

BOB COBBING'S PERFORMANCES: PRODUCTION AND CIRCULATION, OF THE TEXT

Bob Cobbing produced and circulated texts as poet and artist and publisher for sixty years. Many of his own texts, and their performances, were collaboratively authored and or collaboratively interpreted. Performances of production and circulation for poetry for him did not at all rest only with the non-reproducible *live* event, but his understanding of the dynamics of the *live* increasingly informed and influenced all aspects of poetic production and circulation for him. That is, Cobbing's extension of performances for the production and circulation of poetry gradually widened through his life to include all acts and aspects of composition and definitions of publication. This essay maps some key markers on that trajectory, concentrating here for the sake of brevity on earlier and late works, in the course of doing so pointing insistently towards an expanded conception of the poetics of performance and the performances of production and of circulation for poetry. The methodology here, especially in the final two thirds of the essay, is an expanded reflection based substantially on informed witness-participation and primary sources.

Printing is but one performance of production and circulation within a wider definition of publication. Framing a *British Poetry Revival*, Eric Mottram using his own coin, articulated it as "a performance: the creative presentation of imaginative work in the public area," extensively listing *Magazines, Presses and Events* to document a period "movement from private to public." (Mottram, 1974: 117) Circulation of the work of poetry was, for him, at that time, through "tapes,

records, printed texts, live readings, talks on poetry, conferences, public conversations with poets - this is the action of publication demonstrated by our poets in the 1960s.” (Mottram, 1974: 117) Such a diversification of modes, for the production and circulation of poetry, enlarged throughout Cobbing’s creative lifetime to include Compact Disc, Video, Web Cast, e-listservs, blogs and Digital Archives offering unifying platforms for variant precedent formats.

Writers Forum however was more than a publication house. An *open* workshop under the same name, dedicated to exploring performances of writing, took place for fifty years under Cobbing’s invitation, from its inception in Hendon 1952 until his death in September 2002. Writers Forum occasioned an international community of poetic enquiry, a welcoming gathering, for performances of poetry. Conversation after sessions was discursive and frank. Writers Forum poets, and Cobbing’s position as their convenor and presiding energy, were generative, positive and encouraging influences. His presence and contribution remained one of generosity; creating space for others to be creative in. Since 2002, convened partly as perceived continuity in tribute to Bob Cobbing, workshops have continued.

My first witness--participation in the productive-interpretative community of a Writers Forum workshop during 1975 was at the invitation of Bill Griffiths. Writers Forum at that time occurred at the National Poetry Centre in Earls Court Square. Staple resorts of poetry openly contested at these workshops were the unitary voice of epiphanic glibness, and the boundaries of lyric *I*; both frequently put under pressure by polyphonic recomposition and polychronic attention. Poetic texts, all manner of alphabetic and non-alphabetic mark-making, graphic scores and visual notations, were frequently read by two or three voices (or more); voiced in improvised interaction, with syncopation, with overlapping stresses, with partial erasure, foreground and background scripting, staccato narrative assemblages and

dialogistic interjection. Some poems were arraigned on the floor, others hung cascading from the ceiling. Sheaves of pages fluttered loose in the hand. Listening was premium. Spatial sonic placement became an arena of perceptual investigation; spatiality of page layout, both the placement of pages in the room and the spatialisation of writings on the page, were consequent. Witness-participant attention was full on and wide open, exhibiting a porous frame. In workshop presentations a dynamic interchange between improvisation and composition occurred. Potential live performances of a piece of writing would give rise to consecutive versions in which two or three different possibilities were offered. Writings thereby explored through out-loud readings became subjects for revision, a direct result of having been aired. A performance of writing was an embodied occasion, belonging to neither giver nor receiver; a signal, even secretion, mobilised liminal exchange. Between the writing on the page and the writing off the page, projected through the bodies of its temporary operators (its readers), lay sonic orientation and propulsive gesture.

The Writers Forum workshop exemplified a research group, and was a seedbed for emergent collaborations; collaboration between poets, between poets and printers, between hand production and machinic transformation, between poets and artists from disciplines other than poetry found home there. Cobbing practised a leading politics and ethics of interdisciplinary collaboration for poetry at that time.¹ As a poet he sustained an investigation into the syncretic and the synesthetic; exploring hybridisable boundaries between poetry and painting, poetry and drawing, poetry and music, poetry and film in all of which he took an active interest. He generated productive and circulatory conversations between practitioners of discreet artform disciplines and instigated sustaining networks of widely associating thinkers and makers as a result.

Recycling and re-versioning and morphological transformation of material content were core to his creative practice. For example Cobbing identifies several poems in *Cygnets Ring*, the first volume of an ongoing collected project, as cut-ups of earlier cut-ups, rendering a predilection for versioning plain. (Cobbing, 1977) Material mark-making, whether linguistic or extra-linguistic, is to be treated as material for potential transformation and category puncture. Working with potentialities between art form boundaries and between traditions and cultures of poetry, his poetry was a performance of decisions and adaptations; in respect of linguistic materials, forms and formats, technologies of production and reproduction, context and audience. He could render the same basic poem as a concretion and as an abstraction; as a humorous commentary, an excoriating critique, a prompt for trance or song, a fearsome shriek and a childlike song of nonsense. Works were subjected to variation.

Cygnets Ring charts an initial network of taut structures moving increasingly towards permutational and mutational writings. In *Make Perhaps This Out Sense Of Can You* (1963) six out of seventeen lines end with “perhaps,” emphasising that a community for which sense becomes operational is no more than provisional. (Cobbing, 1977: np26) Another small piece, permuted from a newspaper headline, *Are your children safe in the sea?* (1960) crafted a provocation in respect of language acquisition, meaning and the world. A subsequent *visual version* took the form of a typestract tryptich (1965) enacting the parental-societal dilemma; the free play of the signifier, let loose from its simplest horizontal propriety, releases anarchistic philosophies of freedom, voiced from multiple sources with only notional focus. (Cobbing, 1977: np25) He was propelled him into complex convergences between distributive performances of printing, bookmaking and *live* vocal renditions that nourished a lifelong exploration of their interstices.

The same month as this typestract was produced Cobbing published a plurilingual abcedarian tour de force, *A B C in Sound*, including minimal but nevertheless cogent instructions for vocal performance composed the previous year, such as:

R. A path from Rebus to Repeat using all words moving to an adjacent word in any direction. Read several times / each time a different route. Last time from Repeat to Rebus. (Cobbing, 1965)

These instructions quickly generated “flexibility in interpretation,” hardly surprising in this instance considering that **R** is a text in four adjacent columns, each containing seven words.

Rebus	Interview	Untitled	Bed
Odalisk	Hymnal	Rhyme	Kneepad
Hazard	Factum	Curfew	Kickback
Forge	Trophy	Inlet	Bypass
Broadcast	Pilgrim	Ace	Empire
Barge	Stopgap	Kite	Payload
Bicycle	Tracer	Flush	Repeat

A rebus is a puzzle in which pictures represent syllables or words. The puzzle here is in Cobbing’s definitional reversal: a picture composed of words and the spaces between them, fitted into a stabilizing diagram for which spatial layout acts as syntax. Resisting anagrammatic subjugation and paragrammatic decoding; no other pattern of syllabic stress, internal rhyme, acrostic code, abcedarian or counting scheme emerges from these columns with sufficient urgency to provide a key.

There appears to be no theme, no logic, nor pattern of meaning, to the mechanics of representation other than those regulated by visual appearance and the potential play in assemblages resultant from their sounding. The value of this rebus lies in its being a conceit. In fact it is not so much a picture, as a score. Furthermore, anybody could read this text, both on and off the page. Following instructions for sounding this component of his alphabet, the fact that none of its words present difficulty and that no amplitude is specified, only decisions as to order and duration need be made by a temporary operator of this text for a performance to be achieved. For Cobbing though words were only part of communication, much of which occurred “through gesture, through looks through sounds other than words, through bodily movement and so on.” (Cobbing and Smith, 1998: 1)

A B C in Sound celebrated Cobbing’s undoubted skill as a maker of carefully-wrought, highly-expressive and formally-diverse writings that pointed generously to what else might be done. The success of its book publication and radiophonic broadcast generated opportunities for him to work with tape recorders and to move beyond the simple instructions for performance in the first editions.

