

Writing The White Voice

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As we tune our ears to the patterns of chatter and clatter in literature and the hesitations and lapses that mark their abeyance, we may easily forget the most important defining condition of most literary writing, namely that it is itself stonily mute, and that it exists in a world in which it is assumed that it will be read by a similarly silent reader. The exceptions to this, like the public readings of his work undertaken by Dickens, and the new popularity of audiobooks, seem to reaffirm this powerful background condition in the very way in which they break from it. Literature elaborately and attentively concerns itself with sound, but does not itself make a sound. Georges Bataille once remarked that ‘the word silence still makes a sound’; it is the opposite point that I am proposing; that the noise of literature is itself mute. It is with this strangely resounding silence, this vociferous dumbshow, that the sentences that follow will be concerned.

It seems to be widely agreed and regularly affirmed that literature has not always been silent. The story of the move from voiced to silent reading usually draws on the account in St Augustine’s *Confessions* of the very distinctive manner in which Bishop Ambrose of Milan read. Augustine is explaining how difficult he found it to get access to Ambrose to tell him of his spiritual struggles:

For I could not ask of him, what I would as I would, being shut out both from his ear and speech by multitudes of busy people, whose weaknesses he served. With whom when he was not taken up, (which was but a little time,) he was either refreshing his body with the sustenance absolutely necessary, or his mind with reading. when he read, his eyes were led by the pages, and his heart sought the meaning, but his voice and tongue were still (*sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant*) Often, when we arrived, for nobody was forbidden to enter, nor was it his wont that any who came should be announced to him, we saw him reading silently to himself, and never in any other way; and having long sat silent, for who would dare intrude on one so intent ?) we took our leave, conjecturing, that in the small interval, which he obtained, free from the din of others' business, for the recruiting of his mind, he was loath to be

taken off; and perchance he dreaded lest if the author he read should deliver any thing obscurely, some attentive or perplexed hearer should desire him to expound it, or to discuss some of the harder questions ; so that his time being thus spent, he could not turn over so many volumes as he desired; although the preserving of his voice (which a very little speaking would weaken) might be the truer reason for his reading to himself. But with what intent soever he did it, certainly in such a man it was good. (6.3.3)

This passage is the lynchpin of a consensus that the move to silent reading was an innovation of the fourth century, meaning that books were read before that date, throughout the classical world, out loud. One of the ways in which the move from sounded to silent reading has been explicated is in terms of a move from the ear to the eye, particularly in the development of punctuation. It is usually maintained that the development of punctuation and the development of silent reading are simultaneous and closely connected. The argument is this: there was no need for texts and inscriptions written in the era of sounded reading to be punctuated, since the very work of bringing them to utterance would supply the pauses and breaks required. Hence the extraordinary practice, to modern eyes, of rendering written texts in *scripta continua*, without breaks between words or sentences. It was only when this structuring support of orality was removed that the need for spacing and pacing started to be felt and supplied. It is possible to run this argument the other way round, too. The absence of spacing made it necessary to adopt what Peter Saenger, who has done most to substantiate this case, calls the ‘tunnel vision of orality’ (Saenger 1997), groping one’s way blindly along the line with the probings of the tongue.

I have never really seen the force of this explanation. For surely silent reading is precisely what is required to sieve and riddle the sense of *scripta continua* (and here it will be appropriate perhaps to remember that the word *sens* in French means direction as well as meaning), while unrehearsed reading out loud exposes one to multiple possibilities of error. This point is well made by A.K. Gavrilov, who observes that ‘when a reader of any experience reads aloud – especially when it is someone whose job it is to make public announcements or give artistic performances from written texts – the habit of reading to oneself is presupposed. Indeed, it is itself an essential element of reading aloud’ (Gavrilov 197, 59). Only a small amount of reflection is needed to show that it is only the reader who is capable of scouting out and construing the passage of text to be read in advance and, of course, necessarily in silence, since the tongue will be preoccupied with its work of word-by-word enunciation, who is capable of performing the extraordinary trick of parsing a complex text in this apparently *en passant*

