

instructions for reading

Água Viva:

Start reading, do not stop,
keep going to the end.

A ··· Is “X” the breath of the it? the cold radiating respiration of it? Is “X” a word? The word only refers to a thing and is always unreachable by me. Each of us is a symbol that deals with symbols— everything a point of only reference to the real. We desperately try to find an identity of our own and the identity of the real. And if we understand ourselves through the symbol that is because we have the same symbols and the same experience of the thing itself: but reality has no synonyms.

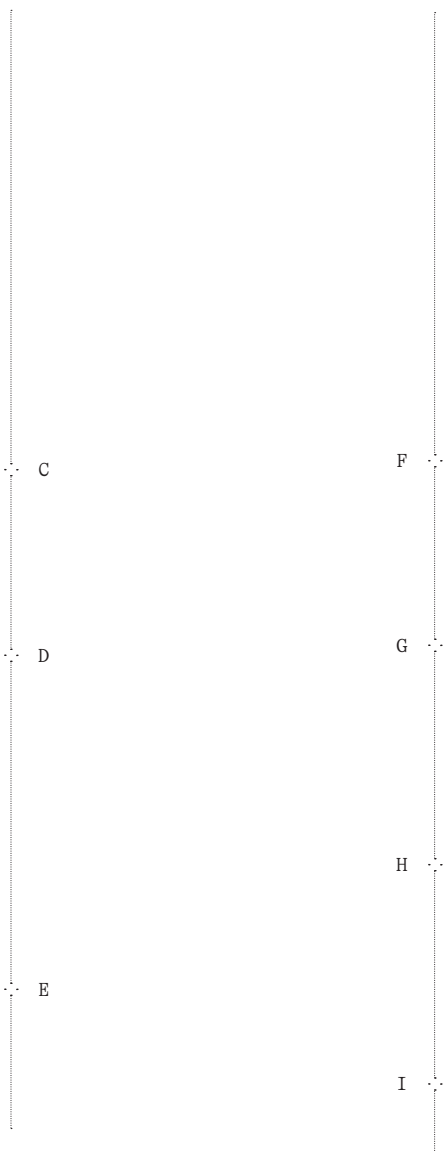
B ··· I am speaking to you in the abstract and wonder: am I a cantabile aria? No, you cannot sing what I am writing you. Why don't I tackle a theme I could easily flush out? but no: I slink along the wall, I pilfer the flushed-out melody, I walk in the shadow, in that place where so many things go on. Sometimes I drip down the wall, in a place never reached by the sun. My maturing of a theme would already be a cantabile aria—so let somebody else make another song—the song of the maturing of my quartet. This is before the maturing. The melody would be the fact. But what fact has a night that happens

entirely on a byway while we slept unaware of anything? Where is the fact? My story is of a calm darkness, of the root asleep in its strength, of the smell which has no scent. And in none of this does the abstract exist. It is the figurative of the unnameable. There is almost no flesh in this quartet of mine. A shame that the word “nerves” is linked to painful vibrations, otherwise it would be a quartet of nerves. Dark strings that, when plucked, do not speak of “other things,” they don’t change the topic—they are in and of themselves, they surrender just as they are, without lie or fantasy.

I know that after you read me it’s hard to reproduce my song by ear, it’s not possible to sing it without having learned it by heart. And how can you learn something by heart if it has no story?

But you will recall something that also happened in the shadow. You will have shared this first mute existence, you will have, as in the calm dream of a calm night, have run with the resin down the tree trunk. Afterwards you will say: I dreamt nothing. Will that be enough? It will. And especially in that primary existence there is a lack of error, and a tone of emotion of someone who could lie but doesn’t. Is that enough? It is.

But I also want to paint a theme, I want to create an object. And that object will be—a wardrobe, for what is more concrete? I must study the wardrobe before painting it. What do I see? I see that the wardrobe looks penetrable because it has a door. But when I open



it, I see that penetration has been put off: since inside is also a wooden surface, like a closed door. Function of the wardrobe: to keep drag and disguises hidden. Nature: that of the inviolability of things. Relation to people: we look at ourselves in the mirror on the inside of the door, we always look at ourselves in an inconvenient light because the wardrobe is never in the right place: awkward, it stands wherever it fits, always huge, hunchbacked, shy and clumsy, unaware how to be more discreet, for it has too much presence. A wardrobe is enormous, intrusive, sad, kind.

