

Balderdash: A Lecture from Kenneth Goldsmith

ryan conn

Thursday October 1<sup>st</sup> 2009

1 o'clock

Second Floor RISD Design Center

Room 205

note: all language in brackets come from audience members or abstract noises – the words or sounds are never spoken or made by Kenneth Goldsmith, albeit some brackets fall into Goldsmith's lecture.

## Introduction by Unimportant Grad Student

**Kenneth Goldsmith!**

Applause

**Kenneth Goldsmith:** How do I do the slide thing?

Pause

[Soda Snaps]

**KG:** OK. It's OK. They may be back. Some of them may be backwards. How do I – What do we do?

Pause

**KG:** OK, sorry. Uh - I'm gonna do something I DON'T EVER DO which is show - show you slides. Uh - I haven't don't this in - i don't know, 15-20 years. Um, [Cell Phone Text] but - um - we're gonna make sure it works.

Short Pause

**KG:** Um, I – I wanted – I – When I come to you this could be sort of – uh – intimate and it's not particular intimate in this classroom but – uh – it could be because I graduated RISD 25 years ago. Um – in 1984 with a BFA in Sculpture.

Um – and i kinda wanted to just talk, this is something I really, I really never do but this, seeing that it's like 25 years and, and, - uh – oh yeah, yeah, that's me. [Quiet Girl Laughter] Back, that's at Woods Gerry. Uh – in 1981.

**Ellen Driscoll** (Department Head): Okay, we've gotta kill the – um – projectors. [Yeah]

**KG:** Uh – let me give my intro and then I'll, then we can go [Laughter] break these things. Uh – SO you know, I wanted to sorta say like, like what happens to somebody when [wydot?] m-make many of you are grad students. Uh – but what happens to somebody when they get out of RISD and what hap- what happens over the next 25 years. And I, I don't k-know if I'm typical, but I know that in my – uh – [Audience Member Responding] I know that [Laughter] in my – um – graduating class – um - in 1984 of sculpture uh-undergrad I'm the only one whose still is out there doing anything related to art, and my wife who I met at RISD as an undergrad - uh – we met our junior year and we're still together, she's the only person from painting from 1984 that is still doing anything in the art world. Um – So I mean, you know, and yeah, we were not considered good, yah know, we were like, yah know there were like these – ah - kids that could paint the ass off of everyone else and they were, I mean, yah know the kids in school that were the most talented where the ones that went absolutely no where. The ones who thought were really going to storm New York and were going to take it, absolutely went nowhere. Uh – uh – I don't even know where they are today. Sometime Cheryl and I speak to each other: what ever happened to Andrew Hunt? He was the – the best painter - Steven Corbious[?] – these were the best painters of RISD in 1984 - they're the competitive stars and they all vanished. So it's not always, you know, like nobody ever would have entered it could – my wife has been in a show [about-again?]. She's a video artist and painted. She's been biennales. She's been – she's been in the Venice Biennale. She's been in the Whitney Biennial. She's been in – in the Guggenheim Museum. She's been in the Met - blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Y'Know, NOBODY putting their money would ever have bet that Cheryl was going to be the one in that class that was actually going to go out and do anything. So, y'know, you never know like, ya know, [gn?] you really never know when contingent upon so many things [Bubble Gum Pop] and I'm not – uh – a visual artist anymore. I came out of school thinking that, you know, I would conquer the art world and, you know, for a while I did. And then things changed. I'm [Audience Member Snicker] y – y I'm a writer now I – I live in the world of writing, but ya know, you don't know, you just don't know what's gonna happen. You can [ss] use me as a guinea pig and you can sorta see some of the – uh – some of the changes that I

went through. It's really, I honestly it's embarrassing for me but it's important for you to see, okay.

**Ellen Driscoll:** Kenny, you want the slights off.

**KG:** Sure, you probably want to see how beautiful I was. [Ha] 30 years ago.

Pause

**KG:** Actually, I wasn't that beautiful, y-see. [Laughter]  
And I've had [much ?????? ?????].

Very Short Pause

Okay, so that was like um – uh – I-I came here. I did one year undergraduate at NYU, didn't know what I wanted to do. Did i want to be a social worker? Then realized, I took a drawing class, it changed my life, and I said oh I really wanna, I really wanna be an artist. Um – so I went to Parsons a year in undergraduate. Uh – I did freshman foundation at Parsons, and then I followed a professor in ceramics. Uh – cuz I just happened to be hanging out in the ceramics room for some bizarre reason and up to RISD in the summer of 1980, or – yeah – it was summer of 80-81 I don't remember. And, and I ended up saying here. I was from New York. I'm from New York. With my 48 years on the planet, I've lived 44 in New York..

*Enters Mairead Byrne*

**KG:** Mairead, come in! It's so good to see you.

**Mairead Byrne:** [??? ?????? ??????!]

All Laughs

**KG:** Yeah. and YOU NEVER get to see this! You know -- This is Mairead Byrne. And, she's had me ah – up-t – up up here a lot. She teaches in poetry. And – uh – Mairead you've never seen ant of my old visual arts!

**MB:** Oh, good.

**KG:** I think you should have a real laugh. No-

**MB:** Please, let me sit down here.

**KG:** Nobodies ever seen this.

[Hahahm]

**KG:** Um

Short Pause [Drink?]

**KG:** And so yeah, followed a professor up here and I ended up in ceramics. And like, they took me, didn't have to apply, it's just like, they, y'know. It's who you know. So they got me in. [Hahahm] So this is like, maybe right when I first arrived. I was building these – um – little pieces of clay. And I build em, nd build em, nd build em, and build them until, you know, things would start to fall apart and then I, if I could possible get the thing in the kiln. I'd throw it into the kiln, and, and light it on fire. And, and this was like the kind of stuff I was doing. But, the weird thing is that like 30, nearly 30 years ago. This is kinda what I'm doing now with language. So its, you see, the whole thread through the thing.