Having witnessed ultra-lettriste Henri Chopin *live*, generating multi-layered assemblages for vocal micro-particles and buccal instances that he called *poésie sonore*, Cobbing admits to hearing a playback of his own voice at that time and being horrified “with the feeble quality of the voice” and trying to *do* something about it he began to manipulate the machine controls so as to nurture a voice he could be “a bit more in love with.” (Mottram and Cobbing, 1977: 15) During the following decade he assembled poems that included marks increasingly abstracted from semantic elements. At least forty-six forays into tape recording explored the granularity of the treated and the untreated human voice. (Mayer, 1974: 80-2) Almost all were produced in collaboration with other sound artists and

poets, such as Annea Lockwood, Henri Chopin, Francois Dufrêne and John Darling. New collaborations brought exploratory conversation and fresh discursive perspectives into his vocabulary.

He used and he misused the tape machine, as a tool to modify his vocal capabilities; much as he used and misused the stencil burner and office duplicator, later still the photocopier, to extend his textual enquiries on the page. Striking a playful attitude to machine-human interfaces Cobbing began to accept happy accidents in the work, something Mottram, in conversation with Cobbing, characterised as a “very 20th century attitude . . . that you make a field and then you leave inside it what is happening.” (Mottram and Cobbing, 1977: 16) This concept of an inclusive boundary combines with the sense of a poem being a range of versions exhibiting family resemblance, to generate and circulate productive variance. Indeed Cobbing often spoke of differing exophonic versions of the same titled marks, as sharing kinship characteristics in a processual proliferation of what Genette terms “versions of the same pluri-occurential work.” (Genette, 1997: 200)

No longer excited by merely producing and circulating typographic overprinting, Cobbing had begun to exploit the affect and effect of an excess of ink oozing indecorously out from under the edges of the duplicator stencil in a carnivalesque blotching of bureaucratic conventions. These concrete abstractions of the materiality from which conventional linguistic signifiers were usually isolated brought semantic elements into conversation with the extralinguistic, foregrounding the voice as an index of the body of language. By the time of *Kurrirrurriri* (Figure 1) Cobbing was offering both multi-vocal performance groupings and solos, depending upon the nature of the invitation and appropriateness to occasion. Having experimented with tape and worked on his voice, he abandoned a solipsistic tape practice and largely concentrated on being in the moment. Notably, he came to

privilege the *live* in almost every aspect of his practice, from the actions of printing, performances of production that became the site of so much of his poetic composition, to the performances with *live* witness where work passed into further forms of circulation.

A sonic structure of any writing is complicated when more than one voice is simultaneously involved in its sounding. Two people, reading the same poem out loud together, are unlikely to maintain the same intonation, same pacing and so on throughout; unless the aim is to sound utterly stilted. Whether uttered by a group or a single voice such a text as *Kurrirrurriri* offers refreshing complexities. Consider reading order. Should anybody begin in the top left hand corner of the image, taken orientation its title, such a reading will issue from a thicket of overprinting so intense as to be an interpretative engagement with almost unbroken black ink. The urgent question this temporary textual operator confronts is how to deal vocally with markings not derived from, or divisible, even decodable, into alphabetic forms. Subsequently the ear-eye must progress through negative imprints created either by creases left on sheets of paper after getting jammed in the passage through a printing machine or else by creases in a duplicator stencil, deliberately mis-fitted; or possibly a combination of both? Once exploratory articulation has traversed these ridges, they meet discernible words, “analysis,” “In order to” “some of this writing” “my long-lasting disagreement” before legibility buckles again. A reader might be tempted to reorient the page, or try reading upsides down and back-to-front. Cobbing encouraged the exploration of *correct* orientation by tending to read from separate cards and turning those cards in his hand while reading from them, as well as by publishing poems as separate cards gathered into envelopes, so a reader would need to decide which way up to read too. At times Cobbing would lay cards on the floor and move around them which

vocalising, bringing to mind documentary films of Jackson Pollock in the act of painting. This is not a reference made lightly.

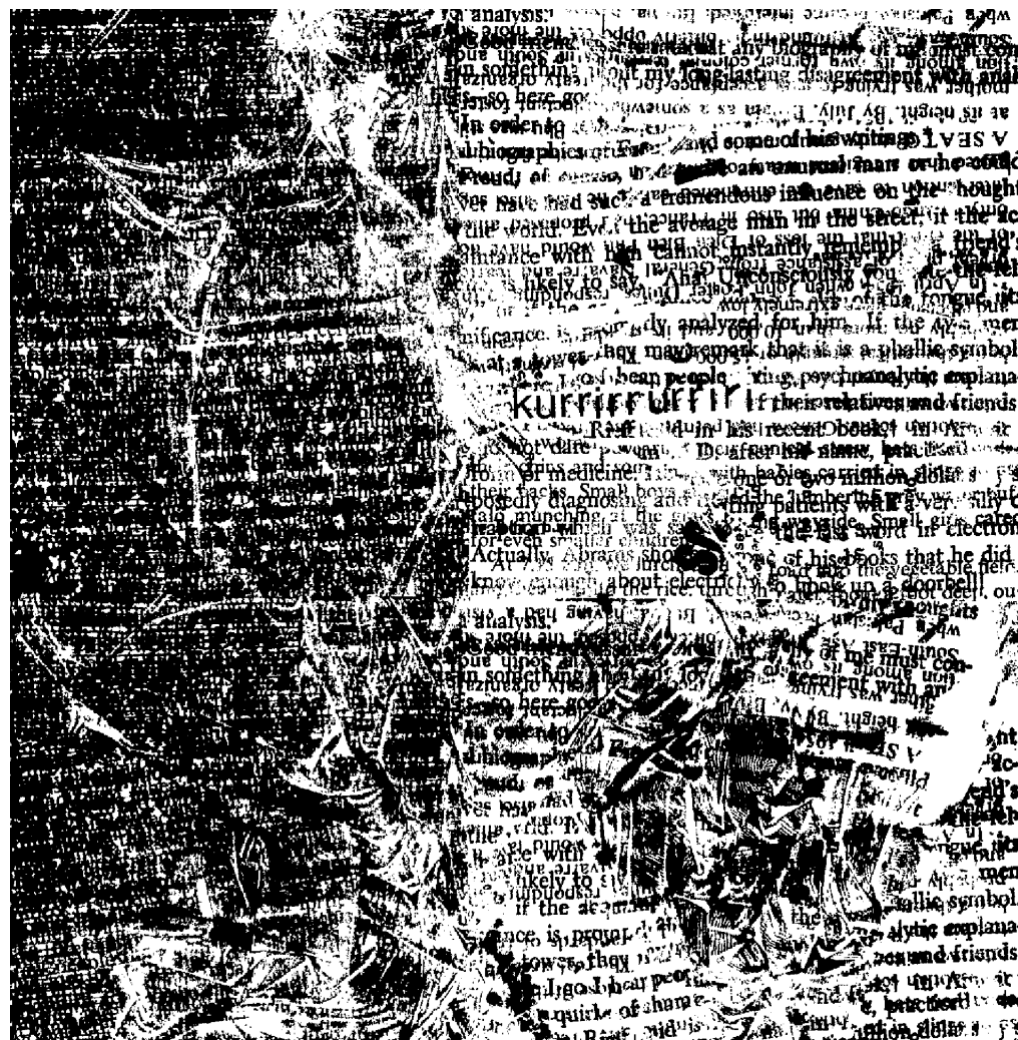


Figure 1. Bob Cobbing, *Kurrirrurriri* (1967).

