

# KONNTEXTSOUND



# KONTEXTSOUND

a compilation of  
sound-poetry  
text-sound compositions  
poésie sonore  
auditive texts  
optophonetics  
verbosonics  
lingual music

edited by michael gibbs

published by  
kontexts publications,  
on the occasion of the  
"tekst in geluid"  
(text in sound) festival,  
stedelijk museum, amsterdam,  
april/may 1977

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edition of 1000 copies.

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this publication was made possible  
thanks to financial assistance from  
the prins bernhard fonds, netherlands.

KONTEXTS PUBLICATIONS  
Michael Gibbs, editor,  
Eerste van der Helststraat 55,  
Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands.

kontextsound is dedicated to the  
memory of Hugo Ball (1886-1927).

this year is the 50th anniversary  
of his death and of the publication  
of his diary "Die Flucht aus der  
Zeit", in which he wrote:

"We must return to the innermost  
alchemy of the word, we must even  
give up the word too, to keep for  
poetry its last and holiest  
refuge. We must give up writing  
secondhand: that is, accepting  
words (to say nothing of sentences)  
that are not newly invented for  
our own use."

organising committee for the festival:

prof.dr. h.l.c. jaffé, professor in the  
history of modern art, university of  
amsterdam.

dr. gerrit borgers, director lerrerkundig  
museum, den haag.

g.j.de rook, secretary archive for visual  
concrete & experimental poetry, den  
haag.

ab van eyk, radio producer.

lisbeth crommelin, co-ordination stedelijk  
museum.

michael gibbs, kontexts publications.

thanks to ulises carrion for help with  
french translations.

photo credits:

p.9 francois lagarde

p.11 andré morain (dufrêne)

stedelijk museum (chopin)

p.13 michael gibbs

p.15 michael gibbs







1953 Oyvind Fahlström: Manifesto for Concrete Poetry.  
Rune Lindblad's first concrete sound works, Gothenburg.

1954 Bob Cobbing: first version of 'Worm' poem, with both sound and visual forms.

1955 Henri Chopin and Bernard Heidsieck begin series of Audiopoesies by processing the voice on tape with techniques of speed/volume changes, inversions, filters, echoes, fold-ins, superimpositions.  
Hausmann introduces his (old) sound poems to a younger generation at Basel.

1957 Ernst Jandl: first sound-poems: Ode to N; Schutzengraben; Bestarium.  
Ladislav Novak records 'Poésies Onomatopées'.

1958 Dufrêne: Le Tombeau de Pierre Larousse.

1959 Hans Helms: Fa m'ahniesgwow (postscript by Gottfried Michael Koenig) in five macrostructures (with LP of extracts).  
Jack Kerouac: Old Angel Midnight (published in Big Table).

1960 Brion Gysin: I am that I am.

1960-62 Epitaph for Aikichi Kuboyama (Eimert)

1961 Stefan Themerson: Poem in Cardinal Pölättö.  
Oyvind Fahlström: Radio-poems (from 'Bob').  
Graham Reynolds: Palindromes.  
Novak: Tape-poems.  
Inaugural lecture: Poetry of Significant Nonsense: Leonard Forster (Cambridge University Press).

1963 Paul de Vree broadcasts 'Veronika' and tapes 'Vertigo Gli' (oeuvre mimusical-miphonétique, with musical arrangement by Bruyndonckx).  
Frans Vanderlinde composes: Partituur voor toonzetting sonorisering van het gedicht Waarschuwing No. X.  
Kriwet: Hortext 1.  
Ake Hodell writes 'Igevar'.  
Niikuni: Piece Po.

1963-65 Pierre and Ilse Garnier: Sprechaktionen, Sonies and Souffle-manifestoes.

1964 Ernst Jandl: Langegedichte (Rot 16).  
Lemaître: Sonnet à Nehama d'Israel (TLS 6th August 1964).  
Dufrêne: Superpop (TLS 3rd. Sept 1964).  
Bengt Emil Johnson: Gubbdrukning (book and record).  
First OU record (Heidsieck, Gysin, Chopin).  
Bob Cobbing's ABC in Sound (published with record 1965).

1965 Ernst Jandl: Mai Hart Lieb Zapfen Eibe Hold (Writers Forum).  
Ernst Jandl at Albert Hall.  
Booklet by dsh to introduce Cobbing/Jandl record (WF 15).  
B.E. Johnson and Lars-Gunnar Bodin: Semikolon; Vietnam.  
Steve Reich: Its Gonna Rain.  
Dufrêne, Wolman, Brau records: Achele, Paris.

1966 Steve Reich: Come Out.

1967 Gust Gils: Consonance.  
First 4-channel tapes in Sweden (Hodell, Johnson, L-G Bodin).

1968 Ake Hodell: USS Pacific Ocean  
Ilmar Laaban: Stentorian Groan  
Sten Hanson: Che & Coucher et Souffler.  
First Stockholm festival of Text-Sound Compositions.  
First Fylkingen/Swedish Radio record.

1969 Sound-poetry Workshop started at National Poetry Centre, London.  
Fylkingen Catalogue of Text-Sound Compositions.

1970 Sound/movement Workshop at NPC.  
Jukebox of sound-poetry at Stedelijk Museum Concrete Poetry exhibition; anthology record published.  
Verey/Mills/Clark: Experiments in Disintegrating Language.

1971 First issue of Kroklok: An Anthology of sound-poetry in 21 parts.  
Cobbing/Claire/Chant: Konkrete Canticle. Record of sound-poetry from Arts Council of Great Britain.  
Sound Poetry issue of Stereo Headphones (no. 4).  
Henri Chopin: Audiopoesies, Tangent, London.

1972 Canadada (record): The Four Horsemen, Toronto.  
First sound-poetry performance by abAna (Cobbing/Burwell/Toop).

1973 Poesie phonétique: article by Dufrêne in Opus magazine. Record: L'Automatopek 1.

1974 Text-Sound Compositions (Sound Poetry) Festival moves to London.  
Beginning of emphasis on live performance at NPC, London.

1975 Jackson MacLow and bp Nichol at 8th International Festival, London.

1976 First performance by JGJGJG (Upton/Cheek/Fencott).  
Poesie Sonore record edited by Maurizio Nannucci.  
'De la Voix' series of manifestations, Annick Le Moine Atelier, Paris.  
'Word Events' by Gibbs/de Rook/Monach/Carrion: Amsterdam & Utrecht.

1977 Tenth Festival of Text-Sound Compositions, Stockholm.  
'Tekst in Geluid' festival, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.  
publication of Kontextsound.

1978 Eleventh Festival planned for Toronto (October).

(the first version of this chronology appeared in Writers Forum no.15, september 1965)

## h.n. werkman u.g. stikker

Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman (1882-1945), an experimental typographer and forerunner of concrete and visual poetry, has also been one of the few dutch poets of sound-poetry. His poems were published only by himself and in a few studies about him. They still belong to the unknown part of his work.

Werkman published his sound-poems from 1936 (perhaps one earlier) till 1944, when his booklet '3 syllabijnen, 2 vocaletten' was published in a very small edition. The poem 'somire mare maks' printed here dates from October 1936 (published in 'Zwart-wit-boek').

g.j.de rook

**somire mare maks  
conbrise la contaksi  
a monde microkaksi,  
parfalte satisfaksi**

**valore non valaxi  
presente par sequaxi  
colosso la colaxi  
un grande stupéfaxi**

**aquiso quasi quaksi  
stupido adoraksi  
sublto un injaksi  
profonde proflaksi**

**ridícuala loquaxi  
un Imposante smaksi  
regarde son pretaksi  
devalde educaxi**

**retorica redaksi  
perfecte superflaxi  
a basso immédiaxi  
salvo sonoso claxi**

h.n.w.

U.G. Stikker, a dutch poet who lived in Groningen for most of his life, and who wrote sound-poetry as well, titles one of his sound-poems with a word taken from one of Werkman's sound-poems. (The word 'synagobi' comes from Werkman's 'loemmoem loemmoem laroem lakoem')

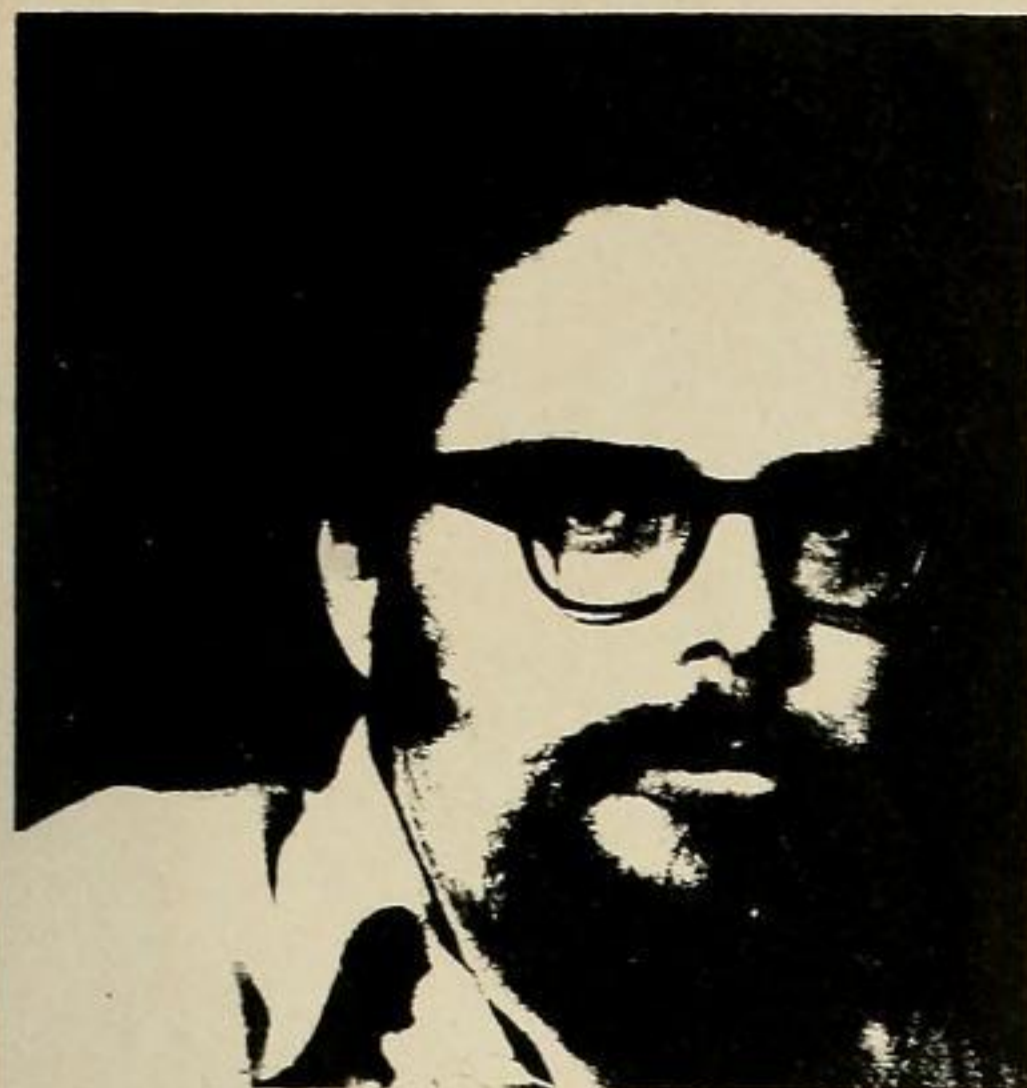
### SYNAGOBI

strup te gasasásse  
get te ghotte  
gérto azóto  
loela loela  
jen toe lev.  
ráoes  
sssss sssss  
massácrá massada MASSADA  
zzzzz  
óndula lúla láting  
sssssjjft  
as if the desert wore  
abracadabras

átta  
nah

(from U.G. Stikker, AUCHEMIE, Groningen 1968)





## STEN HANSON, 40 COMPOSER, POET & SONOSOPHER

Sten Hanson is also manager of the Fylkingen Centre, Stockholm, where the 10th International Festival of Text-Sound Compositions is being held this April. Here he is interviewed about his own work by Michael Gibbs.

M.G. How did your interest in text-sound compositions develop?

S.H. I started to think about sound poetry with the use of tape recorders around 1961. The first thing printed on the matter was an enquiry answer that was published in a Swedish magazine in 1963 where they were asking some poets and artists what they were doing, and there I made the first statement in Sweden on the subject of sound poetry. After having published that, Bengt Emil Johnson told me that he had been thinking about the same thing, independently, and we found out that we were both interested in doing it. The first things we did were things for live performance. We were interested in the principle of simultaneous action: when you read you can only follow one word at a time, but when you listen you can follow different layers of activity at the same time. In that kind of sound poetry, and in a lot of the Swedish sound poetry, you have several things going on at the same time which you are supposed to perceive more or less independently, and that could of course be done by live performances. The aim was to go on to the tape recorder, but the practical possibilities of doing so didn't exist until 1965 when the Swedish Radio founded its electronic music studio which the Fylkingen artists could use.

The group for Linguistic Arts was established in 1966, and there was a lot of theoretical activity also within the group. We had for several years a seminar twice a month, and we discussed the theory and practice of linguistic arts. It wasn't only sound poetry, but also to a certain extent visual poetry, and above all, the use of computer techniques in poetry.

M.G. What were the most important things that came out of this research?

S.H. The most important thing, I guess, was an agreement on the aesthetics and principles of sound poetry, which was carried out by most of the Swedish sound poets, and which was also set up as the aim for the text-sound festivals when they were created. It wasn't until after the formation of the linguistic arts group that we found out about the works of people like Dufrene and Heidsieck.....

In 1967 they had a conference on experimental radiophonic work for people from the different radio companies in Europe, and Bengt Emil Johnson, who works for the Swedish Radio, went there. To that conference people brought works, such as some German experimental radiophonic plays by people like Heissenbüttel, Mon, even Jandl and Dieter Mayrocker, if I remember rightly. And there

was the work from the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop, which was then quite recently made by Cobbing, Jandl and Brion Gysin. The Dutch radio brought a piece by Gust Gils called "Consonance" which is really a very early example of advanced tape techniques in sound poetry. So Bengt Emil brought home copies of all these things. By then we were also getting hold of copies of OU magazines & records, and things like that, works by Steve Reich, and Alvin Lucier, and even Dick Higgins' works. All that together meant that we found out that we weren't alone on earth, so to speak, but that there were other people, primarily the people in Paris who had started well ahead of us, but of course they worked differently: they didn't put the emphasis on the technical quality as much as we had done. Had better technical facilities been available earlier in Sweden, the sound poetry activities and the sound poetry festival would have started in 1963 instead of 1968. We really had to wait for the electronic music studio to be created. The Linguistic Arts Group had to ask for money from the Fylkingen main organisation to present it, and we also got support from the Swedish Radio. We played a lot of tapes and invited three artists - Dufrene, Heidsieck and Cobbing - to Stockholm, not only for them to present work, but also to give them access to the technical facilities of the electronic music studio, and the big radio mixing studios, because it was generally known then that the working possibilities of the sound poets in other countries wasn't very good. In France, for instance, there was no contact whatsoever between the Pierre Schaeffer group, and the sound poets, because Pierre Schaeffer's idea in music was to get away from the origins of sound, which is the opposite of what sound poetry aims at.

M.G. Had you formulated any principles to distinguish a poetic approach from a musical one?

S.H. In the beginning, what I thought counted was the aim of the piece. With a musical piece the approach to the material is different, on a more intuitive, abstract and constructional level, while in poetry the aim is to express something very distinct. I don't think it necessarily has anything to do with whether you're using words or not; it's all a question of the aims and attitudes of the composer.

M.G. If a work is produced that does fall more towards music, it is still possible to call it "sound poetry"?

S.H. I guess it's a question of how you define the word "poetry". I regard poetry more as an attitude towards life, so to speak, in general, and that the quality of poetic sense can be present in a lot of things; it can be present in the newest art works as well as in poetry, and there is a lot of verse written that lacks the quality of poetry to me.

M.G. Many of the works presented at Fylkingen, at the text-sound festivals, seem to have a very scientific approach to language, making works with synthetic language, for example. Was this the result of deliberate research?

S.H. Yes, I think so. At the time in Fylkingen there was a great deal of interest in art & technology, as well within the linguistic arts group as such. And there was a kind of research aspect to it - a lot of people there had the theory that linguistic elements existed that were bearers of a non-semantic meaning, and by treating the spoken word, taking the semantics out of it, you could get to those elements that non-semantically bear a meaning. That was one way, by the treatment of ordinary semantic words by electronic means. Another way was the construction of new words, new linguistic structures that didn't have any meaning at all, and then trying to give the meaning by the way they were expressed. And both these lines of work are present in a lot of the Swedish text-sound compositions.

M.G. How are the works actually produced? What sort of methods are used to create these new structures?

S.H. It's rather hard to describe in general, but what you do when you treat the spoken language electronically is that you have a theory on what's significant in it,

and what you want. It's a fact that sound-wise there's hardly any sound that's as rich and varied as the spoken language, and it's a lot richer, even so to speak musically, than the sung language. What singing training does is to narrow the field of frequencies that are present in the voice as much as possible. The spoken language has an enormous variety of surprising frequencies, and it's also individual for each person, which means you can get very different results with different people's voices. Anyway, what you do is you decide what elements you want to build up your composition from, and then you try to extract them from the material, or to amplify them and make them more apparent. There are different techniques: you use filtering, of course, so you can cut out very narrow bands of frequencies from the voice sound. You can use deeper kinds of modulations, and you can superimpose different filters to get new kinds of frequency spectrums. You also use the change of speed: by playing tape of spoken language faster or slower, you move it up and down the frequencies, so you can get a rich representation of frequencies that are normally not so well represented. So there's practically no sound whatsoever that you can't get out of the human voice. There is always a basic difference between material you get out of the voice, and purely electronic material, and that is the fact that, whatever you do to voice materials, it always keeps its human touch, so to speak. It has more of a direct and natural appeal to people than purely electronic sound has, and it's also a scientifically proven fact that the more close to the spoken voice sounds get, the more associations people get out of it.

M.G. But there is no need for actual words, or recognizable semantic content?

S.H. No, not at all.

M.G. So it remains on an abstract level.

S.H. Yes, because the quality of semantics and the quality of sound, of orality, in language are two quite different things.

M.G. In this sound poetry, then, the emphasis is on the sound.

S.H. Yes, and I think it's very justified because that quality of the spoken language is very much neglected in our culture. Our culture is one of the written word, not of the spoken word, and the communications of the spoken word have hardly been worked on by artists, not until the creation of sound poetry, I feel that the Dadaist or Futurist people, like Hausmann, Hugo Ball, those kind of phonetic people, and also the Lettriste people, what they did was interesting in its own way, and had some influence on what has happened since, but it wasn't really based on a valid programme for developing a sound language art.

