

NOTES for **Bob Cobbing and the book**

An exhibition at UWE Bower Ashton, Bristol

Tom Trusky Exhibition Cases
Special Collections Room
from December 2011 to January 2012
curated by Lawrence Upton

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Jennifer Cobbing, the artist's widow, for her continued encouragement.

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General Notes

All published items *Writers Forum* unless otherwise stated.

All Cobbing's texts would have been intended by him to be realised by sonic performance and perhaps dance.

Some exhibits are labelled; but not all, to avoid clutter. For instance, many of the exhibits are copies of publications; and it is clear from their covers what they are.

General comments

Cobbing's approach to publishing, as possibly to most things, was egalitarian. (I think those who say he was democratic may have misread him; not that he wasn't, but it doesn't quite catch the man. Similarly, undue emphasis is sometimes placed on his artistic innovation: of course he was innovative, but that was part of a wider approach which seems to be beyond the comprehension of those who take a catechismal approach to art.)

He wanted everybody's work to be affordably available; and, for him, that meant cheap. You'll see sales post it notes attached to a couple of publications, with rather low prices considering the effort taken to produce them. Actually, low without any such consideration.

Another element of his approach was relaxed time-efficiency. He was quite capable of undertaking long and complex projects; but he did not like to make what could be achieved simply into something complex or slow to be finished.

So the ink duplicator, and later the photocopier, suited him. He could use them in his home when he had a free moment. If he couldn't sleep, he would use them in the middle of the night.

An office stapler is quicker to use than a needle and thread; so he used the office stapler on most pamphlets.

Judicious purchase of papers made for pleasing designs. Staples were pressed down with a coin or knife. Pages and whole books were guillotined when appropriate.

He explored the potential of the chapbook made from one sheet of card. He published books in plastic wallets where it suited the contents.

A book could be conceived and published within 24 hours. The *Writers Forum Workshop* provided one outlet; and that met frequently.

Sometimes these methods were supplemented by use of silk screen; and, later, colour photocopy; and, when money was available, by litho. (From early on, he had used coloured inks in the ink duplicator; but it was a lot of work.)

Writers Forum also produced posters, audio cassettes and an LP record.

verbi visi voco, on display here, is one example of what could be achieved by way of camera-ready copy at the Cobbing kitchen table.

When Cobbing handed over *Writers Forum* in 2002, I asked him about his own work, which he had not mentioned; and he said it didn't matter or words to that effect. I think it was only party rhetorical on his part. He knew his own worth; but his main interest had been here and now and in knowing that we would try to continue something of his approach.

Now the sticky tape is failing and some of the publications are a little battered. One tries to maintain them; but such decay is a risk of the approach. There are collections where pristine copies are maintained although there is no one comprehensive holding of the output of this productive and creative man.

In the years since Cobbing's death, printing has become cheaper; and the press relies more on that than in Bob's day, although the process is slower and somewhat reliant on donation to pay for it. I am not sure that Bob would have entirely approved.

A few examples of the post 2002 work of *Writers Forum* are included where there is a direct link back to Cobbing's methods and interests.

bill jubobe and **bob jubile**, the two large selections of his own work from *Coach House Press* (1976) and *New River Project* (1990), are not included here. Both afford ample evidence of Cobbing's aesthetic approaches but are felt to stand outside of what is achievable here.

This is only an introduction and much has to stay undisplayed here and unsaid. (And apologies for any ambiguities or omissions: these work is being completed under a quite heavy cold.)

Feel free to get in touch with *Writers Forum*: info at wfuk dot org dot uk

Lawrence Upton, December 2011

Specific comments

15 Shakespeare Kaku by Bob Cobbing; 1971 (4th edition 1998) *notice the 50p sales post it note still affixed*

A movie book by Bob Cobbing – *not the publication itself but an example of one of Cobbing's simple but effective working method*

A Processual Supplement by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 392 4; Christmas Day 1986; A4 portrait cards in envelope with title page glued on in the frequent manner of Cobbing. Photocopied..