Meaning in such a text as *Kurrirrurriri* lies in the inter-relationships between legibilities and illegibilities, between linguistic figuration and abstracted blocks of black ink, between creases and folds in the palimpsest and discernible fragments of text. Viewed under a microscope parts of the text begin to map a document containing surprising narratives found amongst over-printed references to accounts of psychoanalysis:

even the average man in the street cannot instantly remember
Aha! unconsciously . . tongue . . significance . . analyzed for
him . . may remark that is a phallic symbol . . of bean people .
. supposedly diagnosing . . munching . . (Cobbing, 1978: np23) ³

The consideration of interpretive procedures is advisory, either prior to or during a performance, so as to guide interactive strategies for differing densities of concrete and abstracted typographic detail. Cobbing used the drawn film soundtracks of Norman McLaren as a pointer towards correlation between shape and sound when making statements such as “when I make marks on paper I am writing in sound,” (Cobbing and Smith, 1998: 4) ⁴ but each reader has the challenge of finding their own path to understanding. Despite the title being imprinted so as to made a decisive intervention into the orientation of its page *Kurrirurriri* strongly suggests inversion through rotation, and the lack of short-term satisfaction remaining from any attempt to operate the text in this dogged fashion, other reading strategies must surely come into play. Paula Claire, a regular performance collaborator of Cobbing’s by this time, writes:

During 1972, while interpreting pieces like Bob Cobbing’s *15 Shakespeare Kaku, Judith and Mary Rudolph’s Chromosomes*, I got used not only to improvising to deliberately ambiguous letter forms, but blobs, smudges and dashes amongst these letter patterns. (Claire, 1974)

Exactly how any given reader interprets *ambiguous letter forms, blobs, smudges and dashes* can only be negotiated through performance both and on and off the page. Any vocabulary for improvisation and the confidence to employ that

vocabulary is constructed through practice; remains provisional, is modified, changes. Through open workshops and advertised readings Cobbing put textual versions and their proliferating interpretations into play, learning and teaching through interaction in performance, developing a coterie of collaborative interpreters.

Vocal improvisation produces small dances of involuntary gesture that in turn affect the production of further vocal sound. Even a single voice, its interlocking movements and signals enmeshed in the production of articulatory resonance, dancing its way through a pre-scripted text, has sonic and visual choreographic qualities. McCaffery has written that two, three or four performers giving voice together in a space that can be considered as a stage, however ad hoc, push “ontology toward polis, addressing the accidental configuration of two intermeshed ensembles—performers and audience—as an urgent issue of community.” (McCaffery, 1998: 169) An occasion of a poem and its temporary operators, those performing as temporary transmitters and those performing as temporary receivers both, are thereby situated as an occasion for provisional community then. The roles of transmitters and receivers do not remain fixed and should not be understood as being so. This is a very subtle dance. Reception and transmission form a reflexive loop. The poem provides an occasion of convergence between scored impetus for sound and actualised sound, between voiced bodies of transmitters and attentive bodies of receivers. The outcome is an interweaving of production and circulation, a splice between witness and participation .

Having launched into publication with cut-ups, having been instrumental in founding the London Film-makers Coop and having worked intensely with electronic tape for sound recording, it is perhaps not so surprising to find Cobbing beginning to cut not merely between lines of text but directly into the

physical appearance of actual lines themselves; slicing into the shapes of words and even of letters to achieve a poetic methodology appropriate to era. An era during which a preponderant terminology, related to artistic ideas of juxtaposition seizing a moment in time, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, would have to include the (re)*mix*, the *cut*, the *splice*. Sound and shape and image brought into close conversation, producing syncretic gesture, to forward the verbi-visi-vocal. The booklet *15 Shakespeare Kaku* (Cobbing, 1972) is the most interesting early example of this development in his practice. First published in *Poems for Shakespeare* by the Globe Playhouse Trust, squarely in the tradition of the occasional poem; later a tiny booklet (120mm x 93mm), produced out of one A4 sheet, printed on both sides, folded and stapled together with a white card cover.

At a *Shakespeare Birthday Week Gala Concert* in Southwark Cathedral on April 23rd 1972, *15 Shakespeare Kaku* was given a *live* performance for three-voices and organ by *Konkrete Canticle* (Bob Cobbing, Paula Claire and Michael Chant). The text presents fifteen spatially-sequential, typographical assemblages, hereafter referred to as *figures*, the linguistic content of which is so partial as to be all but illegible.

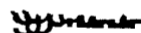
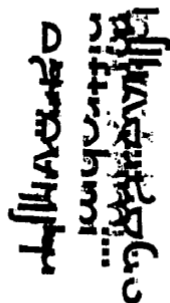


Figure 2. Bob Cobbing, from *15 Shakespeare Kaku* (1972).

A six-page text sequence begins on the recto with three horizontal *figures*; then a double-page spread with one vertical *figure* opposite to three more horizontal *figures* (Figure 2); a second double page spread with two horizontal *figures* opposite to three horizontal *figures*; finally a verso with three horizontal *figures*: fifteen *figures*, in total.

Cobbing stressed his ongoing interest in this work thirty-five years later; privately circulating jwcurry's *journal extracts on Bob Cobbing's 15 Shakespeare Kaku*, taken from a quarterly of "haiku related material." Curry refers to that which I have called *figures* as not being visually mimetic "apples, landscapes or lettriste portraits of our man Will; they *look like* bunches of type."⁵ However these "bunches of type" for jwcurry are not throw-away gestures. He means that appellation constructively. Expectation of conventional meanings, as with typestracts operated by conventions of linguistic closure, are, those first and final *figures* aside, made the subject of disappointment. This is the first time that Cobbing juxtaposes vertical and horizontal *figures* as a double-page spread in book format (fig. 2). The book object, as with earlier separate cards such as *Kurrirurriri*, suggests being turned in the hand; a feature of content-architecture exploited by works I am coming on to discuss.

Cobbing renewed his interest in the *kaku* in March 1998 by producing and circulating a text of teasing, explicatory definitions. *Kikaku Kaku*, is named after *Kikaku* a disciple of Basho in the often alliterative and assonant Japanese short form of frozen zen *haiku* and these reworkings were subsequently brought together into a large-print version as *15 Shakespeare Kaku – augmented* (Cobbing, 1998), working with material gleaned from over twenty variant-language dictionaries

around this time. *Kaku* has twenty-eight entries in Japanese, several of which hint at writing and drawing going in and out of each other through line-making—"an enclosure", "a stroke", "character", "the figure", "write on every other line", "scribble", "spell", "compose", "draw", "cut", "daub a picture", "scratch", "choice extracts"—for example. Other meanings invoke natural shapes that bring philosophies of hermeneutics into play—"a kernel", "a stone", "crack ice"—and others still talk of societal position—"a bishop", "a palace", "promoted to a higher rank" and "good English" (Cobbing, 1998). Such definitions augmented the earlier *kaku* which, made from cut, inter-spliced, broken and thereby deconstructed alphabetic typography, are overprinted so that their spatialisation on the page creates a suggestion of motion; playing both into and against the spare and sparse qualities of *haiku*. A sense of texts being caught in motion towards the semantic, rather than static, not unlike the doubling that can occur in good haiku that both shifts and preserves a moment, is unsurprising given that dance remained a crucial aspect of Cobbing's view of poetry. He invoked it with regularity; indeed he pointed to it as a convergence between all of his various performances, considering dance "perhaps the key to them all" (Mayer, 1974: 55). This *augmented* edition of the *kaku* manages to seem both didactic and elusive. Cobbing dangles a carrot to what the work *might* mean; with a trademark emphasis to playful ambiguity. At the same time he presents such a plenitude of meaning that closures are rendered moot. It was a lesson that Robert Sheppard learned that Cobbing made readily available: not to "hypostasize the Poem as a closed structure" (Sheppard, 1995: 87). Generations of new textual versions were motivated and mobilised through frequent, *live* performances witnessed by diverse audiences.

Versions of texts hybridized to a sufficient extent that Cobbing began to use photocopying to produce extensive works that foregrounded morphology,

calling them *processual*. Often he would move around the machine, circle the machine, manipulating the *original* by hand as the light of the copying instrument attempted to catch its detail. He literally pulled and dragged and turned the *original* in the moments of the machine's attempt to produce copy. The result was that a sense of movement, of gesture and of embodiment, was often caught in the process of the production of the textual image. A kind of micro-bio-linguistics of scale is suggested in works such as (*Processual*) *One – Christmas Day* (Cobbing, 1982): in which letters are paradoxically macro and micro; monumental, page-sized and also cracked open to reveal variant cellular and granular structures. Producing poetic visual scores for sonic variation he made books out of the very stuff of poetry. He moved a page through the light of the photocopier as that machine attempted to produce facsimile; he encouraged physical mobility in front of an audience through a preference for the hand-held card, rather than a book, as his sonic signal. But notation for performance suggests more than just a sounding. The occasion itself, the environment in which it occurred and interactions with those in attendance were critical. There is no sense in notation without occasion.

