

The following discussion is copied and pasted from the British and Irish Poets discussion list, and can be found in the list's archives, which are displayed publically. However, for some reason it is no longer possible to link directly to the discussion, as was the case a few years ago, hence this facsimile. The discussion took place between 19 October and 27 October 2009.

Text that appears within square brackets are explanatory additions to this facsimile, to clarify in certain instances to whom a particular response is addressed, or what it is addressing.

Discussion subject: The launch of The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry.

Anthony Levings

A quick reminder that this Wednesday (21st October 2009) is the Birkbeck launch for the Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry. Starting at 7:30 pm. Room B29, Birkbeck Main Building, Malet St., London WC1E 7HX

<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/readings/news/journallaunch>

Speakers:

Caroline Bergvall, Poet and performer, Arts and Humanities Research Council Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Southampton

Andrea Brady, Poet, Lecturer, Department of English, Queen Mary College

Robert Hampson, Poet, Professor, Department of English, Royal Holloway

Scott Thurston and Robert Sheppard, Editors, Journal of Innovative British and Irish Poetry

Followed by discussion and drinks.

All Welcome.

Patrick McManus

Just wondered if there is a journal of un-innovative poetry??? could be a great scope there who would volunteer??

Patrick :-)

Liz Kirby

Anyone who isn't already on a payroll somewhere invited? Or is this really just the Journal of British And Irish Innovative Academics (Poetry).....

I suppose people who dont have the sanction of an academic institution and a steady income cant really be innovative?

Just wondering.

Liz

Peter Riley

I think what it's about is an insistence that the teaching and study of "Innovative Poetry" is now an established and respectable academic speciality in this country.

PRi

Liz Kirby

hmmm - 'established respectable innovative' - all very cutting edge. I know we do care, and 'attention must be paid' - but do we really care?

Liz

Geraldine Monk

Hi Liz,

It's an academic journal - so no surprise it's being run by academics (Elizabeth James is the exception I think) but I think if you glance at the editorial board you should be delighted because the academics are almost all poets - and fine ones at that. I think this journal is a cause for celebration not a reason to be dismissive and sniffy.

Bestus,

G.

Jimmy Cummins

not only that but a good number of the contributors to the first issue are poets.

party hats for everyone

Jimmy

Jeffrey Side

You would say that, though, Geraldine.

It seems to me, that this growing trend towards gaining academic legitimacy for innovative poetry, is partly based on a sense of inferiority that without it such poetry will continue to be seen as "not quiet up to scratch" in the more conservative halls of academia. But such a panic-stricken attitude, is, I believe, a mistake, as it will only cause innovative poetry to be seen as a practice and topic of discussion that is only open to those within academia. This not only will be bad for such poetry from a public relations point of view (and it has quite a poor PR standing amongst the general public as it is) but it will cause a backlash against it, with younger poets who have a more romanticised idea of what avant-garde poetry is, and how it is written and disseminated, forming antipathetic groups and schools. And does this sort of poetry really need more factions representing it?

Elizabeth James

Hello

I think there are logical errors in most of the objections raised. Just because academics decide to talk about something doesn't mean they can or desire to lay claim to it. Most literature is already studied academically without any particular impact on its other audiences. An even better example probably is film studies.

As for the possibility that young people will be bored by the poetry currently thought of as innovative when it becomes academically recognised -- well, that's OK isn't it? they need to move on in the antipathetic cycle, make their own innovations ...

Elizabeth

Rupert Mallin

Sorry Peter, but how do you teach innovative poetry as opposed to teaching poetry? Also, is 'Innovative Poetry' now an "established and respectable academic speciality" in this country? Mmm, tell that to the University of East Anglia -- but also tell it to me!

I don't understand how "respectable" and "innovative" can live in the same sentence. That is, I'm wondering which comes first here - the respectability or the innovation? I'm all for universities but they are NOT centres for poetic or artistic innovation. Surely, innovations in art and poetry have come about historically when students and academic staff have fused with the society beyond. These days, while government directives and the universities themselves claim a plurality of purpose and record student numbers, ironically, what I see are teaching practices narrowing sharply.

So I applaud Liz for actually questioning the ground here - because it is not fixed, nor is the pole of the academic as steady as it appears here.

