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Kenneth Goldsmith and Conceptual Poetics

Guest-edited by Lori Emerson and Barbara Cole

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Introduction

In Spring 2002, Lori Emerson and I began tossing around the idea of a journal issue devoted to Kenneth Goldsmith and Conceptual Poetics. We were confident that Goldsmith's prominence in North American poetic practices warranted discussion. The question was how such a dialogue might best be facilitated. The uniqueness of Goldsmith's work demanded a unique context; Lori and I were committed to a forum which would invite both critical and creative contributions. *Open Letter's* ongoing tradition of exploring innovative issues in innovative ways made it an obvious choice. And, much to our good fortune, Frank Davey – demonstrating the openness that his journal is named for – agreed. If there had been any question as to the relevancy of our issue, Juliana Spahr's declaration in response to *The Weather* (2005) that "Kenneth Goldsmith is without a doubt the leading conceptual poet of his time" confirmed that we were on to something.

In the spirit of Goldsmith's poetics, our original call for work proposed an A-Z listing of potential contexts; this initial catalog of topics varied from Joycean influences to the Kootenay School of Writing, the Toronto Research Group to Goldsmith's behemoth online archive, *ubu.com*. What neither Lori nor I could have predicted was the enthusiastic surge of proposals which came flooding in. Despite the diversity of approaches this A-Z list might have aspired to, we were even more delighted to discover that the submitted essays spanned an even farther reaching scope, orienting Goldsmith in an avant-garde tradition which includes Mallarmé, Andre Breton, Gertrude Stein, Guy DeBord, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, and Language writing. It is our hope that the essays appearing here mark the beginning of a much longer conversation.

The enclosed pieces analyze the conceptual question from a variety of angles: close readings of single texts; comparative studies; and creative responses. Craig Dworkin's essay begins with a redirection of Goldsmith's critical reception and, thus, it is with this essay that our collection begins. Through his reading of the "concept of the interval," Dworkin offers a productive analysis of Goldsmith's *oeuvre*. So, too, Molly Schwartzburg, in her consideration of "Encyclopedic Novelties,"

assumes an encyclopedic approach in her discussion of a broad range of Goldsmith's texts. Addressing the length and supposed difficulty of these tomes – deflections often hurled at the *avant-garde* – Schwartzburg takes on the writer himself as well as his critics, questioning the accolades as much as the accusations of Goldsmith as "jokester." Bruce Andrews offers his own response to the notion of writer as jokester in his Goldsmith-inspired "ollapalooza," in which the first letter is removed from words and then reshuffled in alphabetical order, thereby deconstructing "umbo-jumbo" and offering an Andrews "anfare" of sorts to the surrounding "owwow" on Conceptual Poetics.

In turning to specific texts, Geoffrey Young's retrospective piece reflects on Goldsmith's segue from sculptor to "word processor," offering particular insights into the early works, *73 Poems* (1995) and *No. 111 2.7.93-10.20.96* (1997). Rubén Gallo and Derek Beaulieu each address *Fidget* (2000) in relation to the body. Extending the Deleuzian concept of the "body-without-organs," Gallo reads the "organic unconscious" of *Fidget* as a "literary *trompe l'œil*" while Beaulieu compares Goldsmith's representation of the body to crime scene photography. Aptly-suited to the task of unpacking the language game at work in *Soliloquy* (2001), Christian Bök refutes the accusation that Goldsmith's poetics commits an "act of literary temerity," and places this text in a literary history that spans from Wordsworth to David Antin. Jason Christie employs Chris Cutler's theory of "plunderphonia" to examine Goldsmith's conceptualist praxis in plundering *The New York Times* in *Day* (2003). In so doing, Christie examines issues of ownership and originality as they pertain to high and low art. Marjorie Perloff lends her expertise to Goldsmith's most recent book, *The Weather*, offering a political reading of this text's implicit critique of the bombing of Baghdad and the United States involvement in Iraq.

A recurring theme throughout Goldsmith's work as well as this collection of essays is the city of New York. Employing questions adapted from Proust's questionnaire, Caroline Bergvall interviews Goldsmith on a "tour of his idea of New York." In a fitting poetic tribute, Rob Fitterman's "W. 3rd St – W. 26th St" chronicles the pastiche of cityscape and wordscape that is quintessential NYC as much as quintessential "Kenny G." Even more quintessentially Kenny G is Goldsmith himself who provides his own contribution to the discussion in "Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing."

The comparative approaches included in this issue each identify significant connections between Goldsmith's poetics and his modernist predecessors as well as his contemporary peers. Joshua Schuster reads Goldsmith's exploration of "boredom" in the context of Walter Benjamin's material historiography whereas Carl Peters considers Goldsmith's conceptual poetics in relation to Duchampian indifference and Steinian repetition. Making a necessary leap, Johanna Drucker extends the consideration of Goldsmith's work to Darren Wershler-Henry's *Tapeworm Foundry* as an instantiation of Conceptual Poetics.

As the remaining essays demonstrate, Goldsmith's work raises a number of crucial questions regarding the relationship of theory to poetic praxis. Analyzing his oft-quoted manifesto, "Being Boring" in lieu of Jacques Ranciere and Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Christine Wertheim examines how "gender anxiety" figures in Goldsmith's work at the intersection of aesthetics and politics. In a piece inspired by Goldsmith's *oeuvre*, spanning from his early chapbook, *Gertrude Stein On Punctuation*, to more recent works such as *Soliloquy*, *Day*, and *The Weather*, Simon Morris offers a transcript of his debate with psychoanalyst, Howard Britton, on the psychoanalytic definition of poetry as an "attack on language" as it might (or might not) pertain to Goldsmith's poetics. Darren Wershler-Henry concludes the collection with a range of questions apropos to a twenty-first century consideration of Conceptual Poetics. Reading the fluidity of language in Goldsmith's work as operating according to the logic of "software and the flow of the digital text," Wershler-Henry opens the discussion to the role of the writing subject in digital culture.

Barbara Cole

Zero Kerning

Craig Dworkin

Goldsmith: "By self-advertising, attract the attention of the day."¹ The *Day* being a perfect example of the degree to which Kenneth Goldsmith's attention-attracting projects have been so well self-advertised that their paratexts – blurbs and back-cover copy, author statements, interviews, reviews – make a bid to eclipse, or even completely replace, their content. Consistently branded, his books come so neatly packaged in single-sentence summations that they seem to render any actual reading redundant, or unnecessary: 600 pages of rhyming *r* phrases, sorted by syllables and alphabetized; everything he said for a week; every move his body made for a day; a year's worth of transcribed weather reports; one day's *New York Times*, retyped....

Measured against the specifics of the particular texts, such tag-lines are of course to some extent inaccurate, and one should always remember Benjamin's warning: "Never trust what writers say about their own writing."² Indeed, part of the interest of Goldsmith's projects lies precisely in the distance they deviate from the tidiness of their clear protective wrappers. Moreover, I suspect that the obvious topics attracted so far – strategies of appropriation and boredom; rhetorics of "uncreative writing" and "conceptual poetics"; genealogies traced to the rules of the OuLiPo or the useless reference books of 'pataphysics – have worked as decoys, distracting readers from what may be more central concerns and entrenched networks of filiation.

One of those concerns, I want to suggest in these paragraphs, is the concept of the interval. To read Goldsmith's *oeuvre*, at a certain remove, reveals a consistent concern with spacing – with the collapse of distances into equal measures, and the differences and repetitions subsequently legible within regimes of periodic regulation. Here the concept of *rule* begins to move beyond the obvious, pre-established methods for structuring books like *No. 111* (or the related projects *No. 105* and *No. 110*) and to extend, as a general principle, to Goldsmith's other works as well. *Regulate*: to make regular, or even [f. late L. *regulat-*, ppl. stem of

regulare (5th c.), f. *regula* RULE].

“If you start with rules, you’ve really got a tough road,” as Clark Coolidge says, and of course in any long work “there will be long stretches of time that will be dry.”³ But even pacing itself (“a thing quite out of taste, no variety, no composition in the world”) can be exciting; the percussive swarm of Ligeti’s *Poème*, after all, is made entirely from measure.⁴ It sounds like a hailstorm. “Interval,” not coincidentally, has always been idiomatically associated with the weather; it appears, accordingly, in *The Weather* (as does “pace”), “from time to time, in place to place”, as in the beautifully rhymed and assonant phrase “some intervals of sun.”

“Interval: [Ultimately ad. L. *intervallum*, orig. ‘space between palisades or ramparts’, later ‘interval of space or of time’, f. *inter* between + *vallum* rampart. In F. the word appears as *entreval*, *antreval* (13th c.), *entrevalle*, *-valle* (14-16th c.), *intervalle* masc. from 14th c. The earliest Eng. example represents the first of these; the 14-16th c. *intervalle* was evidently also immediately from F. The appearances of the word till the beginning of the 17th c. are quite sporadic, having little or no historical connexion with each other.] **1.** The period of time between two events, actions, etc., or between two parts of an action or performance; a period of cessation; a pause, break.”

No. 111: “time-share, Times Square [...] Time Warner, timekiller, timepleaser [...] time traveller [...] time was whatever, times without number [...]” *The Weather* reveals similarly idiomatic and idiosyncratic uses of “times” (e.g. “times of sun and clouds”) and those intervals the weather registers “at times” or “from time to time.” Moreover, the structure of these texts foregrounds the intervals that constitute calendrics: the hours of *Fidget* within its day; the days of *Soliloquy* within its week; the days of *The Weather* within its seasons (sections) within its year (*Year*, in fact, being the original working title for the project); the dates that form the full, awkwardly unmemorable title of *No. 111: 2.7.93-10.20.96*.

Such intervals *punctuate* [“to break into or interrupt in intervals”] the flow of time, just as the “periods of rain” repeated throughout *The Weather* interrupt otherwise indistinct atmospheric systems of continuously varying degrees of humidity, pressure, and saturation. But the etymological chance of that idiomatic phrase – “*periods* of rain” – further emphasizes the underlying concept of spacing that relates *The Weather* to

Goldsmith’s earlier series of works on punctuation, beginning with a suite of large-format drawings from the 1990s and culminating in the chapbook *Gertrude Stein On Punctuation*, in which all of the punctuation marks in the eponymous section of Stein’s lecture are extracted and distributed in constellations across a triptych of pages.

One precedent for these works, as Goldsmith has acknowledged, can be found in the redistribution of punctuation in John Cage’s *Writing For the Second Time Through Finnegans Wake*. In a haphazard scatter over the field of the page, unaligned with the orthogonal set of the rest of the text, the punctuation from Cage’s source text is spread without any particular orientation. Cage and Alison Knowles (who collaborated on the layout) may in turn have been inspired by one of the more curious moments in the *Wake* itself: a question mark, dropped askew between two lines of type and rotated so that its crook seems to do the work of a comma.⁵

The Weather also references Cage, who composed his own *Lecture on the Weather*, and who repeatedly “said that he wanted his music to be like the weather.”⁶ The more direct link, however, is formal. Cage listened to radio news “in order to find out what the weather is going to be.” As *The Weather* records, those reports – fit to Procrustean intervals of sixty-second slots – are exact analogues of Cage’s *Indeterminacy*.⁷ Cage explained: “In oral delivery of this lecture, I tell one story a minute. If it’s a short one I have to spread it out; when I come to a long one I have to speak as rapidly as I can.”⁸

Registering the pressures of a regulating interval, the varied tempi of Cage’s vocal performance distort a natural speaking rhythm and transform vignettes into a musically interesting composition; because of those variations, as Goldsmith observes, “*Indeterminacy* is terrific listening.”⁹ Conversely, the move from speech to transcribed writing can make for terrific reading, and the tension between vocal performance and written text – yet another instance of the logic of the interval – runs throughout Goldsmith’s own work as well. The notation displayed in *Gertrude Stein On Punctuation* is exemplary: marking the intervals of grammar in writing while recalling the oral history embedded in their elocutionary origin as cues for regulating speech for rhetorical effect.

“The auditor learns[...] Note the notes of admiration! [...] Count the hemisemicolons! Screamer caps and invented gommias, coites puntlost, forced to farce! The pipette will say anything at all for a

change,” to return to *Finnegans Wake*, which is itself “the difference between speech to make a point and speech to make no point at all” (where “point” is the sentence’s full stop).¹⁰ Or, as Cage put it in his *Lecture on Nothing*: “I have nothing to say and I am saying it.” Like *Indeterminacy*, that “saying” is a “composed talk” pitched to the *rubato* of “everyday speech” and with its text divided into the equal measures of a rhythmic structure.

In the *Lecture on Nothing* (as in the contemporaneous *Lecture on Something*), Cage’s casual, colloquial “talk” is not only punctuated into movements and units, but the lines of the scored text are each divided into four measures spaced across the page (“re-quired,” as Cage puns in the opening movement) in a striking typographic layout.¹¹ “This space of time” (or *Interuall*, as John Bullokar defined it in 1616: “a distance of time or place”) is also one of the lecture’s themes. In an instance of ‘composition as explanation,’ Cage’s typically modern, intervalic text discusses his interest in “all the intervals,” especially “the modern intervals,” explaining: “I learned that the intervals have meaning.”¹³

Intervals not only have meaning, but they are, in some sense, what grounds meaning itself: “the *spacing* (pause, blank, punctuation, interval in general, etc.) which constitutes the origin of signification.”¹² The semiotic system of language depends on its multiple articulations at different levels: those intervals between letters, words, and larger units of grammar which introduce the physical space of difference that permits us to distinguish, cognitively, different meanings. Moreover, as evinced by the move from the *scriptura continua* of western antiquity (in which texts were written without spacing between words), such intervals have had far-reaching conceptual effects, with changes in textual space changing the way we understand the world around us.¹⁴

Perhaps the most significant “consequence of the medieval evolutionary process through which space was introduced into text,” according to Peter Saenger, was an increase in the incidence of silent reading (in short: “space between eyebrows pushed by speech”).¹⁵ Whatever the true extent of the historical change in medieval reading practice, or the actual mechanism of that change, comparing the intervals of written and spoken language is instructive, given the counterintuitive degree to which the spacing of spoken language fails to correspond to written word-boundaries. In the more regular and predictable blanks of writing, even the most accurate transcription cannot register speech’s incongruent and

idiosyncratic measure of interlexical pause, slur, and transegmental drift.

(Although, as *The Spectator* reminds us, with a pun on the typographic and psychological senses of the word *character*, handset type might reveal an equally individualistic temper: “the difference between huddling and spacing out is one which depends partly on character: very few men spacing out their letters exactly alike”).¹⁶ While Goldsmith’s punctuation pieces can reveal some “interference of the lyric ego,” the stenciling of his hand-drawn word pieces (*73 Poems* and *Tizzy Boost*, for instance) seems designed to counter any idiosyncrasy with uniformity and consistent spacing. However precious, even those handmade works seem closer to the digital age of precision desktop publishing than to the classicism of antique fine-press book-art.

As *Soliloquy* attests, Goldsmith is attentive to such typographic particulars, especially on-line. “There’s no spaces in URL’s,” he explains at one point, and he later discusses the distributed setting of web text at some length, concluding: “Is that at about the spacing you want it?”¹⁷ One should recall that Goldsmith’s monumental on-line editorial project, *UbuWeb*, originally began as a far more modest and haphazard archive devoted primarily to visual poetry, like Brazilian *concretismo*, that emphasized the spacing of language on the page. Tellingly, “the physical attributes the Noigandres group found inspiring in various poetic precursors reappear in” Goldsmith’s own work, with “space (*blancs*) and typographical devices as substantive elements of composition.”¹⁸

Here, despite the obvious emphasis on speech – the mouthwork of salivary swallows in *Fidget*, with its play-by-play narration in which Goldsmith “spoke every movement,” or the captured conversations netted in the filtering screens of *No. III* (not to mention the colloquial stutters and idioms laid bare in *Soliloquy* and *The Weather*) – is the point at which Goldsmith’s work announces itself *as writing*, as *écriture*.¹⁹ To align those works with Cage’s spoken lectures or David Antin’s “talk poems” is tempting, but the real affiliation would be based not on the similarly blatant (and slightly aggressive) self-proclamation of “talking” in those works, but rather on the signature spacing (*les ‘blancs’*) of their transcripts.

“It is necessary,” in Derrida’s accounting, “that interval, distance, spacing occur [...] with a certain perseverance in repetition.”²⁰ A reflection of that perseverance, mirrored from one facet of the logic of the interval, can be

glimpsed in the exhaustive compass aspired to by so many of Goldsmith's projects (already evident in the reference-book length of *No. 111*): *all* the punctuation from a source; *every* move his body made; *every* word spoken; *every* word in the *Times*; *every* forecast, every day. The logical conclusion seems to be the end-game of Benjamin's collector: "Everything remembered, everything thought, everything conscious...." (*Arcades* 205). Intervals register only when their background has a sufficiently inclusive, expansive extension and duration.

(The interval thus opens a series of alternately discrepant and congruent spaces between construction and reception. On the one hand, it can serve to pace both the material and the reader ["I'll finish that chapter and then we'll take a break"].²¹ On the other hand, the rigorously uniform and exhaustive structures aspired to by these works are at odds with the modes of their assumed reading: irregular, discontinuous, distracted – skimmed and sampled and dipped. "You cannot read this thing cover front to back[....] It's the kind of book that you might leave your on the back of your toilet[....] It's not meant to be read linearly... none of my work is.")²²

For this reason, a project such as *Broken New York*, with its *flâneur* "attempt to catalog every type of streetscape defect the city has to offer," fits assuredly into Goldsmith's *oeuvre* (although the work is in fact a collaboration with David Wondrich).²³ The family resemblance is equally unmistakable in a project Goldsmith referred to as "retyping my library": ostensibly every book on his shelf, in the alphabetical order of their author's last name, retyped and repackaged under the logic of a new, uniform interval. In place of the irregular sizes, colors, and bindings of the originals, and regardless of their genre or status: a vast set of identical, archival-grey document boxes.

Such a project obviously points in many directions. With its witty evocation of the geometric units of 1960s Minimalism it veers back toward the sculptural tradition in which Goldsmith was trained at the Rhode Island School of Design (and hence is directly related to the volumetric heft of *Day*). At the same time, it re-imagines Benjamin's "Unpacking My Library," recalls Perec's catalogue of ways to rearrange a library, and restages Borge's quixotic Menard. But what I want to emphasize is how effortlessly it merges with Goldsmith's other works, and what a solid (perhaps, necessary) place it holds in that series, *even though it went unrealized*. The *oeuvre*, in short, seems to have established its own interval.

A certain spacing, that is, has emerged between the books themselves (I am always a little surprised to see the books together, side-by-side, and remember that they were not all published in an identical format, or with a uniform design). The *oeuvre* has come to constitute something like a collection of collections, a second-order collection in Benjamin's thinking, a sort of *catalogue déraisonné*. "What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. The relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness" (*Arcades* 204).

Accordingly, the converse also holds true. The logic of the interval has come to feel like such a forcefully established principle of Goldsmith's signature that some of his works – *Head Citations*; "Punk"; 6799; an unpublished Manichean epic of variously weighted fonts; an immense unfinished drama of chat-room dialogues – have in turn come to seem like more minor and insubstantial works than one abandoned and recycled before being finished or ever seen by more than a few studio visitors. And this is true irrespective of those texts' interest or importance, and regardless of the time or effort they required. They almost seem to lack a certain authenticating signature, to be fully *his*.

So 6799, for instance – simply a list of Goldsmith's record collection – is the work that at first glance seems to most nakedly evince his identity as a collector, but it appears, in light of Benjamin's argument, to actually be the book furthest removed from the logic of the collector. It does reflect (though "brittle, too, are mirrors") the collection's peculiar category of completeness, but like a library card-catalogue 6799 is still too utile, still too close to what might have been its original function. (204) All of which brings us back again to sculpture. Relating collector and sculptor through the figure of the plinth, Benjamin concludes: "Collectors are beings with tactile instincts" (*Arcades* 205).

Ultimately, Goldsmith's spacing creates a kind of non-rhythmical metrics. While all intervals permit measurement (phone-poles in the desert, equally spaced and pulsing as you pass, allow distance to be judged), Goldsmith's spacing is a special instance. Where some spacing overlays a regular interval onto an unchanged ground (like the superimposed grid of an unprojected map), or establishes a form into which information is fit in distributions that could be accounted for otherwise (the measures of

a musical score, the frames of cinema), Goldsmith's intervals tend to regulate one regime in a way that distorts others. With one variable held – perversely, 'pataphysically – constant, others are allowed to be set radically, reeling, free.

Much of the interest of *Soliloquy*, for instance, comes from its defamiliarization of otherwise quotidian speech, and the way in which diegetic space and time are collapsed into the equal intervals of the textual period: one statement follows another with the same spacing regardless of whether the two utterances took place as part of the same conversation or an hour later, across town, with a different interlocutor. Similarly, the syllabic intervals of *No. III* reveal unexpected rhythmic patterns; the spacing of its phrases yield a data-set of discoveries for questions linguists never thought to ask (e.g.: do five-syllable colloquial American English phrases ending in a schwa have a typical metrical base?)

Similarly, the spacing in *Fidget* establishes a certain interval by registering only one movement per sentence, creating a strange sense of bodily rhythm in which any action is equally narrated regardless of its scale or significance: a swing of the arm condenses into the same textual space that the blink of an eyelid expands to fill. Moreover, because the spacing of *Fidget* depends on the time it takes to narrate (rather than perform) actions, they appear hastened or slowed to match the beat of this new textual pulse, just as any comprehensive corporeal view is distorted by recording only selected movements at the expense of the thousands of other simultaneous ones.

The spacing of *Fame* is equally distorting. Goldsmith asked Birmingham residents for five names off the top of their heads and then published the responses in public venues: the newspaper, billboards, and finally a bronze civic monument. The pentameter intervals of those texts bring together certain names that other categorizations (family, lovers, heroes, friends) would separate while omitting names that other schema would put in natural proximity. Again, I do not mean to suggest that *Fame* is unrelated to Goldsmith's several other projects exploring the interesting and timely intersection of surveillance and exhibitionism – only that they are also connected, and perhaps at a deeper level, by the logic of the interval.

Day also depends on the distorting effects of the interval, at both a molecular and molar level, and as in *Soliloquy* and *Fidget* its acts of

regulation defamiliarize the quotidian world, rendering its everyday language extraordinary and strange. At the micro-level, its distinctive facture arises from a peculiar textual democratization, reducing the newspaper's patchwork carnival of fonts and typefaces to the book page's uniform print-block of equal-weight twelve-point Times. Each word in *Day* is given equal weight, just as setting the kerning to zero gives each typeset character an equal spacing. "Spacing consists in putting a proper distance between words."²⁴ "My entire production," as Goldsmith has observed, "is predicated upon distance."²⁵

At the molar level, the newspaper source of *Day* is twice removed from its original spacing. First, the paper is pulled from the dependable interval of the daily (a single date, September 1st, 2000, snatched from a series that stretches back before any reader's memory to 1856 and projects forward to any imaginable horizon). Secondly, the book removes the paper from the multiple printings of that single day's circulation run, as its text is translated into the new format of a second codex edition. With this double withdrawal, *Day* fixes and monumentalizes the transient in the frozen moment of sculpture (like the implicit gossip and fleeting associations of the Birmingham monument).

(The *punctum* in this snapshot of a day, it seems to me, are the obituaries. "Literature," as Pound famously put it, "is news that STAYS news," and in this strenuous attempt to avoid literariness the obituaries maintain their status – *stay news* – in a way that other items do not.²⁶ The other stories, in hindsight, now appear obsolete or irrelevant; they have been superceded by more recent developments or rendered mere trivia [the US Open semifinalists, say]. Or, more interestingly, they have acquired a certain ironic frisson from subsequent events. Obituaries, in contrast, capture their news at a point of singularity: each individual always just as dead, their facts without a future.)

Moreover, these removes bring Goldsmith's project under the sign of Marcel Duchamp. Although Duchamp's *readymade* is often taken as a synonym for *objet trouvé*, part of its essence is the same logic of the interval we have already seen, including the temporal spacing that structures so many of Goldsmith's books: "Naturally inscribe that date, hour, minute, on the readymade as information. Also the serial characteristic of the readymade."²⁷ That "serial characteristic" is the removal of one particular item from the spacing of otherwise identical, mechanically reproduced commodities: one singular snow shovel from the

undifferentiated stock on the hardware store hooks; *this* urinal from the equidistant set on the men's room wall....

My argument here has not been that reading the spacing inherent in Goldsmith's work has led us anyplace unexpected (one can see the allegiance to Cage or Duchamp with half-a-glance at any one of the works), but rather that attention to the interval brings us to those familiar places by more secure and assured routes, that we have met topics half-way, on the common ground of structure. It is the logic of the lap, which requires two equal intervals (the up *and* the back, even to imagine something like "half a lap"). The lapse of a catalogue, equal and opposite, alogical, pure. "Suppose a collapse," as Stein wrote, "in rubbed purr."²⁸

16 June, 2005
Salt Lake City

Notes

- 1 Oliver Goldsmith, *The Life of Richard Nash, of Bath, Esq; Extracted Principally From His Original Papers* (London: J. Newbery; Bath: W. Frederick, 1762): 13.
- 2 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999): 302.
- 3 Clark Coolidge, "Arrangement," *Talking Poetics from Naropa Institute*, ed. Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb (Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1978): 159; Kenneth Goldsmith, *The Weather* (Los Angeles: Make Now, 2005).
- 4 Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield: A Tale. Supposed to be written by Himself* (Salisbury: Printed by B. Collins, for F. Newbery, 1766): xvi. György Ligeti. *Poème symphonique pour 100 metronomes* (1962).
- 5 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (NY: Penguin, 1976): 207.
- 6 Kenneth Goldsmith, untitled review of *John Cage: Composed In America*, RIF/T 05.01.
- 7 Kirk Simon and Karen Goodman, interview with John Cage.
- 8 John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 260.
- 9 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Soliloquy* (New York: Granary Books, 2001): 38
- 10 Joyce, *Wake*, 374; Kenneth Goldsmith, "I Look to Theory Only When I Realize That Somebody Has Dedicated Their Entire Life to a Question I Have Only Fleeting Considered" (work in progress, version 01.2002).
- 11 Cage. *Silence*: 109.

- 12 John Bullokar, *An English expositor* (London: John Legatt, 1616); Cage, *Silence*: 115-116 *et passim*.
- 13 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976): 68.
- 14 See, to begin with: Paul Saenger, *Space between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997); and *A History of Reading In the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1999).
- 15 Saenger, *Space*: 20; Goldsmith, *Fidget* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1999): 11:00.
- 16 *The Spectator* XLIV (London: 22 April, 1871): 474.
- 17 Goldsmith, *Soliloquy*: 31; 111.
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- 20 Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973): 135.
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- 22 *Soliloquy*: 14.
- 23 Andy Newman, "Torn, Bent, Dinged or Unhinged" *New York Times* (April 13, 2002).
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- 25 Goldsmith, *Language Encounters*.
- 26 Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1934): 29.
- 27 Marcel Duchamp, *Essential Writings: Marchand du sel / Salt Seller*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer M. Peterson (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975): 32.
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Encyclopedic Novelties: On Kenneth Goldsmith's Tomes

Molly Schwartzburg

Query: How contrive not to waste one's time? *Answer:* By being fully aware of it all the while. *Ways in which this can be done:* By spending one's days on an uneasy chair in a dentist's waiting-room; by remaining on one's balcony all of a Sunday afternoon; by listening to lectures in a language one doesn't know; by traveling by the longest and least-convenient train routes, and of course standing all the way; by lining up at the box office of theaters and then not buying a seat; and so forth.

Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Defamiliarization should be declared dead, even though it's not. Over the past few weeks I've been reading through reviews of *Day* and Kenneth Goldsmith's earlier books, and have been surprised to see that several base their positive judgments upon the weary claim that these works help make us newly aware of some everyday convention. For example, Raphael Rubenstein explains in his review in *Art in America* that

Reading the actual paper, we are trained to follow a thread from one page to another and keep several stories half finished in our minds as we scan a page. By eliminating the countless, usually unremarked graphic hints that help this process, Goldsmith makes us aware of the strangely disjunctive nature of a newspaper's contents.

In case his readers have not quite grasped this idea, he restates it in the review's concluding paragraph: "Even more important, though, is how awareness of Goldsmith's efforts makes one pay a different kind of attention to these quotidian documents. After all, what is art if not a way of getting people to focus on phenomena they would otherwise ignore?"

There's something peculiar going on here. Is Goldsmith's experiment so radical that Rubenstein must walk us through it by reviewing the basic concept of the readymade? Or is he pointing out, implicitly, that it is simply a one-trick pony in the increasingly creaky traveling carnival of conceptual art? Is *Day* just another iteration of something we have seen many times before?

Other writings imply that this might be the case. Stephen Cain says

what many likely think: that in *Day*, "the gesture is perhaps more enjoyable as a concept than as a reading experience." Here, redundancy again rears its ugly head, for *Day*'s basic point has been made before. In the Toronto Research Group's 1973 "The Book as Machine," for instance, the first entry in a list entitled "TWENTY-ONE FACTS THAT COULD ALTER YOUR LIFE (send for illustrated booklet)" reads as follows:

The front page of a newspaper is the paradigm of typographic cubism. Considered as a multi-page whole, the newspaper is founded on a model of structural discontinuity and a principle of competitive attentions. Front-page stories seldom end on the front page, nor do they all end on the same interior page. The front page is an opening made up of many openings terminating on different pages and which themselves contain other openings – to read a newspaper as a consecutive experience leads to extreme discontinuity." (McCaffery and bpNichol 63)

Goldsmith himself repeats another extant idea when describing the project "Year" that became the book *The Weather*, "a transcription of the one-minute weather forecasts on a New York all-news station" ("Statement on Year"). Ulises Carrion offered up the concept in his 1975 manifesto "The New Art of Making Books": "The text of a book in the new art can be a novel as well as a single word, sonnets as well as jokes, love letters as well as weather reports" (41).

Of course, Goldsmith is more than aware of such redundancies, and perhaps even puckishly cultivates them. Even more to the point is his emphasis in interviews and articles of late on his desire to be as utterly uncreative as possible: "If there were an Olympic sport for extreme boredom, I would get a gold medal.... I don't invent anything. I just keep rewriting the same book" ("Being Boring"). But despite this emphasis upon the fact of gesture, Goldsmith's works are not best understood as reframings of the materials he begins with. Something else is going on in *Day* and his other books. This something has less to do with newspapers than it does with revising the idea of "conceptual poetics," by way of Goldsmith's unique ability to produce, from spartan procedural constraints, complex and original systems of process, tone, genre, and bibliographic coding. In this essay, I will look at how four major books – *No. 111 2.7.93-10.20.96*, *Soliloquy*, *Fidget*, and *Day* – constitute just such a system.

