

Chapter 7

Conceptualist Bridges / Digital Tunnels:

Kenneth Goldsmith's *Traffic*

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path—condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Hart Crane, "To Brooklyn Bridge," 1930¹

Right now you've also got jam-ups on the Brooklyn Bridge, bumper-to-bumper to Brooklyn but the lower roadway is wide open. The Brooklyn Bridge is swamped.

Kenneth Goldsmith, *Traffic*²

The Brooklyn Bridge, whose elegant "curveship" Hart Crane and other Modernists celebrated as the emblem of a new visionary engineering, is now just another of the many clogged arteries—bridges and tunnels—connecting the island of Manhattan to the surrounding landmasses—Brooklyn and Queens to the East, the Bronx to the North, New Jersey to the West. Those headlights, once seen from the city's skyscrapers as constituting a "swift unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars," have become the glare of the giant gridlock of the New York nightscape. Bridge, tunnel, highway traffic—or even passage through one-way city streets, whether in New York or London, Athens or Beijing—has become a fact of life that we accept with a sigh or shrug as we navigate our way through it, ears tuned to those radio "sigalerts," as we call them in Los Angeles, that tell us which freeway to

avoid, which tunnel is undergoing roadwork, and which bridge is blocked by an overturned vehicle.

Traffic is the second volume of Kenneth Goldsmith's *Trilogy*: the first, *Weather* (2005) transcribes a year's worth of daily weather reports for the Tri-State Area (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut) from the New York radio station WINS (1010 AM); the second, (2007), records a twenty-four hour period of WINS "Panasonic Jam Cam [Camera]" New York traffic reports at ten-minute intervals on the first day of a holiday weekend; the third, *Sports* (2008), contains a complete broadcast transcription of an entire (five-hour) baseball game between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox in August 2006, as reported by the well-known Yankees commentators John Sterling and Suzyn Waldman.

Transcribing weather forecasts, traffic reports, play-by-play Yankee Stadium broadcasts: what could be more pointless than such neo-Dada games? Goldsmith himself has added fuel to the critical fire by insisting that his "conceptual" pieces are "boring," "unreadable," and "uncreative." In a widely disseminated manifesto, published on the website of the August Poetry Foundation of America, for example, he declares:

Conceptual writing or uncreative writing is a poetics of the moment, fusing the avant-garde impulses of the last century with the technologies of the present, one that proposes an expanded field for 21st century poetry. . . . Conceptual writing obstinately makes no claims on originality. On the contrary, it employs intentionally self and ego effacing tactics using uncreativity, unoriginality, illegibility, appropriation, plagiarism, fraud, theft, and falsification as its precepts; information management, word processing, databasing, and extreme process as its methodologies; and boredom . . . as its ethos. Language as junk, language as detritus. . . . *entartete sprache*, everyday speech, illegibility, unreadability, machinistic repetition.

Obsessive archiving & cataloging, the debased language of media & advertising; language more concerned with quantity than quality. . . . With the rise of appropriation-based literary practices, the familiar or quotidian is made unfamiliar or strange when left semantically intact. No need to blast apart syntax. Conceptual writing is more interested in a *thinkership* rather than a readership. Readability is the last thing on this poetry's mind. Conceptual writing is good only when the idea is good; often, the idea is much more interesting than the resultant texts.³

And in the related "Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing," Goldsmith adds, "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."⁴

If this last passage sounds familiar, it's because "Paragraphs on Conceptual Writing" is an almost verbatim recycling of Sol LeWitt's foundational statement on Conceptual art, first published in *Artforum* in 1967 and widely disseminated.⁵ In the sentences above, substitute "author" for "artist," and "text" or "writing" for "art," and the two are identical. Was Goldsmith, then, too lazy to make up his own theoretical statement? Is he just pulling our leg? Or is his "plagiarism" in fact a sly way of reinforcing his argument that aesthetic concepts formulated in the art world half a century ago and now so widely accepted that they are no longer subject to debate, are treated as suspect in a literary world that has not yet caught up with the visual arts.

How do we account for the time lag? Unlike the visual arts or music, architecture or dance, photography or video--art forms that turn to the verbal to convey the "idea or concept" at issue-- literature is, by definition,

always already made of language: indeed, it *is* language, no doubt defamiliarized and reconstructed but the language we all use nevertheless. Accordingly, the prominence of language in the visual field of the art work – a situation central to Duchamp’s *Readymades*, and, by the sixties, to the work of Jenny Holzer or Yoko Ono, Yves Klein or Lawrence Weiner, as well as in the dance pieces of Yvonne Rainer-- has no real parallel in poetry. Duchamp could take an ordinary dog comb and make it count as “art” by giving it the caption, “Classify combs by the number of their teeth.” Or again, he endowed a nondescript French window (not so nondescript since its panes were made not of glass but green leather and hence opaque) with the ambiguous title *French Widow*. To make a comparable move in poetry, one would have to eliminate or at least decompose all the words and phrases. Concrete poetry comes close to this goal, breaking down larger coherent phrasal units into assemblages of morphemes and letters to be looked at. Sound poetry is even more radical: at its best, as in the work of Henri Chopin or Steve McCaffery, “translation” into coherent semantic units is quite impossible, although the suggestibility quotient of the enunciated sounds may be quite high.

Goldsmith’s own poetry began under the sign of concrete poetry (see the elegant word/number constellations in his early artist’s book *73 Poems*), and his recorded “singings” of the “big” theorists—Derrida and Baudrillard, Adorno and Benjamin-- may be classified as “sound poems,” in their move to undermine meaning in favor of pitch and rhythmic structure.⁶ But the so-called conceptual works, beginning with *Soliloquy* (2001)--the transcription of every word Goldsmith spoke for a one-week period in New York City, recording only the poet’s own words, not those of the many people he spoke to --are designed to look like normal “books,” one block of print following another in what we might call “referential” prose. In conceptual writing, as opposed to conceptual art, Goldsmith implies, positioning himself against the

Sol LeWitt he “plagiarizes,” the issue is less to bring together diverse media (e.g., word and image) than it is to relate the stated conceptual germ (“this book reproduces a year’s worth of daily weather forecasts”) to the text itself. But because both concept and resultant text draw on the same linguistic base, most readers have taken Goldsmith at face value when he declares, “I am the most boring writer that has ever lived,” or again, “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,” and so on.⁷ Indeed, Goldsmith’s provocative equation of poetry with “word processing” or “information management” has met with strong resistance from the poetry community—not just from the Establishment but, perhaps surprisingly, from such well-known experimentalists as Ron Silliman.