Rupert

Geraldine Monk

I second Elizabeth and she saves me having to reply in depth. Her statement on younger poets is spot on. And to film studies we should add the visual arts which has seen most of its innovation nurtured in the colleges since the war (WW2).

I also find that a journal with such a glittering editorial line up and ambition should be seen to be born out of a 'panic stricken inferiority' and 'factional' - how Jeffrey arrives at that I really don't know. But I would say that wouldn't I even though I am not an academic, I don't teach and have nothing to do with the journal.

G

Liz Kirby

I know I am being a bit sniffy really (hi Geraldine!) - just getting over flu, what can I say? I don't dismiss the journal, and I don't disparage the poets.

I am just struck by a certain dependence on official sanction and academic authority. How powerful and grand it is. How restrained and measured and intelligent.

And then I know that what I love, what stirs me, is work that spits and vomits and is embarrassingly passionate.....

Universities and academics are A Good Thing. Poetry however is an incontinent, driven thing. And sometimes not very polite. Or very clever.

Lx

David Bircumshaw

I wouldn't like to get drawn to far into this except to observe that anything that flies on its banner a word like 'innovative', which has long ago been drained of reality by business and politics, is unlikely to be as it claims. I might suggest that using it hints at a certain lack of feeling for language, which is not an inspiring quality in a poetry journal.

Writing about it is also inflicting the tone of an automaton on me.

Tim Allen

I don't really agree with the bit below Jeffrey, although I wish I did. Younger poets seem to be more and more accepting of the way the system works. It is not just a matter of them buying into the system, by imagining that you have to go to college and do this course and that course before you can be accepted as a poet, it is more a case of them not knowing anything different and never experiencing anything different. They have been brought up in/with this mechanical/career orientated view of education so the hoops expected of them regarding creative arts are no different to any other part of the package. It is all a con of course, as 'careers'

are as hard to find as ever, but that tends to actually reinforce the imperative to work through the system, as a kind of hopeful insurance or safety net. Yes, there will always be independent spirits, but not enough of them to make any difference to the trend in my view - I certainly don't think too many of them will have a 'romanticised' idea of avant-garde poetry.

I know that in these discussions there is always the problem of examples - so here is one - what about Luke Kennard? I am about 90% sure that if Luke had not been part of that course he did in Exeter he would still be an unknown - not because I think the course made him a good poet (I have no way of knowing such a thing) but because without that base and influence his work would have come across to the usual mag editors as just another young man mucking about with language with a bit of an attitude.

I have said before that it is academia which has, to a degree, been the saviour of brit innovative poetry - in my interview of Robert Sheppard in 'Don't Start Me Talking' I think I said it was like being given the kiss of life by your worst enemy.

Cheers
Tim A.

Jeffrey Side

Geraldine, I was referring to the fact that Scott Thurston edited 'The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk', which indicates a partiality to your work that you no doubt welcome. And since Scott is co-editor of The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry, you know you will always have a potentially favourable critical reception within in its pages. So naturally you are enthusiastic.

Jeffrey Side

I think you are being slightly idealistic here, Elizabeth.

Jeffrey Side

Liz, I agree.

Poetry can be taught as an academic subject, but I don't think innovation in writing can. I fear this journal will become yet another exclusive partisan establishment body, like Poetry Review is for the mainstream.

However much I admire the board of directors individually, especially Marjorie, I feel they are merely figureheads used to add credibility to a project born from insecurity.

Jeffrey Side

You may be right, Tim. It seems that many younger poets now see such courses as an essential requirement. This no doubt will produce more identikit "innovators" with very little independent thought and an increasingly procedural-based approach to poetic composition. Although, I dislike the mainstream, I do admire their amateurism.

Tim Allen

Elizabeth

Jeff says you are being too idealistic, I think you are being just a little naive. For one thing I just don't see how you can make an analogy with film studies - the status of film and the way it functions within society is a completely different thing to poetry. And your comment about academics not being obliged to 'lay claim' to what they are talking about ignores the psychological relationship that those outside of academia have with something inside academia (the problem with this is mainly to do with literature etc, not the sciences). I haven't said that very well, sorry. I have talked about this before on this list though.

I am not against academic involvement and engagement with poetry, or any sort, that would be absolutely stupid and nonsensical. However, I do think that the various effects that such an involvement have need to be tracked and taken into account.

All the best

Tim A.

