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# Avital Ronell

## USA

## Performing Women

### The author

**Avital Ronell** Ph.D., was born in Prague. Her parents were Israeli diplomats who returned to Israel before going to New York. Avital Ronell studied at the Hermeneutics Institute in Berlin with Jacob Taubes, ultimately earned her doctorate at Princeton University, and then worked with Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous in Paris. She was professor of comparative literature and theory at the University of California at Berkeley for several years before eventually returning to New York, where she currently is chair of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literature and teaches German and comparative literature and theory – in addition to her yearly Fall semester seminar about Derrida – and where she continues to churn out a breathtaking range of deconstructive rereadings of everything from technology, the Gulf War, and AIDS, to opera, addiction, and stupidity.

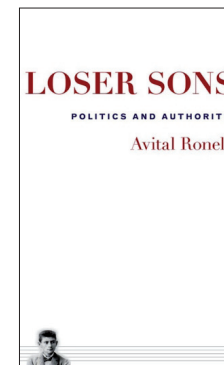
### Bibliography

***Loser Sons: Politics and Authority***, (University of Illinois Press, 2012)  
***Fighting Theory***, (University of Illinois Press, 2009)  
***The Test Drive***, (University of Illinois Press, 2007)  
***Dictations: On Haunted Writing***, (University of Illinois Press, 2006)  
***Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania***, (University of Illinois Press, 2004)  
***Stupidity***, (University of Illinois Press, 2002)  
***Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium***, (University of Nebraska Press, 1998)  
***The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech***, (University of Nebraska Press, 1989)

Saturday October 12th | 7.30pm | NYLA

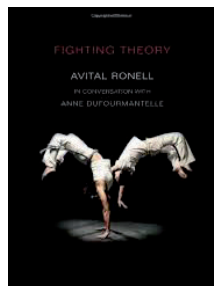
### Zoom

***Loser Sons: Politics and Authority***, (University of Illinois Press, 2012)



There are sons who grow up unhappily believing that no matter what they do, they cannot please their fathers. Often unable to shed their sense of lifelong failure, either they give up and suffer in a permanent sulk, or they try with all their might to prove they are worth something after all. These are the «loser sons,» a group of historical men as varied as President George W. Bush, Osama bin Laden, and Mohammed Atta. Their names quickly illustrate that not only are their problems serious, but they also make serious problems for others, expanding to whole nations. When God is conceived and inculcated as an angry and impossible-to-please father, the problems can last for generations.

**Fighting Theory**, (University of Illinois Press, 2009)

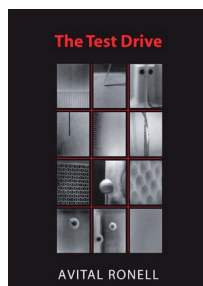


International interest in the work of Avital Ronell has expressed itself in reviews, articles, essays, and dissertations. For *Fighting Theory*, psychoanalyst and philosopher Anne Dufourmantelle conducted twelve interviews with Ronell, each focused on a

key topic in one of Ronell's books or on a set of issues that run throughout her work.

What do philosophy and literary studies have to learn from each other? How does Ronell place her work within gender studies? What does psychoanalysis have to contribute to contemporary thought? What propels one in our day to Nietzsche, Derrida, Nancy, Bataille, and other philosophical writers? How important are courage and revolt? Ronell's discussions of such issues are candid, thoughtful, and often personal, bringing together elements from several texts, illuminating hints about them, and providing her up-to-date reflections on what she had written earlier.