“What does it mean for a work of art to be eminently likeable and almost completely unreadable?” Silliman wonders in a long entry (2006) on his influential poetry blog. “This is the ultimate trick at the heart of the project of Kenny Goldsmith’s self-announced uncreative writing.” Since the poet’s “projects, by design, never stand on their own,” Silliman argues, the reader invariably turns to “the cult of the artist as his own work of art.” And egotism is not the only problem: another is the refusal of history. For in merely recycling the words of others—whether from *The New York Times* as in *Day*, or from radio as in *Weather*—Goldsmith denies the very possibility of the poet’s ability to have perspective on the cultural moment, much less to critique it. A valueless synchronicity becomes all: indeed, “Kenny Goldsmith’s actual art project is the projection of Kenny Goldsmith.”⁸

This argument sounds reasonable if we assume that what Goldsmith says about a given work is equivalent to what it *is*. For Silliman and similar critics of the books in question, there is evidently never a question but that *Day* (2003) is a mechanical transcription of a single day’s copy of *The New York Times*, that the earlier *Fidget* documents every move Goldsmith’s body

made for a twenty-four hour period, or that *Soliloquy* records every word Goldsmith uttered for a week in 2000.⁹ It is the poet, after all, who insists that it is only the “concept” of these books that counts, that indeed it is impossible to “read” *Day* or *Fidget* or *Soliloquy*.

“Never trust what writers say about their own work,” observes Walter Benjamin, himself a master of appropriation, in a note for his *Arcades Project*.¹⁰ In the case of conceptual art, this warning makes little sense, given that, by definition, what the conceptual artist *says* about the work is often equivalent to the work itself, as in the case of Robert Rauschenberg’s famous “telegram” --“This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so”—sent to the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris in response to their request for a Rauschenberg painting. But “conceptual” poetics works somewhat differently: in Goldsmith’s own case, the appropriated text is often submitted to a particular Oulipo-like constraint that complicates the process, even as the materiality of the text—its visual dimension—plays a central role.

Consider the place of D. H. Lawrence’s short story “The Rocking-Horse Winner” in Goldsmith’s 600-page volume *No. 111. 2.7.93—10.20.96*, published in 1997. In an interview, I asked Goldsmith if he had ever read Lawrence’s brilliant modern parable, which he includes without title or acknowledgment in what he calls his “useless encyclopedic reference book.”¹¹ *No. 111* is an assemblage of all the phrases collected by the poet between the two dates listed in the title that end in the ubiquitous phoneme *schwa* (“er” as in “father”); the phrases are organized alphabetically by syllable-count beginning with one syllable entries for Chapters 1 (“A, a, aar, aas, aer, agh, ah, air. . .”), two for #2 (“A door, à la, a pear, a peer, a rear, a ware”), and ending with Chapter VMMCCMMVIII, the 7,228 syllable “Rocking Horse Winner.”¹² In response to my question, Goldsmith insisted he had never read Lawrence’s story, except insofar as he had counted its syllables:

I only chose that story because the last syllable of the last word in the story, 'winner', ended in an 'er.' Because the story had more syllables than any other entry in the book, it was used as the last chapter. So theoretically, I felt that I could have included any short story or even full-length novel into *111* and would have been justified in doing so. It was just a matter of nerve or finding the courage to do so. . . . I know it sounds prudish or puritanical, but for me to read 'The Rocking Horse Winner' as is — within the context of *No. 111* — would destroy some crucial conceptual part of my book. (Perloff, *Jacket*)

But is the selection of "The Rocking Horse Winner" really just a matter of chance? Would any short story—there must be hundreds whose title ends on *er*, for example, "The Secret Sharer"-- do? In her essay for *Open Letter*, Molly Schwarzburg notes:

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. . . . The name of the winning horse is merely a fact that he knows before anyone else. . . . 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.¹³

And one could posit further connections. Like the John Cage who regularly insisted he had never bothered to read Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, a text he "wrote through" so frequently, Goldsmith wants us to believe that Lawrence's story is mere grist for the conceptual mill. But then, the description of the constraint used throughout *No. 111* is itself dubious: Goldsmith claims to be arranging, by syllable count, all the

phrases collected between February 7, 1993 and October 20, 1996 that end in *schwa* [er], but how were these in fact assembled? In Chapter 6, for example, there are six 6-syllable units ending in *er* that begin with the letters *b-o*: “Bob The Anal Fissure,” “Bolshevick Behavior, bootblack wickerwhacker, bored to a bellwether, both knew how to shower, Boy what a bagbiter.” From what sources could these disparate and fantastic items have been “collected”? And why these and no others like “born to be wealthier”? We are given the ostensible rules of the game but what is the game?

