Collaborative Doctoral Award: British Poetry and Performance 1960-2008

Doctoral Student: Steve Willey (Department of English and Drama, Queen Mary, University Of London)
Award Holder: Dr. Andrea Brady (Department of English and Drama, Queen Mary, University of London)
Partner Organisation: Mr Stephen Cleary (Curator of Drama and Literature at The Sound Archive, The British Library).





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.

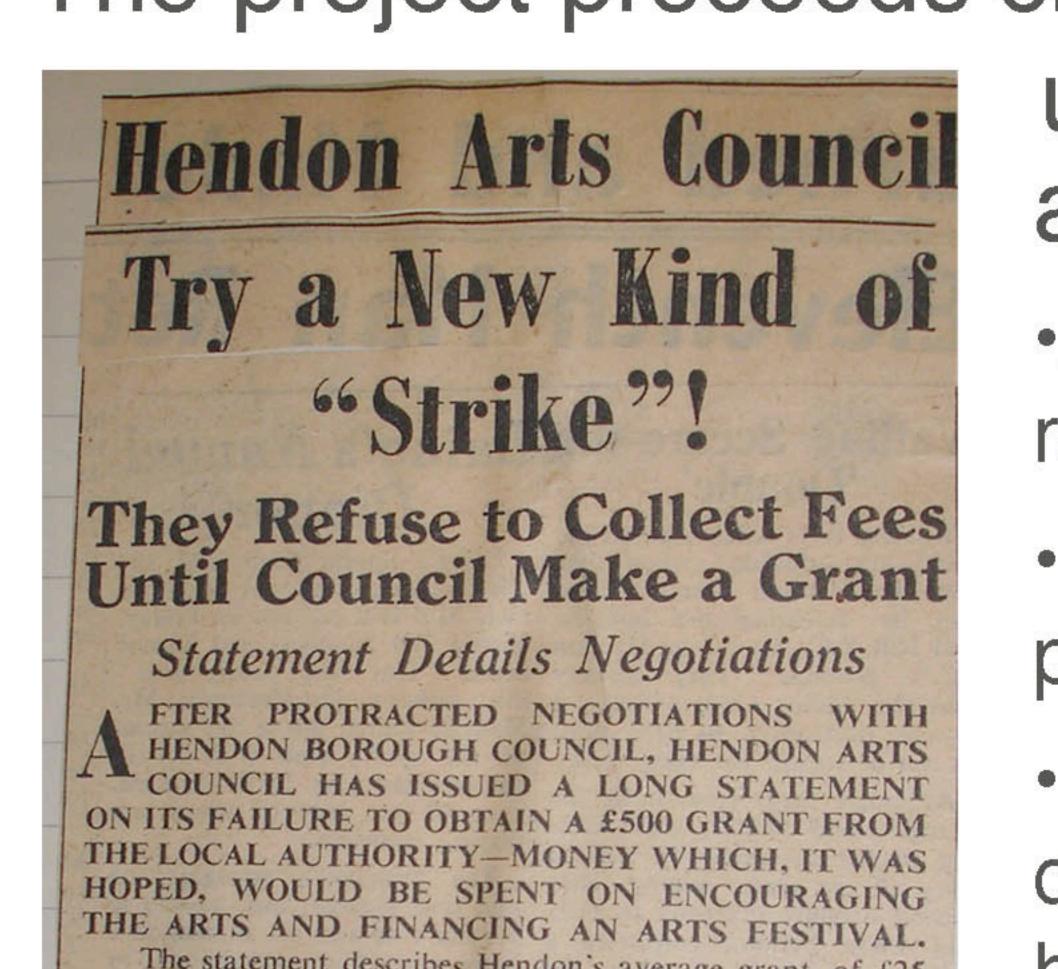
The Project makes use of Cobbing's personal tape collection held in the British Library's Sound Archive, the British Library's Cobbing Ephemera Archive, as well as Writers Forum material (Cobbing's long running press and workshop) held at UCL.

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



They Refuse to Collect Fees Until Council Make a Grant

Statement Details Negotiations

A FTER PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS WITH HENDON BOROUGH COUNCIL, HENDON ARTS COUNCIL HAS ISSUED A LONG STATEMENT ON ITS FAILURE TO OBTAIN A £500 GRANT FROM THE LOCAL AUTHORITY—MONEY WHICH, IT WAS HOPED, WOULD BE SPENT ON ENCOURAGING THE ARTS AND FINANCING AN ARTS FESTIVAL.

The statement describes Hendon's average grant, of £25 a year, as "pitiful" and claims that the demand for £500—equal to one twenty-seventh of a penny rate—would have a negligible effect on the local rate.

