

**Beginning to write after Clarice, after Clarice's  
(echo and dub versions)**

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*Ah, but to reach muteness, what a great effort of voice.*

I listen to the long breath of Clarice in her last interview, the long sigh after the repetitions of 'it changes nothing. It changes nothing. I write without the hope that what I write can change anything at all. It changes nothing.' The long sigh after she's asked, 'so why do you keep on writing?' Between her saying 'we're not trying to change things' and her saying 'we're trying to open up somehow', the long sigh draws a frayed line between muteness and a great effort of voice.

I always thought that writing after Clarice could only begin for me in that gap, with that sigh, in that suspension, as silence. A match is lit along with that sigh. In my ears its hiss transforms literature into literasure: it erases a voice, so that another voice can resound in the words that fill the sigh's dense blank.

I always thought of that sigh as the sound of *Água Viva*'s instant-now: a presence that punctuates her words and inhales them into their silence, in her longing for muteness. Nothing much could be said about it, but its fullness resounds and contains, porous, the pacing of intermission, the breaking out of breath.

's

's

's

Can you hear it?

Can you say it?

Clarice's?

Clarice's.

Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's Clarice's

's - 's - 's - 's - 's - 's - 's - 's

When's the breath?

An awkward breath

A match is lit

Lit erature

Lit erasure

Match the 's of Clarice with my silence

Does this silence hold muteness?

Does it hold time, will it build the rebounding walls necessary to host writing as echo?

Clarice: Clarice's.

On reading *Água Viva* and *The Passion According to G.H.* I become silenced. How can I move on after encountering words such as these that coincide, edge to edge, with something so crucial and leave me speechless because at this point the only action I may want to take is to become cavity, contain them for a while and echo them?

*The secret harmony of disharmony: I don't want something already made but something still being tortuously made. My unbalanced words are the wealth of my silence. I write in acrobatics and pirouettes in the air—I write because I so deeply want to speak. Though writing only gives me the full measure of silence.*

*I am speaking to you seriously: I am not playing with words. I incarnate myself in the voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that tangle up beyond the words. And a silence rises subtly from the knock of the phrases.*

*Whatever we live from—and because it has no name only muteness pronounces it—it is from that that I draw closer to myself through the great largess of letting myself be. Not because I then find the name of the name and the impalpable becomes concrete—but because I designate the impalpable as impalpable, and then the breath breaks out anew in a candle's flame.*

*It is exactly through the failure of the voice that one comes to hear for the first time one's own muteness and that of others and of things, and accepts it as the possible language. ... Ah, but to reach muteness, what a great effort of voice.*

How could I move on from this, so near to the heart, so very close to my innermost ?  
(My innermost .  
Innermost what?)

I do not move. I stay, and very close. Only so, I might begin again to articulate my words again, from the innermost . Gently but with intent. Not about or from Clarice's words but under and aside them, splitting their edges with the fine blade of my hearing, and listening between the two thin layers, curious as to what faint voice I can hear through them, curious as to whose voice it might be, how it might sound.

The faint voice murmurs to me: aside and with.

The faint voice murmurs: write aside, listen in, echo, write with.

The faint voice pushes me one slight bit aside, with and toward another silence, toward another void: aside, in, with.

Only then will the words that surround these words resound, other than these words, through that faint voice. I can only start writing again as I tune in and attend to the faint voice as it emerges out of the split edges of her words, deforms and unforms them into more words not quite all hers, not quite all mine.

I want to linger on the beginning of writing after Clarice as a gesture of friction and as a difference in echo; in reiterations of Clarice's instant-now. *The feeling core. And that makes me quiver.* To begin to write after Clarice carves a space not ordered but heard: the space of a prolonged echo, like the sibilant hesitant echo at the end of Clarice's if I try to speak it out loud, can you hear it? Can you say it, Clarice's, and perceive the friction in the simultaneous timing of echo? This is where my writing now begins: not to explain with definitions and limits, but to amplify, echo, transmit. Between the 's of Clarice's and the s that delimits my silence.

I tune in a current of words. I don't have to shed light on them but channel them as noise, let them carve my resonant caves of writing out of listening. The presence of these words is manifested as transmission, made of discrete instants and persistent through time.

*It won't stop. It goes on.*

Then again can I begin to write, and inhabit writing as echoing, almost nothing, almost.

The echo of Clarice's. I shall begin to write by building rooms for its almost nothing to resound: for the echo of Clarice's *tiniest act that I had always been missing*.

