

I look to theory when I realize that somebody has dedicated their entire life to a question I have only fleetingly considered.

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

Writing should be as effortless as washing the dishes -- and as interesting.

Hunter S. Thompson retyped Hemingway and Fitzgerald novels.  
He said, "I just want to know what it feels like to write  
these words."

Obama regularly copies his speechwriter's work out in longhand on legal pads in pencil: "It helps organize my thoughts."

If you're not making art with the intention of having it copied, you're not really making art for the 21st century.

From producer to reproducer.

The Internet is destroying literature (and it's a good thing).



"Plagiarism is necessary," Lautréamont insisted. "Progress implies it."

Authenticity is another form of artifice.

It is possible to be both inauthentic and sincere.

The moment you stand up in front of people, you are no longer authentic.

The telling of a true story is an unnatural act.

My writing is political writing; it just prefers to use someone else's politics.

I always had mixed feelings about being considered a poet.  
If Robert Lowell was a poet, I don't want to be a poet.  
If Robert Frost was a poet, I don't want to be a poet. If  
Socrates was a poet, I'll consider it.

Art dealer to Captain Beefheart: "You'll never be respected as an artist -- you'll always be a musician that paints. If you really want to be a painter, you have to stop doing music." Not long after, Captain Beefheart began referring to himself as a painter named Don Van Vliet.



A child could do what I do, but wouldn't dare to for fear of being called stupid.

Futurism made flesh, Barry Bonds is a lovechild of William S. Burroughs ("We ourselves are machines") and Andy Warhol ("I want to be a machine").

REPORTER: How do you feel when you are greeted by a resounding chorus of boos when you step on the field?

BARRY BONDS: I turn it into a symphony.

Gravitas is obsolete.

Boring and long-winded writings encourage a kind of effortless nonunderstanding, a language in which reading itself seems perfectly redundant.

"The Internet is of no relevance at all to writing fiction, which expresses verities only found through observation and introspection," said Will Self.

Jonathan Franzen famously wrote portions of *The Corrections* wearing blinders and earplugs to reduce disruptions.

Jonathan Franzen is America's greatest novelist... of the  
1950s.

The new memoir is our browser history.



Writers are becoming curators of language, a move similar to the emergence of the curator as artist in the visual arts.

Sampling and citation are but boutique forms of appropriation.

Remixing is often mistaken for appropriation.

Our poetry has eerily begun to resemble data trails.

Poetry is an evacuated and orphaned space, begging to be repurposed. The new poetry will look nothing like the old.

The Internet is the greatest poem ever written, unreadable mostly because of its size.

An article in *China Daily* refers to a young worker who copied a dozen novels, signed his name, and published a collection of "his works."

Alphanumeric code, indistinguishable from writing, is the medium by which the Internet has solidified its grip on literature.



Richard Prince recently took America's most valuable literary property, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and made drop-dead facsimiles of the first edition. Everywhere Salinger's name appeared, Prince substituted his. He sells a signed copy bearing the signature of "Richard Prince" for whatever Salinger's signed first edition is going for that day.

Contemporary writing is the evacuation of content.

The future of writing is the managing of emptiness.

The future of writing is pointing.

The future of writing is not writing.

The future of reading is not reading.

The human entity formerly known as "the reader."

John Cage and Morton Feldman in 1967. Feldman was complaining about being at the beach, annoyed by transistor radios "blaring out rock and roll," and Cage responded, "You know how I adjusted to that problem of the radio in the environment? Very much as the primitive people adjusted to the animals which frightened them, and which, probably as you say, were intrusions. They drew pictures of them on their caves. And so I simply made a piece using radios. Now whenever I hear radios -- even a single one, not just twelve at a time, as you must have heard on the beach -- I think, well, they're just playing my piece."



Andy Warhol said, "My style was always to spread out, anyway, rather than move up. To me, the ladder of success was much more sideways than vertical."

Stasis is the new movement.

The writers' desk is beginning to resemble a laboratory or small business office rather than the contemplative study it once was.

A good poem is very boring. In a perfect world all sentences would have an overall sameness.

Start copying what you love. Copying, copying, copying. And at the end of the copy, you will find yourself.

On copying: It's not a bug. It's a feature.

Bob Dylan on appropriation: wussies and pussies complain about it.

The regulation of intellectual property is a euphemized form of corporate control -- and a futile one at that.



They spoke of the idea that in China, additional books are written and inserted into extant canons. There are ten Harry Potter books in the Chinese series as opposed to the seven penned by J.K. Rowling.

Individual creativity is a dogma of contemporary soft capitalism, rather than the domain of non-conformist artists: fiction is everywhere.

Toward the end of his life, Alexander Trocchi rewrote his early manuscripts in longhand and sold them to collectors as originals.

Ted Berrigan stole books by famous authors and forged their autographs. He then sold them back to the dealers he stole them from at greatly increased prices.

We don't need the new sentence. The old sentence reframed is good enough.

Today's plagiarism and copyright battles are to the 21st century what the obscenity trials were to the 20th.

At Tony Oursler's retrospective at the Williams College Museum of Art, upstairs, buried deep within the galleries, the artist had set up a microphone into which anyone could step up and speak. What they said would be broadcast into the entrance atrium of the museum. There were no restrictions on what you could say, only a small note reminding the speaker to be sensitive of others and a gentle suggestion to refrain from swearing. When it was my turn, I said in my clearest and most radio-like voice, "May I have your attention. May I have your attention. The museum is now closing. Please make your way to the exit. Thank you for visiting." Although it was hours away from closing time, I repeated the announcement again and saw in the video monitor that was provided, people streaming toward the exit. Again, I made my announcement. At once, a frantic, elderly guard came running up to me, grabbed my arm and said, "You're not allowed to say that!" When I told him that there was nothing prohibiting me from saying it, he again told me that I wasn't allowed. "Why?" I asked. "Because it's not true," he replied. "You must stop saying that right now." Of course I repeated my announcement once again. This poor man was really struggling with what to do with me. He knew that while I wasn't breaking any real laws, by questioning the institution's authority I was breaking an unwritten social contract.

There are no 'correct' readings. Only reproductions and possibilities.



Q: Why do you think practices of appropriation are much less acceptable to people in terms of the written word? Why is it a much bigger deal to plagiarize writing?

JONATHAN LETHEM: Literary criticism is too closely intertwined with newspaper journalism. So whereas other fields of art reception are successfully partitioned from the ethos of journalists, book reviewers are usually newspapermen who fancy themselves book reviewers. The field of book reviewing so totally overwhelms academic literary criticism in terms of influence, and journalists are of course obsessed with journalistic notions of plagiarism, sources, and inaccuracy. These standards migrate far too much in the realm of literary writing.

The problem isn't piracy. The problem is obscurity.

Being well-enough known to be pirated is a crowning achievement. Most artists want first and foremost to be loved and secondly to make history; money is a distant third.

Information is like a bank. Our job is to rob that bank.

I find the idea of recycling language to be politically and ecologically sustainable, one which promotes reuse and reconditioning as opposed to the manufacture and consumption of the new. It's an attitude that counteracts rampant global capitalist consumption by admitting that language is not able to be owned or possessed -- that it is a shared resource. So in this way, these ideas are more ideologically in line with marxist thought than anything else. Also, because of the sheer volume of language -- an ecosystem yielding limitless resources -- there's never a chance of scarcity; it's a landscape of abundance. Yet -- and this is where it gets interesting -- conceptual writing's obsession with the latest technology, the hoarding of language, its celebration of baroque excess and so forth, aligns it with often nefarious global capitalist tendencies. In addition, there's an imperialistic aspect of the movement; in terms of its internationalism, it's the first worldwide poetry movement since concrete poetry since both are predicated upon transnational uses of language (concrete poetry being visual, conceptual being unreadable). As a result, the movement is spreading rapidly around the globe, threatening to take on characteristics of a huge multinational monsters. All of these contradictions, I feel, are part of the discourse of conceptualism, which is an ideologically fluid movement embracing impurity and guilty pleasures, shunning received notions of purity, authenticity, or absolute claims of truth.

I'm not really a poet, but poetry was the only field open enough to accept my ideas, so I became a poet by default.

The poet as anti-hero.

*Soliloquy* was a book of every word I spoke for a week, from the moment I woke up on a Monday morning until the moment I went to sleep Sunday night. It was horrible, turning out to be 600 pages of gossip and pettiness. I lost many friends as a result. While some forgave me, many still will not speak to me some two decades later.



Listening to music has become literary, requiring typing and sorting; we select what we hear based on keywords.

We skim, parse, bookmark, copy, paste, forward, share, and spam. Reading is the last thing we do with language.

We spend much more time acquiring, cataloging and archiving our artifacts these days than we do actually engaging with them. The ways in which culture is distributed and archived has become profoundly more intriguing than the cultural artifact itself. As a result, we've experienced an inversion of consumption, preferring the bottles to the wine.

Interest has shifted from the object to the information.

People insist upon self-expression. I really am opposed to it. I don't think people should express themselves in that kind of way.

Shortly before he died, we were invited to dinner at Merce Cunningham's loft on Sixth Avenue. Upon entering, we were astonished to see numerous priceless works of art lining the walls. When we inquired "Is that...?" we were unceremoniously cut off and told that everything here is what you think it is. There were works by Johns, Rauschenberg, and even a little Duchamp *Czech Check* framed in a 1970s plexiglass frame close the floor, covered in cooking grease, dust and cat piss. Over many valuable works of art were leaky skylights. During dinner we asked Merce what would happen if one of these works were damaged. He smiled and said, "But of course our friends would just make us another."

If you do something wrong for long enough people will eventually think of it as right.

Art is a license to do things wrong. The rest of the world tries to get it right. We revel in doing it wrong, not knowing, breaking things.



The necessity of bad transcription: working to make sure that the pages in the book matched the way the high-school typist had transcribed them, right down to the last spelling mistake. I wanted to do a "bad book," just the way I'd done "bad movies" and "bad art," because when you do something exactly wrong, you always turn up something, said Andy Warhol.

Exactly wrong.

The act of moving information from one place to another  
constitutes a significant cultural act in and of itself.  
Some of us call this poetry.

Toward a disengaged poetics: writing books without the need to have any relationship with the subject that we're writing about.

Paint-by-numbers writing: filling in the blanks.

Leaving the White House after the reading, Joe Reinstein, the deputy social security to the president, slung his arm around me, smiled, and said, "Well, we got the avant-garde into the White House."