But suddenly the door-mirror opens—and suddenly, in the movement the door makes, and in the new composition of the room in shadow, into that composition enter flask after flask of glass of fleeting brightness.

Then I can paint the essence of a wardrobe. The essence that is never cantabile. But I want to have the freedom to say unconnected things as a deep way of touching you. Only the erring attracts me, and I love the sin, the flower of the sin.

But what can I do if you are not touched by my defects, whereas I loved yours. My candour was crushed underfoot by you. You didn’t love me, only I know that. I was alone. Yours alone. I write to no one and a riff is being made that doesn’t exist. I unglued myself from me.

And I want disarticulation, only then am I in the world. Only then do I feel right.

Do feel right. I in my loneliness am ready to explode. Dying must be a mute internal explosion. The body can no longer stand being a body. And what if dying had the taste of food when you're very hungry? And what if dying were a pleasure, selfish pleasure?

Yesterday I was drinking coffee and heard the maid in the laundry room hanging up clothes and singing a melody without words. A kind of extremely mournful dirge. I asked her whose song it was, and she replied: it's just my own nonsense, it's nobody's.

Yes, what I'm writing you is nobody's. And this nobody's freedom is very dangerous. It is like the infinite that has the color of air.

All this that I'm writing is as hot as a hot egg that you quickly toss from one hand to the other and then back to the first in order not to get burned—I once painted an egg. And now as in painting I just say: egg and that is enough.

No, I was never modern. And this happens: when I think a painting is strange that's when it's a painting. And when I think a word is strange that's where it achieves the meaning. And when I think life is strange that's where life begins. I take care not to surpass myself. In all of this is great restraint. And then I get sad just to rest. I even cry gently out of sadness. Then I get up and start again. I just won't tell you a story now is because in that case it would be prostitution. And I'm not writing

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to please you. Mainly myself. I have to follow the pure line and keep my it uncontaminated.

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Now I shall write you everything that comes into my mind with the least possible amount of policing. Because I feel attracted to the unknown. But as long as I have myself I won't be alone. It's going to start: I'm going to grab the present in every phrase that dies. Now:

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Ah if I had known that it were like that I wouldn't have been born. Ah if I had known I wouldn't have been born. Madness borders the cruellest good sense. This is a brain tempest and one sentence barely has anything to do with the next. I swallow the madness that is no madness—it's something else. Do you understand me? But I'll have to stop because I'm so and so tired that only dying would release me from this fatigue. I'm leaving. I'm back. Now I'll try once more to bring myself up to date with whatever occurs to me in the moment—and this is how I'll create myself. It's like this:

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The ring that you gave me was glass and it broke and the love ended. But sometimes in its place comes the beautiful hate of those who loved and devoured one another. The chair there in front of me is an object to me. Useless while I look at it. Please tell me what time it is so I can know that I am living in that time. I am finding myself: it's deadly because only death concludes me. But I bear it until the end. I'll tell you a secret: life is deadly. I'll have to interrupt everything to tell you this: death is the impossible and intangible. Death is just future to

such an extent that there are those who cannot bear it and commit suicide. It's as if life said the following: and there simply was no following. Only the waiting colon. We keep this secret mutely to conceal that every instant is deadly. The chair object interests me. I love objects to the degree that they do not love me. But if I don't understand what I'm writing it's not my fault. I must speak because speaking saves. But I have no word to say. What would a person say to himself in the madness of sincerity? But it would be salvation. Though the terror of sincerity comes from the part of the shadows that connect me to the world and to the creating unconscious of the world. Today is a night with many stars in the sky. It stopped raining. I am blinded. I open my eyes wide and only see. But the secret—that I neither see nor feel. Could I be making here a true orgy of what's behind thought? orgy of words? The record player is broken. I look at the chair and this time it's as if it too looked and saw. The future is mine—as long as I live. I see the flowers in the vase. They are wild flowers and were born without being planted. They are yellow. But my cook said: what ugly flowers. Just because it's hard to love Franciscan things. In the beyond of my thought is the truth that is that of the world. The illogicality of nature. What silence. "God" is of such an enormous silence that it terrifies me. Who invented the chair? It takes courage to write what comes to me: you never know what could come up and scare you. The sacred monster died. In its place was born a girl who lost her mother. I am very well aware I'll have to stop. Not for a lack of words but because those things and especially those I only thought