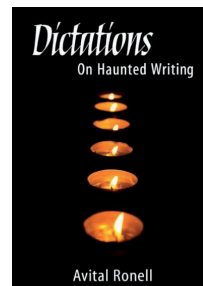
**The Test Drive**, (University of Illinois Press, 2007)



The *Test Drive* deals with the war perpetrated by highly determined reactionary forces on science and research. How does the government at once promote and prohibit scientific testing and undercut the importance of experimentation? To what extent is testing

at the forefront of theoretical and practical concerns today? Addressed to those who are left stranded by speculative thinking and unhinged by cognitive discourse, *The Test Drive* points to a toxic residue of uninterrogated questions raised by Nietzsche, Husserl and Derrida. Ranging from the scientific probe to modalities of testing that include the limits of friendship or love, this work explores the crucial operations of an uncontestable legitimating machine. Avital Ronell offers a tour-de-force reading of legal, pharmaceutical, artistic, scientific, Zen, and historical grids that depend upon different types of testability, involving among other issues what it means to put oneself to the test.

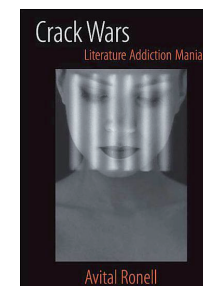
**Dictations: On Haunted Writing**, (University of Illinois Press, 2006)



"*Dictations* will change not only the way we read Goethe, but the way we read."- Rainer Nagele, author of *Reading after Freud*. *Dictations* treats the way in which Goethe continues to speak from beyond the grave; not only in the texts of Kafka, Nietzsche, and Freud,

but also in the ventriloquised writings of the spiritualist, Johann Peter Eckermann.

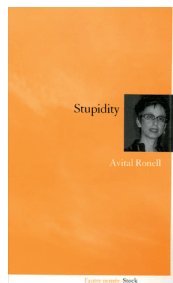
**Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania**, (University of Illinois Press, 2004)



Avital Ronell asks why "there is no culture without drug culture." Tracing and tracking the zones of modern dependencies, she deals with the usual drugs and alcohol (and their celebrities: Freud's cocaine, Baudelaire's hashish, the Victorians' laudanum), and moves

beyond them to addictive mappings that are culturally accepted -- an insatiable appetite for romance novels, for instance, and romance itself as well as the satellite technologies of our everyday existence. It is a commonplace of modern culture to presume that there is a subculture or counterculture deeply saturated with drugs, but such modern cultures need subcultures, and need drugs on every level. Culture defines itself, its classes, its power structures, and its economy in terms of how it allows and encourages drugs to circulate. If drugs are dangerous and belong to a thinking of the death drive, that danger seems to increase their appeal for millions. Where do the mind-altering effects of drugs begin? What is art but a kind of drug, a source as Baudelaire and Benjamin state of intoxicated destructuring? On a political scale, Ronell investigates how the so-called drug culture has become the perverted site for state-sanctioned ethnocide. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* takes up the problems of drugs and addiction in numerous ways, which Ronell unpacks and presents as exemplary of the contemporary fascination with extreme danger. For Ronell, *Emma Bovary* represents the first addict, embodying a yearning that calls from the bottom of her depleted soul, and which places her in a chronic state of dissatisfaction.

**Stupidity**, (University of Illinois Press, 2002)



Nietzsche, Einstein and Deleuze agree: the question of stupidity, its unrelenting sway, needs to be dealt with.

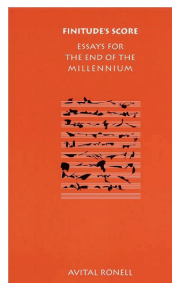
This book explores the urgency of stupidity, its hiding places as well as its everyday public appearances. It maps areas of thought in which stupidity has been traditionally concealed or repressed and tunes into

stupidity's static in the realms of literature, philosophy and politics. Neither a moral default nor a pathology, stupidity has no duty to truth yet nonetheless bears ethical consequences. At the same time there is something about stupidity—what Musil and Deleuze locate as "transcendental stupidity"—that is untrackable; it evades our cognitive scanners and turns up as the uncanny double of mastery or intelligence. A major phobia in the lexicon of learning, stupidity opens up new unintelligibilities, as Schlegel might have said—an unexpected range of explosive stammers—marking at times a new beginning, the philosophical primal scene of stupor.