Our writings are now identical to those which already exist. The only thing we do is claim them as our own. With that simple gesture, they become brand new.

I am a dumb writer, perhaps one of the dumbest that's ever lived. Whenever I have an idea, I question myself whether it is sufficiently dumb. I ask myself, is it possible that this, in any way, could be considered smart? If the answer is no, I proceed. I don't write anything new or original. I copy pre-existing texts and move information from one place to another.



Quantity, not quality. With larger numbers of things,  
judgment decreases and curiosity increases.

Words now function less for people than for expediting the interaction and concatenation of machines.

In China after I had finished giving a lengthy talk about appropriation, plagiarism, and writing in the digital age, an elderly woman in the audience raised her hand and asked, "But Professor Goldsmith. You didn't discuss your relationship to Longfellow."

Translation is the ultimate humanist gesture. Polite and reasonable, it is an overly cautious bridge builder. Always asking for permission, it begs understanding and friendship. It is optimistic yet provisional, pinning all hopes on a harmonious outcome. In the end, it always fails, for the discourse it sets forth is inevitably off-register; translation is an approximation of discourse.

Displacement is rude and insistent, an unwashed party crasher: uninvited and poorly behaved, refusing to leave. Displacement revels in disjunction, imposing its meaning, agenda, and mores on whatever situation it encounters. Not wishing to placate, it is uncompromising, knowing full well that through stubborn insistence, it will ultimately prevail. Displacement has all the time in the world. Beyond morals, self-appointed, and taking possession because it must, displacement acts simply -- and simply acts.

The book is crucial but unimportant.

Unfortunately creative writing is very much alive. I'm doing my best to kill it.

Choice is authorship. Legitimate authorship.



The beauty of misfiling.

There is no museum or bookstore in the world better than  
our local Staples.

As Vanessa Place recently commented on the reported death of conceptual writing, "You know that it's on when it's declared over."

A new ecstasy of language has emerged, one of algorithmic rationality and machine worship; one intent on flattening difference: meaning and nonsense, code and poetry, ethics and morality, the necessary and the frivolous. Literature is now approaching the zero degree of blunt expediency -- a thrilling, almost Darwinian opportunism in action. Writing it appears, at this scale at least, is dead.

If I look at a Coca Cola bottle and then look at another Coca Cola bottle, I want to forget the first Coca Cola bottle in order to see the second Coca Cola bottle as being original. And it is original because it's in a different position in space and time. And light is shining on it differently so that no two Coca Cola bottles are the same.

Easy is the new difficult. It is difficult to be difficult,  
but it is even more difficult to be easy.

The reconception of art as networked power, not content, is the true death of the author.

At this point in time, it's hard to verify authenticity, singularity, or proper sources for anything. Instead, in our digital world all forms of culture have assumed the characteristics of dance music and versioning, where so many hands have touched and refined these products that we no longer know, nor care, who the author is -- or was.



At the Iowa Writer's Workshop recently, they were experiencing a crisis. The remoteness of the location traditionally offered the writer two choices: either look into thy heart or look to nature. But once they had the Internet, they began looking into the screen, thereby able to escape the confines of their binaries.

Contemporary writing requires the expertise of a secretary  
crossed with the attitude of a pirate.

The idea of celebrities adopting art strategies. They are so bored with their "creative" acts that they're ready to be uncreative.

The recent durational performance pieces by Jay-Z, Tilda Swinton, and The National are making boring mainstream. Soon, we'll have to find another line of work.

Earlier this year I encouraged Shia LaBeouf to declare his retirement from public life and #stopcreating. It's true.

I had never heard of Shia LaBeouf until the he started quoting the me extensively on the web, claiming my words as his own, naming me as his collaborator.

Normally when these kind of scandals break what we see is a James Frey -- going out and apologizing; he's shamed and everybody's shamed. LaBeouf plagiarized and instead of apologizing, he decided to tap into the vast body of strategies around free culture that have been developed really over the last hundred years, and used that as a defense instead of a typical apology.

Today, we face what I will call the LaBeoufian moment:  
the limiting point at which all art based on questioning  
authorship is pointless.



In which Shia LaBeouf blames me for his breakdown. "I took [Clowes's] work and tried to adapt it into a film out of insecurity, a fear of my own ideas. I thought, 'Well, I have a right to do it because this postmodernist, Kenneth Goldsmith's idea of uncreative writing says so.' I ran with that and found that it put me in a fucking corner."

But what must it become? What is art post-LaBeouf?

Just before the reading at the White House, Obama passed through the green room where we were sitting. He stopped, looked at us, pointed a finger and said smilingly, "You guys behave." Suddenly, the voice of god boomed, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States." As he was about to take the stage, he turned heel, popped his head back into the room, stared at us, and said, "No. You guys are artists. Misbehave."

Nam June Paik said once that the Internet is for everybody who doesn't live in New York City.

I always joke with my students that poetry couldn't possibly be as hard as they think it is, because if it were as hard as they thought it was, poets wouldn't do it. Really, they're the laziest, stupidest people I know. They became poets in part because they were demoted to that job, right? You should never tell your students to write what they know because, of course, they know nothing: they're poets! If they knew something, they'd be in that discipline actually doing it: they'd be in history or physics or math or business or whatever it is where they could excel, said Christian Bök.

Getting it wrong is a privilege that happens only after you  
get it right.

There is freedom on the margins. We've become interested in practices that exist on the edges of culture where there is little light, those which revel in the unpoliced freedom of what's permitted to happen in the shadows, where few people bother to look. Why would artists rush to the hot white center?

Auto-tune your next book of poems.



Two back-to-back readings. The first in Chicago. Met at the airport by limousine which drives me to a glamorous and crowded art venue where no one listens; chauffeured back to airport, all in one day. Superb pay. The next night, a reading at a tiny bar in the East Village. Took the subway there, ten engaged people in the audience. No pay. Turns out to be the best reading I've ever done.

Overwhelmed by so many requests to blurb books, I began a system of conceptual blurbing. I say to an author, write or steal the blurb of your dreams and sign my name to it. I don't wish to see it until I receive the book. That way, I can be surprised just like anyone else by what I've "written."

Love art. Hate the art world.

The art world is cleaved between the market and the academy. A third way: become your own self-invented institution.

When the art world can produce something as compelling as  
Twitter, we'll start paying attention to it again.

The gallery and museum world feels too slow, out of touch with the rest of culture, like an antiques market: highly priced, unique objects at a time when value is in the multiple, the many, the distributed, the democratic. In this way, the art world is quickly making itself irrelevant. Soon, no one will care.

To construct a career based on the ephemerality of the meme is at once thrilling and terrifying.

What if the poetic has left the poem in the same way that Elvis has left the building? Long after the limo pulled away, the audience was still in the arena, screaming for more, but poetry escaped out the back door and onto the Internet, where it is taking on new forms that look nothing like poetry. Poetry as we know it -- the penning of sonnets or free verse on a printed page -- feels more akin to the practice of throwing pottery or weaving quilts, artisanal activities that continue in spite of their marginality and cultural irrelevance. Instead, meme culture is producing more extreme forms of modernism than modernism ever dreamed of.



Artists may be crazy or terribly uninformed about their practices, but they are never wrong.

When artists become accountable for ethics in their practice, they fall under the same scrutiny -- and are held to the same moral standards -- as politicians and bankers, a regrettable situation.

If I raised my kids the way I write my books, I'd have been thrown in jail long ago.

The moral weightlessness of art.

In the digital age, how odd that many prefer to still act like original geniuses instead of unoriginal geniuses.

Before going on the show, Stephen Colbert stopped into the green room to chat. His mother had recently passed away, and the night before, he went on the air and became so overwhelmed with emotion, that he couldn't speak. So he just sat there in complete silence for what seemed like an eternity. When I mentioned how moving and how unusual his use of silence was, he stated how important it was to employ dead air in media. He recalled hearing an innovative radio show when he was child that aired a full hour of dead silence, most likely as a prank. But it changed his life, he claimed, and he became dedicated to using silence in mainstream media. He then told me how much he enjoyed my book and the uncreative writing that was used to construct it. He paused for a moment, cocked his head, and said, referring to himself, "But that guy out there on the set is going to hate it."

Short attention span is the new silence.

Every word I say is stupid and false. All in all, I am a pseudo, said Marcel Duchamp.



Beckett in 1984 on Duchamp's readymades: "A writer could not do that."

I recently was in a public conversation with my dear friend Christian Bök. If I am the dumbest poet that's ever lived, then Christian is the smartest. His projects are very complicated, taking years to complete. During our talk, Christian went on at length about a project he's been working on for the past decade, one which involved basically giving himself a PhD in genetics. In order to compose two little poems, he had to learn to write computer programs which went through something like eight million combinations of possible letters before hitting on the right ones. And then he injected these poems into a strand of DNA, which was ultimately designed to outlive the extinguishing of the sun. The whole thing involves working with laboratories and has cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Christian is super-articulate -- really more like a robot than a person -- and had the audience's head spinning. When it came my turn to speak, all I could muster was: "... and I transcribe traffic reports."

There's nothing that cannot be called "writing" no matter how much it might not look like "writing."

If anyone can't do it, I'm not interested in it.

What would a non-expressive poetry look like? A poetry of intellect rather than emotion?

All text is used, soiled, and worn. All language presenting itself as new is recycled. No word is virginal; no word is innocent.

Expressive, but not expressionistic.

Bertolt Brecht said, "I wish that they would graft an additional device onto the radio -- one that would make it possible to record and archive for all time, everything that can be communicated by radio. Later generations would then have the chance of seeing with amazement how an entire population -- by making it possible to say what they had to say to the whole world -- simultaneously made it possible for the whole world to see that they had absolutely nothing to say."



Any newspaper today is a collective work of art, a daily book of industrial man, an *Arabian Night's* entertainment in which a thousand and one astonishing tales are being told by an anonymous narrator to an equally anonymous audience, said Marshall McLuhan over a half-century ago.

My muse is the fluorescent tube. It is cold and affectless; it is unflattering and functional; it is bland and neutral; it flattens all it touches; it is harsh, ugly, and unflattering; it is industrial and efficient; it is cheap and economical; it is ubiquitous, universal, and global; it is amoral; it has no agenda; it is past and it is present.

Like morality, politics seems an unavoidable condition when engaging in the reframing of language and discourse.