Day is, as Chris Goode points out, "both an 800-plus pager and a one-liner." As Goode eloquently articulates later in his review, its size stuns

us Goldsmith fans, demonstrating as it does the worrying fact that he really *has* intentionally wasted a monumental amount of time in writing – that is, typing – it. Though Goldsmith often talks the serious, philosophic talk of experimentation, his books, manifestoes and interviews all contain some quantity of brash irreverence, even adolescent smugness. I find my own response at the publication of each of his new books to be accordingly self-contradictory: I am on the one hand excited by the (dare I say it?) mysterious power each work seems to hold, and on the other hand suspicious that behind the curtain is a little boy saying, “ha! she bought it again!” By constantly shifting his tone, Goldsmith courts this type of suspicion – a suspicion that his work may not only be derivative conceptualism, but that each book is simply a corrupted version of the one he published the year before.

“Even though I construct boring works, I wouldn’t dream of forcing you to sit through an extended reading of my work,” states Goldsmith in his brilliant essay on *Day*, “Being Boring.” Redundancy is a kind of weariness, an exhaustion that in Goldsmith’s case tilts over to a decadence. Many critics have noted that Goldsmith’s recent books seem compellingly appropriate to our own *fin de siècle* moment. Paradoxically, that moment of exhaustion seems also to be a moment of epic: countering Goldsmith’s calculated irrelevance/irreverence is the fact of his tomes’ serious weight, both physical and conceptual. Christian Bök calls *No. 111* a “titanic, rhyming poem in the process of being written by everyone,” a “core sample extracted from the everyday, millennial language of capitalism,” and in Goldsmith’s entry in the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poetry*, *No. 111* is described as “the last significant epic poem of the twentieth century” (Cain); Marjorie Perloff notes that *Soliloquy* “create[s] a very vivid image of life in Manhattan at the Millennium, in all its craziness and value”; Brad Ford notes that *Day* is “a picture – in an unfortunate coincidence – of life right before 9/11”; Raphael Rubenstein’s phrasing captures pre-9/11 decadence: “the entire book can be read as a kind of textual vanitas, a picture of an ordinary day in a city whose inhabitants don’t guess what we know now.” Viewed as a unit, Goldsmith’s bibliographic works from the last decade contain an extraordinary amount of information, and the manners of collection and organization across these volumes produce a magnificent range of possible interpretive paths. Goldsmith’s three big books, *Soliloquy*, *No. 111*, and *Day*, along with their relatively diminutive sibling *Fidget*, make up a quartet of millennial intensity that contrasts strongly with

Goldsmith’s deflationary tone. And yet somehow, this tension produces not dissonance, but complementariness.

I saw the beginnings of an explanation for this effect when I sat down to re-read *No. 111*’s final entry, D.H. Lawrence’s “The Rocking Horse Winner.” The story brilliantly describes the ultimate “one-trick pony”: a toy horse – and a boy – that can only do one thing over and over again. Just as the boy helps his uncle win massive purses at the racetrack, Goldsmith produces massive books. And like the Goldsmith of *Day*, Lawrence’s unnamed boy is utterly uncreative; his revelations of winning horses do not *create* the conditions for the horse to win. The name of the winning horse is merely a fact that he knows before anyone else. This uncreativity is disturbingly sexualized in Lawrence’s familiar manner: the boy’s frenzied riding on the rocking horse produces nothing but the name of a racehorse that already exists. This product brings money to the family only at the expense of the family’s male heir and the story’s hero: the boy himself, who dies. An almost parodically Freudian character, Lawrence’s race-winning boy attempts to distinguish himself from his unlucky father to gain his mother’s affections. In turn, Goldsmith’s own performed anxiety of influence is to be found throughout his books: in the nastily self-conscious dismissals of fellow artists and writers in *Soliloquy*, in the overly unabashed descriptions of bodily functions in *Fidget*, and in the brash appropriation of the entirety of the *New York Times* – the ultimate cultural father figure – in *Day*. These are just a few of the links to be found between the psychosexual plot of Lawrence’s story and the complicated rhetoric of Goldsmith’s experimentations. Goldsmith and the boy are doubles of a sort; like the boy, Goldsmith rides his hobbyhorse, and yet at the same time, seems to be undertaking a deeply serious project.

Goldsmith claims to have never “read” Lawrence’s story. I won’t argue this point but will say that its inclusion in *No. 111* is serendipitous in more than one way. Parallels between the boy and Goldsmith, as listed above, are at first glance useful frameworks for understanding the wild swings between seriousness and play, creativity and sterility, ephemerality and monumentality that range throughout Goldsmith’s work. But they also suggest two more paths of investigation, which will be my focus for the rest of this paper: first, that beyond the thematic and narrative parallels between Lawrence’s protagonist and the real person of Kenneth Goldsmith is a more fundamental one: that the title of “protagonist” might be applied to “Kenneth Goldsmith” as he performs – and describes – his

epic bibliographic projects. And second, that the drama of these undertakings, which so forcefully wedges itself into the embrace of avant-garde traditions, becomes a kind of narrative in its own right. The result is something that looks at least as much like a novel as it does conceptual art. Located somewhere among the materials of Goldsmith's works – the objects,¹ the initiating constraints, and Goldsmith's actions – is a tale inhabited by a peculiarly traditional hero. Goldsmith's performance of his experiments is not just the story behind his works, it *is* the Work.

What would it mean to imagine *Soliloquy*, *No. III*, *Fidget*, and *Day* as chapters in a single novel that extends out beyond the limits of page and book, into the reality show of Goldsmith's procedural poetics?² This heuristic does explicitly what many critics have done implicitly with Goldsmith's works: reads them not just as a group, in which each project frames our reading of the others, but also as integral stages in a single process. It also prompts a closer look at these works' elaborate textual apparatuses, ranging from book design to jacket copy to the Electronic Poetry Center's useful website of critical responses, interviews, and Goldsmith's own manifestoes (somewhat ironically, it is those initiated into the study of avant-garde poetics, those who know all the works and where to read about them, to whom the conventional "novelistic" experience is most available). Here, three novelistic qualities come into view: a complex, sympathetic protagonist who holds our interest; the experiences of that protagonist – significant life events, quotidian details, and moments of self-interrogation; and a narrative arc that concludes in a momentous climax. What is less clear is the kind of protagonist our hero is. Is he the budding truth-seeker of a *bildungsroman*, for whom each experience leads to a more complex vision of the world that we readers consequently absorb? Or is he a picaresque jokester traipsing ironically through the avant-garde countryside, episode by episode?

As the details of Goldsmith's process indicate, the answer is probably a bit of each, a duality that is just one part of the novelistic system that Goldsmith constructs. The first novelistic quality of Goldsmith's imagined grand Work is simply his choice to carry it out. A number of critics have pointed out that his decision not to stop at Oulipean "potential literature" is a productive one, if only because the results reveal how utterly subjective even *Day* must be when realized. More importantly for us here, Goldsmith's decision produced not just the tangible, unique objects we

hold in our hands, but the differently tangible, equally unique story of the hours, days, months and years that Goldsmith spent realizing these books. Significantly, each book's jacket copy explains the constraint under which the work was composed. This means that readers understand, *before* beginning to read, how the text came into being. So while we read, two narratives are underway in our minds: the narrative in the book and the narrative of Goldsmith making the book. We imagine how Goldsmith worked, picturing the act of collecting language for *No. III*, the process of listening to oneself on tape for *Soliloquy*, the ways that speaking into the recorder must have disrupted the fidgeting in *Fidget*, how the newspaper must have yellowed as the months of making *Day* went by. If each work taken individually "defamiliarizes" something we thought we knew, taken as a group they do the exact opposite: they familiarize us with the constructed persona of Kenneth Goldsmith and his writerly processes.

Goldsmith emphasizes, in essays and interviews, how profound the *experience* of making the books was, most dramatically in his discussion of the complicated levels of "boredom" brought on by *Day*. "Believe me, you've never really read the paper," he states in "Being Boring," though it is important to note that in pointing this out, he wants to stress what *he* learned in the process of typing *Day*, not encourage us to read it. On the contrary, he repeatedly reminds readers that they do not need to invest in the process as he has: "as I've said before, I don't expect you to even read my books cover to cover. It's for that reason that I like the idea that you can know each of my books in one sentence" ("Being Boring"). Elsewhere in the same essay, he says, "You really don't need to read my books to get the idea of what they're like; you just need to know the general concept." But he, in contrast, definitely "needed" to undertake each project and suffer through its realization. Statements that emphasize this difference serve to exaggerate the gap between the time of writing and the time of reception – the first takes months or years, the latter a few moments.

Goldsmith violently skews our focus away from the works and toward the process of their making, urging us to think at least as much about Goldsmith as a character with a story to tell as we do about the books themselves. For example, writing about *No. III*, he calls the project "a failure" because the specifics of the process meant that he, the writer, couldn't read it properly when it was completed:

I wanted to write a book that I could never know. The approach I took was

that of quantity. I'd collect so many words that each time I'd open my book, I'd be surprised by something that I had forgotten was there....And in the end, the project was a failure. I got to know every word so well over the four years that it took me to write it that I am bored by the book. I can't open a page and be surprised. Perhaps quantity was the wrong approach. ("I Look to Theory")

This statement seems strange – who cares whether Goldsmith knows his own book too well, since that has no bearing on our reading of it? It has resonance only if we are invested in the experience of Goldsmith and see the "project" as located in his edification.

Goldsmith writes, "I'm interested in quantifying and concretizing the vast amount of 'nutritionless' language; I'm also interested in the process itself being equally nutritionless" ("Uncreativity as a Creative Practice"). He uses the language of nutrition elsewhere in the same essay, again emphasizing the importance of the writing process, but here he also points out the unimportance of the reader suffering through something similar:

Retyping the *New York Times* is the most nutritionless act of literary appropriation I could conceive of....I took inspiration from Warhol's "Empire," his "unwatchable" 24-hour film of the Empire State Building. Similarly, imagine a book that is written with the intention not to be read. The book as object: conceptual writing; we're happy that the idea exists without ever having to open the book.

Again, Goldsmith exaggerates each position. In this and the previously cited passages, it seems that the only person who he feels needs to learn from the massive size of each project is Goldsmith himself. We sense that each time he learns something quite profound, despite – or perhaps because of – the "nutritionless" content of his procedures: "After transcribing *Soliloquy*, I've never heard language in quite the same way" ("I Look to Theory"). Such passionate descriptions of his own transformations appear throughout his writings.

All this is not to say that Goldsmith is unconcerned with his readers, or that he doesn't realize or expect that there are many people out there who will in fact read his books. But the passages above are noteworthy for taking such care to provide us with a window into Goldsmith's process, as if *this* were the "nutrient" he wants to make sure we absorb. These efforts serve to transform the books we hold from works into plot-points that get us to the heart of the story – "Kenneth Goldsmith" and the experiences he had in making these books – a story that is not just engrossing, but, like many novels, scandalously easy to consume.

The surprising thing is, so are the texts of *No. 111*, *Soliloquy*, *Fidget*, or *Day*. This takes us to the next stage of Goldsmith's "novelistic" tendencies, for despite Goldsmith's comments about the irrelevance of our reading his books, lots of people seem to read and enjoy them. Many critics note that the texts are exciting, not simply as conceptual experiment, but as "absorptive" literary texts. Not all readers would agree. Brian Kim Stefans calls Goldsmith's books "impossibly long," though in comparison with, say, *Middlemarch* or *Don Quixote*, even *Day* is definitely possible. Stacy Levine qualifies her discussion of *No. 111*'s content with the aside, "Not that anyone will read *No. 111* front to back, or even at large stretches." Or, as Doug Nufer puts it, "You jump around *Day* from one section to another, as if it's understood that nobody would ever read such a thing straight through." But is it understood? I have read *No. 111*, for instance, front to back, fascinated by the way its accretive structure paints a picture of a very "real," dazzlingly heterogeneous, linguistic world.

Even *Day* is surprisingly interesting. Charles Lamb once wrote that "Newspapers always excite curiosity. No one ever lays one down without a feeling of disappointment" (147). The opposite is true of *Day*: when one picks it up, one is initially disappointed to learn on the back cover that all it is a transcription of the newspaper. But as one begins to read, *Day* becomes curiouser and curiouser, coming alive in the most old-fashioned, unfashionable way. Goldsmith says, "I'm interested in a valueless practice. Nothing has less value than yesterday's news," and he's probably right ("Uncreativity as Creative Practice"). But though the events of September 1, 2000 were perhaps "yesterday's news" when Goldsmith was in the early stages of typing, that day was ancient history by the time the book was published – history ancient enough to provoke many reviewers to linger a long time over the content of this interwoven mass of stories from pre-9/11 New York.

I find *Day* to be utterly compelling, but not for the reasons I expected to when I first received my copy. When I first opened it, I assumed that all my years of reading contemporary poetry that is densely linguistic, often affectless, and frequently long, would help me; we readers of contemporary poetic practice know hard reading, we know intentional boredom. But it turns out that it's not my avant-garde training that came in handy. My own willingness/drive/capacity to read all of Goldsmith's books straight through has at least as much to do with my traditional literary background; as I reread the books this spring, I was most helped

by just having finished a year of teaching a “Great Books” curriculum. After nine months of classics like *Inferno*, *Don Quixote*, *Capital* and *The Plague*, Goldsmith's books are familiar – both in their physical size, and in the kind of sustained attention – concentration upon multiple layers of plot, language, and argument over hundreds of pages – that they require. Certainly my eyes glazed over as I worked through *Day*'s stock quotes, but not much more than they did as I attempted to follow the denser bits of Marx's complex economic theories. A number of critics have noted that Goldsmith's books have the heft of reference books. But when I look on my own bookshelves, I see that they are closer in size to my copies of *Magic Mountain*, *Moby Dick*, and *Remembrance of Things Past*.

If the content and dimensions of each of Goldsmith's books recalls classic novels, an even more significant novelistic element subsists in the relationships that begin to appear between all four as we look at them more carefully. In the progression from *No. III* to *Day*, our hero's quests grow – or shrink, depending on how you look at them – in difficulty and in scope. This narrative progress may be seen with surprisingly clarity in the jacket copy. As I mentioned earlier, the jacket copy makes explicit to readers the process Goldsmith underwent to produce the books. In addition to describing the relationships between Goldsmith and each project, it also describes relationships among the projects themselves. Listed chronologically, here are the sentences printed on the back of each book that describe the constraints:

No. III 2.7.93-10.20.96 (1997): “The text adheres strictly to its chosen rules: all the phrases collected between February 7, 1993 and October 20, 1996 end in sounds related to the sound ‘R’...”

Fidget (2000): “*Fidget* is writer Kenneth Goldsmith's transcription of every movement made by his body during thirteen hours on Bloomsday (June 16) 1997.”

Soliloquy (2001): “An unedited document of every word Goldsmith spoke during a week in 1996, *Soliloquy* quantifies and concretizes the sheer amount of language that surrounds us in our daily lives.”

Day (2003): “I am spending my 39th year practicing uncreativity. On Friday, September 1, 2000, I began retyping the day's *New York Times*, word for word, letter for letter, from the upper left hand corner to the lower right hand corner, page by page.”

A surprisingly smooth, stepwise narrative is plotted in these peritexts: the descriptions, when read chronologically, allow our protagonist to emerge

from background to foreground. The story begins with a focus upon the finalized “text,” then shifts to the “transcription” and “document,” and finally, centers definitively upon Goldsmith himself. Goldsmith's presence in these peritexts also shifts grammatically. Each book's jacket after *No. III* takes a step to realign our attention away from the object we hold in our hands and on to Goldsmith himself. In the first book, we are informed that the words are “collected,” in a phrase constructed in passive voice, which renders the collector's name unspoken. In the second, Goldsmith's name and the fact of his body creep in, but still only in passive voice. In the third he appears as an actor in the past tense (he *spoke*). Finally, in *Day*, he makes a grand, fully developed entrance. Represented by a large dropped capital “I,” Goldsmith himself, rather than a dispassionate editorial voice, tells us not what the book does, but what *he* was doing three years ago while undertaking the project. We are plunged into the process; the finite past tense that dominated the previous descriptions is replaced by the participles “I am spending” and “I began retyping.” A first-person narrator speaks intimately to the reader, setting up the conditions not just for a confessional, comfortable read, but also for a quest narrative: can our hero practice uncreativity? What obstacles will get in his way? What will he learn?

Perhaps most interestingly of all in this narrative drama, *Day*'s back cover retroactively frames the three earlier volumes not as objects but as the parenthetical byproducts of *experiences* that “Kenneth Goldsmith” has gone through – trials, perhaps, preparing him for the grand quest of the final volume, *Day*:

Long an advocate of extreme writing processes – recording every move his body has made in a day (*Fidget*), recording every word he spoke over the course of a week (*Soliloquy*), recording every phrase he heard ending in the sound of “r” for four years (*No. III*) – Goldsmith now turns his attention to quotidian documents.

This final blow knocks the books squarely off center, solidifying the sense that our attention should be displaced from the inert objects and onto the protagonist-driven story of their making.

These multiple insistences upon the centrality of Goldsmith himself of course echo the intentional self-absorption that characterizes the two middle volumes of the group, *Soliloquy* and *Fidget*. As I will show, closely related to this theme of self-absorption is the seemingly distinct theme of uncreativity that also runs throughout Goldsmith's descriptions of his process. Though it is only upon the composition of *Day* that

Goldsmith fully embraced uncreativity, he certainly calls attention to it in these earlier books, which emphasize the hours upon hours of word-by-word, linear transcription. Uncreative self-absorption is a major theme in Goldsmith's works, and brings us to its relation to a more specific category than just "the novel." This is a theme that Goldsmith first introduces explicitly in *No. III*, with the inclusion of "The Rocking Horse Winner." Lawrence's protagonist, like Goldsmith, becomes more and more self-absorbed as the story moves on, and his work on the horse ultimately sterile; it is not just uncreative, but unprocreative. The language used to describe the boy's riding has often been described as masturbatory; his frenzied riding in the secret, dark bedroom, the subject of oppressive silence and furtive glances among the family members, has provided fodder for generations of undergraduate papers on the subject. By including this story, rather than any number of texts he might have found that end in "r," Goldsmith "unintentionally" emphasizes the anti-creative side of his writing, while also linking it directly with the fact of narrative fiction.

Uncreativity seems a straightforwardly "conceptual" move, running counter to the expressive qualities of storytelling. But Goldsmith here, and elsewhere, brings the two together. He intentionally aligns masturbation and fictionality in a later work, in allusions not just to a short story like "The Rocking Horse Winner," but also to the ultimate modernist novel, *Ulysses*. *Fidget* was not only composed on June 16, Bloomsday, but also like *Ulysses*, follows the actions of one man on one day. The characters Goldsmith and Bloom share a characteristic rarely represented in any text, fiction or nonfiction: both masturbate, a fact noted by multiple commentators on Goldsmith's work.

The broader self-reflexivity of each of these works is emphasized in the inclusion of masturbation passages, and Goldsmith's in particular seems a carefully plotted commentary on the reflexive, intentionally redundant qualities of his transcriptive projects. Goldsmith re-produces without reproduction, births huge books out of his utter isolation:

My entire production is predicated on distance. I sit in a room by myself and communicate to many people. I write books and they are read by people unknown to me. I do a weekly radio show and I am heard by 10,000 people at any given time, but it's just me alone in a room. I build websites for a living and communicate with people all over the world, without ever engaging in a conversation with them. ("I Look to Theory")

As is seen most dramatically in *Soliloquy*, Goldsmith is no less than a

master of the one-sided conversation. But though he performs himself as solipsistic to literal excess, in the form of great big self-involved tomes, Goldsmith somehow transforms that solipsism into epic feats of successful communication: he is not, in the end, sterile like the family in Lawrence's story, but linguistically fertile in the manner of *Ulysses*.

But how does this combination of self-absorption, uncreativity, and fertility relate outward into the larger intertextual Work I have been attempting to describe? The answer begins with *Day*, which seems to be quite the opposite of *Soliloquy* in its disallowal of *any* of Goldsmith's one-sided conversation, but is in fact self-reflexive in a similar manner. More importantly, *Day* also resembles *Ulysses*. It is a book whose 'action' takes place on a single day – not Bloomsday, of course, but a day in a great city, framed through the transcription experiences of Kenneth Goldsmith, protagonist. But the parallel with *Ulysses* is less complete, since it doesn't contain a masturbation scene as *Fidget* does. Ironically, its utterly un-originating constraint makes such a scene impossible – one is not likely to be found in the text of the *New York Times*.

But such a scene does exist, just not in *Day*'s text proper. It exists as part of the bigger novelistic Work, and more specifically in the relationship between Goldsmith and his day-to-day procedures as conceptual poet over the course of several years. In the following description of the process of transcribing *Day*, we are made privy to the onanistic culmination of our hero's years of experiment, his moment of utter absorption and utter transformation presented in appropriately high-flown rhetoric:

Far from being boring, it was the most fascinating writing process I've ever experienced. It was surprisingly sensual. I was trained as a sculptor and moving the text from one place to another became as physical, and as sexy as, say, carving stone. It became this wild sort of obsession to peel the text off the page of the newspaper and force it into the fluid medium of the digital. I felt like I was taking the newspaper, giving it a good shake, and watching as the letters tumbled off the page into a big pile, transforming the static language that was glued to the page into moveable type. ("Being Boring")

Here, all the elements seem to cohere as the text he describes falls apart: the "wild sort of obsession" of Lawrence's rocking boy, the masturbatory acts of *Ulysses* and *Fidget*, the reorganized language of *No. III*, and the transcription procedure of all his books. His world unmasked, the hero is transformed. Teetering on the line between profundity and absurdity, the

passage almost giddily dismisses both in favour of the ephemeral pleasure of vision.

“The project of encyclopedism, the complete codification and cross-referencing not just of all forms of knowledge, but of the consciousness experiencing knowledge, must be simultaneously reified and mocked,” writes the critic Richard Hardack in his study of the genre of the encyclopedic novel (133). This genre emerged some time ago as the quintessence of a certain brand of literary postmodernism, and in it we see more than just glimmers of Kenneth Goldsmith's own project. Most compelling when we imagine Goldsmith's projects as one unified Work is Hardack's description of the tension inherent in encyclopedic narratives:

In these works the male protagonists undertake reflexive and often doomed journeys seeking some form of chivalric or absolute knowledge. In the process, their bodies become subject to the most extreme forms of disproportionate, satirical representation. The encyclopedic male protagonist thinks he can account for himself from origin to extinction, for all the facets of his individual development, along with the development or progress of his entire species, its whole encyclopedic catalog of knowledge. But as anatomies of discord, encyclopedic texts advance a particular kind of satire. (131)

Eerily appropriate to Goldsmith's long-term project, this description reframes the “uncreativity” of his works, shifting it away from the sterility that arises from the success of “The Rocking Horse Winner”'s winnings and towards the productive “doom” of failed grand ambition.

Ulysses is considered to be an encyclopedic novel, a category, as Edward Mendelson defined it in his foundational 1974 essay on the subject, composed of long fictional narratives written by authors who “set out to imitate epics, but unlike epic poets, they write about the ordinary present-day world around them instead of the heroic past” (1268). Self-conscious yet endlessly ambitious, narratives like *Don Quixote*, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *Moby Dick*, *Tristram Shandy* and *Gravity's Rainbow* are

encyclopedia[s] of narrative, incorporating, but never limited to, the conventions of heroic epic, quest romance, symbolist poem, Bildungsroman, psychomachia, bourgeois novel, lyric interlude, drama, eclogue, and catalogue.... each encyclopedic narrative is an encyclopedia

of literary styles, ranging from the most primitive and anonymous levels of proverb-lore to the most esoteric heights of euphuism. (1270)

Into this stream we place not just the “core sample” of millennial experience in *No. 111*, but the fantastically disparate languages of the performatively ‘natural’ speaker in *Soliloquy*, the professional newspaper columnists and ad agency writers who keep getting interrupted in *Day*, and the weirdly atmospheric, self-describing fidgeter in *Fidget*.

Gazing from four different angles at the urban New York of a single decade, 1993-2003, Goldsmith's masterwork of process, books, and associated secondary materials can only be inconsistent, moody, and elusive: “No one could suppose that any encyclopedic narrative is an attractive or comfortable work....all encyclopedias are monstrous. (They are *monstra* in the oldest Latin sense as well: omens of dire change)” (Mendelson 1272). “Bloated” and “extravagant,” Goldsmith's Work is an undertaking that must take such a form if it is to be what it is, a forward-looking memorial not just to an historical moment, but to Goldsmith's own ephemeral experience (Hardack 133).

Both the author of and protagonist in this drama, Goldsmith gets to stand both outside it and right at its center. In a sense, he asks his readers to do the same. His careful construction of a persona pushes us to look beyond the solid physical boundaries of the conventional object of our attention, the heavy book sitting in front of us, and out into the endless possibilities of intertextuality. Once we're there, we find a new organization structured around the experiences of Goldsmith's processes, an organization that resembles the contained, if bulging, space of the encyclopedic novel. Goldsmith's decision to move beyond conceptual gesture and into conceptual practice recenters his work, shifting its focus off of the unit of individual books and onto the truly ephemeral fact of making them. What this generates is something vital and, for Goldsmith's readers, infinitely productive: a Work whose boundaries are unclear. What is most compelling about Kenneth Goldsmith's *oeuvre* of the last decade is not what it shows us about yesterday's news, but what it makes us wonder about the next generation of protagonists of the avant-garde.

Notes

1 I refer throughout this paper only to the printed editions of Goldsmith's works, since differences between these physical objects and the digital versions, though not in conflict with my points here, are beyond the scope of my argument.

2 This notion, of a multi-volume 'novel' not unlike a Victorian triple-decker, is not incompatible with Goldsmith's poetics. In an interview in 2000, he mused, not without humour, about the conceptual possibilities of a "52 volume work – one book for each week – with each book about 350 pages long (the length of the printed edition of *Soliloquy*) giving me a total of approximately 18,000 pages. It'll literally be an encyclopaedia, a reference book of what one average person said for an entire year in the early part of the 21st century. It'll not only make a great artwork, but every library in the country will have to have a copy, due to its sociological relevance" (Bessa).

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from COLDEST

Bruce Andrews

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KENNY

Geoffrey Young

In a group show at a mid-town gallery in 1992, I discovered a few works of art by an artist I'd not yet heard of. The works were a hybrid form of sculpture (six feet tall, three feet wide, in shallow box frames, leaning against the wall), and text (white fields with top-to-bottom thin columns of machine-printed words, or fragments of words). I began to read them – to sound them – trying to figure out what their organizing principles were.

Some time later, I saw two graphite drawings by the same artist in a Soho Gallery. Like the sculpture, they used words, or symbols from language, as well as repetition, but unlike the sculptural works, they were carefully executed by hand.

I wrote his name down on a piece of paper.

Not long thereafter, as if out of the blue, I called NY Information to get the telephone numbers of all Kenneth Goldsmiths. Of the few I jotted down, the first one turned up Kenny, then living in Soho, on Thompson Street.

Cheryl passed the phone to him and I complimented his work, told him I had a small gallery in Great Barrington, MA, and invited him to show some work in one of my summer shows. Later he confessed that he thought, upon my request, that his career had descended into pastoral insignificance if the most excitement he could generate from his work were the enthusiastic words of a backwater hick.

But he said, sure, why not, and we arranged to show a few things later in the summer.

Turns out he knew Great Barrington and the Berkshires quite well, had skied here as a boy since his parents had a second home on a dirt road in nearby sleepy Sandisfield.

I remember the day we met in the flesh: Kenny, Cheryl, and their brindle boxer Babette came bounding into the tiny third floor gallery with great energy, long hair, and miles of curiosity. Kenny had been rethinking his relationship to sculpture, to object making in general, had been moving toward the production of texts, was a devotee already

of the computer, and so he was keen on hearing more about the poetry world which claimed a large chunk of my identity and of my press, The Figures, which had published many of the poets whose friendship he would later share.

Later that summer he called to tell me he was going to bring one of his collectors into the gallery. When Kenny and Mr. A.G. Rosen did come in, and A.G. bought a small beautiful Richmond Burton painting called "Electricity," it began an ongoing many-year relationship with Rosen, whose art collection grows apace, with no signs of slowing down.

That fall Kenny and I would get together in New York from time to time. He invited me to visit his Akido class, where I watched his sensitive, attentive work reducing other class members to lumps of incapacitated meat on the mat, then he'd change and we'd go to NOHO STAR and eat big fat hamburgers, drink beer, and talk art and poetry. Hungry to study, take in, and assimilate the radical pop culture of the sixties, he was immersed in Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*, John Cage's *Silence*, Joyce's novels, & *Don Quixote*. Not having been a student of literature, his self-education continued apace. At one point I remember him lamenting that his generation, the art students who graduated in the mid-80s and came to New York, had no generational identity-producing rallying cry, no war to resist, no draft to outsmart, no drugs to pioneer, no English (pop) invasion to embrace. There were tectonic movements going on in the art world where money was creating superstars out of smart young painters, but Kenny wanted something else. He wanted social unrest the equal of his own anxious transformation from object-producing artist in studio in a system of galleries and collectors, to a text-producing writer with laptop in a world where money didn't play any role at all.

Kenny was still an artist with a gallery during the 90s, so there were opportunities to attend his openings, follow his art production as it incorporated collage elements (I recall funky graphic homages to four Jewish heroes – Ginsberg, Dylan, Kafka, Einstein), installation bravado (he papered a gallery floor to ceiling with large sheets of gridded text), and one beautiful show of framed "poems" on paper, in large printed letters, shadowed by letters half erased, where, at the opening, Kenny sported a brand new t-shirt with the letters FUCKING NYC on the front. His hair was long, his enthusiasm contagious, and his love of the art game palpable. But the direction his work was going was less and

less commercial, more and more about the book, so that it became something of a crisis in his relationship with dealers. Kenny expected them to stay with him, knowing him to be a serious, committed artist, but they had to deal with the bottom line. By the time it went down, he had nothing for them to sell.