M.G. What about the types of sound poetry where it's possible for the audience to participate? This would seem difficult to do with electronic works, except, to a certain extent, in the way that Henri Chopin does get one or two people to join in. I'm thinking of bp Nichol, Bob Cobbing, the way that they involve the audience in a communal, participatory experience. What value do you think this has?

S.H. It has value, but it doesn't personally interest me that much, because I don't feel that the concert situation, or the gathering situation is the right distribution situation. Like that your reach is 20, 50, 100 people, and that's it. The way that interests me more is having it on record, and especially having it broadcast on radio. In several countries, they have had series of sound poetry on the radio; the latest was Bernard Heidsieck's on the French radio this spring for 10 days where he presented one sound poet every day. If a sound poem gets played once over the radio in a big country, it's heard by more people than would hear it if you spent your life going round little art galleries speaking it out loud yourself.

M.G. What's been the reaction to this radio distribution?

S.H. It seems that the sound poetry works appeal more to people interested in music than to literary people, and there again,



you have another aspect: a lot of literary people are so very print-minded, their minds don't work in the way of anything that isn't semantically printed words. It's the same with visual poetry, which interests people who are interested in art a lot more than people who are interested in literature.

M.G. What possibilities do you see for poets working with other advanced technologies, such as computers and video?

S.H. I see some major achievements to be made with this in the near future. I don't feel that the use of computers in constructing languages is very important because there the computers are only tools that make the long and dullish work a little easier. Another thing is the use of computer techniques for creating, or for synthesising, linguistic structures, requires big computers and big computer programmes; it requires a system of so-called digital to analog conversion, which they now have in many of the big electronic music centres. There are also now very good programmes created for working with synthesised spoken language that's all computer-made and doesn't involve people at all. Especially interesting is the work that has been done by an American artist called Charles Dodge who works at Columbia Princeton Centre together with a programmer called Joseph Olive. They have created an amazingly good programme for speech synthesis.

M.G. How does that work?

S.H. It synthesises the kind of sound that the human voice produces and by using that you can give the quality you want to the sound that comes out. I think there's a great future for computer-synthesised sound poetry. And of course also for sound poetry in connection with other art forms, especially video, and there have already been some pieces made around the world in which visual poetry, sound poetry, and other kinds of image and media techniques are married together. Also television is a medium that reaches further out than any other. In the Swedish TV they have started a little - they let Bengt-Emil Johnson and myself do one piece each last year, and I'm doing another one this year.

M.G. Can you describe what you did, what it involved.

S.H. It involved an ordinary generated text-sound composition together with the electronically treated image which was based on three films taken of a moving girl, mixed through a mixer into a visual structure, but it didn't involve any letters that time. Bengt-Emil Johnson's piece was a text-sound composition, but there the image was letters, so it was a kind of moving visual poem together with a sound poem.

M.G. What particular direction are you interested in working in now?

S.H. At the moment my activity in the field of pure sound poetry isn't so much. After I finished my big trilogy in 1974, I didn't do so much new work in sound poetry. I have worked with other things: bigger intermedial things, musical work, those TV things. I'm now planning to start something involving computer synthesised language, and I'm planning a new trilogy involving this, which I'm going to work with in the electronic music studio in Stockholm. The facilities for creating synthesised linguistic structures aren't quite ready yet, so I have to wait before I can really start the project. At the moment I'm doing research on this, and studying other people's programmes for language synthesis, and the physical nature of spoken sound. There's been a lot of research done in the field, not so much by people in the arts, but by people researching for other purposes, mainly for helping deaf people, and for developing different kinds of devices to improve hearing. Studying all this will save me a lot of work later when I really go into the practical details.

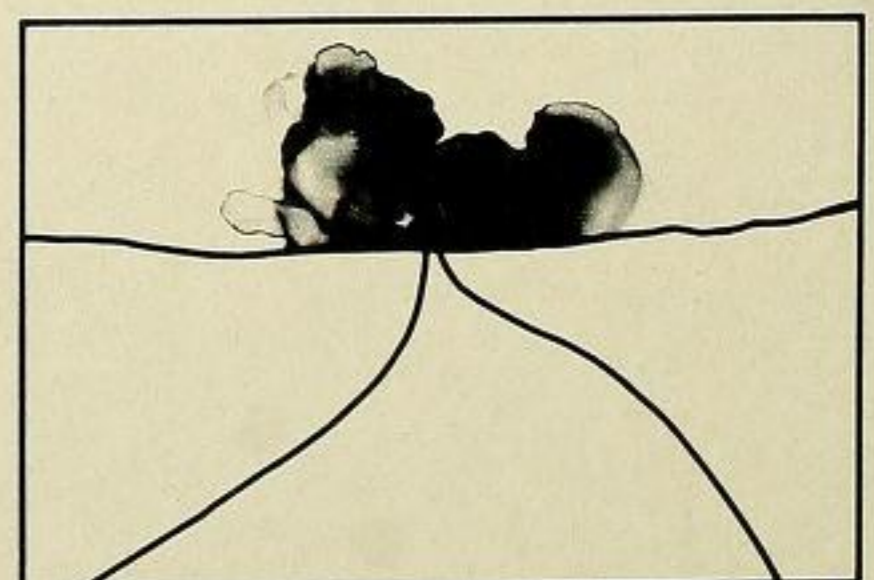
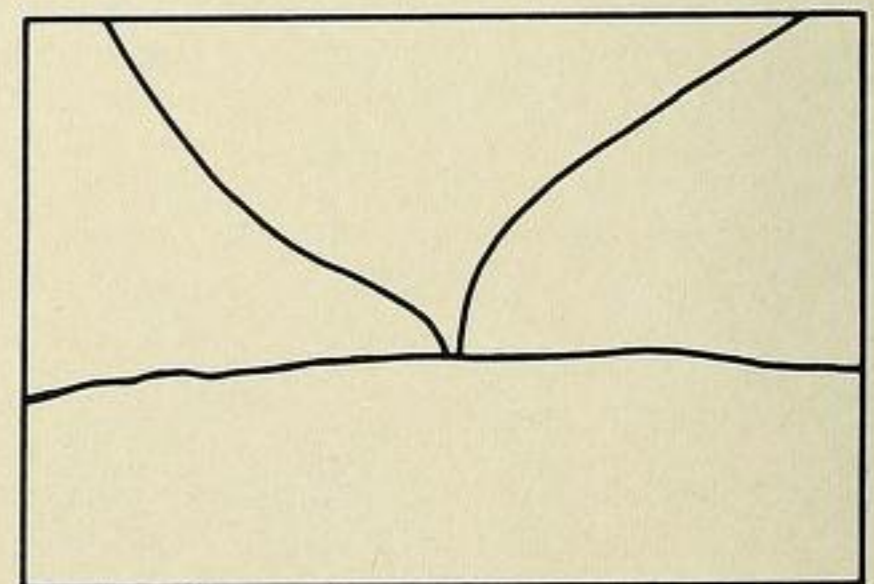
Amsterdam, November  
1976

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Lars-Gunnar Bodin

Clouds



sten hanson: la destruction de votre  
code génétique par drogues,  
toxines et irradiation

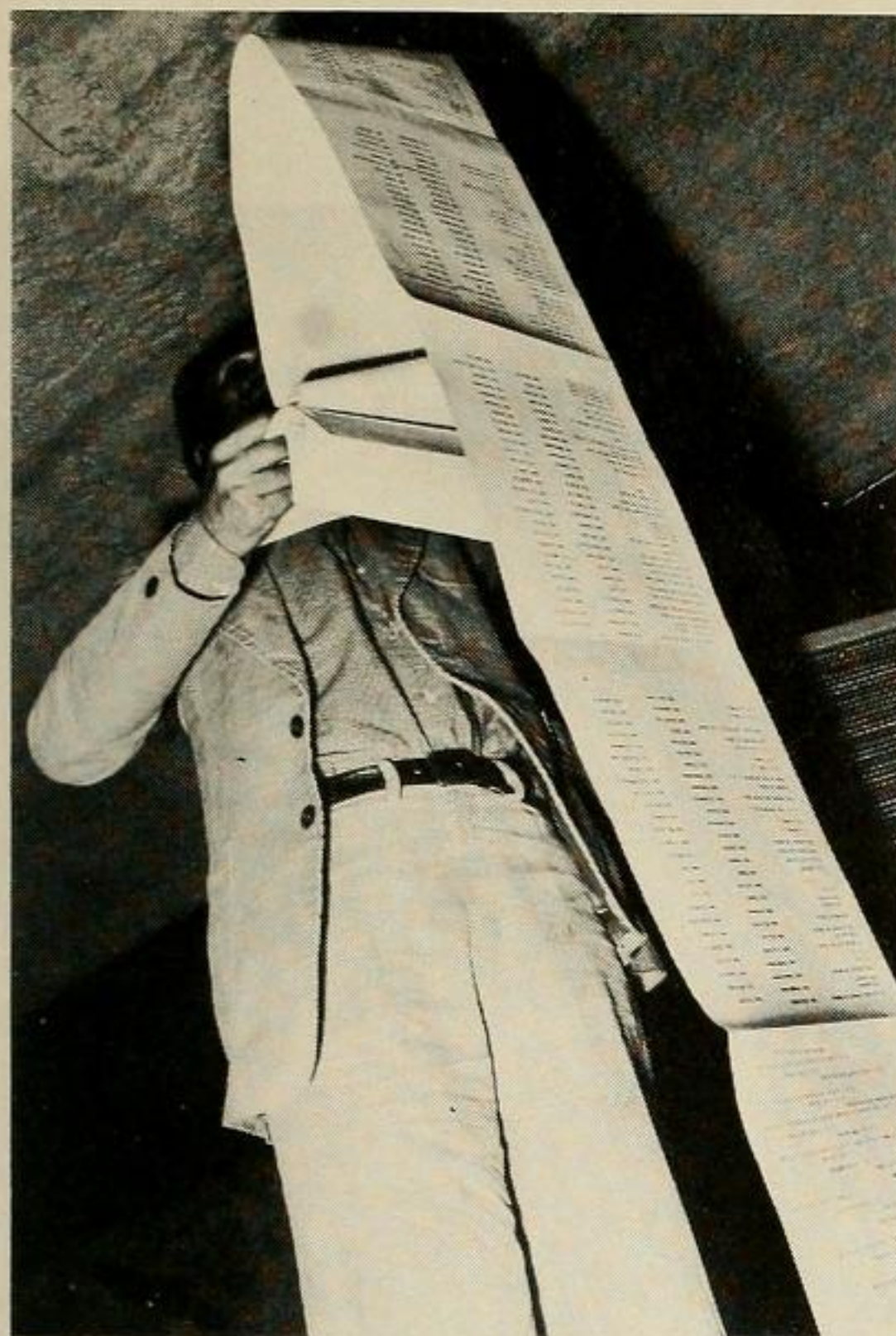












WHY POESIE SONORE? Why indeed, other than where it is! - this concern for conserving its traditional meditative power but using simply the techniques at hand nowadays, those of the everyday environment, of each and everyone. On the one hand there is the poem, until now passive, slumbering on the page, there's no doubt, but moreover the inflation of words had blunted ad nauseam their power of exploding or awakening. Thus the poem with its perpetual preoccupation with communication resolves itself, concentrated itself, in the shout, in the phoneme, in the chains of phonemes, in the sound. Fleeing in this way from the page, and, in a word, having become "active" again, it has used those means, the electric, electro-acoustic techniques, which were at hand, and which are those of our daily sonorous bath. The page, when it survives, is then nothing more than a simple score, an element of reference, or a jumping-off ground, but undoubtedly the page can, in extreme cases, even disappear. Poesie sonore, either spoken or on tape, thereby allows for the recovery of possibilities of spontaneity and improvisation, and grasps anew the advantage of chance. Furthermore, the machine, through the pulverising of words and the sounds that it makes possible, that it provokes, with the possibilities of variations of speed, juxtapositions, superimpositions, collages, manipulations of all sorts that are permitted, promotes a new, concrete and immediate, physical approach to reality - just as much as to the imaginary - whose possibilities have been only slightly glimpsed and touched upon until the present, and the extensions but only slightly perceived.

But there is also - besides the advent of these new electro-acoustic media at the level of work as well as communication - the fact of see-sawing in a mass civilisation with all the imperatives - and also all the obligations - imposed by such circumstances, and there is the consciousness - perceived intimately if not nebulously - of belonging to, of participating in the very first beginnings of a "different" civilisation (information science, among other things... isn't that so!). So, it's a non-fortuituous coincidence this time, but hasn't poetry always existed, isn't poetry always "oral" at the beginning of every cycle (from the ancient Greeks to medieval poetry, passing through that of the so-called "primitive" "cultures"... a long series of examples could certainly be given here). And so aren't we experiencing the "primitive" culture of our planetary tribalism? The culture of a new age?

autour de Vaduze il y a des Suisses  
autour de Vaduze il y a des Autrichiens

autour de Vaduze il y a des Allemands  
il y a autour de Vaduze des Tyroliens

il y a des Saxons

il y a autour de Vaduze des Bavaois  
il y a autour de Vaduze des Silésiens

des Tchêques

il y a autour de Vaduze des Slovaques  
il y a autour de Vaduze des Magyars

il y a des Slovènes  
il y a des Ligures

des Vénitiens  
des Italiens

il y a des Provençaux  
il y a des Savoyards

il y a tout autour de Vaduze des Lorrains  
des Alsaciens

il y a autour, autour de Vaduze, il y a des Polonais  
il y a des Grands-Russes  
il y a des Ruthéniens

il y a autour de Vaduze des Tziganes

tout autour de Vaduze des Ukrainiens  
tout autour de Vaduze des Monténégrins  
tout autour de Vaduze des Roumains  
tout autour de Vaduze des Serbes

et il y a autour de Vaduze des Serbo-Croates  
il y a des Macédoniens

il y a autour de Vaduze des Albanais  
il y a des Grecs

et des Siciliens

des Toscans et

des Sardes  
des Néfoussas et des Berbères

il y a des Andalous autour de Vaduze

il y a des Espagnols  
il y a des Catalans

il y a autour de Vaduze des Basques  
tout autour de Vaduze des Occitans

et des Auvergnats

il y a tout autour de Vaduze des Français  
tout autour de Vaduze des Bretons

il y a des Wallons

il y a autour, autour, autour de Vaduze des Gallois

il y a autour de Vaduze des Flammands

il y a des Néerlandais

tout autour, tour autour de Vaduze des Anglais

il y a des Frisons

il y a autour de Vaduze des Prussiens

il y a autour de Vaduze des Danois

il y a des Baltes

tout autour de Vaduze des Lituaniens  
des Estes

et des Caréliens

il y a autour, autour, autour de Vaduze, il y a des Blancs-Russes

tout autour, tout autour, tout autour de Vaduze il y a des Juifs

il y a tout autour de Vaduze des Finlandais

il y a tout autour de Vaduze des Velkorussiens

et des Biélorussiens

il y a des Tchéréniesses

il y a autour de Vaduze des Kirghizes

il y a autour de Vaduze des Houtzouls

il y a autour de Vaduze des Kachoubs

il y a tout autour

il y a tout autour

il y a tout autour

tout autour de Vaduze des Bulgares

il y a autour de Vaduze des Sorabes

il y a tout autour de Vaduze des Turcs

il y a tout autour des Azerbeïjani

il y a

il y a

il y a autour de Vaduze des Chegs

il y a des Tosques

il y a des Crétois

il y a autour de Vaduze des Yougoslaves

il y a des Kroumirs

il y a des Kabiles autour de Vaduze

et des Mozabires



# La Cantate des Mots Camés

Ceci est un extrait de mon dernier poème de 510 "alexandrins", achevé en Janvier 1977... et commencé en novembre 1971

Homme	te	de um	ni bus	On dez	homo	pho	nies
Focales!	Tes	dés	sont	jettes	songe	Thésée	Hom,
Hom	je	t'ai	dé bus	que	Bel zé bu	th, eh	zé bu!
Mo	des	tes	sai,	c'est	dés c'	de bus	qu'é fait
Babel!							
-Ne	nni,	Bu	dé!	Calomnie,	Bus	sy-	Ra bu tin!
Ra	gots,	Ia	go!	Roussis	et	cal	ci nés,
ra	cca!						
Jes	de	me	ne	est	un	butin	si
ra	ssis!	Ainsi					
qu'A	bel!	câ	ble	A	cha	ba,	Ca in,
tâ	ci	abl					
Bl	bla	rou	ca	lla	l'hom	me	honnê
te	im	bu.	Sca	Breux			
Sl	alom	la	sia	bre	Ra	ci	ne.
Hé	breux,	c'la	Si	re	he	nnit	
Mau	ras	ir	asci	ble	cu	bit,	ra
ci	ste	at	teint				
Mor	du	ré	a	cha	by	ma	mon
ne,	i	dem	Ru	mez			

Il est publié en cassette par le Centre d'Art de Culture George Pompidou de Colmar.

## HISTOIRE D'UNE CANTATE ET D'EN DIRE DEUX MOTS (Extraits)

Il y a vingt ans, érigeant le Tombeau de Pierre Larousse, mon ambition n'était que d'ordre phonétique: "faire du lettrisme" avec les mots de la langue française et les noms propres. Certes, un grain de sel sémantique relevait l'Ouverture du Tombeau, comme l'Ouverture sans fin et la plupart de ses Suites ("française", "anglaise", "allemande" et surtout l'Italienne, la "tchèque" restant sourde au chant du sens).

Laissons de côté avec quelques "chansons" mon Comptinuum (1958-1970) où tente de s'établir entre sens et son un autre type de rapport; ma production au plan du poème écrit, pur flot sonore de substantifs, écartait jusque là, à quelques rares exceptions près, toute syntaxe, tout mot de liaison, tout verbe.

C'était encore le cas d'une première version de la Cantate dont lecture privée fut donnée en février 72 à l'issue de l'exposition consacrée, au CNAC, à Daniel SPOERRI. M'étant alors aperçu du peu de rigueur du système syllabique que j'avais mis en oeuvre il ne s'agissait pour moi de rien moins que de reprendre cette Cantate à sa source et de la faire se couler dans un lit qui s'avèra bientôt jumeau de celui de Procuste.

La gageure, car c'en était une, était de laisser le poème s'écrire de lui-même (ou presque, car j'y ai, d'arrache pied, oeuvré 5 ans) à partir d'une syllabe et d'une seule - Homme - (OM) syllabe mère choisie pour sa résonance propre, sa vocation vacative et ses connotations, tant humanistes, après tout, que mystiques.