I was on the air on the morning after Obama was elected in 2008, from 9am to noon. I played Parliament's 1976 five-minute long "Chocolate City" over and over again for an entire three hours without interruption.

Innovate only as a last resort.

In the digital world, the noun is obsolete. The noun is a relic of a predigital time when, if something could sit still for long enough, it would be granted taxonomical status: an apple wasn't an Apple, it was an apple. Digitally, nouns are often metaphors: a desktop is not a desktop; a folder is not a folder; a cloud is not a cloud; spam is not Spam. Nor are they stable. A page used to live on a shelf bound between covers. Today, that page is restless, morphing from one state to another: it is scanned, which is then inserted into a MS Word document, which is then PDF'd, which is then uploaded to file-sharing, which is then placed on mirrored servers, which is then downloaded, archived, or read -- sometimes printed out on paper, other times on an electronic platforms. That same file is shared, sold, bootlegged, and resold as faceless commodities, or ultimately stockpiled as click-bait. What do we call this artifact? I think we can only call it a verb. Since we can no longer name the product (noun), we can only articulate the process (verb). In a time of radical dematerialization, the verb does twice the work: text is both noun (text) and verb (to text). The noun is like a photograph and the verb is like a film; one is static, while the other able to capture the dynamism of today's cultural artifacts.

I love the idea of the cloud, but I hate the reality of it. The reality of it is nothing like what's been promised to us. Trusting the cloud is a mistake: it's too centralized, too easily blocked, too easily controlled. And it's privatized, owned, and administrated by someone other than you. There there's the issue of politics. When I recently attended a conference in China, many of the presenters left their papers on the cloud -- Google Docs, to be specific. You know how this story ends: they got to China and there was no Google. Shit out of luck. Their cloud-based Gmail was also unavailable, as were the cloud lockers on which they had stored their rich media presentations. Don't trust the cloud. Use it, enjoy it, exploit it, but don't believe in it.

Writers try too hard to express themselves. We're working with loaded material. How can language -- any language -- be anything but expressive?



In a time when cultural materials are abundantly available on our networks, there is no turning back. Appropriation and plagiarism are here to stay. Our job is to do it smarter.

Choosing to be a poet is like choosing to have cancer. Why would anyone ever choose to be a poet?

I had gotten in the door when no one was looking. I was in there now and, there was nothing anybody from then on could do ever about it, said Bob Dylan.

INTERVIEWER: In an interview with Michael Palmer, he testifies that he prefers writing by hand over typing because the former is more intimate physical experience. How do you feel about doing everything by computer?

GOLDSMITH: I honestly think Palmer's statement is the most idiotic thing I've ever heard. He must be living in a cave.

Writing on an electronic platform is not only writing, but also doubles as archiving; the two processes are inseparable.

Against improvisation.

Writing without failure.

Against expression.



If the machine is built well, the resultant texts will sparkle.

Linearity is prescriptive; lineage is subjective.

After giving a reading in Los Angeles, another reader on the bill came up to me and exclaimed, "But you didn't write a word you spoke tonight!" It was true.

The author's biography, the back jacket copy, the publisher's list, the acknowledgments, the dedications, and the Library of Congress information -- are all more interesting than the part of the book that's supposed to be read.

Somehow during Christmastime in a small house crammed with extended family, reading the Sunday paper is acceptable, but reading a book is considered antisocial and rude. Many times I've been asked while reading, "Is everything alright?"

We have houses in America that are bereft of books, an appealing idea, if one assumes that all culture has migrated to the web and one need nothing more than a laptop to access everything that used to clutter up a living space. Yet most empty houses are just that: enormous echoey spaces where the main feature is an oversized television set surrounded by oversized furniture, inhabited by generally oversized people. Books were never removed because books never existed.

Driving down a Los Angeles boulevard, a billboard was legible from a half-mile away. It said one or two words. In Los Angeles, people are used to reading single words, very large at far distances, and passing by them very quickly. It's totally the opposite in New York where we get our information by reading a newspaper over somebody's shoulder in the subway.

Pointing at the best information trumps creating the best information.



Pre-loading -- constructing a flawless writing machine before the writing starts -- alleviates the burden of success or failure, mitigates the ego, and annuls the small-mindedness of authorship that invariably comes with more conventional modes of writing.

Many years ago, on the way to England to work on a museum project, I was seated in the plane next to a young man who was a classical lute player. We got to talking and I asked him what he was listening to on his Discman. He showed me the CD and began to talk about the music. It was a collection of a minor composer's music played from transcriptions of broadsides that were sold on the street for pennies in the Middle Ages. The composer, however, was clever and included beautifully hand drawn images on his scores. Over the ages, they were framed and preserved, not so much because of the music, but because of how beautiful and distinctive they were as objects. While his peer's music -- printed and distributed in the same form without decoration -- vanished, this composer's scores remain as the only examples of the genre. By default, they are now considered classics.

The Internet makes us see how large the world really is. No matter how many times you say something, there's always someone hearing it for the first time. Sometimes we become self-conscious that we're saying the same thing over and over, repeating ourselves endlessly. But we need not worry. There's always a new audience.

When I began doing radio, I was told by the station manager that my on-air voice was too smooth, too professional sounding. He suggested that I add some "ums" and "uhs" during my mic breaks to sound more like an average person.

We don't really seem to believe that copyright exists, nor do we particularly care.

W.G. Sebald's advice to creative writing students: I encourage you to steal as much as you can. No one will ever notice.

Text by the square inch.

Not the line, sonnet, paragraph, or chapter, but the database.



Not the object, but the oeuvre.

How much did you say that paragraph weighed?

Contemporary writing is a practice that lies somewhere between constructing a Duchampian readymade and downloading an MP3.

Poetry is an underutilized resource waiting to be exploited. Because it has no remunerative value, it's liberated from the orthodoxies that constrain just about every other art form. It's one of the great liberties of our field -- perhaps one of the last artistic fields with this privilege. Poetry is akin to the position that conceptual art once held: radical in its production, distribution and democratization. As such, it is obliged to take chances, to be as experimental as it can be. Since it's got nothing to lose, it stirs up passions and emotions that, say, visual art hasn't in half a century. There's still a fight. Why would anyone play it safe in poetry?

Life can only imitate the web, and the web itself is only a tissue of signs, a lost, infinitely remote imitation.

If you printed the Internet, reading it would take 57,000 years, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week non-stop and if you read it for 10 minutes a night before bed, it would take 8,219,088 years.

If you printed the Internet, it would be a book weighing 1.2 billion pounds, 10,000 feet tall.

If you printed the Internet, it would require 45 million ink cartridges and a half a million liters of ink. If those liters were fuel, it would power a 747 for 18,000 miles -- a flight from New York to Tokyo, the long way around the globe.



If you printed the Internet, you would need enough paper to cover half of Long Island (about 700 square miles).

If you printed the Internet, you would have to sacrifice 40,000 trees, almost twice as many trees as there are in Central Park.

If you printed the Internet from a single ink jet printer,  
it would take 3,805 years.

If everyone in the U.S. printed out a portion of the Internet, it would take 6 minutes and 36 seconds.

If the ancient Babylonians started printing the Internet in 1800 BCE, they would be done right about now.

We printed the entire fucking Internet.

Secretly, what people hated most about Printing out the Internet was its democracy, that anyone could be an artist with a simple command + p.

When asked at the end of his life how it was being an artist, Jean Dubuffet said, "I feel like I've been on vacation for the past forty years."



When the machines takes control, we passively -- and  
happily -- acquiesce.

The world is full of texts, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more.

When you challenge someone not to listen, they listen harder.

When you challenge someone not to read, they read closer.

When you say a text is unreadable, you guarantee yourself a readership.

When you claim to have a thinkership, you gain a readership.

Archiving is the new forgetting.

Archiving is the new publishing.



Archiving is the new folk art.

Self-plagiarism is the new plagiarism.

post-plagiarism = self-plagiarism

Now that we've plagiarized everyone else, all that's left is to plagiarize ourselves.

There was no postmodernism. There was modernism. Then there was digital.

The pre-digital and post-digital. Those who got stuck on the wrong side of the wall.

There are things of great beauty in the world that are unique. I'm just not certain of their relevance.

Attribution is not a requirement of fair use.



No dear, poems will never play a direct role in popular revolution.

The new oppositionality is radical capitulation.

The avant-garde is strengthened, not self-annihilated,  
by incorporating the formulae of popular culture, fool.  
#21CENTURYSKILLS

The avant-garde is the new 1 percent.

Abundance is the new disjunction.

Copyright is so 20th century.

Captain Beefheart's response (1970/71) when a journalist asked what his music had to do with "the revolution".  
"Well, when the record goes around once, that's one revolution. When the record goes around twice, that's two revolutions..."

If you want to make something new, don't go too far beyond one simple idea.



The genius in Christian's Bök's "Xenotext" isn't in the text -- formally it's not a remarkable poem -- but in the process he used to construct it.

The voice hydrates the driest of texts.

All material is, in principle, usable by everyone, even without acknowledgement, without the preoccupations of literary property.

People buy more records than they can listen to. They stockpile what they want to find the time to hear. Use-time and exchange-time destroy one another, said Jacques Attali in 1985.

A poet has no recourse other than to write their own discourse.

Let us judge our literature by the machines we build, not  
by the products they make.

For poetry, there is no life outside the academy.

If everyone drinks the Kool Aid, it becomes real.



It's a mistake to mistake content for content.

No quality judgments. Things just are.

The Borgesian metric of infinity now seems hopelessly dated, a quaint relic of the 20th century, wedded to an equally dated idea of omniscience.

Whenever I have an idea, I question myself whether it is sufficiently dumb. I ask myself, is it possible that this, in any way, could be considered smart? If the answer is no, I proceed.

Dumb doesn't go out of fashion because it is never in fashion. Dumb is stalled and irredeemable. It's too twisted, too weird, too contradictory and takes too many turns of thought to be reduced to a slogan or ad campaign. No matter how dumb they may appear, ad campaigns are invested in being smart; at the end of the day, you need to communicate smartly in order to get someone to buy something. Dumb muddies the waters.

You get to dumb after going through smart. Smart is stupid because it stops at smart. Smart is a phase. Dumb is post-smart. Smart is finite, well-trod, formulaic, known. The world runs on smart. It's clearly not working.

I want to live in a world where the smartest thing you can do is the dumbest.

I want to live in a world where a fluorescent tube leaned up against wall is worth a million dollars.



Poetry is an occupational hazard.