The first substantial body of work that showed me Goldsmith's ambition and inclination toward collaboration was 73 poems. In 1995, the Drawing Center in Soho showed all 73 framed sheets of paper, hung three high and stretching across one long wall, which gave the viewer the opportunity to see how these 'pages' functioned as linked poems, filling up graphite space, then emptying it out, then filling it again, all the while moving its verbal content along with deft alphabetical and counting procedures. And to make matters even better, Kenny had invited Joan La Barbara to sing a selection of these brief, but lively texts. On the night of the performance, she stood before a large seated audience, the poems at her back, and, with pre-recorded taped accompaniment, sang a sequence of them, producing an art music of poise and intelligence. It was a ravishing, pitch-perfect evening.

In 1995, Stuart Downs, the curator of painting and sculpture at the Art Gallery at James Madison College in Harrisonburg, VA, organized a survey of Kenny's sculpture and works on paper, many drawn from the collection of A.G. Rosen. We all went down for the opening to see the free standing works whose shapes for the most part were derived from books, including one on the floor made of solid lead, called "Steal This," after the Abbie Hoffman book of the same title (the irony being that no one could lift the insanely heavy object). I was invited to do a poetry reading on the occasion of the show, and Kenny did a talk, perhaps his first. It was this talk that really convinced me that Kenny was capable of dazzling structural sophistication. Influenced at the time by John Cage, Kenny delivered the information of his talk in incomplete bits that slowly, over time, as they accumulated and developed, became complete statements. As he repeated and expanded, and qualified his material, its meaning filled to the brink, like water overflowing a bath.

At one point, for a spell, Kenny was listening to John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* on his daily walk from apartment to studio, and I recall how surprised he was to hear that I'd heard Coltrane play several times at the It Club in LA in 1965 & 66. That's when I realized I was sixteen

years his senior (how could anyone have been around back then?) and that musics, like cultures, come and go.

Little self-made chapbooks that documented his writing activities led to the monumental breakthrough book, *No III*, much of which was composed (found) obsessively while Cheryl was teaching for a semester at a college in Tennessee. Kenny holed up in his studio, all of his reading and internet surfing at the service of accumulating the fragments of sentences that went into the composition of *No III*.

Finally it was done, and Cheryl was back, the last chapter being the wildest, most unreadable graphic gobbledegook ever presented as “poetry,” when Kenny asked me one day if it wouldn’t be hipper to end the book with a short story, and did I know any good ones he might include? The story in question would have to end with the end-rhyme “r,” and it would have to be longer in length than the chapter before it, so I recommended a few stories, but really championed D.H. Lawrence’s “The Rocking Horse Winner.” So, without reading it, Kenny found it on the internet, and with a lengthy cut & paste swipe, appropriated it for the book. *No III*, published in 1997 by The Figures, was a brilliantly constructed and often captivating reading experience of 600 pages, a text which plays our own culture’s fragments back at us in unpredictably goofy ways, as if the bits and pieces that make up the book migrated to their nesting places, propelled by the randomness of procedural design.

Fidget’s Body

Rubén Gallo

One: Body

“*Fidget’s* premise,” Kenneth Goldsmith explained in a letter, “was to record every move my body made on June 16, 1997 (Bloomsday).”¹ The experiment lasted from 10:00am, when the narrator wakes up, until 10:00pm, and the result is an uncanny text that reads like a minimalist inventory of bodily movements (consider, for instance, the opening passage: “Eyelids open, tongue runs across upper lip moving from left side of mouth to right following arc of lip. Swallow. Jaws clench. Grind. Stretch. Swallow. Head lifts...” (8)). This sequence of telegraphic sentences continues for almost ninety pages, describing the countless motions involved in getting out of bed, taking a shower, having breakfast, masturbating, falling asleep, leaving the apartment, drinking a bottle of liquor, and finally – around 21:00 and under the influence – losing the ability to speak coherently. Towards the end of the book the narrative stops making sense (“words deformed easily as crawl earlier in synchronicity,” we read on page 69) and by 21:00 it has become completely jumbled: “.etarapes regniferof dna bmuht thgiR” opens the last chapter.²

Fidget is an experiment in writing the body, in translating ordinary movements into words. The project sounds simple but it is actually an extremely complex investigation of the relationship between bodily functions and literary devices.

But what kind of body is written in *Fidget*? The answer seems simple: most readers would expect the book to be about the poet’s own body. But Goldsmith has made clear that this is not the case: the word “I” never appears in the book. All movements are described either in the third person (“Eyelids open,” “Arm straightens”), as if the different organs were individually responsible for their own actions, or through chains of infinitives (“Grind. Stretch. Swallow”), as if the entire body could only focus on one function at a time.

The body that appears in *Fidget* is thus a most unusual construct: an eerie textual organism with some striking characteristics:

First of all, there are no clothes in the book. The body wakes up, walks about, showers, drinks, and masturbates, but never once does it put on an item of clothing. *Fidget* is thus the structural opposite of “Inventory of my clothing as of June 19, 2000, 22:00,” a poem that contains clothes but no bodies.³ One text features the body-without-clothes (a close relative of Deleuze’s body-without-organs); the other, clothes-without-a-body.

(A perverse reader could use the clothes in “Inventory” to clothe the naked body in *Fidget*, in the manner of children’s books featuring cut-out shirts and pants that can be draped over paper mannequins. After the narrator wakes up, for instance, we could wrap him in “1 white Bernard Company white waffle cotton bathrobe, size XXL” and throw him “1 pair Hanes thermal underwear, white, size large” or even – we did say the reader was perverse – one of the “2 martial arts gi’s, white, size 5.” To walk around the streets of New York, he could put on “1 pair black Doc Martin sandals” and don “1 straw hat with navy and maroon band.” The greatest challenge would be to select clothes for the masturbation scene. What does one wear for such an auto-erotic exercise? Certainly not “1 brown Brooks Brothers suit,” but perhaps any of the following useful accessories: “2 black belts,” “5 white handkerchiefs,” and perhaps even “1 orphan brown sock.”)

The nudity in *Fidget* extends beyond the body. The book is the textual equivalent of a nude beach: a nude text in which language has been stripped down to its most basic elements. Literary ornaments, syntactic accessories, and all other writerly luxuries are banished from this composition. There are no metaphors or similes, no baroque syntax, no poetic elaborations, no figurative language. Within the realm of the text, all of these would seem as excessive and as extravagant as feather boas, wool capes, and frilly tutus. Instead we find only bare nouns and stark adjectives, as in the description of walking that appears on page 38: “Step. Step. Step. Right. Left. Right.” Three words, arranged in different permutations, convey movement and direction without resorting to articles, prepositions, conjunctions, subjects or objects. There are only steps, left, and right. A minimalist construction fit for describing a naked body moving through bare space (space, too, is naked: there are no beds, chairs, tables, closets, doors, carpets, curtains, televisions, or extraneous objects cluttering the textual realm inhabited by the protagonist).

Although *Fidget* is a nude text, its nudity produces unexpected results. The body that inhabits the text is entirely unlike the naked bodies that come to mind to most avid consumers of fashion advertising: it is not the sexy body of Dolce and Gabbana ads; it is not a prepubescent body; it is not smooth, toned, or airbrushed body, and neither is it pretty, sexy or desirable. On the contrary, it is an abject body that repels the reader – at least the squeamish reader – with its constant fidgeting of nostrils, tear ducts, testicles, and perianal regions. It is a body filled with mucus, urine, sperm, and other lowly fluids.

Fidget zooms in on the body parts that are always avoided in fashion advertising, like the inside of the buttocks:

Hand raises. Moves to back. Drops to buttocks. Fingernails scratch. Index finger extends into crack of buttocks and probes anus. Scratches once, twice, three times. Strong pressure applied by fingertip. Finger glides over coccyx and out of buttocks. (9)

Or the nasal cavity:

Forefinger moves to nostril. Enters. Tip of finger probes ridges inside nostril. Shape of left nostril conforms to shape of left nostril. Finger removes caked mucus from nostril. Wipes. (10)

Or even the urinary tract:

Left hand tucks at pubic area. Extracts testicles and penis using thumb and forefinger. Left hand grasps penis. Pelvis pushes on bladder, releasing urine. Stream emerges from within buttocks. Stomach and buttocks push outward. Stream or urine increases. Buttocks push. Sphincter tightens. Buttocks tighten. Thumb and forefingers shake penis. Thumb pulls. Left hand reaches. Tip of forefinger and index finger extend to grasp as body sways to left. (15)

Fidget desublimates. It never shows the body thinking, writing, painting, or engaging in any other intellectual endeavor. It does show it scratching, probing, picking, pissing.

No matter what it does, *Fidget*’s body resembles a machine more than a living organism. Even urinating is rendered as a series of operations that involve extracting, grasping, pushing, releasing, and tightening. It is as if the narrator were operating a piece of equipment – a giant mechanical apparatus full of levers, knobs, and buttons, like the one depicted in Chaplin’s *Modern Times* – and not a penis.

Sex, too, is described as a series of mechanical operations, as we discover in the masturbation scene:

Stroke. Stroke. Stroke. Tip of middle finger inserts into anus. Left hand grabs and pulls breast. Successive strokes increase in speed. Testicles contract. Right hand probes testicles. Left bicep grinds. Breathing becomes stronger. Toes curl. Leg lift. Genital area sweats. Legs spread. Right middle finger presses anus. Left breast muscles pulse with arm movements. Profuse sweat appears on chest. Right hand massages belly repeatedly in circular counterclockwise motion. Left hand strokes penis. Pressure on bladder. Legs stretch out straight. Calf muscles tighten. Buttocks tighten. Sweat. Left hand continues to repeatedly stroke tip of penis. Right hand applies pressure to anus. Motion stops. Body slumps. Motion resumes. Body rocks back and forth. Knees move rhythmically. Buttocks and thighs jiggle in unison with stroking. Feet lift off ground. Toes point. Rapid succession of strokes. Left hand to mouth. Tongue touches left forefinger and middle finger. (28-29)

The verbs used to describe masturbation – inserting, contracting, probing, grinding, pressing, tightening – evoke the repetitive tasks a worker must perform at an assembly line (though the goal here is to produce sperm and not marketable commodities).

In order to make the descriptions as mechanical as possible, *Fidget* leaves out the psychic dimension of the actions it describes. The movements included in the book are completely detached from emotions or other affective responses: we never learn whether the body in question likes or dislikes the action it performs, whether certain motions are pleasant or unpleasant, comfortable or uncomfortable, easy or difficult. Even the masturbation scene excludes all references to pleasure, sensations, or fantasies and presents us merely with a long string of discrete bodily motions.

Fidget's body is thus naked, abject, and machine-like. It is also alone. It moves through space without ever encountering another body. It lives in a world without others – though, as we learn in the masturbation scene, a world without others is not necessarily a world without desire. The body does desire, but since there is no one else around it can only desire itself. Psychoanalysts would no doubt suspect a regression into primary narcissism. A fidgety kind of narcissism.

Two: Unconscious

In his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin developed the concept of an “optical unconscious.” He argued that photography introduced a series of revolutionary techniques – close-ups, oblique perspectives, timed

exposures – that revealed striking aspects of reality that were invisible to the naked eye. Through the use of extreme close-ups a photographer like Albert Renger-Patzsch could capture the geometrical patterns on a snake’s skin, or the textured surface of a metal pipe. These details belong to an “optical unconscious” that surfaces into visual consciousness only after the invention of photography. Benjamin thus established a parallel between photography and psychoanalysis, another modern technique that makes accessible, through the figure of the analyst, an unconscious realm that is usually inaccessible to the subject. Benjamin thus considered photography as a visual psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis as psychic photography.

Like photography and psychoanalysis, *Fidget* deploys a number of innovative techniques to reveal aspects of everyday reality that are usually inaccessible to the naked eye. To describe the body and its movements through space, the book uses the textual equivalents of photographic close-up, slow motion, and freeze-frame. Like film, it splits the simplest of actions – drinking, washing, walking – into a dizzying number of individual frames. Even unconscious tics, like scratching an eye, are rendered in quasi-cinematic detail: “Right hand raises. Digs between tear duct and nose” (15).

But what kind of hidden reality does *Fidget* reveal through these textual close-ups? It uncovers neither an optical unconscious (the text is not accompanied by visual images), nor a psychic unconscious (the body’s movements, as we have seen, are detached from fantasies and affects). Rather, it unveils an *organic unconscious* consisting of the myriad bodily movements – including tics, twitches, fidgets – involved in performing the simplest of tasks, like brushing one’s teeth:

Mouth opens. Right hand enters mouth. Left cheek puffs. Teeth cool. Tongue sweats. Right hand fists. Teeth grind back and forth. Noise in ears. Mouth gathers saliva. Lips purse and expel. Upper teeth comb lower lip. Hand opens. Shifts to right. Arm moves back and forth. Gum jams lips. Cheek inflates. Tongue expels. Sucks to back of mouth. Hand twists around back of teeth. Tongue gathers. Expels. Left hand twists clockwise, driven by thumb and forefinger. Hand drops. Moves to face. Expels water. (16)

Broken into its individual components, brushing becomes an extraordinarily complex procedure involving the coordination of dozens of body parts and scores of tiny actions.

We find another glimpse into the organic unconscious in the section describing frame-by-frame the pose one takes, inadvertently, while thinking or concentrating:

Hands meet. Fingers intertwine. Thumbs stretch, barely touching one another. Head bows. Bridge of nose meets joined thumbs. Thumbs separate and apply pressure to sides of nose. Tips of thumbs rest on tear ducts. Right elbow flicks. Thumbs apply strong pressure to tear ducts. Thumb and forefingers grasp. Fingers separate by a centimeter. Thumb and forefinger push. Press. Fingers open. Thumb leads, forefinger follows. Flips. Gully between thumb and finger cradles. Hand drops. (34)

But how does *Fidget* manage to reveal the organic unconscious? Benjamin argued that it was only the invention of photographic technologies that afforded a glimpse into the optical unconscious. Cameras introduced new ways of seeing the world that made visible elements of reality that had been invisible in pre-technological times. But *Fidget* is a book and not a machine, and its minimalist use of language seems to have little in common with the mechanical foundation of Benjamin's optical unconscious.

But there is more to *Fidget* that meets the eye. The text reads like a simple translation of movements into words, of body language into written signs. But the genesis of the text was actually much more elaborate: the poet could not move and write at the same time, so he enlisted the help of a small tape recorder for the duration of the experiment. He taped a small microphone to his body and went about his day describing each of his movements verbally, in as much detail as he could. Once the twelve-hour experiment was over, he transcribed the tape and carefully edited the text to make it more figdety.

Fidget is thus a text mediated by recording technologies. It is a mechanical device – the tape recorder – that makes accessible the organic unconscious probed in the text. The tape recorder is to Goldsmith's organic unconscious what the camera was to Benjamin's optical unconscious.

Through its use of recording technologies, *Fidget* bridges the abyss separating the spoken word from written text. Writing is an activity – one that, ironically, is absent from the inventory of actions performed in *Fidget* – that requires the body's full concentration and cannot be performed while doing anything else. One cannot write while showering, walking, eating, masturbating, sleeping, waking up, or

engaging in any of the other actions described in the text. Writing, it seems, hijacks the body.

Speaking, on the other hand, only requires the use of [only] a few organs – lips, tongue, vocal chords – and can be [easily] combined easily with other activities. As *Fidget* shows, one can speak while showering, walking, drinking, eating, and even while masturbating. But writing has a marked advantage over speaking: writing leaves a permanent record while spoken words vanish into the air – and into oblivion. The use of recording technologies allows the poet to combine the best of both worlds: the corporeal flexibility that comes with speaking and the permanent record left by writing. *Fidget* is thus not only an elaborate translation of movements into words: it is also an exercise in technological mediation, a conversion of spoken words into written signs.

Fidget is also a literary *trompe l'œil*: the reader focuses on the images conveyed by the words – as he would on the scene depicted in an intaglio – and misses the elaborate artifice that went into constructing such a minimalist realism: the serial processes of speaking, recording, replaying, transcribing and editing are all hidden from view, concealed behind phrases that sound as simple as “Arm drops. Grasp. Right hand rests. Fingers bend. Fingers outstretch. Arc backwards” (56).

3. Self-analysis

In addition to representing the organic unconscious, *Fidget* is also an exercise in self-analysis. In psycho-analysis the subject becomes aware of countless unconscious actions, fears, fantasies, and desires that are normally hidden from consciousness. In *Fidget's* self-analysis, it is the body that becomes aware of all the tiny jerks, jolts, and twitches that go into something as simple as raising a hand or taking a step forward.

But how could *Fidget* be a self-analysis if there is no “I”, no subject in the book? Does it make sense to speak of a self in such a selfless project? Indeed the reader often wonders just *who* is performing the actions, *who* could be the subject in the book's endless descriptions. Consider the opening of the second chapter (11:00):

Thumb and forefinger grasp. Pull toward floor. Right hand moves palm upward. Back of hand holds as thumb and forefingers grab. Forefinger moves away. Thumb and middle finger grasp. Palm of hand receives. Thumb and middle finger grasp. Palm of hand opens. Holds bottom

side of thumb. Left hand releases and moves to top. Hand retreats.
Right hand lifts. Left hand grabs. Turns over. (14)

This passage – like most of the book – is marked by indeterminacy. What is being grasped, pulled, held, received? And *who* is doing the grasping, pulling, holding, and receiving? In these phrases the subject is never a unified self but only a body part: it is a thumb that grasps, a hand that lifts, a forefinger that moves away.

Fidget's self-analysis thus consists in breaking down the self, in experiencing the body not as a unified and coordinated entity but as a set of disparate body parts. The project is an attempt at experiencing daily life as a disarticulated collection of organs: not a self that walks, drinks, eats, and sleeps, but a pair of hands that grasp, a foot that steps, a finger that scratches. Nothing seems to connect the arms, legs, hands, feet, nipples, and biceps that lift and raise, bend and probe. They seem to have a mind of their own, moving, twitching and fidgeting without rhyme or reason. These disjointed body parts bring to mind Lacan's theory of the "*corps morcelé*," the "body in bits and pieces," as the French analyst called the infant's earliest experience of a disjointed, uncoordinated self. *Fidget* features not a body-without-organs but a collection of organs-without-a-body.

Earlier we asked who performs all the actions in *Fidget*. We now have the answer: A naked body. An abject body. A machine-like body. An isolated body. An organically unconscious body. A body in self-analysis. A body that is all organs-without-a-body. A fidgety body.

Notes

1 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Fidget* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2000), 91.

2 By the end of the experiment the poet's words had become so slurred that he could no longer transcribe them, so he decided to close the text by taking the opening chapter and writing it backwards. The enigmatic phrase quoted above is an inversion of the last sentence of the first chapter – "Right thumb and forefinger pinch." Marjorie Perloff, "'Vocable Scripsigns': Differential Poetics in Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget*," *Fidget*, 92.

3 The poem opens with the following stanza: "6 pairs of K-Mart Rustler blue jeans, size 36 waist, 30 length / 3 pair of K-Mart Rustler blue jeans cut off into shorts, size 36 waist / 2 pairs of Club Monaco white jeans, size 34 waist, 34 length / 1 pair Marithe Francois Girbaud white jeans, size 34 waist / 1 pair Carter's blue jean overalls, size 36 waist / 1 pair of Levis cutoff blue jean

shorts, size 34 waist / 1 pair of Club Monaco pedal pushers, off white, size 34 waist / 1 pair of Calvin Klein blue jeans, size 32."

“*Fidgeting* with the scene of the crime.”

derek beaulieu

This paper examines the representation of bodies and the representation of the scene – the “crime scene” – as a space of prior action, and with the documentation of this prior action. The ramifications of these actions on the body and on the construction of history fall outside the frame of the narrative, the presentation of an absent body. The “formed holes” in narrative of action echo the crime scene as being spaces of question; where “[t]he body is envisioned neither as an innocent repository of nature nor as an existential symbol of isolation, but as an artifact that leaves traces and in turn is a surface for recording them” (Rugoff “More than meets the eye” 104).

Eyelids open. Tongue runs across upper lip moving from left side of mouth to right following arc of lip. Swallow. Jaws clench. Grind. Stretch. Swallow. Head lifts. (Goldsmith 8)

The crime scene is more than simply the scene of the crime. Ralph Rugoff uses the field of criminalistics – what he defines as the “analysis of traces” – to examine conceptual art. Unlike the crime scene investigator, however, the viewer of conceptual art is not asked “to reach a definitive finding or conclusion: instead our search for meaning engages us in a goalless activity of speculation and interpretation” (“Introduction” 18). Art and writing practice can be read through the “aesthetic of aftermath, as a place where the action has already occurred” (Rugoff “Introduction” 19). As in crime-scene photography, in *Fidget* Kenny Goldsmith “functions [...] much like a camera or a recording device, often dwelling obsessively on peripheral detail” (Wollen 27).

In Goldsmith’s case he has applied a transcription process to the movements of his own body aiming for the “observation of a body in space, not [his] body in space. There was to no editorializing, no psychology, no emotion – just a body detached from a mind” (Goldsmith as quoted in Perloff 91). Goldsmith’s process was seemingly simple. On June 16 (Bloomsday) 1997 Goldsmith woke up

and immediately began obsessively narrating the movements his body made over the course of the entire day, but without ever using the first-person pronoun – there is no speaking “I,” no narration of self-awareness. Goldsmith spoke the movements of his body in a voice-activated tape recorder, returned to the tape to transcribe his recording and edit out all mentions of the first-person pronoun as well as any unnecessary words. It was Goldsmith’s intention that the transcription and editing would “divorce the action from the surrounding, narrative, and attendant morality” (Goldsmith quoted in Perloff 93). The body of the poem is without anchor, without intention, it “addresses the body as a dispersed territory of clues and traces” (Rugoff “More than meets the eye” 88). The crime-scene as an artistic site is dependant on “the actions of a missing body or [...] complete scenes that must be reconstituted from shreds of evidence” (Rugoff “More than meets the eye” 101). The absence of a body – or in Goldsmith’s case the presence of nothing but body: the absence of context and intention – leads “not toward analysis but toward a new mode of aesthetic contemplation precisely because there is no moral reason [...] but simply a documentary impulse to record” (Wollen 29). What is being recorded in *Fidget* is not solely the actions of an unanchored body, or a non-narrativizing narrative, but rather the “impulse to record.” This impulse overrides meaning as is traditionally constructed, in favour of absence and melancholy; “meaning seems overwhelming in its presence yet strangely insubstantial ... [s]omething happened here that we cannot quite grasp or understand” (Wollen 25). *Fidget* leaves the reader / viewer reflecting Goldsmith’s own movements:

Grasp. Reach. Grab. Hold. Saw. Pull. Hold. Grab. Push. Itch. Push.
Push. Turn. Walk. [...] Turn. Chew. Massage. Gather. [...] Reach.
Open. (Goldsmith 62).

Unlike the literary trope of the retrospectively narrated detective novel where the scene of the crime is of utmost importance and where “the crucial dramatic action – the crime – always takes place before the story has begun” (Ernst Bloch as quoted in Wollen 33), *Fidget* occurs simultaneously. To Goldsmith, the crime and the investigation occur simultaneously. Classically crime scenes are “traces of prior mayhem” (Rugoff “More than meets the eye” 84). For Goldsmith the mayhem is continuous and continuously present.

Lips part. Hand tilts. Swallow. Repeat. Eyes dart left to right. Ears twitch. Eyes look straight ahead. Focus. Double Vision [...] Eyes dart left. Light forces eyes to move to right. Eyes focus closely. Glace afar. Register motion. (Goldsmith 35)

Goldsmith has “leach[ed] away the significance of narrative point of view and subjectivity” (Wollen 26) by removing agency from his body’s movements. Peter Wollen describes crime-scene photography and crime-scene investigation as having “an acute sensitivity to the trite, the futile, the banal, and the insignificant” (32). “[T]he banal and the insignificant” are meticulously documented by Goldsmith in an anti-space, a space of absence or negativity created by the “displaced signifiers of the crime” (Wollen 24) – we are not asked to read for the evidence of presence, but rather for the residue of absence. Goldsmith’s *Fidget* articulates the absences of narrative. Walter Benjamin stated that “to live means to leave traces” (Benjamin quoted in Rugoff 75), and Goldsmith dwells exclusively in those traces, creating a narrative solely of traces, without effects. But like any investigation, what is *not* documented in *Fidget* is just as important as what is documented. Goldsmith’s documentation gives in to “the temptation to make things fit, to squeeze clues into a coherent picture by highlighting some facts and excluding others” (Rugoff “More than meets the eye” 62). Only once does Goldsmith document the act of documenting: “Mouth forms round o of swallow” (10). This is the only time in the entire text where the act of speaking is documented. At this point, early in *Fidget*, the line between the document and the act of documentation becomes blurred.

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The cool distance of *Fidget*’s isolated crime scene soon degrades and is contaminated as Goldsmith’s consciousness begins to infect the scene. As the task of narrating and transcribing his movements begins to tire and wear out Goldsmith, he actively intercedes into the isolation. Barry Le Va argues that the rise of installation art in the 1960’s meant that “the stuff laying around the object ... grew more important than the object itself” (as quoted in Rugoff 71). As the hours of *Fidget* ticked by Goldsmith intercedes and introduces something “laying around the object” which began to grow “more important than the object itself”: a fifth of Jack Daniels.

The narration of the factual in *Fidget* becomes increasingly idiosyncratic as Goldsmith becomes increasingly drunk. Later

transcription of the original tapes exposed that his speech was becoming slurred and difficult to transcribe, although Goldsmith did not cease describing his actions. Investigation into the crime scene became less dependant on fact and increasingly dependant on clues, suspicions of what the actions *may have* been. Transcription begins to be based not on movement, but rather on an approximation of the sounds produced by Goldsmith while transcribing:

Greens projectile. On ah squint. Elen crows on tongue. With muriss. Kush jimmyhands. Cinder hung moistened, Soldiers stable. Midgets in palm. The latter affair. Lowerslime. Your pinch yearning. (Goldsmith 73)

The shift from exact transcription to approximation suggests a homolinguistic translation where the resultant text gives clues about both the originary speaking, but also to the act of transcription itself; a “latter affair” of Goldsmith’s transcription.

The clue of action – the deposit of possibility – “may derive from the absence of a relevant object as well as from the presence of an irrelevant one” (William O’Green as quoted in Rugoff 90). Goldsmith’s transcription begins to border on language-based writing, allowing a shift of priority from *communication of fact* to *communication of suggestion*. Certainly, crime scenes present us with “both a surplus and a dearth of meaning” (Wollen 25), a co-mingling of presence and absence and *Fidget* is no exception.

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A Silly Key: Some Notes on *Soliloquy* by Kenneth Goldsmith

Christian Bök

Soliloquy by Kenneth Goldsmith constitutes an act of literary temerity, in which the writer lampoons the romanticism of lyric poets, who give voice to their most spontaneous meditations, pretending to cogitate alone and aloud as if to themselves, knowing full well that, in the gloom beyond the proscenium of the blinding desk lamp, a politburo of ignored readers eavesdrops upon every uttered thought. Goldsmith transcribes, verbatim and unedited, each word that he speaks over the course of a week in New York City, recording only what he says to others, not what others have said to him, so that, as if watching a stage actor, playing the part of Hamlet, receiving only his lines, but no others, to memorize before a Broadway audition, we experience the lyric voice of the poet as nothing more than a lengthy excerpt from the screenplay of our daily lives. Goldsmith describes such “nutritionless” documentation as an act of “uncreativity”¹ on a par with the readymade exercises of Warhol, who records the ennui of events themselves, parodying epistolary narratives, for example, in his novel *A* by transcribing biographical conversation in the form, not of couriered notes, but of telephone calls. Goldsmith implies that lyric poets have tuned out this other voice so that only one voice gets heard.

Goldsmith reveals that, while theatrical monologues often involve a dialogue with the self, in which one person takes on the role of both participants in a conversation, another self who might in fact speak aloud in such a dialogue must nevertheless take on the role of a third party, there to be excluded from the exchange, yet required to be its audience. Goldsmith parodies these discursive conditions of the poet through the hyperbolic deployment of ellipsis, excising any incoming voices that might intrude upon his own outgoing speech, thereby producing a text that reads very much like the overheard half of a telephone call – a condition made all the more ironic because much of the text does in fact take place on the phone, and only by context can the reader decide for sure whether or not a potential addressee stands in the presence of the author. The pleasure of perusing such a text arises from the challenge of filling in the missing context for these exchanges, particularly since the author often interacts with renowned artists and powerful critics, whose private remarks go unheard, even as the author talks among these people, gossiping about friends, divulging their secrets, insulting their careers, behaving in fact like a soliloquist, who pretends that his intimate thoughts go unobserved and unrecorded.

Goldsmith parodies the lyrical poetics of vernacular confession, revealing that, despite the desire of lyric poets to glorify the everyday language of their casual, social milieu, such a democratic utopianism often balks at the candour, if not the squalor, of ordinary language, so that in the end, the elite, poetic assertion continues to supercede the trite, phatic utterance. When Wordsworth wishes to articulate spontaneous expressions in a plainer, simpler diction, closer to actual, rustic speech, he still subordinates such colloquialism to the rules of clear prose, adorned with rhyme and metre.² When Williams demands that poetry must validate the concrete language of quotidian existence, he still subjects his banal idiom to the formal rigour of concision and precision.³ When Ginsberg argues that an initial thought is a supreme thought, he seems to advocate the kind of unpremeditated transcriptions imagined by Breton and Desnos, but like them, he still subordinates his rhapsodic outbursts to the syntax of the rational sentence.⁴ When Antin transcribes his own improvised monologues, he streamlines them to make them seem more eloquent, more polished.⁵ When such poets profess to support the artless diction of common speech, they still refuse to subdue the formalities of their own literary artifice.