A compter de celle cellule, je me donnais pour règle de n'utiliser, à l'exclusion de toute autre, que des vocables dont au moins une syllabe dans le cas de mots en comprenant deux (ou exceptionnellement trois) et au moins deux dans le cas de mots en comprenant trois ou quatre (ou exceptionnellement cinq) étaient strictement

ment homophones avec celles de vocables précédemment énoncés, cinq vers plus haut au maximum - voire à la chute du 6ème - espacement au delà duquel l'oreille, en effet, perd mémoire. Tout syllabe nouvelle se devait, corrélativement, d'être reprise, cinq vers plus loin, voire à l'attaque du 6ème, dans l'hypothèse la plus défavorable (1).

Encore fallait-il pour qu'un mot de trois syllabes (par exemple) fut convenablement introduit par une seule que l'homophonie portât sur une syllabe forte. On observera à cet égard que l'omnibus figurant parmi les wagons de tête du train de phonèmes (dont Homme est la logo motrice) n'est pas attaché au te deum de façon rigoureusement conforme aux normes. Non seulement OM est sous entendu, mais BUS, syllabe lourde, fait une première apparition intempestive. Il eût été bien évidemment préférable que cet omnibus fût médiatisé par un "omni" quelconque ou, mieux, par un "ombus" remarquable. Mais l'oreille n'est pas encore faite au jeu et la pirouette fait passer la hardiesse. On peut, du reste, considérer OM TE DEUM NIBUS comme l'équivalent du "sujet" d'une fugue (celui de la fugue en ut majeur BWV 547 de Jean-Sébastien Bach ne comporte que neuf notes) à partir duquel se développe une suite d'"imitations" dont la succession produit cette impression de poursuite, caractéristique du genre. Ainsi, notre Cantate serait-elle, en quelque sorte, fuguée, et cela - ô miracle! - sans que le moindre contrepoint y mit son nez. Néanmoins, et vue par l'autre bout - sémantique - elle s'apparenterait bien plutôt à la RHAPSODIE au nom de laquelle j'ai même, un instant, hésité à faire passer mes mots camés. Rhapsodie donc ou, si l'on veut s'en tenir au produit "littéraire" et par référence au moyen-âge, FATRAS et plus exactement FATRAS POSSIBLE, c'est-à-dire, opposé au "fatras impossible" plus purement non-sensique, une fatrasie

recupérée par la Logique.

Il n'y a, bien sûr, pas lieu de s'étonner qu'ici la Raison revête un caractère quelque peu.. "changeant" quand on a claire conscience que la Rime y est générale pour la première fois dans l'histoire de la poésie (si l'on excepte quelques très rares distiques, dont le plus fameux demeure celui d'un certain Alain Monnier:

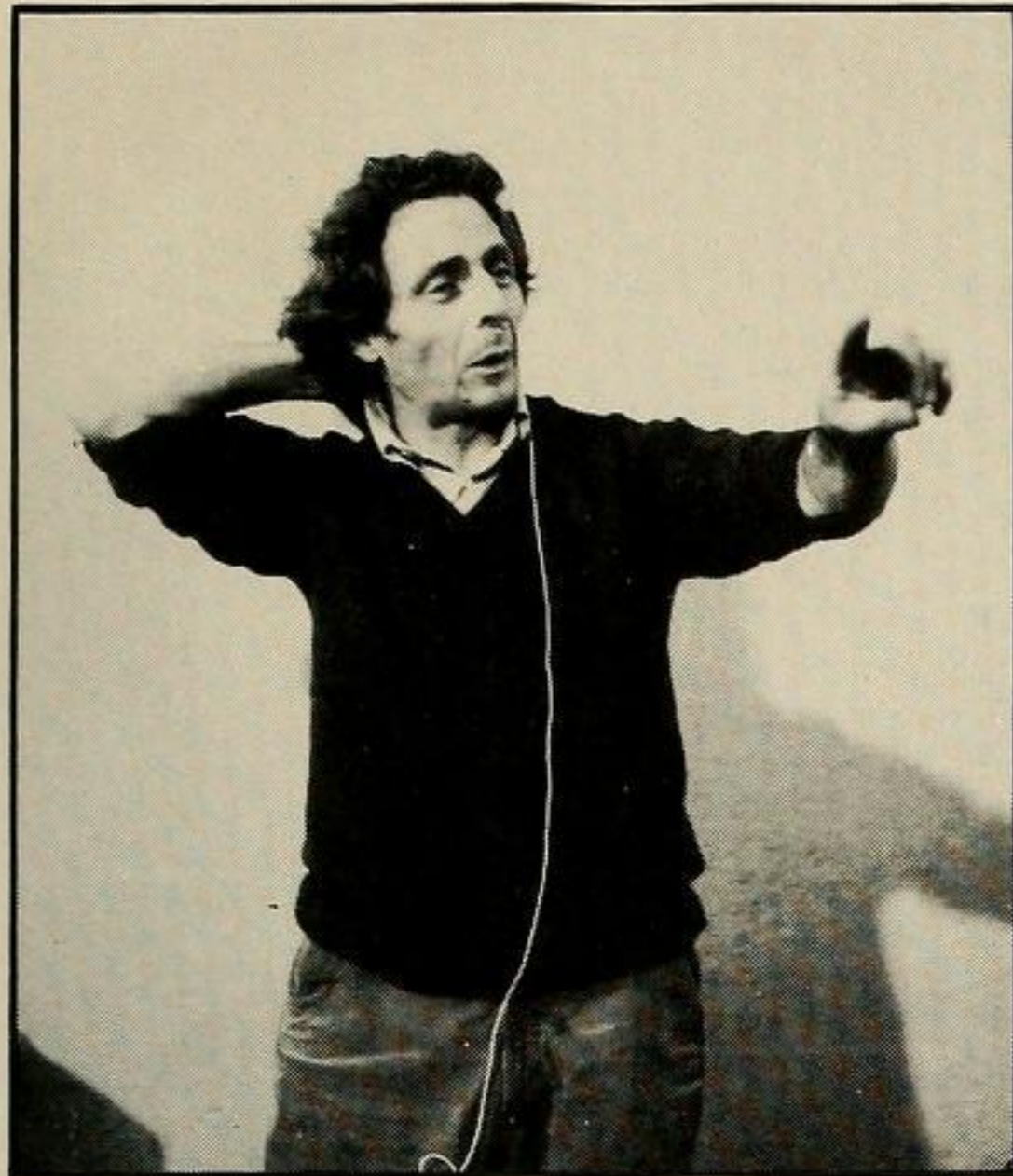
Gal, amant de la Reine, alla, tour magnanime,  
Galamment de l'Arène à la Tour Magne à Nîmes)

La Cantate, en cela, laisse loin derrière elle les prouesses d'antan, tel ce pantogramme dû au moine HUCBALD, poème dédié à Charles-le-Chaive et comportant 146 hexamètres dont les mots commencent tous par la même lettre, et les rimes batelés des Rhétoriciens du XV<sup>e</sup>.

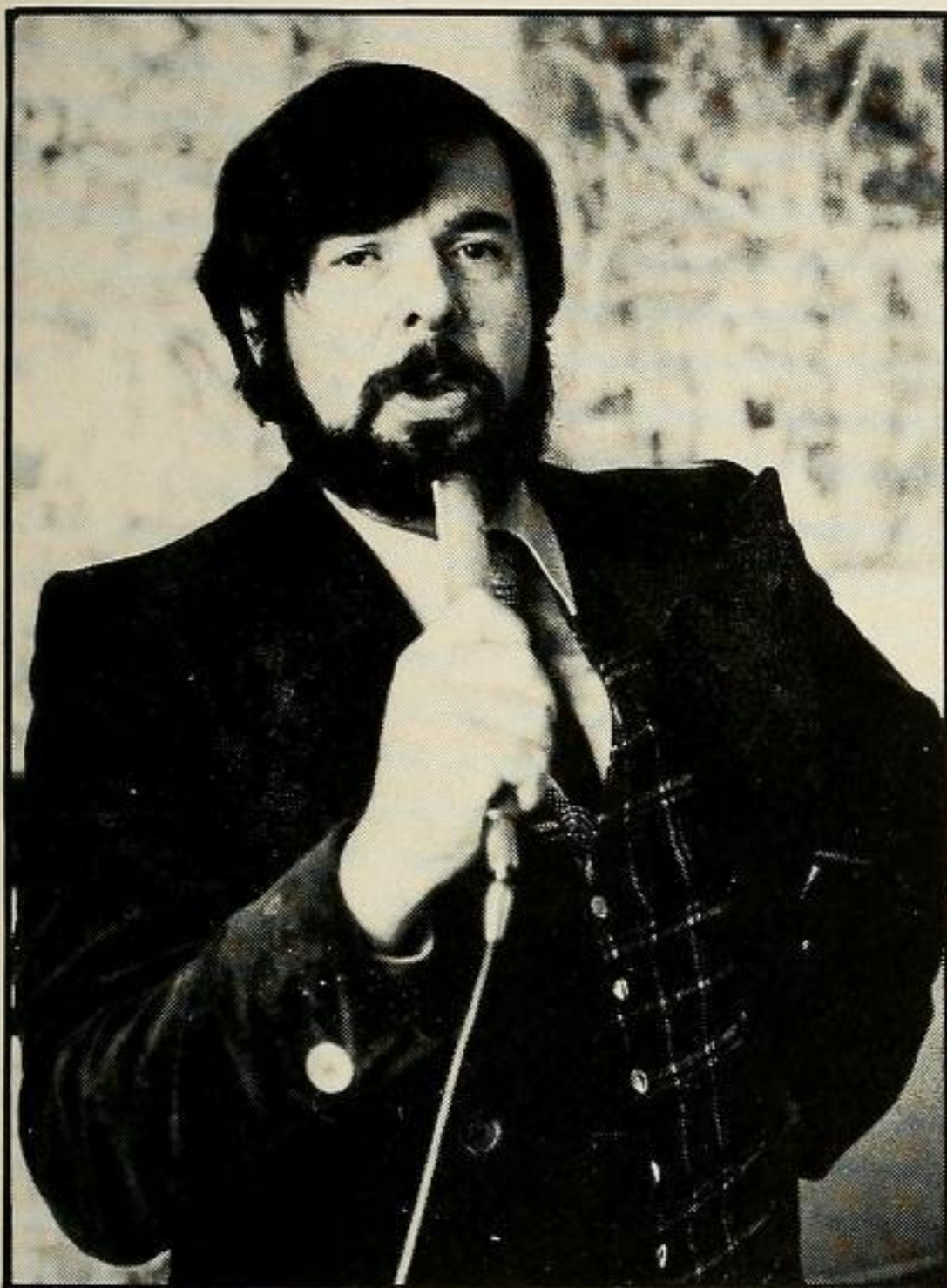
Inutile est-il de noter que faire la liaison entre deux mots consécutifs modifie considérablement le jeu des homophonies? Prélevons, à titre d'exemple - mais dans lequel ne joue que la vitesse d'élocution - l'assez inattendue juxtaposition, coupée d'une parenthèse: ... Pausilippe (Ottway ... Nous avons dans ce PÔZILIPOWE, aussi bien POZ (solution maxi) que PÔ (solution mini), ZIL que ZI, LIP que LI, POT' que PO, WE que TWE.

Telles rimes pour une séquence donnée, ne se rencontreront qu'une fois; telles autres vont, plusieurs pages durant, cheminer et, parfois, de conserve - comme justement font LIP et POT - et de LIP en LIP, et de POT' en POT', jamais, au grand jamais, séparés par plus de quatre vers, rien, cependant, n'interdisant qu'à la faveur des liaisons, nouées et dénouées, se glisse un LI, se glisse un PO. c'est ainsi donc qu'en mal de POT', POTE engendrerait POÉSIE si POTE suivi de A se décompose en PO et TA. POeta faber que je suis!..





## Henri Chopin



Que je suis aussi, car bifrons à l'instar d'un chacun-Janus, vates de par mes crirythmes je m'affirme! (2)

François Dufrêne  
Janvier 1977

(1) On voit que le problème de l'intervalle devant séparer deux homophonies a été résolu de façon fort libérale par rapport aux modèles proposés par la versification classique (Rappelons nous: a a b b, a b a b, a b b a. La formule a b b a impliquait généralement l'usage de vers de position b dont la longueur ne dépassât pas l'octosyllabe). Mais plus de rigueur m'eût conduit à sacrifier au pur phonétisme la part de signification minimale que, par postulat, je tenais à préserver.

(2) On me permettra d'en redonner ici la définition. "CRIRYTHME: nom masculin, de Cri, son inarticulé n'impliquant pas obligatoirement éclat de voix, et de rythme, n'impliquant pas forcément cadence, néologisme (F.D. 1953) désignant la PRODUCTION VOLONTAIRE DE PHONEMES PURS, ASYLLABIQUES NON-PREMEDITES, DANS UNE PERSPECTIVE ESTHETIQUE D'AUTOMATISME MAXIMUM, EXCLUANT TOUTE POSSIBILITE DE REPRODUCTION AUTRE QUE MECANIQUE (bande magnétique, disque)" in TAFELRONDE no. 1-2, avril 1967 (Le Crirythme et le Reste).

Again, yet again  
poésie sonore, 22  
years later; that's what they say,  
without thinking that for five hundred years we have been saturated with the kind of poetry that is set down, written, typographical, confidential, as dialogue between the poet and the reader, who in most cases doesn't exist except in a dubious historical context, in opposition, in secret, etc. Poesie sonore is the sort of poetry that offends the superficial men dedicated to politics, to ideology, to the cult of personality, to the concentration and extermination camps, to the gas chambers, to tear gas, in short all those things as well as the weapons used in high politics.

In the face of all that there is only poetics, but this, from the day when the bourgeoisie appeared, when the dictatorships of the proletariat arose, this poetics was reduced little by little before being forbidden by the same bourgeoisie or the same 'troikas' that wanted - without knowing the reason why - to direct everything. With the result that poetry has become in the West very much closed in on itself, and that for a half-century it hasn't existed in the Soviet Union. And yet, I don't feel I have to accept anything at all from any Stalins!

So that is the situation of written poetry. Because paper can be controlled, paper can be directed, paper can be suppressed, paper can be analysed. Even Aragon, who was orthodox anyway, spent his life being closely examined, being a dissected vegetable, before being totally or partially forbidden. That's paying a high price for his loyalty. This is just an example.

On the other hand, yes, on the other hand, for 22 years there has been a poetry which is no longer parings. It is a poetry which is no longer on paper. It is the poetry of sounds: fugitive, elusive, that cannot be blocked by a wall or an iron curtain, that cannot be stopped by two rows of electrified barbed wire, while in the middle there is a path of fine sand where even the footprints of a bird are visible, where the radars detect even that, all the more likely then that they can detect a poem on paper which leaves its rectangular imprint.

This poetry of the (sound) waves doesn't give a damn about these real barriers, or even often the linguistic barriers. If you want, Messieurs poets who oppose us, you in your writings, while we are not, if you want to defend the freedoms of expression that won't be blocked by any wire, stop calling us "destructors" of languages; we amplify them, multiply them, allow them to travel. It is not for nothing that by means of the waves we traverse the globe, promoting not an eternal work, but voices that grow. The makers of systems don't look so good in contrast with us, who enrich every living expression.

It's not for nothing that electricity has made the voice come from every direction, and in the face of this dictators are ridiculous.

And at any rate I attach the greatest importance to these poets of sounds and to the poets of vision, who no longer pat themselves on the back in front of a beautiful poem.

Henri Chopin  
7 February 1977

Encore, toujours  
poésie sonore, depuis  
22 ans, c'est ce qu'on dit, sans penser que depuis 500 ans on est saturé de poésie couchée, écrite, typographique, confidentielle, dialogant entre le poète et le lecteur, le plus souvent qui n'existent pas sinon dans un douteux contexte historique, dans la résistance, dans le secret, etc. C'est ce genre de poésie qui porte ombrage aux hommes voués à la politique, à l'idéologie, au culte de la personnalité, aux camps d'extermination, de concentration, aux chambres à gaz, aux gaz lacrymogènes, enfin tous ces trucs ainsi que les armes utilisés au sommet par la politique.

Face à elle en fait il n'y a que la poétique, mais, celle-ci, du jour où les bourgeois parurent, où les dictatures du prolétariat vinrent, celle-ci, la poétique, fut peu à peu réduite avant d'être interdite, par les mêmes bourgeois ou les mêmes troïkas qui voulaient - en méconnaissance de cause - tout diriger. Avec le résultat que la poésie devient en Occident très enfermée en elle-même, que depuis un demi-siècle elle n'existe plus en Union soviétique. Et pourtant, moi, je ne dois rien recevoir des quelconques Stalines!

Cela, c'est la situation de la poésie écrite. Car le papier peut être contrôlé, le papier peut être dirigé, le papier peut être supprimé, le papier peut être analysé. Même Aragon, pourtant orthodoxe, a passé sa vie à être épluché, à être un légume disséqué, avant d'être en totalité ou partiellement interdit. C'est payer cher sa fidélité. Ici, ce n'est qu'une exemple.

Par contre, oui, par contre, depuis 22 ans est une poésie qui n'est plus épluchure. C'est une poésie qui n'est plus sur le papier. C'est celle des sons: fugitifs, insaisissables, à ne pas bloquer par un mur ou un rideau de fer, à ne pas arrêter par des barbelés électrifiés, sur deux rangées, tandis qu'au centre est une allée de sable fin où l'empreinte même d'un oiseau est visible, où les radars détectent même cela, à plus forte raison un poème sur papier, qui laisse son rectangle imprimé.

Cette poésie des ondes se moque éperdument des barrières réelles, comme des barrières linguistiques, souvent. Si vous voulez, Messieurs les poètes qui nous combattez, vous dans l'écrit, nous non, si vous voulez défendre les libertés d'expressions qui ne seront bloquées par aucun barbelé, cessez de nous dire "destructeurs" des langages, nous qui les amplifions, les multiplions, les laissons voyager. Ce n'est pas pour rien que nous traversons le globe, par les ondes, sans avancer une oeuvre éternelle, mais des voix qui grandissent. Les faiseurs de meurtres commencent à avoir bonne mine face à nous qui enrichissons tous les exprimés vivants.

Ce n'est pas pour rien que l'électricité a fait venir la voix en tous sens, devant laquelle les dictateurs sont ridicules.

Et en tout cas, je rends toute importance à ces poètes des sons, qui ne s'embrassent plus devant un beau poème.