Toward an authorless literature.

Transcription is hardly passive recycling.

Sometimes I feel that guys sitting in cubicles understand contemporary culture better than most curators and critics do.

Boredom, appropriation and repetition, are the new  
frontiers of creativity; they are creativity's last hope  
for reviving its tired self.

Words truly are cheap.

There is no necessity in poetry. There is no reason for it to be. It has no objective or goal. It's a hobby, it's a fake. It's nothing.

Ignore all inner voices. Instead, adopt voices and opinions that are not your own, thereby making them your own.



The Death of the Author. Finally killed by the Internet.

Acting is plagiarism.

A contemporary poet is someone who doesn't write poems.

Originality is the most dangerous word in the advertiser's lexicon, said Rosser Reeves.

When I write an ad, I don't want you to tell me you find it creative, said David Ogilvy.

Ogilvy deplored creativity, a word he professed not to understand.

We're reading more now than ever, but differently, in ways that we previously weren't able to recognize as "reading."

A radical statement used to be a beginning, middle, and end, but not necessarily in that order. Now there are only fragments.



At the end of a concert at Carnegie Hall, Walter Damrosch asked Rachmaninoff what sublime thoughts had passed through his head as he stared out into the audience during the playing of his concerto. "I was counting the house," said Rachmaninoff.

Cy Twombly practiced drawing in the dark to make his lines less purposeful.

Mangle it, manhandle it, wrestle it. The more you process texts, the more they becomes yours.

At the radio interview, the host began reading something that was long and tedious. When he was done, he looked up at me and said, "Do you recognize that?" I paused for a moment and said, "No." He then stared at me and said, "It's from your book *Day*."

Subjectivity is over.

Organic is a artificial construct.

My dear Degas, one makes poetry not out of ideas but out of words, said Mallarmé.

My conceptual aesthetic does not serve my affect: it does not convey my feelings about this or that to the world.



The poet's role now is finding how best to absorb,  
recharge, and redistribute language that is already  
present.

John Cage used to say this his audience was perpetually students. He felt that as students, people have the time to engage with and try out ideas that, for a lack of a better word, we would term "countercultural." But when they "grow up" and enter the "adult" world, such idealism is left behind when one is forced to deal with more practical matters.

I discovered that those who seldom dwell on their emotions know better than anyone else, just what an emotion is.

Most ideas that are successful are ludicrously simple.  
Successful ideas generally have the appearance of  
simplicity because they seem inevitable.

When he was sought out by a budding aesthete a few years later, Duchamp memorably described his artistic goal: "To grasp things with the mind the way the penis is grasped by the vagina."

Creativity is about the most worn-out, abused concept that used to mean something remarkable, something that differentiated someone, something that made them special. It's a term that's been usurped and reduced to a base concept that has come to stand for the opposite of creativity: mediocre, middle-of-the-road, acceptable, unadventurous, and so forth -- so that creativity is no longer creative. What was once creative is now uncreative.

Calling a practice uncreative is to reenergize it, opening creativity up to a whole slew of strategies that are in no way acceptable to creativity as it's now known. These strategies include theft, plagiarism, mechanical processes, repetition. By employing these methods, uncreativity can actually breathe life into the moribund notion of creativity as we know it.

The effectiveness of a work is measured by the number of people who see it.



The beauty of radio is its off-switch. No matter what comes across the airwaves -- no matter how annoying, absurd, or incongruous -- you can always turn it off. The off-switch is a tool of empowerment for both broadcaster and listener. It allows the broadcaster to take chances; and it allows the listener to opt-out.

Andy Warhol said, when asked how he feels about his reviews: "I don't read them. I just measure the column inches."

I keep a poor sound system so I can simply hear music, not fidelity. I can't tell the difference between LPs, CDs, or MP3s.

One afternoon, UbuWeb received an email from the estate of John Cage with a cryptic note saying, "We know what you're doing." Wondering if this was a pre-cease and desist, I became perplexed and wondered how UbuWeb might continue to exist without the guiding light of Cage. I opened the Sound page and began scanning the endless lists of artists' names for his. I couldn't find it. I ran my eyes up and down and back and forth, still not able to find it. Finally, I did a search on the page and, at last, his name appeared. It was there the entire time, but surrounded by so many other stellar names, his seemed to fade into the texture of the page. It was then that I realized that if Cage's name was, indeed, removed, nobody would ever notice he was missing.

Later, I got to know the author of the cryptic note. When I asked her about it, she smiled and said, "We were just letting you know we were watching." When I asked her if she ever had any plans to sue UbuWeb, she shook her head and said, "No. Of course not. We don't have that kind of money."

One Friday afternoon, we received a proper DMCA takedown notice from a well-known literary agency acting on behalf of the estate of William S. Burroughs. In proper legal parlance, the agency claimed that UbuWeb was breaking copyright on the materials of William S. Burroughs and insisted that we remove the following materials. What followed was a list, pages and pages long, of every place where the name William S. Burroughs appeared on the site. Cited were everything from academic papers, which mentioned his name, to liner notes of a pop artist who claimed that one of his songs was composed using the Burroughs cut-up method. In short, what the agency had done was plug the words "William S. Burroughs" into the search engine and cut-and-pasted the entire list, claiming every instance as their property. The pièce de résistance was the final line on the takedown notice that, "Under penalty of perjury in a United States court of law, I state that the information contained in this notification is accurate."

As it turns out, all the materials of Burroughs we hosted did not belong to his estate, rather the copyrights were all held by various record companies and presses that published the works.

I replied to the email saying that, while I understood their intentions, they were going about it in the wrong way. I received a meek reply from an intern telling me that she was very sorry, that she was just acting under orders from a higher-up, and that come Monday morning, she would resend a revised list.

On Monday morning the revised list came and it was pretty much the same. I wrote back, saying, please send this note to the Burroughs estate: "William wrote, 'Tristan Tzara said: 'Poetry is for everyone.' And André Breton called him a cop and expelled him from the movement. Say it again: 'Poetry is for everyone.''"

We never heard from the literary agency nor the estate again. To this day, the works of William S. Burroughs are represented on UbuWeb in their full glory.

Many years ago, we were given a digitized version of the legendary avant-garde magazine from the 1960s, *Aspen*. It's a magnificent collection. In it are represented all the major figures of the 1960s in various forms: films, postcards, broadsides, tabletop sculptures, flexidisks, and so forth.

The New York Times wrote up Ubu's acquisition of it glowingly and asked Merce Cunningham how he felt about having his works on the site without his permission. Merce, addressing two MP3s of his on the site -- one interview and another spoken statement -- said that he was delighted. He claimed that the value of having his words available for educational purposes far outweighed any monetary value that the works would ever generate.

Several years later, after his death, I received a terribly nasty note from the Cunningham Foundation telling me that if I didn't remove those MP3s they would move to take legal action against us. I politely emailed them back, telling them of how Merce publically stated his delight of their inclusion on the site and sending them the press clip as evidence. They wrote back an even angrier note threatening me, this time even more strongly. I then wrote to the fellow who digitized the collection and asked him to check the copyright on the flexidisks from which the MP3s were ripped. He did, telling me that in no uncertain terms, the copyright was, indeed, held by *Aspen*, not by Merce Cunningham. I sent the foundation the scans as evidence and never heard from them again.

A few months later, I had a similar complaint from Yoko Ono's people about her *Aspen* flexidisc MP3s. Cheekily, I asked my man to check the copyrights on her, figuring I'd have my second victory in a row. He wrote back saying that the copyright was, in fact, held by Yoko Ono and John Lennon and not by *Aspen*. I wrote back to Ono's people asking for permission to keep the MP3s up on the site, as they were an important part of an historical collection. They politely said they would ask Yoko. A day later they wrote back that she was delighted to have her work represented on UbuWeb. A second victory, achieved in a different way.



For many years, we have been collecting the works of Michael Snow -- his audio works, his writings and his films. At one point, we had about six or eight of his films up. One day we received an email from Michael Snow simply asking us to remove two of his films from the site but that it was okay to keep the rest. We saw this as a victory. Having four films of Michael Snow's with his permission beats a dozen without.

If we had to ask for permission, we wouldn't exist.

UbuWeb can be construed as the Robin Hood of the avant-garde, but instead of taking from one and giving to the other, we feel that in the end, we're giving to all.

UbuWeb is as much about the legal and social ramifications of its self-created distribution and archiving system as it is about the content hosted on the site. In a sense, the content takes care of itself; but keeping it up there has proved to be a trickier proposition. The socio-political maintenance of keeping free server space with unlimited bandwidth is a complicated dance, often interfered with by darts thrown at us by individuals calling foul-play on copyright infringement. Undeterred, we keep on: after nearly two decades years, we're still going strong.

But by the time you read this, UbuWeb may be gone.

Never meant to be a permanent archive, Ubu could vanish for any number of reasons: our ISP pulls the plug, our university support dries up, or we simply grow tired of it.

Acquisition by a larger entity is impossible: nothing is for sale.

You might remember the climax of the film *24 Hour Party People* (2002) where a large record conglomerate swoops in to buy the stubbornly independent Factory Records for millions of pounds. Factory head Tony Wilson produces a document sworn in blood stating that the bands own the rights to all their material; the record execs grin madly as they walk away with the Factory's catalog for free. Wilson muses in the coda that, although it was financially worthless, Factory Records was a great success, a fantastic conceptual art project, full of integrity, one that never had to make a single compromise. UbuWeb is similar except unlike pop music, what we host has never made money.



The music of Jean Dubuffet. It's wonderful stuff: *musique brute* meets electronic music. Users of UbuWeb love the music of Jean Dubuffet. Later they find out that he's also a painter.

On UbuWeb, we host Julian Schnabel's little known country music album. It seems that while casting around for his next move after his brilliant career as a painter and before his even more brilliant career as a film director, he considered becoming a musician. It's a good thing he thought better of it.

While you won't find reproductions of Dalí's paintings on UbuWeb, you will find a 1967 recording of an advertisement he made for a bank.

UbuWeb stumbled into the avant-garde. We began as a repository for visual and concrete poetry. When sound came along, we began hosting files of sound poetry as well. But once we encoded the works of John Cage, we stumbled. Cage often read his poetry accompanied by aleatoric orchestral works, making it both sound poetry and 20th century classical. Throwing our hands up in the air, we had no choice but to simply call it "avant-garde," and we proceeded forward from there.

We really don't know what the avant-garde is. It changes every day.