Goldsmith attacks the literary pretense of such common speech, demonstrating that lyric poets who purport to speak in the vernacular do not in fact do so because they do not, halfway through a thought, stutter words or corrupt ideas, neither repeating themselves nor redacting themselves, despite extemporizing, nor do such poets typically punctuate their talk with the ums and the ahs of, like, you know, phatic speech, even though words like “yeah” and “okay” probably represent the most commonly deployed language in our daily lives. Goldsmith suggests that the debased diction of offhanded discourse might provide a heretofore unexplored repertoire of musical rhythms, as revealed, for example, in a typical excerpt such as this one, in which the poet asks: “What does it look like?” and then responds with interest: “Yeah. Yeah. Uh huh. Wow. Huh. Right. Right. Right. Of course. Yeah. Yeah. Right. Right. Oh wow. Yeah. Right. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, that’s great. That’s great.”⁶ The poet suggests that the dyspraxia in even the most conventional conversation already offers, readymade, a radical grammar, as asyntactic and as semantic as any literature by the avant-garde: “what modernism [...] has worked so hard to get [...] for the past 100 years has always been right under our noses!”⁷

Goldsmith thematizes such an artistic attitude when he talks about his job as a DJ on public-access radio at WFMU, where he orchestrates a musical program that broadcasts unpopular listening: “They[,] they[,] they[,] they encourage people that have never done this shit before. You don’t sound like a DJ, you sound like a person. Lots of um’s and uh’s[....] [They] encouraged me to say um in the beginning[....] [Y]eah, you know, cuz I was reading something. Throw that away and just, you know[....] They encourage you to just swing it[,] you know?” (86). Goldsmith adopts the role of a spontaneous broadcaster, who pretends to converse with an intimate audience, regaling us with the improv comedy of his own brazen patter, all the while scorning any listener who might demand a polished delivery. Goldsmith emulates in print his practice on radio, keeping his art lo-fi so that, like the scratchiest recordings of avant-garde retro-music played by him on a defunct machine with a crappy needle, his own voice skips and trips over itself, conveying the amateur rhythms of an ordinary language, no longer remastered by literature into a hi-fi art, where the perfection of form supersedes the experience of flow: “That way[,] I hear the music[,] I don’t hear the system[,] the[,] the[,] I don’t hear the format” (86).

Goldsmith alludes to the overabundant, scatological condition of language, thematizing the “volume” of his speech, both the loudness of it and the muchness of it, accumulating “every piece of shit word” and “all the crap that you speak” (15) – the sublime, general economy of wasted breath, misspent on meaningless interaction with the café waiter or the taxi driver. Goldsmith tries to envisage this volume as a number of either waterdrops or jellybeans, suggesting that, “[i]f every word spoken in New York City daily were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, each day there would be a blizzard.”⁸ While we might expect poets to demonstrate more eloquence on a daily basis than the average speaker, the soliloquist finds that his own monologue becomes a humbling exercise for him because, much to his chagrin, the project reveals that, despite dedicating vast sums of energy to the output of speech, we expend much of our own spoken labour, not upon anything of lyric value, but upon petty, if not nasty, tasks within language itself, conveying very few profound insights, even in moments of familiar intimacy. Words become disposable pollutants in a milieu of urban ennui, and language is sublime, not for its quality, but for its quantity – which in turn has an uncanny quality all its own.

Goldsmith thus makes an astounding commitment to an ethics of speech, owning up to all that he says, taking credit for each word, be it kind or mean, doing so without embarrassment despite the sociological consequences. While lawyers might now leap with evermore zeal to the defense of our copyright so that our words might receive due attribution, we often forget that we also utter disownable statements better left unassigned to us because we cannot bear to take credit for them. Who among us is willing to own all that we say behind the backs of our peers? Are we willing to be quoted as sources for our spiteful insults and our shameful secrets? How can any of us bear witness to our own sexual banter, our own casual deceit, all the stupid things that we declare in ignorance, but with authority – statements that, when attributed to us, require of us that we backpedal, that we apologize, renouncing our words, disavowing our ideas. Who can sustain such radical honesty? Certainly not the confessional poets – who pretend to offer up a voyeuristic, if not solipsistic, account of their privacy invaded, but fail to live for real under the unremitting observation now demanded by a panoptic audience (one for whom such drama never truly takes place on stage, but only behind the scenes).

Goldsmith puts at risk his social relationships for the sake of his poetic brinksmanship, particularly when he gossips about his dearest friends like, for example, the poet Andrews, to whom Goldsmith attributes a hardnosed frankness that, ironically, Goldsmith himself dramatizes (albeit with caveats of respect): “Bruce is really rough[....] He cuts[,] he cuts right to the bone[,] it’s not a[,] he’s not a polite person. Oh, he’s very hardcore. He’s a very hardcore[,] experimental writer. Very leftist politics. Great guy. Very probably my best friend, you know, my best[,] male friend in New York. Great[,] great friend of mine. Yeah, you know, just a great guy. A lot of people don’t like him. He loves you. He loves you. Just don’t get on the wrong side of Bruce. I never want to be on Bruce’s wrong side. I mean, ew, yeah, oh.... That’s what I feel[,] but I know people who have been on the wrong side of Bruce[,] and he’s fearsome, yeah. Fearsome. Yeah, he’s got a[,] a mind, you know, he’s got an intellect that’ll, you know[,] just shred anything in sight”(82). Similar moments of honesty in the text have cost the author a friend or two, and many of us might feel relief that we ourselves have never known the author during this week of his work, thereby dodging, for a bit, the candid camera of his assessments.

Goldsmith takes pride in the fact that his soliloquy is relentless and unreadable, often describing his work as a genre of word processing or data management, in which our tedium is the message.⁹ Skeptics who might dismiss such an enterprise as entirely unpoetic fail to appreciate its surprising, narrative novelties, since the author does in fact create suspense for readers; first, by expressing recurrent anxieties about foreshadowed people; second, by conducting enigmatic dialogues with unintroduced people – so that, in both cases, the reader continues to peruse the text in order to discover either the awkward dialogue with the awaited person, still forthcoming, or the gossipy anecdote about the unknown person, already encountered. Goldsmith, of course, retells similar stories to diverse friends, creating space for dramatic irony, particularly when he changes details of the same tale to suit the persons present (behaving amiably, for example, with a person whom he has elsewhere maligned and insulted), revising the details of his stories with each recital. We see his patter evolve over the duration of the exercise, as he becomes more and more practised at repeating these riffs. The text begins to infold upon itself, opening up the gaps for an eventual speech while filling in the gaps of a previous speech.

Goldsmith even infuses his work with the self-reflexive, self-justified attributes of metafiction at the moments when he responds to queries about his project, explaining it to curators in an effort to sell it as an artwork. Goldsmith alludes in the text to “a Fluxus piece that was done where a gesture was substituted for an alphabet so that a theatrical piece was composed, you know, by way of letters and sentences” (175) – and indeed his work takes on the improvisational characteristics of such a performance, in which he must undertake a set of screen tests, learning to ignore the constant presence of the mic on his collar: “Well, I[,] I did a lot of tests[,] and I tried to get off of, uh, being self-conscious about it. I mean at first it was a little awkward and I did it like several days of tests and[,] yeah, you know, I was like watching what I was saying[,] and at this point it’s like I’m just letting it[,] yeaah” (209). The soliloquist, moreover, draws attention to the condition of his monologue not only when he buys batteries and cassettes to replace the ones used up in the flow of his talk, but also when he repeatedly enunciates the word “testing,” introducing it into his speech, like a punctuation mark, as if to check not only whether or not the dictaphone is recording, but also whether or not the readership is listening.

Soliloquy almost resembles a script for a drama on stage or a movie on video, since the text does seem to outline lines to be spoken for the day (despite reading like a simulcast or a docudrama, its footage as raw as any on unscripted television) – and as technologies for such lingual storage become less expensive and more pervasive, we might witness the copycatting of such transcripts, perhaps for a period much longer than a mere week, each recorded and uploaded onto blogdexes everywhere for us to read out loud in real time. Goldsmith has confessed to me in conversation that his project now makes the viewing of films unbearable for him because the theatric dialogue in cinema sounds canned and forced. Goldsmith implies that, although theatre derives its impact from speech, the genre fails to reimagine the sum of our lives as a single stream of sequential utterances, all divorced from their original contexts, but recorded in the form of a book, one that Mallarmé might recognize, one in which we might read the transcript of our complete lifetime within language, including not only our first words ever spoken, like the cue for a childish thespian debuting on stage, but also (on a more ominous note) the final words spoken by us at our expiry when, like me at this moment, we run out of things to say.

Notes

- 1 Kenneth Goldsmith. “Uncreativity as a Creative Process.” *Drunken Boat* 5 (Winter 2002-2003). <http://drunkenboat.com/db5/goldsmith/uncreativity.html>.
- 2 Wordsworth remarks that, while his lyrical poetry has adopted “[t]he plainer and more emphatic language” of the rustics, such discourse is “purified indeed from what appears to be its real defects” – i.e. “[r]ibaldry, blasphemy,” even “drunken language.” (“Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems* (1800).” *Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth*. Ed. Paul M. Zall. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1966: 18.)
- 3 Williams claims that poets must speak in the quotidian discourse of everyday language, “[n]ot [...] talk in vague categories but [...] write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular” – i.e. “no ideas but in things.” (William Carlos Williams. *Paterson*. San Francisco: New Directions, 1963: [vii].)
- 4 Ginsberg of course provides one of the rallying precepts for the beatniks when he asserts: “[f]irst thought, best thought.” (Allen Ginsberg. “Cosmopolitan Greetings.” *Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems 1986-1992*. New York: Harper Collins, 1994: 13.)
- 5 Antin admits that often he does modify each talk-poem when transcribing his recordings of it: “I felt free to add to the original material and expand it—with phrases or whole passages that were not in the original but belonged in the talk.” (David Antin and Charles Bernstein. *A Conversation with David Antin*. New York: Granary Books, 2002. 63.)
- 6 Kenneth Goldsmith. *Soliloquy*. New York: Granary Books, 2001: 58.
- 7 Kenneth Goldsmith. “A Conversation with Kenneth Goldsmith.” With Marjorie Perloff. *Jacket* 21 (Feb 2003). <http://jacketmagazine.com/21/perl-gold-iv.html>.
- 8 Kenneth Goldsmith. “Kenneth Goldsmith and As Bessa: 6799” *Zingmagazine* 11 (1999). <http://www.zingmagazine.com/zing11/bessa/index.html>.
- 9 Kenneth Goldsmith. “Being Boring.” <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~wh/boring.html>.

Sampling the Culture: 4 Notes Toward a Poetics of Plundergraphia and on Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day*

Jason Christie

“Many artists refused to join the church of formalist purity, however, and continued to paint representational pictures, even pictures of the most retrograde subject of all, the human figure. Yet many of those who did so still thought they were, as Ezra Pound urged, making it new” (Goldsmith 691).

1. *Plunderphonia* > *Plundergraphia*

In Chris Cutler's analysis of John Oswald's CD, *Plunderphonic*, he mentions that “plagiarism ... has today emerged both as a standard procedure and as a consciously self-reflexive activity, raising vexed debates about ownership, originality, copyright, skill and cultural exhaustion” (138). Cutler defines a theory of plunderphonics in which he advocates artists to assume a plagiaristic attitude toward copyright-protected or previously published material in the pursuit of a new and unique sonic art object. He sketches a plunderphonia that situates plunderphonic art practice *as* cultural critique. I'd like to extend Cutler's theory of plunderphonia to literature and articulate a plundergraphia that treats words in an equivalent manner to how he describes Oswald's use of sound: sound (and words) in the public domain are objects and therefore plunderable (138).

Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day* is the product of a process similar to Oswald's plundering of music in that both manipulate entire samples of copyright-protected material; they both put the original through a transformation yet are careful to maintain the integrity of the original despite the alteration of form; and both challenge ownership, copyright, etc., through this act of plunder. Goldsmith appropriates an issue of the *New York Times* to transform it into a book, while Oswald mines popular songs and manipulates them to produce wholly new sonic objects. The effects are similar, the practices are similar, and yet the process is slightly different. I believe it is therefore necessary to define

a praxis of plunder distinct from and yet similar to Oswald's plunderphonics that focuses on words instead of sound as manipulable material. I offer 'plundergraphia' as a term that applies to words in the same way plunderphonia applies to sounds.¹

I believe it is also necessary at the outset to demonstrate how plundergraphia is distinct from plagiarism and reference, and shares little more than intention with found poetry.² Plagiarism requires a person to desire to conceal a source for his or her benefit and assume ownership of a previously published source. The act of reference requires that a person credit a source in his or her attempt to benefit his or her argument through an invocation of support either by importing a voice of authority or that of a contemporary. Found poetry appropriates previously conceived material into new arrangements but is still dependent upon the final product as a product. Plundergraphia is a more general praxis that situates words in a new context where they are charged by their trans-formation into an entirely different context than that of their original one. The distinction between plundergraphia and found poetry is that plundergraphia's political impact is in the act more than in the product, while found poetry is still somewhat dependent upon the final product with a trace of politics supporting the activity. Plundergraphia could be a type of found poetry, but the distinction would be that the work that is found has to be retained in its entirety without anything else being added to it.³ Tom Phillips' epic found project, *A Humument*, and Ronald Johnson's treatment of Milton, *Radi os*, both suggest a plundergraphic attitude toward an original source but their transformations of the original distort it beyond legibility into an entirely new creative expression. Goldsmith and Oswald, although distorting the original, do not do so to the extent that the original source is unrecognizable.

2. *Kicking Lacan: the objet d'art, simulacra, the aura, and The Real*

“Of all the processes and productions which have emerged from the new medium of recording, plunderphonics is the most consciously self-reflexive; it begins and ends only with recordings, with the *already played*” (Cutler 141, original emphasis).

Plunderphonics/graphics is the art form of copies, of “the already played,” where art objects dance in our imagination, pretending toward the Phallus yet deliriously never authenticating an experience of the Real. What we can realize through such a ludic praxis is that the Real is

now something different than a reality full of discrete objects to which we think we've been annexed through language or symbology. Instead the Real *is* the annexation to a world of copies. We live in the immateriality of language, in a highly combinable space strewn with indeterminate pulsions we turn into arrows and objects. We mistake language as distinct from that which it posits. Simulacra are real and all that is real is simulacrum. The Real is always a fabrication dependent upon socially determined variables. In this case objects are only unique if that uniqueness is a characteristic intrinsic to their creation, if that is the specialness of their identity. It is a characteristic of production that it is now always possible to make several copies of any one thing. And so, the idea has become the only locus of originality. The bastion of the art object's aura, Benjamin's aura of originality, surrounds the concept. The necessary conclusion, the realization and materialization of the concept in a concrete form, is nothing more than ephemeral detritus fallen from a unique and insubstantial object. We moved the aura from an illumination of praxis through techné into our minds where it only shines around the most unique of ideas. What we get in the conceptual art object made manifest is an echo. We still privilege uniqueness and originality but our definitions of how these terms apply to an art object has changed to suit our reality. The aura has no place in our everyday experience and the wake of its withdrawal into thought and immateriality only highlights the ordinariness and drabness of our received cultural surroundings: concrete, functionality, lawns, gardens, etc. If our reality is entirely constructed from simulacra, then DJs and artists such as Goldsmith manipulate facets of culture with a facility heretofore only intimated in modernist and postmodernist art practices without succumbing to the mind-numbing castration anxieties of our previous generations. They dramatize the process of the Real in their annexing practice. The aura that would have existed around the cultural products they manipulate now enshrouds the activity *of* manipulation, and in this case, the act of plunder.

3. *Mocking art news*

By transforming the quotidian and banal information in the newspaper into the legitimating form of the book, Goldsmith plays DJ with our understanding of the cultural relevance of words. The daily newspaper is meant to be a temporary repository for words employed in the service of informing people about potentially relevant events. Goldsmith forces these words into a perpetual anamnesis by publishing

an issue of the newspaper in a book format; the words enact a constant haunting; dead words archived as ghosts with mock historical relevance: "a great weight of dead music to press upon the living" (Cutler 138). Reading a newspaper in some archival form such as microfiche or in its original form in an archive has different cultural connotations than encountering a daily newspaper transformed into a book. Microfiche is a form that isn't fraught with the preciousness historically associated with the book. And reading the newspaper in its original form in an archive touches on anamnesis but only as a mechanism of nostalgia or as a facet of historical research. A book is always anamnestic since the words contained exist with each reading as information bound to, but not intrinsically dependant upon, a historical moment the way a newspaper is inextricably bound to the day it was published even if brought into the present. This paradoxical point, this imminent anamnesis, is exactly the productive element of Goldsmith's transformation of the daily news into literature.

The DJ samples a historical moment and incorporates it into a new framework; the DJ transforms dead sonic material, discarded, and disembodied sound into a living moment. And thus, DJing relies on anamnesis to establish a textural and immaterial field charged with the potential for cultural critique. For example, the importation of an element of music from Bach into a Drum 'n' Bass track causes a juxtaposition that renders the division between high and low art both vital and moot. Goldsmith vexes this bifurcation by transforming the newspaper into literature. Like the DJ, his act of plunder offers a cultural critique of the objet d'art by incorporating a low art form (the newspaper) into a high art form's vessel (the book). Both Goldsmith and the DJ demonstrate that the boundary between high and low art is semi-permeable at best, and can be traversed in either direction. The idea that the newspaper is a low art form pertains to our use and valuation of words. Some readers value the efforts of journalists and may even reward a journalist's hard work by clipping a well-written or especially relevant article or column to place on the fridge or in a scrapbook, but generally the words in a newspaper are viewed by a reader as temporary, utile, proximal and ultimately disposable. We have a very different valuation system for words housed within books. Books assume the sacrosanct status of the art gallery, they assume the vaulted architecture of a place of worship ready for the willing spirit;

this is especially true of books we nestle into the category of literature. These words are not disposable.⁴

4. *High Art / Low Art: sexing the slash or what is a bifurcation good for, anyway?*

Goldsmith invites the quotidian dispensability of the newspaper into the sacrosanct space of the book, of literature, or of the art book; he opens the art galleries' doors to lowly proles; he fills the sanctuary of the place of worship with the street noise of traffic, and thereby offers us a glimpse of our continuing dependence on the categorical division of high and low art. In this way, Goldsmith offers literature the same cultural challenge leveled at Art by Warhol and Fluxus at mid-20th century and by Dada artists in the early decades of the 20th century. Warhol and Fluxus challenged the societal fetish around commodities and the divorce of labour from product; it became impossible to experience the mark or trace of the individual presence as a producer of products with the onset of assembly lines and hyperautomated processes in factories, not to mention the idea of celebrity as an insubstantial and eminently desirable product. Warhol and Fluxus relished the auraless objet d'art where an artist's style got offered up in place of techné to determine the objet d'art's appeal. Function and quality gave way to fashion and quantity. Our stance toward words hides a continuation of the distinction between high and low art. With the observation that language, words, is, are, material, that meaning is a commodity, a product, several of the writers associated with L= writing make it clear that our relationship to language-use, to words, is not free from ideological baggage: words in their use become equivalent to the soupcan. Goldsmith's transformation of a seemingly simple use of words as bearers of news, as disposable razors, perpetuates an ideological crisis below that of a manipulation of content: our dismissal of words as temporary containers for meaning is wedded to a consumerist resistance to recycling as a social program and a societal love for commodities: we love to hold things. Books are the inheritors of our most modernist tendencies, specifically that of reifying language or art, of framing literature and art as a sacrosanct space distinct from but relating to ordinary, quotidian experience.

The idea of transporting a quotidian and time-sensitive object such as the newspaper into a posterity-ridden space like that of the book challenges our sense of utility. Words are meant to be read. Words

don't have expiration dates. So, a newspaper that is two days old is already redundant by the simple fact of the two intervening days' issues of the newspaper that are each supposedly up-to-date up to their respective dates of issue. Books are meant to blanket the social aporia generated by newspapers' attempt at total coverage and provide a retrospective, albeit revisionist picture of a given historical moment. Books are meant to be read at any time, irrespective of 'when' they are written or published. But the deceptively honest question remains: how fruitful is it to read a newspaper as a book when it is continuously more and more out-of-date? Should such a book be *read* at all? I realize to some people it is almost sacrilegious to suggest that a book should not be read, that a book's function is other than to be read, but the question nonetheless remains. Duchamp challenged our notions of art and utility, of the height of the objet d'art's preciousness and the lowness of the objet quotidienne with his readymades. Goldsmith's *Day* functions similarly to Duchamp's *Fountain* in that it is still a newspaper as much as Duchamp's *Fountain* is still a urinal. Both are functional. But who wants to piss in Duchamp's fountain? Maybe the text of Goldsmith's *Day* exists otherwise than as a semantic outlay provided by a reader's dutiful reading of the words contained within the book (or on the back cover)? His text exists much like a DJ's mix: in the ephemeral space of experience, the concept, disassociated from but reliant on objects, created in transformation and left there, haunting the annex of the Real, created through an act of plunder, created by sampling the culture. And the book is an independent artefact of the process, a urinal, a recording.

Notes

1 There is a musical performance piece by Mark Applebaum called "Plundergraphic." I wish to make clear that I am using the term to describe a writing practice and not to discuss the piece by Mark Applebaum. Please see for more information on his work.

2 William Burroughs and Bryon Gysin's work with cut-up is also closely related to plundergraphia because they maintain the integrity of the original source in its entirety while putting words into startlingly new and charged relationships.

3 Modernists demonstrate a precursor to the practice of plundergraphia with their collagist methodology, especially Pound in his *Cantos* and Eliot in *The Waste Land*. Their poetics operate at the level of the word or phrase before the level of content, and as such we receive a text of highly plundered sources

concocted as a formal pastiche with content following closely behind, what we used to call highly allusive or intertextual writing.

4 Although, an argument could be made for the disposability of words in pulp books and reference books, how-to books, etc. These words often enter into a ceaseless circulation through second hand bookstores and garage sales — a very different fate than that of most newspapers which remains the recycling bin, garbage, archive, or bird/cat/dog cage.

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"Moving Information": On Kenneth Goldsmith's *The Weather*

Marjorie Perloff

I used to be an artist, then I became a poet; then a writer. Now when asked, I simply refer to myself as a word processor.¹

Exactly thirty years ago, John Cage received a commission from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to write a piece of music in celebration of the American Bicentennial and devised his remarkable *Lecture on the Weather*, the parent text – but also the foil – of Kenneth Goldsmith's 2005 book called *The Weather*.² *Lecture on the Weather* is, of course, no lecture at all: the composer subjected Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience*, *Walden*, and his *Journal* to *I Ching* chance operations to obtain collage texts to be performed simultaneously by twelve vocalists. While these passages were recited, according to strict instructions as to text choice and time-length, Cage introduced, again using numerical constraint, recordings of breeze, rain, and finally thunder, and in the last (thunder) section, a film, representing lightning by means of briefly projected negatives of Thoreau's drawings.

The resulting 'lecture' is thus a systematic, constraint-based "verbivocovisual" (Joyce's term) performance. It varies, as I have noted elsewhere,³ according to the time and place of its venue. At the California Institute of the Arts (Valencia) performance in March 1984, the 'theatre' was a large empty room with bare floorboards and a platform at one end on which the vocalists were placed; in the course of the performance, the audience, milling around the room, gradually formed a huddle, so as to keep out of the 'storm.' At the Strathmore Hall "Cagefest" in Rockville, Maryland (May 1989), in contrast, the performance space was a much smaller conference room, in which the audience was seated conventionally in rows, with open French windows to one side. Halfway into the piece, a storm took place, its thunder claps blending nicely with the recorded storm signals, much to the delight of the composer and his audience. But whatever the venue, Cage's is essentially a *mimetic* text, one that simulates 'weather,' as we know it in the real' world. It wants, at least for the time span of its

performance, to *enact* weather, the atmosphere in which we live. As such, Cage's *Lecture on the Weather* presents itself as an *opening* to the natural world, even though its creation and production are, of course, the very opposite of natural.

Like Cage's *Lecture*, Goldsmith's *The Weather* is a constraint-based, constructed composition. Since Goldsmith's source text, the hourly weather bulletins on 1010 WINS, New York's all-news radio station, lasts exactly one minute, he has recorded a year's worth of weather reports, one paragraph per one-minute report. Like Cage's *Indeterminacy*, whose one-minute segments demand that some stories will be speeded up, others slowed down by "er" and "um" interjections so as to satisfy the constraint, the WINS time frame provides the form. In a 2003 statement, Goldsmith tells us that he began to record the radio weather forecasts on December 21, 2002 and continued for exactly a year. And, logically enough, the book has four chapters for the four seasons – Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall.

Within its Cagean framework, however, Goldsmith's little book manages to turn the phenomenology of *Lecture on the Weather* inside out. Whereas Cage uses the most elaborately artful means (the "writing through" of Thoreau's journals and their vocalization, the recorded weather sounds, the intermittent visual images) to simulate the *feel* of weather in all its uncertainty and changeability, for Goldsmith, discourse is all: the transcription and reproduction of a year's worth of radio weather reports, left intact. Nothing, one surmises, is invented or added or even altered (although Goldsmith evidently left out a few asides and jokes): what you see (or in the case of Goldsmith's reading on MP3, what you hear) is what you get. And, after all, Goldsmith himself has repeatedly insisted that his aim is to be as "uncreative" as possible, indeed downright "boring."⁴

But wait a minute! Take up *The Weather* as you might any other book, and you will soon find that what seems to be boring, straightforward, and incontrovertible fact is largely fiction. The book's division into four chapters, one for each season, is already an artifice, for of course we don't experience the seasons this way. Nothing happens on December 21st that couldn't just as well happen on December 20th, the last day of fall. The seasonal cycle, moreover, is, as David Antin notes in his jacket comment, presented as "a classical narrative," moving from the bitter freeze of Winter 2002 through a moderate New York spring, to the summer season of thunderstorms

and hurricanes threatening the coast, to the autumn of World Series weather (fortunately, fairly dry), back to a winter that seems, at least so far, not as cold as the previous one. The larger narrative thus mimes the familiar myth of "in like a lion, out like a lamb."

Within this frame, the struggle to survive, as defined by the daily weather within which, rich or poor, young or old, citizens of the New York area function, is dramatized in all its boring detail: rare is the week that there isn't an unexpected shower, a crust of frozen snow, a swollen river, or some other impending disaster. Listen to the weather forecast and you cannot avoid the beginnings, middles, and ends of Aristotelian narrative: "The storm is approaching! (beginning) . . . The storm is getting closer! (middle) . . . The storm is here!" (climax) "Oh, boy, what a storm that was!" (dénouement).

But in 2003, quite by coincidence, given Goldsmith's original design, the structure of his narrative was heightened by an unanticipated event. On the first day of spring (in fact, though it isn't cited here, March 20, 2003 or the evening of March 19, Baghdad time) the U.S. launched its war against Iraq. Military experts had warned that the attack should not be delayed until the hot season (which comes in early May in Iraq and is long and intense), and late March was already borderline. Baghdad weather bulletins, in any case, suddenly infiltrate the New York weather news, even as our troops were infiltrating Iraqi soil:

Oh we are looking at, uh, weather, uh, across, uh Iraq obviously here for the next several days, uh, we have, uh actually some good, good weather is expected. They did have a sandstorm here earlier, uh, over the last twelve to twenty-four hours those winds have subsided and will actually continue to subside. Uh, there will be enough of a wind across the southern portion of the country that still may cause some blowing sand tomorrow. Otherwise we're looking at clear to partly cloudy skies tonight and tomorrow, uh, the weekend, uh, it is good weather and then, we could have a storm, uh, generating some strong winds, uh, for Sunday night and Monday, uh, even the possibility of a little rain in Baghdad. Uh, currently we have, uh, uh, increasing cloudiness, uh, forecast locally night, uh, its gonna be brisk and chilly, temperatures getting down into the middle-thirties, and then some uh, intermittent rain is expected tomorrow and tomorrow night. It'll become steadier and heavier late in the day and, uh, actually a pretty good soaking tomorrow night. It'll become steadier and heavier late in the day, and, uh, actually a pretty good soaking tomorrow night. Uh, temperatures getting into the mid-forties tomorrow, and then

staying in the forties tomorrow night. Friday it's a breezy and warmer day but, uh, still a few more showers maybe even a thunderstorm, the high of sixty degrees. Currently we have sunshine and forty-four with an east wind of ten. Repeating the current temperature forty-four, going up to forty-six in midtown. (39)

This passage nicely exemplifies the powers of 'mere' transcription, mere copying, to produce new meanings. From the perspective of the weather forecaster, Iraq is experiencing some "good good weather" – good visibility, no doubt, for bombing those targeted sites, and not too much wind. The risk of "blowing sand" is slight. After the reference to "a little rain in Baghdad," the "we" shifts back to the New York area, as if the Baghdad rain or wind were merely a brief diversion from everyday life in the Tri-State area where it's a nice average day with temperature in the forties and a chance of rain.

In the next report, "Middle East weather . . . continues to be favorable for military operations, and that'll remain the case through Sunday, but Monday and Tuesday, there may be another episode of strong winds, poor visibilities, and, uh, even some sandstorms" (39-40). And a few days later, the weather is turning "nasty" in Baghdad, with "strong winds . . . kicking up the sand and making for poor visibility." Within a week, the region is "sunny and hot," highs in the "middle-to-upper nineties" (43). Perhaps, it seems, the U.S. waited too long after all, what with "one hundred degrees plus, in the southern and eastern deserts." But, whatever the realities of military strategy, within less than three weeks, Iraq weather literally disappears from the WINS radar screen. No further mention of sandstorms or rain or the sizzling heat in Kuwait is made, no doubt because on April 9, the fall of Baghdad is announced: for weather purposes, the 'war' is over.

At this writing in July 2005, with the postwar (often more deadly than the war itself) dragging on day by day, this weather tale could hardly be more ironic. Yet it is perfectly accurate: as soon as the statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled down amid jubilation, 'Iraq' was presumed to be no longer a primary concern to residents of the Tri-State Area, tuning in to the Weather Forecast on their morning commute or weekend get-away. Within days, the 'real' news – an item of April 15, for example, that daytime TV was about to get "its first lesbian kiss" – was competing with Iraq for airtime, and that meant that, so far as weather reports were concerned, it would be all weather,

all the time. Not Baghdad but Bergen, New Jersey, not Kuwait, but Danbury, Connecticut (55). And it has remained that way ever since.

In the wake of such "consumer minimalism," as Goldsmith calls the mode of these one-minute weather reports, those sound bytes that "take our most complex, life-sustaining environment, and simplify it in a way that either aids or abets your commute" (email 14 July), the poet need provide no moralizing on the horrors of war; the actual discourse of the day says it all. The Baghdad thread is thus the clinamen that gives the "classical narrative" of *The Weather* its piquancy. But this is not to say that Goldsmith needed such outside interference to enhance the intrigue of his tale. For the transcriptions themselves, the 'mere' retypings of the daily reports, have their own poetic force – a force that relates them to science fiction rather than to the boredom of everyday fact.