Nothing but an actual reading of the text can clarify the questions of choice and chance that arise here and elsewhere. This is as true of the *Trilogy*, with its ostensibly simple transcriptions of weather, traffic, and sports reports, as of *No. 111*, *Soliloquy*, and *Day*. Suppose, then, that we put aside, for the moment, Goldsmith’s insistence that his books are “unreadable” and read *Traffic* as a book about traffic.¹⁴

Midnight Gridlock

“Traffic” is the second installment of what should properly be called *The New York Trilogy*.¹⁵ All the speech recorded in these books, from the WINS daily weather reports, to the twenty-four hour traffic alerts, to the commentary on the Yankees game, is entirely New York material: indeed, a stranger would not recognize many of the names included: such commonly used abbreviations as BQE (Brooklyn-Queens Expressway) and LIE (Long Island Expressway) may be unfamiliar even to those, like myself, who grew up in New York. More important than names: the ballpark is New York’s iconic Yankee Stadium, the weather is New York weather—which is to say extreme and unpredictable, ranging from scorching summers to glacial winters—and the traffic flow is determined by the basic fact that Manhattan is an island—a very crowded island. Los Angeles traffic may be just as

heavy and the distances to be traveled even greater than in New York, but it doesn't quite have the gridlock produced by the dependency on bridges and tunnels. And San Francisco, which also depends on its bridges, offers fewer options, so that there is less scrambling for the hot tips offered by WINS's Jam Cam. Then, too, the dramatic seasonal contrasts that characterize New York are absent in San Francisco and Los Angeles; in the latter, according to a common quip, there are only two seasons—day and night. The rhythm of the different circulation systems is thus quite variable.

The twenty-four hour segments of WINS traffic reports (numbered, American style, 12 to 12, rather than from 0 to 24, but with the designations A.M. and P.M. missing) take place, we learn in the very first sentence, on a "big holiday weekend." But which holiday is it? For all the seeming precision and documentary veracity of Goldsmith's book, one can't tell. There are no references to ice or snow, so it does not seem to be Christmas or New Year's or even Presidents' Day, no turkey talk, so it doesn't sound much like Thanksgiving, which is, in any case, more than just a weekend. Memorial Day? The 4th of July? Labor Day? There are no identifying tags—a situation that makes the reader wonder how Goldsmith managed to erase any and all references to specific holiday paraphernalia such as 4th of July fireworks or Memorial Day gravestones. Indeed, we don't even know whether the legal holiday is a Friday or a Monday and thus whether the twenty-four hour cycle transcribed in *Traffic* is that of Thursday midnight—Friday midnight or later in the weekend. Then, too, by the end of the narrative, the traffic has eased up enough to suggest that we have reached the end of the holiday: if alternate side of the street parking rules will be in effect "tomorrow," the next day must be a work day. But how can this be the case—how do we get from beginning to end of the holiday weekend in twenty-four hours, whichever the legal holiday?

There is, in other words, something surreal about this seemingly ordinary sequence of traffic reports. Not only does the particular weekend and day of the week remain elusive, but consider the cover [fig.7.1]. It cannot be a photograph of New York—as the larger source photograph [fig.7.2] makes even clearer, given the predominance of small old cars on the road, the obviously foreign buses, and taxis, the sign *Mudanzas* (Spanish for “Movers”) on the big rig in the center lane, and the foreign license plate (971 BSK) on the second car in front, [see fig.7.2]. Then, too, New York drivers are unlikely to get out of their cars to inspect the scene as the men (no women visible) do here, but the urge to step outside the car may also have to do with the weather-- it seems to be a very hot day—or with the sighting of an accident up ahead. The many long-sleeved white shirts suggest, moreover, that this photograph dates from an earlier time—say, the 1970s. The six-lane highway (with dangerous access lanes) may well be in Mexico City, the sly implication being that New York circulation in the twenty-first century can be channeled through the images of gridlock in the smog-ridden chaotic thoroughfares of the Mexican metropolis of thirty or forty years ago.

But our climate is also very different. In WINS-speak, accidents are viewed as something to avoid by taking another route: “the Garden State Parkway north near the Bergen tolls, an accident has two right lanes closed off” (W 33) or “They’re clearing that accident over by the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, all lanes are being reopened” (W 70). The personal element—represented by the anonymous men on the cover-- has been erased. Indeed, in its focus on traffic tips rather than travelers, *Traffic* positions itself as a curious antidote—or at least response--to such searing critiques of postmodern automobile traffic as Jean-Luc Godard’s *Weekend* (1967).¹⁶

Godard’s famous *nouvelle vague* film follows a bourgeois Parisian couple as they leave for a weekend trip across the French countryside to

collect (by murder, if need be) what they consider to be their rightful inheritance from the wife's parents. After a breakdown on the road, the couple gets involved in scenes of violence, killing, and even cannibalism: the film is designed to present traffic as the emblem of the brutal consumerism of the Capitalist class. Thus the film's most famous scene is an eight-minute tracking shot of a traffic jam on the country road outside Paris [**fig.7.3**]. It is a shot almost unbearable to watch and listen to: bombarded by a sound track of incessant honking of horns, we see cars, trailers, and trucks wiggling through the traffic, stuck in the roadside ditches, overturned, going backwards, and crashing into one another. Bleeding corpses line the roadside, even as passengers in some of the stalled vehicles play cards or car-to-car volleyball, embrace, sunbathe, have picnics, and flag down each other's cars. Only at the very end of this seemingly interminable sequence, does the couple's black convertible pass the police barrier and make a right turn into the "open" countryside, the sound of screeching horns giving way to pop music. And of course, their newfound mobility doesn't last long.

Week-End presents a terrifying image of traffic as embodiment of the evils of consumerism in a heartless society. Technology is seen as the enemy of the human spirit: the automobile pollutes and ultimately destroys the natural world. Godard's is the antithesis of F. T. Marinetti's Futurist dream in which "Combustion engines and rubber tires are divine. Gasoline is divine."¹⁷ But the spirit of 1968 with its Maoist fervor and taste for violence has not lasted: in the new century, Godard's indictment of contemporary consumer culture is as anachronistic as is Marinetti's celebration, in the 1909 Manifesto, of his beautiful black shark of a motor car overturned in a ditch. Indeed, in our own moment, the weekend traffic crunch is nothing if not normative, quite simply the condition of everyday life. And here Goldsmith's *Traffic* is apposite.

