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REVIEWS & PRESS

Kenneth Goldsmith. *Soliloquy*. Granary Books, 2001.

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Workman, Michael. "Review of *Soliloquy*." *New Art Examiner* (May/June 2002).

New York artist Kenneth Goldsmith, editor of *UbuWeb Visual, Concrete + Sound Poetry* (ubu.com) and DJ on Freeform Radio WFMU, recorded every word he spoke in a single week, divided the results into seven 11 acts, and presented them as a text installation in 1997. Recently he published the work as *Soliloquy*. In its postscript Goldsmith writes that "If every word spoken in New York City daily were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, each day there would be a blizzard." Part of that blizzard is represented here as a lengthy, improvised stream of monologue, at times reading with all the disjunctive, undifferentiated force of a grand mal seizure.

Soliloquy is Goldsmith's follow-up to *Fidget*, a book in which, using a Dictaphone, he made a verbal record of every movement his body made on June 16, 1997. June 16 is also known by readers of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as "Bloomsday," after the main character of that novel. In *Soliloquy*, rather than registering the rake of fingernails across his scalp or the relaxing of facial muscles as he did in *Fidget*, Goldsmith offers a concisely framed experience of his use of spoken language. Half the pleasure in reading the text is often in attempting to pinpoint exactly to what Goldsmith is referring when his attention has momentarily been diverted from a topic. The "narrative" is unexpectedly displaced by his response to a waitress who has asked if he'd like more coffee or merely in response to his own internal, unrecorded stream of thought.

David Antin's poetry collection *Talking*, first published in 1972, figures prominently as a precursor to Goldsmith's efforts. *Talking* gave new life to avant-garde poetry with its unique sensitivity to the relationship between verbal and written language, a work profoundly concerned with techniques taken directly from Wittgensteinian theories of linguistic practice. In "Proposition 1. 19" of his *Philosophical Investigations* (a text that Antin has theorized is heavily influenced by the philosopher's commitment to improvisational techniques), Ludwig Wittgenstein stated, "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life." By equating meaning with word usage in specific contexts, Wittgenstein offered implications as to how sentences often seem to be endlessly and variably creative. In *Soliloquy*, Goldsmith appears to speculate as to the transmutative

potential of language by recording and offering a full week of such creative fabrications. Much like Antin's, Goldsmith's speculations ultimately incorporate a process-based social realism in his approach to devising meaning.

In *Soliloquy*, as with *Fidget*, Goldsmith is exploring an approach emblematic of both poetry and performance art as an approximation of a form of life. A key to each is found in *Soliloquy*'s treatment of time seven days, divided into "acts"—through which the reader is capable of moving at an indeterminate, highly individualized speed. With sustained reading a nearly meditative state occurs wherein the conversational use of language seems less relevant than the woof and warp of language itself, as in this typical passage: "Grrr!!, guard, gyre, ha, haah, hah, Hair, hair, hdr, hard, hare, harr, harre, haw, hawe, hear, beer, heere, heir, her, here, herr, hir, hire" and so on.

In this respect *Soliloquy* is also not unlike *Empire*, Andy Warhol's eight-hour film of a static shot of the Empire State Building, in which actual stillness is the subject depicted in a medium usually defined by its ability to show motion. In *Soliloquy*, a form of life is manifestly the subject of a medium defined by singularity of authorship. The result is that our awareness of the precise improvisational performance of those language acts is caricatured and accentuated. This is especially true when Goldsmith becomes self-conscious of participating in his project, as he does at the opening of Act 6: "Yeah, if you were if you were taping you'd have 5 times as many tapes as me. I have very few tapes from this week. No, it's much better than it was. It's way better. Yeah. I don't mind, you know, it's just an industrial noise right now it's just it used to sort of scream and whine and, you know, no, it's a lot better."

What emerges from the whole cloth of Goldsmith's conversations, musings, responses, and expressions is precisely an intentional omission of how he determines his language usage. As a finished work, *Soliloquy* generally makes for enjoyable reading, though at times threatening to get bogged down in, for example, the frustrating analysis of a software problem or the redundancy of Goldsmith's praise for the creative pursuits of innumerable friends. *Soliloquy* is most rewarding when it moves with the practiced, tactile quality that successfully imparts Goldsmith's insistent desire to articulate the fashionable sensibilities of an industrious New York life.

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http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/new_art_soliloquy.html

Strausbaugh, John. "How to Talk Nonstop." *New York Press* 7.

