

Your Voice Travels

There you are, sitting in your room, at your simple desk, on your simple chair. You have before you your experiments. Your voice speaks to you as though you understood it.

You count the hours, then the days, the weeks, months, until you loose count, make do with the years, or major fractions of years; a half, three quarters, for a while. Then just the years. The fractions don't matter; the detail doesn't count. A second doesn't last, a minute is just a minute. The hours pass, from day to day.

But each has their own day nought. Each begins their own count, or at least you count for them. You count their days as yours. The days you will never remember, the days before counting, before numbers, before concepts, before space and time. You count the time when movements have no sequence, when memory barely functions. You move in and out of their fixed focus counting the days before they first realise you are separate, they are autonomous; they watch as you count.

Hi... Who are you?

Each day, you sit at your desk. You travel to and from your desk. You look at the clock. You remember the time at which you looked at the clock yesterday. You think about today and yesterday, the days stacked up on top of one another, one time viewed geographically, centring on your chair. You watch yourself busying at your desk, going to and fro, your arms in different positions as you adjust your experiments. You overlap yourself and make shapes where you intersect. You blur at the edges, your body smears in several directions. Your voices become a crowd that babbles and talks in tongues. You are fluid and indefinite.

You sit still for a while, to focus.

It's OK, you can talk to me whenever you like.

These experiments have brought you closer to something; further from something else. The sound of your voice, your reflection mocks you. It renders you, infects you, feeds itself and grows. It feeds hungrily and multiplies, kills off its original form, evolves into something new. Within and without; form and non-form; substance without form.

You listen for evidence of others; other voices. Distance echoes elude you. The time, when paced out, appears to fold over itself, collapse in on itself. You are one being. One moment. Your history consumes you as you consumed it.

Mother:

“ _____ ”

Son: “...yes mother?”

Mother:

“ _____ ?”

Son: “I don't know. I think I'd be OK... It's the others I would worry about...”

Mother: “ _____ .”

You cannot recall your voice before it became your present one

What's your name?

Your voice splits off from your present. It Breaks away. It dissolves and melts into some fluid mass. And you are left drifting. You float across its surface, outside of history and time. You bob up and down and occasionally your head submerges, your sense organs are engulfed by it. Fragments of images and sounds wash over you, your skin crawls, your mouth fills with the voices of other people. You form their sentences with your tongue and lips. Your glottis opens and closes, chocking on each word as you make it yours. Your voice; your “S”, your “R”, and your “T”, each inflection, the subtle adaptations you have made, the people you have known; they are all there hiding in your voice, haunting your speech. And though you can't remember him, remember hearing him, your father is there. He resonates in your chest, pulling you deeper, away from the surface.

You're swimming with your father, he occasionally takes you at weekends. You like the sound of the people under the water. He tosses you up and you splash down into the field of voices, muffled but somehow close, coming from everywhere at once. You keep your eyes closed and wait for the splash and the bubbles to subside so that you can listen to the yelps and screams of the playing children, scalding parents, and his voice. A hand grips your ankle and tugs you backwards through the water. It stings as the chlorine enters your nose and the drag and turbulence of the water wets your eyes. The sound of rushing water summons voices of its own that rumble and gargle. Your voice is there too. You struggle to get to the surface, to turn your body over and around and face the direction in which you're travelling, like a shark you think, must keep moving forward in order to breathe; travelling backwards can be fatal. You stop fighting. You have to conserve oxygen. A loud voice shouts out above, cutting through the water and the other voices. Your ankle is released and you snatch at the surface to suck in fresh air. Your father is talking to the lifeguard.

The other voices, quietly at first, begin again

One, two, three, four,
Your ship departs and leaves the shore
Five, six, seven, eight,
It bobs and tacks along the way
Eight, seven, six, five,
It won't be long 'till we arrive
Four, three, two, one,
Back home again, our journey done

You watch your father hand out his possession in silence from behind a table. It looks like a stall, perhaps at a jumble sale, but his is the only table, only he is there. And you. Neither of you speak. He has your voice, but he does not use it. Trinkets of little consequence; a St Christopher, a watch, an ID tag from work. He doesn't even look at you. You supposed this is some sort of reconciliation for him, and for you. He turns and walks away, back across a beach as you watch.

You turn to look as you hear your voice calling; you look out to sea and spot a distant figure waving from a yacht. You know you've watched this scene before but have no recollection of it. Perhaps you'll recall later?

You have a photograph of yourself. You haven't looked at it for years but you know it intimately. You know the garden, the house, the woman behind the camera, her voice calling to you, laughing. The man sleeping on the grass behind her, the red Wellington boots and underpants, your head turned to the side. You know the uncomfortable merger of expressions that inhabit your face, the complexity of the situation, the pride you felt. You were Superman. And yet you were so small... just a speck, caught between the blades of grass, lost in the shadows. No one can hear you.

Why aren't you talking back?

