

Matthew Abess
Make Perhaps This Out Sense of Can You

This text is by no means definitive. It offers little explanation and arrives at no conclusions. It ends as it begins and goes nowhere particular in between. It is all departure without destination. The structure is permissive: “Let it sing itself through you.” The material is at hand: “The vowels have their pitch, the phrase has potential rhythms.” The dance is jubilant: “You do it with the whole of you, muscular movement, voice and lungs, limbs.”¹ Ruth and Marvin Sackner’s passionate commitment to the puzzling work discussed in this text manifests its most concrete feature: there is much delight to be had here.

Genealogies: the Origins of a Community Space

Make Perhaps This Out Sense Of Can You has been, throughout, a family affair. Tracing its genesis, one might look to the Philadelphia of 1955 where a junior undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania and a junior medical student at Jefferson first initiated their inimitable companionship that, made official by a marriage in June of 1956, marked the auspicious beginning of Ruth and Marvin Sackner’s eminent partnership. One might also begin in 1964 when the young doctor and educator journeyed southward to settle in Miami Beach where, 15 years later and a stone’s throw away from my own childhood home, they would establish the world-renowned Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry. More conservative observation might locate its origins in a Winter 2005 Kelly Writers House event in Miami. There the thrill, for this then 18-year-old writer, of working alongside still breathing authors whom I could endlessly beleaguer, was compounded when Dr. and Mrs. Sackner, introducing themselves, extended an open invitation to spend an afternoon exploring their Archive. This generous summons was prompted by my reference to a particular book, *Soliloquy*, by a particular writer, Kenneth Goldsmith, whose work enjoys a venerated position in the Archive. The kinship network is so extensive that one could well indicate genealogies to and from any point. Fortuitous linkages abound.

The venture commenced its present track on 38th and Walnut Street in the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing (CPCW) seminar room 111, late afternoon, month of January, year 2006. I sat at the oval oak table beside none other than Kenneth Goldsmith with whom I had just begun working as a CPCW-sponsored writing apprentice. Only weeks earlier, having been delayed nearly a full year by schoolwork and general juvenile delinquency, I had finally spent my afternoon at the intersection of word as word, sight, and sound. I relayed the details of my visit at an exhilarated pace that Goldsmith immediately identified as a symptom of Sackner Archive immersion. He shared with me the story of his own introduction to the Sackners and their eponymous Archive, telling me how, as a young visual artist just beginning to delve deeply into the art of the word, he too had felt invigorated and enabled by this charming pair and the perplexing, delightful work they stand by.

Works represented in the Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry, though wildly diverse, share at least one common thread: *language*. Entering the Biscayne Bay-side apartment where the Archive has resided since March 2005, one tumbles into the heart of the wor(l)d: peculiar alphabets adorn the walls, letters loop to the ceilings, stone doorstops compose Concrete Poetry, divider screens are semantic, and porcelain vases calligraphic. Word-plastered parasols greet visitors at the door, surely to shield the uninitiated from these showers of palpable speech. The Sackners' correspondence with the artists whose work fills their quarters figures prominently in the Archive, generating a dynamism and sense of immanent possibility that recently led Harry Ransom Humanities Center director Tom Staley to describe it as "one hell of a collection!"² Yet "collection" hardly suffices as a description for this dynamic community space. It's the Archive: a vital space where one feels very much at home. If it were a family, then Ruth and Marvin Sackner would be the spirited aunt and uncle who, with unparalleled charm and wit, tell the younger kinfolk about all those fun things their parents didn't want them to know: things like Dadaism, Fluxus, auto-destructive art, textual interventions, action poetry – about, in other words, the fragile intricacy and stunning resilience of the word.