Unlike *Weekend* or, for that matter, unlike J. G. Ballard's great science-fiction novel *Crash* (1972), where, in the novelist's own words, "the car crash, a sinister portent of a nightmare marriage between sex and technology" is used "not only as a sexual image, but as a total metaphor for man's life in today's society,"¹⁸ *Traffic*, written as it was at the beginning of the new century, takes the minute-by-minute traffic incidents it records very much in its—forgive the pedestrian term—stride. Submitting his chosen Jam Cam reports to the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action, Goldsmith has produced a vivid representation of contemporary urban life in all its ritual, boredom, nervousness, frustration, fear, apathy—and also its pleasure. Goldsmith's book casts no blame, finds no first cause, and attributes no venality to anyone, nor does it assume that traffic has brought out the worst in us. Rather, *traffic* is that which IS—messy, unbearable, infuriating, debilitating, but also challenging, invigorating, and unpredictable. Traffic is both an existential and a linguistic challenge: the anonymous Jam Cam voice tries to liven things up by using colorful phrases like "what a doozy," "snail's pace," "absolutely crawling," "stacked up," "getting clobbered," "the makings of a rough ride."¹⁹ And yet the real action of this twenty-four hour period can only be conveyed by the anchors' description of what is happening, one moment at a time.

One of the great ironies of radio traffic reports, as they are transcribed here, is that they tell us so little, and that their predictions are so often wrong. At 12:31 (in the opening chapter), "midnight gridlock" has taken over both bridges and tunnels: "There is a stalled bus inside the Lincoln Tunnel that is refusing to move, blocking all access to New Jersey" (T 2). But by 1:21, less than an hour later, the reporter is telling us that the "Lincoln Tunnel [is] still your best way across the Hudson River" (T 6), and at 1:51, "the good news" is that "the Lincoln Tunnel, that's still the best way across the Hudson" (T 7). Then again, tunnels and bridges, all of them, are

the greatest gamble for, once the driver has opted for the George Washington Bridge or the Midtown Tunnel, there is no turning back and no alternative. Elevated highways like the Major Deegan, running through the East Bronx, are more user-friendly; clogged as they are, they might just reopen. Here is the entry for 11.21 on the get-away morning:

Whoa! What a backup lining up to the tolls here at the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels. We now have probably close to a twenty minute waiting lining up for the tolls at the Holland Tunnel from all approaches, and twenty-five to thirty minutes coming down into the Lincoln Tunnel. Still pretty good along the GW Bridge. And we had an accident and construction on the Tappan Zee Bridge in Westchester, but not a bad looking ride overall. The Brooklyn Bridge has gotten very slow coming back into Manhattan and the delay coming into the Midtown Tunnel has ballooned. There's gotta be over a thirty-minute backup, it goes back up to before the BQE [Brooklyn-Queens Expressway]. As I look in live here on the Panasonic Jam Cam, you do have delays along the Whitestone and Triboro Bridge too. And if you're in Manhattan coming downtown, it has improved a bit on the West Side Highway and the FDR Drive, especially the FDR Drive in the 90s. But what has gotten worse is Broadway. Don't get involved in Broadway at all. (T 53)

This radio bulletin, as Goldsmith transcribes it, makes for theater of the absurd. There is an accident on the Tappan Zee Bridge, yet the report maintains that the bridge crossing is "not a bad looking ride overall." The Whitestone and Triboro Bridges, connecting the Bronx and Queens to Manhattan, are jammed, but they feed into the FDR Drive, which is "OK," whereas Broadway is inexplicably jammed. The Jam Cam reports suggest no solution, no corrective; they merely offer practical alternatives for specific

problems. Here's a tip: take the Holland Tunnel rather than the George Washington Bridge. Given the existential situation—too much available money, too many cars, too many places to go, even on weekends and even through bumper-to-bumper traffic—there is little that can be done to change things. But problems also produce solutions; one must be flexible and *inventive* so as to find another road—an alternative. Driving, in this scheme of things, becomes a mental challenge—how to get there—rather than a pre-planned move toward one's destination. Getting there, ironically, really does become half the fun!

John Cage often cited the Zen koan, "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."²⁰ It is in this sense that Goldsmith's "uncreative" and "boring" narrative becomes increasingly absorbing. The more traffic bulletins one reads, the more questions occur. Where, for starters, are all these people going and why? If it is common knowledge that "big holiday" weekend traffic is unbearable, why subject yourself to it? What percentage of New Yorkers stay home? And what is the difference between those who come *into* the city and those who *go out*? Between the natives, who have a shared vocabulary as to the LIE Expressway, Tappan Zee Bridge, FDR Drive, and so on, and the strangers who try to take the straightest path recommended by Mapquest, only to find themselves stuck in the Holland Tunnel for hours?

And what about the traffic anchors themselves, those invisible voices that deliver the reports at ten-minute intervals? From the perspective of a Godard—or, say, a Guy Debord--²¹ to be an anchor would be, no doubt, to be confined to one of the lowest circles of hell, aiding and abetting what should, in any decent society, be banned as a menace. But when, out of

curiosity, I googled the radio station 1010 WINS, the first item that appeared was a biographical sketch of one such job-holder:

Pete Tauriello has been 1010 WINS morning traffic anchor for 18 Years. Pete began his radio career 29 years ago at Seton Hall University as a disc jockey on WSOU. . . .

“The last thing I ever expected to be was a traffic reporter,” he says. I sort of fell into this job and then fell in love with it, so here I am 18 years later and lucky enough to be on the biggest radio station in the world!”

Pete has a BA in communications, and has been married to his college sweetheart, Maureen, for 25 years. His 3 children, Sean 22, Kim 19 and Mark 14, keep him as busy off the air as he is during the morning rush hour!

Ask him what his favorite jam cam is and he’ll tell you, “It has to be our East River camera. I’m a bridge freak and I get to look at these beautiful works of architecture all day at the touch of a button. I really can enjoy both of my passions. . . radio and beautiful bridges . . . and they pay me too. I ask you, does it get better than that?”

As far as his favorite traffic story goes, “One day we had this gigantic water main break and the subway stations looked like waterfalls. I was called upon to do this story for our sister station in Chicago, WMAQ.” His biggest fear? “That all the traffic jams will one day be solved and I’ll be out of a job.”