Very Very Short Pause

**KG:** And how do I? This thing, this – what do I do to make this thing

**KG & Ellen Driscoll & Mairead?:** [PaKin???

**Who?:** [Pakin????]

**Erica, Etc:** [TEHEHA]

**Dean “The Original Dude” Snyder:** Try, try one of the others.

Pft! haHmm?

**Dean:** There's, there's two there, k.

**KG:** Yeah, pushing them both.

**Dean:** Nothing.

[??? ???? ????]

**Dean:** Turn over.

**KG:** I can say NEXT, if somebody wants to run it.

[Right]

[Erica: haha]

**Ellen Driscoll:** So how bout the one on the..?

[Erica: haha]

**KG:** Dean [laughing] Dean told me that, that there's a place that converts slides. Oh, ok. Here we are.

[Hahaha!]

**Ellen Driscoll:** Yes.

**Dean:** You Rockin'?

**KG:** Right, right. Okay. so this is like a detail of it and this like-like-like the slip and lots of. You know, lots of – uh – little bits behind held together. Um – can we focus? Do I have a focus this on this? [haha]

[Haha]

**KG:** This is – ah – my senior thesis show at-at-at – uh – Woods Gerry. Uh – this is 1984 when I was in sculpture this was my senior thesis show in sculpture. By the way, I'm ah the only person I know that doesn't have a graduate degree. Um – when I – When I was going to school wanting to be an artist the only people that got MFAs were people that wanted to teach and if you taught you were a loser.

[Hahaha]

**KG:** You were never; you were never going to make it as an artist. So, - um – I – I uh – I never bothered and I just went to New York and wanted to be – wanted to be an artist. My wife wanted to teach n she got an MFA, but now

it's so different everybody – ya know – everybody coming out has MFAs, but I'm the only person I know that that doesn't have an MFA. I just have a – I LOVE it because – y'know – I teach at – I teach an IVY league university, and now and I just love saying to my colleagues – you know – who are just PhDs up the ass – I love saying O yeah, I have a BFA in Sculpture.

[Laughter]

**KG:** In the English Department they just don't know what to do with that.

[More Laughing]

**KG:** So, these are lots n lots of cast pieces – like – uh – I think I got the – uh – um, uh – the uh – classical cast from Brown from some library up there, and just took – ya know – again I was just making piles of things. I didn't, you know. Kinda thinking of Mythology kinda thinking about classical sculpture – I – ya know – not thinking about – you know – I was just doing. Doing, doing, doing. And that, that was RISD at that day and that day was like – ya never thought about what you did. To think would be to spoil the kind of impulse – you know – the creative impulse. And – ya know – it's just there was no theory at RISD at the time and no – you could – there was – no – NOTHING was offered like that. It was all – I was here, like – like post Talking Heads, so it was kinda like – let – it was really fun. [ha] I remember having a lot fun, smoking a lot of dope, dealing cocaine [ha ha hahaha] and – uh – making things like mad, snorting coke and staying up all night in the studio doing [haha] crazy things and making huge piles of them and dancing at uh place that used to be called The Tap Room that's no longer here. The RISD Tap Room. This is like a detail of that

[Erica: It's still here]

**KG:** I really, I uh have no idea what this is about. Um – it was about Alchemy maybe. I don't know.. And then, just these massive kinda – uh – you know, drug [addled?] piles of just compulsive making of things and just – you know – do they still have that ah-imagine library here the uh.

**All:** Ya, yes.

**KG:** The image library was that amazing. I'd just go in there – and I'd ta – and I'd find like pictures of uh Phrenology and Mythology and these are guns and I dunno they have teeth and Holocaust and numbers and rational and all sorts of

crap and just throw it all together and put it in a room and walk away. [haha] OR I could take the u-units and put them discretely into piles... Y'know, again, you weren't supposed to really say what it was about. You would use things – y'know – all this was just – y'know – you're supposed to just kinda FEEL it – y'know – it was supposed to be meaningful. It was supposed to be archetypal. It was so Jung-y and everything was Jung back then. It was all Jung, Jung, Jung. And so, you had to, you had to do collective unconscious and universal symbols and-and-and all this kind of stuff. Um – this was like kind of a piece that I did when I graduated from RISD. I stayed a year in Providence after. I worked at – um - a restaurant that's still here. I can't believe it. Called 3 Steeple Street. And – um – my whole career at RISD I worked there to get myself through school and also dealt coke [ha] um – through – behind they counter. They have a counter – I was a short order cook and I was mostly dealing coke to the um – ah – waiters and waitresses and COPS. All the off duty cops blowing coke.

[Hahahah]

**KG:** I went to – I went to summer camp with a girl whose brother was the biggest coke dealer in Providence. And it was GREAT. I made this great money, the problem was, of course, I was – did all the profits. And then the real h-worst thing was that – um – I had people then – I would – then after work at 3 Steeple Street at like 11 or 12 at night after I clean the kitchen I'd come back to Metcalf and I'd start working and suddenly these – um – coke heads would start showing up at my studio. Like, hey man we'd – you know – want something or I'd go home and the phone would start ringing and which point I realized that I didn't want THAT element to pollute my – uh – pure art practice here. So, I stopped dealing coke. This was also – you know – this was also post RISD. I didn't have – I was still sort of using clay but I didn't bother – O you know – I want to talk – This thing was so beautiful. These were casts of – um – of rocks, and, and branches and stuff. And I would make these things and they were cast out of wax and I would just leave them around – I'm sorry I don't have a better picture of them – and the sun would come and they'd melt and they'd slowly melt and they'd slowly melt and they'd end up like these fabulous like Guston – Guston was the other one that – I dunno – does anyone still care about Philip Guston at RISD? He was the GOD – if you could make things that were kind of Gustonian it was really the – it was really the – uh - the thing to do – you know – like a lot of these forms – you know. You know those Guston piles of-of – you know – like cu-crosses and sticks and clansmen and all that kind of stuff was really the thing to do. Um – and so these were like-like num-they had numbers stamped into them and I didn't