The volume of this writing can only be perceived in the distance of its echo—bound to it, but other, rebound.

To begin to write, I have to build rooms to host this echo through a number of resonant frequencies, one by one. The rooms take the name of three women, three writers, three resonant frequencies: Teresa, Laura, Elfriede. In their writing I've heard echoes of Clarice's, although none of them directly refers to her: sometimes because they lived before her, sometimes not. Writing these rooms of echo is my almost-nothing-writing in spite of myself, that allows those frequencies to coexist.

Juxtaposed to the echo rooms, I want to write three dub versions of Clarice's. I shall write them by fading the volume of her voice down, while keeping its bass and its rhythms prominent. Because I can only write by exhausting my desire for repetitions and quotations; by wearing them off; by focusing on the way they are heard, on the bass deep sound that can be heard in them before any rational understanding. That is to say, I could focus on another type of understanding, through words as medium and ghost, rhythm and material. In other words, a dub. I want to produce dub versions of Clarice's. I do not mean dubbing as explanatory subtitle or disclosure: I mean dub in the musical sense of the word, muddy and viscous, I want to bury the direct meaning of the words and keep their sound, their bass, their rhythm. I want to dub her sentences through my writing voice which inhabits and is inhabited by others. I want the resulting sentences, so close and so dissimilar, to articulate a transmission of words as they are spoken to the page; as rebeginnings through silence; as the telling of confinement; as a sequence of ghost tracks. *I'm not transmitting to you a story but just words that live from sound*. I want to produce dub versions of Clarice's words and sigh, that would hold and transmit all the time I spent attending to them. Their form might not be uniform but the density of time spent with them holds these fragments together as opaque unstable substance of muteness. I will never write what I heard: I want to write how I repeatedly want to hear. How I repeatedly want to hear. How I repeatedly want to hear, I want to write, of an almost silence, these days, that slides, into words, and pages, all of them. Shall I begin by telling you of that almost silence from its last breath?

After the dubbing, I might hear again my writing voice which is not over.

## Echo Room 1: The Frequency of Teresa

In *The Book of My Life*, Teresa of Avila ‘begins to speak in writing, to write in speaking’—so Michel de Certeau maintains in *The Mystic Fable*. In the case of the 16th-century Spanish mystic, writing in speaking is a way to disenfranchise her language from the norm, and to establish the articulations of mystic utterance on its own grounds. In *Água Viva*, Clarice too mentions a way of writing as speaking, as a perplexed state: *I almost don't know how to speak. Particularly speaking to you in writing*. In these words of Clarice’s I hear the echo of Teresa’s speaking, that does not know what it echoes. It is a fiction of the soul told by a writer unknown to herself within the canons of writing, yet present in her willingness to write nonetheless. Teresa’s sentences are the iridescent inner lining of her willingness. Like Clarice’s speaking-in-writing they emerge from an inward journey within the core of the ineffable. Clarice: *My destiny is to search and my destiny is to return empty-handed. But—I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can only be given to me through the failure of my language. Only when the construction fails, can I obtain what it could not achieve ... For the journey exists, and the journey is not simply a manner of going. We ourselves are the journey. In the matter of living, one cannot arrive beforehand. The via crucis is not a detour, it is the only way, one cannot arrive along it and with it*. Teresa: ‘Well then, to return to our beautiful and delightful castle, we need to see how we can enter it. It sounds as if I’m saying something idiotic, because if this castle is the soul, it is obvious that there is no way to enter it because it is the same thing. Similarly, it would seem insane to tell someone to enter a room if she is already there. But you must understand that there are many ways of being there... You have already heard ... how the soul is advised to enter into itself; well, that is what it is.’ Writing is the necessary journey through the creased stillness of presence by way of time, persistence and echo. That is what it is. It creates nothing but what it gives space to. Teresa is speechless, and writes: ‘I do not know what I’m saying.’ Clarice is almost speechless, and writes: *I almost don't know how to speak*. This ‘almost’ matters: its subtle variance rings within writing, as hesitancy, as breath. I begin to write after Clarice’s as I tune in the sound of her writing as a transmission of words, that is already there before it begins. I must enter it while already being there, I cannot arrive beforehand, it won’t stop, it goes on.

