

Richard, Frances. «Joseph Grigley White Noise». *Artforum* - August 13, 2001

Joseph Grigley breathers new life into the dying art of conversation. Grigley, an artist who became deaf at age 10, often chats with hearing people by asking them to write down what they are saying. Since 1994, he's been incorporating their scribblings into his installations. Tacked to a curving wall at the Whitney are some 2500 utterances scrawled on handy bits of notepaper, business cards, gallery announcements, and airplane menus. A graphologist's wet dream, this vast social mosaic is composed of fragments, each on bearing the trace of someone's hand and personality – a myriad of tiny monuments to moments of communication.

Mesmerizing and endearing, combining the visceral pleasures of eavesdropping with a teasing intellectuality. "White Noise" is also a strangely vivid self portrait; Grigley's ghostly presence, an unseen interlocutor, animates these exchanges. People ask him questions that are blunt ("So, is your girlfriend deaf?) or politely curious ("Can you read lips in both English and French?"). Others discuss continental philosophy and Slovakian locutions. A French menu is jotted down on a stained paper tablecloth: "tripes veal head! Duck with olives." Friends are coyly inviting ("Sahll we have a last drink?") or mournfully confessional ("I can't get knocked up"). And my own admission: while reading through this chorus of silent voices, I stumbled across a note I had written to Grigley at an art opening, and that small relic of our brief, forgotten encounter startled and moved me.

Legend has it that modernism was born amid the chatter of café society. (Anyone who has spent substantial time speaking casually with artists has most likely come to doubt this version of art history.) Grigley's work records not the height of artistic discourse, but throwaway bits of conversation, things said at parties, on airplanes, and over dinner – slight and soon covered in oblivion, yet improbably revealing of humanity.