Granary Books has published a new, larger edition of our friend Kenneth Goldsmith's *Soliloquy* (489 pages), which originally appeared in an extremely limited edition in 1997. *Soliloquy* is every single word Goldsmith spoke during a week in April 1996. Before publishing it as a book, he plastered the text over every surface of a SOHO gallery in '97, to what he concedes was a "lukewarm reception."

It's not a book I'd read cover to cover, but I love to dip into it a page or two at a time. Like all of Kenny's projects (e.g., *Fidget*, which recorded every move his body made in a day), it comes off as either massively narcissistic or just a bad case of OCD, and its endearingly feckless babble reads

somewhere between Andy Warhol's "A" and one of Beckett's endless solipsisms. At times *Soliloquy* reminds you of the unconscious poetry of everyday speech—and often its banality and disjointedness. Here's an excerpt I hit at random:

Where's my animal. OK, I gotta run upstairs. Bets. What is she? Alright, I'll pick her up when I come get my computer. C'mon, pal. Let's go. I'll see you guys I'll see you guys in just a little bit. C'mon, Bet. C'mon, baby. Oh boy. Bets come. Good girl. Yes. Are you getting food? Uh, you are. Bets. Come Bets. Bets come. Oh boy oh boy. What a day. Hey. How you doing? Good to see you. Where's do you mind the dog do you want me to? Yes, it's Babette. Yeah, she's 7. How you doin'? Good. Where's Daniel? Brian. I kept thinking Daniel. I don't know why I just put my shoes on it's so nice out. Maybe we'll sit outside and get a coffee? Yeah. Where is he from? I see. Huh. That's good. Uh huh. I don't know her, no. Let's let's go outside I've got about a half hour and then I've got my my, uh, I've got all these. I just had lunch with my mother. Yeah, she's just in seeing Cheryl's show. What? Sure, I'm from Long Island. My whole 35 years, I guess 31 of them have been spent within 20 minutes of where we're standing right now. Yeah. Yeah, sure, we'll all get a fresh, a little fresh air. It's beautiful is it still warm out? Great. Great. Yeah. Anything to get out. Alright g'wan go ahead, g'wan. Go on, Bets. Babette go on. What are you waiting for? You waiting for your leash, OK. Here it is. Same old dog.

Original URL:

<http://www.nypress.com/14/45/news&columns/publishing.cfm>

Staff. "Review of *Soliloquy*." *Publishers Weekly*, (January 21, 2002).

Goldsmith, schooled as a sculptor, here continues his project of exposing language as a phenomenally excessive material extension of consciousness, culture and commerce. Language stands in the same relation to his work as, say, landscape does to the work of Robert Smithson or silence in the compositions of John Cage—a once-familiar "substance" made strange by its totalizing presence when foregrounded. But Goldsmith is also funny.

Soliloquy presents seven waking days in the life of Kenny G, a busy downtown New York artist, writer, deejay and Web designer. With Warholian zeal for quotidian routine, Goldsmith captures on tape every word he utters in the course of a week in 1996, presenting his side of conversations with cabbies, deli men, his wife, his dog, his conscience and strangers, as well as with recognizable figures such as literary critic Marjorie Perloff, with whom he has an alcohol-addled lunch at MoMA, and Language poetry granddaddy Bruce Andrews.

The book achieves a surprising groundedness over time, as the reader is forced to extrapolate from language snippets to a larger context—"Wait, there's another one coming" puts any New Yorker on a street corner looking for a cab, and the exercise is a model lesson in reading strategy.

Fortunately, Goldsmith is fun company, gossiping, riffing, worrying and doing business as an artist trying to make ends and means meet in New York. The downtown art-and-lit set will enjoy guessing the identity of the author's silenced interlocutors, whose words are not recorded. As in his earlier "text art" efforts (*Fidget* and *No. 111* 2.7.93- 10.20.96), Goldsmith shows how "cheap language is," due to its overabundance. But unlike his earlier work, *Soliloquy* leaves the reader with a convinced

sense that language, no matter how un-artful, does the heavy lifting in our lives, and has encoded the entire registry of our being.

Original URL:

http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/pw_soliloquy.html

Nufer, Doug. "Review of *Soliloquy*." *Rain Taxi* (Spring 2002).