Henri Chopin  
7 février 1977



# Gerhard Rühm

## AUDITIVE TEXTE

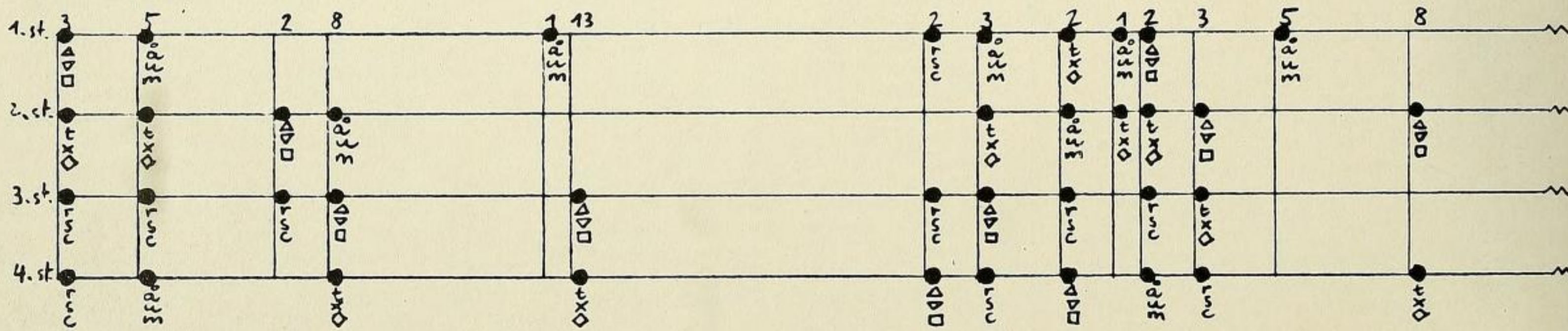
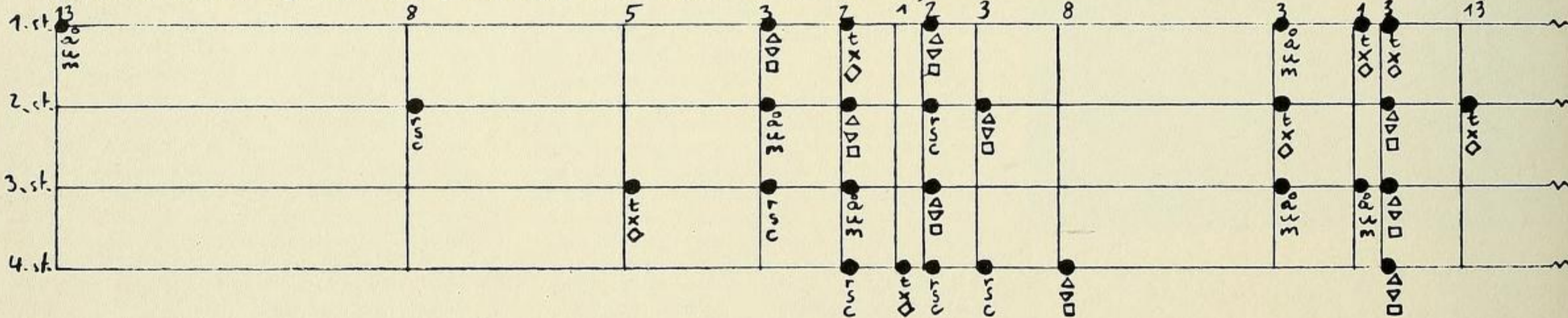
was hier als 'text im klang' ('text in sound') bezeichnet wird, habe ich mir angewöhnt mit dem terminus 'auditive texte' - in entsprechung zu 'visuelle texte' - zu belegen, wobei ich 'auditive texte' als übergeordneten sammelbegriff für alle jene poetischen produkte auffasse, in denen sprachklang und artikulation bewusst mitkomponiert wurden, konstituierende bestandteile des textes sind. der wortklang wird schon bei einer so altbekannten erscheinung wie dem reim mitkomponiert; es gibt gedichte (ich denke zum beispiel an beaudelaire), wo eine überraschende thematische wendung durch ein passendes reimwort provoziert worden zu sein scheint. für 'auditive poesie' im engeren, in unserm sinn muss also noch ein kriterium hinzukommen, das die einföhrung dieses terminus als neuen gattungsbegriff erst rechtfertigt. ich meine, ein auditiver text muss über den mitkomponierten sprachklang hinaus eine information vermitteln, die überhaupt erst durch die akustische realisation des textes, sofern man hier nicht schon von einer partitur sprechen will, rezipierbar wird. das einfache wort "du" lässt sich durch verschiedene artikulation differenzieren, in seiner bedeutung verändern, je nachdem, ob es fragend, hinweisend, befehlend, zornig, zärtlich, erstaunt usw. ausgesprochen wird. diese differenzierungen sind solche des stimmklanges, des stimmendrucks; es sind die musikalischen parameter der gesprochenen sprache wie lautstärke, klangfarbe, tempo. der musikalische ausdrucksgeus der sprache vermittelt sich im emotionalen bereich so stark, dass es bereits auf dieser ebene, sogar zwischen menschen die verschiedene sprachen sprechen, zu einer durchaus sprachlichen, wenn auch nonverbalen kommunikation kommen kann und das umso unmissverständlicher, je emotionaler die inhalte sind, die

mitgeteilt werden sollen die reine lautdichtung, jene dichtung also, die vokale äusserungen nicht mehr in den begrenzten und, wo es sich nicht um onomatopoetische handelt, willkürlichen kombinationen verwendet, in denen sie begriffe bezeichnen, setzt nicht zuletzt bei diesem ausdrucksgeus der sprache an. die lautdichtung bildet inzwischen einen eigenen autonomen bereich innerhalb der 'auditiven poesie', man könnte sagen, sie sei 'auditive poesie' in reinsten form. der unterschied zwischen gegenständlicher und ungegenständlicher kunst, zwischen semantischer und asemantischer poesie ist kein prinzipieller, sondern ein gradueller, wenn auch der schritt vom "gerade noch" zum "nicht mehr" grösser erscheint, als der vom "noch" zum "kaum noch". was wir bei gegenständlicher wie bei ungegenständlicher kunst - und das gilt heute auch für die dichtung - verstehen oder nicht verstehen (wenn wir ein ästhetisches verstehen über das bloss registrierende wiedererkennen eines gegenstandes hinaus meinen), ist das, was uns daran berührt, unsere vorstellungen bewegt, ist der ausdruck, den etwas für uns hat. dieser ausdruck wird nämlich von uns in einem auf erfahrung vertrauenden interpretationsprozess in den gestus, in die haltung des gegenstandes hineingelesen, oder, wie man glaubt, daraus "verstanden". es ist für den rezipierten nicht von prinzipiellem belang, höchstens ein problem der ästhetischen bildung, ob diese haltung zum beispiel durch eine "realistische" gemalte menschliche figur oder bloss eine schmale linie repräsentiert wird. der menschliche sprachlaut ist eine noch unmittelbarere, ursprünglichere ausdrucksform als die linie, die ja nur spur einer geste ist. jeder mensch bringt in verschiedenen emotionalen situationen unzählige differenz-

ierteste laute hervor, die auch ganz unabhängig von ihnen aufgeschnallten begriffen, einfach als "musikalische" ausdrucksgeus, unmittelbar "verständlich" wirken; jeder kennt sie aus eigener erfahrung, und sie sind in allen sprachkulturen gleich. die menschlichen sprachlaute bilden ein internationales ausdrucks-"vokabular", das buchstäblich für sich selbst spricht. man kann aus diesen vielfältigen, weit über den jeweils von den nationalsprachen genutzten bereich hinaus sich anbietenden lauten künstlerische gebilde formen, man kann sie verdichten, isolieren, neu ordnen, man kann sie vervielfältigen und - die technischen mittel stehen uns heute zur verfügung - verfeinern, verlängern transformieren; sie bilden das unmittelbarste und menschlichste gestaltungsmaterial mit dem der künstler arbeiten kann. die lautdichtung ist für mich nicht das ende einer poetischen entwicklung, sondern eine ihrer aufregendsten und vielversprechendsten konsequenzen.

12 : 4  
für vier stimmen

so schnell wie möglich aber präzise (1 = kleinste takteinheit)



- a = dunkles a wie "was" im wiener dialekt
- c = sch
- x = ch
- o = lippenschwalzer
- d = zungenschwalzer
- v = rülpser
- q = huster

besetzungsmöglichkeiten: 4 männerstimmen; 4 frauenstimmen;  
2 männer- und 2 frauenstimmen.

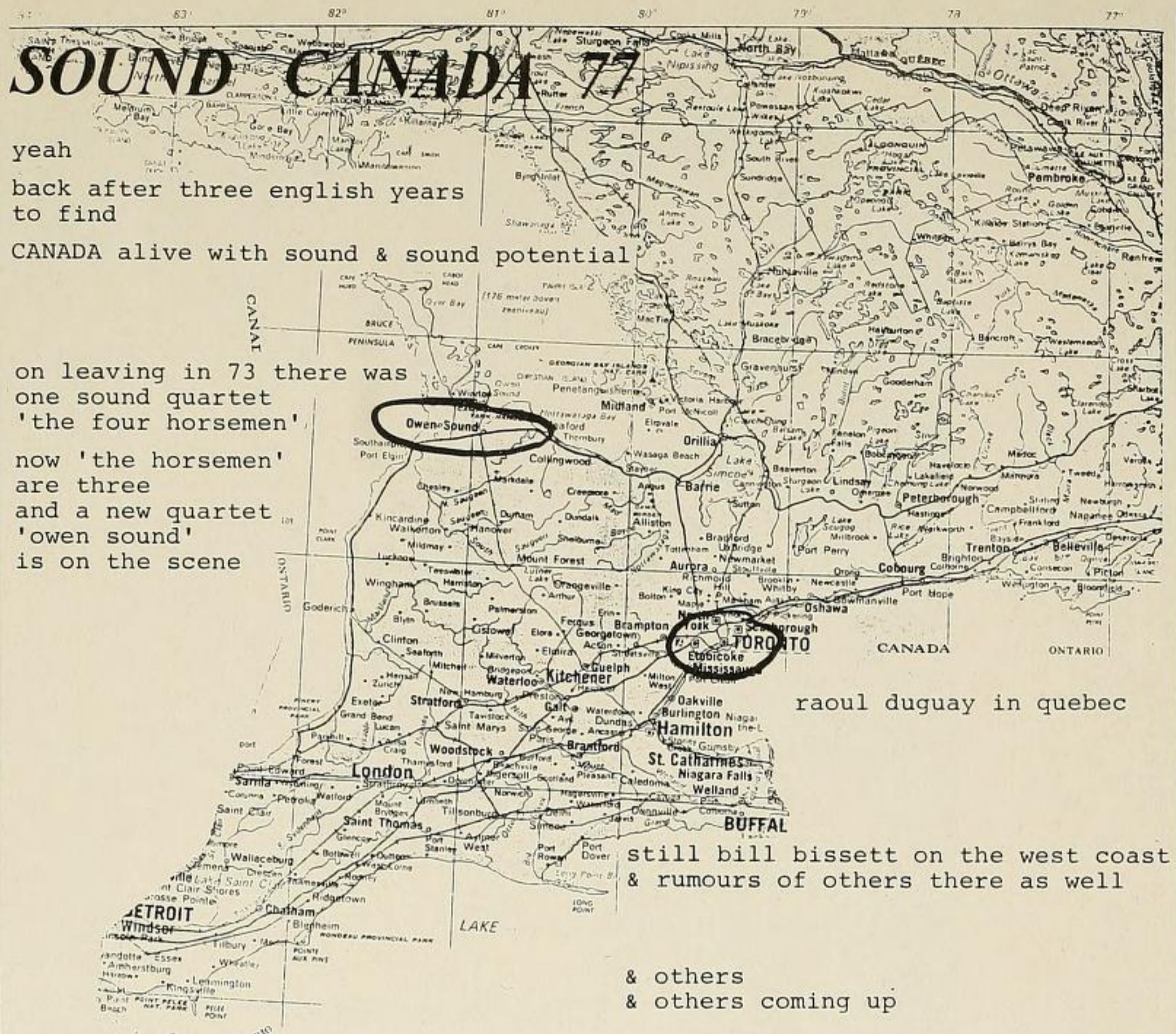
die laute werden entweder punktuall (kurz) hervorgebracht oder für die dauer eines "taktes" durchgehalten.  
aus den 3 unter einander stehenden lauten wird jeweils einer spontan ausgewählt. die lautstärken sind frei.



# from AUGEN

- 1 stell dir zum beispiel vor.
- 2 stell dir zum beispiel vor augen.
- 3 stell dir beispielsweise vor, wie ein auge aussieht.
- 4 stelle dir einfach vor, ein auge käme dir unter die augen.
- 5 stelle dir einfach vor augen, wie es aussähe, wenn du ein auge hättest.
- 6 stelle dir einfach vor, wie ein auge ein anderes sieht.
- 7 stelle dich einmal darauf ein, dass dein eines auge das andere sehen kann.
- 8 stelle dich einfach darauf ein, das eine auge zuzudrücken und das andere aufzuschlagen.
- 9 stell dir einfach ein auge vor, das sich im selben augenblick öffnet, da du deine augen schliesst
- 10 stelle dir vor, es gäbe ein auge, das deine augen sähe in dem augenblick, da sie sich gegenseitig erblicken.
- 11 stelle dir das auge vor, das imstande ist, dein eines auge in dem augenblick von dem anderen zu unterscheiden, da sie sich gegenseitig erblicken.
- 12 stelle dir deine augen in dem augenblick vor, da sie das auge erblicken, welches deine augen in dem augenblick gesehen hat, als sie sich gegenseitig erblickten.
- 13 stelle dir das auge des gesetzes vor, das auge in auge mit dem auge des herrn ein auge zudrückt, weil es seinem augen nicht traut.
- 14 stelle unter vier augen einfach die these auf, das weisse im auge des gesetzes sei ebenso augenscheinlich wie das schwarze im auge der herrn.
- 15 stelle dir auge um auge vor in der abfolge, wie sie sich erblicken, und schenke dein augenmerk dem unterschied zwischen dem erblickten und dem erblickenden im augenblick des erblickens und des erblicktwerdens.
- 16 stelle dich in dem augenblick zwischen das auge des herrn und das auge der vernunft, da sie im begriff sind, einander zu erblicken, und beachte die verzögerung im blick des erblickenden und verfrage die laszivität im blick des erblickten, der sich in deinem rücken befindet.
- 17 stelle dein d genes augenlicht demjenigen zur verfügung, dessen augen nicht, noch nicht oder nicht mehr imstande sind, dem blick eines fremden augenpaares ohne auszuweichen standzuhalten, weil sie einen blick im auge haben, der sich vom eigenen nicht mehr unterscheidet.
- 18 stelle keinen vergleich an zwischen den augen eines menschen, der im ersten augenblick dem blick eines fremden augenpaares nicht zu widerstehen vermag, und einem auge, das keinen augenblick zögert, einem auge auszuweichen, dessen blick sich nicht von dem eigenen unterscheidet.
- 19 stell dich auf den standpunkt, es sei besser, ein auge zu riskieren, solange kein fremdes auge ihm standzuhalten vermag, als sich umzuwenden eben in dem augenblick, da ein fremdes auge beginnt, sich nicht mehr von deinem zu unterscheiden.

**Franz Mon**



yeah

back after three english years to find

CANADA alive with sound & sound potential

on leaving in 73 there was one sound quartet 'the four horsemen'

now 'the horsemen' are three and a new quartet 'owen sound' is on the scene

raoul duquay in quebec

still bill bissett on the west coast & rumours of others there as well

& others  
& others coming up

march 11  
'language landscapes' culminates with 'cabaret voltaire II'

'owen sound' 'the horsemen' & the spiegelgasse jazz band

evening dedicated to hugo ball great performance great success

meanwhile the cbc approaches me regarding 2 hr special radio on mayakovsky

to be aired april 14 anniversary of his suicide

using some of 'owen sound' & 'the horsemen' as a chorus

new music concert series march 18 trio ex voco perform

meanwhile r. murray shafer composer commisioned to do major work 'apocalypsus' based on book of revelations

using 'owen sound' and 'the horsemen' october 77

new album by 'the horsemen' coming up book/record by 'owen sound' just out

new tapes by mcaffery/ann southam/myself

back after three english years to find myself involved again in schools many workshops using sound & concrete

march 1 'owen sound' present an exhibition of visual poetry 'language landscapes' mostly toronto poets

2 weeks previously steve mcaffery on west coast reading tour CANADA & usa

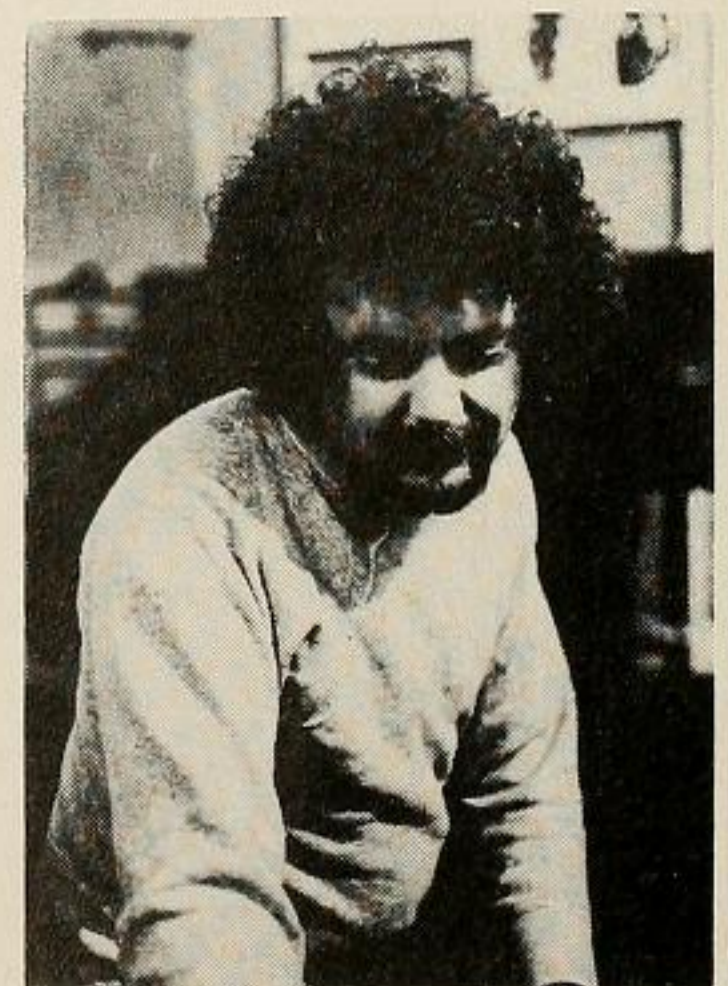
meanwhile out of 'mayakovsky' negotiations for a series on sound poetry radio

to lead up to an international festival toronto october 78

april 8 league of canadian poets annual general meeting toronto annual performance evening devoted to sound poetry

toronto probably has best audience for sound poetry anywhere

CANADA this moment is exciting busy bursting with potential



**Sean O Huigin**







# COMPOSITION AND PERFORMANCE IN THE WORK OF BOB COBBING: a conversation

Between October 1972 and April 1973 I held a series of conversations with poets at the National Poetry Centre in London. They were entitled Poetry Information since the idea was to provide information about the work procedures of each poet. The talks have been transcribed and it is hoped to bring out a book of them shortly. A transcription aims not at polished prose but at recording the directness and freshness of the occasion. It is virtually impossible to convey in language the total effect of gesture, tone of voice, pauses, laughter, inflection. The best one can do is to find a way of cutting out duplications, false starts and irrelevances of the moment, so as to make a readable discourse. At one point in the Cobbing conversation, the poet began to chant one of his poems: impossible to transcribe. Cobbing also made some of his statements very much with certain members of the audience in mind - actually addressing them from time to time - particularly, for example, his fellow poet in sound-text work. Lily Greenham. Towards the end, other questioners came in. Bill Griffiths, who has worked with Cobbing in the Workshop referred to, is identified; two others are not. The conversation was held on March 5, 1973.