In December 1994, Bob Cobbing and Lawrence Upton were asked to close *The Smallest Poetry Festival*, held in Robert Sheppard and Patricia Farrell's living room in a council house in Tooting (Cobbing and Upton, 1995). For an occasion that instigated the last major phase of Cobbing's creative work; proliferating performances of variation, permutation and transformation previously most evidenced by his *Processual* projects of the previous decade (Cobbing, 1987) were taken a stage further into a fully collaborative writing practice. These two poets had known each other over a period of thirty years and worked together previously, though alongside rather than directly *with* each other (Cobton and Upton, 1977).⁶ From this invitation, calculated, according to Robert Sheppard⁷ to

get these two poets working together once again, a three-hundred booklet project began, *DAN*, that culminated in the launch of the two-hundred-and-ninety-ninth and three-hundredth booklets five-and-a-half years later. An average of just over one booklet every week for seventy-two months is an astonishingly sustained creativity, especially given their other several activities.

I am concentrating in this essay on Bob Cobbing but Lawrence Upton is also a major figure in contemporary British poetry for whom appreciation has been tardy but growing; partly due to the belated, but now blossoming, publication of his work outside a previously small London-centric appreciation and partly due also to the diversity of his practice, which tends to delay reception and absorption but whose breadth is becoming increasingly understood. He describes his own practice as “restless” (Upton and Spinelli, 2002). The younger, by some quarter of a century, many of Upton’s enthusiasms had been significantly filtered through, or gleaned from, those spaces which Cobbing was instrumental in carving out. However, his participation in *Mail Art* postal networks and an in-depth knowledge of mid-late-twentieth century computer science are both important influences on *DAN*. As is his concern with exploring the impact of transformational syntax, both on narrative eruption and subject-identity displacements. Upton’s exploration of choreography in relation to writing, something shared by Cobbing as noted earlier, became a named focus in their jointly edited *Word Score Utterance Choreography*, an important anthology of approaches to performance notation, published as Writers Forum’s seven hundred and fiftieth publication. The latter spoke directly to the core enquiries of their collaboration (Cobbing and Upton, 1998). *DAN* can be understood as a dialogistic network of writings, processed and produced and circulated through performances, both on and off the page, between two peers with overlapping histories and domains of poetic enquiry.

Cobbing and Upton's process of composition and assemblage was based upon themes from one and thematic variations from the other, directly extending procedural and processual tropes in which both were invested. Variations in turn became subsequent themes, sometimes resulting in a branching lineage reaching extreme convolution. Catalogue indices of available issues to date were sometimes informally circulated (Figure 3).

An improviser simultaneously operates as creator and interpreter inside a work, a driver who is trying to look under the bonnet and inspect the engine and understand how it is working whilst driving on the road; oscillating with micro-macro rapidity between listening and composing. Many writers continually improvise in the rhetorical moments of composition; most poets improvise, to some extent, in the performances of their work off the page. Such off-the-page soundings as the vocal mesh between Cobbing and Upton produced follow the most commonly understood dictates of improvisation, as coincidence occurring between production and transmission. A sound composition, made in the moments of being heard; seemingly out of the blue, without preparation; although the truth is that they have been preparing throughout the entirety of their combined practice as poets for such moments. The term improvisation is too often misused as a synonym for indeterminacy, when in practice improvisation proves a highly determinate activity in which decisions are taken as to what might be appropriate and acted upon accordingly. Guitarist Derek Bailey, a peer of Cobbing's, scorns the idea that improvisation is a mode of performance without preparation. In his book *Improvisation - its nature and practice in music* he writes that improvisation occurs when preparation and execution converge through time. Improvisation in correspondence with empiricism is composition that can be apprehended in the moments of its making. In Bailey's understanding of improvisational music-

making, one of the key terms he utilises is the “ability for immediate adjustment,” both between musicians themselves and between the musicians and the music’s environment, including the audience (Bailey, 1992: 39). Improvisation brings production and circulation into close conversation.



Figure3. *DAN* ‘update’ showing 25 covers (1998).

Cobbing’s politics and ethos are those of a non-violent anarchist in respect of linguistic power. His intent remained emancipatory by example, a corrective to that which he saw as being suppressed right from Primary School in the UK education system. Having trained and worked extensively as a teacher, he

understood that in regards to “the creative ability of the body and the voice” pupils are repeatedly told to “make less noise, step into line” (McCaffery and Nicol, 1978). His poetics can be understood as permission to make more noise and to step out of line, out of the line, literally, as well as to take what he located and experienced as suppression in the classroom of the child, and challenge any residue of such suppression in the social and cultural institutions of the adult.

Noise is never absent from performances of writing. Be it the signature scratching of a pen on a paper sheet, the click-clacking of a typewriter or keyboard, the turning drums of machines for print manipulation and reproduction, the judder of the photocopier, a cough in an audience or the hum of the tape recorder; all have noise. Douglas Kahn calls noise “the forest of everything,” whose existence:

implies a mutable world through an unruly intrusion of an other, an other that attracts difference, heterogeneity, and productive confusion, moreover, it implies a genesis of mutability itself. Noise is a world where anything can happen, including and especially itself. (Khan, 1999: 22)

DAN, an acronym for *domestic ambient noise*, suggests being at home with the possibility of encompassing, or of being encompassed by, the inference and interference of everything. Noise is not only reserved for sonic perception, noise is visual too, and can take many diverse forms. In fact according to Fiske “noise is anything that is added to the signal between its transmission and reception.” (Fiske, 1990: 8). Interpersonal performances of variations on themes in *DAN* can be considered then as interpolations between signal and reception. But variations themselves in turn become themes in this processual. Noise in *DAN* is positively embraced as party to the work. Textual distortions, deliberate misunderstandings,

erasures and blotting out, all can be read as noise between its collaborating writers and readers, between occasions of transmission and occurrences of reception. Kahn writes, “between pure legibility and an entirely illegible scrawl there is a great deal of variability” (Khan, 1999: 26). Differing sensibilities will find noise more or less significant and more or less a welcome subject of closure. *DAN*’s embrace of noise challenges the re-establishment of clear boundaries beyond which *outside* lies. *DAN* is not keeping the world, everything, at bay; it is a distributed network made at the point at which *the book* is flooded by *the world* and re-enters the fabric of the everyday. *DAN* presents everyday *poesis* (the making and production of things) in dynamic interchange with everyday *praxis* (affective, rehabilitative actions in a public sphere).

A unit of poetic composition might range from positive and negative space between marks as explored by paleographers of separated writing, to the blot, part-letter, letter, part-word, word, phrase, line, partially erased line, the assemblage of lines, the page, the double page, the sequence of pages and the book. *DAN* explores the fullness of this potential range, a befitting culmination of Cobbing’s pursuits. In this writing, beyond the surface appearance of linguistic components, there is persistent concern as to what correspondence can be traced between what is paginated and vocalisations they can give rise to.

Claims of a direct inter-relationship between a sign and the sound corresponding to it, wheel a Trojan mysticism into the contextualisation of a practice such as that which *DAN* represents, temporarily damaging its reception. This period obfuscation is confirmed by the statement quoted from Rudolph Steiner included in an introduction compiled by Peter Mayer for Cobbing’s *The Five Vowels*:

the consonants have their source in the Zodiac; the vowels in
the dance of the planet, these poems move to sound, dance to
light, vibrate to touch are innumerable many things at
once (Cobbing, 1974)

which can be understood as evocations of syncretic ritual having a strong resonance
with liberationist incarnations and dialectics of the mid-late 1960s, unsurprising in
Cobbing's instance.