have a kiln so they were just regular clay and they'd just kind of hang out on the floor and get wet and dissolve. So then I came to New York – um - in 1985. Um - my wife and I moved to New York and it was the the – uh - tail end of the East Village scene. Was sorta – just – um – on its last leg so I missed that whole thing because I was in New York. I left New York in '80 to come to RISD – um – and by the time I got back real estate had gone absolutely made and the art world had really blown up and – um – and the – uh – um – um – you know the East Village gallery scene was just kinda bubbling and we missed it completely. So, I had this cn- this loft on Canal Street and I continued to kind of do my work. And this was – I was living in China Town – um – and Canal Street and I was just grabbing casts from China Town; pop things they were selling on the street. All of this and the iconography begins to ship toward popular culture and t-around my environment and this was like another thing that I did – you know – this kind of uh – you know, again I'm not so sure if they were really about much and it began to not make sense to do this in New York. This is like '85. Um – and just looking at the beautiful temples and stuff that were around China Town. Um – but it was impossible and what do you do with this in New York – ya know – what do you do with this? So, what you do with it is you take it apart – and this is what New York does – like, this is like – student - and this is like – Okay, I'm in New York. Right? [Laughter] It's like you take that whole mess and this is that-that-that big element that brown dome at the top is this element and you straighten it up into something that bolts together, is stacked up, is neat, and shipped out the door to a gallery. And the New York – you know – the work – I don't know if I'd stayed in Providence I'd probably still be making you know, like big piles of things, but the thing is y-you think O – you know – all these kind of like deep eternal changes happen. It's – you know – they do, but what really happens is that your environment puts a certain type of pressure on you. And suddenly there's this uh idea to professionalize. And I wanted to be – you know – a gallery artist in New York and I wasn't gonna do it with piles so I started making these sculptures. Um – oh it's uh backwards. See. Some of these are going to be backwards, but – um – and then I took – there's a book form in here – and then I took this book form, right? And this is – this used to be this weird religious cart that they used t – that they used to –um – distribute. And – um – I made these enormous singular objects that were books. Um – and this is now in about '88. [Soda Snaps] And they're made out of wood. Oh-ho I'm so sorry this is backwards – O I hope they're not all backwards. Anyway, this is - this is the uh-cover from the original Abby Hoffman's Steal This Book. And I wanted to make an object that – in the studio – that – uh – was so big that is couldn't be stolen – um – it couldn't fit out the door so you p-pr really couldn't steal the book and then I did another one – O there're all backwards, sorry.

**Dean, The Dude:** I-I'll get it Kenny.

**Ellen Driscoll:** Dean's going to save the day.

**Kenny G:** No- Oh what can you do?

**Ellen Driscoll:** Turn them around.

[Erica: haha]

**KG:** Oh No!

[Laughter]

[Dean: cough, cough]

**KG:** Dean are they right?! Are you gonna make them right?

**Ellen Driscoll:** He is.

[ha]

Pause

**KG:** No?

Pause

[heh]

**KG:** Okay, great. mmm – because I – make sure – Hey Dean! He can't hear me. [Short Pause] All this stuff becomes language so it's important that they're right. I think they may be right. Maybe I got just a bad run here. Okay?

**Dean:** All right.

**KG:** So, this is a great thing. Thing is a really little book. This is a-a book the size of a book cast out of solid lead. You couldn't lift it. Um – it was like 300 pounds. And – um – and Abby Hoffman – um – at the time – um – had been – had been – um – living in New York and he was – um – doing like the

yippie-yuppie tour with Jerry Rubin. And, his collective writings were coming out from a press called Four Walls Eight Windows and they had caught wind that I had done this piece, and there was going to be this party at this loft around this enormous [??????] book and I have this like great visit on me and Abby kind of hugging each other in front of this book, and-and and then he killed himself. So, it never – it never came off. And it's all about the failure of revolution – uh, uh – obviously revolution had never really got off the ground. Um – you know – the-mm. Um – this was another *REALLY* enormous book and I – this is almost close to the actual size of it. And then, when you zoom in, O it's backwards! O no! This is – I'm so out of practice with this – So, I'm taking the empty area and this was like during the rise of the uh-uh uh Christian Right uh in-in America. The Jerry Falwells', Reagan, uh – AIDS and everything kinda begins to get very – um – um – social and politically orientated and though somewhat obliquely – um – at this, during this period. It's just a little silk screen of – of a – of a thing that I've had. You c- really not read it, but it was a big beautiful white book. Uh – there's ba-there're- y'know – can you just change – I'm sorry guys – um – this is – this is – embarrassing. Dean I think we better just switch them all. I think I screwed up. [Pause] So this was my – this was um – works of my first show in New York which was – um – uh 1988 and they were serial books. They were dealing with advertising and they were d-dealing with display. This – uh – dealing with self help, dealing with religion, dealing with hypocrisy, and-and politics and – you know – all sorts of t - things like that. This was – um – uh – from a-a book by a guy named L. Ron Hubbard called Dianetics. That was in the day like the big – the big kind of rip off self help book. And I – by sstripping uh away – and o – I – I – I also didn't do this – uh – ina dur? – in the late '80s artist then stopped making their own work. So, I made the forms, cuz I could, then I hired a SVA student to paint the covers. That's – there, there - actually some of them are very funny. Yeah, there's the plain truths. Like – you know – and also, this was like also uh the uh '80s and things had to be slick and very – really packaged and really marketed. And this thing's huge. I mean, this thing was really probably up to – you know – the big books – kind of – they were on shelves and they came up to here and they - - looked like television sets and they were really – you know – they were kind of evil and - uh - and slick. And that's all wood. There're gone. I don't know what happened to them. But there're very beautiful, aren't they?