fashion. This is made all the more remarkable since almost all reading of this kind would have been of texts in a Latin and Greek characterised by inflection and complex subordination of syntax. This fact is acknowledged even by Paul Saenger, in the course of his detailed account of the link between visual punctuation and the development of silent reading. Even though Saenger argues that the unpunctuated blocks of prose of early writing required slow and laborious oral unpicking, he also recognises that much of the labour consists of ‘the onerous task of keeping the eyes ahead of the voice while accurately reading unseparated script, so familiar to the ancient Greeks and Romans’. This, he says, ‘can be described as a kind of elaborate search pattern. The eye moves across the page, [6-7] not at an even rate, but in [a] series of fixations and jumps called “saccades.” ’ (Saenger 1997, 6-7). But what is going in these anticipatory leaps if not a kind of silent reading? There is no need to doubt that silent reading is materially assisted by spacing and punctuation. There is equally no need to infer from this that silent reading required its development, or that its absence necessarily enjoined reading out loud. The idea that before the development of this visual architecture readers had to rely on their voices alone to sound out the sense of what they were reading is neither necessary nor easy to sustain. The fact is, punctuation assists every kind of reading, oral as well as silent.

One might wonder too why Latin becomes syntactically simpler, and more oral, during the period in which silent reading was becoming widespread. Perhaps the kind of reading involved in sounded reading was not in fact of the kind that we would recognise today; that is, perhaps there was much less attempt to inhabit and dramatise the sense in the orderings and inflections of the voice. Perhaps the kind of sounded reading which allegedly came before silent reading was a word-by-word sounding (though some kind of on-the-fly analysis would have been necessary even to separate out words in the absence of spaces), rather than a reading which constructed synthetic or intensive arcs of sense across sentences.

Nevertheless, the story of the silencing *d’un seul coup* of the act of reading is constantly told and retold. There is strikingly little agreement about precisely when this process is supposed to have occurred. For Alberto Manguel, it occurs during the life of St Augustine, for book 8 of his *Confessions* records an act of silent reading on Augustine’s own part that seems to mimic that of Ambrose described in book 6. ‘For most of written history, reading was speaking’, declares Stephen Roger Fischer, at the beginning of his *History of Reading* (Fischer 2003, 11); but this condition was suddenly revoked at the beginning of the ninth century when, he says, ‘Western Europe’s scriptoria fell silent’ (Fischer 2003, 159). For Elspeth Jajdelska (2007), it is the increasing ownership of books during the eighteenth century that makes

possible the definitive moved to silent, private reading on a wide scale. Just as the silent reader is said to need punctuation to orientate themselves to a soundless text, so historians of reading seem to need the semi-colon provided by the idea of the switch from sounded to silent reading to orientate their histories, even though that historical hinge may be placed at different points.

The idea that silent reading is a distinctly modern experience is tied to some strong presuppositions about the nature of that modernity. The first is that silent reading brings about a withdrawal from the oral world of sonorous collectivity. For Walter Ong, this scoops out a space of interiority, the fine and private place of the solitary subject, that had simply not previously existed. This is a space of suspension, reservation, exception. The subject becomes able for the first time to project alternatives to the authority of the world as it is collectively construed and reproduced through mimicry, iteration and policing. Silent reading is identified with the Protestant spirit of sceptical thinking for oneself. This is at once an alienation and an emancipation – for the subject will have henceforth to make out the grounds of his being for himself, and give himself the law. The subject will be free, but in a state of wounded loss, having gained his soul at the cost of a richly sonorous being-in-the-world.

In fact, though the myth of the epochal shift from sounded to soundless reading is regularly restated, a great deal of work has been done in the last decade or so to cast doubt on it. The first to enter reservations was B.M.W. Knox in 1968, who drew attention to a number of references to or depictions of reading in classical texts that make no sense unless one assumes that silent reading is occurring. This work has been extended by A. K. Gavrilov and M.F. Burnyeat (1997), who continues to prosecute with missionary zeal the cause of rescuing the Greeks from the myth of reading out loud (Fenton 2006).

It seems sensible to assume that sounded and silent reading have always coexisted, and that what happens historically is not a simple shift from one to the other – in which an increase of sound necessary means a deficit of visualisation and vice versa – but rather a readjustment of the ecology of eye, tongue and ear involved in the process of reading (not to mention all the other members of the mixed body of reading, heart, fingers and stomach among them). We may also need, as William A. Johnson (2000) has suggested, a more nuanced and particularised sense of the many different kinds of practice, going far beyond the cognitive procedure of extracting the sense from strings of words on a page, that ‘reading’ may involve.