Eric Mottram

(the original transcript of the conversation runs to 53 pages; because of limitations of space, and the wish to omit material that went beyond the subjects of composition and performance, this first publication is an edited version. M.G.)

E.M. At what point did you sense that what you were doing was part of a wide-spread thing, stretching from the Noigandres group in Brazil through to people like Dufrêne and Chopin in France, and Heissenbüttel in Germany?

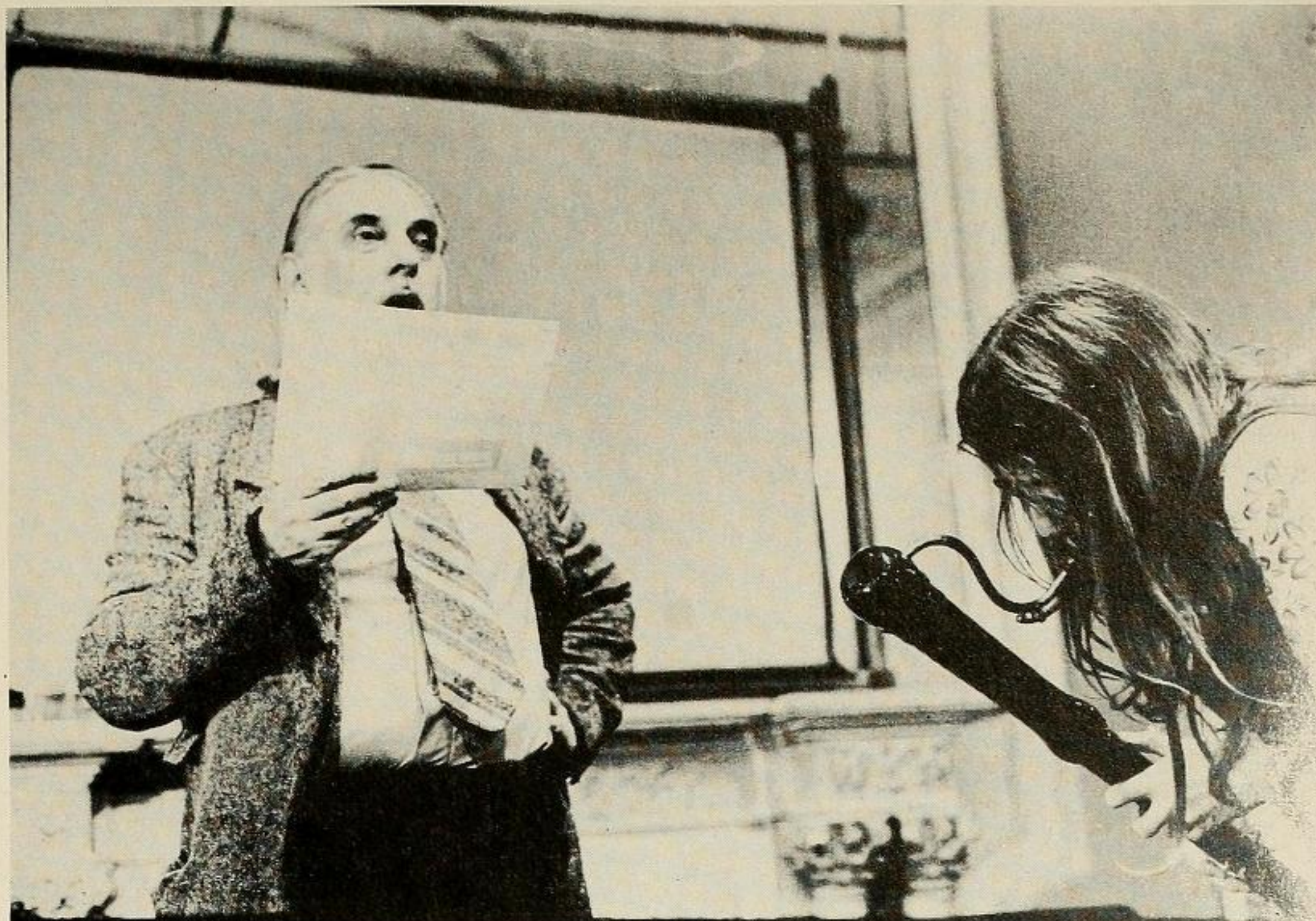
B.C. I can tell you exactly: November, 1964. In November 1964 I had flu and a very high temperature, and I had finished off in that week my ABC in Sound; and as soon as I had done that, I started sending copies around to various people I had vaguely heard of, people like Dom Sylvester Houedard.... I was vaguely aware of them, that they existed, I had never met any of them at that time. John Sharkey was another one. I got one or two addresses - Edwin Morgan was another - and sent a few copies around. Immediately the response started coming back, not just from this country but from abroad as well, in a couple of months from that November.

E.M. You knew who to send them to - you were aware of the fact that you were working in an international field already?

B.C. I had come across Chopin's work before this. He had come across and done a lecture at the I.C.A. in, I think it was, 1964 - it might have been 1963.

E.M. What did he play? Can you remember?

B.C. He played pieces like "Sol Air" and "Le Corps" and things like that, and also he played a Heidsieck tape which I was highly fascinated by. It was made in the family champagne cellar. You got this tremendous echo; he was really belting the voice out, and hammering; you got a wonderful echo. This really turned me on. It was his "Poeme



bob cobbing and david toop (photo: michael gibbs)

Partition D4P".

E.M. And Dufrêne?

B.C. Dufrêne I had never come across until - wait a minute - I didn't meet Dufrêne until 1968 in Stockholm. I knew of his work before that.

E.M. At what point did you get associated, as they are associated, with the magazine called Ou?

B.C. I don't think I have ever been associated with Ou.

E.M. Well, you have had your material in it.

B.C. I have had a bit of material in it.

E.M. And you know both Chopin and Dufrêne.

B.C. I know the people involved, but, you know, there is a certain uneasiness on their part about the direction that I am going in. Now I was very much anchored to the word or the letter. It may not be the word. It may be the word broken up into its letters, or it may be just letters which have a significance apart from the word. But they are very suspicious of using the word so importantly. Whenever I turn to non-verbal sounds, Chopin welcomes me with open arms! "You're one of us!" But I go back to the word again, and they tell me the word is finished.

E.M. Is this what fascinated you with Heissenbüttel?

B.C. Yes, I feel very much akin to his attitude.

E.M. Were you working with tapes and electronics before you heard Heissenbüttel's tapes or not?

B.C. Yes, I was working with tapes before I really had any inkling that there was an international field around.

E.M. What was the first tape that you made?

B.C. The first tape of any consequence, I suppose, was the one of the ABC in Sound. I had been dabbling and experimenting before that but nothing survives.

E.M. Why did you want to make the tape rather than leave it in a printed form?

B.C. It was pure accident really, that I happened to acquire an old second-hand tape recorder around that time.

E.M. You needn't have used it, but you did.

B.C. If you have got the machine, it is there and you tend to start using your voice on it, and I started reading things into it. I was working on similar things to the ABC in Sound; probably it was the time that I started writing that series, and I read poems into it and heard them back, and I was so horrified with the feeble quality of the voice that came out, I thought: is this the vocal instrument that I've got - it really is appalling! Then you start to try to do something about it, and you start

manipulating the tape controls. You slow the tape down. You can superimpose one voice over another; you can play around, and gradually create for yourself a voice that you are a bit more in love with. And then you say to yourself: if I can do this on the tape recorder, if I can manipulate the tape recorder to make this voice sound respectable and possible, maybe I could improve on my own voice, maybe there is a chance of improving in a parallel fashion. It was that sort of thing I was into in about 1964.

E.M. This is, in a sense, increased control, isn't it?

B.C. It is a matter of understanding the nature of the voice, I think, and in using the tape recorder, particularly if you maltreat it as I always do, you can find out a lot about the vibrations of the voice, about the physical nature of the voice.

E.M. At what point do you decide to leave in bad taping and feedback and when do you cut them out? Because I have heard some of your tapes which are not up to normal pristine standard, but you have left the accidents in.

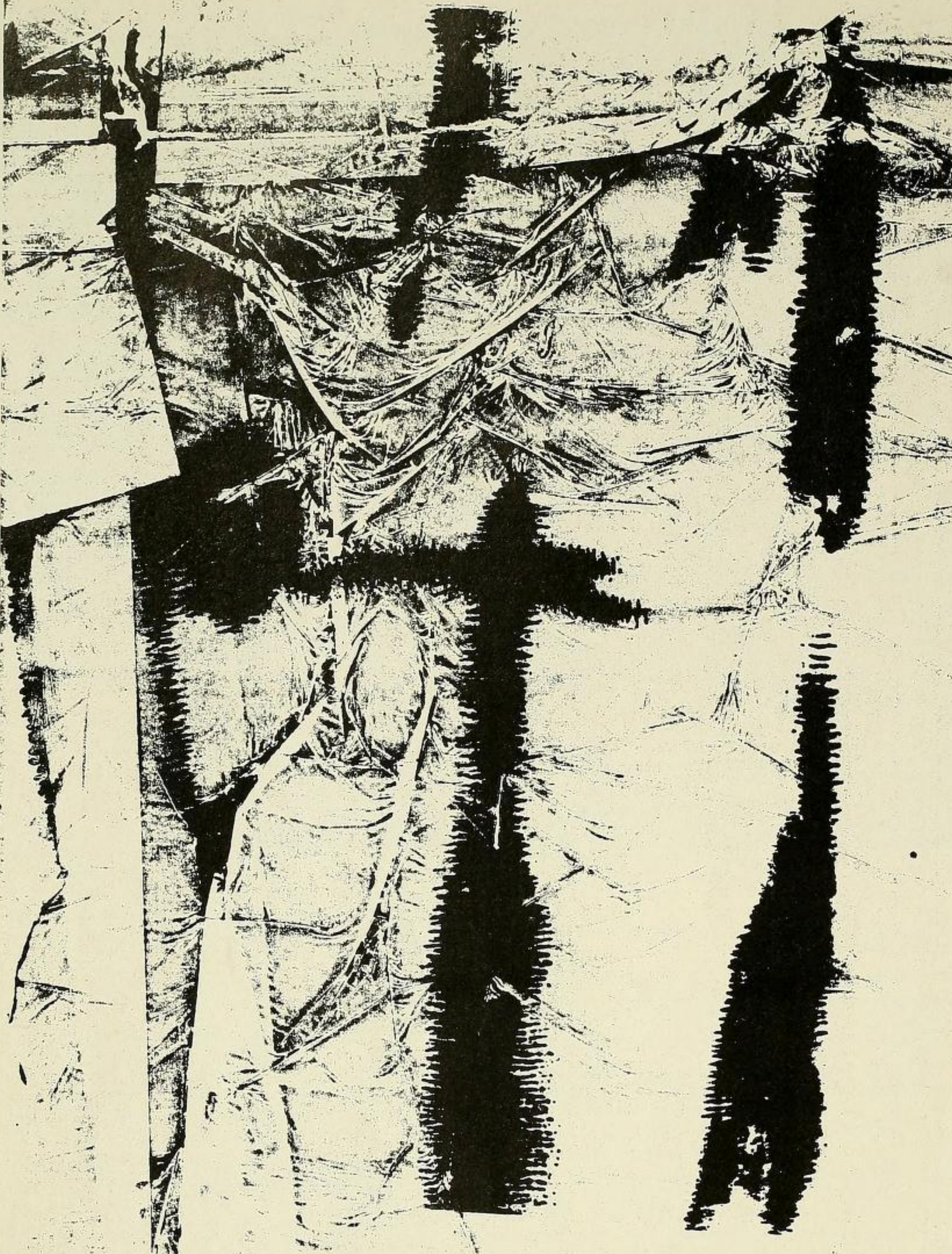
B.C. I think it was in Stockholm in 1968 - no, probably a bit before that - but that was one particular instance. I was doing a recording of Chamber Music and I had a Swedish girl with me and she mispronounced quite a number of the English words. So when I came to edit the tape, I first of all started cutting out the words which she mispronounced - took a pair of scissors and just cut them out. After I had done this a couple of times, I thought: this is ridiculous, those words are beautiful, this mispronunciation is lovely; and so I put them back again.

E.M. And with the feedback of the tape, and so-called "bad" sound techniques, made into sound techniques which are part of the poem.

B.C. Yes. There were two instances: one, I was up in Newcastle in the Morden Tower. Tom Pickard had an old tape-recorder and said, "Look, I want to record you." We didn't understand it; we had all these buttons; and Tom said, "Well look, let's press these two." and I said, "All right, let's press these two," and we got this incredible result, with wonderful feedback coming out of it, and I loved it. Tom was horrified and said, "This won't do at all", and I said, "It's lovely." The second occasion when the tape recorder played up was at London Arts Lab. Both tapes were used in Klowkukulan which I made in 1968.

E.M. This is very much to do with a different concept of composition, isn't it, that it isn't just words and sounds, either written on the page or pronounced, but it is to do with using the effect of electronics in the final performance.





B.C. Yes, it is an enhancement of what you try to do with your own naked voice, really. In a way, you are trying to make the tape more like the poem than you can possibly achieve with your own voice.

E.M. And also the attitude towards so-called "accidents" is very different, isn't it, to what it would be for a classical, classicizing production, it is nearer something like, Charles....

B.C. It is like water colour as opposed to oils.

E.M. Yes. I was thinking like Charles Mingus saying there are no accidents and like Charles Ives writing on the score, directions to the other players - I think in one of his Quartets - indicating that there are no accidents, whatever you think the music looks like. It's a very, it seems to me, a very 20th century attitude here, you know, that you make a field and then you leave inside it what is happening.

B.C. Yes, I think it has been adopted as a general rule by some people in the poetry circuit; it has always been there. I think there have always been these two attitudes. One is that you have a very definite idea of what you are going to do, like the classical idea of painting, for instance; you have a very clear idea in your mind of exactly what it is going to look like and you start in the left hand corner and you paint it meticulously like that, the next bit, then the next bit, and you gradually work right across until you get to the bottom right hand corner, and there is the painting. Whereas in the other type of painting, you start splashing paint all over

the canvas, and you sort of push it around and welcome the accidents. It is the classical as opposed to the romantic attitude, I think. In concrete there are clean and dirty, and I have always been regarded as dirty.

E.M. I am not sure about that. You were discussing this once before - the fact that you associate the word romantic with messy and dirty, and saying you were a romantic...

B.C. I mean the romantic painter gets more paint on him than the classical painter, but the result of the painting may not be messy at all, it may be very beautiful. You resolve that messiness; you have to decide exactly when to leave it, and this is very tricky. It is like photography, knowing exactly when to press the trigger, and this is quite a different problem from the classical one.

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E.M. You are deeply concerned to make not only a solo performance, but at some point to make the solo performance over into a group participatory action, isn't that so?

B.C. Yes. Lily Greenham and I were talking really about this last night. There are two attitudes to poetry reading. There is one where the poet stands up in front of the audience, and it is a matter of communication from the poet to the audience - a fairly orthodox type of reading.

E.M. Which you do yourself sometimes.

B.C. Yes. You can do wonderful things within that. But I have the idea that you should have a different kind of poetry read-

ing altogether, where you have a poem, which maybe the poet has thought up - he has the score for it perhaps. or he has an idea for it, maybe a minimal idea - but it is there for everybody to come into. It is an area in which everybody can join and, hopefully, if you have time, it can go on so that the poet can almost sort of step outside it, the group are no longer audience, they are performers, they are almost poets, they are creating things in their own right. They can carry the thing on.

E.M. What are you relying on when you do this? You obviously know very well that you can do this now. What is it that you are relying on in all of us, particularly those who are not poets, or have never tried it? Are you anticipating an ability there, which is neglected?

B.C. Well, not just neglected, it is actually pushed under, isn't it? In schools, for instance - all right, in the primary school, you let the children chatter and move around and so on, but by the time they get to the secondary school, they are all sitting in rows in desks, and they have to be quiet most of the time. It is suppressed.

E.M. What is suppressed?

B.C. The creative ability of the body and the voice.

E.M. To do what?

B.C. To make lovely patterns.

E.M. The kids in the playground go mad, and we go mad when we are playing games, but are you suggesting something else?

B.C. How many times are they told to make less noise, step into line, and that sort of thing! Creative ability gets very much crushed out, and I am trying to give the opportunity, even to people who are grown up, to regain it.

E.M. You don't think it is ever dead, finally. I have heard tapes of you turning on middle-aged people in countries which don't speak English.

B.C. Yes.

E.M. They are your own quasi-English poems, right?

B.C. Yes.

E.M. So you believe that anybody...

B.C. English is almost an international language now, but my poetry is probably more international.

E.M. But it is a marvellous thing that you have this great faith that education doesn't finally crush out the creative desire in people - not only the ability but the desire, the need, to do it.

B.C. I think the need is there with all of us, and people are really cheered by being given the opportunity of joining in.

E.M. At what stage in your readings and performances did you understand that you had this ability? It is not an ability that everybody has. Can you remember at what point you understood that you could do it? From reading solo, I mean, to participation.

B.C. I stumbled on it myself step by step from, as I say, the single, rather feeble voice, reading the poem on the page. I gradually found that, by using the voice more fully, it becomes a more exciting thing, and you can get more communication between yourself and the audience because you are using your voice a bit more. Then, as you begin to use your voice, of course, you begin to move around to it; as the muscles of the throat are relaxed, the muscles of the whole body are relaxed and it turns into almost a dance. And then you say: well, I can see somebody else wriggling around to it over there - there is a rhythm going, somebody else is moving to it. So you say: right, they can come in too. There is that kind of feeling that people respond to, like a jazz concert, people are moving to it.

