Collaborative Doctoral Award: British Poetry and Performance 1960-2008

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Introduction
The project focuses on the work of poet, painter, publisher, editor, arts organiser and leading figure of the British Poetry Revival, Bob Cobbing (1920-2002). It sites his visual, verbal, concrete and sound poetry, which was sometimes improvised in the moment performance, within its original social, institutional and historical contexts.

This project will develop our understanding of the interaction between performance and poetic practice, including both the visual and sonic features of experimental poetry. By looking at the poetry of other poets that collaborated with Cobbing, it also evaluates his impact on the development of the experimental poetic tradition in Britain, and its relevance today.

The project makes use of Cobbing’s personal tape collection held in the British Library’s Sound Archive, the British Library’s Cobbing Ephemera Archive, as well as Writers Forum material (Cobbing’s long running press and workshop) held at UCL.

It also creates new archival material for both the Archive of the Now and the British Library’s Sound Archive. This new material takes the form of audio recordings of new performances, poetry readings, and filmed interviews.

Methodology
The project proceeds chronologically and uses extensive but uncatalogued or under-researched archives. Research questions include:
- How was the civic responsibility of the aesthetically radical poet figured from the 1950s to the present day?
- In what spaces has ‘experimental’ poetry been performed? What spaces did it produce?
- How did Cobbing’s poetry and organising work develop such a large audience in the 1960s, and why has the audience for poetry shrunk in the intervening years?

Over the course of the project many social and institutional spaces are considered in relation to the performative possibilities of poetry. Some of these spaces, including Finchley Library, Anti-university of London, and the ICA, are described and depicted to the right.

Research Outputs
Conference Papers
- March 7 2009 - Academic Symposium at Nottingham Trent University: ‘Historicising Writers Forums’

Poetry Readings
- March 22 2010 - reading organised for Writers Forum Poets Ulli Freer and Adrian Clarke at Off The Shelf, Slade. 120 people attended.

Compact Disc and Podcast
- February 2009 - Wrote C D sleeve notes for Bob Cobbing: Early Recordings, published by the British Library as part of their Spoken Word series. CD compiled by Steve Cleary and Jennifer Cobbing. The first run of 200 copies sold out.
- March 2009 - Podcast published on the British Library Website Steve Cleary and Steve Willey introduce the British Library CD.

Audio Recordings
- 2009 - Recorded poets Niall Wheatley, Elaine Randall, Anna Blundell reading their own work in the British Library sound studio for the Archive of the Now.

Documentary Film
- March 22 2010 - This 30 min documentary features eleven poets published by Writers Forum over a period of 50 years. The film was first screened at the Off The Shelf event held at the Slade/UC. The film, archived on www.Openned.com, has had 516 views to date.

Further Examples of Cobbing’s Output

Cover of Cobbing’s Sound Poems (London: Writers Forum 1965). This poem is better known as The ABC of Sound. First performed in full at the ICA on 10 June 1960. The BBC’s Radiophonic Workshop. The Anti-University Term is now open.

Spontaneous Appellainr Contempate Apollinaire. The visual version of the sound poem of the same name. The poem was collaboratively performed and recorded by Bob Cobbing and French sound poet François Duhére in 1966.

Future Plans
Doctoral Research: Cobbing was active at a time that poetry achieved a political and artistic prominence that it has since lost. By following Cobbing’s trajectory through to his death in 2002, the changing fortunes of poetry in Britain since the 1960s will be traced. Future work will include chapters on: The relationship between poetry, pedagogy and performance in the 1960s; The influence of sound recording technologies on poets; Cobbing’s poetry during the Poetry Wars, the six year take over of the Poetry Society, and its journal, Poetry Review; The influence of Cobbing’s work on younger poets, including Maggie O’Sullivan and Peter Manson.

Archive Of The Now: Steve Willey and Andrea Brady are also collaborating on the development of the Archive of the Now, a major research resource which has recently secured funding from the Westfield Trust. The Archive is a free-access online repository of recordings of poets reading their own work. Its focus is poets within the experimental tradition, in which Cobbing himself was a major figure.