The silence of your father's car has made you mute. You face forward as you travel towards your home, feeling your movement through space and time. Your double glances at you from the rear view mirror, so you lean over against the side window to escape their gaze. Another catches your eye from the wing mirror in the shadow of the reflected hedge-line, and then disappears behind the clouds reflected in the window. You haven't asked why your mother didn't come to collect you. You haven't made a single sound. You want to ask him now, and to reassure him that she's alright. You want to tell him that she's home in a few days and everything is alright. You know this. You sit up and watch yourself from the windscreen mirror again, until he catches your eye.

You haven't asked why your mother didn't come to collect you.

I'm fighting for my little boy

On the way down
The fields were empty
I suppose they must have been sleeping

No, It's because I was put here. I get him back soon hopefully

You borrow the words of others, crop, cut and paste, edit them for your own use, but they are still not yours.

“Short Story.”

“She has settled now.”

“I do really appreciate you listening.”

“Everything is OK.”

“Please don’t be offended.”

“Thanks.”

“Don’t leave.”

“Nothing.”

Hi. Did you call me earlier?

You never quite saw the point in God; always searched for meaning elsewhere. The coffee cup half empty, too near the corner of your desk. The wisp of cigarette smoke that danced momentarily towards the window before it vanished. The sensation of total awareness at the moment of some seemingly profound realisation brought about by a particular image in a particular film, as the woman speaks to the boy. You cannot hear what she is saying, and then she turns away and cycles away along the track, the frame held long as she goes, longer than you expected, just longer than you can bare and then released at the very moment you wanted to hold onto it.

You walk outside to smoke.

- "Your misses pregnant too?"

- "No."

- "Oh, mine is."

- "Uh."

...

- "No clouds tonight."

- "No."

- "There'll be loads tomorrow."

Across the road, a street light
Casting a shadow of the bin on the side wall
That looks something like a bear
Or a dog
Flickers.

You awake one morning and switch on your radio to hear the dull buzz of distant interference. All transmissions are cancelled; all voices silenced. Only the myriad of electrical and radioactive interferences shoot about your simple room, piercing you like minute shards from some great story carved into a giant shattered tablet, each grain making tiny lacerations, ageing you at an atomic level, upsetting the orbits of neutrons and electrons around their nuclei. You turn the dial and scan across the airways to check. As you do so, you breath out slowly; a gentle hiss accompanies your sigh.

Your father's leather bound tan coloured radio rasps and fizzes, breathing with you. You hear it searching. It needs a purpose, its worn strap handle calls for his tender hand to lift it and carry it outside. Its warm tone sucks at the air in search of his voice. It wants to talk to him and tell him all its news.

You speak to your father in his car. He drives you about, probably to get you out of the house for a bit. He never speaks much. He parks outside his local pub.

- “Daddy, why can’t I go in?”

- “You’re too small.”

- “But I could come in with you.”

- “Oh no, not until you’re big.”

- “But I’m big now, Daddy.”

You’re big. Your voice is big and powerful. It rattles inside your head and presses against the backs of your eyes. You push it towards him with your irises and let him feel its power. He laughs, kindly, and you look away and let his laughter subdue your voice. You’re small again. The engine drowns out the memory of your voice.

I’m still trying to get my little boy back.

Tape to tape. Your father’s tape recorder turns as it copies from one tape to another. A compilation of his old favourites creates a collage of a previous self. You ask him if your voices will be on the recordings and he laughs. He leans over the machine and shouts at the tape head at the point where it’s magnetising the revolving cassette. He stops the recording and rewinds the tape a little. The playback starts and you listen to the last few bars of music that you just heard as he smiles at you. Then he stops smiling. There is a moment of distortion at the point where he shouted. He stops the tape again and silently rewinds both tapes to find the start point of the song on each cassette. He restarts the tapes and erases the residue of his voice’s interference.

You both listen in silence

Anniversary. The sun and the moon align. The echo of an event travels across time, radiates outwards from a single point. He, sat in his car, the radio speaks to him, soothes him. Music from another time. He mouths the words, but does not sing. The engine's rhythm plays against the broadcast music, a familiar song made new. He leans back against the driver's headrest and breathes in another time. You follow the pattern of his respiration as it slows and settles on the framework of the song for a while. Its slows further until the breathing of the exhaust takes over, takes up his last breath and fuses it with engine and the music. They run for some time, the car battery keeping them alive until it can eventually no longer support them. The engine coughs twice at strange intervals. It can no longer manage its subtle interplay with the music. And the song is left playing alone, to no one...

Repeat to fade.

You speak with his voice. Your voices an indistinguishable from one another, passed back and forth.

And there you are. You speak, and you hear all of your voices for the first time as one. You hear the words that you speak and each sound of each word and it's own lineage, its own story. You hear through the noise. The child of your parents, the parent of your children, author of your voice, voice of your author. You sit back in your chair and see what you had made, what you had been, what you had done. And it is, and you are, good. Resolved, in that moment at least. And you leave. Your voice carries you out and away, back home.

Back home.

I'm with my little boy now

- "Back home"

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