

# Fabulating in Echoes

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## Abstract

This is an experiment in fabulating while also thinking through what it might mean to fabulate, when the form is constitutive of the argument. It consists of nineteen fragments that appear in a random sequence each time they are read.<sup>[1]</sup> While fabulating around—under, through and in between—the Greek myth of Echo, I draw on modes of creative criticism, also known as post criticism,<sup>[2]</sup> *écriture féminine*,<sup>[3]</sup> and diffractive reading.<sup>[4]</sup> The result is, I believe, a story full of openings and possibilities. I offer no conclusions.

Inspired by literary montage techniques and devised theatre methods, I write consciously from my position as woman, academic and artist.<sup>[5]</sup> The work is deliberately rhizomatic, disjunctive and repetitive, seeking to trouble traditional and hierarchical assumptions around linear argument-building. The reader is invited to discern their own connections. As an experiment, the piece may, of course, not work as intended.

Each fragment is accompanied by a photograph, which, like Echo, echoes the one prior to it, as well as the one afterwards, gently disrupting unidirectional understandings of time and space. The photographs were taken over a two-year period in collaboration with fellow artists and thinkers Christopher Heighes and Katja Hilevaara, and present a series of circles. Not only do they celebrate the non-linear, but they also suggest a manifestation of concentric soundwaves echoing outwards, or diffracting, from multiple sources.

There is no beginning.

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## References

1. I would like to thank Lucy Cathcart Frödén, one of my two generous peer reviewers, for this insightful and joyous suggestion. [↑](#)
2. Creative criticism is a writing practice that involves merging creative and critical discourses to generate embodied and theoretical insights. It is an experimental form of criticism that in engaging with artworks, texts and historical figures, not just analytically but also imaginatively, is literary in its own right. See for definitions, Hilevaara, Katja and Orley, Emily. Eds. *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about*

- Practice*. London: Routledge. 2018; Mikkilä, Elina. “The Art of ‘Creatical Writing’: Unlocking Insights Through Creative–Critical Fusion”. *Life Writing*. vol. 21. no. 3. 2024. pp. 535–48; and Schad, John, Callus, Ivan and Corby, James. “The CounterText Interview: John Schad”. *CounterText*. vol. 10. no. 2. 2024. pp. 79–94. ↑
3. *Écriture Féminine* as a concept and textual practice was developed in France in the 1970s as a kind of writing that exists outside masculine economies of patriarchal discourse. The concept has since evolved through different waves of feminism. Hélène Cixous coined the term in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”, in which she defines it as “precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.” See Cixous, Hélène. “The Laugh of the Medusa”. Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs*. vol. 1, no. 4. 1976. pp. 875–93. For a contemporary discussion of the practice, see Taylor, Jacqueline. “Thinking Difference Differently: An Exploration of l’écriture féminine, Women’s Art Practice and Postfeminism”. *L’Esprit Créateur*. vol. 58. no. 2. 2018. pp. 41–55; and Kaiser, Birgit M. *Hélène Cixous’s Poetics of Voice: Echo–Subjectivity–Diffraction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2025. ↑
  4. The concept of diffractive reading was first proposed by Donna Haraway in her essay “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others”. In *Cultural Studies*. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler. London: Routledge. 1992. It was significantly developed and formalised into a specific posthumanist and materialist methodology by Karen Barad, particularly in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham London: Duke University Press. 2007. In Barad’s terms, it involves reading different texts, theories and other artifacts “through one another” to generate new, emergent insights and patterns of difference, rather than reading one against another in a critical, comparative way. As a method it undoes historical order and aesthetic hierarchies. ↑
  5. I am thinking of the written work of Gertrude Stein, Walter Benjamin, John Berger, Anne Carson, as well as the devised theatre work of Complicité, Tim Crouch, Frantic Assembly, Javaad Ali Poor and Katie Mitchell, to name a few. ↑
  6. In Chapter 8 of *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed describes a “feminist snap” as a moment of feminist refusal, a decisive refusal to reproduce harmful worlds or ideas, and a breaking point after repeated experiences of oppression or discrimination. Snapping signifies resistance by exposing problems and acting as a refusal to concede to systems that perpetuate sexism and other injustices. Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2017. ↑
  7. *Ibid.*, p.186. See also the first sentence from Ahmed, Sara. “Feminism and Fragility”. *Feministkilljoys*. 26 January 2016. Available at <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/01/26/feminism-and-fragility/> (accessed 2026-04-20). ↑
  8. These include Greek writer Longus in the second century CE, for example, as well as Nonnus in the fifth century. Then Guillaume de Lorris wrote about Echo in the thirteenth century, and she inspired paintings by artists such as Nicolas Poussin in the seventeenth and John William Waterhouse in the early twentieth century. Operas about her include Domenico Scarlatti’s *Amor d’un’ombra e gelosia d’un’aura* (1714) and Christoph Willibald Gluck’s *Écho et Narcisse* (1779). Female painter Evelyn Grace Ince did, however, produce a painting of Echo in 1915. ↑
  9. European and American pioneers of feminist myth criticism include Harrison, Jane Ellen. *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021 [1908]; Harding, Esther. *Woman’s Mysteries, Ancient and Modern: A Psychological Interpretation of the Feminine Principle as Portrayed in Myth, Story and Dreams*. London: Rider & Co. 1971 [1935]; and De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. London: Vintage. 2011 [1949]. Other women who have carried out and written about the importance of feminist re-tellings of Greek

