

JOSEPH GRIGELY is an appropriationist *auteur* of the finest kind. Deaf since the age of ten, Grigely collects bits and pieces of paper on which his interlocutors unskilled in sign language have registered sentences, exclamations, utterances, cries, and whispers in written conversations with him. Since 1994, Grigely has recombined and rearranged these disjointed scraps of dialogue into sets he often names *Untitled Conversations*—which may then be followed by themes or rubrics (such as “sex,” “stories,” “music,” “meals in restaurants,” or “the twists and turns some conversations take”), numbers, or colors (some collections of paper are arranged according to the sheets’ common hue).

In film or in literature, the French expression *auteur* identifies the director or writer who develops a distinct and innovative personal and authorial style, often with a marked concern with the structure of language—be it filmic or writerly. One thinks of French cinema and literature from the 1960s, and indeed, Grigely’s visual work brings new meaning to Roland Barthes’s notion of the “grain of the voice.” In Grigely’s otherwise flimsy and disposable pieces of paper, the grain of the voice of anyone engaged in conversation with the artist is unequivocally expressed—in the form of the unguarded, unpretentious, and informal notes and scribbles collected in his everyday exchanges. In these candid messages, it’s as if the accent, tone, or emphasis that written language can barely convey are somehow taken into account. Yet Grigely’s conversation partners are also anonymous; in all of the artist’s *Untitled Conversations*, the texts remain unidentified by signature, origin, or date. It is through precisely such works that Grigely emerges so vividly as the *auteur* in a precise and subtle play with his very absence, as well as through appropriated and re-contextualized fragments, articulated in discontinuous and non-linear narratives.

The main concern in Grigely’s *Untitled Conversations* is, of course, communication. Not so much what is being said, but how it is being said. That the artist’s conversations are all untitled suggests that their quotidian meaning and function is no longer privileged. What is presented is a fragmentation of the grain of the other’s voice. The question that Grigely’s art raises is twofold: On the one hand, how do these voices reflect or mirror the very absent *auteur*? On the other hand, what (or where) are the pitfalls and consequences of this type of communication?

One of Grigely’s most accomplished works is *White Noise* (2000), consisting of more than 2,500 pieces of white paper, representing conversations from the previous ten years. White noise (as depicted ominously in Don DeLillo’s 1985 novel, also titled *White Noise*) is not only the constant and inescapable humming silence produced by a cacophony of sounds in the big city, but also the interference that surfaces in communications of all sorts. In a clever articulation that furthers the opposition between “white” and “noise,” Grigely’s largest conversation to date registers a decade-long cacophony of others’ voices, referring to the most silent of all pictorial manifestations: the white monochrome.

