

Zeteo is Overhearing

By William Eaton

Zeteo is Looking and Listening, September 2014

The Atlantic Theater Company in New York is currently presenting a new musical, *Found*, based on “on scores of surprising and eccentric discarded notes and letters that have been ‘found’ in the real world by every-day people.” I do not know why the Web announcement puts “found” in quotes, and I am wary of musicals, but the very idea of this piece has caused me re-open one of my several files of found language. In this case these are remarks overheard.

W. 14th Street, NYC. Taxi driver, after getting past a truck that had been slowing progress for several blocks:

When you’re behind a truck it’s like the end of the world, and then, when you get past, the whole world opens up.

Harvest restaurant, Cambridge, MA. A woman in her late 60s talking across a restaurant table to her somewhat older husband:

I know what my question is: “Should we disable the motion detector in the garage?”

In a coffee shop near the United Nations headquarters, NYC. A middle-aged Nigerian woman:

I have a master’s from one of the best universities in New York. I have experience. It doesn’t make sense that I’m jobless. I don’t get it at all.

French Roast restaurant, Greenwich Village, NYC:

If you stick to one thing, which I never do, you get successful, but I can never figure out the one thing I’m interested in.

E. 46th Street near First Avenue, NYC. Young man talking into microphone connected to cellphone:

How do you kick your own mother out of the fucking hospital? How do you do it?

20th Street Loop entering Stuyvesant Town, NYC. Young woman walking and talking on cellphone (to her mother?):

I’ve been here for six months and I haven’t met one decent person.

E. 21st Street and Park Avenue, NYC:

The person that you really are is not the person I was with.

*William Eaton is the Editor of **Zeteo**. A collection of his essays, **Surviving the Twenty-First Century**, will be published by Serving House Books. For more, see **Surviving the website**.*

The Smith, Second Ave and 51st Street, NYC. Waitress explaining what she had done the night before:

Went to Koreatown and got some ginseng soup, watched a couple of hours of really bad TV, popped some NyQuil, and that was it.

Nice Matin restaurant, Amsterdam and 79th, NYC. Mother explaining to second grader about good ol' days before cellphones:

It was nice because when your boss left for the day that was it. Couldn't call you, couldn't text you, couldn't e-mail you.

Sandra Cameron Dance center, NYC. Swing dance instructor, offering the interior monologue of someone dancing with a new partner:

I'm being connected to differently, I need to pay attention.

Stuyvesant Town, NYC. Young woman walking along sidewalk, towards other people:

Are these my friends? I think these are my friends.

Hotel restaurant, NYC. Child talking to young relative:

OK, now leave me alone while I learn something.

Link

In another lifetime, it must have been, I built a 8,6671-word essay from a single found line. It was, however, a particularly juicy line, overheard at Darwin's Ltd., a sandwich shop on Mt. Auburn Street in Cambridge. A young woman asked over the counter to an employee: "Do you know, is the crab soup vegetarian?"