In some detail, the statement describes the Arts Council's negotiations with the Borough Council between October last and the most recent meeting of the Council.

This section concludes: "The net result of all this is that during the financial year 1956-57, Hendon Arts Council has received no support whatsoever from Hendon Borough Council."

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Term PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS WITH SUBJECTION WITH ARTS NEGOTIATIONS WITH HENDON ARTS COUNCIL, HENDON ARTS COUNCIL, HENDON ARTS FESTIVAL.

The statement describes Hendon's average grant, of £25 a penny rate—would have a negligible effect on the local rate.

In some detail, the statement of these, headed 'Proposed formation of Hendon Arts Council' announced that 'the Borough Council' had 'arranged a conference of local organisations to consider the formation of a local Arts Council." Its activities, the document continued, 'could include the following:— Joint publicity of the work of its affiliated societies; co-ordination of the work of local societies and

in 1950 when Hendon Arts Council first came into being:

"On June 6, 1950, certain documents were issued from the from the Borough Council. One from the Borough Council. One Article from the Hendon Times, 1948," it said, 'the Council have power to spend Council concerning the funding of the arts.

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. (Thanks to the British Library for permission to reproduce images)

Research Outputs



THE SPOKEN WORD

Bob Cobbing

ARCHIVE OF tHE NOV

Conference Papers

- March 7 2009 Academic Symposium at Nottingham Trent University: 'Historicising Writers Forum'
- June 30 2009 English Research Forum Royal Holloway: 'The Roots of An Experimental Poetry Society'
- November 13 2010 Slade Word Image Forum, at The Slade: A Short History of AND Magazine'

Poetry Readings - March 25 2009 - reading of Bonney at Openned. Archive

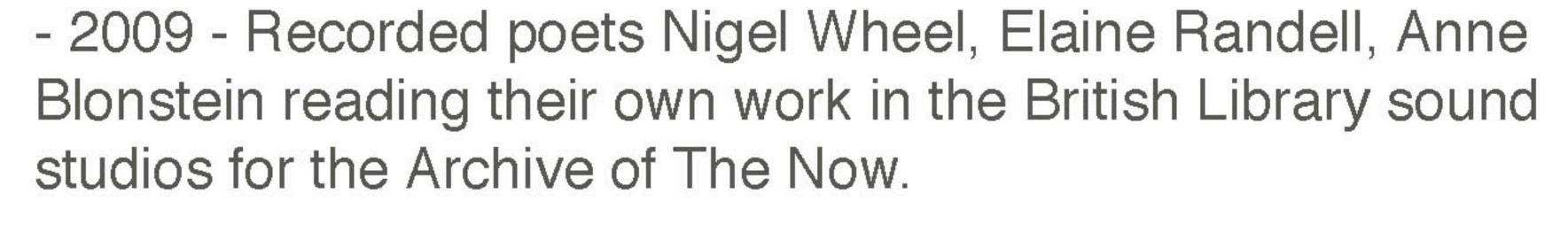
- March 25 2009 reading organised for Writers Forum poet Sean Bonney at Openned. Archived by Sound Archive, 100 people attended.
- March 22 2010 reading organised for Writers Forum Poets Ulli Freer and Adrian Clarke at Off The Shelf, Slade, 120 people attended.





- March 2009 - Podcast published on the British Library Website. Steve Cleary and Steve Willey introduce the British Library CD.