Following afternoon tea with Goldsmith in the spring of 2006, Dr. and Mrs. Sackner offered me unrestricted access to the Archive for the duration of the upcoming summer. The format was permissive, the guidelines simple: explore the oeuvre of their dear friend Bob Cobbing, a "concrete text-sound" poet and a foremost member of the Archive as preparation for curating an

exhibition of his work at Van Pelt Library, ideally to be accompanied by some kind of published text. Following the permissive ethos permeating both the Archive and Cobbing's oeuvre, *Make Perhaps This Out Sense Of Can You* is a participatory site, a space for the pleasure of the word and *you*.

The Other Side of the Se/a/en

1965 inaugurated a propitious renovation of England's literary landscape. In the bustling basement of Better Books on London's Charing Cross Road there occurred a metamorphosis that England's innovative writers for many years had longed to welcome. A structural shift of colossal proportions lay in its midst. This was the year when Writers Forum firmly established its presence at the perimeter of a literary scene that has never since appeared quite the same. At the helm of this transformation, looking like the old man of the mountain and behaving just like that rowdy grandfather who teaches you all about that-which-has-been and the other side of all-that-might-be, stood Bob Cobbing.

Born on 30 July 1920 in Enfield, England, Cobbing was an assiduous innovator in the sphere of language and a mentor to generations of younger innovators surveying the vicinities that, together with them, he labored to open. Alternately a landscape gardener, farmer, steward's clerk at a hospital, and teacher of Esperanto, Cobbing fluidly traversed dissimilar vocations with the same dexterity apparent in his boundary-dissolving performances with and of the plasticity of the word. When asked about the development of his intermedia praxis,³ Cobbing remarked, "I commenced as a painter; later wrote poetry; studied music; began to realize all three were one activity (together with dancing, which is, perhaps, the key to them all)."⁴

Cobbing entered the organizational front of London's literary scene by way of the Hendon Experimental Art Club. Founded in 1951, it was renamed in 1954 the Hendon Group of Painters and Sculptors, and renamed again in 1957 Group H. As early as 1952, together with dramatist and painter Lewis Cook, Cobbing launched a series of informal events that over time evolved into Writers Forum Workshop. 1954 saw Cobbing's earliest contribution to small press

publication with the debut of *And* magazine. To writer and collaborator Jeff Nuttall's subsequent query, "why don't we all start publishing regularly?" Cobbing offered, "why not?"⁵ Writers Forum Press released its first publication in 1963. Cobbing's succession to manager of Better Books in July 1965 presented Writers Forum with the geographical base that would permit an elusive name on London's literary fringe to become a definite locus of activity.

Writers Forum emerged within a social order that would have been entirely unrecognizable to its trans-Atlantic counterpart. Under the auspices of the Beats, American writers had grown accustomed to autonomy. Where informal poetry readings were an increasingly common sight and sound across the open literary vistas of America, the English scene was formally regulated and roundly penetrated by entrenched institutions and their self-sustaining practices. The National Poetry Society maintained ornate procedures of training and examination in professional elocution. State certified teachers of poetry performance, often with positions in state funded schools, tutored aspiring professionals in this expert practice, with pupils' progress frequently and meticulously scrutinized. Poetry connoisseurs and other shrewd parties deemed this rigor wholly necessary in light of their concern that a poet possess "the capacity for being absolutely honest and true to his innermost being when he . . . vocalises his experience[.]" An exemplary professional elocutionist, Betty Mulcahy, cautioned that should the capacity for such honesty and truth be lacking, then, in listening to the poet read poetry, "we may well be listening to 'mask' and not 'face.'" Or, if not through ineptitude, then perhaps by "sheer familiarity with his material, the poet may underplay his own poem; perhaps his very modesty will act as a barrier to full communication."⁶ For the sake of poetry, then, the poet was stripped of his or her⁷ voice. Over the brief span of his tenure in the 1970s as a councilman of the National Poetry Society, Cobbing lobbied for the legitimacy of the poet's voice, though apparently to scant avail. As recently as 1982, then General Secretary of the National Poetry Society Brian Mitchell wrote in a letter to critic Josephine Johnson that, while "[a]ll those associated with the poetry society do consider there is an art to reading poetry," even so, "that does not preclude a great deal of debate taking place as to whether poets or trained readers are best in terms of reading contemporary poetry."⁸