Kenneth Goldsmith has a novel approach to poetry: He records chunks of experience and releases the transcriptions as books. The books resemble fiction, as his observations take prose form, but his focus on the bits and pieces of language (to the exclusion of fiction's standard preoccupation with plot, character, and theme) gets his work consigned to a peculiar dustbin of poetry. "No. 111 2.7.93-10.20.96" (*The Figures*, 1997) displays sounds and phrases he collected over the period noted in the title. *Fidget* (Coach House, 2000) is his tape-recorded notation of the moves his body made in a single day. And now, *Soliloquy* consists of every word he said in one week.

This book is less refined than his earlier transcriptions, in that the author doesn't mediate his observations as he does in *Fidget* or arrange phrases as he does in "No. 111". It's even less refined than a novel, the minimally edited (and somewhat designed) series of transcribed tape recordings produced by the Andy Warhol Factory in the 1960s. Yet *Soliloquy* is perhaps the purest example of Goldsmith's transcription methodology. It is a quintessentially unwritten book. Sentences veer all over the place, crashing into fragments as they're jammed one after another into long stretches that break only at the end of the day. Each day gets a chapter, called an "act." For almost 500 pages all you get is what Goldsmith says, in nonstop one-sided conversations with his wife, friends, pets, and everyone else he talks to, in person or on the phone, in a chatty vernacular that's mercifully devoid of overt self-conscious displays of wit and wisdom. He refers to his project once in a while, but a hidden microphone lacks the intrusive absurdity of the cinema verite camera as it monitors the stuff of everyday life. Now that anyone in terrorized America is subject to surveillance, *Soliloquy* might even cultivate sympathy for those poor bastards in the intelligence sector who must listen to every scrap of verbiage that comes over the wires and through the air.

So, in addition to being unwritten, is this book unreadable? Like Goldsmith's other books, *Soliloquy* defies anyone who would read it straight through while also inveigling the curious to pick it up and have a go. Skip around, zoom ahead, avoid the web site shop talk of his day job, cruise the prattle of the dog walks, savor literary gossip over lunch with Marjorie Perloff, and ogle the unspeakable practices of natural acts. Despite its fidelity to quotidian tedium, the book does manage to generate a kind of plot as you may wonder and the subjects finally discuss how they feel about more or less exhibiting their intimate moments. While the bulk of all of this is necessary for the book's sheer existence, it's not necessary to read the whole thing in order to appreciate it.

What is necessary? This is the question experimental work often poses, even if such inquiry exposes the work's weaknesses. Although Goldsmith's recorded experience is much different from that of Warhol's dopey superstars, *Soliloquy* takes a certain risk by replicating a technique that may well have been exhausted by a previous avant-garde. Then again, techniques that don't draw

attention to themselves or question the necessity of their existence stalk the literary earth with all of the clout of dinosaurs. Publish a novelized memoir and the slightest deviation from the standard issue of tropes may get you accused of originality. Publish an experimental work that is substantially unique but for one or two predecessors, and you're a copycat.

The value and fun of *Soliloquy* is that it raises such questions and refuses to explain them away by taking dead aim at the meaning of it all.

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<http://www.raintaxi.com/online/2002spring/goldsmith.shtml>

Bök, Christian. "A Silly Key: Some Notes on *Soliloquy* by Kenneth Goldsmith." *UbuWeb*.

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 candor, 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 meter. (2) When Williams demands that poetry must validate the concrete language of quotidian existence, he still subjects his banal idiom to the formal rigor 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?" (8) 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." (9)

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" (10)—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." (11) 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 labor, 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." (12) 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. (13) 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 patten 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" (14)—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." (15) 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. *Soliloquy*. New York: Granary Books, 2001. 86.
- (9) Kenneth Goldsmith. *Soliloquy*. New York: Granary Books, 2001. 86.
- (10) Kenneth Goldsmith. *Soliloquy*. New York: Granary Books, 2001. 15.
- (11) Kenneth Goldsmith. "Kenneth Goldsmith and As Bessa: 6799." *Zingmagazine* 11 (1999). <http://www.zingmagazine.com/zing11/bessa/index.html>.
- (12) Kenneth Goldsmith. *Soliloquy*. New York: Granary Books, 2001. 82.
- (13) Kenneth Goldsmith. "Being Boring." <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~wh/boring.html>.
- (14) Kenneth Goldsmith. *Soliloquy*. New York: Granary Books, 2001. 175.
- (15) Kenneth Goldsmith. *Soliloquy*. New York: Granary Books, 2001. 209.

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http://www.ubu.com/papers/kg_ol_bok.html

Tapper, Gordon. "Kenneth Goldsmith's *Soliloquy*." *Zingmagazine* (1997).