[Hehe]

**KG:** This was a guy named – uh – Doctor Wayne Dyer. And if you see here – it says happy down here. And I had this SVA student named - named Beverley

[Defonso?] came in and painted these for me. She kept having nervous break downs because the image was freaking her out and she'd – she'd sit there with an air brush and have these panic attacks and anxiety attacks [hahaha] looking at this guy. It was awful [hah]. Oh, this is – this, there's this another book. I made a whole series of work then with these books and you can't really see it here, but it's a – it's a – this thing was-was – you know – a little bit bigger than- than [cough] [????? ??? ????]. It's really large. And these are the Dianetics books and it was one layer of books and then I screwed – um – into another one I put the word help. H – I think we can't even see it [mmm] E – L – P – in there made out of [books?]. And it was great cuz I had to go up there to the Dianetics center – um – you know – they're really cult – they're terribly cult-y. And I said, Oh I really love this. I wanna – I said, I want to start a reading group [mm] – you know – with my friends and I gave them fake addresses so they would sell me the books for real cheap [haha] and they were very compelled -

**Dean:** Hahahah

**KG:** but I did it and I was making artwork [????? ???]. Um – so then – um – around – you know again – the late '80s – um – the work began to respond to AIDS – um, which – and AIDS, and AIDS activism and I began using just this book as sort of a vehicle to express – uh – s- political and social stuff and this – this was just from a library card catalogue. I think there were two of these. OH, and this was so incredible those death – you know – these are just dead, dead of a [minor?] character, then the perfect mother, [simple giant?], death of a [?????] animal, death of an honorable member, death of [me yet?]. They're just titles of books and I would crave into the – um – wood. And so, at this time I got the weirdest studio visit from – um – the – uh – brother of Steve Rubell who started Studio 54 but had just died around this time and he had caught wind that I was doing these sculptures and wanted me to – um – commission me to do a sculpture for Steve Rubell's grave. Right? Which I thought was going to be – ya know – kind of a glamorous – uh – kind of a glamorous thing to do. And, and – ah – just for some reason, I can't remember why, I didn't get the commission. But I really, really enjoyed that, yeah. So, these are lousy slides. I'm sorry. [Pause] Um, and then what I began to do, and this – this was like-like-like – uh – uhh – I began – this is my life expectancy. I used actuarial charts. And then this – then I began – like – taking the paint away from the book, craving into the book, making these absolutely gorgeous objects. Oh, I was working at the time as a carpenter. So, I got all these skills, right? I mean – you know – artists come to New York – in those days, guys were carpenters and girls were waitresses. And my wife, to

this day, she says [cough] she never made as much money as she did when she waitressed in New York. Um, so I was a carpenter during the day and then I um – and then I – uh – do this kind of – uh – very fine woodworking at night. And these. When you think of like when I came to New York doing all these piles and this is like kinda the-the beginning of like when I had a career because I could actually make something that was absolutely gorgeous, meaningful, and sellable, right? I was [????] in New York. So, this is my studio in maybe '89 – um – these are books that were-were in process about to be carved. This was a – um – I wish, uh – this is the actuary of what this, a boxer puppy. Would live for 13 years. [ha] And I can't remember what that big white one says but it was really, really good.

[Hahaha]

**KG:** I cannot – I cannot remember it. And then I'll talk about this one in a minute. But this is suddenly when the studio becomes very sculptural, it becomes very – um – you know – and I make these discreet objects and this was um – a – a-a-a-a light – um – oh, that's what it was. It was a red light and it blinked and you know, so the history repeating itself. I began to work with puns. Right? So, this was just something that hung on the wall. I mean, stupid puns. This was another one, the blinding truth. You know, just really really dumb puns, but they were really gorgeous. And I sold everything. I got to quit my day job – um – as a cabinet maker and – and um – at the end making a good living being an artist in New York in the early '90s. Um, I wanted to move over to something else and these are paddles of actuarial – actuarials on them again. Uhh, this was based on Caucasian life expectancy and this was African-American life expectancy. Um, and I think there is probably one for each decade starting with the- with the oldest person to the youngest – to the – to the youngest person according to the lengths. And so, again, you know, you're thinking this is like – the like – wild AIDS time. Everybody is thinking about mortality. Everybody is out in the streets marching. Everybody – you know – thinking about these things. I want to make these paddles that actually had the date in it, but if you tried to use them were – they - they didn't function at all. Um, and I began doing shows of these. This was in L.A. – um – in maybe '90 – '91 or something. Mm, and I did one paddle for every person, for every person living. For every birth year – living. Um, and so you start like with the smallest ones here for the white and the black. This w- this is from like 1890-something to 1991. Yes, this is the year I did it. With the death expectancy there and as they go through they get higher and higher. It's like half the gallery was white and half the gallery was black. And I would only sell this one as a set. [Pause] And they-they – you know – they were really – they