When we began using the word "avant-garde," it was still *verboten*, having been dropped during the 1970s and 1980s for its patriarchal and militaristic connotations. As time went on, it became an orphaned term, open for reinvestigation and reinterpretation. We picked it up, soiled it, made it impure.

On UbuWeb's film section we feature the works of Samuel Beckett and Captain Beefheart. It's hard to imagine any other place where both names appear -- certainly not in the music, literary, or art worlds -- but somehow it makes sense. You can't imagine Captain Beefheart ever having existed if it weren't for the influence of Samuel Beckett. This is the secret history of the avant-garde.

One day in the mail, I received the most wonderful book of visual poems. They were the most intricate and detailed pieces I'd ever seen: dense weavings of words that all added up to striking images. And as if that weren't enough, all of the poems doubled as autobiography, embedded with strange stories from the author's life. But perhaps the most incredible thing was that they were all made in an early version of Microsoft Word.

I corresponded with the poet, a man named David Daniels and was later lucky enough to meet him -- by then a craggy old man with a long, white beard -- and hear his story.

In the 1950s, he was an up-and-coming New York School Abstract Expressionist painter. Bound for stardom, one night at a party he said the wrong thing to de Kooning -- he wouldn't tell me any more details -- and was expelled from the group. Shattered, he dutifully obeyed and left New York, landing in Boston.

Lost and miserable, he drifted aimlessly through the streets of Boston, looking for a direction. Unable to find one, he decided to cast his life to the wind by simply saying "yes" to anything that anyone asked him. It turns out at that moment he was walking through Cambridge, when a young panhandler asked him, "Can you spare a dime?" David answered "Yes" and gave him the money. The panhandler looked at him again and asked, "Can you spare a quarter?" to which David responded in kind. This was followed by a request for a dollar and then five -- all which David handed over -- whereupon the fellow asked him if he could spend the night at his house. David acquiesced. Before long, David had a roommate. As word got out among the young panhandlers, dropouts, acid-heads, and hippies, David's house became a commune and remained one of the largest in Cambridge throughout the 1960s. Whoever needed a place to crash asked David, who always, true to his promise, responded "yes."

The house became a hub of activity, much of it illegal. When



a prostitute asked him if she could turn tricks there, David said yes. Later, one of the many prostitutes who became fond of David asked her to marry him, he said yes. He also said yes when she asked him whether she could have his children.

Over the years, David found himself in the position of being a counselor to these young people, many of whom were MIT and Harvard dropouts. He would hold group therapy sessions, giving sage advice. He became a sort of a guru.

And over the years, he simply forgot about his art.

By the late 1970s, the commune was breaking up. Drugs had taken their toll and at the dawn of the 1980s, with the appearance of AIDS, there was further devastation. One day David got a call from one of the earliest members of the commune who, at this time, was residing on the West Coast, and was involved in computers. He suggested that David relocate to the Bay Area. It turns out that many of the communards, shaking off their 1960s bohemianism, had migrated West and were evolving into Silicon Valley moguls. To express their gratitude to David for saying "yes," they purchased him a modest house in Oakland and gave him a life-long stipend. The only thing they required was that David restart his legendary group therapy sessions in the Bay Area, which he did. For nearly twenty years, he held these sessions in a East Bay warehouse for some of the most successful entrepreneurs in America.

But the silver lining was that, as a gift, they gave David a PC and Microsoft Word. While he had never touched a computer, he began intuitively experimenting with Word as way to write visual poetry. It was in this way that, decades later, David reconnected with being an artist. Ultimately, he mastered the Word program, turning it into a way to create visual poems. Over the years they evolved into baroque bodies of work that he worked on every day until his death just after the turn of the millennium.

UbuWeb hosts something called The 365 Days Project, a year's worth of outrageous MP3s that can be best described as celebrity gaffs, recordings of children screeching, how-to records, song-poems, propagandistic religious ditties, spoken word pieces, even ventriloquist acts. However, buried deep within The 365 Days Project are rare tracks by the legendary avant-gardist Nicolas Slonimsky, an early-20th ultra-modernist century conductor, performer, and composer belting out advertisements and children's ditties on the piano in an off-key voice. UbuWeb had already been hosting historical recordings from the 1920s he conducted of Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles, and Edgard Varèse in our Sound section, yet nestled in amongst oddballs like Louis Farrakhan singing calypso or high school choir's renditions of "Fox On The Run," Slominsky fit into both categories -- high and low -- equally well.

I'd rather shutter UbuWeb than ask for donations.

And yet... it could vanish any day. Beggars can't be choosers and we gladly take whatever is offered to us. We don't run on the most stable of servers or on the swiftest of machines; crashes eat into the archive on a periodic basis; sometimes the site as a whole goes down for days; occasionally the army of volunteers dwindles to a team of one.

A few years ago, UbuWeb's server was hacked. Although we never found out who did it or why, much damage was done and the site went dark for six months. During that time, some people thought that the site was gone forever, and as word got out about the hacking, some people began celebrating, particularly one listserv that was dedicated to avant-garde film (old-fashioned celluloid film, that is), where some members were relieved to see the site gone, perhaps indicating that the previous order of things had been miraculously restored. My attention was directed to their hostilities, which I read with great interest.

After reading their responses, I penned an open letter to the group, explaining, "Ubu is a provocation to your community to go ahead and do it right, do it better, to render Ubu obsolete. You have the tools, the resources, the artwork and the knowledge base to do it so much better than I'm doing it. I fell into this as Ubu has grown and am clearly not the best person to be representing experimental cinema. Ubu would love you to step in. Help to make it better. Or put us out of business by doing it the way it should be done."

The response was dead silence. No new site was built and the criticisms stopped; since that day, no further mention of UbuWeb has ever appeared on their list.

Over the course of the next few weeks, several of Ubu's worst critics on the listserv wrote asking whether their films could be included on our site.

If it doesn't exist on the Internet, it doesn't exist.

If it isn't free, it doesn't exist.

Copyright is over. If you want it.



Breaking the law.

If you think you shouldn't do it, you must do it.

Creative Commons is another form of copyright.

While UbuWeb may be legally wrong, it is morally right.

Plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery.

Adorno was so wrong in so many ways that it's fascinating. He's a relic of a sort of romantic modernism that has absolutely no bearing in today's world. Of course, I'm a devoted modernist, but my modernism is an impure one, a messy one, a revisionist one. Adorno would've hated that.

Internet es el poema más grande jamás escrito. Ilegible,  
debido a su tamaño.

In the 1980s, when I began transitioning from the visual art world to poetry, I was listening to a lot of rap. And when I started looking into poetry, I was sort of shocked that none of it rhymed at a time when rhyming and word play was slathered all over culture. The tradition of text art, too, looked staid and uptight, dry and philosophical. Rhyme seemed to be a way out of all that.



Back in the early 1990s, I was working in my studio on Houston St. with the window open. In those days, people were still playing music on the streets from oversized ghetto blasters balanced on their shoulders and, more often than not, playing hip hop. From outside the window came an array of sheer white noise, which quickly morphed into what sounded like the electronic whooshes of *musique concrète*. I was stunned and rushed over to see what was going on. But by the time I got there, the noise had changed again, this time into light Daisy Age beats. It took me a few minutes to realize that what I was hearing was a noisy break in what was a rare and unique moment for experimental hip hop; a moment that passed quickly once gangsta rap took over.

Radio is background, not foreground. You are always doing something while listening -- with one ear -- to the radio. With the exception of drivers, nobody sits by the radio and just listens. Along with drivers, artists are the best listeners. Artists' hands and eyes are busy, but their ears are wide open. As a result, visual artists know more about music than anyone else on the planet.

After a drawing class, nothing was ever the same again. A car was no longer simply a car; instead it was a complex amalgamation of line, color, and form.

After reading Gertrude Stein, language was never the same again. Words were no longer simply words; instead they were complex amalgamations of meaning, sound, and shape.

Every time we read Gertrude Stein, we have to learn to read all over again.

The sheer scope, variety, and seeming endlessness of Napster was mind-boggling: you never knew what you were going to find and how much of it was going to be there. It was as if every record store, flea market, and charity shop in the world had been connected by a searchable database and had flung their doors open, begging you to walk away with as much as you could carry for free.

One of the first things that struck me about Napster was how damn impure (read: eclectic) people's tastes were. Whilst browsing another user's files, I was stunned find John Cage MP3s alphabetically snuggled up next to, say, Mariah Carey files in the same directory. Everyone has guilty pleasures, however, never before have they been so exposed -- and celebrated -- this publically. While such impure impulses have always existed in the avant-garde, they've pretty much remained hidden.

We find that many people downloading MP3s from UbuWeb have no interest the historical context; instead, the site seen as a vast resource of "cool" and "weird" sounds to remix or throw into dance mixes. It's been reported that samples from Bruce Nauman's mantric chant, "Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room" on Ubu has been recently been mixed with beats and is somewhat the rage with unwitting partiers on dance floors in São Paulo.



A few nights ago at home, after putting the kids to bed, I was parked in front of the computer sipping bourbon. My wife asked me what I was doing. I told her I was going record shopping. As I glanced at my screen, ten discs I would've killed for way back then were streaming down to my living room for free.

If it can't be shared, it doesn't exist.

*Écriture mécanique*

A few summers ago, we went to see Pietro Sparta, a very successful art dealer living in the tiny French town of Chagny. He had a beautiful industrial space and a stable comprised of internationally known conceptual artists. After seeing his shows, we went to a café for drinks and he told us how he ended up in this unique situation. His father, a communist sympathizer, was thrown out of Sicily for his politics and he found factory work in Chagny. While there, one of his sons died and was buried in the town. According to Sicilian tradition, a family can never leave the place where the son is buried, hence Chagny became the Sparta's new home. Pietro got interested in contemporary art by reading glossy art magazines procured from the newsstand in Chagny. He became obsessed and started corresponding with the artists. Before long, when in France, the artists came to see Sparta. He soon won their trust and began holding modest exhibitions. The artists were so impressed by his sincerity and devotion for art that they began showing their best work with him. Little by little his reputation grew until he was able to buy the factory that his father worked in when he first came to town and convert it into a spacious and gorgeous gallery. Today, he still lives in Chagny and his father, now retired, maintains the numerous and luscious plantings on the former factory's grounds.

That same summer we met a French filmmaker who proclaimed that the paradigm was no longer "make it new," suggesting instead that we need to focus on the ways that artifacts are distributed. In a time of pluralism where all activities hold equal interest, he said, what's distinctive is how works find their way to out into the world.

