



July 2008

Poet Kenneth Goldsmith encourages his students to plagiarize. Maybe that's because stealing is making him famous [By Jason McBride](#)



Image credit: David Velasco

### You teach Uncreative Writing at the University of Pennsylvania. What's on the syllabus?

How to plagiarize, appropriate, steal, lie and cheat—things the students are already good at. They're marked down if they show a shred of creativity or originality. They love it.

### Why do you think other writers are so hung up on originality?

I don't know. It's something the music and art worlds dealt with long ago. Nobody wants Britney to really sing. She lip-synchs and everyone's happy. Marcel Duchamp put the question of what art is to rest almost 100 years ago. But literature is always 50 years behind painting.

### Your work *Soliloquy* is a transcription of every word you said in the span of a week. Aren't your books tedious to produce?

I find them very pleasurable to produce. It's relaxing to retype and transcribe. I absolutely adore it. It's easy. I'll never have writer's block.

### Do you ever miss more conventional literary pursuits, such as crafting the perfect metaphor?

No, but then I wasn't trained as a writer. That's like asking Matthew Barney, "Do you ever miss drawing a beautiful face?"

### What are you working on now?

Rewriting Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*. I'm transposing the whole thing onto the New York of the 20th century.

### How long do you think that will take?

About 15 years.

**Kenneth Goldsmith** performs as part of the Scream Literary Festival on July 10.

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