First, how daily is our experience of the daily weather report? In theory, it is constant, but in practice, it all depends on the listener. There should, for example, be 365 reports in this annual record, but I count only 293 entries, with summer being the shortest season (sixty-four entries) and winter the longest with eighty-four. What can this mean? And how can the reader, trying to 'date' individual weather reports, know where s/he is? Is Goldsmith suggesting that summer *feels* shorter than winter? But that hardly seems likely, given that the summer of 2002 was a special weather challenge, what with terrible hurricane Isabelle coming in from the Carolina coast and the storms plaguing the New York Area. What is more plausible is that Goldsmith was out of town – say, at Christmas time, which has a paucity of entries, or for the 4th of July. Then, too, sometimes there seem to be two or more weather reports for the same day, so similar are the descriptions in question.

The neat four-season cycle thus turns out to be anything but neat; the text assembles not *the* weather but Kenny's weather, witnessing his comings and goings in the course of a year. Goldsmith is the first to admit this. "The act of transcription," he remarks, "as a hands-off, bone-dry act of coldness is a fallacy; no matter what we do, we leave our imprint – and a very personal imprint at that – on our work" (email 7/14). Central to this "imprint" is the poet's decision to provide no dates or even the month in question (is entry x made in January or February?) – a decision that challenges the reader to find logic and coherence in what turns out to be a curiously illogical and incoherent narrative. For try to establish the actual sequence of these weather

reports and you will be startled to find that the 1010 Weather Forecast is mostly wrong or at least confusing!

In mid-February, for example (about fifteen entries past Groundhog Day, which falls on February 2), we read:

We're gonna get a break in the weather, not only for today but for the next, uh, well, three days as clouds, uh, thin out for partial sunshine today. We'll get the temperature up close to forty this afternoon, certainly above freezing and well into the thirties. Might be a sprinkle or flurry this evening then clearing tonight. Tomorrow a mostly sunny day, I'll tell ya, if you're outside tomorrow afternoon, there won't be much of a breeze, the sun will be out, temperatures into the forties, it will feel good. And then a, uh, nice day Friday but increasing clouds. Rainy and windy Saturday, and that combination of rain and melting snow can cause street and highway flooding Saturday. Dry Sunday but blustery and colder. Right now it's thirty-two and party sunny in Central Park, temperature today going up to thirty-eight. (25)

But the next entry announces "arctic air tonight, some clouds, thirty-four in midtown, we're heading down to twenty-four. We'll be hard pressed to get, uh, close to the freezing mark tomorrow." And then the forecast looks ahead to "single digits in many suburbs" coming "tomorrow night" (25). What's happened to the "feel good" weather with its "mostly sunny day" predicted above?

Again and again the elaborate and laborious five-day forecast turns out to be incorrect. Or is it just that the omission of an entry or two makes nonsense of the forecast? In the extract above, it should be Thursday, since the forecast looks ahead to Friday and then to the weekend. But in the very next entry there is talk of "precipitation Thursday, Thursday night, early Friday." Does this already refer to the next Thursday, the report coming on Wednesday? Or does Goldsmith skip a number of forecasts? Give two or three for a single day? Again and again, talk of upcoming days of the week conflicts with prior "evidence," and so the book begins to feel like the elaborate fantasy, which in fact it is.

For even though Goldsmith *invents* nothing and merely transcribes, there are constant "artistic" decisions to be made, beginning with the omission of the date, time of day, day of the week, and month. It is an omission that makes it impossible to orient oneself vis-à-vis actual weather events, and, without changing a single word of a given report, it heightens a particular phenomenon: the chanciness of the weather. "Chance" is, of course, one of the most common words in any weather

report: a chance of showers, a chance of rain, a chance of a thunderstorm, a chance of snow flurries. The tension that animates weather discourse is thus a tension between number and chance. After an announcement that "we could see some snow by the weekend" (22), the next sentence tells us, "Right now it's partly sunny, thirty-one in Central Park, humidity forty-one percent, a west wind gusting to thirty-one, gives us our RealFeel temperature of about nineteen."

Whose RealFeel is this? Does everyone *realfeel* 19° when the temperature is 31°, the humidity 41%, and winds gusting thirty-one miles per hour? Who decides, and doesn't specific predisposition, location, or clothing have anything to do with it? More important, how do we process all this accurate information, given the continuous references to chance, to the *possibility* of this or that happening? Indeed, the further we read into *The Weather*, the more we note that the only certainty has to do with *present* time and place (but whose present?), whereas the forecast is always, so to speak, under a cloud. Consider the last day of "Summer," whose Weather Report concludes as follows:

And a chance of showers lingers into Tuesday, high on Tuesday seventy-two degrees. Currently seventy-two degrees at LaGuardia, sixty-eight at Newark, in Central Park a cloudy sky, seventy degrees, relative humidity eighty-four percent, and we have a calm wind. Repeating the current temperature seventy going up to eighty-two in midtown. (90)

There's *chance* again, but reassuringly linked to a particular day and those wonderfully precise temperatures at LaGuardia, Newark, and Central Park. Numbers and place names: these circumscribe weather discourse and make it seem nothing if not informative. But when the current temperature is repeated just seconds after its first mention, the data is confusing because the location – Central Park, where it is 72° – is not the location which was the original point of departure – LaGuardia Airport. So even these numbers demand qualification.

Now suppose that, as I write this, I had on my desk the necessary tools to measure weather conditions: thermometer, barometer, anemometer, etc. Obviously, I could determine, without listening to WINS or any other station, precisely what 'my' weather is. Indeed, the newer automobiles all register on their dashboards the outside temperature, and soon, no doubt, they will be able to register the humidity and wind velocity as well. Why, then, do we continue to tune

in to the weather report? What is it we enjoy about its frequently fabulist narrative?

Here pronouns play a major role. Consider the following, from "Summer":

Well, you can already feel that heat and humidity out there as the sun, uh, has been really warming us up and, uh, we'll stay that way today. Some clouds and parts of the area could get a thunderstorm this afternoon or early tonight, as a cold front passes through, but not all of us seeing any shower activity. (71)

What rapport! We're all in this weather game together, right? And the wise reporter knows that "not all of us" are "seeing" any shower activity. S/he knows "we" feel that "heat and humidity." Then, too, this impersonal voice has insight:

We're going to have very strong winds today. The winds are going to gust past fifty miles per hour at times and this is going to bring down some tr . . . tree limbs, power lines. Already thousands of people as close as Philadelphia are without power, across parts of New Jersey as well. This all spreading north-eastward (108)

Again, what wisdom! The godlike weather forecaster seems to be witnessing those trees coming down: he (on radio, it usually is a he) is a prophet who "already" knows the fate of Philadelphia, where thousands are without power!

Weather is thus the most intimate and yet the most impersonal of 'news.' On the one hand, it draws 'you' into the magic circle of 'us,' who have insight into the air movements of far-away Philadelphia. On the other, the weather forecast is wholly non-judgmental. Not for the forecaster to tell us how to feel about the Iraq War, the fate of Kuwait, or even the outcome of the World Series. The weather cycle is, after all, the same in war and peace; it is wholly independent of our human attempts to control it or steel ourselves against it. And precisely because it *is* thus independent, we marvel at its excesses: year in and year out, we express surprise and outrage over ninety-five degree heat in July and subzero temperature in January. Amazing! Who would have thought it? Let's listen to the weather forecast and find out what happens next! Maybe.

Like Goldsmith's word-for-word reproduction of a single day's *New York Times* in *Day* (2003) or his transcription of his every spoken word during a given week in *Soliloquy* (2001), *The Weather* is a work of radical defamiliarization. It forces the reader to think about weather in entirely new ways. Whereas Cage could still find it useful to 'create' a weather situation that would seem "real" and alive, that would force us to open our ears to the sounds we actually hear, Goldsmith is responding to a later, rather different situation – an electronic environment where appropriation and sampling are simply par for the course. Nothing in our environment can now be 'natural,' not even the weather over which we have no control, because it is transmitted to us through particular channels that are continuously packaging and monitoring meteorological events.

For many artists and writers, this situation spells the endgame of art. Here we are, so the pessimists would claim, the victims of the consciousness industries, of a relentless commercial and political spin that controls our every action and denies our freedoms. But Goldsmith knows better. "Suddenly," he remarks in a discussion of *Soliloquy*, "the familiar or quotidian is made unfamiliar or strange, without really blasting apart the sentences. Forget the New Sentence. The Old Sentence, if framed properly, is really odd enough." Or again, "Writing needs to be as simple as possible – just put a net up and catch it."⁵

The notion of putting up a net to "catch it," of framing the "old sentence" is not as absurd as Goldsmith's detractors would have us think. I doubt that the author of *The Weather* has spent much time poring over Wordsworth's famed "*Preface to Lyrical Ballads*," but much of Wordsworth's case for defamiliarization applies nicely to Goldsmith's work. Consider the following passage:

It is supposed, that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will *gratify certain known habits of association*; that he not only thus apprises the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded. . . . they who have been accustomed to the *gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers*, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title.⁶ (my italics)

Wordsworth famously goes on to explain that his “principal object” was “to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them . . . in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way” (869).

But, the skeptical reader will ask, how can the “colouring of imagination” Wordsworth speaks of so eloquently be thrown over words that were not invented by the poet, how can it transform sheer *copying*? Goldsmith recalls that a student once approached him and complained, “Your poem doesn’t contain a single word of your own!” Here a comment in a recent Goldsmith interview on “uncreativity” may be apposite:

Creativity as we’ve come to know it is bankrupt. . . . Think of the flood of worn-out narratives, passing for originality, be it novels, films or music, and you’ll find that what we term creative is nothing more than repetitious formulas, spun over and over. Should something appear that’s truly “creative” it doesn’t stand a chance of selling and as such, is rendered culturally insignificant and marginalized to the point of invisibility. By opposing creativity as commonly accepted – in a sense by constructing a negative notion of creativity – perhaps we can breathe new life into this practice. Hence, my concept of the uncreative.⁷

The “flood of worn-out narratives” reminds me of Wordsworth’s strictures on writing that merely “gratifies certain known habits of association.”

Indeed, just as I was completing this essay, the mail brought a copy of the winner of the 2004 Walt Whitman Award of The Academy of American Poets, a slim volume by Geri Doran called *Resin*. According to the dustjacket, “the [poet’s] voice . . . tells how the natural world . . . expresses and mediates human longing.” Given these parameters, weather would seem to be involved, as it is in the first poem, “Tonight Is a Night Without Birds”:

The sky fell open to a map of the constellations.
Earlier the snowmelt reconfigured the field.
I tried to describe it, but the field transformed
into the plains of the soul pressed flat.⁸

This is, I’m afraid, sleight-of-hand. Skies, no matter how much we strain, don’t “fall open to a map of the constellations,” and, had the poet really “tried to describe it,” the field in question would not so

easily morph into the “plains of the soul.” Indeed, Doran’s are the “repetitious formulas, spun over and over” that Goldsmith rejects, the “gaudiness and inane phraseology” Wordsworth is determined to replace.

Reading such strained comparisons, one turns with relief to the found text of *The Weather*. Here, a given “crooked tree / small with wild spikes and a covering of snow,” is not said, as in *Resin*, to “look like a deranged bonsai”(45); trees are always and only trees. But the text has its own pleasures. Consider the “getaway day for the Memorial Day holiday weekend” (what date is that exactly?), a day on which “We’re waiting, actually, on a storm system organizing in Georgia right now to bring the real rain of consequence” (58). The *real rain of consequence*: it sound ominous indeed, coming as it does all the way from Georgia. Will it really hit New York? There is no telling, but its “consequence” is everywhere to be found in this delightful and creatively “uncreative” little book.

Notes

1 Kenneth Goldsmith, “I look to theory only when I realize that somebody has dedicated their entire life to a question I have only fleetingly considered (a work in progress: version 01.2002),” Kenneth Goldsmith author page, <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/goldsmith>.

2 See John Cage, “Preface to ‘Lecture on the Weather’,” *Empty Words, Writings 73-78* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1979): 3-5. There have been numerous recordings of the performance of the *Lecture*: see, for example, Cambria Records 8800: Composers’ Portrait Series: 6-17. John Cage: *Lecture on the Weather* (1975).

3 See my *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992): 20-28.

4 See Goldsmith, “Being Boring” (2004), on the author’s home page. This lecture, delivered at the First Seance for Experimental Literature, Disney REDCAT Theatre, Los Angeles, November 2004, and again at Kelly Writer’s House, University of Pennsylvania, November 2004, makes a witty distinction between “unboring boring” and “boring boring.” Interestingly, here too Goldsmith draws on Cage, specifically the famous statement in *Silence*, “In Zen they say: if something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and so on. Eventually one discovers that it’s not boring at all but very interesting.” See *Silence* (Middletown: CT, Wesleyan, 1962): 93.

5 See Leevi Lehto, "Interview with Kenneth Goldsmith: Nude Media, or Benjamin in the Age of Ubiquitous Connectivity," *Tuli & Savu* (Helsinki, 2002); see Kenneth Goldsmith author page; Goldsmith, email to author, 14 July 2005.

6 William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)," in *William Wordsworth, The Poems*, 2 vols, ed. John O. Hayden for The Penguin English Poets; Vol. One (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981): 866-96. See pp. 868-69.

7 See Anne Henochowicz, "Petty Theft: Kenny G Gives A's for unoriginality," *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 18 November 2004; see Kenneth Goldsmith author page.

8 Geri Doran, *Resin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005): 3.

Stepping out with Kenneth Goldsmith: a New York Interview

Caroline Bergvall

I cannot dissociate Kenneth Goldsmith's gridded work from the city of New York, nor ignore the autobiographic displacements that lurk in his warholian transcriptive structures. I ask him to take me on a tour of his idea of New York. I buy a small dictaphone. I bring along a set of questions loosely based on the questionnaire developed by Proust, which has often been used on writers as an indulgent and pointless identification game. He invites me to meet him on Monday morning at 9.15am. I catch the unreliable F line from East Broadway and remain stranded on the platform. At the Lafayette-Broadway stop, I get out at the wrong exit.

1. Corner Lafayette St and Bleeker St

This is the Noho Star and this is where when we first came to New York after college Cheryl [Donegan] was waitressing in 1985 21 years ago she made great money incredible money \$500 a night incredible it was perfect we had a place on Canal St and there used to be all these galleries yes they'd all come in here and that was really our first connection to the art world there was this whole gallery thing migrating from the East Village back to Soho and Cheryl got caught right in the migration it was really fantastic but the thing I love about the Noho Star is that it hasn't changed since 1984 when it was opened look at this Memphis style thing isn't it great look at these columns aren't they just like 1984 aren't they just so fake

Q. A few things you need to do before you die.

The only thing I need to do before I die is to capture and transcribe all the varieties and amount of available language around the world.

Walk west on Bleeker and one block south on Broadway.

2. Corner Broadway and Houston St

This is an amazing corner I had an office in this building the Cable Building it was my first post-studio situation I consciously called it an office it was a great transition for me from being a studio artist to a writer I wrote *73 poems* there I started off in a largish room that looked right onto Houston St. here and I would be doing these textual wall pieces then I moved into a very cramped room with dropped ceilings and carpeting and that way I knew I couldn't make any more visual art really I wasn't able to and I wanted to do everything on the computer oh and *Soliloquy* took place here and *III* and *ubuweb* started here this is all probably 1990 I migrated to a laptop in the Cable building just across the street in 1998 or something I surfed the heights of the dotcom era I had this big important well paid job I nearly lost my life to the corporate world well I got fired for letting everybody play videogames on company time but a lot of the kids I was working with became very famous artists the whole company went bust and I watched my stock options go from million of dollars to a reverse split

Q. Where would you like to live

New York City

Walk three or four blocks west down Houston.

3. Corner La Guardia Place and W Houston St

Here we are in front of the Time Landscape this is such a funny piece I adore this basically this guy fenced off this area and is letting it revert to its natural state no no it's a public art piece he researched it and went and bought all the plants and types of plants in 1978 that would have been in the primeval Manhattan forest and as the city gets bigger this evolves or devolves into a primeval Manhattan forest the thing I like the most about it is that it's full of trash and people come in here bums come in here couples come here one of the things when you're a teenager and you're walking around Manhattan with a girl and you're just so horny you try and find a place to go for a fuck and so as this grows in guys and girls you know hop in for a fuck it looks like it's been thinned out but theoretically it should be allowed to grow extremely dense I think they're afraid a lot of people throw food for the rats and the pigeons in here

Q. Who would you be if you weren't yourself

John Cage.

Walk up La Guardia Place, north across Washington Square Park to the NW corner.

4. North West quadrant corner Washington Square Park

Where we are now used to be a dog run where dogs can go and be free I had a dog in the early 90s late 80s when I had an office in the Cable Building and it's in this dog run that I read all the works of Modernism most specifically I remember reading *Ulysses* in this part of the dog run I completely educated myself to everything Modernist I'd never paid much attention to it before but now I read everything I could get my hands on and also the complete works of Henry James and *Washington Square* of course I read *Making of Americans* here I read Cummings here I read the *Cantos* right in this dog run it was insanely important for my Modernist education I just sat down and read everything

Q. Who would you be if you weren't yourself

Andy Warhol

Walk through the park southwards to its periphery cross the street to the corner of Thompson and Washington Square South.

5. Corner Thompson St and Washington Square South

Here we are at Judson Church of course when it was in its heyday I was just being born but subsequently over the years I befriended many of them to the point where Alison Knowles asked me to speak at Dick Higgins' memorial service which was held right here in the church and I remember giving this speech at Dick Higgins' memorial which was an obit he had written for himself in the foreword of that book called *Foewomwhnw* and I said it word for word and afterwards people came up to me and said that was such a moving tribute to Dick but I didn't write a word of it and it made me realise how unfamiliar everybody in that room were with his own writings it's a book everybody's got on their shelves but of course it's a difficult book to read and no one has ever read it that was such a strange thing but I looked over the audience and saw all my heroes from the 60s out there it was an amazing crowd Meredith Monk all the Conceptual artists great film-makers the whole avant garde world was there

Q. Your favourite art piece

Vexations by Eric Satie

Walk down Washington Square South turn down on Sullivan St turn west on W 3rd St down Macdougall turn right on Minetta Lane then left to 6th Avenue.

7. Corner Bleeker and 6th avenue South East corner

Here I watched the World Trade Center collapse I'd dropped my son off for his first day of pre-school right over there I heard one of the towers had fallen and the whole thing was being announced this car radio was blasting the local news as thousands of people were watching the second one collapse aesthetically it's one of the most magnificent things in my life I sound like Stockhausen we couldn't comprehend the magnitude of what it was *New Collapsing Buildings* Einstürzende Neubauten looking right down 6th avenue and turning around and looking at the faces of people after the thing had collapsed it was an amazing communal experience everybody had their hands over their mouths people were crying in complete shock and this guy narrating the whole thing on radio blasting the day's events out of the boom box

Q. Your favourite artform

Language

Walk west from 6th Ave through the convoluted streets of the West Village to Clarkson between Greenwich and Hudson

8. 39 Clarkson St

This is the loading dock on which I got drunk on the evening of *Fidget* where I went with my dog and a bottle of Jack Daniels and sat down at about 6pm I began drinking I was wearing dark sunglasses in this decrepit loading dock facing an office block and I recorded every move as I was swigging down the Jack Daniels I must have looked like a crazy bum sitting here and talking to myself for two and half hours I was getting more drunk and I was slurring my words then I walked west down the street to the river kept talking and doing my activity looking over the Hudson River before the tape recorder clicked itself off this is an important site for *Fidget* on June 16 1997 the loading dock is still as grubby and awful as on that day and the tape recorder just clicked off

Q. Your favourite dish

Indian fiesta by Mikasa [???

Walk down Clarkson cut up Downing make right on Bedford then down Bedford to Houston down Macdougall then left on Prince down to Thompson

9. 32 Thompson St

This is the apartment that Cheryl and I rented for 7 years after we lost all our money on a bum real estate deal here I wrote *III* also *Fidget* this was our bedroom window this is where *Soliloquy* took place this was a tiny apartment where I really dedicated myself to writing it's also here that I ran into Language Poetry Geoff Young had solicited some works of mine for a show in Great Barrington so we went up for the Summer and he said I'm a publisher of books of Language poetry I'd never heard of that this was in 1992 and he gave me a stack of books Silliman's *Tjanting* was one and I thought it was incredible we came back after the Summer and there was a package in the mail from somebody called Bruce Andrews and the manuscript was *Stet, Sic & Sp* which I would go on doing drawings for I was stupefied I had never seen any work like this I had no idea who Bruce was and it wasn't mechanical like *Tjanting* I just ignored it but back on a train from Boston I had a few drinks and I thought I'd try and deal with this manuscript and finally by Connecticut I started to ask what it wasn't and by negative definitions I arrived at what it was and that was the only way I managed to understand Language Poetry I also had my first dial-up internet connection here and it fed *III*

Q. Your favourite historical figure

I don't care much for history with a capital eitch so I'll have to say that I don't have a favourite historical character.

Walk south down Thompson turn east on Grand right on Mercer to Howard then north on Broadway

10. Broadway between Howard St and Grand St

Where we're standing was a cafeteria called the Daynton Cafeteria and when I first came to New York there were still old Jewish places that were open all night for garment workers and people packing lofts down here artists would come and sit forever in this place and have a cup of coffee and crummy Jewish food it always used to be full the garment

district it's all gone now in the 80s it became a restaurant called Amsterdams they just gutted the Daynton and then that went out because it was pretty horrible and then this clothes store moved in and to save money they just took off the S and called it Amsterdam and I just love the way NY fills up its history they just don't take things down it's just typical in a wonderful way NY keeps on accumulating its history over and over again and look only the AMSTER is still there and the DAM is unlit and this is all falling apart

Q. Most despised historical figure

Not only do I not believe in history with a capital eitch but I don't believe in black and white demarcations nor do I believe in the power of individuals in history, the absolute power of the individual in history, so I don't have a response once again.

Walk south down Broadway turn East on Howard

11. Dead-end corner Howard St and Cosby St

When I first moved here in the late 70s this whole area was machine shops there are still some on Lafayette St huge monstrous machine shops and this used to be very desolate nothing but sweatshops steam pipes coming up there's still some chinese stuff here but now it's all very fancy like this Tibetan carpet store it used to feel like the end of the world and when my cousin and I were asked to register for the draft in 1979 I had a big qualm whether I should register and we decided that if we were to get drafted or war came or we needed to vanish we'd go under cover for a couple of years as bums down here in the belly of lower Manhattan where nobody knows about you and you're completely anonymous you could wander around the back alleys of Chinatown and the industrial areas how different it is now it's all above ground and fancy but there was a time when you could vanish into it and feel just lost in the labyrinth of industrial decay of course there's no chance of disappearing in Manhattan any more

Q. What do you hate the most

(sudden car alarm) I hate car alarms!

Walk down Howard through a labyrinth of streets to Chinatown down Pell to Doyers

12. Doyers St

Lost in the snaky streets of Chinatown is the Nam Wua tea parlor early in the 80s we were just coming off acid one night and we walked into the Nam Wua tea parlor and there was a big green festering pig on the table and we were all rattly from being up all night so everytime I walk past I'm so happy it still exists in my opinion Chinatown exemplifies what New York is all about crowded streets dense crazy signage people goods new things old things useful things not useful things graffiti dirty streets run-off shit tossed off into these streets old cooking oil acid has just eaten the streets away the ground is greasy and you're really god only knows where it fulfills my definition of a good city which is a city you can never really know San Francisco is a nice city but you can know San Francisco but cities like LA Paris London certainly you'll never know you'll never really know these cities they say New York is overdeveloped and it is but this place just continues to fester and accumulate and get richer and richer with each passing year the Nam Wua nobody goes there it's such a great place I'll be very sad when it goes but it's also part of New York you can't get attached to anything in New York because the minute you get attached something else comes in its place

Q. Your idea of perfect happiness

Standing where we are right in the midst of deep dark chinatown

Walk down Doyers cross the Bowery walk down to Division St

13. Corner Eldridge St and Division St

This is a fantastic corner there's the Manhattan bridge and the train is rumbling over there making a deafening sound we've moved from the belly of Chinatown to the bowels really down and dirty look at the signage on the street and here's the most glorious synagogue the Eldridge St synagogue it used to be the old Jewish quarter down here and now standing here you can look up the street straight up to the Chrysler building that's Midtown business that's rational New York the New York on the grid and this is just a fucking organic mess down here we're on the corner of 6 streets determined by the pre-grid ancient Manhattan landscape there are several layers of subways trains cars above them on the bridge hairsalons everything is thrown on top of one

another but it is beautiful and you look up and see the modern New York the Sex and the city New York the professional New York you catch a glimpse of it and all this exists simultaneously

Q. Your main weakness

Love of substance and love of style, both are weaknesses.

Walk up Eldridge street take a right east on Canal between Orchard and Ludlow.

14. 46 Canal St

This was the first loft we lived in when we first came to New York me and Cheryl it's now been turned into a high speed internet café let's go in hi hey this was our old loft hey how are you doing we used to live here I used to live here so we had a bed here we slept here and there was a bathroom here this was our bathroom and our toilet the kitchen was in here in this room and this was Cheryl's studio this whole room we painted the floor this was my sculpture studio the big windows used to look out onto a Chinese opera company there was a little closet back here you can see out the window it had beautiful woodwork an artist had lived here for many years I came here as a sculptor this is so great ok let's go

Q. Your obsessive habits

My entire practice is one obsessive habit.

W. 3rd St. - W. 26th St.

Rob Fitterman

if I was a master thief, perhaps I'd rob them
Bob Dylan, "Positively 4th Street"

West 3rd Street

super vege flaying our guitars for Caroline or Roz's team it's different figures us ok but what these people don't know anything about that suede life everything I'm telling you is a fact

West 4th Street

pop dog fork right there automatic ram garage your ultra swan pepper steak I'm on the street now I just left the hospital boat care why are you telling me this train dunked philosophy soy

Washington Place

sunshine spirituality you're confusing us with boot cut gothic alliance turtles as a new pet financing stone for the stars this place blows I don't see what's so sexy about it top lobby

Waverly Place

always in the all over the world wonderful surprise off a sudden lack of any major art movement my publisher tells me it's out of print but nobody tells me anything I'm sorry

West 8th Street

Man Plus you'll see me out there a full pair of snappy west coast choppers organic steam table dansko cambio angela davis camouflage girls vamp glam adamantly fetish friendly pouring

West 9th Street

one of the largest and irregularly defined Italianate media celebrities as well I'm not sure we're not meeting I know she's meeting a couple of her friends but after that overhead deposit

West 10th Street

gosh we're in a whole new neck of the wood world class fascinating it is just so fascinating hardwood path Emilio why can't we all go and meet them there 14th street you can't go up

West 11th Street

gowns get ten years back Ives are you ever like the lost French-Indian Twiller admiral don't feel like you have to low rise ascension pantry take one do I look like a durango synagogue

West 12th Street

wholesome like everything looks good on her anyway he won a prize a physics prize a highschooler isn't that funny he was all like oh my friend Ben Affleck and I separate sofa units

West 13th Street

don't tell me to take a walk it whirls royal flush the freshly tossed we are at the risk of losing our après quad filaments custom aldar court Drewe liberty Milano what are you honking at

West 14th Street

soul signs commerce into the west character patterns send videos what are you doing this weekend just relaxing right it makes the beginning of summer a really good point close jumbo multi-use hot-n-ready daisy mavericks but I think most people we do U jubilee more Greek Hollywood soft observer going out everything with exam sure what time are we talking about

West 15th Street

slate in suit ok for me it is a problem rendezvous yarn I'm gonna start off and get some dinner literally craving science fiction borders Tibet waxing includes pouring hot chocolate skin film

West 16th Street

not once did she starting over pets family singer drop treatment you want me to show you how to do a one-armed pull-up grill benches Coach a national cell theory Sarah understands

West 17th Street

PFS CNK BLZ JNS sleep now video old all over cove a better eco flash inn elevator to the ocean how easy is this old storm wiggle this with a dark shirt and a pair of jeans it's frosted

West 18th Street

decorative slaves of wonder who started as lovely indigenous home gifts 10 mile inspirations what is modern sculpture again and I want them to be bright play house mimosa presentation

West 19th Street

the supple west anchor body authority portfolio smoothie look at the fucking light asshole mom there's no rush hour on Saturdays yeah what do you call this green peace now baking

West 20th Street

riveting innocence hides no. 9 keep going keep going mounting signatures spring walk-ins how you doing esso crystal VIP pistol range no work boots vegetables rock ask us about it

West 21st Street

oh so they say the house of anonymously unsafe great American masquerade so is she still sleeping call the world from this phone neckface blow-out I have no idea did you call me

West 22nd Street

classic fiber dumping apply dupes just calm down comfort academy like you're gonna really appreciate that per cominciare everything you want is possible that Ralph G-A-B-like boy

West 23rd Street

it's actually fine but you know what I mean upper di volo TV's it girl kick your ass light-weight water-resistant guys take a look originals no bootleg no copies what floor 4th floor computer giant and sons it's so ridiculous Medici style reliable and courteous u.b.u. shoegasm I don't know what to tell you check Kmart and then call me right back yeah yeah right

West 24th Street

talking antique something toy south I should get a job here due to her universal all of a sudden I have a malpractice suit I know what you mean but mine's starting to look like a portrait

West 25th Street

pull-up grand runner I mean is there any way that all night showcase pays you back superior Johannesburg equipment dog spa I don't have any money right now yedsonic memories we're

West 26th Street

Apollo mango shea butter body wash then he popped out I'm not adding onto the house just yet ripe building sticker replay chivo seabliss epoch McGrady pro-land we have plain T-shirt

Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing

Kenneth Goldsmith

I will refer to the kind of writing in which I am involved as conceptual writing. In conceptual writing the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an author uses a conceptual form of writing, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the text. This kind of writing is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless. It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the writer as a craftsman. It is the objective of the author who is concerned with conceptual writing to make her work mentally interesting to the reader, and therefore usually she would want it to become emotionally dry. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the conceptual writer is out to bore the reader. It is only the expectation of an emotional kick, to which one conditioned to Romantic literature is accustomed, that would deter the reader from perceiving this writing.