Writers Forum Workshop was one of the earliest literary venues during England's formally conservative postwar years where the voice of a living English poet other than Ted Hughes

might be regarded with any measure of confidence. The Workshop's permissive ethos, especially uncommon at that time, maintained the contention that a poet's merit in no way derives from traditional criteria of historical precedent and institutional rank. Affirming the poet's right to speak aloud and admitting poets access to collaborative forms of life which they previously had no way of encountering, the Workshop was a participatory site of enormous energy. Anyone at all could wander in without worry of exclusion or derision. "The point about criticism," Cobbing dutifully notes, "is that it is frequently wrong." At the workshop, "people [would] read their work out loud and . . . learn by performing it."⁹ The enjoyment of reading came first, after which nothing considered secondary would remain in this rare place where delight in the word amply legitimated both poet and poem.

Particularly for younger writers freshly entering the literary scene, the Workshop offered an invigorating alternative to the introverted confessional mode dominating the National Poetry Society circuit. Poet Maggie O'Sullivan recalls how, at age 19 or 20, "it was Bob [Cobbing]'s workshops really that were the main kind of excitement for me. . . . I was so excited and intoxicated by what Bob was doing. . . . I knew immediately that this is the work that I wanted to be involved in." Most salient for O'Sullivan was "this astonishing kind of bodying forth of the sounds, the language. It's bodying forth, [the] experience [of] that presence, that physicality. . . . That language, bringer of language to experience them in the flesh."¹⁰ The Workshop offered a space where ripe young poets could mingle with those of longer standing, experimenting with diverse forms in a setting where seasoned knowledge met fresh perspective: a dynamic space where the usual practice of "just reading stuff"¹¹ gave way to the vitalizing dynamism of interaction. Just as Dr. and Mrs. Sackner have "adopted" many an innovative wanderer in the field of language, so Cobbing mentored a circle of just-emerging writers who now belong to the vanguard of trans-national literary enablers. Even in the earliest years, these writers were endowed with a space to speak. At a time when others would not, Cobbing listened, and the collaborative cacophony often informed his own work.

ABC in Sound (originally titled *Sound Poems*),¹² described by Cobbing as "the first important poem I ever did," arose within this collaborative context. Cobbing frequently drafted ornate chronicles of the work's development, each time opening with its origins in the Workshop: "I did three poems for three successive [Workshop] meetings and it suddenly occurred to me that one

began with the letter A, one began with the letter B and one began with the letter C. I thought I should simply carry on and do the rest of the alphabet.”¹³ As the well-rehearsed tale goes, Cobbing, struck with a terrible bout of influenza, went on to complete the work in a feverish state that left him with “all sorts of strange sounds . . . buzzing in [his] head.”¹⁴ The narrative is emblematic of Cobbing’s penchant for play. Though habitually cagey when prompted for explanations of his work, Cobbing embedded sincerity in his statements’ subtext, generally to the effect that he took pleasure in crafting such and such a work and would like the reader to take pleasure in it as well. Even so, Cobbing’s ribald tale of providential affliction evades mention of his careful hewing of language in this alphabetic sequence. Utilizing foreign tongues, palindromes, puns, and elaborate constraints, the text illustrates the idiosyncratic calculation underlying even the most chance-determined productions. Near the center of the work appears J for *jouissance*: enjoyment, sensual pleasure, orgasm; at its extreme, rupture. Just pages away, pivoting at the alphabetic axis, stands M. The final section of M, when unaccompanied by its preceding parts, would be printed under the title “Ejaculatory Poem.” The graphical bombast of its visual rendition upholds a “connection with the pulsating of breathing, the blood, ejaculation,”¹⁵ in other words, bodily rhythms and physical expressivity.