Pete, don’t worry about it.²²

Twin passions: “radio and beautiful bridges.” What makes this little vignette so amusing is its element of genuine surprise—a surprise too often absent in the pages of so-called “original” writing. The Canadian Coach House Press

has recently published a book of poems by the experimental feminist poet Sina Queyras called *Expressway*, a book that, according to the book jacket, “exposes the paradox of modern mobility: the more roads and connections we build, the more separate we feel.” And the poems, with their strong indictment of the “corporations and commerce” that have allowed expressways to dominate our lives, includes lines like the following:

Car Crashes into Petrol Station Making a left-hand.

His car was broadsided.

Fatal car crash in Al Ghusais. Police investigate.

Survivor remembers. Impact. Crash.

Plane crash-landed on a major expressway.

‘Honeybee’ dies in Two-car accident.

Near Mustang Road.

Does this scene look familiar?²³

Perhaps too familiar. The “real” action, when we turn to the minute-by-minute transcriptions in *Traffic*, is much more variable and interesting. Escaping the city on a holiday weekend--or, conversely, coming into the city on the holiday weekend—is seen as a challenge to be overcome by the alert driver. Paradoxes—not of anything as abstract or general as “modern mobility,” but such paradoxes as that, on the eve of a holiday weekend, midnight turns out to be the worst time to travel because it is the hour when “holiday” road repair is scheduled —haunt the scenario. Despite such “set-backs,” the narrative moves from pain to progress, from the “Hudson River horror show” of 12:01 (T 1) and the “absolute nightmare” of 1:11 (T 5) to the moment at 11:01 the following evening, when the report begins with the words “It’s been a long day here but there is an end in sight on the East Side as we are actually beginning to see movement on the southbound FDR for the first time in hours now that that accident’s been cleared by the 59th Street Bridge” (T 111). By 11:21, our anchor person is exclaiming, “And a

happy holiday to you too.” (112). The tunnels to New Jersey are “looking swell,” the GW Bridge “still moving nicely,” and “no delays at the Verrazano [Bridge].” There is always, of course, a collision somewhere—right before midnight on Highway 134 in Yorktown. But the final entry (12:00) of the book reads as follows:

We’re over the hump and into the official holiday weekend. I want to wish everybody out there a safe and happy holiday, especially when traveling on the road this weekend. If you’re trying to get out of town now, you’re in for an easy time of it. No reported delays around the metropolitan area as I see it live on the Panasonic Jam Cam. Let’s head over to the East River where we’ve got no reported delays running the length of the river from the Battery on up to the Triboro. FDR is moving nicely as well. No reported incidents on the West Side Highway which, if you recall, oh, say about six hours ago was simply not moving at all with delays up to three hours. Now it’s deserted. And here’s what you need to know about the bridges and tunnels: all the East River crossings moving well. No reported incidents at the Triboro, 59th Street Bridge, Queens-Midtown Tunnel. Looking down to the Williamsburg, Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, it’s one big green light. And over in Jersey, it’s never been better with traffic flowing smoothly across the Hudson at both the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels. Even the GW Bridge which has been choked for what seems like the last twenty-four hours is now flowing like water. Remember, alternate side of the street parking rules are in effect for tomorrow. (T 115)

“One big green light,” can life really be so beautiful? From East to West, North to South, traffic is “flowing like water.” A triumphant conclusion, worth waiting and struggling for! But of course as the last line—the refrain throughout the piece—suggests, however peaceful that midnight moment

described above, the cycle never stops: by tomorrow, the streets, tunnels, and bridges will once more be clogged.

“Remember, alternate side of the street parking rules are in effect tomorrow.” This admonition, which is repeated with minor changes at set intervals throughout *Traffic*-- a kind of reality check on the chaotic traffic flow, heralding, as it does, the end of the holiday weekend, gives the book its very particular rhythm. As in minimalist music, a single chord, like the name “GW Bridge,” is introduced, repeated in different contexts, and then diminished while a second motif comes to the fore. Again, the melodic phrase “bridges and tunnels” is repeated again and again, with only the slightest variation. The “alternate parking” refrain, which will appear more than sixty times in the “every ten minutes on the ‘ones’” traffic sequence, makes its first appearance at 4.31 AM:

Don’t forget the alternate side of the street parking rules, if you do manage to drive into the city, will be suspended for the duration of the holiday, but you’ll still have to pay the meters. (T 18)

The warning continues to appear, in shortened form and slightly altered wording, every ten minutes or so until, shortly before 8 A.M., traffic is so choked up that the focus shifts from the Manhattan streets themselves to the movements of the trains, buses, and ferries that serve as traffic alternatives—the Long Island Railroad, Jersey Transit’s commuter rail, the Staten Island Ferry, Westchester County Bee Line Buses. Only by 10.41, are cars themselves moving adequately enough to mention the “alternate side” rule. Jams become worse in the course of the day and when alternate side parking is mentioned again. It is to say (5:21) that “tomorrow, alternate side parking back in effect citywide in all Five Boroughs” (T 83). From here on out, the refrain is steady: by 11:51, we hear, “Alternate side of the street parking rules are back in effect” (T 113).

But wait a minute: what happened to the holiday? If the alternate side rules were suspended in its honor, how long were they actually in effect? Goldsmith's "factual" narrative, plotted so carefully and divided into neat block-paragraph segments turns out to be wholly implausible, indicating as it does that this holiday weekend is over before it has even begun. For before anyone can take advantage of the open parking situation, the alternate side rule is back in effect. Time's linear progress, in other words, is illusory: it cannot encompass the events supposed to occur at particular moments on the scale; indeed, time collapses into space. If the final section (12:00), defined as being "over the hump and into the official holiday weekend," is terminated by the resumption of normal traffic rules "tomorrow," then the weekend has all but never happened.