Audio Recordings

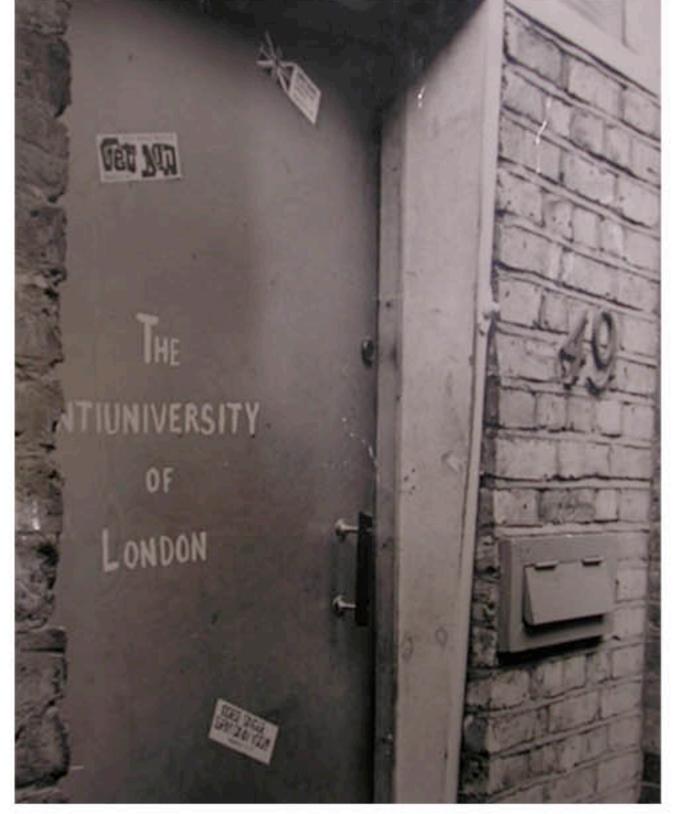


Documentary Film

- March 22 2010 - This 36 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/UCI. The film, archived on www.Openned.com, has had 316 views to date.

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,



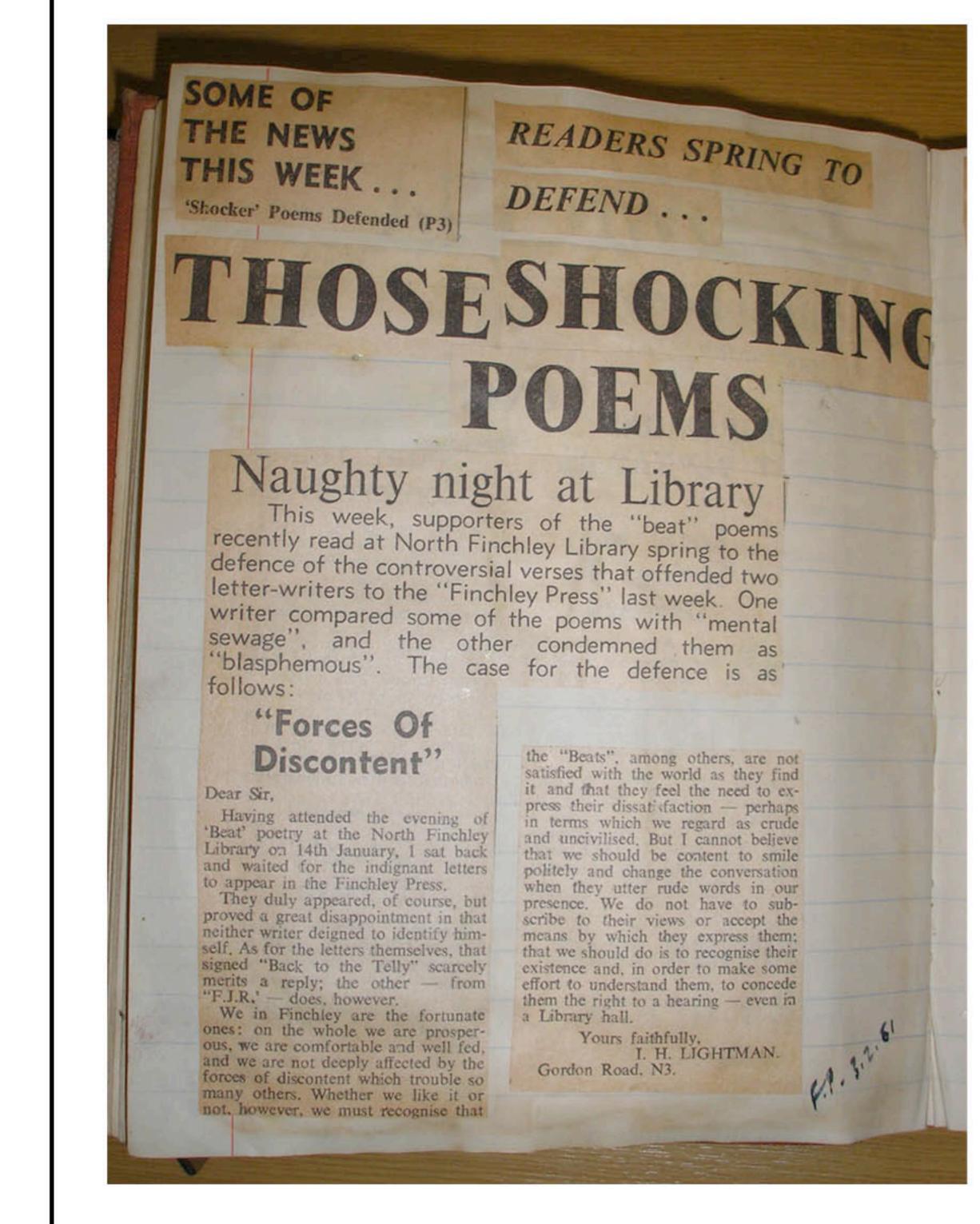
the changing fortunes of poetry in Britain since the 1960s will be traced. Future work will include chapters

on: The relationship between poetry, pedagogy and performance in the 1960s; The influence of sound recording technologies on poetics; 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.