The idea behind Kenneth Goldsmith's latest installation of "text art" is disarmingly straightforward: record everything spoken by the artist over the course of a week and cover a gallery's walls with the transcription, preserving every syntactic glitch, every conversational cul-de-sac and "um." Confronted with the clutter of "real" speech (not to mention its content, which might prove even

more embarrassing than its stammers and mumbles), we realize that we all sound a bit like George Bush. This originating concept may be simple, but the end result is a complex provocation on language and visibility, documentary, autobiography, and the elusive relation between an individual's speech and the linguistic patterns of a particular social milieu. It is also an enormously entertaining piece of writing, inhabited by the crackling, shameless, free-wheeling voice of Kenny Goldsmith, at once the "real" person who is a downtown Manhattan artist, webpage master, and DJ, and the persona created by the written word. What is striking is that Goldsmith has generated an absorbing piece of prose with no apparent "literary" effort. He has not labored over subordinate clauses or tropes; he has simply spoken the words he always speaks in the course of living. Every writer's guilty fantasy may be to write as effortlessly as one speaks, but few have thechutzpah to actually expose themselves in such an unedited state of undress.

The installation at Bravin Post Lee Gallery, entitled *Soliloquy* ("No. 116 4.15.96- 4.21.96"), was pared down as much as possible to nothing but the text. Using a laser printer, Goldsmith displayed his week of talk on 341 sheets of ordinary white paper that exactly filled the entire wall-space of the gallery. It wasn't quite possible to read the text from beginning to end (even if one had the stamina), since it began just out of eyeshot near the ceiling in the upper left corner of a wall before snaking across and down like any other piece of English prose. But there were no quirky fonts, no fine rag paper, no inventive impediments to distract the viewer from the words themselves.

Visually, the installation was a model of self-effacement. It would be a mistake, however, to see this "anti-aesthetic" as signaling the unimportance of visibility. Goldsmith could have generated an equally comprehensive snapshot of the language and the cultural moment it embodies with a sound installation, filling our ears with his week-long *Soliloquy*. The translation from speech into writing was, evidently, pivotal, since it thereby produced something to see. Like the practitioners of concrete poetry, Goldsmith wants us to look at language so as to confront it as abstract visual images that represent utterance. He also wants us to see that language occupies space, and lots of it. Listening to a recorded voice might impress us with its loquaciousness, but we would miss the impression of abundance available in a single glance as we take in the textual landscape. By gathering such a large quantity of language, Goldsmith launches a rather polemical riposte to the commonplace assumption that Postmodern culture is primarily visual. Goldsmith's world of words is so saturated by language that there isn't room for anything else.

Goldsmith's other text pieces are also based on language-gathering systems. His most recent work, "No. 111 2.7.93- 10.20.96" (*The Figures*, 1997), is a 606-page tome, some of which appeared in "No. 109 2.7.93- 12.15.93", a 1994 installation at Bravin Post Lee. "No. 111" gathers words and phrases ending in variations on the "r" sound, such as "ah," "ur," and "ear." These units are organized by syllable count and alphabetical order into chapters that range from strings of monosyllables ("A, a, aar, aas"), to disjunctive phrasal sequences ("I Love You Just The Way You Are, I masturbate in the shower"), and finally to massive acts of appropriation-by-downloading, as in the final chapter, which consists of the entire contents of D. H. Lawrence's story "The Rocking Horse Winner." I have by no means done justice to the immense variety and playfulness of "No. 111," but I raise it here principally so as to contrast it with *Soliloquy*.

Both projects involve totalizing gestures that celebrate our culture's *mélange* of rhetorical styles, while simultaneously suggesting that we are drowning beneath their wordy tide. Both document this linguistic proliferation, but in *Soliloquy* the artist who collects is also a hyperactive talker. "No. 111" consists almost entirely of language appropriated from other sources. *Soliloquy*, however, includes only Goldsmith's voice, and thus seems wholly occupied with subjectivity. At one point, Goldsmith recounts his conversation about "No. 111" with the literary critic Marjorie Perloff, drawing attention to precisely this contrast between the "I" in *Soliloquy* and "No. 111":

we're talking about like really dreadful confessional work and she's like well, you wouldn't write anything confessional, would you? I said, well, absolutely not, really. But then I started to think, like some of the longer pieces are a little bit confessional but they're mostly appropriated; the I is not me... [my ellipses] Yeah I got a little, you know, like I have to I'm going to have to give her a little disclaimer before I give her the thing ["No. 111"] that there's very little of the I in there. I'm interested in a subjectivity that's not my own. I'm interested in a confession that has nothing to do with my life. You know, like taking shit from the net.