A Short History of London; "Text: Jeremy Adler Maps: Bob Cobbing"; ISBN 0 86162 236 7; April 1979 (item displayed is second edition October 1985); A5 landscape pamphlet; single side, side stapled; original ink duplicated

A text book of drama by Bill Griffiths; ISBN 0 86162 403 3; June 1987; B5 book; photocopied; all hand glued; card cover with glued on dust wrapper; an enormous labour – a note on the verso invites buyers to contact the press if they need help with photocopying scripts for performance!

A Winter Poem by Bob Cobbing; December 1974; A5 portrait card formed from A4 folded in envelope (item displayed is second , posthumous edition, 2004); original was ink duplicated; reprint by ink jet, to retain some of the qualities of the original

A winter poem by Bob Cobbing ; A5 portrait card formed from A4 folded; ink duplicated

A winter poem by Bob Cobbing ; A5 portrait card formed from A4 folded; ink duplicated

A Winter Poem 13 by Bob Cobbing; A5 portrait card formed from A4 folded; photocopied

ABC in Sound by Bob Cobbing; was, as **Sound Poems**, Cobbing's first solo collection. First published 1965 (as "Sound Poems"; it is the book which first made his name internationally. This is a posthumous reprint, litho, perfect bound.

Third ABC in Sound by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 989 2; B5 portrait; photocopied; note use of blank pages to face images – in the press's early years this was sometimes necessary to overcome problems with the printing machines; but Cobbing took that on also as a way of giving some image sets their own space without their being in conversation with each other

Are your children safe in the sea by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86163 828 4; July 1998; B5 portrait pamphlet. *The poem itself dates from the mid 1960s; this is one of many versions and presentations.* Photocopied; original(s) were ink-duplicated on card. *See fold out page of Extra Verse 17 also on exhibit.*

Bob Cobbing and Writers Forum; ed Peter Mayer; Ceolfrith Press 1974 – this is the third edition, published by *Writers Forum* in 2010, perfect bound. *Writers Forum* under Cobbing had produced a second edition on Cobbing's own photocopier: an enormous labour

collaborations for Alaric Sumner by Bob Cobbing and Lawrence Upton; *Speechless*, Canada – a reprint of a title issued in Cobbing's lifetime by *housepress*, Canada

collaborations for peter finch by Lawrence Upton and Bob Cobbing; 1997 (item exhibited is third edition, litho, from 2010) 64 pp, B6, perfect bound. 1st edition was photocopied

Concerning Concrete Poetry by Peter Mayer and Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 200 6; 1978 (The item exhibited is the second edition from 2000); 85 pp plus many illustration pages; A4 portrait; originally ink duplicated, second edition photocopied with some unused ink duplicated pages surviving from the first edition.

Concretion from within creates the specific place by Bob Cobbing; 1978; not a *Writers Forum* publication, more an ink-duplicated and hand-written manuscript. The title is hand-written, with the date, together with the number "3", the significance of which is now seemingly lost. The images themselves are well-enough duplicated; but the reverse of one card has picked up inky roller marks from the machine. Cobbing's purpose would have been primarily to communicate the work; and so he kept and used it, but not as an official publication. (The water marking on the card is a separate issue, resulting from poor storage in the 20 plus years which followed.) Private publications, generally given away, generally quite humble – but appropriate – in production were a feature of his entire career but most especially of the 1960s and 1970s

destruction in art by Bob Cobbing; 2004; 24pp; A4 portrait; ISBN 1 84254 589 2; perfect bound; a small selection from already published works from 1966 arising from Metzger's *Destruction in Art Symposium*

Duppies by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 485 8; 13 pp (using inside back cover as a page; B5 portrait; ink duplicated; card cover; centre-stapled.

e-colony by Bob Cobbing; two A3 landscape pages, folded three times along their short dimension; note that it is displayed alongside the later version included in **The Five Vowels**.

ein noise project by Bob Cobbing and Serge Segay; ISBN 0 86162 866 7; March 1999; photocopied; 8pp pamphlet B5 portrait; card cover; centre-stapled.