## Dub Version 1: The Not

— — — — — it won’t stop, it goes on, looking for beginnings and realising I have already begun, long time before this, there’s no doubt, this voice must have forgotten its beginnings, all its words have gone through me toward what they do not say, it changes nothing, voice, I almost don’t know how to speak, and I want to tirelessly hear of your points of fugue, of your eroded focus, to listen into your far and farther, to your fullness which is never completion, looking, waiting, hearing, and for months, nothing, but these pages, written out of a mixture of discipline and abandon, trying to graft those rhythmic gestures that will hold you together and prevent you from dissolving, will I ever find a way to say, of when I heard that voice speaking the ’s, or will I return with the unsayable, the more I think about it the less it seems to exist and yet its sibilant coils hold me, in this speaking, which is the only way, into this writing, which changes nothing, which is very much an opening up somehow, a tuning — — — — —

## Echo Room 2: The Frequency of Laura

*I am not playing with words. I incarnate myself in the voluptuous and unintelligible phrases that tangle up beyond the words. And a silence rises subtly from the knock of the phrases.* To use words as material is not a futile play but a profound engagement with the undoing and doing of meaning; unlike the roar of discourse and debate, it unravels in the rhythmic knots of a particularly loaded silent space. In these words of Clarice's I hear the echo of Laura Riding's *The Telling*, a text that appeared in different forms between 1967 and 1972 after she'd been silent having renounced poetry for twenty-one years. Riding too ponders the weight of silence, through a writing which is in fact a telling-on-the page uttered through a position of fractured authority: 'There is a new Silence ... in which desperate attempt is made to make this great non-speaking seem speaking.' Like Clarice's writing of the instant-now, that makes the almost silent knock of the phrases audible, Riding's 'word-use' allows a shift from text to utterance, utterance as becoming. The telling won't stop, goes on, extreme and sounding, an utter, another: 'We listen for our own speaking; and we hear much that seems our speaking, yet makes us strange to ourselves... Our truth cannot be all-told, from the beginning told, unless we tell it to one another. But the memory-adumbrations of our utter, total origin have grown dim, dimmer...' This moment is tenuous, and crucial: reaching out to you in another is articulated through other voices before its beginning. Then it is written: never only for the page but as word-use, for you as other/utter, utter both sounding and ultimate, holding breath, muting voice. A rebeginning, Riding calls it: a gift to one another in which and through which one could disappear in the simultaneous present. 'And I will expect that all our speaking to one another, then, will be as a book of one continual making.' Hear Clarice: *For 'I' is just one of the instantaneous spasms of the world. ... And handing myself over with the trust of belonging to the unknown. And such handing-over is the only surpassing that does not exclude me. I was now so much greater that I could no longer see myself. As great as a far-off landscape. I was far off. But perceptible in my furthest mountains and in my remotest rivers: the simultaneous present no longer scared me.*

## Dub Version 2: The Knock

— — — — — No longer scare me voice. You are the durable sense of my silence. Voice. I am not playing with words. Voice. We could be one another's record. Voice. Your substance is my vulnerability. And what to do when I have no voice to speak back? I listen like the . And through the . And with the of a always present. And I can write the layers of this voice. It's sibilant. It's a sybil. It ceaselessly charms into weaving. And unweaving. Of more words. I am *not* playing with words. I incarnate myself in the words. Inexhaustible. That voice. It doesn't have to do with think. But with sing. With how I got lost in song. I do not want to write what I heard. But what I want to continue writing. I do not want to write what I heard. But what I want is to continue writing. I do not want to write what I heard. But I want to continue hearing. I do not want to write what I heard. But I want to contain hearing. Until it's eroded. Until I can sense life infiltrating voice. Somewhere she. She wrote these lines and words and voice. They are repeated now. They return. I am not playing with them. Afterwards I will no longer need to wonder what I did not understand. Words beyond display of knowledge. It's a movement through. Until one day I realise. The only way is a cover version. An embodied repetition. I do not want to write what I've heard. But what I want to continue hearing. Until it is eroded. Until I can sense life infiltrating voice. I want to write voice. I do not want to explain it. I am not playing with words. I incarnate myself in the voluptuous and unintelligible phrases. That tangle up beyond the words. What shall I write then. To cover my silence with the blanket of her words. What shall I write then. Let me repeat the hum. To cover the volatile subtle presence. Of what I cannot write. What shall I write then. I skip the illustrations. The subtitles. The diagrams. The charts. The chants. Look at the blanks. The shimmering voice goes on. After all that's been said. It won't stop. It keeps speaking. In a silent book. Almost nothing to be said about it. But between almost and nothing is much. Having spent an enormous amount of time with it. Time spent is the point. It's not quite the voice. It's the echo. The tiniest act. Through muted combinations. In compound experiences that cannot be disjointed. Involute. In the end I hope you hear a silence. It rises subtly from the knock of the phrases. From the knock of the phrases. From the knock of the phrases. From the knock of the phrases. The phrases. The knock. — — — — —

