

# Book Notes: Living Speech: Resisting the Empire of Force, by James Boyd White

Rosa Kang

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*LIVING SPEECH: RESISTING THE EMPIRE OF FORCE*, BY JAMES BOYD WHITE. PRINCETON: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2006. Pp. xii + 226. Index. USD \$29.95 hardcover.

BY ROSA KANG

Simone Weil's essay on the *Iliad* plays a significant role in *Living Speech*. Weil states that war requires particular psychology—the dehumanization of the enemy so that we can engage in, and even justify, the killing of another human being. And such psychology is made possible through what Weil has called the “empire of force”: the way we think about ourselves and the world when we deny the humanity of others through exploitation, manipulation, and destruction.

In *Living Speech*, James Boyd White discusses the presence of the empire of force in our language as we think and speak in ways that dehumanize and demean human experience. By drawing on various sources, including children's essays, English literature, and judicial opinions, White explores some of the ways in which we may learn to disrespect the empire of force and engage in “living speech,” the kind of language that makes meaningful communication possible without degrading either the speaker or the hearer.

White focuses on the importance of resisting the empire of force, especially in the context of law, where the power of language becomes most evident through its direct impact on the public. White examines ways in which judges, practitioners, and law teachers should think about and understand language in order to engage in living speech. White also considers the First Amendment: it should prioritize protecting speech that is most sincere and alive while affording limited protection to dead forms of language that have been reduced to clichés or bureaucratic and mechanical phrases. White shows that living speech is a real possibility in the context of law, as demonstrated by several judicial opinions, and this is significant because it is only by resisting the empire of force that our world can change for the better.

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