and didn't write— cannot be said. I'll speak of what is called the experience. It's the experience of asking for help and that help being given. Perhaps it was worth being born in order one day to implore mutely and mutely to receive. I asked for help and it was not refused. I then felt like a tiger with a deadly arrow buried in its flesh and who was slowly circling the fearful people to find out who would have the courage to come up and free it from its pain. And then there is the person who knows that a wounded tiger is only as dangerous as a child. And coming up to the beast, unafraid to touch it, pulls out the embedded arrow.

Q And the tiger? Can't say thank you. So I sluggishly walk back and forth in front of the person and hesitate. I lick one of my paws and then, since it's not the word that then matters, I silently move off.

R What am I in this instant? I am a typewriter making the dry keys echo in the dark and humid early hours. For a long time I haven't been people. They wanted me to be an object. I'm an object. An object dirty with blood. That creates other objects and the typewriter creates all of us. It demands. The mechanism demands and demands my life. But I don't obey totally: if I must be an object let it be an object that screams. There's a thing inside me that hurts. Ah how it hurts and how it screams for help. But tears are missing in the typewriter that I am. I'm an object without destiny. I am an object in whose hands? such is my human destiny. What saves me is the scream. I protest in the name of whatever

is inside the object beyond the beyond the thought-feeling. I am an urgent object.

Now—silence and slight amazement.

Because at five in the morning, today July 25th, I fell into a state of grace.

It was a sudden sensation, but so gentle. The luminosity was smiling in the air: exactly that. It was a sigh of the world. I don't know how to explain just as you can't describe the dawn to a blind man. It is unutterable what happened to me in the form of feeling: I quickly need your empathy. Feel with me. It was a supreme happiness.

But if you have known the state of grace you'll recognise what I'm going to say. I'm not referring to inspiration, which is a special grace that so often happens to those who deal with art.

The state of grace of which I'm speaking is not used for anything. It's as if it came only for us to know that we really exist and the world exists. In this state, beyond the calm happiness that irradiates from people and things, there is a lucidity that I only call weightless because everything in grace is so light. It's a lucidity of one who no longer needs to guess: without effort, he knows. Just that: knows. Don't ask me what, because I can only reply in the same way: he knows.

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And there's a physical bliss to which nothing else compares. The body is transformed into a gift. And you feel that it's a gift because you experience, right at the source, the suddenly indubitable present of existing miraculously and materially.

Everything gains a kind of halo that is not imaginary: it comes from the splendor of the mathematical irradiation of things and of the memory of people. You start to feel that all that exists breathes and exhales a most fine resplendence of energy. The truth of the world, however, is impalpable.

It's not even close to what I can barely imagine must be the state of grace of the saints. I have never known that state and cannot even guess at it. It is instead just the grace of a common person turning suddenly real because he is common and human and recognizable.

The discoveries in this sense are unutterable and incommunicable. And unthinkable. That is why in grace I stayed seated, quiet, silent. It's like in an annunciation. Not being however preceded by angels. But it's as if the angel of life came to announce the world to me. Then I slowly emerged. Not as if I had been in a trance—there's no trance—you emerge slowly, with the sigh of one who had everything just as the everything is. It's also already a sigh of longing. Since having experienced gaining a body and a soul, you want more and more. No use wanting: it only comes when it wants and spontaneously.

I wanted to make that happiness eternal through the intermediary of the objectification of the word. Right afterwards I went to look up in the dictionary the word beatitude which I hate as a word and saw that it means spasm of the soul. It speaks of calm happiness—I would however call it transport or levitation. Nor do I like how the dictionary continues: “of one absorbed in mystical contemplation.” That’s not true: I wasn’t meditating in any way, there was no religiosity in me. I’d just had breakfast and was simply living sitting there with a cigarette burning in the ashtray.

I saw when it started and took me. And I saw when it started growing faint and ended. I’m not lying. I hadn’t taken any drug and it wasn’t a hallucination. I knew who I was and who others were.