Five of the poems from *ABC in Sound*, including M, received visual treatment in *Six Sound Poems*. Here, anticipating the query, “why publish sound poems in visual form[?]” Cobbing responded preemptively: “the poem exists in many forms aural and visual becomes perhaps many different poems.”¹⁶ Analyzing these poems and others, writer Dom Silvester Houédard distinguished between “ear verse and eye verse, . . . ear verse with an eye equivalent, eye verse with an ear equivalent, and eyear or ‘oreil’ in which the two aspects are equally important or so closely interwoven as to be almost inseparable.”¹⁷ Organizing its units according to relative emphasis on either the visual or aural aspects of language, Houédard’s terms effectively offer a point of entry into Cobbing’s often disorienting oeuvre. Still, the inclusion of “eyear, or ‘oreil’” indicates that the order of things is not so even. Inviting and receiving endless treatment, the works persistently elude such clear-cut classification.

Cobbing’s activity with Writers Forum Press stands at the intersection of these seemingly contrary types. The process of production and distribution itself operated as a “vital part of the creative process.”¹⁸ publication as praxis. Cobbing described his activity as follows:

“[Viktor] Schklovsky says that, ‘poetry is a ballet of the speech-organs.’ A dance of the vocal chords and that dance of the vocal chords is connected to the dance of the body and the movement of the body can affect the voice. Obviously, the dance of the voice and the dance of the body starts in the machine. Basically, when I’m working on the photocopier I’m dancing round it and what I’m doing on the machine is movement and that movement then gets into the finished work which again is transformed into movement when I perform it. The whole process is really related to dance.”¹⁹

Cobbing’s practices hinge on the fundamentally performative nature of situated human interaction as it occurs in everyday life. His praxis insists that, within the space and time of these events, the body operates, at least in part, as a language machine. To the self-directed query, “Why does one use machines?” Cobbing offers, “Because they are there.” Pressing himself with the follow-up question, “Why does one attempt to mis-use them creatively, in addition to using them in the orthodox way?” he continues, “In order to explore all their possibilities. One does not know what is possible until one does it . . . ‘what will happen if. . . .’”²⁰ His work self-reflexively performs the performances routinely carried out by social actors in social space, carefully registering the capabilities and constraints of the physical body as a language processor.

As the publisher of Writers Forum Press, Cobbing was an avid and efficient machinist. The dance of the body regularly converged with the mechanics of the duplicator, “marrying . . . human warmth to the coldness of much electronically generated [sight] and sound.”²¹ If a particular publication demanded a novel form, the human capacity for subjective reasoning would creatively navigate the photocopier’s formal program. The tape-recorder, “by its ability to amplify and superimpose, and to slow down the vibrations [of the voice],”²² indicated the enormous range of the human vocal apparatus. The interface of body and language, whether entirely purposive or left to chance,²³ often yielded rich results. Cobbing created his first duplicator print in 1942 while working as a steward’s clerk at a hospital: “In the store room was a Roneo and I played around on it a bit and that’s how my first visual poem occurred.”²⁴ What will happen if. . . .

Writers Forum operated according to the clear but often disregarded principle that a work can be neither evaluated nor enjoyed if nobody gets to see or hear it. With Writers Forum Workshop,

Cobbing and his band of outsiders labored to resolve the latter problem; Writers Forum Press sought to sort out the former. The maxim was simple: “[P]ublish something and let the reader decide whether it’s any good or not . . . rather than judging it before hand.”²⁵ The plan was straightforward: swiftly and efficiently make innovative works available at least cost to readers. The Press achieved this aim with great success. When artist W. Mark Sutherland interviewed Cobbing on Thursday, 19 April 2001, 1,027 publications already bore the WF imprint. Many of these works came from regular attendees of the Workshop. The Press, like the Workshop, intermingled emerging and established writers. Works by young English poets appeared side by side with the poems of Arrigo Lora-Totino of Italy and Pierre Garnier of France. Even a young Allen Ginsberg, eager for the prompt public reception of a particular work, turned to Writers Forum Press. Poet Anselm Hollo, who had been frequenting the Writers Forum Workshop, reportedly suggested to his friend Ginsberg, “Bob Cobbing, you can let him have it tomorrow and he’ll have it out the next day.”²⁶ Ginsberg’s 1963 work *The Change* would be Writers Forum Press’ fifth publication. Indeed, it was an auspicious start for what proved to be an enormously successful campaign.