Goldsmith's "transcription" is thus hardly passive recycling. The design of the book emphasizes the hour in question, that hour (e.g. 3.00) printed in boldface on an otherwise blank page, thus calling special attention to the new "chapter." But the chapter separation is illusory, the fact being that "events" merely continue. Moreover, these numeric titles are left undesignated (A.M. versus P.M.), and the individual entries, so specifically referring to the exact time of day (e.g., 5:11), never tell us which day this is. In skipping from one day to the next, or starting in mid-weekend, Goldsmith's book thus transforms the intersection of time and space into a wholly surreal situation. The weekend, far from extended as it is in Godard's film, is here telescoped to fit into twenty-four hours. But in the digital age, a marked segment does not signal any particular chronological frame, even as "place" can be multiple and "action" simultaneous. At the same time, the "plot" ironically turns out to be a perfect Aristotelian one with beginning, middle and end, as the image of the nightmare city gives way to a momentary vision of the open road-- *one big green light* pointing us into the future. Inevitably, too, this green light recalls the one at the end of Daisy's

dock in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*: consider that novel's famous final paragraphs:

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity, beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning---

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.²⁴

Traffic gives these memorable images of desire an interesting spin. The cars skimming the Long Island Expressway "against the current," headed toward the waters of Long Island Sound, "beat on" into an unknowable future that, as we have already seen with respect to the narrative's time course, is already past. Like *Gatsby*, *Traffic's* drivers long to reach "that vast obscurity beyond the city" where all those tunnels and bridges lead, to the streets beyond—streets never mentioned in the radio bulletins. And unattainable as those mysterious "dark fields of the Republic" are, "tomorrow we will run faster" to get there.²⁵ "Over in Jersey it's never been better with traffic flowing smoothly across the Hudson."

“The Madness of the Unexpected”

The July/August 2009 issue of *Poetry* features a little anthology of “Flarf and Conceptual Writing,” edited by Goldsmith. In the Introduction, he declares:

Start making sense. Disjunction is dead. The fragment, which ruled poetry for the past one hundred years, has left the building. Subjectivity, emotion, the body, and desire, as expressed in whole units of plain English with normative syntax, has returned. But not in ways you would imagine. This new poetry wears its sincerity on its sleeve . . . yet no one means a word of it. Come to think of it, no one’s really written a word of it. It’s been grabbed, cut, pasted, processed, machined, honed, flattened, repurposed, regurgitated, and reframed from the great mass of free-floating language out there just begging to be turned into poetry.²⁶

This, like Goldsmith’s earlier provocations, has prompted strong objections from fellow poets: Ron Silliman, for example, has again risen to the bait, declaring that no, no, disjunction is NOT dead at all, and that indeed Goldsmith’s own transcriptions (e.g. of the *New York Times* in *Day*) are full of disjunctive words and phrases. As for the claims made for appropriation: “the use of found language being folded, spindled & mutilated in a variety of fashions” is hardly news: consider “Jackson Mac Low’s use of insurance texts in *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*, or Kathy Acker’s appropriation of the work of Harold Robbins in the 1970s”?²⁷

Such accusations recall nothing so much as the uproar over Duchamp’s readymades (from the time of their inception in the 1910s well into the 1960s)—an uproar which the artist himself aided and abetted by insisting that “The choice of readymades is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad

taste." "I don't believe," Duchamp famously told Pierre Cabanne, "in the creative function of the artist," "He's a man like any other. . . . Now everyone makes something, and those who make things on canvas, with a frame, they're called artists. Formerly, they were called craftsmen, a term I prefer."²⁸ Such statements must, of course, be understood in context: Duchamp took his "art" very seriously indeed, his objection being, not to art as such, but specifically to what he took to be the excessive importance given by the artists of his own day to "retinal" art:

Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral. . . . our whole century is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still they didn't go very far! In spite of the fact that Breton says he believes in judging from a Surrealist point of view, down deep he's still really interested in painting in the retinal sense. It's absolutely ridiculous. It has to change. (Cabanne, 43)

It must change. These hardly sound like the words of an artist who doesn't care. "I tried constantly," said Duchamp, "to find something which would not recall what had happened before" (Cabanne 38). And by "what happened before," he meant before in his own work as well as that of others, prompting him to turn to the reproduction in miniature of his earlier work in the boxes and *boîtes en valise* rather than the making of new readymades or paintings. "Everything," he tells Cabanne, "was becoming conceptual" (Cabanne 39).

Everything, one might add, including Duchamp's own statements on art, which must be read carefully and contextually in order to understand the artist's actual conception of art-making. The same is true for Goldsmith. When, in the *Poetry* feature, he outlines the relation of Conceptual poetry to

Flarf and presents specific poets from each category for our consideration, he is, I would argue, producing what is itself a conceptual piece, designed to produce debate as to the *value* of particular movements—movements from which, in fact, Goldsmith has kept his distance, even as Duchamp never quite allowed Dada to claim him as one of their own, citing instead such influences as that of the Cranach paintings he saw in Munich in 1912 or the use of the mathematical perspective of machine drawings he studied at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris.²⁹

But why the need for so much displacement, so much ironic self-invention? Why call oneself boring or indifferent or uncreative when one obviously has a passionate desire to *create* something new? For Goldsmith, as for such of his precursors as Andy Warhol, John Cage, and especially Duchamp, art defines itself by its struggle with its immediate past. For Duchamp, this meant the retinal art of the Post-Impressionists and Cubists. Since he wouldn't (or couldn't) emulate the painting skills of Picasso or Matisse, Braque or Gris, he decided, at a critical moment, to "do something else."³⁰ But this emphatically did not mean that anything goes or that anyone can be an artist. On the contrary, the enemy was a particular kind of painting, then dominant in Europe as in America.

Goldsmith, educated at the Rhode Island School of Design, was trained to be a visual artist—a painter and sculptor. But since his coming of age coincided with a general acceptance of Conceptual, Minimalist, and Language art, he could move elsewhere only by shifting to the verbal/musical realm, rethinking art issues from the outside: his now celebrated and unique website *Ubuweb* gives special prominence to avant-garde musical composition, sound poetry and film. And indeed, only from the outside, could it become clear to Goldsmith that the art discoveries of the later twentieth century could function to renew the poetry world. At the same time, from his vantage point, the Language school, with its emphasis on

non-referentiality and the dissolution of the first-person lyric mode, was itself still rooted in aesthetic issues no longer fully relevant. Whereas poetry anthologies and blogs continue to this day to debate the relationship of experimental to traditional, raw to cooked, “post-avant” to the “school of quietude” (Silliman’s terms),³¹ it must have seemed to Goldsmith, as to such other Conceptualists as Caroline Bergvall and Christian Bök, Craig Dworkin and Jan Baetens,³² that as in Duchamp’s case, the time had come to do something else.