E.M. It means then that you are presenting yourself rather than the text or some fixed thing. Are you very conscious of a presentation of a self, or do you feel very impersonal about it?





B.C. I feel very impersonal about it. I think this a point about concrete poetry, if you like to call it that (I think it is probably a bad term): it is very much an impersonal kind of poetry. It is the poem itself that matters, something that exists outside the self. Certainly you have helped it into being, but what exists is something outside yourself, and therefore it is an area in which not only you can join, but other people can join.

E.M. Let's go back to those texts again. A great deal of your work, as you were hinting a little while ago, is not exactly English poetry in the sense it has been known. It suggests, even if it doesn't include, a variety of linguistic devices. How many languages do you know? Do you actually know French, German, and so on?

B.C. No. I'm lousy at languages. I have an acquaintance with a fairly large number of languages, but the only other language I can speak even badly, I think, is French. A little bit of Swedish but not enough.

E.M. Now this acquaintance means that you have got sufficient idea what the sounds and the structure of the language is without actually being able to speak it, so that you can use it as poetic elements, is that it?

B.C. Yes.. I think I am probably misusing it. My whole attitude to poetry could almost be summed up as a misuse of the elements. As with my tape recorder: I press all the wrong buttons, I turn all the wrong knobs, I put the tape all round the wrong way. And I do things with the duplicator that Gestetner

really get horrified over. I think it is the same with language. I can misuse elements of other languages to my own creative purpose. I am misusing Japanese at the moment. I started on a poem the other day which is a poem for Jack Kerouac, and it is Kerouac going into Japanese. I read all my Japanese poems to a Japanese audience once, and they didn't see the point at all, I'm afraid.

E.M. But with a poem like that one in the ABC in Sound, "Tan Tandinanan tandinane", the elements there are not only the sounds of tantric poetry, but I think the structure of that poem is based on...

B.C. That's a permutation poem...

E.M. a tantric number - which is going quite deeply into a whole cultural area, isn't it? Is that frequent with you?

B.C. Yes, a lot of my poems are based on some theory of number, based on permutations of one kind or another.

E.M. And in this case, it so happened that you were into the tantric area which used numbers. But this is not normally your procedure?

B.C. No. I tend, whenever I do a poem, to come up with a new device for it, a new rule for it. I don't like to repeat myself. When you have done a poem on one sort of structure, when you do another one, you want to try a different way.

E.M. But normally, you set out a procedure, which is frequently mathematical, before you begin to compose.

B.C. When I am doing a poem, the first stage is to arrive at a procedure, and once I have

hit upon the right procedure for it, then it is just a matter of time and patience.

E.M. What do you mean by hit upon the right procedure?

B.C. Well, I have done a lot of poems based on girls' names and you might say that any poem based on a girl's name will follow the same sort of procedure. You just take the name and you have a device. You just move it around, and there is your poem. But I don't think that at all because, one thing, each name is quite different, it is quite a distinctive thing, quite apart from the girl being a distinctive thing too! But the poem is going to be based on that name and you have got to somehow delve into the quality of that name, as a word, as a sound.

E.M. As a sign too, I think; it is a visual thing as well. It is strange, isn't it, because it is a very ancient device, not a very modern one.

B.C. Oh, sure.

E.M. Did you become aware of this early, or was it recently that you understood that what looks very new inside what you are doing is, in fact, based on very ancient techniques of using number and sign. Did that come to you quite late?

B.C. It came to me late. As I said, I stumbled from this to that to the other, developing in my own way, and then I suddenly realised that either this is all going on in other countries or that all this went on hundreds and thousands of years ago perhaps, and one sensed this link up with the past. So many people are under the impression that so-called concrete poetry started in 1954 or 1955, that suddenly from nowhere it sprang into being, that you could actually name the person who first coined the word, that Gomringer and the Brazilians started concrete poetry, and that there is nothing before that. This is nonsense because there has been this sort of poetry all the way through history. There has been visual poetry, there has been sound poetry, and we are just the modern manifestation of that type of poetry, and I think our intention in tracing the history back is to show that this is a very traditional type of poetry. People are always calling my poetry avant-garde and that sort of thing. Well, you know, it's not; it is the most primitive type of poetry that you could possibly have, I would think, and I want to establish my primitive roots, and at the same time show that because we live in a modern age and have things like tape-recorders and duplicators and letaset and all the devices for printing and so on, that we can take it further, today, through the instruments. So that it is both primitive and sophisticated.

E.M. Why do you think there has been an increased incidence since the 1950's - to go no further back - of soundtext and concrete poetry? Why do you think it has caught on so very quickly in Europe, and to a lesser extent in the United States?

B.C. I don't know. I suppose that the Renaissance emphasis on the printed text and on the poem read silently in your study, this went on and on and on until people couldn't bear it any longer and they had to break out and shout from the roof tops again. You get the beginnings of it right back, even in this country, with people like Gerard Manley Hopkins, for instance, whose work then (it isn't now) was almost incomprehensible on the page. He said: OK, fair enough, just open your mouth and speak it out and you will find that it will come right. He had the idea that poetry wasn't just something for the page, it was something to be spoken, almost sung.

E.M. What you are saying is that you think it was a dissatisfaction, that somehow the cerebral poem in printed form was not tapping everything that poetry meant.

B.C. Yes. We were very satisfied with it for a long while. Obviously it is a very fine thing that one can have poems that are very complex and which need close study, which need reading several times. It is very fine to have that sort of thing running for two or three hundred years, perhaps. Then suddenly there comes the realisation that because we have plumped for the intellectual poem, for the written poem on the page, we



have turned our backs on something that is equally valuable.

E.M. You called that primitive just now. What do you mean by that - because as has been said, "primitive means complex".

B.C. Yes. I think it is just as complex but in a different way. It is not complex intellectually, it is complex emotionally, for a start, I think. It is very complex in sound patterns. I am thinking back to the times of the troubadours, for instance, where they would have a stanza with seventeen different line endings, and they would remember the sequence of those seventeen rhyme endings and pick it up again in the next stanza. We could never do that sort of thing these days. We couldn't remember those seventeen sounds in sequence, could we?

E.M. Well, that is because the oral tradition is different.

B.C. Simply that we have concentrated on the page and we have forgotten the sound of it. Our memories are lousy. I can't remember my own poetry.

E.M. I was just about to say that, because you always read from a text; it's surprising.

B.C. I know, it's ridiculous!

E.M. Why is it that you can't remember your poems?

B.C. I don't know. It is just that in this century our memories are pretty weak and mine is pretty weak. If I try to remember my poems, some of them I can remember, but with most of them I leave out a line or two. Perhaps it doesn't matter very much!

E.M. Some of them are so complex, like the mushroom poem - "Soma Haoma" - that you've got to have a text.

B.C. That one I can remember.

E.M. Do you make a deliberate effort to remember?

B.C. If I have taken the trouble to work out an elaborate permutation, it seems to me that it is up to me to do justice to the poem and actually get the things in the right order. True enough, I could improvise on the text, but that is not quite the same thing; it hasn't got the precision of the mathematical approach. So, yes, there are two different kinds of poem. There is the poem where you have written a very deliberate text which needs to show through at some point at any rate; it may still be overlaid with improvisation. Then there is the type of poem which is deliberately made for improvisation; it has no order at all; you have simply got the elements of the poem and you can take them in almost any order you like, push them around, overlay them, and build up your own new text every time you do it.

E.M. How much feedback do you think there is from the precisely musical side of this field? We have talked about this many times, and obviously there is an overlap between the purely musical and the purely verbal. I mean for instance, a work like Luciano Berio's *Homage to James Joyce* in which he takes a text from Joyce, read by a woman, and then slowly permutes it, as a sound-basis, until it comes out as a purely sound structure. Or Stockhausen's *Stimmung* where he takes vowels and sounds and builds those into a musical action. There seems to be an interface, doesn't there?

B.C. There is an overlap there, certainly.

E.M. Do you think there is much feedback between the poetry and the music, or is it happening automatically on either side?

B.C. I think there is a difference of approach. The poet is mainly interested in the articulation of the material, whereas the musician is mainly concerned with the sound structure of it. But they do overlap.

E.M. An overlap in structure, in the use of permutations and numbers, in the Berio and in the structures you have been working on. Do you know, in fact, whether the sound structures - Dufrene calls them "cri-rythmes" and Chopin's breathing and snoring poems - have been used by composers, that although the poets got there beforehand, the procedure has been taken up by composers?

B.C. Yes. Henri Chopin would very much go along with that idea. He has written in, I think, *Ou* no. 33, an attack on musicians who have pilfered poets' work without acknowledgements, giving specific incidences where his work and Dufrene's work have been pilfered by musicians, who have used it in their compositions without acknowledgement. He is a little bit paranoid about it, but it has happened; and yes, I think you are absolutely right that the poets got there first. It seems to be a fact that poets were using the word *concrete*, before you had "musique concrete", and before even you had "art concrete". The poets were there first and it was the other arts which took it up. I wave the banner for poetry now and then!

E.M. What about the other way round - do you listen to much music?

B.C. A fair amount, yes.

E.M. What do you listen to?

B.C. A wide variety, from Australian aboriginal music, Tibetan music, to Stockhausen; Steve Reich I'm very fond of.

E.M. Do you think you have borrowed from the musicians?

B.C. I don't think so, no. I don't think I have ever consciously or even unconsciously taken very much from musicians.

E.M. You don't improvise, do you, in the sense that jazz musicians improvise. What do you mean when you say you improvise? It is not like the changes in classical blues playing, is it?

B.C. No, it is freer than that. With the abAna group, we do improvise. Every performance we do is an improvisation, but it is not on the same fairly rigid skeleton form which exists in jazz. It is very much an improvisation on a text which we have in front of us. My job is to provide them with a text, like the one which was deliberately written for abAna.

E.M. That is "Trigram"?

B.C. Yes. They can read that just as well as I can, and we improvise on that text.

E.M. Have you ever gone on to perform with an idea in your head, without a text, and then improvised?

B.C. Not so much now, but I used to. I have had three periods, I suppose. One, where I was writing very much the single voice poem, where I stood up in front of the audience and communicated my poem to them. Then I got to the stage where I was disregarding words very largely. It hit me this way. I was going into dictionaries. I might have studied twenty-three different dictionaries to find just the sounds that I wanted for a particular poem. I suddenly said to myself: you utter idiot, why go searching twenty-three dictionaries to find the sounds that you want for a poem, why not just make them? That made me tremendously free. I just said to myself: fair enough - there's a tape recorder, here's a microphone, come on, let's get going, and a lot of stuff was then improvised into the tape-recorder, either myself alone, or with other people. I worked with Dufrene on one occasion, with Chopin, with John Darling, and people who were sympathetic to the idea and we were actually creating things completely without a text at that time.

E.M. I have heard you often criticize other poets by saying that they are not concerned with dance, that their poems do not dance.

B.C. Well, I think Pound put it, didn't he, in several of his writings, that the further music gets away from dance, the less vital it is, and the further poetry gets away from music, the less vital it is. He used different words for it in different contexts.

E.M. So you are saying that poetry is a kind of interface, a place between music and verbal text, the body in action rather than the voice.

B.C. I am very much concerned with what we lost. I am thinking of the Renaissance now

as a period when we gained so much and lost so much. It is time we turned our attention to what we lost at that period, and one of the things we lost was the very close connection between poetry, music and dance. I had no conscious thoughts about this. It is something that I have come to step by step, naturally; but now I am very much aware that we are trying to get back that unity again between the dance of the voice and the ballet of the body. I think Schkl-ovsky said that poetry is a ballet of the speech organs.

E.M. But dance is a visual performance: if you can't see it, it doesn't happen. So is your work a visual performance of rhythm?

B.C. I don't see any difference between a visual performance and a sound performance. Everything I see I can hear. Any mark that is down there on the paper can be interpreted as sound.

E.M. But dance is movement.

B.C. Yes.

E.M. I mean physical movement through space.

B.C. So is a wriggle of line on the page, isn't it? That line on the page, which has a muscular quality about it, is the same muscular quality that you get into your voice or into your body when you dance. It is a portrait of the person who does it.

E.M. Well, how about a dance poem?

B.C. It depends what you mean by "dance poem".

E.M. Didn't you do something in Sweden of this kind - I seem to have seen a photo of yourself and a girl in a kind of arena....

B.C. You are probably thinking of the "Shama na" performance. The radio studios weren't available last year, so instead of being able to do a tape as I usually do in Sweden, I had to do an arena performance - partly of course because the arena was there. It was a lovely arena, bigger than this room, beautiful green carpet all over it, just like grass, great dark sky up there, because of the huge, tall dome. It was an old cinema. It was sort of up there with the stars. It cried out for performance, for not just people standing in the middle declaiming poems, but for people who were moving around and almost dancing their poems. So I found a couple of girls who were prepared to have a go, and we had a couple of very quick rehearsals.

E.M. With costumes?

B.C. With costumes, yes, and musical instruments. We had bells and we had drums.

E.M. What did they play? I remember it sounded Japanese to me, like a Shaka Haoki.

B.C. I think again you can bring this word "misuse" into it, you know. Like jazz again, you can play your instrument in the orthodox way, or you can maltreat your instrument and get wild sounds out of it. One of the girls playing a flute was really getting beautiful sounds out of it. I'm not quite sure at certain points (on the tape) whether it is the flute that is playing or whether it is a voice that is making that line or an interplay between the two. This ambiguity is something that I very much like.

E.M. You have finally consummated your unity there. I understood, when I saw the pictures and heard the sounds, what you mean by the dance.

B.C. That was one of the few occasions when it has actually happened. I wish more occasions could be engineered. Another occasion was up in Liverpool. I went up to a girls' Teacher Training College which had a dance movement class with a very sympathetic teacher, and we spent a couple of days during which they really got beautifully into actually making the shape of my poems with their bodies. I could see they were writing my poems with their bodies; it was wonderful.

E.M. What did they have beforehand? Did they have a text or instructions from you?

B.C. It was the *Three Poems for Voice and Movement*. This is one I did deliberately for voice and movement. I gave them all



copies of it and they put them on the floor, went flat on their tummies, and I thought: God, all these girls, flat on their tummies, poring over these texts, what is going to happen now? And nothing happened at all: five minutes, ten minutes went by, and they were still flat on their tummies, poring over the books. Then suddenly they started making sounds, tentative sounds. I thought: ah, something is beginning to germinate! The sounds went on for five minutes or more, and then they gradually got up and began to move to the feel of the sounds. It was really very lovely to see it happen. The poem was born from the text, in sound and in bodily movement; it was beautiful.

Bill Griffiths Does the idea of trance enter into performance for you?

B.C. Yes, I think if a performance goes on long enough; with people who are in the right mood, trance might very well come into it. I can think of one instance. I went up to Chorley in Lancashire to do a reading, and I was billed with three other poets. We were supposed to be occupying the time between 8 o'clock in the evening till 4 o'clock in the morning; it was one of those marathon readings, you know. The other three poets didn't get there; one had 'flu, another's car broke down, and I've forgotten the reason for the third. So there I was with eight hours stretching in front of me. So, fair enough: you can entertain them for a little while and then you have got to get them busy too. So we took *Tan* as the text, and started off doing a wild chant which took off into dance and movement, and became a real ritual. It went on for about three hours, I suppose, altogether, and I think trance would very much describe the elation that came out of it, and the exhaustion too. By the time we had gone through that, they all fell flat on the floor on their backs, and then, after a while, started discussing what had had happened to them.

E.M. I think one of the things that Bill was into there is the relationship between, for instance, (what I felt twice taking part with you) chanting "Soma Haoma" and the sort of thing that Allen Ginsberg does in using tantric chants, and others, to get into a state of rearrangement of the particles of their bodies.

B.C. Yes, again, I have never deliberately had this aim in mind, but I have noticed that when one performs things like "Soma Haoma" - again, if the performance goes on long enough - the elements of it do get inside one, and do have that sort of effect. Very definitely something does happen of this kind.

E.M. Again, it is extremely rare.

B.C. Oh sure, but it is so exciting to come across this and realise it still works in this present twentieth century.

Questioner: Have you been influenced by the Beat writers - like Kerouac and Ginsberg?

B.C. Yes, Kerouac, particularly. I think that Kerouac's "Old Angel Midnight", which is scarcely known over in this country, is really a very great work and something which has had tremendous influence on me.

E.M. What was it, Bob, that you were excited by in the Kerouac?

B.C. Simply by the sheer quality of the sound - it is a really lovely sound. He is really writing bop jazz there, actually writing it on the page, using words. It was tremendously exciting. I don't think Ginsberg has consciously influenced me but I have been very keen on his work. I published "The Change", which is a very important Ginsberg poem, way back in 1965.

Questioner: Do you have any specific techniques for overcoming inhibitions? I mean, whether an audience is prepared for what you are going to do, or whether it is a surprise to them.

B.C. Sometimes total surprise. I did a reading in Kettering a couple of weeks ago, and I am sure that, apart from one person perhaps in the audience, nobody had come across anything like it at all. I have no particular techniques but I think I could

possibly throw some light on how it happens. For one thing, when I stand up in front of the audience and make these weird sounds, it is probably quite alarming, quite surprising, quite shocking for them, and quite ludicrous also, and this is the first step: you make people laugh at it. That is one aspect of it. Another aspect, of course, is devising poems that are so very simple that there is no real effort required in joining in. I have several poems which are sort of minimal poems, where there are only three or four syllables to the whole poem. If you start off with something very simple, and almost get right down in your audience, you will find that someone will come out with a syllable, and then when one person has done it, other people feel bold. Once you have uttered something, once you have actually dared to open your mouth and shout something out, it gives you courage somehow. So when I introduce something which is a bit more complicated, there is always one person in the audience who really suddenly discovers that they have this ability. I always look out for that person; there he is, or there she is, and then, when I get on to the next stage, and have done two or three pieces with the whole audience, I pick on this person to come out - and it is often a her - and say: come on, you are going to read this. "No, I couldn't possibly!" And I say: come on! And they do, they do it beautifully, give a wonderful performance, and that again encourages the others. Here's somebody, it is not so difficult, somebody who is prepared to make a fool of themselves, and it was actually rather nice, wasn't it, we rather enjoyed that. So then you come on to the group again and they begin to take part.

E.M. You are using people's fascination with the presentation of themselves in public, in performance techniques, like as an artist or a performer. Old music hall artists used to do it.

B.C. Yes, it is very much like that.