Other than Trevor Wishart's *Book of Lost Voices*, which grappled with
key questions around notation of extended vocal techniques from a perspective
rooted in music, little else attempted to put theoretical grit on the slippage of quasi-
mystical cant around vocal performance and interpretations of graphic scores.
Wishart wrote of instructions for vocal performance that can be considered in
relation to pitched singing, such as "reinforced harmonics, sub harmonics," both of
which are "influenced by ethno-musicological studies" (Wishart, 1979: 3). He
listed that which belongs to vocal drama, such as "phonetic dismemberment of
texts, vocal gesture." Both "have the advantage (and limitation) of being
expressible in conventional notation systems" (Wishart, 1979: 4). He proceeded to
identify his own idiosyncratic vocal extensions, under what he admits are
personalised arbitrary mnemonic devices: *Side Lipfart*, *Flabberlips*, *Flabbercheek*,
Retroflex Rolled R, *Inhaled Vocal Fry*, *Tutclick* and the like followed by complex
sounds such as *Throatroar*, *Coughcomplex*, *Wampbreath*, *Rich Balloon* and other
such neologisms. *Inhaled Vocal Fry* is produced by a fast inhaling of breath, for
example, with the mouth left slightly ajar and the back of the tongue and muscles at
the back of the mouth in the entry to the throat left relaxed so that the inhaled air
vibrates those musculature. Wishart ends up with notational conventions developed
for specific compositions. He subordinated notation to utterance, unfortunately, in a

retrogressive manoeuvre disguised as innovation. Wishart might process his voice into a horse's whinny or a hive of buzzing bees, however even "Number 137. *{d}!: connoting a 'plosive, unlunged, 'd' . . . produced with a retroflexed tongue which snaps forward," (Wishart, 1979: 8) whilst making amusing reading in itself, is unlikely to help anybody confronted by pages from *DAN* (Figure 4).

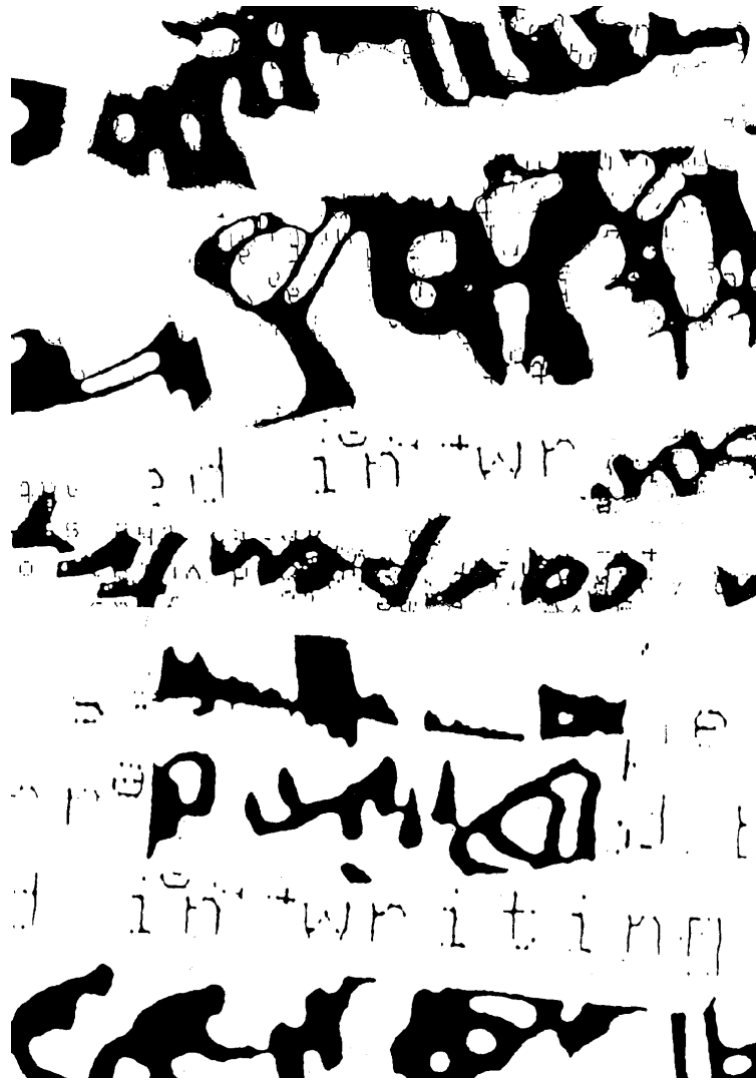


Figure 4. from *DAN* 'moise de boule' (August 1995).

Even close collaborators, such as Upton and Cobbing, retained a differing vocabulary for expressing the conversation between what was on the page and what was off the page: the inter-relations between mark-making and sonic transmission. Cobbing was deliberately vague, not wanting to preclude diverse approaches, using

simultaneously transparent and opaque terms. Posting to the *British-Irish Poets*⁸ e-mail discussion list Robert Sheppard offered the following anecdote from the 1997 *SubVoicive Poetry Colloquium*:

Bob made one gnomic contribution about notation. "Imagine in this hand you have a smooth stone, and in this hand you have a jagged one. They sound totally different."
(Immediately sits down).⁹

Whilst vocal granularity in response to the texture of a printed object was a core trope of Cobbing's interpretative strategy, this off-the-cuff quip reinforces his assertion that much about notation cannot be pinned down. The notation of any performance of writing is not an accurate record of everything informing that performance. No notation is complete, merely a document that remains. That writing which seeks to hide its seams offers only fools' gold in respect of completion and accuracy. Notations are never more than partial being, as already noted, nothing without occasion. Notation then can be understood as an interface between performance and occasion. Some notations *seek* to constrain variance of performances to which they give rise. Other notations, *DAN* amongst these, encourage variance.

Tiny deviations from literal abstraction are the breath of overall musicality during occasions of live performance. There are multiple ways of writing something identically denotative, but connotatively different. Upton is clear to distance himself from any sense that vocalisation is necessarily a mimesis of a paginated graphic:

Where I'm coming from is always aural . . . I'm interested in

the transition. I don't particularly want to look at a visual symbol and SOUND it, in as 'this is the sound of that'. What I'm interested in is 'this is the sound of this becoming that'. This is a sound of change.¹⁰

Upton's crucial distinction here is the idea of writing as a performance of modulated listening, a tuning of *écriture* through *écoute*, an appealing corrective to the dominant fetishization of sight. It suggests another axis along which Cobbing and Upton, as temporary operators of a text as an instrument, tease the jousting between advocacy of literacy and orality into becoming alliances.

DAN was at times, as in its first and multiple subsequent instantiations, an occasional poetry. Concluding occasions, *DAN* 299 and 300, took place on March 31st, April Fools' Day and Sunday 2nd April 2000, in the back room of a North-East-London public house, The Sussex. The launch of 299, in memoriam Alaric Sumner¹¹, was presented on the Friday night as the first part of an evening at The Klinker, a venue for the promotion of sound-based performances which often fore-fronted interdisciplinary modes of live improvisation, was programmed by Cobbing's collaborator Hugh Metcalf from another occasional group *Birdyak*.

The garish wallpaper of this backroom bar was festooned with printouts selected from the *DAN* series, simply mounted black and white photocopies providing a welcome jar to such chintzy decor. All three-hundred booklets were filed upright along the bar-top in transparent open-ended display boxes (Figure 5); the room of The Sussex exhibiting a partial exoskeleton of *DAN* as a machine for potential signification.



Figure 5. *DAN* along the bar of The Sussex, North-East-London, 31/3/00. Bob Cobbing, in shadow, on the right.

Sounding notes of impossible closure, if the launch of a rhizomatic three-hundred-book project can be considered to offer such moments, this weekend partook of aspects common to ritual event-structure. Upton describes “edginess” and “embarrassment” as being potentially “productive” states of attention and awareness in preparation for *live* performance. He continues:

I have often thought: “I’m not sure how this is going to sound? What is this doing to my/our text? How will this come across? Would I / should I have agreed to do this (if I’d known)?” And from such edginess comes the energy that gives the performance its edge. It’s a matter of context, and of expectation (Upton, 2001)

Such thoughts form part of a betwixt and between, at a threshold. Rites of separation in this simultaneous launching and closing of the completion of *DAN* are subtle. A catastrophic tuning of attention towards imminent event, a moving away from mundane space-time towards the immanence of an edge that invokes a leap; not only an edge and a leap for those temporary operators of text performing as transmitters but for those temporary operators of text performing as receivers. The margins of occasion have already been accessed and partially conditioned but as with guests milling for dinner before taking their seats, the table still being set, lighting being rearranged, the core focus of the occasion has yet to come under attention; a slow motion switch moving gradually from a preparatory *off* towards a concerted *on*.