Between its founding in 1963 and Cobbing’s death in 2002, Writers Forum Press published over 1000 works. Yet even this self-evidently remarkable figure does not indicate clearly enough Cobbing’s enormous impact on British small-press publishing generally through the Association of Little Presses, of which he was a founding member and vice president. Under his guidance, Writers Forum Workshop met nearly every fortnight in whatever venue could be found at that moment, pub or barn, bookstore basement or farmhouse attic. Now led by Lawrence Upton, Cobbing’s friend as well as his partner in the collaborative serial work *Domestic Ambient Noise*,²⁷ Writers Forum continues to thrive. Its permissive ethos – “the entirely sane one that people learn from each other and learn most constructively when they are encouraged”²⁸ – persists.

Cobbing’s elegant fusion of concept and form has long been a thorn in the side of his critics. Unprepared for the ad hoc adjustments that Cobbing’s diverse output often requires, many scholars have responded to his seamless interweaving of media by excluding from their accounts

any material that could not be easily managed. Historians have extolled at length Cobbing's prolific activity as the publisher of Writers Forum Press and, to a lesser degree, have duly nodded at his technological achievements in printing and distribution. Journalists have lauded his performances as "reflect[ing] the boisterous hilarity that is surely no less a part of Shakespeare than black Jacobean melancholy."²⁹ His vocalizations of printed texts, or *soundings*, have garnered praise from electro-acoustic composers. Poets, many of them Cobbing's own cohorts from Writers Forum Workshop, have published reverent analyses of his written pieces. Endeavoring to absorb Cobbing's work into their respective discourses, scholars have utilized particular lexicons unique to their fields of study. The reports that have come out of these studies have been chiefly taxonomical and Cobbing's oeuvre has suffered for it. With his recent death, a comprehensive account of Cobbing's practices is decidedly overdue.

Categorical partitions, erected over many years of divisive Cobbing scholarship, stand in the way of this task. Any comprehensive account of Cobbing's practices has first to overcome this essentially lexical segmentation. The uneven distribution of materials correlated with this segmentation, however, is decidedly less manageable. The British Library, for instance, has recently amassed a sizable holding of Cobbing's published works, manuscripts, and, somewhat less methodically, his sound recordings. Studio-recorded soundings crop up haphazardly in anthologies, for the most part pressed in Sweden or Continental Europe, where the primary concern often seems to be the showcasing of a British national in anthologies of self-proclaimed international movements rather than the actual merits of Cobbing's work. Video documents of live performances are scarce. While those that have surfaced have been consistently stunning, they are still only meager surrogates for the physical co-presence that must be in place as a material requisite to the ecstatic performance of "the body . . . in . . . language" for which Cobbing was celebrated. Written reports detailing the live performances are equally paltry proxies for presenting anything like the vital flows of creative performance that palpably distinguish one kind of social structure from another. The blissful "intoxicat[ion]" of a Cobbing performance as opposed to "those awful dull readings at the Poetry Society"³⁰ is hard to convey to someone whose knowledge of both comes from video and print alone.

If Poetry Society events, "embedded in critical analysis," typified "English Lit. at its absolute worst,"³¹ then perhaps Cobbing's pronouncement that "we aspire to birdsong,"³² actualized in