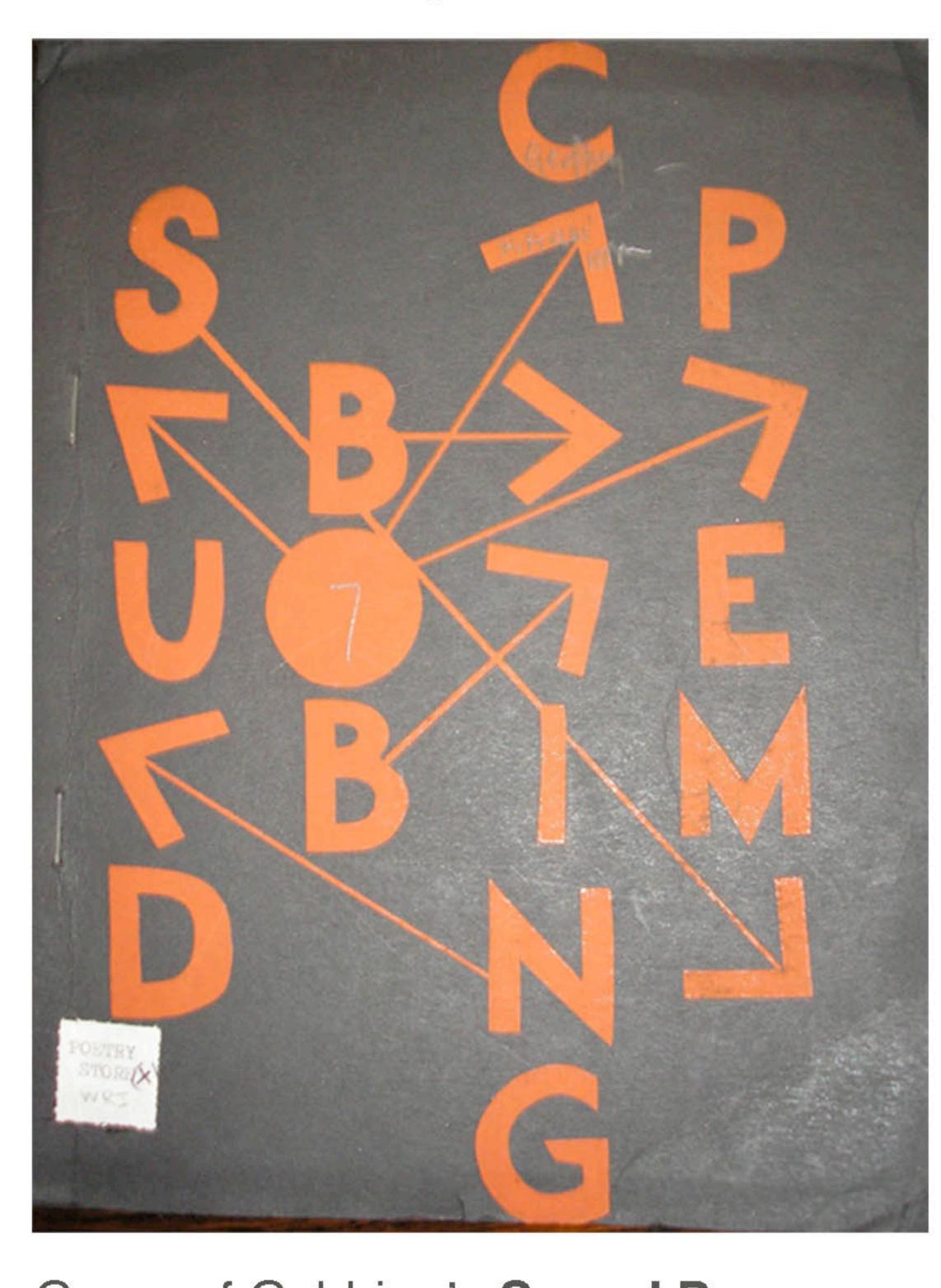
Archive Of The Now: Steve Willey and Andrea Brady are also collaborating on the development of the Archive of the Now, a major research resource which has recently secured funding from the Westfield Trust. The Archive is a free-access online repository of recordings of poets reading their own work. Its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