Ergo, poetry that doesn’t look like any poetry we’ve seen, presented as “unreadable” so as to challenge us to read it. Its premise, Goldsmith has suggested, is that in a digital environment, language, once “locked onto a page” has become “completely fluid; it’s lifted off the page and therefore able to be poured into so many different forms and take so many different shapes and really be molded and sculpted in a way that wasn’t possible before” (*Rain Taxi 3*). The WINS traffic reports, for example, seemingly identifiable by precise time, can be taken from different calendar dates and spliced to produce a new construct. A similar realignment takes place in *The Weather* or, in a different form in *Fidget*, where, despite the ostensibly “full” record of the body’s every movement in the course of a twelve-hour time period, there are curious omissions. The protagonist, for starters, never dresses: as Ruben Gallo notes, “The body wakes and walks about, showers, drinks, and masturbates, but never once does he put on an item of clothing. . . . The nudity of *Fidget* extends beyond the body. The book is . . . a nude text in which language has been stripped down to its most basic elements. . . . The movements included in the book are completely detached from emotions or other affective responses. . . . *Fidget’s* body is thus naked, abject, and machine-like.”³³

Fidget could not have been produced without a tape recorder: Goldsmith taped a small microphone to his body and went about his day

describing each of his movements as fully and accurately as possible. But what *is* accuracy in this context? Having completed his experiment, Goldsmith turned from recording to transcription—a process by no means “natural”; on the contrary, in his role as “word processor,” Goldsmith has drastically edited the tape so as represent the movements of a hyper-mechanical body, a body twitching, pressing, stretching, grinding— in short, so “fidgety” it could never sit still long enough to write what is transmitted to us as a piece of *writing*.³⁴ It is this paradox that animates *Fidget* throughout. *Traffic* similarly “freezes” the speech flow of the radio anchors, creating, in the final analysis, a long minimalist poem, whose Oulipo constraints, visualization of repeated proper names, and mutating signs create textual “bridges and tunnels” that challenge our reading habits.

Indeed, a reading of the *New York Trilogy* takes us back to Benjamin’s *Passagenwerk*, the site of those intricately appropriated and defamiliarized texts that reimagine the ethos of the Second Empire from the vantage point of a soon-to-be Nazi-occupied Paris of the 1930s. Who knows how the “holiday weekend” circulation system, detailed so exhaustively (and yet so ambiguously) in *Traffic* will play itself out in the decades to come? Will Manhattan still be accessible by means of the same bridges and tunnels? Will city parking, alternate-side or otherwise, have been eliminated completely? Or will the streets empty out as digital communication replaces “real” transport? And how will poets conceptualize that unimaginable future?

Notes

¹ Hart Crane, "Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge," *The Bridge*, in *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose*, ed. Brom Weber (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 46.

² Kenneth Goldsmith, *Traffic* (Los Angeles: Make Now, 2007), 78 (§4.21). Digital reading edition on *Eclipse*: <http://english.utah.edu/eclipse/projects/TRAFFIC/Traffic.pdf/>, 51. Subsequently cited in the text as T.

³ <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2008/06/conceptual-poetics-kenneth-goldsmith/>

⁴ Kenneth Goldsmith, "Kenneth Goldsmith and Conceptual Poetics," Special Issue, *Open Letter: A Canadian Journal of Writing and Theory*, Twelfth Series, Number 7 (Fall 2005):98; see also http://www.ubu.com/papers/kg_ol_goldsmith.html/.

⁵ Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967), 79– 83, and widely reprinted: see <http://radicalart.info/concept/LeWitt/paragraphs.html/>. In "American Trilogist: An Interview with Kenneth Goldsmith," *Rain Taxi* (Fall 2008), Kareem Estefan refers to the "stealing" of LeWitt's paragraphs: <http://www.raintaxi.com/online/2008fall/goldsmith.shtml>, but most readers, including the editors of the special issue of *Open Letter* who published it (see note 4), seem unaware that it is not an "original."

⁶ Kenneth Goldsmith, *73 Poems*, with Joan Le Barbara (1994; New York: Permanent Press, 2000); for the "singings through," see Goldsmith's author page at PennSound, <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Goldsmith.html/>.

⁷ Kenneth Goldsmith, "Being Boring" (2004), delivered at Red Cat symposium, 2004; see http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/goldsmith_boring.html/

⁸ Ron Silliman, <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/> Feb. 27, 2006, http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/silliman_goldsmith.html.

⁹Kenneth Goldsmith, *Day* (Great Barrington: MA: The Figures, 2003); *Fidget* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2000); http://archives.chbooks.com/online_books/fidget/applet.html; *Soliloquy* (New York: Granary Books, 2001), <http://www.epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/soliloquy/days.html>.

On *Fidget*, see Perloff, "'Vocable Scriptsigns': Differential Poetics in Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget*," in *Poetry, Value, and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Andrew Roberts and John Allison (Edinburgh Press, 2002), 21-43; Rubén Gallo, "*Fidget's* Body," *Open Letter*, 50-57.

¹⁰Walter Benjamin, #H Konvolut 1-3. *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 203.

¹¹Marjorie Perloff, "A Conversation with Kenneth Goldsmith," *Jacket* 21 (February 2003), 2 April 2005, <http://jacketmagazine.com/21/perl-gold-iv.html>. The interview has been reprinted in *Sybilla*, <http://www.sibila.com.br/2/index.php/sibila-english/303/>.