performance and resonating with the aviary emulations and chirp-chirp-chirping fashionable in Elizabethan theater and song, embodies the best of the English tradition. In the spirit of that tradition, *15 Shakespeare-Kaku*,³³ a spatial sequence of broken and occluded alphabetic figures, seems poised to proclaim the sustained dynamism of the English language. The performance group Konkrete Canticle³⁴ substantiated this dynamism with its three-voice and organ performance of *15 Shakespeare-Kaku* at the 1972 Shakespeare Birthday Week Gala Concert in Southwark Cathedral. It is inscribed in the eminent mobility of the printed pamphlet. While many then-contemporary writers, orienting themselves towards modern architecture, considered the poem a space for living in, this pocket-sized assemblage, decidedly sculptural, leads to consideration of the poem as a material object that one deliberately engages. In sounding the poem, “The voice must seek out guides in the texture and shape of both detail and the whole,”³⁵ notes Bill Griffiths of Konkrete Canticle. Physically oriented towards the text-object, the viewer participates in its (trans)formation, operating as an integral element of the text itself. Language, separated from its functional context, is used for its pure character as a social phenomenon and given a value that might be registered, treated, reconstructed, analyzed, measured, changed.³⁶

This is not the occasion for drafting a general theory of Cobbing’s practices. A comprehensive account would be paradoxical anyhow. Cobbing’s oeuvre, fundamentally operative in nature, is most effectively considered in terms of *what it is like* to participate in these operations. As Ludwig Wittgenstein asserts, “What can be shown cannot be said.”³⁷ While some terminology developed by the psychology of perception and certain branches of sociology can be helpful, no set of concepts could ever wholly substitute for the experience of the body (as distinct, perhaps, from a bodily experience, though the one is surely intertwined with the other) interacting with these materials in the space and time of our human-sized world. Disembodied, that which is most central to Cobbing’s work – *what it is like* to participate in it – slips always out of reach.

Or so the argument should go. As the exclusively stable feature throughout Cobbing’s diverse oeuvre, this slippage establishes its core. Comprised by the oscillation of material presence and absence, formal similarity and difference, Cobbing’s work operates through and in virtue of

contradiction. Where it seems as though a comprehensive account of Cobbing's practices would be paradoxical, the work itself is itself at work, performing the paradox of comprehension.

The Fugitive Poems evidence this mechanism with a distinct elegance. Cobbing describes the Fugitive Poems in his introductory leaflet to *Kwatz* as "poems where words recede & ghosts of image focus."³⁸ The appearance of spectral retreat is immediately perceptible in the Fugitive Poems' visual character, confirming a statement that, true to Cobbing's playful manner, is entirely misleading. It is helpful, then, to seek counsel with the publication's title: "kwatz – in Chinese, He (pronounce Hay) – a meaningless word . . . like the noise made by a vibrating reed to probe deep into the enquirer's understanding." The flicker of ethereal word-images, such as in *Fugitive Poem for Ernst Jandl*,³⁹ induces a parallel undulation in the work's viewer, drawing the viewer now near, now far from the object. Displaced and hovering, the body enters into self-aware relation with the Fugitive Poem. The moment of self-awareness transforms the work from a seemingly distant thing into an object *at hand* and, in that instant of change, the Fugitive Poem reveals its character. The material object – paper imprinted with marks and stains, patterns and textures – drifting in human space and time, rather than the metaphoric ebb and flow of words on the page, composes the Fugitive Poem.

A substantial portion of *Bob Cobbing's Girlie Poems*⁴⁰ is devoted to a sequence of Love Poems, one of which is titled "Fugitive Poem No. 4 (A Love Letter)." Cobbing, an avid purveyor of letters and postcards, composed seasonal variations and sent them to his dearest friends sporadically throughout the year, and always on Christmas and New Years. It is hardly surprising, then, that a Cobbing Love Poem might take the form of a letter. The Fugitive Poem is a love letter. Sent off from a definite origin, en route to its destination, the poem slips from its set path. It wanders, and at times loses its way. Faint trace of making and maker, flee(t)ing, it drifts in space and time. It might arrive on your doorstep, or you might reach to it, grasp it, and take it in your hands. "And you love and you do not love, it makes of you what you wish, it takes you, it leaves you, it gives you."⁴¹ There is something very romantic in all of this.