Conceptual writing is not necessarily logical. The logic of a piece or series of pieces is a device that is used at times, only to be ruined. Logic may be used to camouflage the real intent of the writer, to lull the reader into the belief that she understands the work, or to infer a paradoxical situation (such as logic vs. illogic). Some ideas are logical in conception and illogical perceptually. The ideas need not be complex. Most ideas that are successful are ludicrously simple. Successful ideas generally have the appearance of simplicity because they seem inevitable. In terms of ideas the writer is free even to surprise herself. Ideas are discovered by intuition. No matter what form it may finally have it must begin with an idea. It is the process of conception and realization with which the writer is concerned. Once given physical reality by the writer the work is open to the perception of all, including the author. (I use the word perception to mean the apprehension of the sense data, the objective understanding of the idea, and simultaneously a subjective interpretation of both). The work of literature can be perceived only after it is completed.

Literature that is meant for the sensation of the ear primarily would be called aural rather than conceptual. This would include most poetry and certain strains of fiction.

Since the function of conception and perception are contradictory (one pre-, the other post-fact) the author would mitigate her idea by applying subjective judgment to it. If the author wishes to explore her idea thoroughly, then arbitrary or chance decisions would be kept to a minimum, while caprice, taste and others whimsies would be eliminated from the making of the text. The work does not necessarily have to be rejected if it does not look well. Sometimes what is initially thought to be awkward will eventually be aesthetically pleasing.

To work with a plan that is preset is one way of avoiding subjectivity. It also obviates the necessity of designing each work in turn. The plan would design the work. Some plans would require millions of variations, and some a limited number, but both are finite. Other plans imply infinity. In each case, however, the writer would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem. After that the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work, the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible. This is the reason for using this method.

When an author uses a multiple modular method she usually chooses a simple and readily available form. The form itself is of very limited importance; it becomes the grammar for the total work. In fact, it is best that the basic unit be deliberately uninteresting so that it may more easily become an intrinsic part of the entire work. Using complex basic forms only disrupts the unity of the whole. Using a simple form repeatedly narrows the field of the work and concentrates the intensity to the arrangement of the form. This arrangement becomes the end while the form becomes the means.

Conceptual writing doesn't really have much to do with mathematics, philosophy, or any other mental discipline. The mathematics used by most writers is simple arithmetic or simple number systems. The philosophy of the work is implicit in the work and it is not an illustration of any system of philosophy.

It doesn't really matter if the reader understands the concepts of the author by reading the text. Once it is out of her hand the writer has no

control over the way a reader will perceive the work. Different people will understand the same thing in a different ways.

If the writer carries through her idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made apparent, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps – sketches, drafts, failed attempts, versions, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the writer are sometimes more interesting than the final product.

Determining what length a piece should be is difficult. If the book were made lengthy then the size alone would be impressive and the idea may be lost entirely. Again, if it is too small, it may become inconsequential. I think the text must be long enough to give the reader whatever information she needs to understand the work and framed in such a way that will facilitate this understanding.

The page can be thought of as the flat area bound by the three-dimensional volume. Any tome will occupy space; one must never disregard the physical characteristics of the printed volume. If the text is meant to reside permanently on the computer or network, its placement on the screen or printout is equally important. It is the interval between things that can be measured. The intervals and measurements can be important to a work of conceptual writing. If space is relatively unimportant -- as, for example, on a web page – it should be regularized and made equal (things placed equal distances apart) to mitigate any interest in interval. Regular space might also become a metric time element, a kind of regular beat or pulse. When the interval is kept regular whatever is irregular gains more importance.

Marketplace fiction and forms of 'purposeful' writing are of completely opposite natures. The former is concerned with making a text with a specific function. Fiction, for example, whether it is a work of art or not, must be utilitarian or else fail completely. Conceptual writing is not utilitarian. When poetry starts to take on some of the characteristics, such as staking out utilitarian zones, it weakens its function as art.

New materials are one of the great afflictions of contemporary writing. Some writers confuse new materials with new ideas. There is nothing worse than seeing art that wallows in gaudy baubles. The electronic

writing landscape is littered with such failures. By and large most authors who are attracted to these materials are the ones who lack the stringency of mind that would enable them to use the materials well. It takes a good writer to use new materials and make them into a work of literature. The danger is, I think, in making the physicality of the materials so important that it becomes the idea of the work (another kind of Romanticism). It is challenging enough for the author to simply write with the rigidity of an idea in mind; add to that programming, design and sound and the challenge becomes insurmountable.

Writing of any kind is a physical fact. The physicality is its most obvious and expressive content. Conceptual writing is made to engage the mind of the reader rather than her ear or emotions. The physicality of the work can become a contradiction to its non-emotive intent. Rhyme, meter, texture, and enjambment only emphasize the physical aspects of the work. Anything that calls attention to and interests the reader in this physicality is a deterrent to our understanding of the idea and is used as an expressive device. The conceptual writer would want to ameliorate this emphasis on materiality as much as possible or to use it in a paradoxical way (to convert it into an idea). This kind of writing, then, should be stated with the greatest economy of means. Ideas may be stated with numbers or words or any way the author chooses, the form being unimportant.

These paragraphs are not intended as categorical imperatives, but the ideas stated are as close as possible to my thinking at this time. These ideas are the result of my work as a writer and are subject to change as my experience changes. I have tried to state them with as much clarity as possible. If the statements I make are unclear it may mean the thinking is unclear. Even while writing these ideas there seemed to be obvious inconsistencies (which I have tried to correct, but others will probably slip by). I do not advocate a conceptual form of writing for all authors. I have found that it has worked well for me while other ways have not. It is one way of writing; other ways suit other writers. Nor do I think all conceptual writing merits the reader's attention. Conceptual writing is good only when the idea is good.

On Kenneth Goldsmith: The Avant-garde at a Standstill

Joshua Schuster

Walter Benjamin's notion of dialectics at a standstill is a paradox machine: dialectics follow the movement of an object or concept in development; it is a mode of thinking in motion, conceptualizing process rather than stasis – but in Benjamin's case the paradox of suspended motion allows one to expose the inner workings of the time and process in question. From Benjamin:

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. – Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language.¹

In Benjamin's material historiography, when time and process come to a standstill there is great potential for radicalism in an historical aesthetic. An image at a standstill is a constellated concept or excerpt of experience. The dialectical image stands and yet still moves – it is a collection of history at the same time as it is part of history-in-the-making. It is an event yet also a stoppage in time. The paradox is mirrored in the historical agent who would have to suspend conventional time to create a radically new historical event.

Writing a book is one way to suspend history; writing books that capture the suspension of history is another. This essay on Kenneth Goldsmith explores the paradox or suspension machines at work in Goldsmith's conceptual art poetry.

Uncreativity as a constraint on creativity: in *Day*, Goldsmith applies uncreativity as a method, in effect, paradox as method. The 836 page book is a re-typing of nothing more than the *New York Times* edition of Friday, September 1, 2000. The conceit is a trap that snaps at the

moment when uncreative writing leads to creative reading. The book is unreadable not at the level of meaning, since it is nothing but a collection of the generic journalistic style that maximizes readability, but at the level of the brain's competition for attention. It is guaranteed that the mind will wander while allegedly reading this book. It is without doubt that it will wander to the question of why this book was written in the first place. That is perhaps the zero-point of creative reading. The zero-point of creative writing would be the world as a book or a world without books. *Day* is one long quote. *The plot of a book, which unfolds over hundreds of pages, is that someone is opening a book.*

“Unboring boring”: Writing is vital, alive, lively, intense, engaging, engrossing, captivating, catchy, impressive, necessary, noteworthy, stimulating, thrilling, dazzling, razzmatazz This is not an arbitrary list of superlative adjectives: the Romantic poets and philosophers write in an age of vitality, which is a rather technical term that captures the generative force behind organic bodies and nature in general as well as social-historical changes. Hegel's *Geist* is the vital absolute. Vitalism does not so much wane as it does cloy in Victorianism and *fin-de-siècle* decadence. But modernity would not exist without its own newly sharpened vitalism. For the first wave of modernists and avant-garde writers, the vital in language and culture is once again up for grabs in competing definitions, always in danger of being dispersed and dissolved in antiquation or generic prose. To be modern and to write modern one has to have a vital language: Futurism electrifies a dynamism in language; Imagism quick-strikes the emotion and intellect; Dadaism uses noise and provocation to intensify the zone between sense and non-sense. Time has softened the Romantic and modernist versions of vitalism although aesthetics are still predicated on giving kicks to the senses. Yet most of the terminology of vitalism has been de-motivated in its repeated attempt to give luster to commodities. Mass-market paperbacks and films are pre-packaged with sensuous praise and the assurance that your money will buy you the desired stimulation that goes by the name of the thrilling. Still, it is worth noting that there is plenty to carry on the tradition of vitalism today: the work of Arakawa and Gins, the philosophy of Deleuze, the neo-organic systems theories of auto-poiesis.

Can boredom be vitalist? Perhaps vitalism resurfaces in contemporary avant-garde as experimentation on conviction. Experimental conviction is how I would position Goldsmith's notion of unboring boring. Here is Goldsmith on the difference between boring and unboring boring:

I am the most boring writer that has ever lived. If there were an Olympic sport for extreme boredom, I would get a gold medal. My books are impossible to read straight through. In fact, every time I have to proofread them before sending them off to the publisher, I fall asleep repeatedly. You really don't need to read my books to get the idea of what they're like; you just need to know the general concept....

Unboring boring is a voluntary state; boring boring is a forced one. Unboring boring is the sort of boredom that we surrender ourselves to when, say, we go to see a piece of minimalist music.²

Experimental boredom toys with the art of conviction: at what point does one throw one's hands up and declare “this is too much!”? Not shock but boredom of the new. Yet one can be avant-garde at the level of conviction. Conviction and commitment are fair game for experimental aesthetics. Consider again the example of Arakawa and Gins, who launch an avant-garde at the level of conviction in their assertion that “we have decided not to die.” That these are unreasonable convictions, absurd commitments, over-the-top demands for sustained conceptual attention make them all the more compelling. The heart of the issue: how far can one commit oneself to one's ideas? How serious do you take your own ideas? How long does one idea stay with you, or when you are dissatisfied, bored with it, do you just throw it away? How close is conviction to faith or fundamentalism? Perhaps for most people today, an ethos is built up by the very reluctance to entertain convictions at any length of time. But another ethos is always lurking around the corner, one that would insist only on conviction as the ultimate intensifier of value. Kant overly normalized the role of aesthetics – not to consolidate and universalize judgment but to question judgment, to put judgment in crisis, to make judgment go beyond itself, towards... experimentation and commitment?

One of the bases of politics is the power to access and grant recognition to causality: who decides what causes are valid and what causes never make it to causality. Radical democratic politics must always involve

the making of unreasonable demands to disrupt unresponsive causal networks. One takes an apparently outlandish position (historical: suffrage for all, equal pay and equal rights for all; speculative: unions for all, democratize everything, never work!) and relentlessly adheres to its principles. The taking of extraordinary positions puts the ordinary on its heels – in many cases the ordinary wins, but not before it has to do a little dance to deflect the extraordinary. Radical democratic politics sets in motion a chain of contact that interrupts the *status quo* of causality and initiates a new causal series. In a homologous way, I am attracted to avant-garde art that practices the activity of making unreasonable demands, taking outlandish positions, and enacting experimental convictions – a paradox is an unreasonable demand on logic, a dialectical image an unreasonable demand on time. This is the genealogy in which I place Goldsmith's work.

Poetics solicits theory: Goldsmith's work entertains a conflict between Debord vs. Baudrillard. Both see that the contemporary is saturated with so much capital that the real (of desire or of suffering) is no match for the insatiable demands of ersatz reality whereby ideology is absolute and commodities control the fate of cities and personal identities. Yet whereas Debord still conceives of resistance under a Marxist banner led by a universal class doing battle in the streets, Baudrillard has not left the living room and is watching television flicker a revolution in technology and media every second.

Baudrillard: "The dialectic stage, the critical stage is empty. There is no more stage. There is no therapy of meaning or therapy through meaning: therapy itself is part of the generalized process of indifferentiation.... Implosion of meaning in the media. Implosion of the social in the masses. Infinite growth of the masses as a function of the acceleration of the system."³

Debord: "The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation."⁴

Baudrillard: "We are witnessing the end of perspectival and panoptic space..., and thus to the *very abolition of the spectacular*" (30).

Debord: "The most revolutionary idea concerning city planning derives neither from urbanism, nor from technology, nor from aesthetics. I refer to the decision to reconstruct the entire environment in accordance with the needs of the power of established workers' councils – the needs, in other words, of the anti-State dictatorship of the proletariat, the needs of *dialogue* invested with executive power. The power of workers' councils can be effective only if it transforms the totality of existing conditions, and it cannot assign itself any lesser a task if it aspires to be recognized – and *to recognize itself* – in a world of its own design" (126-127).

Baudrillard: "It is the fantasy of seizing reality live that continues – ever since Narcissus bent over his spring. Surprising the real in order to immobilize it, suspending the real in the expiration of its double" (105).

"It is no longer possible to fabricate the unreal from the real, the imaginary from the givens of the real. The process will, rather, be the opposite: it will be to put decentered situations, models of simulation in place and to contrive to give them the feeling of the real, of the banal, of lived experience, to reinvent the real as fiction, precisely because it has disappeared from our life" (124).

Among other differences apparent here, Debord still insists on the effectiveness of the event; Baudrillard sees no events but only movements of information in a sea of simulation. Debord wants to take back the real in a simultaneous political/aesthetic attack, Baudrillard argues that the political and the aesthetic have fused together (or "imploded") so well that both are now substitutes or simulations of any foregone reality principle.

Since Goldsmith has no interest in workers councils and generally abstains from direct political critique, we can assume that he finds more explanatory power in Baudrillard's writings (Goldsmith teaches Baudrillard's simulacra theory in his uncreative writing seminars). Debord flourished in the 60's; Baudrillard's best years were in the 80's. But Baudrillard has aged badly in recent years. He wrote books on the Gulf War and 9/11 denying that they were events – certainly these were scripted but the script still does not match the devastation or the aftermath. Baudrillard, a sociologist and informatics aesthete, has a

fondness for instruments that have low sensitivity to embodied experience, existence that is exposed to pain and pleasure, sensations that refuse to disappear from life. Goldsmith's poetics still need to respond to the lame-duck status of recent Baudrillard writing. Maybe not a wholesale return to Marx, but since labor can trigger both boredom and events, Goldsmith's intuitive understanding of how work is being redistributed in the 21st Century (via copying, archiving, moving information, plundering, etc.) will be of help for a new challenge to the ongoing disenfranchisement of labor.

Goldsmith's *Head Citations* is an attempt at mixing *détournement* with simulacra. A pun is a minor form of *détournement* – but how many revolutions can there be in a pun? Could one really reconfigure the May 68 line “*sous le pavé, la plage*” as: *under the concrete poetry, the beach*?

Whenever someone says *poiesis* I want *praxis*. Whenever someone says *praxis* I want *poiesis*. *Poiesis* without *praxis* is empty, *praxis* without *poiesis* is blind.

Traditionally poetry fetishes quality. Poetry of quality now converted into quantity – thousands of poetry books published every year. Goldsmith: poetry of quantity, converted into quality. Not incidentally, this is one of Marx's equations for the processing of things into capital. How much does it take for quantity to tip over into value? Could there be a man/woman without qualities who is also without quantities?

The economics of Goldsmith's books are always fascinating. Who put up the cash for these things? Why don't they supply their names? How much did all this paper cost? Who buys these kinds of books? Why should these books take up valuable shelf space? What about the environmental impact of printing these paper saturated volumes? It seems that the larger the book and the more it weighs, the stronger its gravitational pull to these kinds of questions. But as an inverse consequence to this gravitational weight, the ecological impact of these books does worry me. Goldsmith's *The Weather* is composed of haunting prose copied from the slow crawl of an atmospheric ecosystem unfolding – the first lines of the poem: “A couple of breaks of sunshine over the next couple of hours, what little sunshine there is left. Remember, this is the shortest day of the year.” – this made all the

more melancholic in the face of the fact that a massive paper book always implies a ripping out of plant life.

Return to Debord's critical concept of spectacle, which he defines as “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image” (24). Perhaps we could describe Goldsmith's books as language accumulated to the point where it becomes image. *Day* is exactly this unit of capital accumulated as image in the block of a book. By including the text of ads and all the marginalia of newspaper operations in the same flow of writing, Goldsmith provokes a reading that does not distinguish between capital and content, administration and meaning.

Spectacle is the image shorn of its dialectics, the image as absolute that is the inversion of Benjamin's dialectical image. The question remains whether the dialectical image can still exist or be exposed in an age of nothing but the totality of images. Benjamin advocated the dialectical image as an aid to constellate conceptual thinking: “To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions – there the dialectical image appears” (*Arcades*, 475). Constellating thought is akin to spreading the image as a map on a table to have a bird's-eye view of all the contradictions, paradoxes, and simultaneities inherent in an event. (Constellations: all great philosophers are materialist cosmologists.) According to Benjamin, the dialectical image is a momentary surfacing of the unconscious of history matched by the unconscious of thinking. Benjamin writes, “Ambiguity is the appearance of dialectic in images, and the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, a dream image.”⁵ At the point where Benjamin invokes the utopia of the image, he takes a turn towards psychology and the apparition of a public, collective dream. The Situationists later called this *psychogeography*. Benjamin's psychological turn allows for a positioning of the unconscious as agent or as the primal motivational force behind the image-constellation. Consequently, Benjamin is always patrolling for the unconscious, in images, objects, political resistances, etc.

Inversely, the spectacle loves to convert all this into a thriving monopoly of the ego. The avant-garde of the 1930's rebelled against this by tapping into the unconscious; the avant-garde of the 1960's resisted either by trying to shut down the ego (Cage and MacLow's

allegedly ego-less writing) or to saturate the ego with desire and its double, knowledge. By the 1980's the self vs. selfless or anti-self wars had subsided and a multiplication or distortion of self-making practices took over. Such a narrative intersects Goldsmith's conceptual poetry at the point when everyone in the room realizes that there is a tremendous ego at work in his writing – *ego used as a medium*. It would be easiest to pin this ego on Goldsmith himself, an unfair reading that misrecognizes the attack on psychology. Besides, ego as a term is a bit antiquated – some current substitutes include: fame, notoriety, name recognition, self, self-expression, self-absorption, identity, lifestyle, personal capital, etc. Historically, self-expression has taken a beating from avant-garde artists – but isn't this too an expression of the self? I take this to be the motivating question behind Goldsmith's *Fidget* and *Soliloquy*. The self under expression is fair game for avant-garde adventures – experimental artists can do so much more than just reject or refuse that the self is of any importance to them. The self is still a goldmine for avant-garde exploration – another way of saying that above all one should not concede the territory of the self to the poets and painters who insist on only self-expression as the proper of its behavior. Perhaps the most accurate dictum for the avant-garde is: *cede nothing*.

Consider one final paradox machine: the avant-garde at a standstill. The motivating factor of the avant-garde traditionally was its ability to manipulate the future and put art in advance of new ways of living. But art today rarely lives in this forward condition – in almost every case art today does not create events but responds to them (9/11, Bush, the Internet are among the primary pipelines for refreshing new art).

Shorn of its progressive causality, the avant-garde no longer moves in a linear forward direction but spreads out laterally, often oscillating back and forth through the present time. What the avant-garde does supremely well is to investigate what it means to inhabit this lateral time in a literal way. Goldsmith uses boredom to slow down time as a way of tuning into the avant-garde at a standstill. *Fidget*, *Soliloquy*, *Day*, *The Weather* – such art asks: What is it like to live in these textual environments? Could a different management of language create a better way of living? How is it today that simply just living is an unreasonable demand? A standstill as habitat, as book, as barricade even.

Notes

- 1 Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999): 462.
- 2 All quotes from Kenneth Goldsmith taken from his Website: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/goldsmith>
- 3 Jean Baudrillard *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994): 161.
- 4 Guy Debord *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995): 12.
- 5 Walter Benjamin "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and Others (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002): 40.

The Medium Means Nothing

Carl Peters

– art cannot be reduced to the status of a means in the service of a cause which transcends it, even if this cause were the most deserving, the most exalting; the artist puts nothing above his work, and he soon comes to realize that he can create only *for nothing* –

I want to remove the experience from the work of art. (Alain Robbe-Grillet)

I want to put art back into the service of the mind.

In his landmark book, *The Structure of Art*, Jack Burnham argues that “esthetic doctrines once proclaimed that art was *beauty, the search after truth, or significant form*; what passes for esthetics today – that lingering element which makes art *art* – is no more helpful” (7). Western art is a waste-land of critical terms and signifiers – *beauty – truth – significant form – first intensity*. Gertrude Stein observes that nothing changes from generation to generation, except the thing seen – the composition. Marcel Duchamp’s work demonstrates that art is *art* – the Large Glass to the pictures of Giotto. Art stays the same – just look at the composition; composition is how it is composed.

In “Art Degree Zero,” Burnham comments: “Unavoidably, all languages and other sign systems preclude metaphysical premises. Roland Barthes repeatedly asserts that signs remain *open* and by necessity unverifiable. So it seems that every social institution, from religion to traffic regulations, operates as a communication mode with no more authority than the rules of speech. What gives such institutions their power over our lives is their *consistency*. Whatever is done within a semiotic system is always structurally consistent with what has gone before. The pattern of concepts is recognizable because it proceeds with reference to its own past. It is this repetition abetted by a proscribed order that defines man’s connection to and separation from nature” (176). Here we ought to wonder about an iconoclast’s relation to the past, and consider, as well, the relationship between a poet’s irreverence and absence into minimalism, because it is clear that the

minimalist impulse is an important part of the structure of contemporary art.

I will not make any more boring art.

I intend to explore Kenneth Goldsmith’s conceptual art following closely the metaphysics of its poetic and context; Goldsmith is a derivative writer and the context for his work ought to be understood. There is a context for Goldsmith’s *boredom*; this context includes Gertrude Stein and Marcel Duchamp. They are very boring writers. They are also the two single-most important creators of modern and post-modern art. I take Goldsmith’s “being boring” as a refusal to be orthodox. There is a semiotic challenge. Writing and art subverted or even reduced to boredom (again there is a minimalist impulse here – I’ll return to this) is information, and information next to Art is nothing. “Nothing” is not so easily achieved. As I am trying to show, there is a philosophical, certainly an antagonistic, tradition that goes along with it. Art deconstructed by boring art (information?) – a version of the high art / low art binary – is another way of practicing Duchamp’s aesthetics of indifference. Indifference transcends taste; to transcend taste is to undermine the very structure of Western art, writing and critical thought. Goldsmith’s work achieves this better than anyone else’s to date. He furthers the tradition of the re-told, recycled, re-made – ready-made – repackaged, repeated – mundane.

Being is in repeating.

Repetition fascinated Gertrude Stein, because it was at once a physiological and cognitive act. Movement creates (constructs) mind. Marcel Duchamp sought to put art back into the service of the mind, to carry the mind of the reader towards other regions more *verbal*. Reality and experience are reconceptualized in terms of structure and idea; structure and idea subvert standards of taste. Jack Burnham offers the best definition of indifference as a cognitive act:

The Platonic and Christian desire [want] to find moral justification for human acts is alien to strict Gnosticism. In this light we might interpret Duchamp’s legendary *indifference*. The concepts of superior quality and moral preference imply alternatives. But for the Gnostic, “looking toward God” [object - ready-made] means assuming the rigorous impartiality of the Supreme Deity, rather than of obligations, choices, and temptations that constantly try the virtue of a normally religious person. (“The Purposes of the Ready-mades,” 72)

I don't want to suggest that Duchamp's gnostic indifference is the same as Goldsmith's, because Goldsmith is not gnostic. Duchamp's indifference, however, can be a reference point for understanding Goldsmith's conceptual poetics. Indifference is how we can perceive the ephemeral – the de-materialization of the work of art – art as information – art about art – conceptual art. Here is Gertrude Stein:

I then began again to think about the bottom nature in people, I began to get enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thoughts they had but the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different. ("The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans" in *Selected Writings*, 243)

From *Fidget*: "Three. Four. Five. Step. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Step. Step. Eyes scan. Left hand pulls. Stop. Waits. Breathes. Again" (50). Indifference and insistence are pathways to Mind – entity in that sense – which Stein defines as a state of unknowing and pure creation; this is also indifference. Duchamp asserts that "[in] the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane" (139).

A work like *Fidget* achieves this kind of sameness in difference. Goldsmith's actions – his practices – denote a similar kind of attention and concentration – indifference – pure creation and being – the exchange of information from one reader perceiver to another. "I do not transcribe, I construct." (Alain Robbe-Grillet) "Grasp. Step. Bend" (*Fidget*).

Indifference requires labour. One comes to it by naming things that embody the idea of it – one comes to it through cognition (insistence) and recognition (repetition) – being is in repeating (Stein). That is for the making of objects part – thinking them into being – art as artifice in that sense. There's more to it, and Duchamp's own actions demonstrate this poetic. Ready-mades were either chosen and numbered and dated and signed in limited editions; or else they were slightly altered – assisted. He was insistent on making potential readers / perceivers attentive to this, as well. This is achieved in Goldsmith's work or rather

project by thwarting reader expectation. At its extreme, Goldsmith's work is unreadable. Here Idea transcends praxis.

Joseph Kosuth, in "Art After Philosophy," writes: "a work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context of art as a comment on art That is, if viewed within their context – as art – they provide no information whatsoever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art" (Kosuth, 82-83).

In opening the text the reader enters into an architectural space – almost. Word as object is radically displaced – metonymic – literal; the de-materialized trace of the mark. This process and experience is not unlike the incredible minimalist poems of Rae Armantrout (see Cummings and Peters for further discussion). Goldsmith's writing is closer to minimalist sculpture – a sculpture and form – like the conceptual works of Vito Acconci (now an architect) – Carl Andre – Don Judd and Joseph Kosuth – that comes out of writing and performance. These are the writers that Kenneth Goldsmith's texts read. *Head Citations* is set up like the *Tractatus*. It reads in part like Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* – an inventory – a list. Each citation has the clarity of an annotation. Most read like parodies; others read / look like parables. Others still read like analytical propositions. Goldsmith is very much a derivative writer; his work is testament to the insight that art comes from other art. This is great minimalist work, because the object per se is absent. Each text (book?) is its own information room (Kosuth) –

Metonymy and Self-Reference: Art as Idea as Idea

Repetition also undermines metaphor – taste – aesthetic taste motivated by convention. Duchamp's work is intrinsically metonymic – vigorously anti-metaphorical – literal in that sense; so is Stein's:

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS.

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.

This example is not unlike Joseph Kosuth's CLEAR / SQUARE / GLASS / LEANING – four sheets of glass – leaning – literally. Kosuth's intent is to construct a work void of composition. That is like

nothing. Or theatre devoid of literature: “Pull. Sit. Cross. Bring. Right. Chew. Swallow. Repeat. Dance. Reach. Push. Chew. Pick. Scratch. Stretch. Rub. Click. Peck. Hit” (*Fidget*, 62). “Clear. Square. Glass. Leaning.”

Meaning is spatial as well as temporal: “One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. Twenty steps” (*Fidget*, 54). Stein presents several views of the same object – “A CARAFE” – “THAT IS A BLIND GLASS” – “A kind in glass” – kin – a “cousin” (in relation to) a spectacle – “a single hurt color” – A carafe is “all this” – “and an arrangement in a system to pointing.” Self-reference. Stein’s early Cubist writing foreshadows Goldsmith’s writing as concept – as performance.

Each stop enacts a death. And what is laid to rest is the formal lyric. Clear. Square. Glass. Leaning. But as Gertrude Stein observes stopping has a lot to do with going on. By this Stein means that self-reference is without end – it is infinite within a finite structure; metaphors come and go, but relations are permanent.

Alain Robbe-Grillet: “Not only do they claim no other reality than that of the reading, or of the performance, but further they always seem to be in a process of contesting, of jeopardizing themselves in proportion as they create themselves. Here space destroys time, and time sabotages space. Description makes no headway, contradicts itself, turns in circles. Moment denies continuity” (155).

Conceptual art is the presentation of this decay. “Expectations of linearity are also mocked. He thinks he is proceeding in an orderly way and laughs at himself for thinking so.” That is Rae Armantrout commenting on Bob Perelman’s *a.k.a.* It applies to Goldsmith’s writing, too. And this: Kenneth Goldsmith “is a modern metaphysical poet. Every sentence in [*Fidget - Day*] is a sort of critique of reason. Each interrogates the relation between mind and things” (259, 261). Narrative and non-narrative – each are fictions. There are holes in every story. Each hole is an event. Moment denies moment – Gertrude Stein:

A narrative.
Be used.
Relatively refused.
Refuse.
Relatively.
To refuse.

Very nearly right.
Very nearly.
Right.
It will be all of it a day.
They never say.
A
A day.
Having escaped it.

Stopping makes a narrative not stopping but stopping.
 (“In Narrative,” 284-285)

Context and disguise give metonymy its power of ambivalence and multiplicity or open-endedness, which is experienced simultaneously as a gestalt – [a] same-ness – indifference – inclusive – accepting – the part taken for the whole [disguised as whole, in part]. “It is in the *word-to-word* connexion,” Lacan comments, “that metonymy is based” (88-89, my emphasis) – a writing against metaphor – a writing degree zero or the direct presentation of the *event*. In *Fidget* “connexions” are broken and re-made at the same time. Kaja Silverman, in *The Subject of Semiotics*, points out that “metonymy exploits relationships of contiguity [displacement] between things, not words: between a thing and its attributes, its environment and its adjuncts” (111). In *Fidget*, moreover, movement deconstructs event; it abolishes *it*. In other words, movement is event; in this respect, *Fidget* is like d.a. levy’s ground-breaking experiments in destructive writing. The formal lyric reaches ground zero; lyric is gesture. There’s no where else to go –

Information as Form: Consciousness a means to an end

Aesthetic is the same thing as anesthetic, something to put you to sleep. (Les Levine)

Fidget is a work that can be compared with Robert Morris’s “Box with the Sound of its Own Making.” *Fidget* documents the movement of a body in space. Like Andre’s brick works or Judd’s aluminum boxes – one right after the other – all exact – each part its own gestalt - self-referential to itself and to the whole – self-referential of art and art history as well – Goldsmith places event after event, negating its narrative – flattening it out. Literally. Reading visualizes the idea. The idea naturalizes cultural and received patterns and conventions of reading. *Fidget* is ready-made.