E.M. Or like, I remember, at the end of the pier at Blackpool the comedian comes up and opens a sheet and there are the words of a song, and then very slowly one or two people begin to groan it out, and with any luck, towards the end, everybody is chanting away. I think it is very like that with your performances.

B.C. You are simply banking on the fact that people like doing it, and sooner or later somebody will come out and have a go.

E.M. It is very striking that at the beginning of the performances that I have been to with you, people moan a bit and groan and it is a bit stilted, but after about a quarter of an hour, everybody seems to be belting it out, just like these old music hall scenes.

B.C. Ideally, of course, you want to have two halves to your programme. You want to start the participation off at the end of the first half and just get them into the idea, then you break and go down to the bar and have a few drinks, and you feel much better after that.

E.M. Maybe it is those people who are most inhibited, that most like it.

B.C. I was going to say that. I think it is very true that the more inhibited the person the more daring he thinks himself when he does actually let out a shriek.

E.M. Yes, it is a bit shocking first time around, I must admit myself!

B.C. Oh, yes. Actually to be the first one to utter.

E.M. One has a horror of finding oneself, or at least I have myself, feeling like a timid little man, all on one's own, saying it, and nobody else is there.

B.C. I have great sympathy because at one time I was an extremely timid little man myself. I stuttered and had a very timid little voice and so on. I know that one can go step by step from nothing to something which is quite powerful. And if I can do it, everybody can.

E.M. And the group thing is important, isn't it - the sense of doing something together; it makes you feel good.

B.C. Yes. This is what I like very much as opposed to one man versus the audience. The group thing is something which I am very interested in, and I believe there is a lot of scope for the group poem based on a very simple text perhaps, but recreated, every time it is done, by everybody present.

E.M. Have you ever done it in terms of inviting people to submit some phrases or something like that, and then building your poetic structure on such elements not chosen by you?

B.C. Yes, we have done that here, particularly in the Tuesday evening Workshop. We have tried out all sorts of things there.

I don't meet it so much now, but at one time I used to find tremendous opposition to this whole idea of poetry. There was always somebody in the audience who really went red in the face and got in a sort of rage with his umbrella and really denounced the whole thing. This was great. You said: fair enough sir. I'll take you on; you make your noise and I'll make my noise. Do you remember at Cambridge, we did that there. This chap and I absolutely shrieked at each other, growled at each other, and sort of threatened each other and made wild sounds at each other, and then suddenly I relaxed and started laughing, and so did he, and we ended up in chorus, we ended up very much together, and there was this beautiful, lovely serene ending when we were absolutely in accord. He had suddenly realised the joy of it.



# Chris Cheek

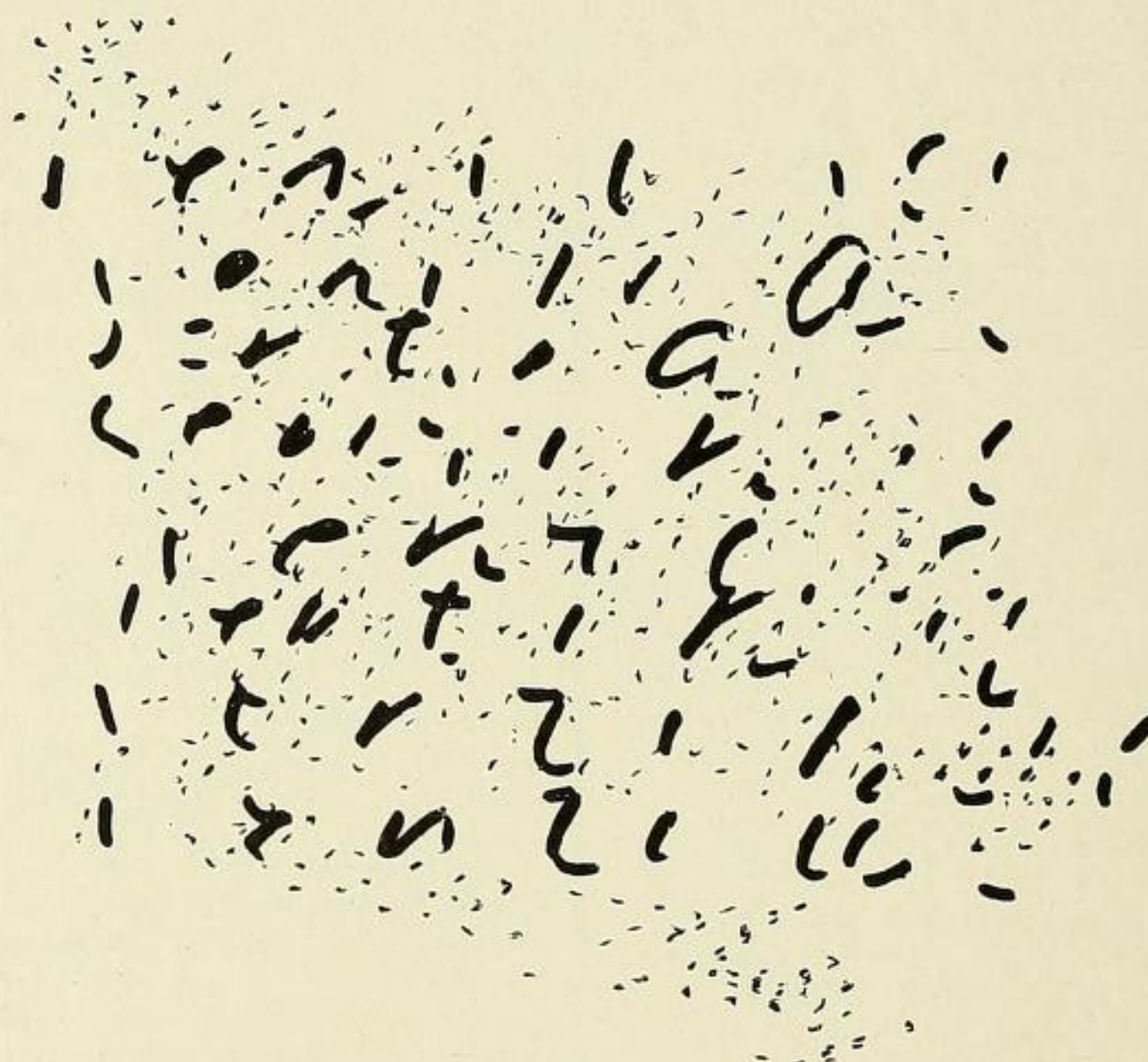
STAVES FOR 2 VOICES

.....words spotted, a composite sound, two semantic lines - a confrontation - both the intended and the error which constantly inform improvisations of a word orientated kind.

i am working into the thinking space both on a page and during performance. from this position where i'm sitting now it's leading towards walking out of the text altogether or otherwise so totally into the textures and tensions presented as to enter in until detail becomes of no further consequences. delicate props.

BURTED	SIGERS	SBROOQUE	GASSNY	CFIASWER	PASIHAD
DOENEL	WEARY	BARROW	GOAZEA	HODISSIN	CHUCKP
BAMBER	HONSY	BRAREN	WHIME	SMBHES	LADAEY
GRYALLY	SONEL	BEATHER	TBRACH	CHAMER	LAWOWD
EARENH	WAKER	HERKER	CRANE	HDEINGH	THOMBS
BRASH	FROSS	CORNER	GRHAME	CRUEN	BRABE
BARREL	LDHIRM	TUMEDRE	PSHSEE	ORANGE	WASTES
FARKEN	CENILE	SHSEN	ISEARE	EDIMBY	SHEAL

# P.C. Fencott



PATA

# Jeremy Adler

Sonatinas. From the Semantic Note-Book

The Sonatinas are potential meanings, little sounds, even landscapes (not printed here), and visual semantics. For performance: take two voices, travel box by box, across or down. Use a few seconds, and no more than a minute, for each box, including brief pauses where necessary, and clearly defined pauses after each box. If more than one section (line of boxes) is performed, these should also be clearly defined. Voice One follows the heavy, Voice Two takes the lighter lines, simultaneously or alternately, echoing, counterpointing, competing or harmonizing, as mood and piece demand. Each box should be brief and intense, whether serious or comic. Instruments, gestures, and other patterns of performance may also be used.









# LINGUAL MUSIC

the main feature of these tape-pieces is the use of speech as basic element. contrary to the traditional way of "setting words to music", in "lingual music" speech "emerges as music". the first step in the working-process is the recording of a "repertoire" of letters/syllables/other fragments/words & sentences. this is then used mechanically only.

"lingual music"-pieces could not be performed live.

the only sound-source used is the human voice (if not otherwise stated).

the recorded material is electronically processed and the result leaves the listener at times in doubt whether he is listening to "electronic music" or the human voice; at other times the voice comes over "straight" and bears no trace of electronics.

like in most of my poems which i perform live, the starting-point for these tape-pieces is either a "key-word", a sentence or a whole poem with semantic content.

i have been working on tape-pieces since 1973; naturally, i started with short "studies", employing extremely simple techniques. it was only at the end of 1973 that i conceived the idea for the first, to me "real", lingual music-piece.

it was "relativity", which wasn't actually recorded before 1974.

this piece is for 6 voices in stereo, but conveys "simulated quad" in stereo. it is based on two sentences from albert einstein's special theory of relativity. the whole concept for the piece arose from the word electron in relation to physics and electronic music.

"traffic" is a piece for 1 voice in quad (usually the stereo-reduction is played); it was recorded in 1975 with the technical assistance of hugh davies. i will refer to it further down, when i go into a few details about certain techniques i use.

"seven consonants in space" is for 1 voice in stereo, again "simulated quad"; it was recorded in 1975. the total material recorded were 7 consonants (for reference see below).

"circulation" is for 1 voice in stereo; dating from 1975/76 and based on a translation into french of my "traffic"-text. there is an immense difference between the english and french version. in the latter i used a computer-programme in parts (by marcus west/using a computer PDP-8 at university college cardiff).

a few thoughts on the relation between product and perception.

in the pieces where i use tape-loops, either in part or exclusively, the "musical" factor can be traced, i.e. one can hear how the music "emerges". when for example, listening to a single loop, one is hardly aware of the musical aspect of speech; it is even doubtful whether one notices the particular pitch of the word. but from the moment the first superimposition of another loop is heard, the ear tends to distinguish "music".

as a consequence, the more superimpositions of loops, the more "chords" one perceives and one ends up hearing horizontal and vertical simultaneously.

another possibility is to set short sections of different loops in particular sequences, so that "melodic lines and rhythm-changes" emerge.

the loops consist of word-repetitions on different pitches and the silences between the words range from very "spaced-out" to being directly linked from the word to its repetition.

the closely joined versions sustain the underlying sound-structure on which the spaced-out loops are perceived as interjections, defining the space-time dimension of the piece.

in certain pieces (in "traffic" for example) i "introduce" the word-loops in the order they occur in a sentence, thus corresponding to the semantics of the text. at that moment the listener perceives the words as pure sound-sources, but his imagination is stimulated by the often ambiguous meanings of a particular word and mental images set in, putting the words into different contexts, this happens, of course, in

flashes of a second. one often hears words which "aren't there". the spacing of wordings is mostly the basis for the rhythmical patterns, as well as the natural accentuation of the words.

stereo-panning, carrying the sound from one speaker to another / "around in space" and other "movements" also emphasise the space-time relationship.

i am interested in creating an "emotional and musical" impact via a product that is basically mechanical. certain sections of "traffic" are extremely "emotional" purely by the way the material is put together. in "seven consonants in space" i recorded the extracted consonants belonging to the word 'consumption' (a word with different meanings), pronouncing them in a "coughing" way, so the piece sounds 'strained' in parts, which in turn is set against extremely 'jolly' passages, jumping around in space. both "moods" are made up of the same material.

## post scriptum

i must state that live-performance is very important to me; the feedback it brings and the challenge it means every time one faces a public is exhilarating. even if one performs a 'set' piece, the way one puts it over always varies slightly. this is, of course, even more so in improvisation, which i enjoy immensely. many people believe that improvisation derives 'out of the blue' and therefore don't accept it as a valid art-form. to that i can only say: i find it a very valid form of expression and it springs also from a 'repertoire' (like any 'set' piece), because improvisation starting from 'zero' doesn't exist. in the best examples it can be as fascinating for the listener as for the performer.

## Lily Greenham

# TRIO EX VOCO



The TRIO EX-VOCO (expanded voice company) consists of vocalists HANNA AURBACHER, THEOPHIL MAIER, EWALD LISKA and acoustic/electronic technician HANS-JÜRGEN BAUER. The group emerged from the vocal ensemble SCHOLA CANTORUM STUTTGART, and their programmes of new vocal music and experimental poetry have been presented in various countries including Sweden and Canada. Among the sound-poets included in their repertoire are Paul de Vree, Bob Cobbing, Kurt Schwitters, Ladislav Novak, Ernst Jandl, Raoul Hausmann, Ludwig Harig, François Dufrêne, and Franz Mon.

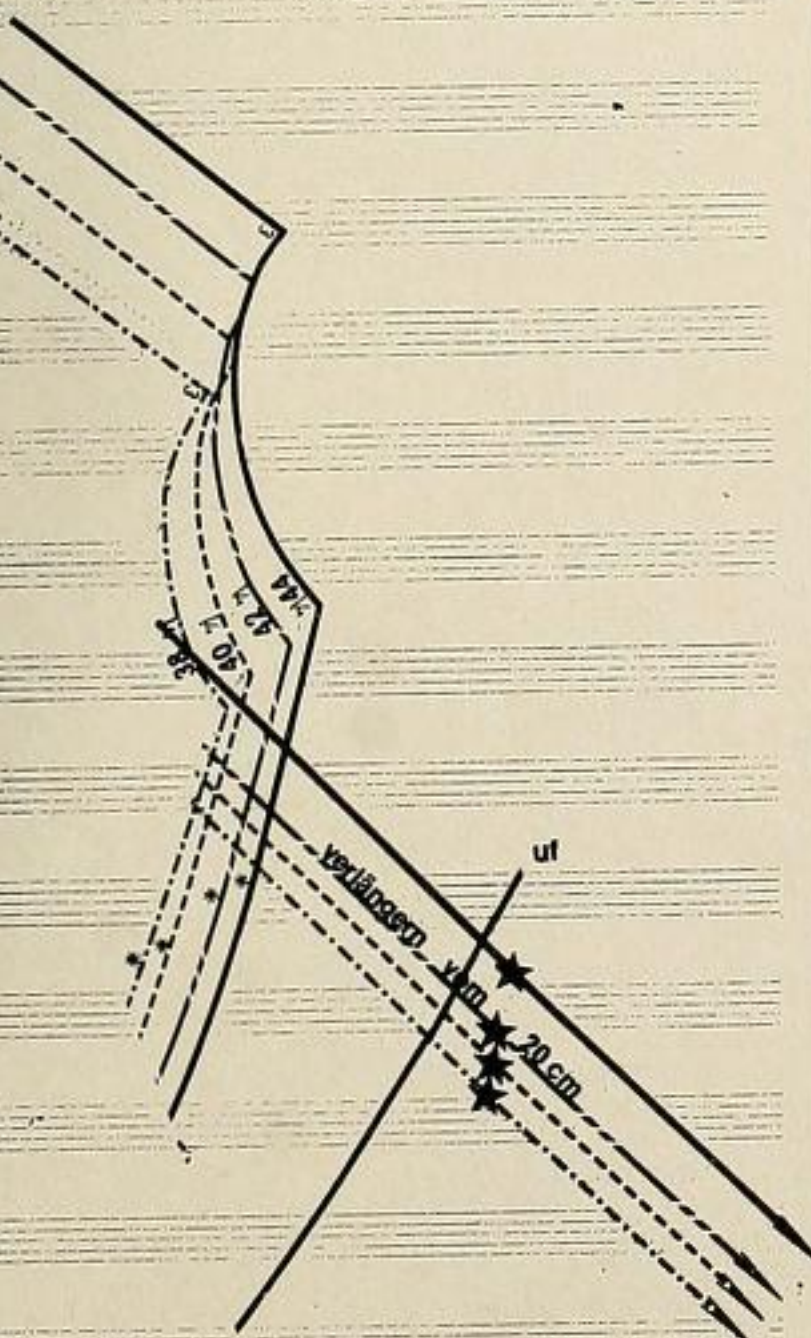


## Katalin Ladik



Katalin Ladik, born 1942, lives in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, works in the fields of literature, acting, interpretation and creation of experimental music pieces, phonetic poetry, visual and phonic research in expanded media.

Sch



score VIII (1977)

## Ab van Eyk

### The Coming of age of Language

The fact that the arrival of the gramophone and the radio, in the beginning of this century, initiated the era of so-called communication, does not necessarily mean that the creative possibilities of language, for example, were immediately exploited. On the contrary. In contrast to the demagogues, most of the poets & writers of the 30's left the technical possibilities lying fallow, and closed themselves off still further from society by a secret language which seemed to be meant only for the initiated.

The social protest of Dada - for which someone like Schwitters did know how to use radio - was overruled by the increasing strength of organised grandiloquence. Instead of being a new method of expression for the voice-without-persona, allowing language to be expressed without the face gestures, etc. of the old-fashioned declamator, the loudspeaker was misused for another kind of experiment on living people: dictatorship, with the loudspeaker as a frighteningly impersonal symbol.

During the second world war, you can hardly speak of radio being used for creative purposes: the BBC broadcasts of direct news were at least as valuable as food and drink.

Only after the war was it possible to experiment, in Paris by the Club d'Essay and also later in other radio studios. But the development of the "spoken word", in contrast to a number of other fascinating projects, had trouble getting off the ground.

The coming of TV, which, as they say, "brings the wide world into everyone's living room", didn't bring any true communication. On the contrary: piping-hot news programmes, trendy stunts, the encouraging of oneupmanship with quizzes and other idiotic games, at most incite a sort of curiosity. Serving up all the world's sorrows steaming hot and with such ease does not result in any kind of communication with suffering humanity, but rather a creepy, enthusiastic ex-communication.

One of the causes of this is the fact that the communication media are still used non-creatively. Radio and TV production is more a hobby of well-dressed managers and big-shots, of an amorphous bunch of dabblers, than of creative and inventive people. This state of affairs worsened because many writers kept themselves apart, and still do so now. They thought, and still think, that microphones and cameras aren't so great, and they prefer to entrust their language to paper than to programme producers.

Leaving aside the question whether they were justified in doing this, they were still only paying attention to one aspect of language, i.e. the written form.

I wouldn't like to state that there's no more future for written language - look how effective a letter can be - but that other important aspect should also be considered: the sound-potential of language.

A poet has every right to bring out a collection of his poems and hope that it will "find its way". But there are cart-loads of written language that nobody wants and not one protestor on the street has any use for.

Anyone who pretends to know language from the inside will create a language which people can articulate whether they're in love, or angry, singing, or demonstrating.

