

## LISTEN

Praise, aloud: human sound, scrapes,  
stops, frictions forced on the air, the  
tactful massage of what had to be breathed  
in, depleted of oxygen, and then, lifeless,  
in wondrous reuse swept by the vocal cords,  
up into resonant cavities of nose and mouth,  
there to be shaped by mucuous membranes, tuned  
in plastic sets of tongue on palate, lips  
opening, cheeks; emerging, air, vibrant  
in a thousand frequencies and amplitudes;  
everyday babble. It's very quiet in a vacuum.

Nadezhda Mandelstam writes: "If nothing  
is left, one must scream. Silence  
is the real crime against humanity."

We must sing: and those who can't carry  
a tune, search, with the reach of longing,  
for that perfect resonant shower stall,  
the empty stairwell, where a bass is more  
than a bass; or, in higher registers, merge  
into Elly Ameling's graced hold on the ideal.

But Augustine in Ostia (who can say if it was  
a quieter time) tells his mother: the absence  
of language, silence, is the meaning of eternal life.