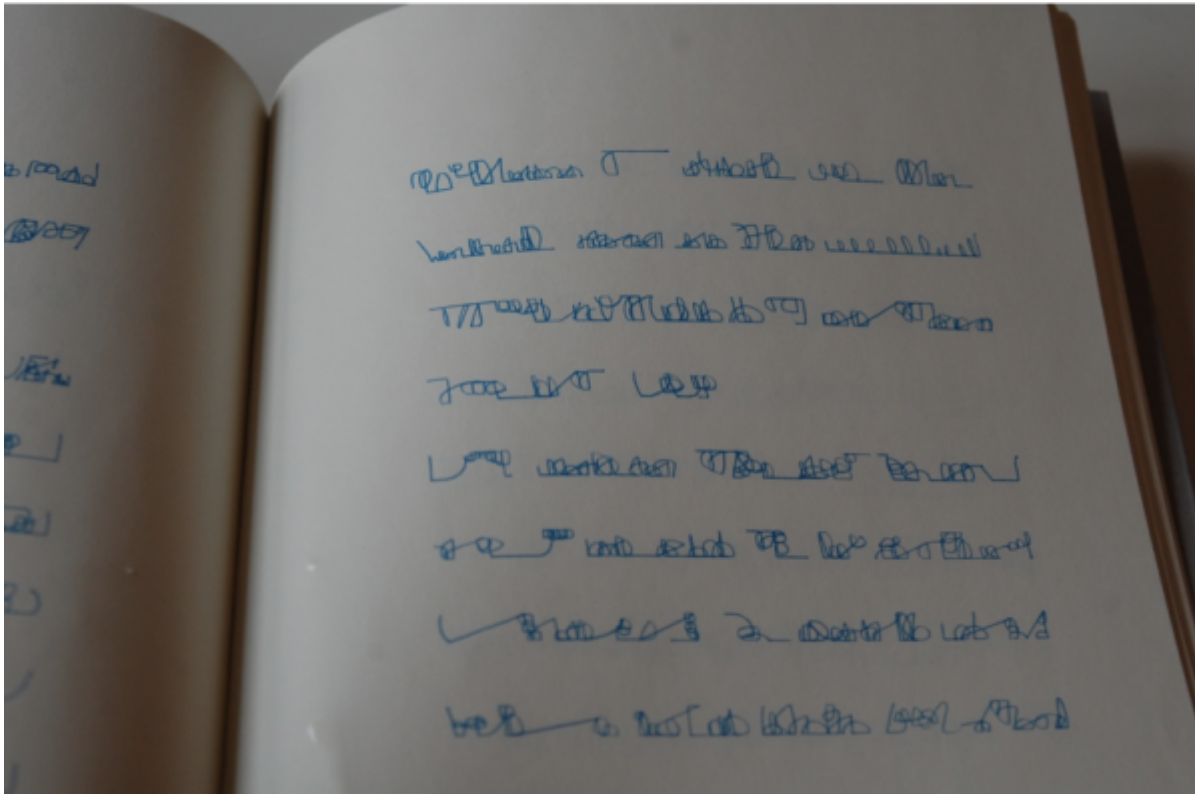
According to French epistemologists like Canguilhem and Simondon, speaking and thinking is always performed in concert, with meaning arriving as sensation, rippling across multiple bodies. Thoughts come out of our language eco-systems, and are not discrete within bodies. As Roger Gilbert Lecomte describes it, the human experience is not made of an archipelago of many islands but rather, as in the peaks of a submerged mountain range. And language is shared, with most language acts, falling within common distributions. To see box plots linked together in a serial text show a little bit about the shared performance of language and living.

## 2. Consider the Monte Carlo Integration



Her pages demonstrate the way a field of data evokes possibility, with information always in a state of becoming and in a state of proximity . This page, evoking the Monte Carlo integration allows for the probable to become predictive. Within fields of data, or fields of affective information exchanged within systems of expression, the site of expression describes a possible way forward. It's a fascinating glimpse at a concept like Saussure's synchronic moment in time for a language, and suggests the possibility that a moment can create a future.

### **3. Latin Noise**



The marking, the scratches fall within a clear Latin alphabet. A hand betrays a native alphabet. The ink pen moving left to right. The alphabet inscribes the imagination, so that the very symbols of a written language inform the experience of thinking within that language.

I live in Minneapolis, and so it's not uncommon to read handwritten notes from non-Latin alphabets of Amharic, Karen, or Cyrillic, and the Amharic or Karen English elides in a new beautiful context. English written in an Arabic hand takes on a new slant. The alphabet informs the language, informs the meaning, and the thinking.

## II. A Language that Heals as Much as it Separates

Encountering Dermisache's work, it's impossible to avoid the operatic and avant garde traditions of gibberish. Countless prominent modernists, like Joyce, and Gombrowicz, employed fake languages, making strange within familiar forms. This mirrored the futurist idealism of concrete language projects, Esperanto and Hebrew, but also described an essential irreverence for the absolutism of concrete solutions. Many of the great absurdist texts, Jarry's *Ubu Roi* for example, or Artaud's later writing, use gibberish to describe the violence of an overwhelming certainty or finality.

Dermisache's texts, as physical objects, further evoke the necessary objectness of the written word. Words are necessarily objects to be exchanged. They have concrete aspects, shapes and sizes. Derrida wrote often about the additional information that words and phrases accrete. Words in serial take on meaning across systems of signification, as objects moving between people. And the purpose of Dermisache's obscure messages is not

necessarily to convey specific information content, but rather to serve as a commentary on our process of meaning making. The process of the decoding, becomes the message. The final writing often most closely resembles a kind of ledger, or blotter. It's an explicit concrete project, without any explicit concrete message. Ugly Duckling has produced a lovely and thorough collection of these writings that culminates with an expanding significance.