Like quilting, archiving employs the obsessive stitching together of many small found pieces into a larger vision, a personal attempt at ordering a chaotic world.

When I was invited to read at the White House -- and pondering the downsides of the invitation -- I wondered aloud to a colleague whether if, asked by the G.W. Bush administration to read, would I have accepted? To which my colleague responded, "Kenny, you never would've been asked to read at the G.W. Bush White House."

Not only is writing melting into everything, but everything  
is melting into writing.



Recently, I witnessed a harrowing sight: the selling off piecemeal of Jackson Mac Low's library at a flea market near my house in New York City. One Sunday afternoon, while rambling through the market, I saw a bookstall and, leafing through the stacks of books, I saw incredible things: every book by Dick Higgins's legendary Something Else Press, yellowed flyers for early 1960s productions of The Living Theater, dozens of rare chapbooks by prominent avant-garde writers, delectable pieces of ephemera related to John Cage and Merce Cunningham, odd 45 rpm records of electronic music, and so forth. The entire history of New York's underground, it seemed, was there for sale. Curious, I asked the seller what was the story behind this trove and he told me that it belonged to a famous poet; evidently the poet's widow wanted to get rid of it all and he personally hauled 75 boxes of stuff down six flights of stairs from a Tribeca loft. Everything was insanely expensive, too dear for me to even consider buying. When I asked him where he arrived at such prices, he said he looked on the Internet and priced them accordingly: he had no relationship to or knowledge of what he was selling. I could've bought Jackson's personal copy of *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* for \$150. I demurred.

Well, I let it play itself as much as I can, but if it doesn't, then I interfere, said David Tudor.

Non-interventionist writing. The need to do less.

Write as if you were dying. At the same time, assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients. That is, after all, the case, said Anne Dillard.

There's something delectable about taking a dense book and turning it into bite-sized chunks.

When one selects parts of a text, one non-narrativizes it.  
When one removes context and explanatory notes, the text  
morphs from the utilitarian into the poetic.

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin didn't respect paragraphs. Every entry runs justified across the page in a block, regardless of its length.

Without knowing, I reread a book and took new notes. When I went to file the notes, I discovered that I had already read this book four years ago, but selected entirely different sections this time around. It's just that today, for whatever reasons, I was struck by an entirely different set of texts.



I cannot let doubt enter this project at this stage.

Undistinguished Speaker Series

My favorite books on my shelf are the ones that I can't read straight through like *Finnegans Wake*, *The Making of Americans*, *The Arcades Project*, or *Boswell's Life of Johnson*. I love how I can pick them up, open them at random and always be surprised -- I'll never know them. I love the idea that these books exist: their scale, scope, and ambition; the fact that they'll never go out of style, that they're timeless. They're always new to me. I wanted to write books just like these.

The graduate students in the reading group could only reference the page; time and again, they were unable to make the leap into life.

Often -- mostly unconsciously -- I'll model my identity of myself on some image that I've been pitched to by an advertisement. When I'm trying on clothes in a store, I will bring forth that image that I've seen in an ad and mentally insert myself and my image into it. It's all fantasy. I would say that an enormous part of my identity has been adopted from advertising. I very much live in this culture; how could I possibly ignore such powerful forces? Is it ideal? Probably not. Would I like not to be so swayed by the forces of advertising and consumerism? Of course, but I would be kidding myself if I didn't admit that this was a huge part of who I am as a member of this culture.

If my identity is really up for grabs and changeable by the minute -- as I believe it is -- it's important that my writing reflect this state of ever-shifting identity and subjectivity. That can mean adopting voices that aren't "mine," subjectivities that aren't "mine," political positions that aren't "mine," opinions that aren't "mine," words that aren't "mine," because in the end, I don't think that I can possibly define what's "mine" and what isn't.

At the afternoon poetry workshop with Michelle Obama. She was wearing a gorgeous beaded and sequined skirt, a skin-tight mauve tank top, and shiny, pea-green pumps when she got up on stage. The room was fraught with tension. After giving a very stiff, formal introduction, suddenly her entire body posture changed. She slumped her shoulders, puckered her lips, tousled her hair and said in a slangy, homegirl sort of voice, "Aw, c'mon, everybody! What are you so uptight about? Relax! This is poetry, after all!"

That evening, with the President sitting five feet away from me, I read appropriated texts. Nobody flinched. I put together a short set featuring The Brooklyn Bridge, and presented three takes on it, including Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Hart Crane's "To Brooklyn Bridge," finally finishing with an excerpt from my book *Traffic*, which is 24-hours worth of transcribed traffic reports from a local New York news radio station. The crowd, comprised of arts administrators, Democratic party donors, and various senators and mayors, respectfully sat through the "real" poetry -- the Whitman and Crane -- but when the uncreative texts appeared, the audience was noticeably more attentive, seemingly stunned that the quotidian language and familiar metaphors from their world -- congestion, infrastructure, gridlock -- could be framed somehow as poetry. It was a strange meeting of the avant-garde with the everyday, resulting in a realist poetry -- or should I say hyperrealist poetry -- that was instantly understood by all in the room; let's call it radical populism.



In the future, the best information managers will be the best poets.

I recall once having seen a restaging of an early Robert Wilson piece from the 1970s. It took four hours for two people to cross the stage; when they met in the middle, one of them raised their arm and stabbed the other. The actual stabbing itself took a good hour to complete. Because I volunteered to be bored, it was the most exciting thing I've ever seen.

I was taken aback by the rudeness of students who felt compelled to throw things at me -- wads of paper and ballpoint pens -- while I was reading appropriated texts. It's hard to imagine the other poets who were reading, say, Amiri Baraka or Thurston Moore being treated similarly. In fact, the thought of any of those poets being interrupted during their readings is simply inconceivable.

The feelings lingered: I was later chided and mocked by students, who called me "rude" and "sassy." In response to them, I patiently explained that my practice is concerned with the equality of all words and is particularly focused upon the peripheral or paratextual parts of normative language. The reframing of regular speech as literature strips it of all its functionality and usefulness. By stressing its concrete and opaque qualities, we are able to alchemically transform unloved speech into valuable poetry. The utopian social, political, and spiritual dimension to my work is embodied in this radically democratic possibility.

Now you know what I do without ever having to have read a word of it.

I have a pet theory that in the 20th century, writing adopted visual arts' crisis of representation as its own, hence precipitating modernist writing. I'm skeptical that writing went through a crisis of equal or even parallel magnitude to what happened to painting upon the invention of photography. As a technological determinist, I'm convinced that painting's crisis was authentic and necessary; but while the invention of the telegraph or typewriter altered writing in smaller and very interesting ways, it didn't challenge the essential nature of the project. So that's my justification as to why there have been two streams of writing -- mainstream and experimental -- whereas the art world since impressionism has been mostly focused on innovation, embracing experimentation. That said, for writing, the digital has forced a crisis of representation all of its own. When the predominant technology of our time is driven by and comprised entirely of alphanumeric language, the writer is forced to change direction and find new ways to use language.

But understanding could be achieved, perhaps, on a different level -- one of willful ignorance.

Trolling books glassy-eyed, head nodding, starting to fall asleep when some chunk of text jumps out of the page, shocking you into awakesness.



After transcribing *Soliloquy* I've never heard language in quite the same way. Sometimes, when someone is speaking to me, I'll stop understanding what they're saying and instead begin to hear the formal qualities of their speech -- utterances, stumbling, and glottal sounds.

Words are no longer just for telling stories. Now language is digital and physical. It can be poured into any conceivable container: text typed into a Microsoft Word document can be parsed into a database, visually morphed in Photoshop, animated in Flash, pumped into online text-mangling engines, spammed to thousands of email addresses and imported into a sound editing program and spit out as music; the possibilities are endless.

Literature's insatiable thirst for authenticity and the self-centred lyric, qualities which are valued above others. Any work which challenges these presumptions is still outright dismissed.

After the reading, a young woman came up to me and told me that she had seen me lecture in a large MFA fiction writing class at Columbia. She said that everything I told the class went in one ear and out the other. All they cared about, including herself she said, was getting a half-million book contract when they graduated.

The idea of whether the book will survive is an uninteresting one, perhaps best left to the industry. What is crucial, though, is the idea that the effects of the digital are apparent in the writing, whether on paper or in pixels.

An emerging poet just put out what I feel to be perhaps the most important book of his generation. In the old days, this one book alone would've put him on the map. Now it's just another in a sea of Lulu publications and Facebook likes.

The translated cultural experience is skeletal at best and is always crass, a cartoon of an idea. Of course the best translations are always inferior to the original, and yet the act of translating can sometimes outweigh the translation itself. Think *La Disparition* into English, still *sans* the letter "e." Adair's role as translator of *A Void is*, in my opinion, an act of authorship equal to Perec's.

One night I found myself at a small dinner, surrounded by million-dollar novelists, their editors, publishers, and publicists. The conversation was mostly polite and forgettable. Toward the end of the evening, the conversation came around to me. "So you're the guy who does the uncreative writing, right? What's that all about?" As I began to answer, I noticed their attention flagging. An editor began checking his cellphone, one novelist glanced at her watch, the PR guy started yawning. Before long, my explanation was drowned out by, "Got an early morning meeting" and "Oh, it's really been fun." A few minutes later, I was alone at the table.

Upon returning home, I was dismayed, to say the least. Cheryl sympathetically listened and said, "Look at it this way. It's as if Adam Sandler and a bunch of guys who produce his movies were at the dinner table with Godard and conversation came around to him, '... and what do you do again?' ... 'Oh yeah. Right. Gotta go.'"



Repeat after me: "I am a pirate."

Misunderstanding as understanding.

Misinterpretation as interpretation.

Vija Celmins's love of duplication. The way she considered copying a kind of spiritual act.

Sighting language by stringing together words according to their audio and/or phonetic combinations rather than by meaning.

A post-aesthetic writing, with increasingly non-literary emphases.

It is speculation to say that *Fidget* describes *my body*; instead it describes a *body*. That body is decidedly male but beyond that, it's a universalized body, one without emotion or feeling, a realm of pure description, which exists in no specific space. When I wrote the book, I wanted to create an anti-Beckettian idea of the body. In Beckett, the tramp in a ditch on the side of a road that struggles to turn over from his back to his belly is a metaphor for all of humanity's struggles. With *Fidget*, I wished to simply describe the body itself, to formalize it, making it closer to the motion studies of Muybridge; the body as a site of non-symbolic, pure movement.