But now I want to see if I can capture what happened to me by using words. As I use them I’ll be destroying to some extent what I felt— but that’s inevitable. I’m going to call what follows “On the edge of beatitude.” It starts like this, nice and slow:

When you see, the act of seeing has no form—what you see sometimes has form and sometimes doesn’t. The act of seeing is ineffable. And sometimes what is seen is also ineffable. And that’s how it is with a certain kind of thinking-feeling that I’ll call “freedom,” just to give it a name. Real freedom—as an act of perception—has no form. And as the true thought thinks to itself, this kind of thought reaches its objective in the very act of

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thinking. By that I don’t mean that it either vaguely or gratuitously is. It so happens that the primary thought—as an act of thought—already has a form and is more easily transmitted to itself, or rather, to the very person who is thinking it; and that is why—because it has a form—it has a limited reach. Whereas the thought called “freedom” is free as an act of thought. It’s so free that even to its thinker it seems to have no author.

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The true thought seems to have no author.

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And beatitude has that same quality. Beatitude starts in the moment when the act of thinking has freed itself from the necessity of form. Beatitude starts at the moment when the thinking-feeling has surpassed the author’s need to think—he no longer needs to think and now finds himself close to the grandeur of the nothing. I could say of the “everything.” But “everything” is a quantity, and quantity has a limit in its very beginning. The true incommensurability is the nothing, which has no barriers and where a person can scatter their thinking-feeling.

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This beatitude is not in itself religious or secular. And none of this necessarily has any bearing on the issue of the existence or non-existence of a God. What I’m saying is that the thought of the man and the way this thinking-feeling can reach an extreme degree of incommunicability— that, without sophism or paradox, is at the same time, for that man, the point of greatest communication. He communicates with himself.

Sleeping brings us very close to this empty and yet full thought. I'm not talking about the dream, which, in this case, would be a primary thought. I'm talking about sleeping. Sleeping is abstracting yourself and scattering into the nothingness.

I also want to tell you that after the freedom of the state of grace also comes the freedom of the imagination also happens. At this very moment I am free.

And beyond the freedom, beyond the certain void I create the calmest of repeating musical waves. The madness of free invention. Do you want to see it with me? Landscape where this music happens? air, green stems, the spread-out sea, silence of a Sunday morning. A slender man with only one foot has one great transparent eye in the middle of his forehead. A feminine entity slinks up on all fours, says in a voice that seems to come from another space, voice that sounds not like the first voice but in echo of a primary voice that was never heard. The voice is awkward, euphoric and says by force of the habit of a past life: would you like some tea? And doesn't wait for a reply. She grabs a slim ear of golden wheat, and puts it between her toothless gums and pads away on all fours with her eyes open. Eyes immobile as the nose. She needs to move her whole boneless head to look at an object. But what object? The slender man meanwhile has fallen asleep on his foot and let his eye fall asleep without however closing it. Letting your eye fall asleep is about not wanting to see. When it doesn't see, it sleeps. In the silent eye the plain is reflected in a

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rainbow. The air is marvellous. The musical waves start again. Someone looks at their nails. There's a sound in the distance going: psst, psst! . . . But the man-with-just- one-foot could never imagine that they are calling him. A sound starts up from the side, like the flute that always seems to play from the side —a sound starts up from the side that crosses the musical waves without a tremor, and repeats so long that it ends up carving out the rock with its uninterrupted dripping. It's a highly elevated sound, without friezes. A lament that's happy and measured and sharp like the non-strident and sweet sharpness of a flute. It's the highest and happiest note that a vibration can give. No man on earth could hear it without going mad and starting to smile forever. But the man standing on his only foot—sleeps upright. And the feminine being stretched out on the beach isn't thinking. A new character crosses the deserted plain and disappears limping. You hear: psst; psst! And no one is called.

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Now the scene my freedom created is over.

I'm sad. An uneasiness that comes because the ecstasy doesn't fit into the life of the days. Sleep should follow the ecstasy to attenuate its vibration of echoing crystal. The ecstasy must be forgotten.

The days. I got sad because of the diurnal light of steel in which I live. I breathe the smell of steel in the world of the objects. But now I want to say things that comfort me and that are a little free. For example: Thursday is

a day transparent as an insect's wing in the light. Just as Monday is a compact day. Ultimately, far beyond thought, I live from these ideas, if ideas is what they are. They are sensations that transform into ideas because I must use words. Even just using them mentally. The primary thought thinks with words. The "freedom" frees itself from the slavery of the word.