This might allow us to grasp the move from sounded to silent reading as not simply a move from noise to quiet. Rather, perhaps, it is a move from one kind of sound to another. The one who reads aloud is silent inside, for his outer voice will tend to drown out or shout down his inner. The one who reads silently, by contrast, is suffused by his inner sonority, if inside is exactly where it is, if sonorous is exactly what it is. The one who reads aloud makes himself deaf, abolishing his ear into the sound that actuates his tongue. The one who reads silently stills his tongue the better to sound out what he reads.

The usual way in which this is thought to be done is through what is called subvocalisation. This may be regarded as the vestigial traces of speech that accompany any act of reading or writing. According to this view, what readers may feel as a sounding in the mind, may be due at least in part to the effect of very small impulses sent by the brain to the larynx and the tongue. The ‘tip-of-the-tongue’ experience, when one is searching for the word that seems to be just out of reach, seems to provide experiential confirmation of this. More physiological proof is supplied by efforts to decode subvocal speech recognition systems, that would allow us to capture and overhear subvocalised speech (Armstrong 2006). Subvocalisation seems to provide some kind of indication of, or at least correlation with what has been called ‘inner speech’. Most readers will report or at least recognise the experience of some kind of ‘hearing’ of some kind of ‘voice’, or ‘speaking’ when they read.

It may be nevertheless that this phenomenon of the internally sounded voice, that inner speech itself, is in the process of fading out, and that our difficulty in describing its qualities is due to the fact that we are hearing its last dim spasms and whispers. Perhaps, following the stilling of our external lips, we are undergoing a slow quelling of the internal voice. And yet, for us still ‘the voice without a mouth still stirs in the head’, as Denise Riley has put it (Riley 2004). Riley has gone further than most toward capturing the strange condition of the inner voice, caught between the auditory and the non-auditory. Of course, the inner voice is experienced whenever consciousness cocks an ear to itself, but her comments are useful since it seems to be activated or at least attended to with particular intensity in the act of reading, during which the inner voice is not quite mine, nor yet not entirely not-mine either. In a similar way, the peculiarity of the inner voice is that it is never quite a matter of hearing, while never quite not-hearing either:

Among its convoluted qualities, the inner voice, however ostensibly silent, is still able to be heard by its possessor. Where it resonates, no air is agitated. No larynx swells, no

eardrum vibrates. Yet if I swing my attention onto my inner speech, I'm aware of it sounding in a very thin version of my own tone of voice. I catch myself in its silent sound, a paradox audible only to me. We don't, though, seem to have much of a vocabulary, an odd lack, for this everyday sensation. On what, then, does my conviction of the tonality of my inward voice depend; do I have a sort of inner ear designed to pick up this voice which owns nothing by way of articulation? For I can detect my usual accents and the timbre of my voice as soon as I try to overhear myself by trapping the faint sonority of my inner words. But they are audible, if that's the adjective, only in a depleted form which keeps some faint colouration but is far less resonant in the ear than when I'm speaking aloud (Well, of course! Still, if my inner speech is less loud to me, that isn't just because it's not uttered.) It's as if an inner ear is alert to my inner voice, although what happens isn't exactly an instance of *hearing* my own voice speaking. So when I think I can overhear my own inner speech, what do I mean? This silent speech is an apparent oxymoron. Is it more of an ear-voice, which detects it at the same time as it issues it? But I do have the feeling of hearing something, in the same way that I can run a tune audibly through my head, yet without humming it even silently. Or I want to say that I 'hear' it; there's no exact verb for this peculiar kind of hearing something which isn't actually sounded, and which evades any measurement of articulation. Yet a kind of hearing it surely is. (Riley 2004)

I have quoted the passage at such length because it seems to mime some of the ruminative rhythms of inner vocality itself, in its saltations, lingerings, and coilings back on itself, marked by swivel-words like 'for', 'still', 'or' and 'yet'.

How are we to sound out this internal sonorousness? What are its qualities and effects? Subvocalisation does not seem to get it, since this relates only to the subliminal quasi-production of sound. And inner hearsay inhabits and requires a complex space, a space in which one will always be in at least two places at once, spaced out, in which one will always be in, one will be, a scenario. For where there is something as-if heard, there must one as-if hearing. And it is anyway not at all clear that, when I hear something in the ordinary external way, I hear it at a particular 'point of audition', though my position in space will certainly create the conditions of what I hear. But when I hear something, I hear it both from where I am and from where I assume it is.

