

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.