¹²Goldsmith, *No. 111.2.7.93—10.20.96* (Great Barrington, MA: The Figures, 1997). "The Rocking Horse Winner" is reprinted on 588-606.

¹³See Molly Schwarzburg in "Encyclopedic Novelites: On Kenneth Goldsmith's Tomes," *Open Letter*, 30-31.

¹⁴An excellent recent study is Tom Vanderbilt's *Traffic: Why We Drive the Way We Do (And What It Says About Us)* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008)

¹⁵This designation was first given the trilogy by D. J. Huppertz, in an essay (August 2008) for his blog *Critical Cities* (<http://djhuppertz.blogspot.com/>); in revised form, it appears in *Critical Inquiry*, (2010);

¹⁶The parallel is drawn by Craig Dworkin on the back cover of the MakeNow edition. Dworkin also cites Guy Debord's "Positions Situationnistes Sur La Circulation" as a model to be parodied here.

¹⁷ F. T. Marinetti, "The New Ethical Religion of Speed" (1916), in *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 256.

¹⁸J. G. Ballard, "Introduction 1995," *Crash* (1983; London: Harper Perennial, 2008), unpaginated.

¹⁹ On a witty assessment of metaphor in *Traffic*, see D. A. Huppertz, "Kenneth Goldsmith: the New York Trilogy," *Critical Cities*, <http://djhuppertz.blogspot.com/>.

²⁰See, for example, Cage, *Silence* (Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan, 1973), 93.

²¹On the back cover of *Traffic*, Craig Dworkin notes that *Traffic* "proves the last of Guy Debord's "Situationist Theses on Traffic," "Revolutionary urbanists will not limit their concern to the circulation of things, or to the circulation of human being trapped in a world of things. They will try to break these topological chains, paving the way with their experiments for a human journey through authentic life" (Dworkin's translation). This is a suggestive connection, but I would argue that *Traffic* submits these, like Godard's political notions, to a playful and disillusioned deconstruction.

²² <http://www.1010wins.com/pages/7792.php/>

²³ Sina Queyras, *Expressway* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2009), 43.

²⁴F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925; New York: Scribners, 1953), 182.

²⁵The richness of the link was first pointed out to me by Craig Dworkin, email, 12 July 2009. I am grateful to Dworkin to this and other special insights into *Traffic*.

²⁶Kenneth Goldsmith, Introduction, "Flarf and Conceptual Writing," *Poetry* (July/August 2009): 315-316. This talk was originally delivered at the Whitney Museum of American Art, April 17, 2009, on the occasion of a "debate" between Conceptualist and Flarfist poets. See <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/whitney-intro.html>. The term *Flarf*, invented by the poet Gary Sullivan to define a new aesthetic of the "inappropriate" in all its guises, has, as its stated method, "to mine the Internet with odd search terms and then distill the

results into often hilarious and sometimes disturbing poems, plays, and other texts” (Wikipedia).

²⁷Silliman’s Blog, <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com>, 7 July 2009, and cf. the dozens of comments, responding to Silliman’s strictures, made by other, mostly angry, bloggers. But for the opposite position, one close to my own, see K. Silem Mohammed on his blog *Lime Tree* (<http://lime-tree.blogspot.com/>), with reference to Craig Dworkin’s long conceptualist poem *Parse* (2008).

At nearly 300 pages, even the most diehard conceptualist might balk at the prospect of actually reading *Parse* front to back, and in fact Kenny Goldsmith has used it as an example of *conceptual texts that don't actually need to be read: the idea is enough*. As appealing as I find this notion in many ways, I don't ultimately find it fully adequate to an assessment of Dworkin's work (or Goldsmith's, for that matter). What I think books like this do is ask us to reconsider *what it means to read*, and to find ways of actualizing new reading practices. This might mean something as simple as flipping around here and there throughout the book rather than reading straight through. It might mean reading one or more sections in an intense state of attention, and generalizing outward from such readings to a larger engagement with the total work. It might mean submitting for extended periods of time to the monotony of the governing structure, so that when there is some kind of variation in the pattern, it takes on an added value of surprise. [my emphasis]

²⁸ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. from the French by Ron Padgett (New York: Viking, 1968), 48. 16, and *passim*.

²⁹On the Munich interlude, see *Thierry de Duve, Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan (1984; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 19-56.

³⁰The phrase is Jasper Johns's: see "Sketchbook Notes," in *Jasper Johns: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, Interviews*, ed. Kirk Varnedoe (New York: Museum of Modern Arts, distributed Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 54.

³¹ The split, extending from at least Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* (1960) to the present, is well documented by Cole Swensen in her Introduction, *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*, ed. Cole Swensen and David St. John (New York: Norton, 2008), xvii-xxi. For Silliman's terminology, see Silliman's Blog, *passim*.

³² On Craig Dworkin and Jan Baetens, see my "The Pleasures the Déjà Dit: Citation, Ekphrasis, and Constraint in Recent Experimental Poetries," in *The Consequences of Innovation: 21st Poetic*, ed. Craig Dworkin (New York: Roof Books, 2008), 255-82. This essay was reprinted in *Another Language: Poetic Experiments in Britain and North America*, ed. Kornelia Freitag and Katharine Veeter (Berlin: Lit Verlag 2009): 125-48. On Bergvall, see chapter 5 above and, together with Christian Bök, see my "The Oulipo Factor: The Procedural Poetics of Christian Bök and Caroline Bergvall," *Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 205-26.

³³ Ruben Gallo, "Fidget's Body," *Open Letter*, 50-51, 53.

³⁴ Goldsmith's technique in *Fidget* is anticipated by David Antin's *Talking at the Boundaries* (New York: New Directions, 1976) and many subsequent collections of "talk pieces"; like Goldsmith's, these transcribe his own speech, producing a written simulation of speech rhythms in a continuous non-punctuated lower-case prose that uses space between phrases to indicate pauses. But Goldsmith's strenuous minimalism creates an artifice that recalls the Beckett of *How It Is* rather than such Antin pieces as "Who's Listening Out There?". Antin, moreover, is not primarily an appropriative poet.