Anyone who thinks that spoken language is beneath them leaves it to the bureaucrats, to the bootlickers of the establishment, to the conformists who turn every living language into commonplaces.

This is why the international movement of the 60's, which tried to free language from its tedious, written-to-death typography and way of reading and to give it a new spoken form, was so inspiring. In America and England there were the sound poets, in France Heidsieck, Dufrene and Henri Chopin - that the last-named had to move to England to make room for Don Quixote De Gaulle says a lot - in Germany Helms, Kriwet and Mon were working, in Austria Jandl, and in the Low Countries Gils, de Vree, Molitor, Damen, Clavin, and so on.

In connection with the enormous postwar development of linguistics, verbosonics - a collective term for various forms of concrete poetry - explored a large, unknown territory, i.e. that of ecto-semantics, a no-mans-land between the official literature and the official music. Composers also took an active part and departed from their trusted safe ground to explore extra-musical sound.

Poets and composers started to collaborate - they made scores together in which the writer was not degraded to a librettist, who is able to supply the resource of language for the fattening-up of a composer wallowing in music.

The fact that ordinary syntax disappeared, the word disintegrated, and the vocal organ was at last used for something other than speaking nicely and singing, was simply the result of verbosonic work.

Language no longer as a thought out and prescribed system, but as living material to play with, to be taken orally in the street and during discussions. So language came of age during the 60's, although many of the experiments were sterile attempts. Vietnam and the revolts of those years gave the sound poets something other to do than rhythmically ordering sounds. There were a few things that had to be said, screamed if necessary. The technique of concrete sound poetry was one that could be applied to this.



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compiled by michael gibbs



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 28/29: Dufrene, de Vree, Chopin.  
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# i.k.bonset

(theo van doesburg)

the first poem by i.k.bonset, theo van doesburg's dada- and literary pen-name, was published in 'De Stijl' in May 1920. a month earlier the 'manifesto II from De Stijl: Literature' had been published in dutch, german and french. it stated that 'the word is dead' and 'the word is impotent', made so by sentimental, individualistic, psycho-analytical and rhetorical influences. it attacked the 'frontal phraseology' and longeur, duration and voluminousness of books. it wanted to 're-establish the word, according to its sound and its meaning' using therefore 'syntax, prosody, typography, arithmetic, orthography'. the modern writer will not 'describe', but 'escribe': 'through the word he will recreate events in their interrelation: a constructive unity of form and content'. this manifesto had been signed by theo van doesburg, piet mondrian, & antony kok.

bonset's first poem was called 'x-images'. two other poems, published later, have the same title. (1922) in july 1921 he published 3 'letter-sound-images'. the fourth one was in november 1921, in the 'anthology-bonset' issue of De Stijl. in that same issue he published some 13 other poems, dating from 1913, of which 'ruiter', 'voorbijtrekkende troep', and 'de trom' are the most well-known. in 1927, in the '10 year De Stijl' issue, his last poem appeared in this magazine. van doesburg died in 1931.

little attention has been paid to the articles (8 in total) that bonset wrote in 'De Stijl' about 'the new poem'. in these articles he states that 'poetry is the area of pure unreasonableness'. 'in the new art of making verses we are looking for the right words to express as purely as possible to the outside the elements of conscious reality. We could call this the organising of our intuition, an expression which counts for all arts.' the new verse needs a 'heroic, alogical spontaneity'. 'the modern poet is forced, urged by his intuition and by taking away every traditional 'meaning' of the word (in the sense of concept-description), to express his full experience of reality by nothing else than word-relation and word-contrast'. only in dadaistic poetry (L'art sans hypothèse) could this 'alogic' be found.

in an article which accompanied his 'letter-sound-images' bonset stated: 'Primarily there comes into consideration here the re-establishment of the inner sound of the word. To take away its past, it is necessary to renew the alphabet according to its abstract sound-values. This means at the same time the healing of our poetic auditory membranes, which are so weakened, that a long-term phonogymnastics is necessary'.

the typographical value determined the tone, the letters had a duration of one 'count', each stripe enlarging this by one more. the vertical stripes should shorten the duration. the whites were pauses.

'the poem should be constructed from its own material'.  
'the reader himself is always, more or less, the subject of the poem. the poet is only the cool constructor who arranges the material according to the utmost economy'.  
'the creating reader adds a projection to the given material; the non-creative, passive reader takes a projection away from the given material'.

a work of art can, according to bonset's theories, never exist in itself. it becomes so only in relation to the spectator, reader or listener. this statement is very modernistic.

in the same issue that van doesburg published his theory of 'counter-composition', bonset wrote: 'in the new art of the word, not a single word is of use any more or understandable poetically, if it is not accompanied by its counter-image. this multi-unity of counter-images makes it possible for us to escape the vulgar meaning of the words and to express ourselves directly, creatively'. bonset regards the word as 'matter' for the word-image-maker.

'the creative construction of sentences, the word, the language, the sentence - according to the procedure of an ideal 'being possessed' - will be able to change the human mentality so deeply and essentially that a totally different way of seeing and thinking will be the result of this'.

the new poem should destruct meaning and syntax. this would mean the abolition of time and space. new poetry knows no next-to-another nor after-another.

in his last article bonset mentions 'indeed in our time the image steps into the place of the word'.

he writes about his 'x-images' that they did not satisfy the demands for tension which he made between word and image. about his 'sound-images' he says that he gave these up because of the certainty of landing in an intermediate form of music and word, and 'with respect to the word music is an inferior phenomenon'.

'in order to use the word in its fixed and most elementary form, so that it visualizes constantly, i was led to prose'.  
bonset's last literary publications in 'De Stijl' were 12 chapters of his 'abstract, sur-humanistic novel' The Other Face.

G.J. de Rook.

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## DE STIJL

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4e JAARGANG No. 11. NOVEMBER 1921.

### LETTERKLANKBEELDEN (1921)

IV (in dissonanten)

U <sup>l</sup>	J-	m <sup>l</sup>	n <sup>l</sup>
U	J-	m <sup>l</sup>	n <sup>l</sup>
V-	F-	K <sup>l</sup>	Q <sup>l</sup>
F <sup>l</sup>	V-	Q <sup>l</sup>	K <sup>l</sup>
X <sup>l</sup>	Q <sup>l</sup>	V <sup>l</sup>	W <sup>l</sup>
X <sup>l</sup>	Q <sup>l</sup>	W	V
U <sup>l</sup>	J-	m-	n-
		g <sup>l</sup>	
A-	O-	P <sup>l</sup>	B <sup>l</sup>
A-	O-	P <sup>l</sup>	B <sup>l</sup>
D-	T-	O <sup>l</sup>	E-
d	t	o	e
		O <sup>l</sup> E <sup>l</sup>	
		B <sup>l</sup> D <sup>l</sup>	
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Aanteekening: te lezen van links naar rechts. Voor de teekens zie men Stijl no. 7.

### X-Beelden (1920)

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hebt gij 't lichaamlijk ervaren  
hebt gij 't li CHAAM lijk er VA ren

O<sup>n</sup>

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het achterhierenginds  
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#### MIJN KLOK STAAT STIL

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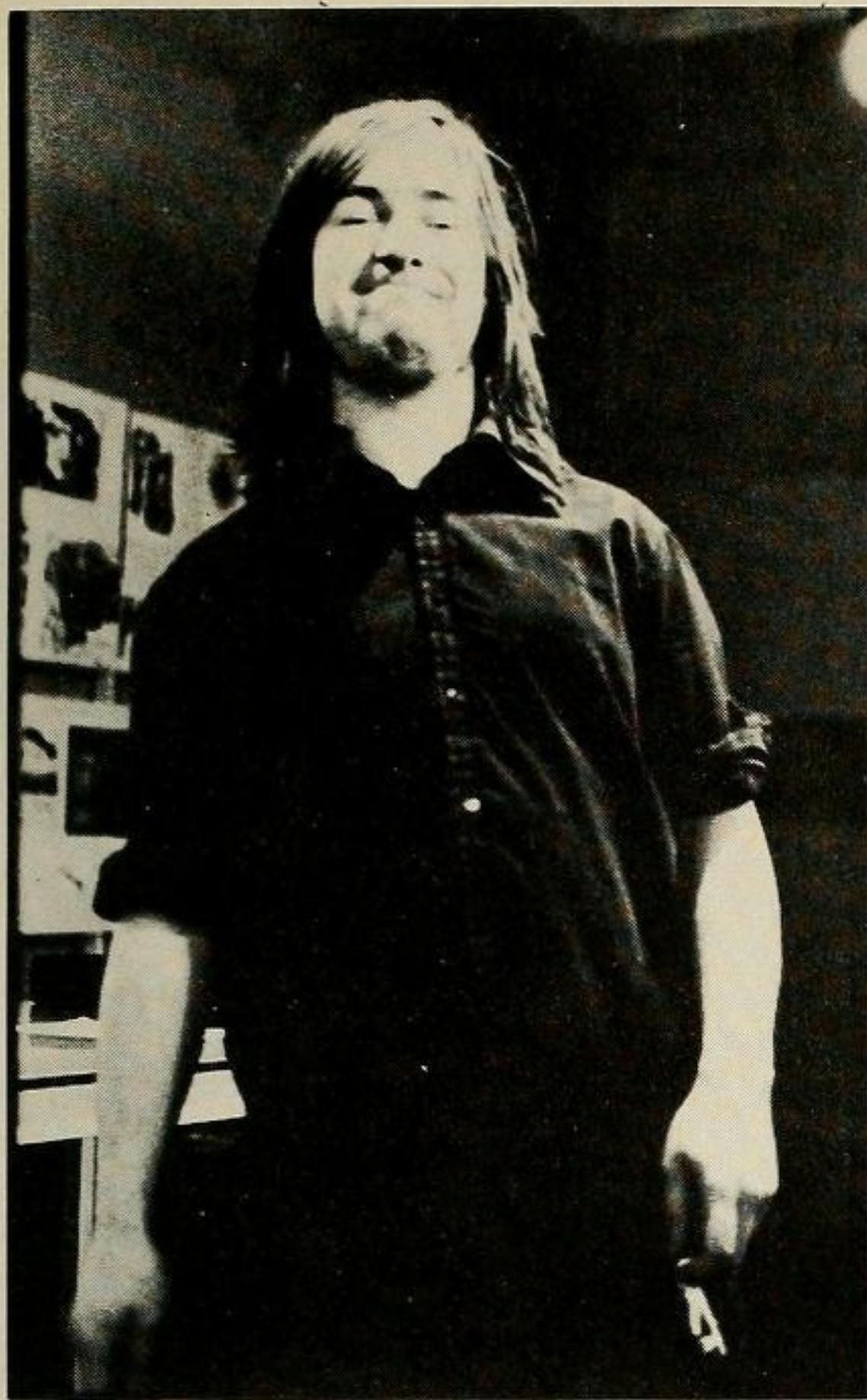
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uomo electrico

rose en grauw en diep wijnrood

de scherven van de kosmos vind ik in m'n thee

Aanteekening: O<sup>n</sup>: te lezen nul<sup>n</sup>; — ruimte en — tijd: te lezen min ruimte en min tijd.



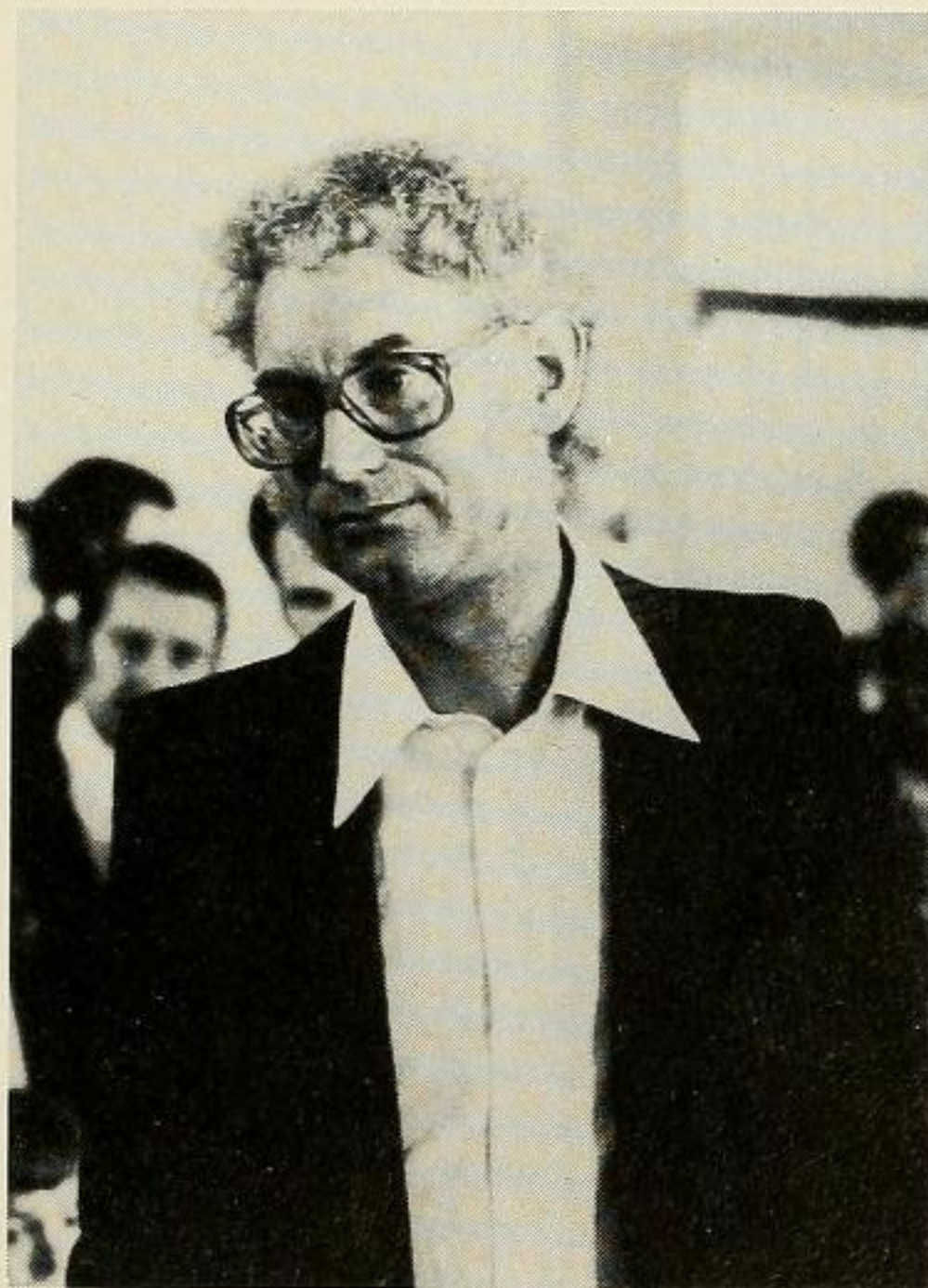
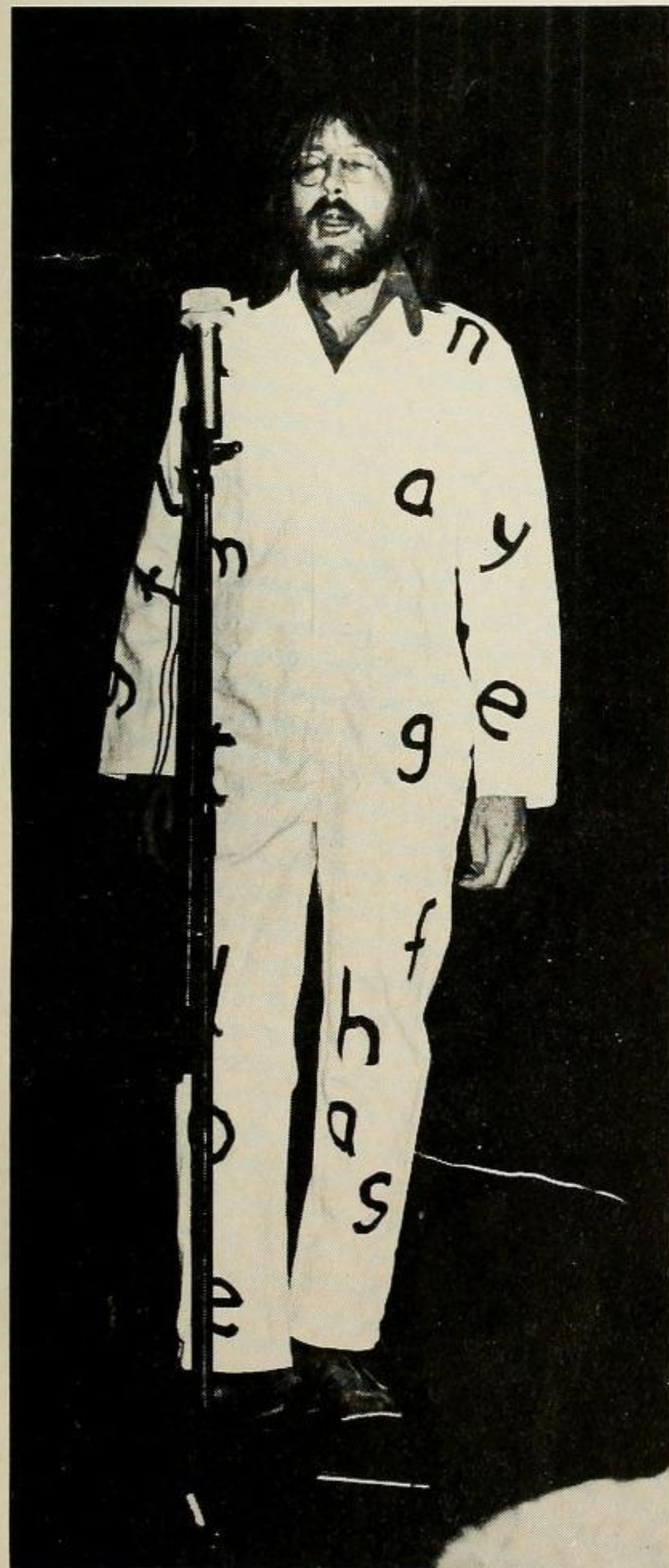


photos: Lawrence Upton, the Good Elf himself, snapped in his usual ebullient mood during last year's sound poetry festival in London. Besides performing with Chris Cheek and P. C. Fencott as JGJGJGJG ("as long as you can say it that's our name"), Lawrence very kindly supplied the back cover for kontextsound.



Ilmar Laaban, photo by Lütfi Ozkök

Franz Mon.



Kontexts editor Michael Gibbs, testing the limits of language at the Amsterdam Art fair - photo by John Liggins.

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