

Writing a script is an embarrassingly ambivalent task for me: it is always me speaking, it is never me speaking. Somehow, my most productive space has always been somewhere between not I and not someone else; neither a projection of a semi-fictionalized self nor a wholly invented persona, I try to sustain an opening between these double negations. And yet this cannot be a space of complete abstraction; it is, I would argue, the impossibility of abstraction that makes producing language, including speech and thought, necessary and vital. I was interested in writing a text for *The Actress* because, instead of trying to hold this space open in the act of writing, we might produce this double negation in the process of adapting the script to different languages, contexts, and actresses. The resulting film would not record the definitive enactment of the text, its final performance, but rather the process of learning to embody it.

For the script, I had to imagine a scene, a certain speaker, her outfit and possible surroundings, a time of day; she enjoys the ritual of smoking herbal cigarettes by the window; she pleads with god to be sterile. Why must the script start with such a specific image? I think because speaking, if the speaker is to move beyond simply referencing given information, must possess some desire to extend itself; it needs a reason to make an address, even if toward nothing; it must know a boundary, if only to assume that there is the possibility of something not yet thought. If I imagine for a moment a computer on a spaceship a few million years from now sailing beyond our galaxy long after our species has disappeared, then if that little computer is to go on "thinking" in any way I would recognize, I hope it has another little computer or an immortal vegetable alongside it that it will never fully understand; not as an object to study, but rather to perceive its own limits, and from there to think, as simply the consequence of taking a form.

I also knew that the specificity I imagined in the script would be intentionally negated in the filming; actresses of different ages and contexts would play the part; my richly imagined setting would be replaced by a black box studio; even the text itself, with its gestures toward the visual form, sonic qualities, and nuances of meaning in English would be dramatically altered when translated into other languages. Our aim through these displacements was to pose more fundamental questions about writing, rehearsing, and performance, but in the script this already positions the character between a specificity required to speak, to make an address, and the negation of that specificity. I wanted to use this scenario as the motivation for the monologue, as the problem that would compel the character to articulate a new thought, and through which the script might unfold. When the text says, "I fall into this self, washing up into my form," in some ways the speaker of these lines is the script itself. Scripts are characters, thoughts, waiting spirit-like to take bodily form. The speaker, the script, is trying to understand for herself what thinking is in this form that she finds herself in.

Here a gap opens between writing and performance: on the one hand, I write the character in anticipation of an embodiment, in a kind of void; and on the other, the actress performs the role, in her own specific body and context. Taking this into account, the question I had to answer was what longing would this script have after having taken the form of an actress, that might prompt it to speak? This longing, I concluded, must proceed from a sense of loss. This becomes both the character's feeling of loss and being lost within a world she finds indecipherable, but also the script's melancholy for embodiments it has not taken.

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Thinking is an embodied feeling, but it is also a consequence of embodiment, a necessary reaction to it. In the script I first describe having a body as an arbitrary game of chance; and then as a cresting, a wave taking shape momentarily on the surface of the ocean. These images of chance and transience were meant to emphasize the potential multiple embodiments that the script might take; and that taking form in a specific instance closes the body off to other forms, severing itself from these possible other beings. The speaker begins to think by feeling for what is already absent; thinking conjures these spectral possibilities as its premise, and their negation as its motivation, if not to repair, then at least to account for that loss. The speaker begins to think and then to speak from the strange feeling of being something particular that follows from the lost possibility of being something else.

In the monologue, thinking is very different from knowledge. It does not impose form on the world, but rather the opposite: it is the consequence of the violence of taking form. Throughout the text, thinking is portrayed as an effect, as something that proceeds after the event—not to make sense of it, but simply as its necessary result. Thinking is “the beet-red froth glistening on [the] surface” of the aforementioned churning ocean; it is “the tidal wave that follows the earthquake,” not “a breath of air, but a drowning.” In only one passage is thinking something like a form of agency: “Every day I wake up in the illegibility of this former world, and in the contradiction I think like a spider weaves. A web stretching across the hole. Destroyed by the events of the afternoon, it is reassembled by morning.” Even here, the effort is far from heroic; rather it is a daily act of repair, to persist another day in a contradiction.

Knowledge does arise in the text, primarily in the confrontation between an entomologist and a vast termite colony. The opening reference to termites comes from an article in *The New York Times* about how individual termite mounds were not seen by scientists as an interconnected whole until clear-cutting the forest revealed the geometry of their positions. The scientist here seeks to find form in the world: to give an explanatory clarity to a complex reality. It felt relevant that this knowledge was gained only through the destructive act of deforestation. While the intention of this ruination was not research, it seemed a stark example of a logic that impoverishes the world so as to know it. What I wanted to do in the script was suggest a form of thinking that would, in some way, move in reverse: it would proceed in the wake of form rather than by giving it.

The challenge of this text began to take shape within these constraints and possibilities when Clarice Lispector came up as a mutual reference for Aimée and I. We had both read a handful of her works, and I had recently finished reading her collected short fiction. Aimée had read *Agua Viva*, and when I started reading it, it was clear that this was not only going to be a possible reference, but a direct model. The voice of Lispector’s protagonist seemed to will herself into being through the act of writing; she seems to undergo a transformation over the course of the text’s unfolding, its continuous current. The force of this narrator was something I wanted to carry into the monologue for *The Actress*. *Agua Viva*’s liquidity, the “stream” or “water” of the title, became a figure for the form-dissolving power of thought.

Translation, then, is not only something that happens after the script is written; it is fundamental to why it was written in the first place. Translation is already presumed in the script’s multiple embodiments, and it is inseparable from the speaker’s desire to think and vocalize her own form. It is there in Lispector’s *Agua Viva*, a translation in context as well as language, as I read it in my own space and time, and in relation to my own urgent

questions. It's in the very relation of thinking to the world: not as a representation of the latter by the former, but as something that simply spans a gap, registering the distance, but not covering or recovering it.