were really very beautiful things. I carved all – everything I-I – at this point I was- I had a good enough career that I had studio assistants. Uh - People would help me carved them, sand them, finish them, and ship them. And the other thing that I was doing at this point was – um – it was so successful that you could have uh- several shows of these around the world. So I had this like – factory exist from almost uh – having – you know – shows in-in France and uh, England, Chicago, San Francisco, L.A., New York, all sort of at the same time. These sets would go out in two different colors. So it became like this massive, kind of, - uh – this is uh-uh a piece – I don't remember if it was New York or whether it was San Francisco. Uh – but these are all ist – I. S. T. So: plagiarist, illusionist, [mythasist?], moralist, actionist, etc, etc. And people could buy these. They could define themselves and actually hang a paddle of what they defined themselves and they could put a set together. I was calling them identity pieces. So, you could kind of stitch together an identity of-of these things and have a series on the wall and [who?] paddles of things that didn't work: cruelist, anarchist, satirist, [allurist?], satanist, sophist, pacifist, [soul assistant?], phenomenologist. [Short Pause] And now this is like – this was also an ENORMOUSLY important piece for me. Um – it was based on Harold Bloom's book called The Anxiety – The Anxiety of Influence – which was really [????] really raging then. Um – and what I did was I-I took – um – a rhyming dictionary and I found all the rhymes for influence so it became: The Anxiety of Impedance; The Anxiety of Innocents; The Anxiety of Infrequency; The Anxiety of Importance and so forth. And suddenly, the work began really changing into a textural engagement. No longer was it just ONE word, but now I began to construct things that was made of like rhythms and sounds and um – um – you know – and the next pieces that I did – um – was a show – um – at White Columns – again the early '90s I can't remember when called The Influence of Anxie- uh – THE Influence of Anxiety: A [Flip Parallel Perumal?] And so one side had a definition that was all carved into this beautiful piece oak – um of anxiety and the other um-side was influence, and if you look at them the right way, they um cancel each other out. Anxiety and Influence would – you know – you can see you can see through it. You wouldn't be able to tell – um – were. And this was like – the was the – um – th-the show White Columns – of these things – and there was all these little books. And they were all like these really – um – they-they were all about judgment. If this books argument was correct, then the covert subject for most poetry of the last three centuries has been The Anxiety of Influence – each poets fear that no proper work remains for him to perform the [????] to create a certain death. A certain death. There goes the dead back in, and this was like a-a quote right from Bloom. And it begins to talk about poetry too. So, I find myself suddenly like in this world of words even though I've been working with books all this time.

I was working with books as a container. Um – and then there were just these systems evaluation one the backs of each ones. This was from a Friday news paper of a – of a – you know – [??????] neighbor something like that. And then – that would be the front side of it. The front side would be the four stars with the quotes around it and the back would be the – uh – the two thumbs up kind of canceling it. [Short Pause] Just things taken from – you know – and mostly from the news paper. Hot Headed Hallucinogenic. Oh. It's one ah- you don't have to turn it. It's just - it's alright. It's a –it's a one of those rare works that encapsulate and define an era. So, after that, I stopped. I stopped. I stopped. I-I was – I was becoming um a business man more than an artist. Um, I had a huge studio full of people working for me. I was successful. I was making tons of money and I just felt like Oh my God I don't want to be doing this. Um – I just – you know it's just one of those weird things. Like I got what I wanted and it wasn't what I wanted. Um – and-and – um – no it's not – it wasn't about New York it w- this is one of those eternal things. I just – I was sort of horrified about my life. I was-I was-I was – uh – buying into – uh – values that I thought were stupid and – you know – playing a game and going to great restaurants and hanging out with collectors and going to happenings and blahblahblahblahblahblah and I just thought it was total shit. And so I began, I threw-I threw it all away – um – to create these next works and I realized that I wanted to work with language. Um – and so what I began to do [Talking] is I began to take these um definitions from the rhyming dictionary and, um, this was a version of Joseph Kosuth's definite dictionary definition pieces. Where he would just have uh the definition of water, say, on a white canvas. The definition – I always thought that Kosuth was trying-trying to open up meaning, but ultimately trying to really nail it and really pin it down. And I thought, how could I invert that and use a dictionary and use language in a way that actually opens up language to – um – much wider and much less specific so I found the rhyming dictionary. Now a rhyming dictionary – it's also good to remember that nobody was rhyming at this time, except for rappers [ha] and so suddenly the rhyming dictionary uh-uh an obsolete thing. I don't – you probably don't know what it is but it's a dictionary – you can actually look up rhymes. And this is a passage from the [Air?]. So, it goes 1 – it goes – it goes: [air heir bear bare blair hair and chair?] A-Z - for what would be Z – one syllable – [where wear yare?] and semicolon starts all over again with two syllables – [affair, armchair, aware, beware, ?????] and um – and ss- the next – uh ss- the next uh – uh – ss-semicolon which is right here. And then it goes three syllables – [anywhere, ??????, ??????, etc, etc]. But the thing that freaked me out about this was um this word uh Frigidaire. I thought what's that – what's that doing in a dictionary. [Hahaha] You know, that's a, that's a brand. It doesn't, it shouldn't belong there. And I thought, Oh my God this is

amazing. What if I began to take this structure, this exact structure, and I began plugging in all the wrong words like Frigidaire. You know you could do uh-uh I think later I did one – you know – the work became and-and-and I put in the name [Linda Blair?], right? Because it would fit in and it rhymed and this kind of thing. So this was like an amazingly important piece, and threw me out of the art world, sort of, not too long for that to happen, but I just moved toward language. I just really wanted to be working with language – um – at this point. Now, the other thing that happens now is I do this series of piece-pieces at the collector's [?????]. So, [?????] is a great collector based, everybody loves me, it's all getting written about blahblahblahblah and they go – they walk in and are like: what is this? You see, you know like in New York, it's still to this day, the hand, the [fetishization?] of the hand is w- the thing that rules the day. Um – and um you know this work had no hand it was all idea. And even worse it was really doing – it was just doing a lot with language and people in the art world really don't like language. That's why language is never more than a paragraph or two – you know Jenny Holtzer couple words here and there. Y'know and I think they're right. I've learned that they're right. I think they gallery's a shitty place to read. It's a really bad place for the reception of language. So then this is the Ah one – um – and this one was the uh – but they're beautiful. Blood, bud, cud, dud, flood, bud, stud, [stunt?], [?????], etc. Fantastic. I think it's a beautiful poem and I didn't really do anything to it. [Pause Drink] Of course, you know, nobody- at this point people were probably talking. [Short Pause] So, I made the career killing move of-of going into making these enormous text works. That work – exactly what I was talking about, using the system of the rhyming dictionary and blowing it out – this is about the actual size of this thing and – uh – we were talking earlier in the crit about the-the uh relationship of the sculpture to the body. And these-I-I wanted the width of these things to be about the width of a body. So, you would actually confront a body's worth of language. So, yeah, [blue, bleu, brew, bru, boo, shoe, poo, do?] and then it goes up to – uhh – [ubi izu?] ok [vou to zou?] and then it goes [abu, abu, abu, abru, adieu?] and they were so beautiful to read and then later – see here's where they weird stuff comes in. Yahoo – uhh – you know – Love Me Do – um and finally the last one is from the Ramones saying Now I Want to Sniff Some Glue [ha]. Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue. Seven syllables. And it – so everything had place so I could actually begin to write these poems that were really fun, they were EXTREMELY structured, they were extremely rigid and yet – you know – they-they were really full of surprises and a lot of language play in it. And then they got bigger [haha] and they got more ambitious. And this is – um – a- A – A/Y A/Y and I was thinking Barnett Newman at this point. I was thinking of these – I wanted to make these in the dimensions of Barnett Newman's zip