Cobbing's practices evoke *eros*, the drive for life. The mark and stain on the page, the shrieks and hisses of the voice, all might join in an ever-widening circle of participation: attracted and repelled by its center of magnetism, moving and always moving. Permuting the possible

arrangement of available materials, Cobbing invites us to participate in a wor(l)d made meaningful by our interaction with it. The text in your hands suggests one entry into this sphere: a seemingly boundless area, brimming with language and thoroughly segmented into posted plots. Cobbing's work measures these borders, tests their permeability, and probes the practical limits of their dissolution. It puts forth a structural model of textual space wherein meaning might emerge concomitantly with the performance and reception of *écriture* – the act of writing; the tap tap tapping of fingertips on hard keys that might confirm one's physical presence; the flow of blood to the thumb and forefinger that pulsates through the pen in hand and materializes as vibrations on the page.

Gabi Weissman, a member of Group H, states the general premise that, with Cobbing's arrival in 1951 at what was then still the Hendon Experimental Art Club, came to stimulate the group's activities: "[p]rogrammes, dogmas, statements, aims and ends are all anathema to art; the only activity it takes seriously is pure play." Where much of the visual poetry being produced around that time considered the poem "a play-area of fixed dimensions,"⁴² Cobbing's poems stood and still endure un-fixed, entirely open to play.

Ending as it began, this text is a point of departure. The structure is permissive: "Let it sing itself through you." The material is at hand: "The vowels have their pitch, the phrase has potential rhythms." The dance is jubilant: "You do it with the whole of you, muscular movement, voice and lungs, limbs."⁴³ The exhibition is permissive: "the constellation is an invitation"⁴⁴ to delight in the pleasure of participation.

I invite you, then, to *Make Perhaps This Out Sense Of Can You*.

¹ Bob Cobbing, "Some Statements on Sound Poetry," in *Sound Poetry: A Catalogue*, ed. Steve McCaffery and bpNichol (Toronto: Underwhich Editions, 1978; available at <www.ubu.com/papers>).

² D.T. Max, "Letter from Austin: Final Destination," *The New Yorker* (11 June 2007): (<http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/06/11/070611fa_fact_max> (accessed 16 June 2007)).

³ Dick Higgins writes: "the word 'intermedia' appears in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1812 in exactly its contemporary sense – to define works which fall conceptually between media that are already known. . . . it allows for an ingress to a work which otherwise seems opaque and impenetrable": "Synesthesia and Intersenses:

Intermedia,” *Horizons: the Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).

⁴ Bob Cobbing to Peter Mayer, from “An Interview With Bob Cobbing,” *Bob Cobbing & Writers Forum*, ed. Peter Mayer (Sunderland: Ceolfriith Press, 1974), 55. Published as *Ceolfriith* 26.

⁵ “The Point About Criticism Is That It Is Frequently Wrong: Bob Cobbing Interviewed By W. Mark Sutherland,” 19 April 2001, London, England (available at <www.ubu.com/papers/>).

⁶ Betty Mulcahy, *To Speak True* (London, 1969), quoted in Josephine A. Johnson, “Return of the Scops: English Poetry Performance Since 1960,” in *Performance of Literature in Historical Perspectives*, ed. David W. Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 310.

⁷ At this time it was still rare for a female poet to be considered at all.

⁸ Johnson, “Return of the Scops,” 310.

⁹ In Sutherland, n. 5 above.

¹⁰ Maggie O’Sullivan interviewed in Nicky Marsh, Peter Middleton, and Victoria Sheppard, “‘Blasts of Language’: Changes in Oral Poetics in Britain since 1965,” *Oral Tradition*, 21:1 (2006), 44-67.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bob Cobbing, *Sound Poems* (London: Writers Forum, 1965).

¹³ In Sutherland, n. 5 above.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Oyvind Fählstrom, “Manifesto for Concrete Poetry,” quoted in Bob Cobbing, “Concrete Sound Poetry 1950-1970,” ? *Concrete Poetry* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1970).

¹⁶ Bob Cobbing, *Six Sound Poems*, 2nd ed. (London: Writers Forum, 1969).