Extra Verse 17; 1966; essay by dsh; *published by Extra Verse*

Fracted by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 189 1; November 1977 reprinted 2004; 1 A3 card folded to A4 portrait; in envelope with title page glued on in the frequent manner of Cobbing. Photocopied. This is a posthumous reprint. *Writers Forum* had various logos under Cobbing, but none were used all the time nor for long; the logo here was designed by Upton after Cobbing's death.

gig by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 806 7; New Years Eve, 1997; A5 portrait pamphlet; card cover; centre-stapled; photocopied

In Line by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 334 2; A5 portrait folded card formed from A4

Jape by Bob Cobbing / Lawrence Upton; ISBN 0 86162 940 X; January 2000; photocopied; images photocopier-generated; publisher's details hand-written by

Cobbing; 8pp pamphlet B5 portrait; card cover; centre-stapled. This is one of approximately 300 such pamphlets belonging to the set *Domestic Ambient Noise*, from near the end of the work, which lasted some six years. The theme, on the first page, was by Lawrence Upton, taken from an earlier pamphlet; Cobbing provides 6 variations on that theme. Intended for vocal performance. Unlimited edition. First runs were often 40 towards the end of Cobbing's life, but the titles frequently reprinted

Kilties by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 487 4; June 1991; photocopied; images photocopier-generated; publisher's details hand-written by Cobbing; 12pp pamphlet B5 portrait; card cover; centre-stapled.

Kurrirurriri by Bob Cobbing; November 1967 (item displayed is 4th edition from 1973); quarto pamphlet, single-sided pages, some coloured, card covers, side-stapled. It may be of interest to you that Cobbing speaks in the book's notes of "largely visual typestracts", suggesting that he was still developing his position that all texts are performable sonically. The poem Grin herein is referred to as a "typographical interpretation" which suggests something other than his later stance.

Lightsong 2 by Bob Cobbing; ink duplicated; publishers' details were written on by Cobbing at or near the time of sale; each copy was slightly different because of the quantity of ink involved, which did not make for good ink control on a machine designed to print typescript; and each copy I have seen was cut to a slightly different set of dimensions.

Massacre of the innocents by Bob Cobbing and John Rowan; 1963; single-sided pages; screen-printed card cover; staple bound – one of the first publications produced by the newly "independent" *Writers Forum*

Members only by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 999 X; July 30th 2000; 32 pp pamphlet; B5 portrait; photocopied; card cover; centre-stapled; Cobbing's 80th birthday book to himself

Morris Dance by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 855 1; Christmas Day 1998; B5 portrait centre-stapled; photocopied

Off the Page (& back again); by Richard Tipping; 40 pp, 20 in colour; 20 x 20cm; laser printed on fine paper with spiral-binding and title on overlaid spine; published 30th October 2010; ISBN 978 1 84254 135 7. Tipping and Cobbing met late in the 1990s and one outcome was Tipping's small *Writers Forum* publication **Know Tipping**. An invitation from Upton in 2009 to reprint, perhaps with additions, resulted in this unusual and engaging book, continuing the press's direction of nearly 50 years and also giving it something of a new direction, still unexpected, still international.

Open Folios title page by Bob Cobbing from 1993; this publication was a collection of cards published in a commercially available plastic wallet. In it, Cobbing revised and reworked visual poems from up to almost 30 years before – nb he can be seen with the publication in Richard Tipping's film of Cobbing which will be available from *Writers Forum* shortly

Ord bok by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 1 84254 023 8; March 2001; 8 pp; B5 portrait; photocopier generated and printed

OW (1966) by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 662 1; March 1996; 8 pp A5 portrait; card cover; centre stapled; publisher's notes refer to 1996, the 30th year of *Association of Little Presses* in which Cobbing was always a major "mover"

OW 3 by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 772 5; June 1997; 8 pp A5 portrait; card cover; centre stapled

Pitchblend by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 448 X; July 30 1994; photocopied; images photocopier-generated; publisher's details hand-written by Cobbing; 12pp pamphlet B5 portrait; card cover; centre-stapled.