pieces. Um – um – [Short Pause] and they were like tire tracks. Yeah, and they were very beautiful in the end. And they, and they could start to get ambitious. Her skin was as white as porcelain clay. Hey teen hows about a roll in the hay. I was just making shit from the newspaper. I can't take any more of this today. There's nothing to do, nothing to say. I'll kill anything that gets in my way. Okay, and then there's a semicolon so that was several syllables. And then, an apple a day keeps the doctor away. As demoralizing as a holiday. [Liberatie, Fraternitie, Gallataie?] blahblahblahblah. Now uh – so yeah – so that's really fun and all – and throughout the whole thing. At this point, it was all good stuff, right? Bloody Sunday, I work [????], funky Broadway, games people play, glad to be gay, going my way, Guevara Che, Hard Rock Café. And I say, so making these really packed pop poems. And they were – they were really really um fun. You know, amazing. Amazingly fun. And they got BIGGER [haha]. And they would this – these are 8 feet high and so – uh – 8 feet by 4 feet and so they're like 15 feet wide and 8 feet high and this is all E. It starts [be, be, be, be, be, and then there's a weeeeeee, underlined Z?] and then it starts up with uh – A/B, A/B, Barbie, bargie, bard, [bardamiere?]. I would sit in a gallery, I'd do these readings of these things [mhm]. It was absolutely, it was absolutely great. And I would just read the entire thing.

[Pause]

**KG:** And then this was the last one of them. Um – and this was – uh – wow – you know – [Short Pause] I know this was like 40 feet [along?]. A person kinda came up to it here. 40 feet long and this was a show in a gallery, and it was all ah-s and then the ah-s reverse themselves and they become ha-s. Um – I think I was jst-. This was such a bomb. People walked in and they walked right out. They were like, they were like, dude, you cannot expect me to read all this. And, in a way, like – you know – but, you know – you see like enormous paintings like this at the MET and d'you really expect anybody to really sit and understand – no you kinda browse at it. And I was like-like why do we have to read this thing linearly? And everybody some how sees language and think they've gotta start at the top and follow all the way through. And honestly, it's just beautiful to walk by and look at whatever sort of catches your eye and you go in and out, but I was REALLY fighting an uphill battle at this point. Uh – you know, and these are, these are the – uh – the-the panels. This is – it starts off with a huge Joycian scream with all aaaa-s and aahhh. And off it goes into-into uh the A sound with an A rhyme. Um – and then backwards but it's ok you can the point. This is the end. And they were – and this-this was also – this was also so Joycian at this point. These were little stage – um – these were little things that were taken from-from plays. Thinking it ever. [Cosbare?].

Make your right. I-I – they were very beautiful so it was this kind of like this inversion I was kind of like laughing at myself, I was kind of laughing at the art world. It was really – it was getting bad. I – this was a – kinda uh. I just want to see if – uh – ok uh – ok, well quickly – um – I was doing these other things at the- at the time too that were like – uh it's called 73 Poems. These were drawings. Sometimes they were about the size – they were rhyming again. Brother, lover, mother's, other, mother, another undercover, and the back text says [pineal, rineal, venal, adrenal, and machinal?] And this was called 73 Poems, and I – and this – um – um – these very beautiful graphical things. This was at The Drawing Center in New York. And they'd start very small, and they'd – and the back text would come to forward and they'd – and they'd grow and then they'd get really huge and then they'd shrink down and then they'd get kind of semiotic and then they'd get really dense and then they'd strip down. It's like they're kind of a weird narrative and they'd grow up again. This was made into a book by um – uh – I made this into my first book and it was also – um – done by – uh – I make these little-little portfolios that were very beautiful and exquisite. Exquisite little poem portfolios 12 – this was 11 poems and 12 sound bytes – their own score. Um, and this was my final thing in the gallery that I did. Um, this was '95 I think. MMM – I'm sorry it's '96 and it's-it's called Soliloquy. It's every word I spoke for an entire week. And I don't think I have a close up. I wish I did. I DO. Right. Okay, so – come back, come back, come back – sorry. [Short Pause] Okay, so what this is like I recorded every word I spoke for an entire and I um – [Very Short Pause] I started on Monday and then I-I-I printed them out really large on computer paper and put together. This thing – this is, this is – I – really you come up to about here. It was like walking into this enormous sea of language. And, it's just, it was amazing – and amazingly powerful thing. And then this was the uh one of the sheets and actually this – the things – the sheets were about this size.