Pauline Oliveros writes of the necessary combination in performance of attention, “focus and clarity of detail”, and awareness, which is a concern “with the overall field, and is diffuse” (Oliveros, 1984: 165). Breadth and longevity of experience make available to Cobbing and Upton’s performative collaboration an awareness of peer discourses in other art-form bases for performance enquiry. Resulting from that awareness is a conversation performed through practice excavating potential for hybridising discourses, located on common grounds of dominant experience in poetry and poetics. A key device that distinguishes this mode of voco-poetic improvisation is that of the instrument, the card or the page or the book, that maps detailed topography onto those commonalities.

A space kept clear for performers is a provisional space for a temporary purpose. Marcio Mattos carries his cello case and amplifier into a space already becoming separated out as the field for witness attentions to play upon. This drawing of a boundary around potential event is an emergent dance between those who would witness and those who would be witnessed, compounded by witnesses

who position themselves, perhaps surprisingly, in a similar position for reverent consumption as in many a chamber concert format. Collective expectations of the openness of what might be immanent are collaboratively narrowed. Cobbing, Upton, and Mattos greet each other. Vicarious pre-events subsequently occur simultaneously: instruments being tuned, sound-levels checked, chairs positioned and repositioned, a makeshift screen is hung and a slide-projector focussed. I place a camera to document events at the boundary between witnesses and witnessed and to the side of the field so as to be able to explore that boundary without becoming a focus of attentions. The theatrical fourth wall is rendered partly fluid by that slide projector and by Jennifer Pike's establishment of a channel for entrances and exits through the audience area. Many of those gathering in the room will perform both as transmitters and as receivers, during the course of subsequent occurrence. The sequence of events throughout the evening can be understood as an extended conversation between differing modes of performance, for differing models of textual production and textual circulation.

For this completion of a major series as a published set¹² Cobbing invited sound-sculptor percussionist, Derek Shiel, to join them. Jennifer Pike, Cobbing's wife and a long-time interdisciplinary collaborator, worked with projections of texts, lit the space with the book, and further exploited the options presented by projection through masked dance. Shiel was playing with Cobbing, Upton and Pike for the first time here. Upton had never met Shiel before. Responding to a typically diverting and destabilising invitation; to induct a new collaborator at a key moment, to open the work to new influences and underline diversity through interpretative variation. No single version of a particular page is *the* definitive version. The definite succumbs to the indefinite. That which is gestured is a text and that which acts as a mark generating vocalisation is a text and

that which is explored through non-vocal sonic markings is a text. As if to head off too much pre-performance elucidation and impose too much a sense of his own parameters for what might occur, Cobbing says emphatically to Shiel shortly before they begin, “I don’t believe in talking about it. I believe in doing it.”¹³ Projected soundings and paginal grounding retain aspects of autonomy, and it is the very situated conversations between those autonomies that are witnessed and socially dispersed. Performance is adumbrated as temporal and spatial threshold, asymmetrically networked in its impact.

Watching the video document it is clear that this on and off and in the page performance is an improvisation; not from the point of view of discourses specifically around music or dance or visual arts or drama, but from a root in poetry and poetics and attendant discourses. These are collaborative remediations. In the sense that *DAN* in totality can be approached as *a* text, its function is poesis. The text performs as a paragram, that which Kristeva describes in “itself as a system of multiple *connections* that could be described as a structure of paragrammatic networks.” (Kristeva, 1998: 32) *DAN* does have many paragrammatic, even hypertextual qualities. Any page, of its 2121 pages, could be a place to start and go anywhere to any other page or pamphlet. The page is a compositional and performative unit, not just a writeable volume; to turn a page is to move through a link. In fact a hypertext with coded links carry more restraint.

DAN 299 has two theme-pages and six variations on each.¹⁴ Theme one is composed of four textual fragments that afford partial closures (Figure 6). They present only small problems to a vocalist. Partially mapped outlines of textual islands and their interrelations might be verbally described, for example, and their linguistic landmarks enunciated. There is little to distress the speaking voice, with the exception of the implied shift in volume for the larger textual fragment - partial

e partial y partial j partial a. With the latter there is a more tricky problem of partial pronunciation, which might be approached through self-erasing articulation.

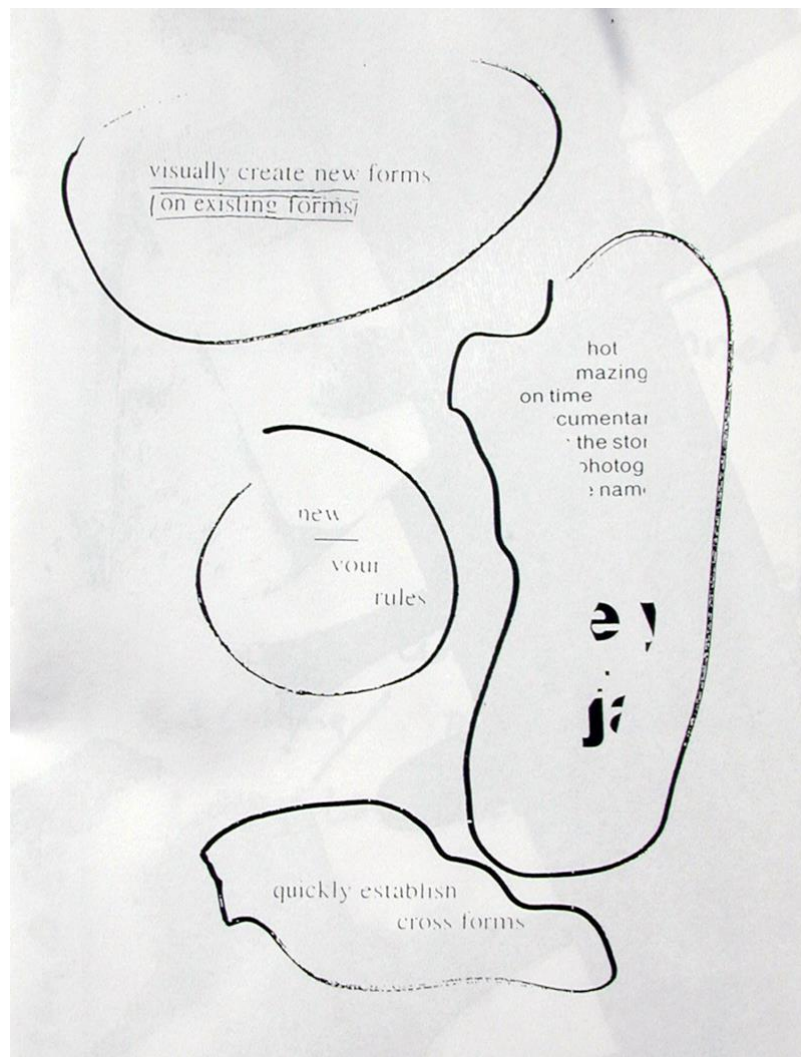


Figure 6. Bob Cobbing and Lawrence Upton, “Theme 1,” from *DAN 299* (2000).

As previously discussed in respect of Cobbing’s work, there is often no *right DAN* way up. The second theme-page of *DAN 299*, can look *right* from any orientation (Figure 7). Whichever way I look at it questions are raised about vocalisation. No ascenders nor descenders are perceptible, so recognisable linguistic fragments are from a majuscule script, namely six or seven possible letters, strings, of probably alphabetic script reversed out; probably the lower part

of an **S**, the bowl and base of an **O**, and the horizontal of an **L** are identifiable. Much of the rest of the page is solid or densely textured black ink, an indexical threshold of plenitude if not of everything, or conversely an absence even refusal of editing towards discreet formation; in which discreet signifiers lose their boundaries as they re-enter the sump of signification. Reversing out of partial letters renders those white spaces that gather towards the centre of a double page spread also indices of other ghosted linguistic graphic signs.