Peter Riley

Rupert -- I wasn't championing the cause of academic study of "innovative poetry" I was merely saying what I believe to be the purpose of the new magazine.

Of course there are problems with such a "discipline", the biggest one being how to identify the subject -- innovative poetry. One obvious way would be to locate some contrasting poetry which *isn't innovative* but that can be extremely difficult because some poetry is innovative in one way and some in another and actually, most poetry definitely has something "new" about it. In fact I don't think they do this . (I might be wrong here but I don't think that hostile analysis of non-innovative poetry is normally part of the run of things). What you do is select a quite small number of young-ish poets and say "These are the innovative poets, these are what we study, the rest can go hang." And having dipped my nose into these areas from time to time it I get the impression that in all the I.P. pockets all over the country they are selecting more-or-less the same few poets, except in a certain south-easterly direction where they select a different and smaller group. And other regional variants. I think that the principal qualifying factor is a hostility to the entire culture we inhabit manifested through a belief that "language" is at the heart of the problem, by adherence to the conclusions of linguistic philosophy, stated or implied. So the innovative is defined not so much against conservative poetry as against a general cultural sense of stagnation and normative language use.

I think it is also undeniably true that some of the poets selected at University A are probably teaching at University B, which is an inevitable result of the demand for a shared cultural agenda which will produce the right kind of innovative poetry.

I don't think there's anything wrong with this (kind of) study as such. What I find worrying about it is the creation of a selective history in exactly the way that English departments have always done -- "This is what we study because this is what is important." People like Leavis and Davie can be seen in the same way constructing a history, or a tradition of contemporary poetry of which they are the guardians (and which now look like fairly ramshackle affairs with moments of brilliant perception). Treatment of pre-C20 lit. has been just the same. You end up with a "canon" as they call it. The possibility of a shifted climate in which we escape from canons doesn't really seem to enter into it, and yet that seems to be what is happening in changing patterns of publication and consumption of new poetry at present.

So, again, a valuable move towards the future is attenuated by the amount of freight it is willing to carry with it (and quite possibly encumbered with the amount of extra-poetical baggage it loads itself with). Well, it could be so, in certain hands.

PR

Gareth Farmer

Dear All

The answer seems simple: don't read the journal if you take exception to it. I'm not particularly fond of *Horse and Hound* but I don't waste my time censoring it.

Best,
Gareth

Tim Allen

Gareth, you seem to have missed the point, or points, being made about this topic. It is not a matter of 'taking exception' to anything. I for one know full-well that I will want to read the journal and will get a lot from it. That is not what this is about.

Tim A.

Jeffrey Side

Yes, Peter. What you say chimes with my reservations, also—especially regarding the possibility of unintentional canon formation. It is certainly the case, as you say, that the same poets chosen as being significant always appear. I expect Robert's journal will be no different. No journal can be without an agenda, despite diplomatic denials.

Jeffrey Side

Gareth, it's not about reading or not reading it. The point is the ramifications the journal will have in the further academisation of poetic writing practice, and its influence in deciding who can legitimately practice this writing and who can't.

Colin Herd

I think a lot of these concerns are addressed in the editorial to the first issue and come down essentially to whether there should be academic study of poetry at all. Jeffrey you appear to be suggesting 'no', but I hope 'yes'. (when you say 'no journal' can exist without an agenda, I take your 'no journal' to be the desirable alternative). I find Thurston and Sheppard's hopeful assertion 'Academic study of poetry need not furnish 'academic' poetry' pretty convincing, and I am willing to give the journal a shot on those terms. If there should be academic study of poetry, then why not 'innovative' poetry?

Of course the term 'innovative' is inadequate, needs to be questioned, challenged etc. But if there is to be a journal of the kinds of poetry that might be critically examined under that name, then I can't think of a more welcoming/inviting one... It opens itself up to current/future innovations that a specific reference to a recent poetic tendency might not. I understand that it may turn out that this journal becomes associated with a closed policy, an unwelcoming one, but from the first issue I don't see any particular reason to assume there won't be room for various/new/different interpretations of who innovative poets are.

Liz's initial problem about non-academically-affiliated writers being somehow not-'invited' is a bit ungenerous I think, given that the editors state that they are proposing to carry 'critical writing that derives from practice-led research and poetics' alongside academic criticism.