Poetry Review cover by Bob Cobbing – from the days when the magazine was printed by some of the poets in it by *Consortium of London Presses*, which included Cobbing who had moved his printing kit into the COLP Printshop

Precipice of fishes by Eric Mottram; ISBN 0 86162 250 2; 1979; ink duplicated cards in a plastic wallet. Printing on cards reflected both the work's structure and the intended method of performance

Processual: After a fashion 2 by Bob and Jennifer Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 321 5; August 1983; 12 pp single-sided, quarto, portrait; card cover; side side-stapled – one of a number of publications over several years in the *Processual* set, later collected as a boxed set. (He bought in the boxes and attached his own label. The box is not shown here for space reasons.

Scorch Scores by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 176 1; A4 portrait (trimmed) cards in envelope with title page glued on in the frequent manner of Cobbing. Ink duplicated.

Sign Writing by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 1 84254 020 3; 25 December 2000; 32 pp; B5 portrait pamphlet; card cover; centre-stapled; drawing and photocopier generated

Stracci 3 by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 423 8; May 1988; (Stracci 1-3 were published simultaneously;) photocopied; images photocopier-generated; 16 pp single-sided pamphlet A5 landscape; card cover; side-stapled.

The congruence of speed and stall by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 472 6; 26 December 1990; 12 pp single-sided, pamphlet; B5 portrait; photocopied; card cover; centre-stapled.

The Five Vowels by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 115 8; 1974 (item displayed, over two shelves, is the second edition, 1986) title page glued on to the envelope; one page introduction by Peter Mayer; coloured cards in an envelope; but multiple cards are joined together as four diptychs and one triptych, one-sided sticky tape being used to join them; the cards are coloured, as are the inks employed; ink duplicating from electro stencils. It is an astonishing craft achievement to have produced it on a Gestetner ink duplicator. Cobbing made what I regard as a superb four channel text-sound composition from a performance of this text at Fylkingen in Stockholm in 1976.

Triptych Five: Feathered by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 447 5; ink duplicated; 3 x A4 portrait cards joined with single-sided office sticky tape; title page hand-written; unlimited edition, but, in reality, probably quite a short run.

Triptych minus one 1953 by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 998 1; July 2000; A3 card folded along short dimension into a portrait triptych; photocopy of 1950s graphic

Triptych Seven A sense of Japanese Dress by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 0 86162 448 3; 3 A4 portrait cards joined with sticky tape; note the hand-written title page / verso although he had the equipment readily to hand to word process

Triptych 10 by Bob Cobbing; 3 A4 portrait cards joined as a triptych by sticky tape. This copy is now falling apart; but Cobbing's main interest seems to have been in making his work available during his own lifetime and then in the process of his press posthumously, rather than in the presentation of his own work into the future.

verbi visi voco a performance of poetry edited by Bob Cobbing and Bill Griffiths; 320 pp; B5 portrait; litho, perfect bound – the 500th *Writers Forum* publication. It documents the work of the press until then by being quite rigorously inclusive

with our tongue our drills and quadras by Bob Cobbing; ISBN 1 84254 051 5; 2001; 24 colour pp; items displayed is second edition of 2010; A6 portrait. The first edition was made one copy at a time, using a desktop 3-in-1 (scanner-copier-printer) machine. Very few were produced and each was slightly different. The second edition was produced by commercial litho. In my opinion Cobbing was at the height of his powers, here, in the use of colour.

lju 12/2011