

Writing Without Images, Writing Without Voice – IRCA 2026 Abstract

Writing Without Images, Writing Without Voice: Creative Process in Combined Aphantasia and Anendophasia

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Abstract

The co-occurrence of aphantasia and anendophasia remains largely undocumented. Research has examined each condition independently – Zeman’s five-dimensional framework for aphantasia subtypes (2025), Nedergaard and Lupyan’s foundational study on anendophasia (2024), Hurlburt’s distinction between fidelity-based and validity-based investigation of inner experience (2026) – but the combined profile has yet to be described from within. What happens when a person lacks both visual mental imagery and inner speech? And what happens when that person wants to write literary fiction?

This paper offers a first-person, structured account of creative writing under combined aphantasia and anendophasia. It is based on over two decades of literary practice and the textual analysis of two fiction manuscripts: a 50,000-word autofictional novel and the first chapters of the first volume of a nine-book science fiction saga, including extensive worldbuilding across seven fictional civilizations.

The account documents three core observations.

First, a reversed sensory hierarchy. Without visual imagery to guide scene construction, the writing process defaults to non-visual senses. Textual analysis reveals a consistent dominance of touch, smell, and proprioception over sight. Visual elements, when present, tend to be blurred, peripheral, or translated into tactile qualities (“a light made of milk and water, as soft as it is sharp”). This is not a deliberate stylistic choice – it appears to be the natural output of a mind that does not visualize.

Second, writing as the site of thought – not its transcription. Without inner speech to rehearse a sentence before committing it to the page, the act of writing becomes generative rather than translational. Scenes do not exist before they are written. Characters speak without the author hearing them first. The text is not a record of prior thinking – it is where thinking happens. This manifests in specific syntactic markers: sentence fragments as the default unit, formalized

hesitation (“not X but Y,” “perhaps,” “something”), and suspended scenes that cut before resolution, because the conclusion was never internally formulated.

Third, cognitive externalization as a structural necessity. The absence of both inner imagery and inner speech creates a dependence on external systems for memory, planning, and creative development. Without internal rehearsal – no visual preview of a scene, no verbal drafting of a sentence – the entire creative architecture must be held outside the mind. Over the past months, I have built what functions as an exocortex: a structured environment that holds context, tracks narrative threads, and enables dialogue-based thinking. This mirrors the three compensatory strategies identified in recent literature (Unseen Strategies, 2025) – semantic reliance, compressed discourse substitution, and systematic external recoding – but reveals them as not merely compensatory. They are the conditions under which creative work becomes possible at all.

These observations are drawn from self-identified aphantasia and anendophasia, assessed using established instruments (VVIQ; ISQ), consistent with current research methodology. Co-occurring autism and ADHD are noted as contributing factors to the non-linear cognitive profile but are not the focus of this account.

This paper contributes to two open questions. It provides the first documented account of combined aphantasia and anendophasia in creative practice, addressing a gap identified across recent reviews. And it proposes that the creative output of this combined profile is not diminished but rerouted: a literature built on sensation rather than image, on emergence rather than transcription, on external architecture rather than internal rehearsal. The approach is fidelity-based in the sense advocated by Hurlburt (2026) – documentation from within the experience, not measurement of a theoretical construct.

The writing does not happen despite the absence. It happens through it.

References

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