Over the past ten years, my practice today has boiled down to simply retyping existing texts. I've thought about my practice in relation to Borges's Pierre Menard, but even Menard was more original than I am: he, independent of any knowledge of *Don Quixote*, reinvented Cervantes' masterpiece word for word. By contrast, I don't invent anything. I just keep rewriting the same book.



The act of transcription can't help but be personal and unique. One exercise I do with my students is to give them a short radio piece to transcribe. I make sure it's never anything too interesting, perhaps something about a budget or tax battle in Congress. The next week, fifteen students each bring in fifteen unique pieces of writing. It's amazing how different they are: what you hear as a pause and annotate as a comma, I hear as the end of a sentence and annotate as a period. Some students transcribe in the format of a script -- properly set in courier font -- others choose to transcribe the clip as a run-on paragraph. But even within those that go with the run-on paragraph format, while many use punctuation and capital letters, many don't, producing documents that feel more like Molly Bloom's soliloquy than hard transcription. Several students include glottal stops and stumbles, while others ignore them entirely. Others try to score cadences and volume using graphical notation. The varieties are endless.

Hard transcription.

Conceptual writing promises to live in the negative space of ordinary literature: to expose the conventionality of ordinary literature's form and language, and incorporate both into its own peculiar superstructure.

Relinquishing the burden of reading -- and thereby a readership -- we can begin to think of conceptual writing as a new Esperanto, a body of literature able to be understood by anyone without having to be saddled with the act of translation.

Even with a thousand different voices, the author becomes singular by their *choice* of material.

I want an art that offers no resistance, an art of pure pleasure, an art that is completely understandable by anyone viewing it, an art that doesn't leave you puzzled, an art that ties up every loose end, dots every *i* and crosses every *t*, an art that leaves nothing to chance, ensuring that the experience of engaging with this art will be the one that is wholly desired by the artist. I want an art that leaves no nagging questions, is insanely simple in its goals, and meets everyone of them unequivocally. I want an art where the philosophical questions posed in the work are answered in the experience of the work itself. I want an art that my mother can love.

As an artist, I was always suspect of the pressure placed upon the artist to be a genius. I wanted to find a way to be that would allow me to work without the onus of genius, hence I found writing, a space for unoriginality, normality. With the lower stakes, came the freedom not to be great.

The moment we shake our addiction to narrative and give up our strong-headed intent that language must say something "meaningful," we open ourselves up to different types of linguistic experience.



The world is transformed: suddenly, the newspaper  
is détourned into a novel; the stock tables become list  
poems.

Over lunch, Sheila Heti asked me, if I really wanted to, whether I could write a narrative short story or traditional book of fiction. I had to admit that, no, I could not.

Being empty of any meaning or intention other than fulfilling the instructions that it's a fulfillment of, the work is perfect by default.

It's a favorite method of encryption: chunking revolutionary documents inside a mess of JPEG or MP3 code and emailing it off as an "image" or a "song."

After a semester of studying uncreative writing, I never want to hear a student say that they have writer's block again.

In 2010 at Columbia University's "Rethinking Poetics" conference, the Mexican-American poet Mónica de la Torre, in the middle of her presentation, broke out, full on, for ten minutes entirely in Spanish, leaving all those who pay lip service to multilingualism and diversity angry because they couldn't understand what she was saying. De la Torre thereafter resumed her talk in English, never mentioning her intervention.

The conceptual work is grotesquely impregnable to skeptical attacks or deconstructive questioning.

I never wanted my books to be mistaken for poetry or fiction books; I wanted to write reference books. But instead of referring to something, they refer to nothing. I think of them as 'pataphysical reference books.



Don't bookmark. Download.

Why I don't trust the cloud.

Like role-playing in an S&M club, conceptual writing is consensual.

A poet's career is rarely made on a single book, rather it's the long and slow accrual of publications, activities, community service, and so forth that firmly establish one's reputation.

These words might be mine. Or they might not. After living with them for so long, I can no longer tell the difference.

Copying-and-pasting words from elsewhere into my Word document: the moment I view them in my default font on my computer, they're suddenly "mine."

When artists are held to the sort of ethical and moral standards that politicians are, it's a very dangerous situation for art.

If I have to stop to ponder whether what I'm working on can be construed as literature, I know I'm on the right track.



If collections of language are truly records of existence,  
one could argue that they are absolutely necessary  
demonstrations of culture.

I've always thought that *No. 111* would age poorly, that the pop references would date very quickly. Thus far, that's been the case. But in 50 years, it'll be seen as a linguistic document of its time -- hazed with nostalgia for long-vanished culture -- and as such, very valuable.

The embrace of impurity permits second generations to freely reconcile opposites and break down binaries while maintaining the rigors and structures of first generations.

I made a recording of Wittgenstein's *Zettel* in German, a language I neither read nor understood. I so horribly mispronounced the words that even native German speakers who heard it couldn't recognize it as German. In this way, I was able to concretely demonstrate Wittgenstein's language games.

Everyone, absolutely everyone, was tape-recording everyone else. Machinery had already taken over people's sex lives -- dildos and all kinds of vibrators -- and now it was taking over their social lives, too, with tape recorders and Polaroids. Since I wasn't going out much and was home a lot on the mornings and evenings, I put in a lot of time on the phone gossiping and making trouble and getting ideas from people and trying to figure out what was happening -- and taping it all.

*Soliloquy* was more of an attempt at describing the difficulties of speech and the impossibility of communication, hence it's an anti-humanist statement. In it, we discover that one's normative babble is every bit as disjunctive as any modern or postmodern attempts to deconstruct language. By stripping speech of its non-referential elements, it permits us to isolate speech from its functionality, thus formalizing and defamiliarizing it. Best to admit that we will never understand one another, because *how* we say amounts to little more than white noise.

Misuses of language like homophonic translations and mondegreens as models of playful anarchy.

Question linguistic structures, question political structures.



Modernist purity had a peculiar shelf life. The only extant legacy of twelve-tone music is horror film soundtracks.

Writing in English gives you a great advantage in that everyone around the world can read your work, where as the downside is that you generally can't read theirs. Many of my Scandinavian writer friends can't read the work of their peers in other Scandinavian countries, yet they can read my work. But I suppose that the good thing about conceptual writing is that it's not supposed to be read anyway. If you get the idea of what they're trying to do, you understand the book, regardless of the language in which it is written, thus circumventing problems of translation.

In my work, I try to use standard grammar and syntax wherever possible. I want my basic unit of writing to be deliberately uninteresting, pre-fabricated, or pre-determined so that it may more easily become an intrinsic part of the entire work. Using a common or readymade form repeatedly narrows the field of my works and limits the amount of choices that I need to make. In this way, the work writes and constructs itself with less of my authorial intervention.

I prefer email to handshakes, culture to nature, air-conditioning to gentle breezes, fluorescents to incandescents, and value artifice more than life itself.

We've needed to acquire a whole new skill set: we've become a master typists, exacting cut-and-pasters, and OCR demons. There's nothing we love more than transcription; we find few things more satisfying than collation.

It's a fact that in the United States, the primary reception of innovative literature happens in the university; there really is very little readership outside of the academy.

One of the great advantages I've had as a writer is the fact that I was schooled as a visual artist. When I became a writer, I didn't know the rules of writing, which made it easy for me to pursue my own vision as a writer. I see many of my peers, schooled for many years in the history and techniques of writing, struggling to unfetter themselves from this knowledge in order to be able to pursue a more innovative path. In this way, I consider my lack of education to be very fortunate.

I'm interested in ideas of writing that are so simple that they verge on stupidity and absurdity.



It's often been said that a writer writes the books that she wishes were in the world, but are not.

Displacement is modernism for the 21st century, a child of montage, psychogeography, and the *objet trouvé*.

I thought back to that child who could sight-read words backwards. I became obsessed with this idea and, with great effort, I began to do this constantly.

As I sit here writing this, just an arm's reach from where I'm sitting is the pantheon of writers I'm conversing with. I don't often reach for those books, but I constantly run my eyes over their spines, as if to seek permission or consolation during my own practice. These sorts of conversations are perhaps the most private and subjective moments of what I do. But they happen. All the time. In fact, I can't make a move without thinking how that move might fit into the narrative of my own work, as well as how it fits into the discourse I'm having with my artistic lineage which, in my case, stretches back 150 years.

I considered the idea of working for twenty years entirely in languages that I didn't know.

The writer's solitary lair is transformed into a networked alchemical laboratory, dedicated to the brute physicality of textual transference. The sensuality of copying gigabytes from one drive to another: the whirr of the drive, intellectual matter manifested as sound. The carnal excitement from supercomputing heat generated in the service of poetry.

The most resistant student always becomes the most devoted.

A pre-programmed automaton, the mirror employs no judgment or morals, indiscriminately displaying all that passes before it. Reflect something emotional, the mirror becomes emotional. Reflect something political, the mirror becomes political. Reflect something erotic, the mirror becomes erotic.



Displaced authorship solely consists of determining what the text will reflect. Reflect something emotional, you have written an emotional text. Reflect something political, you have written a political text. Reflect something erotic, you have written an erotic text. Mirrored writing is not writing: it is copying, moving, and reflecting. Editing is moving. Want to alter your text? Move it elsewhere.

The choice of machine that makes the poem sets the political agenda in motion, which is often times morally or politically reprehensible to the author. In retyping the every word of a day's copy of *The New York Times*, am I to exclude an unsavory editorial?

The weight of holding a book's worth of language in the clipboard waiting to be dumped: the magic is in the suspension.

I began to obsess on the amount of language being produced by individuals. What would happen if all that language were somehow materialized? I thought of the largest snowstorm we ever had in New York a few years ago. The sanitation department came around with a machine that transferred all the snow into dump trucks. The dump trucks then drove to the river and dumped the snow in the water, dissolving it. Would the dump trucks dump our language in the river too? Perhaps, in the same way that snow melts when put in water, they would find a way to liquidate our language, storing it in water towers atop loft buildings for future use.

If every word spoken daily in New York City were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, each day there would be a blizzard.

I dedicated myself to working four years exclusively on one project -- I did nothing else. Instead of becoming bored with the project, I became ever more fascinated by it. As a matter of fact, I was miserable for months after it ended.