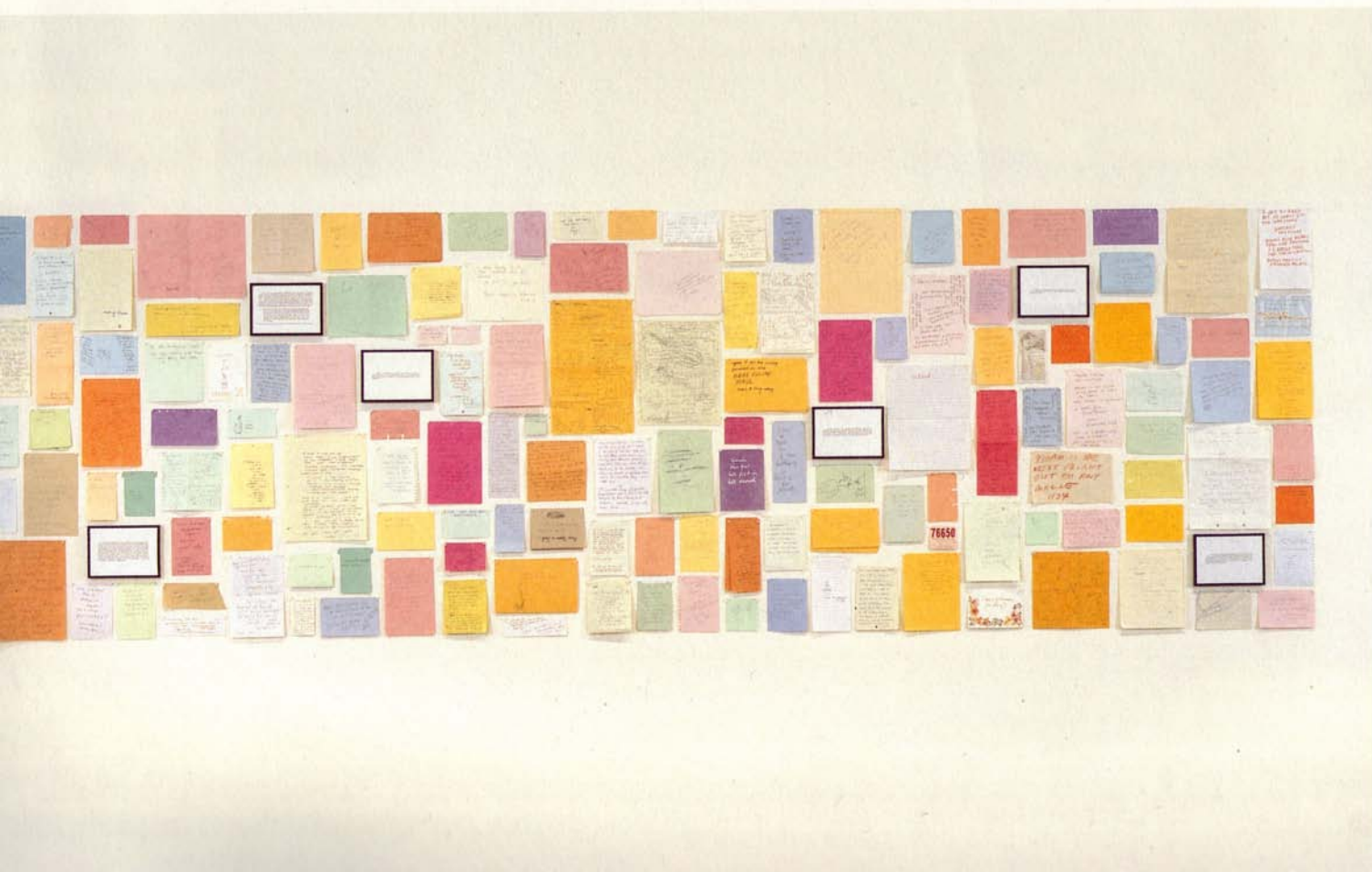
—Adriano Pedrosa

(1)



- (1) *White Noise*, 2000, ink, pencil, and mixed media on paper, pins, dimensions variable, installation at Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris
- (2) *Untitled Conversations (What Else Are We Alive For?)*, 2000, pen and pencil on paper, pins, 44 x 142 inches, 111.8 x 360.7 cm
- (3) *Thirteen Untitled Conversations*, 2002, ink and pencil on paper, pins, 14 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches, 36.8 x 49.5 cm
- (4) *Ten Untitled Conversations*, 2004, ink and pencil on paper, pins, 14 x 16 1/2 inches, 35.6 x 41.9 cm


Air de Paris



Went to a
Tupperware
Party.
New kind
called the
Pampered Chef.

he's doing stuff like take I read there
riding through pink fibrous + the book, etc.
sheets no mention
the phone conversation on a ten of you
on the wall it's so funny - spread out
I love it with the breaking through
except next to it's somehow he manages
as a variation of its to comment on the story
actually they like big things
like becoming popular though a style you're doing so the way
sounds well - is it paying the
familiar for the play or not money off the table
dead I filmed that but more than that
still images

Visually
it's
AMAZING
girls doing
kung fu

It's Vegas too close
I liked
the bathroom


BROTHER OF A FRIEND
IN THE 70's would
inject wigs with
DRUGS - ONE DAY
HIS MOM FOUND A
CLOSET FULL OF OLD
VEGAS & THREW OUT!

Maybe for the first
both I can start
with Sugar

MOM TOOK THE PET
SKUNK "PETER" - TO
A COCTAIL PARTY IN HER
PURSE & LET LOOSE.



THE KITCHEN HEAP (LITERALLY)
WENT OUT THE WINDOW

These guys are gross.
Making fun of
Long Island Italians

these are
the lyrics
we're listening
to now - The Mountain
Goats

SHE IS WORKING
NOW 354W

I'm so non-agreeable
& temperamental.
I've been arrested
for forging checks
Back in SF - when I
was a punk. w/
a fake passport ←
this was the serious
offense



Plus
I WAS
a real
Bitch
I think

You melt
them in the
streets



there was an article
in NY mag recently
about "Bois"
~~male~~ female to male
Lesbians - but it's
really the next generations
understanding of gender
~~they~~ - really scary - talking
about ~~that~~
"fucking their bitches"
etc.

it's consciously
not decided yet
~~the~~ The girls who are
working collect
suggestions of how
to do it.

I heard about the
boyfriend who
mashed after
handling jalapeno
peppers.

I don't think
he intended
to reveal that.

could

with the prop on TV

person is +

you explain
the saying
that you're
making
Howard



Lungs is eating too

Howard thinks she
is like a big
cat.
He cat walk
on him at
night.

Good Helen
is machine
somewhere
over there

You must
stand some
discreetly if at any
time a button in
my dress comes
unbuttoned.

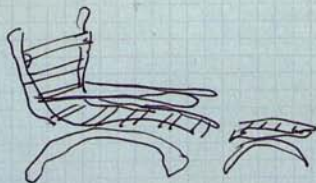
Why - okay

That's so
totally
weird

Do they
feel guilty?
→

The other thing was the
mad king -
he tells Farmir
that he wishes his
brother had lived
instead of him &
orders him into a
hopeless battle.

Adorndak chairs



I'm getting married