Further Examples of Cobbing's Output



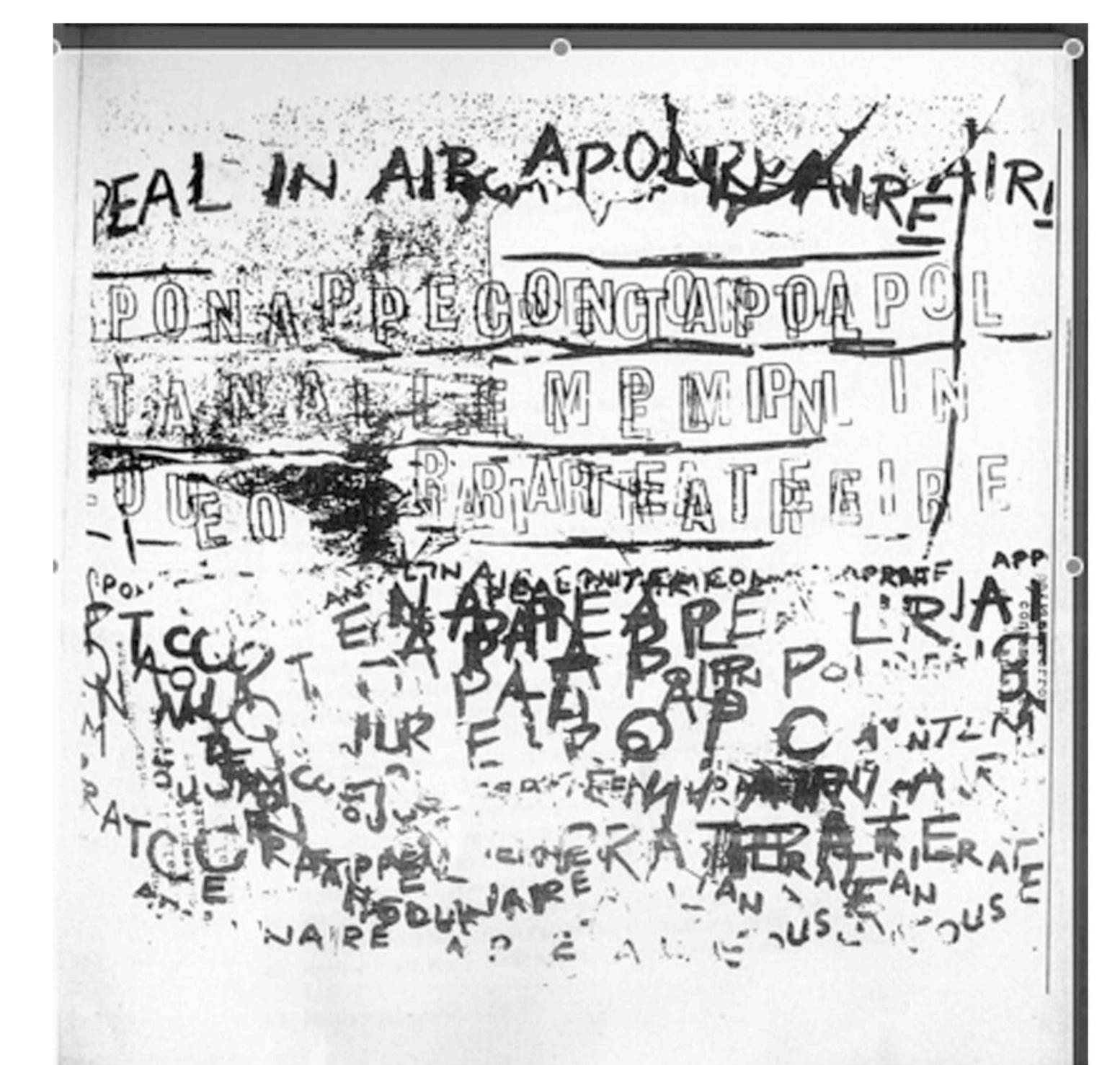
An early British engagement with Beat Poetry. Cobbing and John Rowan outrage local audiences in Finchley, during a reading of their poems in the Finchley public library, 1961



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 and given electronic treatment by the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop.



The Anti-University of Londo was established in 1968, following the landmark conference **The Dialectics of Liberation** (1967) For the first four months Cobbing (far left) was the coordinator of the prospectus and the faculty and organised public talks before resigning in protest. Courses included guerilla warfare and Cobbing's course on sound poem composition. Faculty included Yoko Ono and Edward Dorn.



Spontaneous Appealinair Contemprate
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 Dufrêne in 1968.