In *Soliloquy*, the "I" is me—er, I mean, Goldsmith. The piece is also very much a "confession," in the sense that it lays bare everything that occurs in both the public and private life of the artist. Soliloquies are, by convention, speeches delivered to the audience under the guise of being spoken to no one but oneself. Goldsmith's inverted *Soliloquy* is in fact dialogue exchanged with others masquerading as a speech delivered to the audience. By removing the words of his interlocutors, Goldsmith has generated the illusion of a single voice with the feel of stream of consciousness. Yet because *Soliloquy* never deviates from external speech to inner thoughts, much less to the unconscious, it accomplishes the curious feat of exposing but not excavating the self. Goldsmith seems to be suggesting that the unconscious is either irrelevant, nonexistent, or, perhaps, something of which we simply cannot speak.

Soliloquy is often amusingly self-reflexive: "I mean what what would your language look like if it was if you collected every piece of shit word you that you said for an entire week." The artist even tells us how to read his work: "It's not meant to be read linearly—none of my work is." Our narrator, however, is not entirely trustworthy. This comment, for instance, doesn't seem applicable to the very work in which it appears, especially in its incarnation as a 281-page book (Editions Bravin Post Lee, 1997). Viewed in the gallery, the text seems to be an undifferentiated block of language, lacking paragraphs and justified on both the left and right margins. Reading the book, we realize that the installation's mass of words is in fact divided into seven "acts" corresponding to the seven days (April 15- 21, 1996, as specified in the subtitle) during which the *Soliloquy* was recorded. Beginning with Monday morning and ending with Sunday evening, the text is organized around the diurnal rhythms of everyday life: waking ("Just do you want to sleep? Huh? No? It's early. I have to work at nine"); eating breakfast ("Listen, do you want do you want a your toast is ready."); walking the dog ("Make Bets, you make, you make. Make. Make. Good girl!"); going out for dinner ("Wow, it's crowded in here tonight, isn't it?"); and sex later in the evening ("Isn't that a good one? Was that sensuous? Mmmm."). Because readers are more likely than gallery-visitors to linger over large chunks of writing, the sequential flow of this personal narrative comes across more forcefully in book format. By choosing to cast *Soliloquy* as both installation and book, Goldsmith is drawing

attention to the fact that reading and looking are not equivalent activities.

Soliloquy is filled with inconsequential chatter ("Yeah, why don't we why don't we walk down there and have a look? See you next week, babe. Are you guys walking this way?"), but its ubiquitous gossip often makes irresistible reading, especially if we are familiar with the people whom Goldsmith is talking about. In this sense, the work is a kind of roman à clef to which no clef is needed. In addition to the chitchat in which everyone engages ("Well, who's she with now? Now John's with that John's with that ridiculous."), we find a great deal of material on the inner workings of the culture industry. At one point Goldsmith catches himself in the act of advancing his own career, as he eagerly anticipates meeting the "deeply powerful" Marjorie Perloff:

Um, well, I actually have a great meeting, um, I'm having lunch with, uh, one of the most powerful literary critics you know in the in academia in the country. It's her, Marjorie Perloff and, uh, I'm meeting her actually at the MOMA Members Dining Room for lunch today. And she's deeply powerful and I'm going to get her, I hope, to write a blurb for the back of my book and promote it

. Not surprisingly, Perloff comes up quite frequently, and the dance between critic and artist is by turns amusing and disturbing. On the one hand, Goldsmith (or, perhaps, "Goldsmith") gushes that Perloff is a "goddess" and his "literary idol." On the other hand, he brags about how skillfully he manipulates her:

I just sat there I started slinging shit the minute I saw her I could read her like a book. I had her, you know I am sorry to say, I had her on the tip of my finger. Really. I just, you know, I really. I was twirling her on the end. I knew how to play her. Completely. Completely, you know?

Gossip promotes social cohesion. It may even be linked to the origins of language, as Robin Dunbar argues in his provocative new book, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. It can also get pretty ugly. Part of Goldsmith's point is to "make everybody realize how much garbage they speak." *Soliloquy* also ends up exposing Goldsmith to himself, and as he told me in conversation, that kind of self-examination is not always a pleasant experience.

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<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/tapper.html>