We sympathize with the protagonist of a cartoon claiming to have transferred x amount of gigabytes, physically exhausted after a day of downloading. The simple act of moving information from one place to another today constitutes a significant cultural act in and of itself. I think it's fair to say that most of us spend hours each day shifting content into different containers. Some of us call this writing.

The act of listening has now become the act of archiving.  
We're more interested in accumulation and preservation than  
we are in what is being collected.



Real speech, when paid close attention to, forces us to realize how little one needs to do in order to write. Just paying attention to what is right under our noses is enough.

How fortunate we are to exist in the moneyless economy of poetry!

Now I've been working on a project for ten years. It only gets more fascinating as time goes on.

How to proceed after the deconstruction and pulverization of language that is the 20th century's legacy? Should we continue to pound language into ever smaller bits or should we take some other approach? The need to view language again as a whole -- syntactically and grammatically intact -- but to acknowledge the cracks in the surface of the reconstructed linguistic vessel. Therefore, in order to proceed, we need to employ a strategy of opposites -- unboring boring, uncreative creativity, unoriginal genius -- all methods of disorientation used in order to re-imagine our normative relationship to language.

I wanted to write a book that I would never be able to know. The approach I took was that of quantity. I'd collect so many words that each time I'd open my book, I'd be surprised by something that I had forgotten was there. What constitutes a big book? I looked on my bookshelf for clues. I found that any dictionary worth it's salt was at least 600 pages, so with that in mind, I decided that I would write a 600 page book. I did. And in the end, the project was a failure. I got to know every word so well over the four years that it took to write it that I became bored by the book. I can't open a page and be surprised. Perhaps quantity was the wrong approach.

Some twenty years later, I now open the book and I can't remember a word of it.

Writing, like the new American business cycle, is unfolding today according to the logic of short-term efficiencies: agility, turnover, scale. Ever more scientific in means and pragmatic in its ends, the new writing seeks no other gradient but the one of least resistance: either the continuous predatory-stopgap activity of "efficient market theory" or the "fast cheap and out of control" breeder logic of self-regulating capital. In both cases, writers have discovered that they can fill niches far more quickly if their field of activity is cleared of any of the obstacles or drag associated with precious interiority or self-expression.

Theater and movies after *Soliloquy* are inevitably disappointing. I now hear the studied and stilted way that the actors speak. It's always too clean. Their thought and speech patterns are too directional, streamlined, and less complex than everyday speech. I find it increasingly hard to suspend disbelief.



If you listen to Beethoven, it's always the same, but if you listen to traffic, it's always different, said John Cage.

While waiting for the opera to begin, I had a heated discussion with Bruce Andrews. Bruce insisted that editing is the most important job of an poet. I disagreed and said that if the writer's parameters are "not editing," then different standards apply. We invent our own parameters to fit our own agendas.

Conceptual writing is the Switzerland of poetry. We're stuck in neutral.

Disposability, fluidity, and recycling: there's a sense that these words aren't meant for forever.

*Entartete Sprache*

When the machine takes control, we passively, and happily,  
acquiesce.

April 11, 1954. The most boring day of the 20th century.

What we used to think was history -- kings and queens, treaties, inventions, big battles, beheadings, Caesar, Napoleon, Pontius Pilate, Columbus, William Jennings Bryan -- is only formal history and largely false. I'll put down the informal history of the shirt-sleeved multitude -- what they had to say about their jobs, love affairs, vittles, sprees, scrapes, and sorrows -- or I'll perish in the attempt.



When I started writing poetry, I realized how dull it was. I decided that instead of trying to make it more interesting, I would try to make it duller. And now that it's so dull, it's become interesting.

The grind of the scanner as it peels language off the page,  
thawing it, liberating it.

The endless cycle of textual fluidity: from imprisonment to emancipation, back to imprisonment, then freed once more. The balance between dormant text warehoused locally and active text in play on the web. Language in play. Language out of play. Language frozen. Language melted.

Art used to make me see the world differently, think about things in a new way -- it rarely does that for me anymore, but technology does that for me on a daily basis.

We now favor the slogan, while eschewing the paragraph.

Short attention span is the new avant-garde. Everyone complains that we can no longer intake huge chunks of text. I find that a reason to celebrate. Twitter is the revenge of modernism.

Poets think in short lines. Unless you're Samuel Beckett,  
Twitter might be more difficult for novelists.

SHEILA HETI: People maybe steer clear of Twitter and social media because they don't want to be influenced by it. What do you think of these people?

KENNETH GOLDSMITH: I think they're idiots.



If you just ignore it, the Internet will go away.

If you have nothing to write about turn on the TV and start transcribing.

This week's assignment: Please transcribe the Internet.

It doesn't mean anything until it becomes a meme.

It's art that's irrelevant, not the avant-garde.

Plagiarist, trouble-maker, saboteur. Charges leveled against Brecht, all of which he considered titles of honor.

Humanism is really problematic on about a thousand levels.

Art is something that makes nothing happen.



If you don't want it copied, don't put it on the web.

Where technology leads, literature follows.

Most ideas that are successful are ludicrously simple.  
Successful ideas have the appearance of simplicity because  
they seem inevitable.

Make something useful useless.

The Chicago Manual of Style doesn't offer guidelines for footnoting sources that are acknowledged to be plagiarized and yet cannot be traced.

Only an amateur answers his critics.

If you work on something a little bit every day, you end up with something that is massive.

Dare to be naive.



An intellectual says a simple thing in a hard way. An  
artist says a hard thing in a simple way.

I'm bored when I'm not memeing.

Anyone who is interested in poetry is interested in it for the right reasons. Otherwise, they'd be out of their minds to stick around.

I am a fake. But not a lie.

Artists ask questions, and they don't give answers.

Artists make messes and leave it for others to clean up.

Do we really need another poem that describes the way light falls on your writing desk as a metaphor for your mother's cancer operation?

¡ABAJO LAS GALERÍAS, VIVAN LAS PAPELERÍAS!



If you admit plagiarism, it's fine. If you try to sneak it by, you get caught.

I am unoriginal; I just keep stealing, plundering, and robbing myself.

Drag is plagiarism.

Decriminalize plagiarism.

Plagiarism is, indeed, hip.

Christian Marclay on not clearing any permissions for The Clock: "Technically it's illegal, but most would consider it fair use."

The Clock is both illegal and legal, outlaw and legit.

If you make it good and interesting and not ridiculing or offensive, the creators of the original material will like it, said Christian Marclay about not clearing any permissions for The Clock.



Theorize your digital existence.

If it isn't self-conscious, don't trust it.

If it isn't pretentious, don't trust it.

If it isn't false, don't trust it.

When Picasso learned of Duchamp's death, he was heard to simply mutter, "He was wrong."

All the money in the world can't make a better book of poetry.

You have no idea how hard it is to be unoriginal.

I am not interested in good; I am interested in new -- even if this includes the possibility of its being evil.



Democracy is fine for YouTube, but it's generally a recipe for disaster when it comes to art.

The text of a newspaper is released from its paper prison of fonts and columns, its thousands of designs, corporate, political decisions, now flattened into an nonhierarchical expanse of sheer potentiality as a generic text document begging to be repurposed, dumped into a reconditioning machine and cast into a new form.

To be disappointed in government is to believe in government.

Syntax is the arrangement of the army.

The limits of the network are the limits of my world.

I'm everything you fear I am. And worse.

Far from being 'authorless and nameless', our texts are timestamped and indexed by the technology that created them.

Cruising the web for new language. The sexiness of the cursor as it sucks up words from anonymous web pages, like a stealth encounter. The dumping of those words, sticky with residual junk, back into the local environment; scrubbed with text soap, returned to their virginal state, filed away, ready to be reemployed.



Sculpting with text.

Data mining.

Sucking on words.

Our task is to simply mind the machines.

Barthes' "Death of the Author" revealed that authorship is a capitalist construct. It didn't stop authorship; it only showed its hollowness. Our consciousness is saturated by social media's fountain of text. Because of Barthes we are trained to read without regard to authorial intent. Meanwhile, new technology driven by capitalist logic again and again proves the postmodern tradition absurd.

Yes you can be copied but you can't be imitated.

Being distracted is the new paying attention.

There's a shitload of Internet out there.



There are no more writings and no more writers because in the 21st century these have become data and metadata.

I began tire of the everyday. After all, the job of retyping the entire Internet could go on forever.

A used discourse is better than a new one.

Plagiarize your plagiarizers. Bootleg your bootleggers.  
Pirate your pirates.

We fret too much over originality. Even if we do the same project as another artist, it can never be the same.

I really don't think that there's a stable or essential "me." I am an amalgamation of so many things: books I've read, movies I've seen, televisions shows I've watched, conversations I've had, songs I've sung, lovers I've loved. In fact, I'm a creation of so many people and so many ideas to the point where I feel that I've actually had very few original thoughts and ideas; to think that any of this was original would be blindingly egotistical. Sometimes I'll think that I've had an original thought or feeling and then, at 2 a.m. while watching an old movie on TV that I hadn't seen in many years, the protagonist will spout something that I had previously claimed as my own. In other words, I took his words (which, of course, weren't really "his words" at all), internalized them and made them my own. This happens all the time.

Changing a period to a comma in Wikipedia registers on the page's history with the same magnitude as if you've deleted or added a paragraph. In this way -- through micro-manuevers -- writing subtly, but definitely changes the world.

The gradual accumulation of words; a blizzard of the  
evanescent.



Over lunch at MoMA with Stephen Burt, I learned the difference between a lyrical and a conceptual approach to writing. The conversation came around to music and I expressed my preference for the LP, while he said he preferred the single. He said that he admired the idea of perfect craftsmanship that went into a single, the crisp lyrical quality, and the high stakes involved in compressing everything into an explosively compact format. I responded that I preferred the concept album and the idea that while there might be some dead moments, the brilliance of conceiving of a complete work outweighed the quality of its parts. Stephen preferred a Beatles song like "Taxman," while I'd take the mess that is *The White Album*. Our different approaches to poetry have never been made so clear to me as they were that day.

When retyping a book, I often stop and ask myself if what I am doing is really writing. As I sit there, in front of the computer screen, punching keys, the answer is invariably yes.

Everything I'm saying has been said before by others. There is nothing new here, just remixes and rehashes of soiled ideas and well-worn theories.

I've stolen things that weren't mine and have made a career out of forgery and dishonesty. I'm proudly fraudulent. And it's served me well -- I highly recommend it as an artistic strategy. But really, don't take my word for it.