And God is a monstrous creation. I fear God because he is too total for my size. And I also feel a kind of modesty toward Him: there are things of mine that not even He knows. Fear? I know a she who is terrified by butterflies as if they were supernatural. And the divine part of butterflies is terrifying indeed. And I know a he who shivers in horror before flowers—he thinks that flowers are hauntingly delicate like a sigh of nobody in the dark.

I am the one listening to the whistling in the dark. I who am sick with the human condition. I revolt: I no longer want to be a person. Who? who has mercy on us who know about life and death where an animal I envy profoundly—is unconscious of its condition? Who takes pity on us? Are we abandoned? given over to despair? No, there must be a possible consolation. I swear: there must be. What I don't have is the courage to say the truth that we know. These are forbidden words.

But I denounce. I denounce our weakness, I denounce the maddening horror of dying—and I respond to all this infamy with—exactly this that now will be written—and I respond to all this infamy with joy. Purest

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and lightest joy. My only salvation is joy. An atonal joy inside the essential it. Doesn't that make sense? Well it must. Because it's too cruel to know that life is just one time and that we have no guarantee outside our faith in shadows— because it's too cruel, so I respond with the purity of an untamable happiness. I refuse to be sad. Let us be joyful. Whoever isn't afraid to be joyful and to experience even a single time the mad and profound joy will have the best part of our truth. I am—despite everything oh despite everything—am being joyful in this instant-now that passes if I don't capture it in words. I am being joyful in this very instant because I refuse to be defeated: so I love. As an answer. Impersonal love, it love, is joy: even the love that doesn't work out, even the love that ends. And my own death and that of those we love must be joyful, I don't yet know how, but they must be. That is living: the joy of the it. And to settle for that not as one defeated but in an allegro con brio.

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As a matter of fact I don't want to die. I rebel against "God." Let's not die as a dare?

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I'm not going to die, you hear, God? I don't have the courage, you hear? Don't kill me, you hear? Because it's a disgrace to be born in order to die without knowing when or where. I'm going to stay very happy, you hear? As a reply, as an insult. I guarantee one thing: we are not guilty. And I have to understand while I'm alive, you hear? because afterwards it will be too late.

Ah this flash of instants never ends. My chant of the it never ends? I'll finish it deliberately by a voluntary act. But it will keep going in constant improvisation, always and always creating the present that is future.

This improvisation is.

Do you want to see how it goes on? Last night—it's hard to explain to you —last night I dreamed that I was dreaming. Could it be like that after death? the dream of a dream of a dream of a dream?

I'm a heretic. No, that's not true. Or am I? But something exists.

Ah living is so uncomfortable. Everything pinches: the body demands, the spirit doesn't stop, living is like being tired and not being able to sleep— living is bothersome. You can't walk naked either in body or in spirit.

Didn't I tell you that living pinches? Well, I went to sleep and dreamed that I was writing you a majestic largo and it was even more true than what I'm writing to you: it was without fear. I forgot what I wrote in the dream, everything returned to the nothing, returned to the Force of what Exists and that is sometimes called God.

Everything comes to an end but what I'm writing to you goes on. Which is good, very good. The best is not yet written. The best is between the lines.

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Today is Saturday and is made of the purest air, just air. I speak to you as a profound exercise, and paint as a profound exercise of me. What do I want to write now? I want something calm and without fashions. Something like the memory of a tall monument that seems taller because it is a memory. But I want to have really touched the monument along the way. I'm going to stop because it's Saturday.

It's still Saturday.

Whatever will still be later—is now. Now is the domain of now. And as long as the improvisation lasts I am born.

And now suddenly after an evening of "who am I" and of waking at one in the morning still in despair—now suddenly at three in the morning I woke and met myself. I went to meet myself. Calm, joyful, fullness without fulmination. Simply I am I. And you are you. It is vast, and will endure.

What I'm writing you is a "this." It won't stop: it goes on.

Look at me and love me. No: you look at yourself and love yourself. That's right.

What I'm writing to you goes on and I am bewitched.

This excerpt was translated from
the Portuguese by Stefan Tobler

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