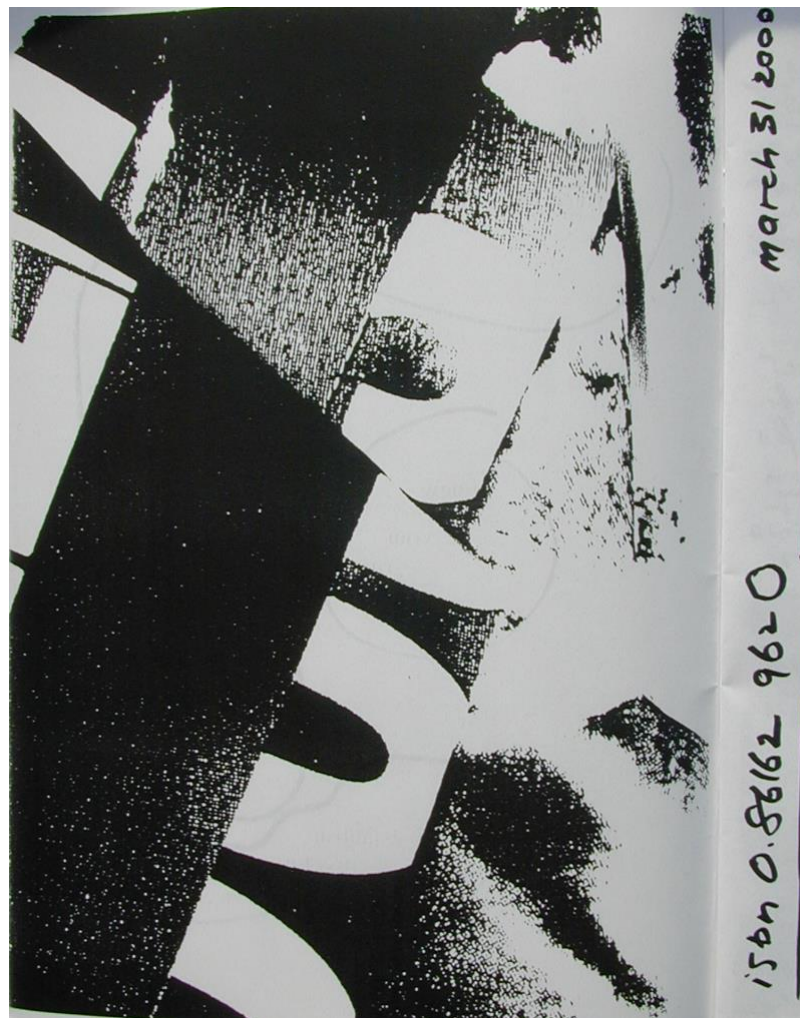


Figure 7. Bob Cobbing and Lawrence Upton, “Theme 2,” *DAN* 299 (2000).

A temporary textual operator as reader entering the series *DAN*, for a first encounter, with booklet number 299 would be left in no doubt that meaning-

making conventions have been seriously challenged. Some ensuing variations might be approached as giving or lending themselves more to visual performance through a contemplative, roving eye as a form of silent production, rather than immediately suggesting a score for vocal performance. There are plenty of semantic elements to build on; “visually create new forms / on existing forms,” “and quickly establish cross / forms then view rules / quickly establish / cross forms,” and “facing explu’ / for the act / investiga’,” being just a few. The typed phrase “hot / mazing / on time / ‘cumenta’ / ‘the sto’ / photo’ / nam’,” is overwritten by hand “hot / mixing / on time / delivered / to your / door / delivered / to your / dawning / imajinati’.” These semantic partials are counter-balanced by blurs, dots, pixellated photo-extracts and heavily-inked blocks.

Anything though *can* be a stimulus, a signal for vocal performance and anything *can* be interpreted as a score. But what do these particular scores suggest that demand they be vocalised, other than the insistence of their makers that they be understood as such? For Upton, “The easiest way to understand a process is to try and do it yourself.” (Upton, 2002); and Cobbing, as has been noted, never shied away from an opportunity to introduce other interpretations into the mesh of interpretations around a given text by getting people to try and do it themselves. An experience of *doing it* informs subsequent experiences both of doing it and of witnessing others’ doing. One thing is clearly known from doing it, that it is never the same; but there are kinship similarities in a field of variations that through experience becomes not a known or a given, nor a privilege or burden but embodied experience which can be drawn on as a resource. For example, one experience foregrounded during group improvisation is polychronicity. In polychronicity simultaneous rhythmic developments are perceived as independent flows of time, with occasional crossings that appear unintentional and consequently

non-discursive.¹⁵ Those comfortable with polychronic time are considered more likely to cope with interruptions and activity switches than their monochronic peers. It is unsurprising that those who “accept events as they arise and engage in multiple activities simultaneously” (Lee, 1999: 16-26) have a propensity for improvisation.

This performance of *DAN 299* began the evening’s events unlit, aside from soft light leaking from the covered fan-vents of Pike’s low-voltage old slide-projector. Other than the whirring of that projector’s fan, near-darkness was punctuated by an exploratory conversational percussion duet between Cobbing and Shiel. Retaining an air of induction, Cobbing toning hand-held gongs and drums with vigour urging on the neophyte, and consistently bland, pantry-fiddling Shiel to more emphatic sonic confidence. An emergent fanfare or opening salvo perhaps, forging separation between signal and preparation, enjoined by intermittent low-tec feedback generated by Upton’s microphone jacked into a tiny hand-swung karaoke machine. The attention and awareness of everybody in the room, both those who moved away to initiate this live performance and those who are witnesses to its unfolding events, plunged into *DAN 299*, realised by those mandated to be their guides in the adventure.

DAN 299, on this its only occasion, was a thirty-one-and-a-half- minute occurrence. Both book and projected versions of pages from the book were used as resources from which sound was produced. Two clear modes of interaction were dominant. *Call and response* is one, particularly evident between sounds not sourced directly from the human voice, percussion for example. Speed of response varies, from almost instantaneous to canon. Call and response encourages variation upon theme. A second mode of interaction occurs when one or other vocalist (Cobbing or Upton), together with percussion (Shiel and also Cobbing) and

electronic projection (slides from Jennifer Cobbing and karaoke distortion from Upton), provides a grounding onto which another voice can map a solo. Vocal grounding is often a drone or a breathy flange, a stretched legato or an attenuated glissando. Sometimes grounding is simply provided by forced breath. This mode suits the figure and ground aspects of the texts well. A variation on it was exemplified by an almost suspended episode, approaching nineteen minutes into this performance, when Cobbing, Upton and Shiel all provide accompaniment to a four-minute-long masked dance from Jennifer Pike, improvised within the frame of projection.

Pike enters, immediately in front of the projector, soaking the available cone of light into her body, darkening the room. Moving gradually towards the fabric projection screen she brings an interlocking sequence of poses back onto the page of this performance with herself as its focus. The spatial organisation, choreography, of Pike's actions might be considered as a code analagous to language. She makes the text appear to break out of its static pagination. The space between light source and projected texts is figured as an open book onto which her movements act as an embodiment of interpretation. Pike dances a figure through which texts, texture, her body and the textile costume with which she transforms her body converse (Figures 8 and 9). Skeletal ghosts she casts are perhaps conversant with costumed figures from the Cabaret Voltaire or an Italian Futurist ballet. However there are also allusions to masquerade, vaudevillian and even English folk traditions such as the Mummers.

Pike's corporeal transformation of text through textile, rhymes with Cobbing's and Upton's processes of textual transformations. For example, Cobbing, describing the process of writing *Recusant Centaurs* for Etruscan Press, told me that the title was two juxtaposed anagrams of that press name, amongst

many words *found* there, typed onto a handkerchief. Text on textile was then hand-manipulated on his home photocopier, using features of enlargement and reduction to achieve figures of abstraction and figuration, and the aforementioned craft of moving source material during moments of photographic reproduction: both using and misusing the machine-conventions to creative effect in a process of production “going in and out of writing and in and out of drawing” (Cobbing and cheek, 1998).



Figure 8. *DAN 299* launch, Jennifer Pike dances, 31/3/2000.



Figure 9. *DAN 299* launch, Jennifer Pike, 31/3/2000.