myths include Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision". *College English*. vol. 34. no. 1. 1972. pp. 18–30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/375215>; Stone, Merlin. *When God Was a Woman*. Dorchester: Dorset Press. 1993 [1976]; Gimbutas, Marija. *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe 6500–3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 2020 [1982]; Ostriker, Alicia. *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. 1986. Available at <http://archive.org/details/stealinglanguage00alic> (accessed 2026-04-20); Warner, Marina. *From The Beast to The Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. London: Vintage. 1995; Zajko, Vanda and Leonard, Miriam. *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199237944.001.0001>; and Beard, Mary. *Women & Power: A Manifesto*. London: Profile Books. 2018. See also the Canongate Myth Series, conceived in 1999 and published between 2005 and 2010, comprising eighteen short novels in which ancient myths from myriad cultures are rewritten by contemporary authors, such as Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson and Ali Smith. Female literary and cultural critics who have written specifically about Echo include, but are not limited to, Spivak. Gayatri Chakravorty. "Echo". *New Literary History*. vol. 24. no. 1. 1993. pp. 17–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/469267>; Carson, Anne. *Glass, Irony, & God*. New York: New Directions. 1995; Berger, Anne-Emmanuelle. "The Latest Word from Echo". *New Literary History*. vol. 27. no. 4. 1996. pp. 621–40; Cavarero, Adriana. *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Trans. Paul A. Kottman. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press. 2005; Bloom, Gina. *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2007; Wallach Scott, Joan. *The Fantasy of Feminist History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394730>; LeVen, Pauline. "Echo: On Listening". In *Music and Metamorphosis in Graeco-Roman Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316563069.005>; Finer, Ella. "Feminism and Sound". In *Sound and Literature*. Ed. Anna Snaith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108855532.016>; and Kaiser, Birgit M. *Helene Cixous's Poetics of Voice: Echo—Subjectivity—Diffraction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2025. The first woman to translate Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into English was Mary Innes in 1955, published by Penguin. Over fifty years after her, feminist translator Stephanie McCarter produced the first full translation into English in verse by a woman as *Metamorphoses*. Ed. Stephanie McCarter. London: Penguin Classics, 2022. As a side project, I am currently gathering lists of art and performance works about Echo made by women in the last twenty years. ↑

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20. *Ibid.*, p. 38. ↑
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