[Pause]

**KG:** And the thing is, it's like, it's uh – heh – people would come into this show and my wife was sharing a studio with this guy Daniel Levine and it's like names jump out so Danny- Danny who I say terrible things about in this thing would walk into this thing and he'd find – be able to find his name. It was just absolutely incredible, incredible, incredible how people could actually find out – um – find themselves ha-ha in this hah thing [Laughs]. What's happening – uh I lost so many friends with this [ha] and it was, it was again it was kind of like after making all these beautiful objects, and stuff – okay that – okay why don't we put the computer on-

**Dean-o:** Yep

**KG:** And we'll finish up kind of quickly. Um, I don't need the remote or anything on this I don't think on this thing. Oh, you do? Good. Um – [Pause] no not right now. [Audience Stirs]

[Long Pause]

**KG:** Quick break and the shows – I swear we're almost done. This is going to be very quick.

[Long Change]

**KG:** Hey, where's the thing where you can open recent? Does anybody know like the one that I last opened? The one that I just made. Does anybody know how to find the thing that says open recent?

**Ellen Driscoll:** Did you title it?

**KG:** It's on the apple?

**Audience:** Yeah, recent – recent items.

**KG:** Oh no, but the recent PowerPoint item.

**Audience:** Yeah, it should be on there.

[Pause]

**KG:** Uh, it I could find the right. Sorry. I thought you just-just-just – uh – here uh let me just quickly see-see where it is. [Short Pause] Sorry you guys. Uh, here it is, okay. Uh – okay. So what happens, very quickly, is that I leave the art world and I wanna – I just realize that like in a way like in a way all I really wanted to do was be a writer. And I don't – didn't know how to do it. I was not trained as a writer. Um – is – how do you make it go the whole thing-

**Ellen Driscoll:** View [?????]

**KG:** Sorry, I'm still learning. Um – I didn't, I didn't – I wasn't trained as a writer. I had no reason to be in the writing world. But, my books had been sort of getting around the writing world and through a really weird bizarre circumstance I fell into a sort of avant garde group of poets called the

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets. And suddenly all this work – all this language work – everybody hated in the gallery was being adored by the poetry world. And suddenly it's like Oh my God, and you know like they understood it, they could read it, the book was a great place to read it. And I was like – I found this whole other world. So the first book that I worked with – I worked with it during these years. Um – the first real poetry book it starts on February 7<sup>th</sup> in 2003, and I finished it up on-on the 20<sup>th</sup> of um – uh October '96. And, and it's just the same exact thing that I was doing in the gallery. But instead I decided to make a 600 page book of it, right? And not have to worry that no body would read it. You know they like – you know – people wouldn't be angry at me, collectors wouldn't be disappointed. Oh, by the way, another little weird thing was happening at this point too called the Internet. And at this point I needed a job, right? I [loaned?] my whole lucrative career as an artist. I needed a job. So I went back and I trained at-in-in uh computers. And – uh – I was doing AutoCAD for a while and then the Internet came and I began building little websites for people. So, fortunately this is – this was like-like – I could be a poet because I had a really good paying job. And I worked regular, throughout the '90s I worked um in offices uh – I rode the bell curve of the Donkey Kong thing. But I was really happy because I had a critical – uh – group around me that could support the kinda work that I really wanted to do. And all these terrible feelings that I had about myself – um – before had now vanished. So here's the first chapter of the book and this is not meant for the gallery. This is meant for the- for the uh – poetry people and they loved it. That's the second chapter. Right? And I, and suddenly I realized that I was writing fuckin poetry [Laughter] like no body else was writing poetry. It was like, I was actually because of what I learned in the art world and because my actions I could actually go in and bring all that stuff into an entirely different discourse and change that discourse by doing nothing different than I had ever done. So, this is uh-uh 60-6- there are 60 syllables in this one. There 60 syllables and then there'll be a – uh – I'm sorry [???? ???? ??????]. I can't even find – see what happens is you lose the structure. The further you get along the book the more you lose the structure of the book. And I – you know – it just becomes like weird poetry. This was all shit I found. And this was the last chapter of the book. It's 2000-200- unn- 30 uh 28 syllables in this thing. And with the last chapter of the book is D. H. Lawrence's – um – Rocking Horse Winner in it's entirety, it's entire story – this was put in there. And I could justify having the entire story, which I never read, don't care about, by the fact that there was that Rr sound at the end. And I just counted all the syllables the night before and I still haven't read the story to this day. They tell me it's good. [Laughter]

[Dean: haha]

**KG:** Um, and this is then – I took that-that-that huge installation of everything I spoke for a week um and I put it into a book called Soliloquy. Um, and, uh, you know – it was 6-700 pages. And then here we go. I broke it up into 7 acts. And this is just everything I spoke for a week unedited. Right. And this – the poetry world loved this. This other – never seen anything like this. It's amazing. The art world hated it. But the poetry world it-it they're STILL talking about it and this is like '90 – '99. It was published – it was published years ago. It's so easy to be radical outside your own field – it's so hard to do it. I wasn't good. I wasn't that good as an artist. I wasn't that radical. I knew I was always going to have a great career. I knew I would make a lot of money. I knew I'd have a great life. But, I knew I'd never be able to change the field. I knew I'd never be an important artist. And yet in poetry like I feel like I-I can change the field. I think I'll be – I am and I'll continue to be important. You know, I could actually really make an impact on this field. It was – it was a really good move. This is a book of every, of every move my body made for a day. Again this was – had been done in some-some what in the art world-some what in the art world but I took it and – IT'S so weird because you can do the same exact thing but if you just publish it. If you put it into a different format and you circulate it in a different economy then suddenly it becomes something else completely. You know y- you know y- just you can take anything. You can take sculpture and you know you can throw it into the music world and suddenly that's the latest music. I mean it's just – its-its- really liberating and very strange. This is a book I did um now long after having left the art world and it's a- it's a – it's a book where I retyped a day's copy of The New York Times. And what it does, this entire book is 900 and I took a day's copy of The New York Times and I retyped the entire thing word for word, every single place there was uh-uh-uh – every single place there was a-a word or letter I'd put it down. And, um, LAUGH. This one – Mairead they're uh still upset about this one aren't they?