I want to propose that this voice is not vestigial but virtual, not diminished but disseminated. What matters is not the channelling or vocal acting out of the text in the reader's own voice, but the creation of an auditorium or *arena of internal articulations*. The inner space of the inward voice is a production, a staging, a topographic projection. In reality, this space is not really inside anything or anywhere inside. It is just not outside. Innerness is an approximation to the particular kind of pantopicality, or atypicality, of the voice that has absconded from space.

'Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves', the Duchess advises Alice. Let me return to a point I made in passing a little earlier, namely the coincidence in the French word *sens* between sense and direction. The distinction between sounded and silent reading is a distinction between words that have an order or direction – a 'drift' as we might say in English – and words arranged with a looser, or more mutable sense of direction. Sound belongs in essence to consequential and irreversible time, while the eye inhabits a much jumpier, complex and reversible kind of space, a space that allows for a certain amount of lateral, back and forth play, a jumping of the tracks, as opposed to a line that is simply played out.

We are accustomed to characterise this as a difference between the linear and the non-linear, though this forgets that the eye too has to move from one place to another, and can never be in more than one place at once, though the speed at which it performs these actions may sometimes persuade us that it can. The reading eye scans the space of the page as the eye surveys a landscape. Its movements approximate to what Michel Serres has characterised as the movement of the maze or the labyrinth, the making out of complex volumes from linear movements.

We inherit our idea of the labyrinth from a tragic and pessimistic tradition, in which it signifies death, despair, madness. However, the maze is in fact the best model for allowing moving bodies to pass through while at the same time retracing their steps as much as possible; it gives the best odds to finite journeys with unstructured itineraries. Mazes maximize feedback. ... Let us seek the best way of creating the most feedback loops possible on an unstructured and short itinerary. Mazes provide us with this maximization. Excellent reception, here is the best possible resonator, the beginnings of consciousness. (Serres 2008, 143)

Serres multiplies in his writing many versions of this maze-like convolution – the scribbling flight of a fly, the chancy dance of a single point in a volume

of kneaded dough, the intricate folding of proteins, or the mapping out of the phase-space of iterative functions – but, at the point in *The Five Senses* at which the passage I have just quoted occurs, it is the structure of the ear that best exemplifies the capacity of the maze to hold up and fold sound on itself. Serres materialises in the architecture of the ear the two-sidedness of the hearing apparatus, that it both transmits and receives sound in terms of the complex structure of the ear:

Sound is transmitted here in non-linear fashion, travelling from hardest to softest; here, at each stage, it submits to loops, circuits or feedback. The box receives the captive energy, organizes the repetition anticipated by the prefix, it traps noise, sound and message, makes them circulate quickly, brings them to rest, makes them vibrate in themselves for themselves, and through these circular movements transforms transmission into reception, resolving the contradiction that besets hearing. (Serres 2008, 143)

The fact the inflected languages give a sonic index of the function of a word in a sentence, so that words have their spin, posture or orientation inscribed in them, is oddly enough what allows them to develop complex cross-fades and counter-rhythms through the interruption of expected word order. One of the paradoxes of the development of language is that, as silent reading has become more and more the norm, so uninflected forms have also tended to replace inflected forms, which is to say, the structure of sentences has become more and more dependent upon word order and therefore the sound stream.

The increasing commonness of silent reading is to be regarded therefore, not as the simple turning down of sound, but as the creation of a more complex space of inner resounding. Augustine's reflections on Ambrose may give us some help here. For Augustine distinguishes many more bodily components to the reading practice than we tend to. There are not just the eye, ear and tongue, but also the 'cor', the heart. Not only this, but the mouth is in operation in more ways than one. Augustine tells us that one of the effects of Ambrose's inaccessibility was that he was not able to discern anything of Ambrose's own spiritual struggles, or of 'the hidden mouth which was in his heart when it was chewing on the sweet joy of thy bread' (*occultum os eius, quod erat in corde eius, quam sapida gaudia de pane tuo ruminaret*). Alberto Manguel has drawn attention to the commonness of the association between reading, chewing, swallowing and ingestion (Manguel 1996, 170-3). But the analogies between reading and eating are not simple. In one sense it is the ear that seems most gullible, the most like a mouth, the most

obedient. Ezekiel describes a spiritual voice entering into him which commands:

son of man, hear what I say unto thee; be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth and eat what I give thee.