Liz Kirby

Oh dear. I have already acknowledged that I was a bit snifty and I regret that. I don't want to be in some kind of anti academic camp or trashing good work done by people who care. Like the editors of this journal. I think they are fine people and it is great they are there in the institutions doing their bit. Good work chapettes (and chaps)

I do think there are some problems.

'Careers'
'Canon formation'
'insularity'
'mind over matter'
might sum them up

Much of this already discussed

For myself I just keep writing. Going to readings. Reading. Being grateful when something in language makes me shiver/think/feel sick/think/cry/think.

Maggie O and Michael Haslem Geraldine M great examples of poets who do all these things for me every time I come across their work.

Trash. Poetry. Who knows? Maybe it is just base jealousy on my part (and on behalf of some good friends). I certainly admit that part of myself. And I humbly apologise for it. Its ugly.

The problems are still there and I am heartened to see they are alive. I'd like to see the journal, having like a bad journalist, simply responded to the press release! Perhaps I can get Hebden Bridge Library to subscribe.....

Liz

Jeffrey Side

I hope you are right Colin. Time will tell.

Their saying that they will look at 'critical writing that derives from practice-led research and poetics' seems to suggest a limitation in itself, and not as openly inviting as you think. Does that mean that critical writing that is non-academic and which is not driven by practice-led research won't get a hearing?

Robert Hampson

No - the editorial material for contributors begins by inviting 'critical articles on the history, context, close reading and poetics of what has been termed "innovative poetry"' - which would seem to fit the title. Colin was quoting from the 'Aims and Scope', which broadens this to include (a) 'critical writing that derives from practice-based research' and (b) 'poetics'.

The Editorial glances at the problems of the term 'innovative' ...

And there are articles on O'Sullivan, Prynne, Forrest-Thomson and Denise Riley.

Robert

Jeffrey Side

Thanks for clearing that up, Robert.

Mairéad Byrne

I'm really happy about this new journal and looking forward to previewing some of it at

<http://www.gylphi.co.uk/poetry/index.php>

I got to say though: all the *doctors* and *professors* on the editorial team look a bit parodic. I'm all for the PhD, and the academy, and very proud of my associations with both, but there's something about poetry, for me, that makes me want to slip off my gown (my academic gown brat though if I had any other ...). There's obviously a conscious foregrounding of academic credentials here, I wonder does anyone on the team feel a tension? Three cheers for Elizabeth James (though to be fair she packs two extra names in with her place of work).

Mairéad

Jeffrey Side

The reason for the PhDs etc. is to claim legitimacy. Robert Sheppard has always been concerned that this sort of poetry has never been taken seriously within academia until fairly recently, hence the emphasis of credentials. As I said before, it's mainly about insecurity.

Alison Croggon

Gosh. That seems fairly sweeping. What if, rather than stemming from "insecurity", it's simply that it's interesting and stimulating to think in a disciplined way about practice? (Sorry, praxis...) I certainly find such things interesting to read. And I just don't get this idea that journals of whatever stripe ought to be wholly without agendas, since I don't understand how that would be at all desirable or interesting - surely it would just mean beige all round? I And don't we all, as Borges pointed out, make our own canons?

XA

David Latane

As the editor of a Victorian studies journal that in the same list doesn't use either "Dr" or "Professor" I'll vote for parodic.

Herr Doktor David Latané, BA, MA, PhD

Elizabeth James

Yes and one of them's a QUEEN so pooh to all your docs & profs.

>Three cheers for Elizabeth James (though to be fair she packs two extra names in with her place of work).

Mairéad Byrne

QUEEN Elizabeth KING James (BIBLE) (QUEEN Victoria and PRINCE Albert MUSEUM): I hope I got all yer titles right, missus.

Elizabeth James

Quite. Consider the possibility that academic discourse might actually be as interesting and rewarding, intellectually / creatively, as poetry (reading or writing); and then getting to be allowed to apply that mind, in work time, to the exciting, difficult and intelligent poetry you already love in the evenings ... To me it looks like a coup, rather than a defence.

The proclaimed inclusion of 'poetics' will complicate that argument, admittedly.

The people on the editorial board by the way are basically there as peer-reviewers, and do'nt run the journal. Well that's how it is for me anyway. I am proud to be among them, furry hoodies and Latin graces notwithstanding ...

e

Peter Riley

This journal will finally be judged entirely on what is written in it.