### Echo Room 3: The Frequency of Elfriede

*Reality is the raw material, language is the way I go in search for it—and the way I do not find it. But it is from searching and not finding that what I did not know was born, and which I instantly recognize. ... I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can only be given to me through the failure of my language. Only when the construction fails, can I obtain what it could not achieve. And it is no use to try to take a shortcut and want to start, already knowing that the voice says little, starting straightaway from being depersonal. In these words of Clarice's I hear the echo of Elfriede Jelinek's 2004 Nobel prize speech, forty minutes stretching the common meaning of the official public address into a sequence of vivid meditations on and off writing and self. 'How do I ensure that all these words of mine say something, that could say something to us? ... It doesn't tell me, although it belongs to me, after all. My language doesn't tell me anything, how should it then tell others something? But nor is it saying nothing, you must admit that. ... Emptiness is the way. I am even on the sidelines of emptiness. ... The unspeakable is spoken every day, but what I say, that isn't to be allowed.'* Clarice: *It's so hard to speak and say things that can't be said. It's so silent.*

I want to hold on to the necessity of writing on the sidelines of emptiness. In her speech, recorded on video and presented in absentia, Jelinek voices a forty-minute utterance that begins and rebegins, and goes nowhere other than the sidelines. It advocates writing as drift and its destabilising potency, the presence of words necessarily jumbled, and presence through words. Jelinek often writes for radio, she is well aware of the fluid quality of the spoken word and of the necessity to reinstate the oscillations of meaning far beyond the demands of direct understanding; she voices instead 'what always had to remain unclear and groundless... groundless but not without ground.' Jelinek's words, like Clarice's, are at once too quotable and impossible to quote because then I would need to quote all of them, or acquire them through ceaseless repetitions. They may sound like they hold nothing because they cannot be kept or summarised, but their substance unravels in the density of their transmission through time. What matters is where the dial is placed, what is broadcast, what is passed on, through more writing and translating and reading and attending. With my Italian-into-English writing through Clarice, Idra, Stefan, Teresa, Laura, Elfriede and more, I can transmit how this language forms, like the unbroken imperceptible growth of a tree through matter and knots of instant-now: in different circles and rebeginnings, it goes on and it does knot. Almost nothing.

*It was almost nothing, but I could make out the minuscule movement of my timidity. ... Not the maximum act, as I had thought before, not heroism and sainthood. But at last the tiniest act that I had always been missing. The self fades into its surroundings, through a transmission that is a telling of otherness, grounded in an inner otherness. I can no longer carry the sorrows of the world. I have often thought about this statement of autonomy, voicing the need to write beyond demands and solutions; about the site of Clarice's writing, its otherness. I have longed for it, probed it, questioned it and regained it, and I have often drifted off wondering about the space of its autonomy, this transient secret writing which is not made to please and which can hardly be validated or substantiated, but secreted through yet another voice on the page. Once somebody said that Clarice writes as if nobody had written before her. To write after her though, to embody the difference that emerges in every echoing: this difference can be written, this moment, away from dominant doctrines and crippling hegemonies of taste and fashion, from flags and loud slogans, away from what pleases and what is expected or easily recognised, endorsed, promoted. Into minutiae, into otherness, into the frictions a lesser voice and its uncomfortable improper syntax, into degrees of stillness and their fragile or faint inflections, oscillating between muteness, and a great effort of voice.*

### Dub Version 3: The Knot (The Ghost)

— — — — — Voice I do not know what I say, you do not know what you seek, I cannot seek you. I seek your refrain. Voice you have lain by me and you have placed yourself listening on my shoulder, and you do not call me through your rhymes. I stretch the fabric of this blanket of words, a cover for a voice. I do not know what takes shape between this rusty syntax and the firm voice. I do not know what takes shape between this rusty uncomfortable syntax and your firm voice. I do not know what shapes, and what it takes to measure these undulations and the wavering. I do knot. I do not, no. I knot. I can no longer carry the sorrows of the world. I do not. I do not, no. I do not know. I do knot. I can no longer, no. But to voice: the muteness, the effort of voice, its words, their knot. — — — — —