

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first themed issue of *Etchings*, with a colourful palette of conversations on offer.

Robert Dessaix discusses the art of conversation, in particular what defines *good* conversation, by placing it in an historical context; Astra Howard presents us with urban conversations, created through performance art aimed at inviting the public into a discourse on social issues; Nicole Goodlad's etchings show us a form of conversation inspired by writing letters to strangers; from a media arts perspective Sean Cubitt discusses mobile phone usage and the concept of connecting versus disconnecting with others; and Liz Walker overhears conversations in public, only to cut them up into snippets and print them on garments, furniture, and tableware.

Then there are conversations that take place over morning tea; conversations between a group of philosophers unlawfully entering a stranger's living room late at night and demanding his participation; a seductive telephone conversation between a man and a woman; failed conversations between friends; conversations gaining meaning only through the absence of words—through absolute silence; and the conversations of Peter Davis, deftly drawing together essay, poetry, and photography.

Also included are pieces that more loosely relate to the art of conversation, such as Glenys Osborne's 'Mermaid Footwear', a powerful story about the routine of a couple's long-term relationship being broken by the insignia of youth and the couple's wish to be young again.

Choosing the art of conversation as a topic is not only about trying to establish what renders a conversation successful, but just as much, if not more, about what leads us to fail in conversation and how the art and style of conversation change from one generation to the next.

We are familiar with the changes language and communication undergo from generation to generation and to the call by many writers over the years for a simplification of language. I am personally intrigued by this, for I feel that the popular idioms of the day tell us a great deal about our true selves. I would like to share part of an msn conversation that I watched, not uninvited, as my teenage stepson communicated with friends:

hey, turns out they hav swet shop shirts
lol!
u was with lyall
well not funy, full wack, swet shops suck
lol
have u seen the movies for school?
yer
k
i only hav 2watch look both ways
im watchin them 2dya
oh k
newayz dude im off
catcha l8er

Could their youthful approach to the art of conversation be an act of conserving energy, a deliberate decision not to pollute the world with an overindulgence of words and letters? Or is it a simple ritual, like that of the mantra, in which abbreviation and repetition are conducive to happiness? By the way, 'lol' means 'laugh out loud'.

Enjoy this collection; it is filled with an abundance of ideas, all portrayed through the magic of words and images. It reminds us that some traditions, such as storytelling, are still important in our lives.

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