But I must say the list of Advisory Editors reads like something from a Marx Brothers film.

PR

David Bircumshaw

I am quite sure the Journal will be carry its weight, but the listing of advisors' credentials, like the title, is alarmingly toneless, it makes me want to retitle the book:

'We Are The Borg: A Journal of etc'

I also can't help thinking of some of the howlers certain of the worthies have committed, I could list quite a few ...

There is this unfortunate sense of Calling In The Experts. I have this unhappy sense of a Herbarium about to be described by Software Engineers.

(Former) Deputy Fire Warden of the Fourth and Fifth Floors,

David Bircumshaw

Tim Allen

OK, to all who this may concern,

Why do all these people have to have where they're profs of after their name. This is what is annoying, meaningless and in essence tends towards the very dangers we have been talking of. Really, I don't give a monkey's about where someone 'works' - yes, 'works', earns their crust etc, wether it be the local supermarket or the local uni. I know, this is supposed to be an 'academic journal etc' so what's the problem etc? Well, I do have a problem with it, obviously. Telling me where these people 'work' tells me absolutely nothing I need to know about what they think of poetry or what their own poetry is like etc. That's all. That's it. And as far as I'm concerned if someone does actually think this is a necessary and positive thing for us to know then I think that confirms the very thing that Jeff, myself and a few others are trying to say.

I have absolutely nothing against anyone teaching of studying poetry in an institution. What I object to is the implied elevation of that.

Tim A.

Ian Davidson

Cool. I always wanted to be in a marx brothers film.

ian

Mairéad Byrne

I think it's fairly conventional to include university affiliation with the name; it's less conventional, in my experience, to include the Doctor and Professor. But this discussion has reminded me how long it is since I've *looked* at an academic journal. When I went to check this out I realized I didn't even have one in the house. Oh poetry you have made a monkey out of me!

Mairéad

David Latane

In academic journals the advisory board is listed that way as a show-off gesture, true -- but also for a purpose: it's an address and an identification. Thus you know that "John Smith" is the "John Smith" at the University of Hoboken, and also how to get in touch.

David Latané
Virginia Commonwealth Diplomas, Inc.

Tim Allen

David,

Yes, i understand the practical side of it, but it doesn't prevent the irritation or the consequences.

I have spent so much of my poetry life defending the type of poetry I like, and the poets who write it, against the stupid and ignorant prejudices of those who accuse it of being elitist and/or too intellectual and up its own arse etc. The base of such prejudices is very wide too, and in my experience goes right through all the social layers. For many of the more polemically inclined of its critics the entry of innovative poetry into the academy has been a godsend as this thing just reinforces and gives substance to their criticism. I know that this doesn't really bother some of you who might say 'Well, they would say that wouldn't they' etc - the 'you do your thing and we'll do ours' attitude. But this attitude will only increase the fault-lines between the different poetries - fault-lines which then some bright spark here will blandly say do not really exist.

Tim A.

Jeffrey Side

Tim, I think, as you say, that the inclusion of the profs and docs does say something about the attitude of those who thought it necessary to advertise such. The profs and docs named would not have insisted on this, but the editorship probably did, in order, as I said, to give the enterprise some credibility, though, innovative poetry shouldn't necessarily require this.

Jeffrey Side

Quite right. It takes such poetry away from those who want to partake in it in a non-academic context. Besides, as David readily said in an earlier post, there's no requirement to mention the profs and docs with the board members names. But Robert (Sheppard) has a thing about legitimacy after years of being out in the cold, so to speak. So it is payback time for him.

[Referring to an earlier response by Tim Allen]

Jeffrey Side

A coup for whom, though?

[Referring to an earlier response by Elizabeth James.]

Jeffrey Side

Yes, it does have the feel of a collective. I haven't seen the first issue but the contents list seems to have items fairly well-trodden before, so I can't see where the "innovative" of the journal's title begins. Maybe, it's building up for future issues.

[Referring to an earlier response by David Bircumshaw.]

Michael J Maguire

My own underacademicified understanding suggests a sorta spirit of Henry Ford like innovative poetry i.e. any medium once its print – that 600+ year old innovation that still incredulously dominates academia—whether Cambridge or elsewhere.