*Stupidity* points to what has been historically inappropriate—the banality and stupidity of evil, as Hannah Arendt says of Eichmann.

On some level stupidity is a "feminine" problem, or has been evicted from philosophical premises to occupy what is marked as feminine incertitude. Still, poets such as Hölderlin and Rilke claimed the predicament of stupidity (or sheer idiocy) as reflecting the true nature of poetic origination. The work studies the modulation of stupidity into idiocy, puerility, and the figure of the ridiculous philosopher, instituted by Kant. Investigating ignorance, dumb-foundedness, and the limits of reason, it probes the pervasive practice of theory-bashing in supposedly intelligent social sectors. A section on prolonged and debilitating illness pushes the text to an edge of corporeal understanding, "at the limits of what the body knows and tells."

**Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium**, (University of Nebraska Press, 1998)



"These lit-crit essays are at once spoofable and brilliant."—Esquire. "'Trauma TV' is . . . the most illuminating essay on TV and video ever written."—Artforum. "Ronell is one of the few critical theorists of talent who can write her way out of the hermeticism typically associated with the deconstructionism of Derrida,

Blanchot, Nancy, or Lacoue-Labarthe. She jumps between the vulgate of television talk shows and the high theoretical jargon of the academy with the adroitness of a speed-fiend switchboard operator . . . [She is] the reigning queen of termino-millennarianism."—PoeticsToday. Suspending the distinction between headline news and high theory, Ronell examines diverse figures of finitude in our modern world: war, guerrilla video, trauma TV, AIDS, music, rumor. Her essays address such questions as: How do rumors kill? How has video become the call of conscience of TV? How have the police come to be everywhere, even when they are not? Is peace possible? Ronell writes to "the community of those who have no community—to those who have known the infiniteness of abandonment." Avital Ronell is also the author of *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (1989) and *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (1992), both published by the University of Nebraska Press. She is a professor in and chair of the Department of German and a professor of comparative literature at New York University.

**The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech**, (University of Nebraska Press, 1989)



The telephone marks the place of an absence. Affiliated with discontinuity, alarm, and silence, it raises fundamental questions about the constitution of self and other, the stability of location, systems of transfer, and the destination of speech. Profoundly changing our concept of long-distance, it

is constantly transmitting effects of real and evocative power. To the extent that it always relates us to the absent other, the telephone, and the massive switchboard attending it, plugs into a hermeneutics of mourning. The Telephone Book, itself organized by a "telephonic logic," fields calls from philosophy, history, literature, and psychoanalysis. It installs a switchboard that hooks up diverse types of knowledge while rerouting and jamming the codes of the disciplines in daring ways. Avital Ronell has done nothing less than consider the impact of the telephone on modern thought. Her highly original, multifaceted inquiry into the nature of communication in a technological age will excite everyone who listens in.

The book begins by calling close attention to the importance of the telephone in Nazi organization and propaganda, with special regard to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In the Third Reich the telephone became a weapon, a means of state surveillance, "an open accomplice to lies." Heidegger, in *Being and Time* and elsewhere, elaborates on the significance of "the call." In a tour de force response, Ronell mobilizes the history and terminology of the telephone to explicate his difficult philosophy. Ronell also speaks of the appearance of the telephone in the literary works of Duras, Joyce, Kafka, Rilke, and Strindberg. She examines

its role in psychoanalysis—Freud said that the unconscious is structured like a telephone, and Jung and R. D. Laing saw it as a powerful new body part. She traces its historical development from Bell's famous first call: "Watson, come here!" Thomas A. Watson, his assistant, who used to communicate with spirits, was eager to get the telephone to talk, and thus to link technology with phantoms and phantasms. In many ways a meditation on the technologically constituted state, *The Telephone Book* opens a new field, becoming the first political deconstruction of technology, state terrorism, and schizophrenia. And it offers a fresh reading of the American and European addiction to technology in which the telephone emerges as the crucial figure of this age.