Goldsmith doesn't distinguish between perception and experience. His closest contemporary is the conceptual artist Les Levine. Like Levine, Goldsmith "is making art from residual effects of avant-garde art, but with several modifications" (Burnham, 146). In one sense, works like *Day*, *The Weather* and *No. 111 2.7.93-10.20.96* are "a somewhat conventional elaboration" of minimal and conceptual art. The ideological/aesthetic polemics behind such works, however, imply that most contemporary writing is alliterative listing – dull projective verse – academic. Parody becomes unreadable. Like Levine, Goldsmith realizes that "parody is becoming more and more of an impossibility because the art system at this stage is merely a series of one-liners and put-ons of its original self" – *Head Citations*. And like Levine, Goldsmith "no doubt realizes this, so the basic thrust of many of his art works concerns self-cognizance, or the response of people to themselves in humanly probing situations" (8-9). *Fidget*: "Tongue probes back of front teeth. Tongue chafes against sharpness of front tooth [insistence as emphasis – objecthood and bottom nature – I as object] Tongue moves to gums. Runs over crevice between two front teeth. Relaxes into slumped tongue. Probes bump on front tooth. Reaches up and grasps" (50). Goldsmith's metonymic experiments – his respatialization of language and the site of interaction and engagement – announce once and for all the death of art. But who is listening? Page as site; installation – text. Les Levine: "What I'm trying to point out is that art is a locked-in system at this stage, so much so that it doesn't need to be done because all locked-in systems prechoose themselves. From now on you don't have to make art because art will make itself" (cited in Burnham, "LES LEVINE," 147). *Soliloquy* into *Day* – work that successfully removes the experience from the work of art at last.

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Un-Visual and Conceptual¹

Johanna Drucker

Very little visual poetry is interesting, but all poetry is interesting in its visuality. A somewhat provocative statement, to be sure, but a necessary one since so many still imagine that graphical codes operate only with special kinds of poetry (like concrete poetry). In fact, however, graphical coding is a common and specific feature of poetic work.² Because it so often appears to be un-visual, or visually neutral, conceptual work offers an ideal example through which to make this case.³

A typology of visual poetry would sort graphic forms into types: icons, pictures, fields, lists, according their specificity as shapes and degrees of mimetic or compositional qualities.⁴ The typographic codes of production are equally available for description: conventional humanist composition, striking avant-garde geometric forms, typewriter work, contemporary photo-type faces, then digital designs.⁵ A list of these features links poetry to the aesthetic and cultural systems of production of which literary work is a part.⁶ But such literalism is only part of what visuality affords and requires. A metalanguage for studying visuality can't be premised on the description of forms, but has to offer an analysis of conceptual premises.

Georges Perec's *Species of Spaces* provides a useful platform for describing poetry in such apparently logical terms. In Perec's schematic typology, the "species of spaces" exist within an architectural, physically inhabited environment of bed, bedroom, apartment, street, neighborhood, town, countryside, country, Europe, the world and beyond. But at the outset he turns his attention to that most obviously overlooked space of all – the page. "I write, I inhabit my sheet of paper, I invest it, I travel across it." He goes on to say, "We live in space, in these spaces" – which he quickly qualifies as "particularized spaces."⁷

These spaces, and even more specifically, his typology of topologies (particularized descriptions of spaces as they are constituted through the conditions of experience and inhabitation) are exemplified

in the work itself.⁸ Perec is revealing the typology of his literary structures. Spatial-temporal-material forms, they are institutionally located (in publishing conventions that are as structural as any architecture) and dynamically constituted (as any reading and writing practice). Space is the literal condition, the physical situation, of text on a page in a book.

Attending to every feature of text, Perec delineates a dialogue of thought and form through his inventory of ways of writing and thinking. "To write: to try to meticulously retain something, to cause something to survive; to wrest a few precious scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark, or a few signs" (92). Graphicality and inscription are integral to this approach, everywhere in its tropes and imagery. But the core of Perec's *Species* is attention, awareness. Not just what he is thinking, but how. The spatialized field of literary references and forms calls attention to conditions and instructions for encountering the world. And literature.

His typology is not an inventory of devices or forms. Rather, its "species" slide toward the topological zone, out of hard and rigorous "logics" of form and towards the study of relations. Topology had its origins in the work of the cartographer-geographer Euler in the early 18th century. Euler's "geometry of position" isn't about measures, but about connections, juxtaposition, sequence, break, order, rupture, and all the many ways spaces and zones relate. As a mathematical field, topology is fundamentally graphical. It provides an exemplary model of description of the temporal-spatialized fields of poetic production. As a study of relations, topology exposes features of composition that are integral to poetry at every level of literal discourse (graphic, semiotic, literary, linguistic, thematic, etc.). By definition, relations are constitutive rather than static, inert, or given. The articulated specifics of such "species" of graphical codes provides a way to position a text within the zones of cultural discourse. A historical axis also opens immediately, of course. And within a contemporary horizon, such specificity locates our predisposition towards reading within a differentiated field (this is or is not a newspaper, for instance, and thus our reading commences). Writing is a site. Documents are specific territories. Their graphic protocols are particular means of expression and exchange. Perec is careful to *show* us all this, as well as to tell us. The visual form of the text, at least in the Penguin edition (John Sturrock's translation) isn't conspicuously marked. But it is structured

and ordered in each section and passage to show how it is thinking about itself. In the section titled “The Street,” he begins with a descriptive statement, shifts to analysis, and in subsequent sub-sections, offers instructions for practical exercise and reflection. “Observe the street from time to time, with some concern for system perhaps” (50). This combination of rigor and nonchalance provides a continual safety-value escape hatch for otherwise overly determined work. Perec can take up anything once his mode of establishing specificity has framed the enterprise of writing in particular “spaces.”

Such process-driven work, executed under constraint, shows up conventions of literary forms. OuLiPo’s conceptualism has its own character, but it is part of a longer, broader tradition.⁹ The boundaries of literature have been stretched before. Cut ups. Found poetry. Computer generated text based on word lists and blank slots.¹⁰ Direct observation and excruciating personal narratives of extreme detail. Documentary works indistinguishable from fiction, almost unformed. Rants. Song lyrics. Advertising slogans and manifestos. Musical scores and performance transcriptions. Talk. All the way to the edges and back. Self-conscious examinations and reflections of form as form. Essays as lyric. Ballads without rhyme, lines hung up on walls and suspended from lines, projected randomly onto surfaces and bodies, or spit out from machines.¹¹ No violation of the protocols of literary production or identity can even register as novel. Not now, not any more. Not since the mad dash 20th century self-conscious modern assault on all convention and then the assault on the assault as its own convention and so on enacted endlessly iterative upping of the continual cycle of violence against established protocols.

But that said, a daily life of literature remains oddly intact. Forty years of post-structuralist thought and a century of avant-garde activity haven’t slowed the production machines of the literary industry. The private aesthetic property of inner life revealed for commodified consumption according to the laws of fiction, verse, and dramatic tale, still provides the bulk of what is published in the worlds of mass media and high culture. Conceptual poetics is a marginal practice. But it has the strength of convictions, a capacity to make striking gestures that call the rest of literary activity to attention. Not by being ‘new’ but by being a current, self-aware, focused on what is happening now, conceptualism exposes assumptions. Poetry (by which I mean any form of self-conscious writing) is a means to call attention to language. Set it

apart. Call it art. And in so naming, preserve the territorial demarcation that says, This Is Aesthetic.

Conspicuously concrete poetry – Emmett Williams’s *Sweethearts* with its elaborate, permutational use of page and book sequence for instance – is often held up as a contrast to the apparently-neutral ‘regular’ presentation of texts. That work is meant to read as a response to the assumed transparency of habitual graphic composition. But of course such oppositions are reductive, wrong-headed. Williams’s piece shows the visual potential and condition of all and any work on the page – as Saussure’s obsessive pursuit of anagrams reveals the texts within texts that haunt all language. All texts are graphically marked.

But so much of the history of mainstream modern poetry was/is caught up with voice, speech, the attempt to catch ‘natural’ speech that the specifics of writing, of graphical codes, didn’t always get attention.¹² Modern poetry broke with [from] classical traditions to engage with contemporary life. The appreciation of speech, voice, and vernacular developed along with the appreciation of language across its broader cultural and social histories. The late 19th-century philologist, tracking sound change into the byways and paths of literal and social geography, had an equal enthusiasm for the specifics of speech patterns. But the philologist, like the poets, depended on writing as a way to access that speech, often without attending to *its* specifics. Typeface? Shape on the page? Whatever convention allowed, or the publisher permitted or could afford. The point is just that writing often serves without much notice.

Exceptions abound. The counter-tradition of modern experimentation is just as boldly, clearly, aggressively interested in graphicality in all its many forms. Modern ways of working in a visually conspicuous manner emerge in the work of a wide range of poets. Walt Whitman, William Morris, Stephane Mallarmé are obvious examples, but literary amusements and games, as well as the art of posters and the proliferation of advertisements change the visual graphic field. A full burst of interest in mass culture explodes the pages of the avant-garde filling it with display fonts and found commercial material. The European and Russian Futurism/Dada/Vorticism movements all engage directly with language as a mass medium and with mass media as a source and inspiration for artistic and aesthetic activity, graphically as well as verbally.¹³ And the American instance (though it was created in France at Cagnes-sur-mer) of direct dialogue

between mass culture media and poetry is the remarkable work by Bob Brown – the *Readies* of 1932-33 – featuring work by Williams, McAlmon, Harry Crosby, Stein, Sidney Hunt, Pound, Hemingway.¹⁴ Brown had his poetic inspirations, as McGann points out – the “Black Riders” of Stephen Crane, composed for some reason in all small caps – but he also had his technological-text-production sources, “ticker tape, micro film, moving electronic ads, news headlines, etc.” In the long and continuing history of poetry which takes speech as its focus, the *Readies* are a relatively rare moment of visually based writing aimed at “carrying the word to the eye.” Brown harped on this theme, “Literature is essentially Optical ... not Vocal.” I would disagree, as literature is not “essentially” *either* as if a choice (check this box) has to be made.

All poets are keenly aware of the breaks and arrangements of their lines, stanzas, groupings and spaces in their verse. At the formal level of graphical composition, as at the poetic level of versification and structure, all that understanding of order is within a poetic frame. How can we understand the history of those forms as graphical forms – and of their meaning within a cultural field in which they serve to distinguish verse from news or publicity or prose? I suggest that every poet of my acquaintance come to the print shop and set some favoured work in “wedding text” – one of the generic forms of god-awful-extravagant-but-utterly-outrageous-amazing black letter favoured by jobbers to provide clients with their invitations – and *then* see what they think of the importance of typography? Like so many other functional systems, typography gets most attention when it breaks from the norm.

Visual conceptual art makes its own compelling case for graphicality. Lawrence Weiner's stencilled letters on the wall, as industrial and un-aesthetic as he can make them, or John Baldessari's otherwise-empty 1967 canvas bearing the words “True Beauty” in block letters are striking instances of self-conscious use of graphical codes. A rough-and-unfussy industrialism, uninflected by the artist's hand, un-expressive of emotion or personal voice, provide the distinctive character to conceptual visual language. Examples can be found across the visual and literary arts (e.g. Jackson MacLow's graph paper based compositions assume a functional appearance rather than a decorative one).¹⁵ Carl Andre's typewriter poems, gorgeous minimalist-conceptual works, like Dieter Roth's extensive book-work executions

of the same mid-1960s era, by restricting their execution to a set of rules and procedures, offer a stunning demonstration of the graphical richness that shows up under restraint. Conceptualism was never *not* visual any more than it was *not* aesthetic. But the choice to distinguish conceptual art from the traditional forms (and formulae) of art conventions went in tandem with the desire to distinguish it from any form of commercialism or entertainment. Why? Because the baggage of high art seemed to get in the way of what conceptual art holds most dear: exposing thought through aesthetic process. The conventions force literary and artistic expression to take a form. They subject experience to rules so formulaic they obscure the acts of apprehension and transformation essential to art making. Think of John Cage, sweeping away all that scaffolding of tradition to clear a space of 4' 33" in order to show us the aesthetics of ambient sound. That daring gesture puts itself in contrast with all the traditions of form-making. Composition, melody, fictions, plot lines, characters, conventional rhyme, pictorial arts—any convention at all within the traditions of fine art look like arts-and-crafts by contrast to the stark revelations of process that are the core of conceptualism.

But if forms and formulae get in the way of knowing, then what happens when conceptualism becomes one among many modes of poetic and artistic practice? Are we stuck in dilemma? Only if we are convinced that what made conceptualism work was its novelty, its shock effect claim to newness in that oldest of avant-garde traditions. But conceptualism now? It still serves to call attention to habits of thought by shaking them out of their familiar forms.

This brings me back to visual language and its familiarity. The graphical forms in which literature is embodied took on new significance as forms in the modern era. For the late 18th and 19th centuries that establish the cultural norms of mass-produced graphic language are rife with forms of print publication and popular art that saturate the eye and language field with possibilities for poetic, aesthetic production.¹⁶ Jerome McGann begins *Black Riders* with a discussion of this very point.¹⁷ Showing that William Butler Yeats established the Cuala and Dun Emer presses within the tradition of fine print, crafted work, McGann argues that this was part of a “massive bibliographical resistance to the way poetry was being materially produced” (5). McGann stresses that attention to materiality was integral to poetic sensibility, not extraneous to it. The “self-consciously

created book, the materially produced text” produced “not the dialogue of the mind with itself but the theoretical presentation (21). In other words, a self-conscious attention to the conditions of production is necessarily predicated on the realization that production is creation. Such recognition emphasizes artifice – that is, the made-ness – inherent in the creation of a work. McGann rolls out instances: W.B. Yeats reformatting a section of prose from Walter Pater to include it in his 1932 *Oxford Anthology*; the evolution of William Morris’s integral visual-verbal aesthetics; and numerous examples of the instantiation of Emily Dickinson’s work and its radical alteration from composition through successive editions and printings.

The case for material approaches to the study of poetry can be grounded in the traditions of poetics as well as in critical studies—which is only to say that visual studies is not imposed on poetry from the outside.¹⁸ Even when the work of a poet apparently ‘refuses’ to acknowledge this – as in the most ultra-conservative-traditional-pure-poetry-as-personal-voice-craft-form – the work remains a visual, graphically coded object. Its spaces can be described within a materially grounded form of inquiry, in a methodology of textual studies informed by media studies where each object is inevitably an embodied expression of its own ideological assumptions.

As I said above, *all* poetry is interesting in its viscosity. For a striking example, take Darren Wershler-Henry’s *Tapeworm Foundry*. The book is as specific in its use of visual codes as any work of explicit concrete poetry while also being a rigorously (if ironically humorous) conceptual work. *Tapeworm*’s material production shows off much of its attitude by its hip seriousness and uncompromising design. A small chap-book, well-made and cleanly printed, about 48 pages, it is oblong, bound on the short side, and set in uniform bold type cast in solid blocks of text.¹⁹ A perfect instance of what McGann has noted: “Much of the best recent ... poetry gains its strength by having disconnected itself from highly capitalized means and modes of production (by which I mean large university presses and trade publishers)” (*Black Riders* 113). From the outset, the visual and material features of the work are part of its mediated interaction with a reader. Its cover flaps proclaim the book to be: “A brilliant list of book proposals,” “a recipe book for poets and a critical examination of the recipes we’ve inherited.” And indeed, it is. *Tapeworm* provides an inventory of programmatic commands. It could also be described in its entirety by

one of its own lines – as a list of all the ways in which poetry can be made, articulated as one-line instructions derived in a glib analysis of other people’s work.

I quote: “imagine a slightly more intelligent universe where joseph beuys plays captain picard andor advance a plan to install rheostats in your urban lighting grid so that the ambient light of the metropolis may be adjusted according to your mood andor write a long poem in the second person andor proceed in your analysis as if neil young not carl jung is the father of archetypal synchronicity andor stuff a copy of the unabridged oxford english dictionary into the hopper of a woodchipper and then read from the resultant spew through a megaphone andor reproduce sepia photographs by carefully using a small butane torch to burn images into pieces of toast andor walk up the coast of british columbia in order to photograph it foot by foot in actual size andor.”²⁰ Every one of these can be linked to either the author or artist named or identified – Richard Long’s walks, for instance, and Byron Clercx’s shredded book objects, or at the very least, similar works whose approaches to conception and production are being made explicit in *Tapeworm*’s account. The title invokes both industrial production and organic parasitic replication equally, and the conviction that art and literature can be reduced to formulaic operations whose terms can be stated is clear.

Tapeworm is a work of exhaustion and play, but also, a work of defeat, nihilism, and hip-ness. An instance of what Alan Liu would call “cool” – the too hip to stake anything work with its rapid-fire, quick/glib/smart/fast commentary on what could be done or has been – rather than a work that takes a chance at *doing*.²¹ Is it, as it also claims on its cover, “a powerful artistic expression of defiance”?

Tapeworm’s own textual/conceptual production plays out “performance commands” and procedural constraints. This work is about poetry’s being ‘over’ – way over, and reduced to its modes of creation/construction as instructions. If the modernist complaint was that “the language is exhausted,” the late modernist registers the impossibility of believing in literature at all. Whether or not it is infused with new matter and substance, all of its forms are worn out executions of too-familiar ideas. Modern literary language sought infusions from vernacular sources, speech in the street, life caught unawares. But now the difficulty is to capture language and literature back from the monoculture, mass mediated systems, and the dull-

witted terms of literary production as an administered art. In his speed rap rant, is Wershler-Henry obliterating that possibility? To have language and use it to make a poetic zone and space seems impossible, foolish, old-fashioned, naive.

But the struggle to define what poetry and literature might be is inseparable from what they do, what function they perform for the individual and the culture. The problems of the form and identity of poetics (ontology) are caught up in new challenges for being-as-knowing (epistemology). Our existence as reading/writing subjects in mass mediated production has perhaps shifted. The balance of power, agency, as Jed Rasula suggests, has now reversed. Subjects are produced for objects rather than as we once thought in our humanocentric tradition. Poetic or literary objects were once assumed to be produced for/by authoring subjects with agency. But in a radical cognitive constructivism this opposition of mutually defining binaries of self/other, subject/object falls away. The 'literature system' has a dynamic capability expressed as a codependent relation of *producing*. The distinction I'm emphasizing is between attachment to a sentimental idea of personal identity and agency rooted in individual talent and its expression, and recognition of a cultural system in which literature is constituted conditionally within various systems of value and symbolic use. The *idea* of literature is at least as important as works, because it governs so much of what is conceived, produced, and recognized as that cultural form. Every individual work is an argument about that belief system. But getting hold of the definition of that abstraction is a theoretical (even anthropological) project, not just a critical act based in reading specific works. *Tapeworm* enumerates the rules that contribute to that idea in our time.

Wershler-Henry works in the orbit of Canadian pataphysical-post-everything. The procedural turn as a method of composition connects his work to OuLiPo, as well as to the more immediate influence of Steve McCaffery, bpNichol, and the theoretical sources of their work in post-structuralist thought.²² That the once obscure OuLiPo is now central to theoretical poetics seems directly connected to our current confrontation with the codes and code-condition of language, poetry, and digital media.²³ We should always be cautious about any sense of techno-determination. Production technologies don't determine our aesthetics, or their content, their mood, or their form. But the aesthetic realm is its own piece of the historical cultural continuum, and just as

the wireless imagination signals a moment in poetic time so the digital calls certain aspects of composition into focus more acutely than others. Among these? The materiality of text production and the media/mediated work insist on the realization that there is no natural condition for language at all, not just no 'natural' relation between language, words, things, and words/ideas.

Wershler-Henry's inventory procedure is as far from the modern purity of image or speech as 'natural' act. But easy as it is to say that poetry is constructed, not natural, this is only interesting if it can be used to address a more immediately relevant and pressing question: what do we want poetics and literature to be for us now? To do? What arguments can we make for poetry today? Not for what it should be about (modernism already bequeaths complete permission), or how it should be formed (ditto), but what it can BE – what its identity as a social, cultural practice is (keeping in mind that it is always a mistake to think in terms of singularities – no "poetry" but "poetries")? And how it is to be identified as such. Graphical codes are central to the answer, since they show how and where a work is sitting in the produced world of texts. The academic and the popular rely on habitual forms, the one to preserve its mission, the other to sustain its markets. Not that different, really. But they avert their gaze from much that is experimental, critical, or else such work often falls beneath notice, out of view, too far from the center even to register in peripheral vision. Or too threatening? This question can't be answered in *The Tapeworm Foundry's* list of possibilities. It has to be addressed by coming back to the actual executed example of a work that is premised on the simpler conceptual idea that an idea makes the work literary whether it is a literary idea or not.

The 'literary' is being busily reinvented by author-functionaries and its reader-consumers. That seems just right. And if it has a different look than it used to, that seems right too.²⁴ No one ever accused conceptual artists or writers of over-doing their graphic design.²⁵ The under-stated and un-inflected attempt at neutrality is now as formulaic and recognizable-as-code as any other set of graphical principles.²⁶

Literature and poetry? In many ways, literature as we knew it is over. Preserved in the inherited artifacts and their legacy, incapable of reinvention in those forms. The forms are probably dead. But the 'literary' as a category of cultural expression is a moving target of opportunity. Most of the forms used and made are as vestigial as polar

ice caps, melting at the same rate into a slushy reminder/remainder of an archaic cultural discourse. Does conceptual work save us from this? Or show the viability of old mythologies (whether those of the avant-garde or the classical tradition) to newly engaging ends? Between the hazards of unexamined legacy activities and the perils of commodity culture, what are the chances of survival? Un-visibility is a way to dialogue with commercial language, just as marked extremes of graphicality are and have been. Neo-conceptualism and ‘un-creative writing’ may not be the only way for ‘the literary’ to prosper. Its methods have a damning combination of self-annihilation and self-promotion at their core. But at the very least, contemporary conceptualism makes practitioners sit up and examine their terms. A useful effect, for sure. Exposing assumptions and premises calls forth awareness. In times like these, that may not be sufficient to save us from anything, but at least it chases some of the illusions from the scene.

Notes

1 The term “un-visual” rhymes deliberately with Kenny Goldsmith’s term “un-creative.” His work forms the subtext of this paper, as will be evident within a Perecian scheme.

2 I use the term “graphical codes” to situate this study among other critical discussions, notably, the idea of “bibliographical codes” in Jerome McGann’s work and in the field of bibliographical studies, but also, to distinguish what I’m calling for from attention to graphic design. “Bibliographical codes” was first put into circulation as a critical term in: “Theory of Texts,” *London Review of Books* 10 no. 4 (18 Feb. 1988): 20-21. Semiotic codes in film studies of the 1960s, with their emphasis on the working of a film-text, or in photographic criticism, emphasized an older, Russian formalist idea of the ‘work’ of a text or art as active and of reading as productive.

3 Specifically, Kenneth Goldsmith’s *Day* (Great Barrington: The Figures, 2003) read in relation to *No. III* (Great Barrington: The Figures, 1997) provides a contrast in which apparent ‘neutrality’ in design acquires significant character. Both works have a marked and conspicuous generic form. They deliberately refuse any overt graphic artfulness in their presentation, aligning the texts with a tradition of conceptual work – and adhering to its distinction from traditions of fine art and mass culture entertainment. Conceptual art claims the intellectual high ground, and it does so by expelling any hint of material indulgence from its formal expression. The difference between the two

works is crucial. The levelling effect of the processing in *Day* shows the dramatic change of fortunes of graphical code translated from newspaper source to new expression. By typing every letter of the *New York Times* from September 1, 2000, from top to bottom, left to right, and outputting this in a single uniform type size and face, much more is stripped away than the design of the *Times*. What was large (headlines) becomes small, and much much smaller in proportion to the visual space once claimed by the display-sized fonts of even the graphically decorous *Times*. The bulk of ‘information’ – if simple presence in alphabet code printed on the newsprint page can be granted such an identity – turns out to be (no surprise) in the greatly condensed fields of financial pages. In that site graphical relations such as columnar grids are essential to the meaning of the text. Numbers get their value from their place-value (ones, tens, hundreds) as well as from the name of the column in which they are listed. All this is erased by retyping.

The argument made by *Day* isn’t chiefly about graphicality and knowledge, though it serves as a dramatic, incidental demonstration of the significance (signifying power) of this relation. The standard formula of conceptual art is that idea + execution = work. Uncoupling the two activities, idea and execution (for I take ideation to be an act) focuses attention on instantiation. Unintended consequences result. The realization involves all kinds of choices—size, sequence, layout, etc.—and has wonderfully tangible results in the sheer tonnage. This is a striking demonstration of the impossibility of ever thinking of any text as ‘immaterial.’ Putting a highly graphically coded text into a single typed stream has the appearance of data processing into ASCII text (almost), and gives lie to the prevalent misunderstanding about the nature of digital code. Texts are stored in some material form. Even data files live in silicon, momentarily inscribed as areas of distinct polarity (positive/negative) held in memory for further processing.

No. III uses its graphical neutrality to a different, more familiar end: to let its rules of selection and composition reveal content and substance. The rules were simple and strict: collect all phrases that terminated with “r” or related sounds. Collected in a two and a half year period (1993-96), they were then sorted by the number of syllables. The strength of such a conceptual gesture is that by stripping away the usual conventions of composition, it exposes facts (or acts) of language, providing a very different access to their expressive force. Goldsmith’s work has another strength – the scale and extension of his execution. The result, in *Day* or *No. III*, is to monumentalize the conceptual act and give it bulk and heft. Material properties, these support his conceptual undertaking, perhaps making it appear to be more than it would be in another, more modest mode of execution. But of course, that wouldn’t be the same work.

4 Goldsmith’s work is compositional and procedural, distinctly anti-mimetic, except, perhaps, in the size of the volumes.

5 Goldsmith's digital works take advantage of the programmatic capabilities of digital media, and are more visually dynamic as a result.

6 Jerome McGann takes up the challenge posed by creating such a descriptive metalanguage in his study "Herbert Horne's *Diversi Colores* (1981): Incarnating the Religion of Beauty," *New Literary History*, 2003, 34: 535-552, though these thoughts weave through *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) as well.

7 Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (NY: Penguin, 1997), originally published in French in 1974 as *Espèces d'Espaces*.

8 Perec's work documents and demonstrates simultaneously. So does Goldsmith's *Soliloquy* (New York: Granary, 2001). But *Fidget* (Toronto: Coach House, 2000) is slightly different, since it uses the excuse of documentation for exhibitionist purposes. As Würst Spoerner said, "the somatic is not a sentence we be obliged to hear spoken aloud." See his *Graphèces* (Koln: Uber Verlag, 2004).

9 The early 20th century avant-garde is filled with conceptual and proto-conceptual experiments. The self-consciousness of Marcel Duchamp, exposing the rules of the art-game. The compositions prescriptions of Tristan Tzara. The compositional games of Surrealists. The rigors of Russian constructivism and the anti-art sensibility of Futurist and Swiss Dada techniques – all of these established the foundation for rule-based (and unruly) work. The later, more 'orthodox' conceptualism of the 1960s is tied to artists Joseph Kosuth, Mel Bochner, Sol Lewitt, and a host of others for whom the intellectual high ground of their work provided a needed antidote to the excesses of late-Romantic expressionism and the noise rising to drowning pitch that came from the world of popular culture. Goldsmith's work is squarely within this tradition, but with a significant difference: try imagining John Cage or Mel Bochner as a DJ.

10 The substitution of program and procedure for personal expression of interior life is an already familiar move in 20th century poetics. In Goldsmith's work those two strains – anti-subjective subjectivity and generative work – intersect. But again, many precedents exist. Paradoxically, the fingerprint of subjective identity sometimes shows all the more strongly for supposedly being filtered out. John Cage's works composed using combinatoric and "chance" methods are distinct in form, character, essence, and 'personality' from those of Jackson MacLow, just as anyone's dice throwing inevitably seems to express who they are as much as they show what the dice can do. Compare Cage's *I-VI*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990) the Charles Eliot Norton lectures and MacLow's *Words and Ends from Ez* (Bolinis: 1989). Poetic production (all aesthetic production) is always a matter of combining constraints and

instructions with a vocabulary list and syntactic rules framed within the cultural and historical conditions of the age. Variables inevitably register.

11 Generative works long precede this era. Goldsmith's work can be put into relation with many such productions, some of which have their inspiration in the machinic (Tzara), ritualistic-primitive (Schwitters), or the more recent vagaries of code-work and its influence in composition-by-computer or human-encoded-program-for-text. Goldsmith's obvious allegiances show how much can now be taken for granted. Still generative text composition mode – programmatically produced work – has often been confined to a marginal limbo. Even the major contributions of OuLiPians have only now, four decades or so after their initial impulse, started to garner serious critical attention. (See Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie, editors, *The OuLiPo Compendium* [London: Atlas, 1998]). The works of early digital writers generating compositions through programs comprise a barely known, esoteric history. The wave Goldsmith is riding had its start awhile back, but it's breaking again on the present shore. His technique won't bear the burden of uniqueness (originality would be a pointless attribute in any case). Instead, it exemplifies a continued commitment to challenge literary conventions in their more normative form – and to do it for a Gen-X audience and in a contemporary idiom.

12 In *Radical Artifice*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991), Marjorie Perloff points out repeatedly that the idea of 'natural speech' in mainstream modern English work (T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Denise Levertov, through later 20th century poets such as Charles Olson, O'Hara, Berryman – the list would get long very quickly) was largely an undisputed goal. Within this curious lineage, Goldsmith's *Soliloquy* is a neo-conceptual natural-speech-in-extreme-unedited-mode creation.

13 Dawn Ades, *The 20th-century Poster: Design of the Avant-Garde* (NY: Abbeville Press, 1984); Jerbert Spencer, *Pioneers of Modern Typography* (NY: Hastings House, 1970), and Judi Freeman, *The Dada and Surrealist Word-Image* (LA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), among many others.

14 Bob Brown, *The Readies*, (Bad Ems: Roving Eye Press, 1931).

15 While making a list of 'un' terms, 'unediting' should get its due. Useful as a way of discussing Goldsmith's work, it has its origins in the critical writing of Randy McLeod, specifically the article titled "UNEditing Shakespeare: Sonnet 111," *Sub-Stance* 33/34 (1982): 26-55. Happy coincidence of title.

16 Michael Twyman "Emergence of the Graphic Book in the 19th century," *The Millennium of the Book* (New Castle: Oak Knoll, 1994 first published by St. Paul's Bibliographies, Winchester): 135-179.