[Laughter]

**KG:** It's like it's so easy to make a splash in this world. And look, I think at the end of the day, I think the most famous, successful artist, sellout artist at the end of the day wants to be important historically. I think they'd trade every-every thing, every money, every [?????], all the great things that the art world has to give if-if they could just be fuckin historically important. I mean, that's what artist want. And so, you know, you do. Here look, here's the ad – you know – public notice warehouse doors open public [????? ????] you know.

Without any images in this, just the text. You know, it's terrible. But it's a great book – I mean it's like an amazing book because the newspaper is – you turn the newspaper into language it's the greatest – it's the greatest – ah – book ever written. It's got love, it's got death, it's got [????], it's got murder, it's got reclamation, it's got all sorts of – you know – you couldn't write a book – oh I did the stock market too. I did the entire – every – the whole - they used to publish the stock things in. So, I took them out of there columns, nothing-n-nothing was standardized and then this was the stock page from some dumb day. It's what – September 1<sup>st</sup> 2000. Nothing. A nothing day with stocks. This was 300 pages. [Pause Drink] And then this is the- this is um I'm just going to show the last three books very quickly. This is my trilogy. The is The Weather, and this is – um – I recorded weather forecasts on the radio for an entire year every day and it became like a narrative of four seasons. Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall. And this is just direct radio transcriptions of um – of that. And this is kind of great because um [Short Pause] yeah, yeah this is winter. Nothing, you know. It's definite another bundle up before you step outside uh morning uh. Uh sunshine is not going to be very effective. [Haha] But what happens amazingly enough um – in-in the uh-uh totally unannounced to me on-on the first day of Spring of 2003 when I was doing this piece we had invade Iraq. And so that starts showing up in the text. So, the second paragraph. Well sunshine will be mixing with clouds as we go through the day. Today it's going to be on the mild side again this afternoon the high up to 64 degrees in mid-town today. Tonight we're partly cloudy dropping back down to the low 44 we're going to stay that way tomorrow. Monday as well. Partly and mostly sunny skies highs in the mid-upper 50s and then back to 64 for the high on Tuesday with a mix of clouds. No chance of rain outside until we get to Wednesday. Dry weather in Baghdad for the rest of the weekend. Partly cloudy skies Saturday night and also some sunshine across Baghdad on Sunday. Right now it's 54 degrees and sunny in Central Park. We're going to [64?] mid-town tonight. It's just absolutely incredible. So, again – then-then the next day they do their thing. Just regular New York weather [???? ????] In Iraq the wind is likely to be picking up in the next 24 hours [Laughter] [raising gusts?] of sand [into the atmosphere?] and that's going to be a problem through Wednesday. Make [???? ????] after all after the current storm from the Mediterranean goes past. This is the New York weather forecast. And it's fabulously beautiful what happens because these things will show up, and then we win the WAR, right. Less- we're less than two weeks into it and once we declare we win the war they just drop out for the rest of the year and we just continue on as if nothing ever happened. It's absolutely, beautifully weird, right? Uh, so that's oh-uh-uh the trilogy here is Traffic uh – ss – uh is-is Weather, Traffic, and Sports. No, I'm trying to get this thing to go to the next.

[Pause]

**KG:** There it is. Okay, so this is the book Traffic. Okay. And this is uh – this is – uh – 24 hour traffic report. So I’m on- I’m in-on New York radio they give traffic on the [?????]. So it’s the terrible thing. The junction now with big holiday weekend we start out with the Hudson River horror show right now. Big delays at the Holland Tunnel. [????] Road work, one lane getting by you might have at least 20 to 30 minutes of traffic and possible more than that. So, you know – 12:11 it changes a little more but it gets worse. One of the nastiest accidents we’ve had in a while across the Hudson River. Tunnel may be up to an hour [???? ?????]. And this-this is horrible. It’s like, it’s like uh – it’s like [Goddard?] it’s like [????????]. The north [????] hold traffic right into a holt all the way back to [????] at the 41<sup>st</sup> and [????] street approaches. The [??] that’s another problem we’ve got a bus stuck in the tunnel.

[Laughter]

**KG:** It’s really like-like the inferno. You know, it’s really Dante [haha] and this is like, like rush hour later. And then finally um, the last paragraph is actually redemption. Everything starts to move well. Okay, that’ll – but remember it’s going to start all up again tomorrow. So that’s the last page. And then the final thing I just want to show you is the book called Sports. Traffic, Weather, and Sports. And this was a transcription of a Yankees Red Sox game um and it’s just so incredible because the um broadcast begins with [1800-LAW-CASH?] reminds you that this copywrited broadcast is presented by the authority of the New York Yankees and may not be reproduced or retransmitted in any form and accounts in the game may not be disseminated without the expressed written consent of the New York Yankees. Have a lawsuit, need money?

[Dean: HA HA HA]

**KG:** Right? And then the pitching matches are as followed. Well the thing is, like I did this. I did exactly what they’re telling me not to – actually published it in a book and I sent it to George Steinbrenner, I sent it to the Yankee’s network [???]. I wanted to get sued. You know, I feel like sue me. Wouldn’t this be a great- a great PR thing. Of course, they probably looked at it and just threw it away. So that’s the way you need to know. And then the rest – you know – the thing is like it’s [??????] and it’s baseball. Nothing happens the same and it took 2 and ½ to 3 hours baseball game only seven minutes of action happens so how do you fill that up on the radio? Right, and there you go. It’s re- this is the worst one I’ve written. And all you need to know is- is

the last one. Ball game over, Yankees win, Yankees win. And that's the end of the – you know – and that's the end of that. So, okay, so we can turn the lights on. Um, um I'm done with it and uh – if anybody has any comments or questions I'm happy to – answer. So, that's 25 years. So, no, nearly 30 years of what happen to me.

### **Questions Comments and Replies**

**KG:** Alright, well Okay. Thank you for listening.

Applause

10 December 2009  
ryan conn