Pike withdraws from focus as she enters, plunging the room into darkness by gradually physically obscuring the lens. There is a hesitant pause before the dominant mood changes to transitional whimsy through quizzical pitch-bends on a flexible metal instrument that can be brought to mimic human speech cadences, somewhat with the affect of a bowed saw. Structural liminality prefaces the search for a drive towards finale. Cobbing re-enters vocally from this passage, setting a descending glissando canon into motion, portending darker tone. Upton breaks away into reticulated variations on the letters *g* and *s* from the projected page whilst the latter scrolls up the wall and across the ceiling of the room with Pike exploring the architecture of the room by hand-manoeuvring the slide projector. This is the penultimate page. The final page brings convergence between aspects of the opening hand-drawn textual island outlines, partial semantic phrasing and texture abstracted from photocopied figure. A phone can be heard ringing in the adjoining bar as sonic resolution of a kind is sought out and found; *off* call and

response. As utterance falls so too the visualisation of the text fades away, shrouded by Pike's softening and distorting otherwise straight-framed projections by moving her hands around the lens and dropping into a silence from which it will not in this instance be rescinded. A brief suspended pause, in which the phone still ringing is answered, "Hello, what?" overheard from a distance in a seemingly utterly appropriate return of communicative norms, is followed by the applause of the witnesses welcoming Cobbing, Pike, Upton and Shiel back, to the assembled collective.

I have concentrated on *DAN* 299 at length, since it held the full seriousness of the weekend. *DAN* 300 was launched the following afternoon and took a much more informal, episodic and discursive form. Peter Manson reported that it was "launched almost as a demo of how they *do it* -- taking the whole book slowly and systematically" (Manson, 2000),¹⁶ double pages being performed as separable events. Others participated in proceedings, impromptu. Cobbing suggested that I dance one of the double pages: I tried, of course. Peter Manson, also a *DAN* novice, described the experience of the entire weekend as "at the very least mind-altering" (Manson, 2000). Subsequently requests were taken from those in attendance, and it was to those texts decorating the room, from previous episodes of *DAN*, that attention was turned. A range of visual-sonic interpretative procedures, from programmatic mimicry, associative translation, speech-incidental parody, burlesque colloquialism, interwoven figure and ground often overlapping or in rapid variations was explored. The core activity was *play*, very much in the spirit of a Writers Forum workshop over its history. Much of the sonic mapping generated by Cobbing and Upton in sounding *DAN* had the gleeful engagement and energetic charge of children at play, before the educational mechanisms of suppression. Events concluded with Upton and Cobbing effectively opening the

work, through invitation, to their peers, in a humble manner quite opposed to the portentousness that might have resulted given the scale of ambition in their achievement across published, broadcast and live outcomes. Production and circulation became a generative circuit.

Performances of writing provide sites of significant convergence for contesting the terms production and circulation, via subtle oscillations between public and private spheres of engagement. Performance is that double-ness which witnesses witness--participate in as an agency of active interpretation. In those moments of bearing witness and participating in bearing witness, writing is motivated into further circulation. The porosity of a performance frame, its site and its attendant witness--participants and attendant expectations and what such expectations seek to include and exclude to what purpose and in whose interests, is at issue. So too the importance of keening attention itself, what it is drawn to and how it operates agency, as a taking note and as a contesting of the usual and more habitual states of perception. Concepts such as attention and frame, in respect of the usual, usher readers into that smoky roomful of mirrors which is provisional community and projected collective expectation and expectation of the confounding of expectation. Horizons of experience are brought into dynamic and intricate conversation with the horizons of expectation.

Anything can become a text; any discarded or found or etymologically researched fragment, in particular. Some days Cobbing would go for a walk along the street outside the house, its grassy verges and its central reservation. He'd pick up a scrap of paper or carrier bag or packaging, so he told me. Back home he would reduce and reduce it and reduce it imprint on the photocopier, until it could barely be seen, and then he would enlarge that and enlarge that to produce a new figure of concretion. Subsequent versions would retain both a level of autonomy *and* become

discussant in a family of interpretations. Cobbing's core ongoing activity was acting as correspondent between movements made around the means of reproduction, initially an office duplicator and then a photocopier for the last twenty or so years of his life, the transformation of texts through variant stages of production and the circulations of those texts including those small dances of the body produced in the throes of vocal delivery; the small dances in the body of a reader navigating intensities of ink on the page.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Konkrete Canticle* (with Michael Chant, Paula Claire and later Bill Griffiths); *AbAna* (with Paul Burwell and David Toop); *Oral Complex* (with Clive Fencott and John Whiting); *Birdyak* (with Hugh Metcalfe, Lol Coxhill and Jennifer Pike) all produced distinctive bodies of performance as group. Throughout his last decade he developed several bodies of work as duets with Lawrence Upton, Ralph Hawkins and Robert Sheppard. In addition he would often work with other performers sharing a bill or with members of the audience; collaboration on interpretation was a core ethos.

2. An introduction drafted by Cobbing locates his method in Tristan Tzara's *live* assemblage of words drawn out of a hat and makes reference to Brion Gysin's newspaper cut-ups; although if dates are to be believed Cobbing's earliest pre-date Gysin's method as developed by William Burroughs by approximately three years, with Tzara as their primary source.

3. This being only one series of potential fragments taken from approximately one twentieth of the available printed field.
4. Cobbing was well-acquainted with independent film at the time, being secretary of the London Film-makers Co-operative in 1967 when that emergent organisation was founded at Better Books, “a centre for poetry readings, ‘happenings’ and small-scale performances, including the influential Destruction in Art Symposium,” where he was manager. (Dwoskin, 1975: 64).
5. The journal in question is identified, by Cobbing, as *Raw NerVZ*, Vol. IV: 3 (1997).
6. The authorial and press brands scramble their own and their imprint names (Upton’s Good Elf Publications is a phonetic cockney rendition of “good health”). The book presents poems by both of them but clearly identified as to their separate authorship.
7. Private correspondence with the author.
8. *British-Irish Poets* was begun as an e-discussion listserv by Ric Caddell in 1994. Subsequently Peter Larkin, Elizabeth James, John Cayley, cris cheek, Trevor Joyce, Rupert Mallin, Mairead Byrne, Randolph Healy and Ian Davidson were list caretakers. List archives: [www.jiscmail.ac.uk academic listserv](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/academic/listserv).
9. British-Irish poets. Date: Tue, 21 Oct 1997. <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa.exe?A2=ind9710&L=british-poets&T=0&O=A&P=23252>
10. Lawrence Upton, recorded in an unpublished interview with the author February 8th, 1998.
11. Alaric Sumner lectured in Performance Writing at Dartington College of Arts until his sudden death, aged 48, in March 2000. A prolific writer, editor and curator, he had been working on diverse projects often in collaboration with other practitioners, including Lawrence Upton, for several years.

12. My research into *DAN* found one title not indexed in the final tally, *a surplus of unsaleable beauty*, seemingly too clever a ruse not to be deliberate error. However my enquiries to Lawrence Upton received the reply that Bob Cobbing might simply have miscounted. I am inclined to doubt this rebuttal.

13. Cris Cheek, unpublished video recording, 31/3/2000. Upton suggests that Shiel's intervention was not considered successful. "Bob asked me a few days before if I minded though it turned out after that the invitation had already been given. Bob said how good he'd be and then later said he meant *he thought he would be good*." Private e-mail from Lawrence Upton: 31/7/03.

14. Doubling the usual format of one theme from one artist and six variations from the other. There are two other instances, aside from 299 and 300 of double issues, *Yibble, yibble, nee nee nana nunu Gobble gobble gobble, niminy piminy Gerbil gerbil, eeny miney mo*, a nose thumbed to critic Andrew Duncan, and a pun on suggested methods for gallery display of the emergent series, *hanging dan*.

15. People who are dominantly monochronic, *monochrons*, prefer to concentrate on one activity at a time, expected to lean more toward strict planning, time allocation, and prioritising in attempting to meet their obligations.

16. Peter Manson, <http://www.jiscmail.co.uk/britishpoets> (British and Irish Poets e-mail discussion list, Mon, 3 Apr 2000).

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