- 17 McGann *Black Riders* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).
- 18 Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1994) and *Figuring the Word* (NY: Granary Books, 1999).
- 19 Publication information: Anansi, a spider line book, printed and bound in Canada, editor Christian Bök, Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Govt. of Canada, published in 2000 in Toronto, typeset in Caspari by d W-H, dedicated to Peter Caspari 1908-99.
- 20 *Tapeworm*, unpaginated.
- 21 Alan Liu, *Laws of Cool* (Chicago: U of Chicago P 2004).
- 22 Steve McCaffery, *North of Intention* (NY: Roof Books and Toronto: Nightwood Editions, 1986). bpNichol. *The Martyrology*, (Toronto: Coach House Books, 1993).
- 23 Christian Bök, *Eunoia* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2001), Steve McCaffery, *Rational Geomancy: Kids of the Book Machine* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992), and our work at www.patacriticism.org.
- 24 We got accustomed to various habits of reading and thinking about what literature should be, and that all came from our training, mainly school-learning. Because we inherited poetry and literature in forms that were marked as 'dead' forms we may have unwittingly imagined them to be so. Goldsmith is very much a Gen-X writer – self-absorbed and ego-centric but the force of the expression defines an edge where literariness appears to break down.
- 25 The graphical character of *Day, No. III, Soliloquy* and other Goldsmith texts is as deliberately un-visual as their composition is un-creative.
- 26 In the case of *Day*, its deliberateness registers anew, not as a category of aesthetic activity, but as an aesthetic act.

The Unboring and the New Dream of Stone

or, if literature does politics *as literature*, what kind of gender politics does the current literature of the boring enact?

Christine Wertheim

Text ...

sucking on words

a conversation between the artist, Simon Morris and the psychoanalyst, Dr.Howard Britton, using the academic methodology for transcription

Howard Britton: ok (1.0) yeah (.) I'm ready when you are then

completely off the wall (.) this doesn't count (.)

Howard Britton: [laughing]

(.) with a little bit of an introduction etc (.) so I put (.)

night (.) 183,685 words (.) to accomplish this (.)

Howard Britton: um (.) I think there probably does

Howard Britton: well (.) it depends on the kind of magazine we're writing for (.) I guess (.) because I quite like the idea of going straight in (.) does (.) in soliloquy (.) does Goldsmith tell the reader what he's doing (1.0) or does he just start straight in

Howard Britton: no (.) he just goes straight into it with what he calls Act 1 (.) so (.) I like the idea of no explanation

Howard Britton: um-hm

Howard Britton: well (.) I think the contextual frame (.) It's important (.) umm (.) but it's part of a bigger view I have of what his work's doing (.) because I think that (.) umm (1.0) he represents what I call an attack on language (.) I think that will come clear as we have our conversation but an attack on language is what I understand as poetry at least from a psychoanalytic perspective (.) shall we start with this idea of poetry (.) in psychoanalysis and link it to Goldsmith's work

Simon Morris: yes

Howard Britton: because (.) I've (.) um (.) I'd like to use the psychoanalytic definition of poetry if I'm going to call him a poet (.) I think that people have called him a poet and there are his own books of poetry as well (.) but (.) um (2.0) the psychoanalyst Pierre-Gilles Guéguen describes poetry as a schizophrenia or an attack on language (.) um (.) he claims that language for the poetic art (.) umm (.) is an attempt to try to reign in (.) the delicious jouissance of words (.) now we've talked about jouissance before as the (.) the sort of satisfaction at the level of the drive and not at the level of language (.) I mean it is an enjoyment that does not pass through the circuits of the Other (.) now I think (.) for me (.) Kenny Goldsmith's work is at the level of removing the context that supports words as language (.) I mean language as meaning (.) and returning them to the side of the drive (.) words stripped of meaning become objects (.) um (.) which is an impossible task and that impossibility for me produces a kind of jouissance (.) because I think jouissance can only emerge within some limits (.) or against some limits (.) uhh (.) or posit some limits (1.0) much like your own work (.) I think (.) Goldsmith takes away the context that provided one limit (.) to give it a meaning (.) and puts it into a different context (.) um (.) to remove meaning and then he puts it back into a book form which is the grand irony of his work in one sense (.) that he destroys language and yet still contains it within a

frame (.) I mean the way he uses the book (.) because the book is usually seen as the container of meaning (.) so in Goldsmith's work he destroys language by a removal of the container of the meaning in language (.) and sometimes it may be the syntax of the language (.) sometimes it may be the other speaker of the language like in soliloquy (.) umm (.) or it may be just a (.) huge (1.0) mismatch of language in the way that he sometimes works within his poetry writing (.) his specific poetry (.) um (.) but I think that context is really important (.) I've said that (.) umm (2.0) what he does is removes the context from language (.) making language into an object in this case (.) yes he makes language into an object (.) he removes it from the context in which it occurs where it's not an object (.) it's a meaning but he reduces it back to an object and he removes it from the context which gave it meaning and places it somewhere else (.) in a new context (.) another scene (.) so he is drawing attention to three (.) three registers or three places (.) where it was and therefore the assumptions (.) that have kept it in that place (.) where it is now and what that tells us about the new context (.) and-and the new place (.) and (1.0) within that there's a transformation of language into the object itself (.) and so there's a third reading of it as well (.) and (.) umm (.) according to (.) to Lacan (.) um (.) there's a proximity between poetry and the language of the unconscious (.) umm (.) and he believes (.) Lacan formulates a term *lalangue* (.) which (.) um (.) is an infiltration into language of *jouissance* and for me I think that's what (.) um (.) *lalangue* refers to (.) a use of language as a plaything (.) so the child (.) before it learns to speak (.) I mean to create a meaning (.) will play with words to enjoy them independently of meaning (.) of the Other (.) and I see that kind of regression at work in Kenny Goldsmith's work as well (.) but what it is (.) is that we infiltrate a *jouissance* into language when actually language has been drained of its meaning in the newspaper report that he rewrites (.) in the (.) um (.) weather forecast in his most recent work (.) it's been

drained of all meaning and I think (.) sometimes (.) a very dubious meaning (.) because I think in the weather report idea the weather report is a very (.) um (.) structured (.) formalised use of language but it's a use of language that I think (.) is very oppressive because the meaning is both in the weather forecast (.) but in the function of language as well (.) in terms of the weather report (.) because what it says everybody experiences weather (.) whether you are rich or poor (.) masculine (.) feminine (.) black or white you experience weather and that-that's an equaliser (.) it refuses all difference (.) where as (.) I think (.) for me there's a particularity at the level of the way that (.) that Goldsmith handles his language (.) it can be just his own language (.) as in soliloquy or it can be the language of other people as in the weather report or it can be the newspaper language which he just completely recontextualises (.) bringing in this-this *jouissance* so that this is why I claim he is a poet and not specifically because of his poetry as such (1.0) ummm

aware of it (.) actually see the frame for the first time (.)

extraordinarily clever guy (.) but in his earlier work (.)

I think there's elements of it being set up beforehand (.)

which is why he moved into his interest in Warhol (.)

straight (.) there's no movement of the camera (.)

way of filming was-was-was very (.) very different (.)

Howard Britton: but I'm quite interested in that other term you've mentioned of (.) um (.) uncreative (.) because I've wondered how to interpret what he says (.) when he mentions uncreative (.) on one level I just see

it as (.) as an attempt to reject a formal aesthetic (.) uhh (.) in his art practice we usually think of art as a creative activity and he wants to be uncreative for his 39th year of practising uncreativity or whatever it is that he says (.) but (1.0) not only that though (.) it-it's (.) uncreative to the extent that I'd say he's working with readymades and the readymades are actually words (.) and he's found words as readymades again and he reassembles them (.) and that's where his uncreativity is in the (.) in the process of (.) um (.) stripping the normal creative function of meaning and taking that out and finding the words once again as readymades to put into some other form (.) but the other form is outside any aesthetic (.) and therefore (.) it-it's (.) for me (.) an uncreative form (.)

writing here (.) I'm (.) "I'm training them to forget"¹ (.)

State (.) "I'm training them to forget everything they've ever learned about writing (.) their ego (.) their sense of

of the ego again which is what I'm seeing in his work (.)

Howard Britton: but-but what is the ego (.) uh (.) the ego is meaning (1.0) psychoanalytically speaking (.) the ego is the thing that has the identity of the (.) um

Howard Britton: that's right (.) yeah (.) yeah

structure of the presentation itself (.)

"what this institution cannot bear (.) is for anyone to tamper with language (2.0) it can bear more readily the most apparently revolutionary ideological sorts of 'content' (.) if only that content doesn't touch the borders of language and all of the juridico-political contracts that it guarantees (.)"³

Howard Britton: that-that's what I mean when I say then (.) that (.) um (.) as I said earlier that he shows us how language functions by removing it from the context in which it occurs (.) and that-that draws attention to the assumptions that take place (.) what you're saying (.) reminds me very much (.) of the (.) I think it's the foreword by Foucault to (.) uh (.) Deleuze and Guattari in (.) uh (.) it must be (.) it must be (.) A Thousand Plateaus (.) I think or (.) or (1.0) maybe its just Anti-Oedipus where he talks about non-fascist living (.) and the idea of removing the frame (.) umm (.) to show the levels of oppression and the assumptions we make about that (.) how that structures our world and our way of understanding the world (.) I think that (.) that's a very important element of his work (.) and I think it's one that fits very much with that view that we see in Deleuze and Guattari about the way in which there is an effect of (.) umm of liberation (.) in (.) art practices (.) when they're at their (.) their best (.) and that liberation is not necessarily in terms of a politics of liberation but it's the creating of a subjective space (.) in relation to

(3.0) the political (.) and the newspaper as we saw when we worked with our ideas on Metzger in a similar way (.) the newspaper is one of his mediums that he likes to work with (.) or one of his materials (.) and because the newspaper is (.) is replete with meaning (.) but it's also a very powerful tool in its own right (.) uhh (.) to (.) to keep us structured and to maintain the political realm (1.0) Kenny Goldsmith's work doesn't disrupt (.) doesn't counter the politics (.) what he does is he creates a subjective space which is far more subversive (1.0) far more radical than opposing politics with politics (.) or (.) um (.) meaning with new meanings (.) of one master discourse with another (.) he is more interested in evacuating meaning and draining meaning away from situations (.) to create a space for something else to emerge (.) that I call the subjective I think (.) the subjective space is the (.) the space that one finds outside the dominant discourses (.) the dominant meaning (.) and it's useless (.) it has no intrinsic value (.) it's-it's not an interest that capitalism would have (.) so it will never be an exchange value or a market value (.) and it will always escape any kind of recognition (.) so we (.) we are operating on the margins (.) between the visible and the invisible on one level (.) which (.) because he himself has made a series of books that are predominantly invisible (.) despite their vastness (.) in a sense (.) seems (.) seems very (.) very appropriate as a way of looking at his work as well (.) I was (.) when I first came across his work (.) I was aware myself of also becoming interested in Jazz and in particular in Jazz the way that it-it-it takes a theme and it destroys it (.) to find out on one level what on earth that theme is about (.) so there's a lot of play within it (.) and (.) for me (.) not all Jazz is like this but the best Jazz is that which almost disintegrates (.) which is on the edge which defines a rim (.) into a cacophony (.) which is presumably (.) is not a dissimilar idea to your maelstrom of words (.) and it's the same kind of thing (.) Jazz for me is breaking down a lot of meanings and (1.0) is always on the edge of total disintegration and

Howard Britton: yeah (.) I (.) I (.) it's strange (.) you seem to be (1.0) I don't know if you've understood what I'm talking about (.) because you seem to be repeating back to me exactly what I'm saying to you but in a different way because that's what I'm trying to say as well (1.0) that in Goldsmith's work there is a flattening of language at the level of meaning but there is a reinvigoration of language at the level of jouissance

Howard Britton: and it-it-it's (.) we're talking about the same thing but you're putting it in (.) you're putting it in an art (.) art specific vocabulary I think whereas I'm (.) I'm trying to put it in a more psychoanalytical vocabulary (.) and as usual when we talk we're missing each other slightly because we (.) we bring two different discourses to (.) to work on (.) on what (.) what we're talking about because um (.) there's a blizzard of words (.) and a blizzard of words (.) is for me (.) the jouissance of language (.) umm (.) which is beyond anything to do with meaning (.) and to create that

blizzard of words (.) umm (.) you have to (1.0) avoid meaning (.) you have to evacuate language's meaning (.) uhh (.) which is the thing that holds it down (.) stops it flying away (.) it's not dissimilar for me as what we could refer to as the aleatory moment in your project the royal road to the unconscious (.) when you've thrown the entirety of Freud's text (.) cut up (.) out of a car window at speed (.) that-that is the blizzard of language (.) the blizzards of words (.) and I think (.) there's no (.) it doesn't surprise me that you enjoy (.) umm (.) Kenny Goldsmith's work so much because (.) he is working (.) in many respects (.) with the same preoccupations as yourself about this (1.0) and (.) and that's too why I think it's a very ethical work and a very (1.0) um (.) uhh (.) and a very (.) I don't know (.) it's possibly a (.) very (.) umm (2.0) I suppose very ethical is all I can say about it (1.0) because it-it (1.0) its true to something else (.) its true to a subjective meaning (.) it's not true to a universal meaning (.) and (.) language is a fantastic vehicle to work with because it's a universality (.) umm (1.0) or it presents that to us where as what he's doing is making it into something entirely personal (.) which is not entirely unlike (.) umm (1.0) the psychotic would do (.) the (.) the words have their very own meaning (.) and it reminds me very much of the start of a Samuel Beckett novel (.) it might be Molloy but it might not even be Beckett (.) I would have to check that for you (.) where he talks about (.) having a word in his mouth (.) which he sucks like a stone (.) umm (.) I think it is a pebble from the beach and he has a whole collection of them (.) and I think (.) that's (.) that's for me (.) the same kind of relationship when I talk about Goldsmith and his reduction of words as objects (.) they are something to suck on that one feels heavy and cool and sculpted on ones tongue (.) and which mean nothing

S. Burroughs saying "language is a virus from outer

(.) that complete (.) um (1.0) freedom from meaning (.)

container (.) you can almost pour it into any form (.)

Howard Britton: but you can't pour language (.) as you put it (.) until you've taken the things away from it that hold it in place

Howard Britton: yeah, the supports

Howard Britton: and (.) one of the (.) that's (.) it's that structure and support that creates the meaning of the words (.) not the words themselves (.) umm (.) which (.) which I-I think is a very (.) kind of (.) psychoanalytical way of looking at language as well (.) that language only gains its meaning retrospectively (.) when you've finished speaking (.) it doesn't have a meaning until the last word's been uttered

- (.) represents a micropause in the conversation
- (1.01) represents a pause in the conversation of a one second duration
- (1.02) represents a pause in the conversation of a two second duration
- (1.03) represents a pause in the conversation of a three second duration

- hyphenated words represent a stutter

Notes

1 Anne Henochowicz, "Petty Theft: Kenny G Gives A's for Unoriginality," *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, University of Pennsylvania, November 18, 2004.

2 Henochowicz.

3 Craig Dworkin's cites Jacques Derrida in *Reading the Illegible*, Northwestern, 2003, from "Living On: Borderlines," transl. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, New York, Seabury, 1979: 95.

4 Text from Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining*, 1980.

5 Graham Gussin, 'Out of It', *Nothing*, August and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, Eds. Graham Gussin & Ele Carpenter, 2001: 12.

6 William S. Burroughs.

Uncreative is the New Creative: Kenneth Goldsmith Not Typing

Darren Wershler-Henry

The epigraph from Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day* is, by now, very familiar: "That's not writing. That's typing."¹ But is it?

a. *The Trouble with Bon Mots*

Truman Capote's famous dismissal of Kerouac's work - "it isn't writing at all, it's typing"² - turns out to be entirely accurate, even if it isn't interpreted as a pejorative. Capote first made this remark on David Susskind's television show during an appearance with Dorothy Parker and Norman Mailer, but, knowing a *bon mot* when he uttered one, repeated it as often as possible (with the inevitable distortions) in interviews in later years.³

What's odd is that Capote never saw his own brand of New Journalism as an equal but different product of typewriting, rooted, as it is, in many of the same values as William S. Burroughs's and Charles Olson's notions of writing as a poetic proprioceptive reportage capable of conveying perceptual truths. After repeating his Kerouac joke in one later interview, Capote was asked by his interlocutor exactly how many writers are just typing, to which he responded "Ninety-nine-point-nine percent. (*Laughs.*) And that's being generous."⁴ Capote was missing the obvious, even though he has already stated it: for most of the last two centuries, writing *was* typewriting, and, rather than being an anomaly, he was as caught up in that logic as everyone else.

Capote's moment of blindness is even stranger considering that it occurred during an event when he was fully aware of the difficulties that Parker and Mailer were having in attempting to cope with another new medium, television, which he had already mastered: "Dorothy Parker was scared out of her wits, 'cause this was live television, and she was just afraid to open her mouth, and Norman - I kept tripping him up all the time."⁵ Even after his comeuppance at Capote's hands, Mailer, in an article for *Esquire*, defended Capote on the grounds that

he was invoking "the difficulties of the literary craft in contrast to Mr. Kerouac's undisciplined methods of work."⁶ He, too, missed the point. Disciplinary practices saturate Kerouac's writing, but as they were not the kind of disciplines familiar to himself, Capote, or Parker, they were effectively invisible. What Kerouac did when he typed was of an entirely different order than the writers working with pens in his own or the previous century. As with custom cars, Marcus Boon notes that *On The Road*, which celebrates speed as a value in and of itself, is a product of "the machinic accelerations of World War II"⁷ ... accelerations which were produced, before, during and after the war, with the aid of typewriting.

What Kenneth Goldsmith does when he writes is not typing. It operates according to another logic altogether, a logic delineated by the disciplinary constraints of networks, software and the flow of digital text.

b. *The Value of Typing*

Day is a massive tome, 836 pages in length - as thick as the phonebook of many cities. Its contents consists of the entire issue of the *New York Times* from Friday, September 1, 2000, reproduced "word for word, letter for letter, from the upper left hand corner to the lower right hand corner, page by page" and bound into book form.

In "Uncreativity As Creative Practice," Goldsmith's manifesto on *Day*, he writes that the object of the project is to be an *uncreative* writer:

I'm interested in a valueless practice. Nothing has less value than yesterday's news (in this case yesterday's newspaper - what could be of less value, say, than stock quotes from September 1, 2000?). I'm interested in quantifying and concretizing the vast amount of "nutritionless" language; I'm also interested in the process itself being equally nutritionless.

Following this trajectory, and with Capote's quote still ringing in our collective ears, it would seem that the logical tool for producing nutritionless language would be typewriting.

However, Goldsmith discovers almost immediately what Capote could not see - that somewhere in the middle of the twentieth century, in the eyes of many writers, typewriting became the preeminent creative method. For Goldsmith like so many others, merely hitting the keys of the typewriter is enough to invoke some sort of inspiration: "with every

keystroke comes the temptation to ‘fudge,’ ‘cut-and-paste,’ and ‘skew’ the mundane language.”⁸ Moreover, because of the current nostalgic cultural association between typing and unalienated writing (both journalistic and creative), the act of typing itself became problematic as a means of composing something “valueless.”

Even the physical labour involved in the retyping of an entire newspaper could be interpreted as a feat of athleticism or performance art, Herculean or abject or both by turns depending on one’s critical perspective. Indeed, one of the obvious precedents for Goldsmith’s “Uncreativity As Creative Practice” in terms of both the document’s syntax and intention are the statements of artist Tehching Hsieh,⁹ whose year-long performances (such as living on the streets of Manhattan for a year; living in a barred, austere cell inside his studio for a year; tied to artist Linda Montano for a year by a length of rope cinched around their waists; punching a time clock every hour on the hour for a year) occupy this same uncertain but extreme realm. Making *Day*, Goldsmith would be equal parts Kerouac and Don Marquis’s abject typing cockroach assistant, archy ... as long as he was actually typing.

But he wasn’t. When Goldsmith conceived of *Day*, he didn’t actually own a typewriter. As an occasional professional web developer, Goldsmith has a sophisticated and intimate knowledge of the artistic potential of network technologies, and has stated on many occasions that “If it’s not on the Web, it doesn’t exist.” For a writer familiar with the tools and procedures that produce text in a networked computing environment, a typewriter is a novelty at best, and at worst an inconvenience. Consequently, Goldsmith boxed up and returned the typewriter that he had purchased explicitly to work on *Day* within days of bringing it home, and turned to the network-based document handling system of choice: optical character recognition (OCR) scanning. In a globalized milieu where multinational corporations routinely outsource the digitization of their print archives to firms in India, China and the Philippines, and digital sweatshops exploit third-world labourers to “play online games 24/7 in order to create virtual goods that can be sold for cash,”¹⁰ Goldsmith commoditizes his own labour by converting himself into a one-man data conversion sweatshop, explicitly to avoid being “paid handsomely” for an extended act of performative typing that could easily be staged in a gallery.¹¹ While Goldsmith is not a political writer, the production of

Day raises many interesting questions about the production, storage and maintenance of writing in a contemporary context.

c. *Unböring*

... which brings me to the question of *Day*’s relationship to boredom. For a writer and artist like Goldsmith, growing up and formulating his practice in New York under the shadow of John Cage, Andy Warhol, Nam June Paik and Jackson Mac Low, whose work all deals extensively with boredom, the question of the artist’s relation to boredom is inescapable. As Fredric Jameson details in his discussion of video art, boredom has been a significant part of aesthetic practice since the inception of high modernism. It “can always be used productively as a precious symptom of our own existential, ideological, and cultural limits, an index of what has to be refused in the way of other people’s cultural practices and their threat to our own rationalizations about the nature and value of art.”¹² Boredom, then, is a sign that we are approaching something we will not yet permit ourselves to think.

One of the most interesting aspects of Goldsmith’s approach is he accuses the boring aesthetes of *not being boring enough*: “John Cage, whose mission it was to accept all sound as music, failed; his filter was on too high. He permitted only the sounds that fell into his worldview. Commercial sounds, pop music, lowbrow culture, sounds of violence and aggression, etc. held no place in the Cagean pantheon.”¹³ In Jameson’s terms, Cage et al. did not place the markers indicating the limits of the amusing far enough out into the boring realm that lies beyond. Over the last thirty years, the low-cultural cognates of Jameson’s subject matter – music videos, reality television and the availability of cheap home video technology which has ensured that many families now have extensive footage of births, birthday parties, baby’s first steps, graduations, weddings and so on, to say nothing of the roles that boredom plays in other aspects of contemporary culture, like electronic music – have greatly expanded the overall toleration of, and arguably even created a craving for, aestheticized boredom, far surpassing the avant-garde’s sorties.

Jameson chooses video as the privileged medium for his discussion of this boredom, which signals an end to both the author as great artist and to the corresponding notion of his productions as Great Works because, he claims, video always exists as part of a “flow” rather than as a series

of discrete objects (76). Goldsmith's own metaphors confirm that he conceives of his own work in terms of flow as well: Cage's "filter was on too high." The notion of the "filter," first part of the lexicon of cybernetics and information theory formulated to express the subjective processes that separate out the signals that one individual finds useful from the otherwise contextually useless noise of overall information flow, has passed into the popular vocabulary, thanks to over a decade of consumer-grade email clients and image handling software. And, large as it may be in bound form, *Day* is still easiest to conceive of as part of Goldsmith's overall output – a considerable flow in and of itself, extensive enough that many of his works bear numerical designations rather than titles. In an interview with Marjorie Perloff, Goldsmith states, "I've come to believe that language by its nature is fluid and will assume any form it's poured into."¹⁴

d. *Word Processors*

The fluidity of language that Goldsmith's writing demonstrates is a function of the behaviour of language under the conditions of networked computing, as Goldsmith tells Perloff:

None of my works after *73 Poems* could have been done without the computer [...] My method of language hunting changed in 1994 when I started using the internet. Back then only gopher space or the text-based Lynx browser was available, but suddenly there was reams and reams of raw language available. I didn't even have to type, I just had to cut-and-paste.¹⁵

Typewriting produces discrete works – one letter per cell in an invisible grid on a discrete page, which in turn is part of a discrete manuscript – written by discrete subjects: authors. Computing produces flows, or more often, *reproduces* flows (as Brian Stefans has remarked, *Day* is "a full frontal act of acidic plagiarism"¹⁶), which aren't so much written as they are filtered by people like Goldsmith, who is not constituted according to the same logic as an author writing with a typewriter: "I no longer think of myself as a poet or a writer, but instead as a word-processor."¹⁷

This is not to say that a kind of "mechanical depersonalization" (Jameson 74) was not part of typewriting as well; in both cases, the machine first renders the body of its operator amenable to its operation, then subsumes the operator's identity into itself. Jameson argues, though, that while depersonalization may have been present in

modernist technologies (such as the still photography that preceded video, which required clamping the subjects' heads into position to immobilize them during long exposures, resulting in "the machine as subject and object, alike and indifferently" [74]), it "goes even further in the new medium." (73).

e. *Extracting Value*

Consider the following passage, from science fiction writer Jack Womack's novel *Ambient*, describing the fate of the "word processor" in Jameson's "new medium":

Each processor sat in a small cubicle, their eyes focusing the CRTS hanging on the walls before them; each wore headphones so as to hear their terminals – number eights – as they punched away. A red light flashed over one of the cubicles. One of the office maintenants rolled over and unlocked the stocks that held the woman's feet. It guided her across the room, toward the lav; her white cane helped her in tapping out the way. The system had flaws; some employees went insane – they were fired – and some grew blind – the ones whose fingers slipped were given Braille keyboards, at cost.¹⁸

In *Ambient*, the cognate of proportional spacing is the ability to write every last drop of productivity out of a human asset – the weakest component in the new human-computer writing network – by adapting itself to steadily degenerating bodies. The cost for the necessary adaptations, which are already minimal, thanks to the adaptability of computing technologies, can always be passed on to the workers themselves.

The situation for generative typists is not much better. The familiar dictating voices are still present, but in a networked milieu, become even more despotic as this fragment of a sentence from William T. Vollmann's *You Bright and Risen Angels: a cartoon* demonstrates:

The keys of my typewriter depress themselves and clack madly, like those of a player piano, like (more appropriately still, since we are in the age of electricity) a teletype machine in some computer center at three in the morning, with the lights glaring steadily down, failed programs in the wastebasket and punchcards on the floor; and far off somewhere at the other end of the dedicated synchronous modem line, a sunken computer swims in its cold lubricants and runs things, and there is nothing to do but wait until it has had its say; the keys do not feel my touch; they do not recognize me; and all across the room the other programmers rest their heads in their arms as Big George dictates to

them as well, garbage in and garbage out, screwing up everything with his little spots of fun, refusing to drown in the spurious closure of a third-person narrative (think how lonely he must be if he has to play such stupid games with me); when what I really wanted to do was write about our hero [...]”¹⁹

As recently as 1967, the focal character of John Barth’s *Lost In The Funhouse* was still capable of formulating elaborate fantasies of authorial sovereignty, describing writing as “a truly astonishing funhouse, incredibly complex yet utterly controlled from a great central switchboard like the console of a pipe organ,” and himself as its secret operator.²⁰ *You Bright and Risen Angels* abandons any hope of mastery along with the phonocentrism of Barth’s pipe organ metaphor; it reveals the fantasy of authorial control as a shimmering chimerical product of his own funhouse mirrors. The author is out of control from the beginning, merely a local node soldered into the complex network that constitutes the scene of computerized writing. There is no certain point of origin for the text, and, it suggests, no privileged final version. A vast, impersonal, remote mainframe and the villainous Big George dictate simultaneously to the author, who situates himself as one of a masochistic group of “programmers” who only experience subjectivity intermittently: “all I can hope to do is to type in a little ameliorating detail here and there so that my angels will at least have the dignity of consistency as they are made to kill each other, and fall and die, and maybe Big George will draw a long breath at the end of this section and I can make adjustments, but I doubt it, I really doubt it; and all I can say is that I’m very sorry and that I’m dying, too” (17).

Womack’s and Vollmann’s abject cyborgs provide some evidence for Jameson’s contention about the depersonalization of the author under computing, but so does Goldsmith’s own work. In *Fidget*,²¹ a limit-case for autobiography, Goldsmith objectifies his body for a day in order to first describe its movements into a tape recorder and then transcribe them into digital text, which can flow into many containers: print, a kinetic software application, a gallery installation, a sound recording (In her supplementary essay on *Fidget*, Perloff calls this a “differential poetics”). Goldsmith’s writing is many things, often simultaneously, but it is never typing.

None of this means that Goldsmith was successful in his attempt to cleanse his work of creativity, which Goldsmith himself freely admits: “The object of the work was to create a valueless practice, which I

found to be an impossibility since the act of reproducing the texts in and of itself has some sort of intrinsic value.”²² In fact, Goldsmith’s practice has proved to be so valuable that it may well have spawned its own movement in American poetry; there are “uncreative writing” classes inspired directly by his work at at least three U.S. universities already. As much as anything else, this is evidence of a discontinuity between discursive formations: while terms like “typing” and “uncreativity” are still in circulation, the networks which inform them in a context like Goldsmith’s writing have shifted the meanings of these terms in substantial ways. Uncreative is the new creative, and typing will never be typewriting again.

What remains is the uneasy question of the economics of writing subjects in a networked world: who writes, who controls, who pays, and who benefits? Goldsmith’s writing practice, already complex and extensive, will be an important site for the investigation of these questions.

Notes

1 Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Day*. Great Barrington: The Figures, 2003: 7.

2 Nicoisia, Gerald. *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac*: 588.

3 See Capote, Truman. *Truman Capote: Conversations*. Ed. M. Thomas Inge. Jackson/London: UP of Mississippi, 1987. 299; also Capote, Truman. *Conversations with Capote*. Ed. Lawrence Grobel. New York: NAL Books, 1985: 135.

4 Capote, Truman. *Conversations with Capote*. Ed. Lawrence Grobel. New York: NAL Books, 1985. 135.

5 Capote, Truman. *Truman Capote: Conversations*. Ed. M. Thomas Inge: 298.

6 Mailer, Norman. “Of A Small And Modest Malignancy”. *Esquire*. Qtd. in Capote, Truman. *Conversations with Capote*. Ed. Lawrence Grobel. New York: NAL Books, 1985: 32

7 *Conversations with Capote*: 198.

8 <epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/uncreativity.html>

- 9 <www.one-year-performance.com/menu.html>
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- 18 Womack, Jack. *Ambient*. New York: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1987: 50.
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