¹⁷ Dom Silvester Houédard, “Bob Cobbing: Troubadour & Poet,” introduction to Bob Cobbing issue of *extra verse*, no. 17 (London, 1966) [all text in lowercase as originally printed].

¹⁸ In Mayer, n. 4 above, 57.

¹⁹ Sutherland, n. 5 above.

²⁰ Mayer, 1974.

²¹ In Sutherland, n. 5 above.

²² Ibid.

²³ Chance procedures were central to Cobbing’s work. I am sure that they account for his and others’ abundant references to the ritual action of certain tribal societies. As Bronislaw Malinowski reminds us, “wherever there is an important human activity, which is at the same time dangerous, subject to chance and not completely mastered by technical means . . . there is always . . . a magical system, a body of rites and spells, to compensate for the uncertainty of chance and to forearm against bad luck.” “The Meaning of Meaningless Words and the Coefficient of Weirdness,” in *Symposium of the Whole*, eds. Diane and Jerome Rothenberg (available at <www.ubu.com/ethno/>).

²⁴ In Sutherland, n. 5 above.

²⁵ In Sutherland, n. 5 above.

²⁶ Quoted by Cobbing in Sutherland, n. 5 above.

²⁷ Collaborative interview and performances by Cobbing and Upton may be heard as part of the *Radio Radio* series, ed. Martin Spinelli (2005). Distributed by PENNSound for non-commercial and educational use (available at www.writing.upenn.edu/pennsound and www.ubu.com/sound).

²⁸ Lawrence Upton, from a 31 October 2006 post on the Writers Forum Workshop blog: <http://www.writersforum-workshop.blogspot.com>.

²⁹ *Financial Times*, 24 April 1972, quoted in “On the Poetry,” in Mayer, *Ceolfriith* 26, 52.

³⁰ In Marsh, Middleton, and Sheppard, n. 10 above.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Cobbing, n. 1 above.

³³ Bob Cobbing, *15 Shakespeare-Kaku*, 3rd ed. (London: Writers Forum, 1973).

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- ³⁴ Members of Konkrete Canticle included Bob Cobbing, Paula Claire, and Michael Chant. Later, Bill Griffiths would replace Michael Chant as the third member of the group.
- ³⁵ Bill Griffiths, "A Note," in Bob Cobbing, *Collected Poems*, vol. 5, *Bob Cobbing's Girlie Poems* (London: Good Elf Publications, 1982).
- ³⁶ Adapted from Bengt-Emil Johnson's statements on sound poetry. Johnson writes of sounds "separated from their functional context . . . used for their pure character of acoustical phenomena, and given a value in themselves as musical building blocks [that] could be registered, treated, reconstructed, analysed, measured, changed." Bengt-Emil Johnson, "Fylkingen's Group for Linguistic Arts and Text-Sound Compositions," trans. Roberta Setles, in *Stereo Headphones*, no. 4, ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg (Suffolk, England: 1971), 48-53.
- ³⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), 4.1212.
- ³⁸ Bob Cobbing, *Kwatz* (Gillingham, England: ARC X-1, 1970).
- ³⁹ Bob Cobbing, *Fugitive Poem for Ernst Jandl* (London: Writers Forum, 1965). Ernst Jandl, a poet and schoolteacher in Austria, was Cobbing's close friend and sometime collaborator. His work has been published by Writers Forum, including the sound poem *Sprechgedichte*, which appeared alongside Cobbing's *A B C in Sound* in Writers Forum Record No. 1 (London: Writers Forum, 1965).
- ⁴⁰ Bob Cobbing, *Collected Poems*, vol. 5, *Bob Cobbing's Girlie Poems* (London: Good Elf Publications, 1982).
- ⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, summary of *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- ⁴² Eugen Gomringer, "From Line to Constellation," in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968), 67.
- ⁴³ Bob Cobbing, n. 1 above.
- ⁴⁴ Gomringer, n. 41 above.