And when I looked, behold, an hand was put forth into me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein;

And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without; and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

And he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel (Ezekiel 2.8-10-3.1)

But only the starving man bolts things down whole. There is in eating as there is in the ingestion of reading, a rumination, a holding-up, a collection, delectation, a tasting and turning-over.

Silent reading opens up a quasi-sonorous space in which sound is lifted out of the linearity of the sound-stream, seeming to allow it to turn back on itself. Only in the last century and a half have we begun to develop phonographic technologies that have allowed the actualisation of the conditions of this inner auditorium, in which sound is capable of being suspended, repeated, reversed, turned back on and fed back into itself.

But the book, at least the form of it that developed out of the scroll, provides the model and promise of this re-sounding space. The book, and all its ways of reflecting on or adverting to itself – with footnotes, headings, indices and their hypertetxual enlargements – provides what you will perhaps permit me to call the phonomorphic furniture of the inner auditorium. This is not a passage from soundstream to paperspace, but an integration of sound and space in a complex new amalgam, for which there is no simple or consistent visual or sonorous correlative. We do however have a word that participates in all the dimensions that are here convened: the ideas of the book, of space and of the pressure of sound swell together in the word ‘volume’.

The space of literature might be regarded as attempting to approximate to the condition of this white voice or sound-space. There are few writers who have gone further in this direction than Samuel Beckett, whom Denise Riley

describes as ‘the arch inscriber of inner speech on the page’. Many of his texts ask us to listen, or to imagine listening, to streams of words and voices that are themselves said to be internal murmurings or overhearings. Their space is the strained, uncertain listening space evoked by Moran, as he tries to decide which of two names for the obscure being who is the subject of his pursuit and report is right:

Of these two names, Molloy and Mollose, the second seemed to me perhaps the more correct. But barely. What I heard, in my soul I suppose, where the acoustics are so bad, was a first syllable, Mol, very clear, followed almost at once by a second, very thick, as though gobbled by the first, and which might have been oy as it might have been ose, or one, or even oc. (Beckett 1973, 113)

Where *Malone Dies* dwells on the awkward, elaborate paraphernalia of the writing process, as Malone describes in detail the pages of his notebook and the diminishing stub of his pencil, the speaker in *The Unnamable* is at a loss to explain how it is that his writing is coming about:

How, in such conditions, can I write, to consider only the manual aspect of that bitter folly? I don’t know. I could know. But I shall not know. Not this time. It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee. (Beckett 1973, 303)

The Unnamable inhabits a terra incognita between script and voice. It is as though a nagging, nattering internal voice were being automatically transcribed, but without ever quite achieving the fixity traditionally attached to script, so the words seem to flicker and wriggle. There is din and babble everywhere, even as the speaker tells us repeatedly of his deafness and his straining to hear the very words to which he is giving utterance. He is, like the soul in Marvell’s ‘Dialogue of the Soul and the Body’, ‘deaf with the drumming of an ear’. He speaks at one point of his fear of sound, in which the voice to which we are paying heed alternately blends with and splits from the sounds to which it is hearkening:

fear of sound, fear of sounds, all sounds, more or less, more or less fear, all sounds, there’s only one, continuous, day and night, what is it, it’s steps coming and going, it’s voices speaking for a moment, it’s bodies groping their way, it’s the air, it’s things, it’s the air among the things, that’s enough, that I seek, like it, no, not like it, like me, in my own way, what am I saying, after my fashion, that I seek, what do I seek now, what it is, it must be that, it can only be that, what it is, what it

can be, what what can be, what I seek, no, what I hear, now it comes back to me, all back to me, they say I seek what it is I hear, I hear them, now it comes back to me, what it can possibly be, and where it can possibly come from, since all is silent here, and the walls thick, and how I manage, without feeling an ear on me, or a head, or a body, or a soul (Beckett 1973, 391)

Perhaps the strange, flickering space imagined by the speaker of *The Unnamable* is a space procured precisely by this sighted sound and sounded sight. It is an attempt both to see and hear this white architecture of vocality.

There is a deeply engrained tendency to read the passage from orality to print as a retreat from the body. For Julia Kristeva, the entry into the world of writing enjoins a move from the mother's body, the locale of the chora, in which the infant is simply the place of intersection of drives, impulses and sounds to a world of signs, in which words are pale substitutes for what they signify. This reproduces the well-known logocentric prejudice which ties speech to the presence of a speaking body and print to its absence. Those who, like Walter Ong, have described the coming of writing as a silencing imply that this retreat of sound is also an abrogation of the body as such. Laura Mandell has recently read the marks of orality in Wordsworth's writing as a partial retrieval of this lost maternal body: 'The symbiotic relation to the mother's body is not altogether foregone but persists in sound and beat: linguistic material is its sublimite. Dancing and reading aloud can bring about a partial return to symbiosis, to a sense that one's body is merged with the materiality around it. The mother's body is resurrected in sound' (Mandell 2007, 77).

But this is an oddly restrictive notion of embodiment. Written signs, after all, are perfectly material, fully bodily. So one cannot gloss muteness as disembodiment in itself. This makes it seem odd for 'body' to cluster on the sonorous side of things, and for silent signs to seem in contrast so bleached of body, though it is hard to ignore or think past the sensory economy that enjoins this way of distributing things. But sounds are no more or less signficatory in themselves than marks. Indeed, there is good reason to suggest that the signifying function arises earlier in sounds than in visible objects, that sounds become the signs or promise of presence, not to say, in the baby's own cry, the means of procuring it, rather than presence itself. It is true that a piece of paper with the word 'water' on it will not slake my thirst, but it is not as if croaking the word 'water' will do any better, even though there is something that suggests to me that the latter might pull off the trick. Kristeva's body of sound, the chora, is in fact a different kind of

body – not so much a body in space, as the body of space. The sound-space evoked by the literary text is not privative, but saturated, interpenetrating, multisensical.

Modern technologies potentiate and pluralise the strange condition that is already instanced and inhabited by literary writing. This is not silence, not the living voice parched and eviscerated into the flatness of speech, and not therefore the defeat or retreat of sound. For the condition of literature has been for centuries the promise of a phonographic order of what during the nineteenth century came to be called ‘visible speech’, of sound propagating into, and out of, visible and material inscriptions. The invention of the phonograph produced vigorous dreams of a transcodable world, of a world scored with sonorous signatures, in which everything represented something that could be ‘played’. In ‘Primal Sound’, (1919), Rilke imagined a device that could play the grooves and seams of the skull as a phonograph follows the grooves of a record and bring to hearing its implicit voice. Ours is not a world of silenced sound, but rather one of sonorised appearances. The phonographic order we have entered is one in which sound is not restricted to that which is heard. What would be the most striking feature of modern life for somebody arriving from the fifteenth century? Surely it would be the cacophony of written language, extending even to human bodies: have human beings ever worn writing as emphatically and ecstatically as today, with our badges, labels, slogans and blazons?

Literature does not silence sound: it auditises the field of the visible. It opens up larger and more variable spaces of reprieve from the distinct orders of the visual-spatial and the oral-temporal. These spaces may not be bodily in the blunderingly crude sense that we affix to that term: that is, they may not be subject to the usual restriction of unshareable space and irreversible time. But that is only one view of what a body is and does. Bodies are also, as Spinoza and, following him, Deleuze, argues, affectings. A body is the sum total of what it may affect and effect. The body is a field of potentials and exposures, which is always therefore ahead or aside of itself. Seen in this way, the paradoxical kind of sound-body suggested by literary works, and pressed to a certain kind of limit by the work of Beckett, is a kind of white body corresponding to that proposed by Serres, a body that can in principle inflect itself in all postures, positions, directions, and possibilities, and which ‘fills its space equally: high as much as low, right as much as left, it abandons preferences and determinations, its memberships, and knows the better how to do so because it has often crossed the old white river. Here it is, a completed body’ (Serres 1997, 24-5).

Corresponding to this white body, would be something that we might call a white voice, on the analogy of the whiteness of white light or white noise,

that include all possible frequencies within them. Such a voice has minimal colour, taste or locative twang; it is, so to speak, vocality itself, without the distinguishing grain that would tie it to a particular space, time, or body. It is a necessity of this writing that it seem faint, but its faintness is really loud with phonic ghosts. Miss Carmichael in Beckett's abandoned play of 1937, *Human Wishes*, bullied by the blind Mrs Williams who demands that she act as amanuensis for her roared *obiter dicta*, and who accuses her of not writing down her words as instructed, replies with thin defiance: 'I write very quiet. Very quiet I write, and very fine.'

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