(in)appropriate Marx Brothers clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtMV44yoXZ0>

Mairéad Byrne

Again, speaking personally, I was thrilled when Lee Jenkins (University College Cork) wrote about my work (is it work?) in a chapter for the *Cambridge Companion to British and Irish Women's Poetry*. It is the first time someone had written about my work in terms of a tradition, and contribution to a tradition. I found it a wonderful relief, in a sense, because obviously I think in terms of debt to traditions, and contribution. So I was enormously grateful to Lee: the idea that someone had been thinking carefully about my work, and framing sentences about it, while I was oblivious to her engagement, was very ... chuffing.

Also, I know aspects of Lee's work very well, and know what a careful and exacting scholar she is. Academic writing is a thing of itself and it's not for everybody but it can be exhilarating and, as I say, having one's own work addressed in that context is a very special consideration. The attention of a scholar is not like the attention of an editor but both forms of attention are among the blessings of being a writer. I also love the carefulness of academic writing: like, you don't just say, um I don't think academic journals usually append academic titles to the names of their advisory board: you go and look it up, and do a search, and get a range, and make precise references. I really appreciate that precision, though I don't always practice in (on listservs) myself. Finally, when academic writing is done well, it's like the most exquisite, probably illicit, pure spirits. Some people have a talent for it (go Paul de Man!). Obviously the advent of a journal dedicated to scholarly consideration of innovative Irish and British poetry is a cause for celebration.

I like the word *innovative*. Quite like anyway. I quite like *Irish* too. Even *British* what the hell.

Mairéad

Jeffrey Side

When you say:

“The people on the editorial board by the way are basically there as peer-reviewers”

This means that anonymity will be taken out of the peer-review process--this can't be a good thing surely? For peer review to work properly one shouldn't know who is likely to be vetting their contributions. It could lead to people being unwilling to submit work, which would be detrimental to the aims of the journal.

[Addressed to Elizabeth James.]

Mark Weiss

It's usually not a list of peer-reviewers, but of advisors who funnel the work of others to the journal.

Jeffrey Side

Quote: “It's usually not a list of peer-reviewers, but of advisors who funnel the work of others to the journal.”

Mark, that is even more of a concern, as impartiality will be threatened. So, given this funnelling by these advisors who are also the peer-reviewers, how much credibility can we now give this venture?

This could lead to yet another clique forming within the non-mainstream arena.

Mark Weiss

Does anybody really want an impartial journal? It's not a trial by jury--any journal worth its salt casts a wide net but develops a personality.

Jeffrey Side

I think this journal, though, is setting out to be less impartial and more catholic. If this is not the case, then fair enough, but it should come clean about it.

Geraldine Monk

Jeffrey,

You seem aggressively negative and confrontational about this journal. Do you feel it threatens you personally because that is how your constant anxieties are coming across. Like Alison says (and Mark echoes here) who wants a beige journal or even worse taupe - yuk!

G.

Jeffrey Side

Geraldine, I don't feel threatened personally as I do not align myself to any particular poetic school. But I see the “academisation” of poetry as largely unfavourable to its larger practice and dissemination without the academy. I see poetry as a cottage industry, not as a corporation. We have seen how once an art form is passed over to the academy, its vitality is weakened.

Besides, I think that academic study of “writing practice” as opposed to merely studying the reception of poetry is too prescriptive an approach to poetic composition. Poets should be allowed to choose how they

approach composition, without concerning themselves about having to formulate a contrived rationale to explain how they do it. This is an approach I don't think Robert or Scott would find appealing.

Sean Bonney

Jeff / would you rather academics didn't talk about 'innovative' poetry? its not as if the appearance of the journal means that poetry is suddenly locked up in the university and no-one else can talk about it. maybe, instead, it can work alongside non-academic activities - Opened, The Other Room and suchlike. I think the kneejerk dismissal of universities going on round here is rather reactionary, as if it was still the 1950s and universities were still strictly for the middle and upper classes, which is no longer the case, and hasn't been for a long time (and, Jeff, on your part rather hypocritical, seeing as only a few weeks ago you were trying to get us all to read your thesis, and telling us how a chapter of it was about to be published in a peer reviewed journal etc).

its also rather alarming to see people lining up to slag off a magazine they haven't even seen yet. maybe its going to be great. give it a chance, yeh?

Sean

Tim Allen

Sean,

There hasn't been any 'kneejerk dismissal of universities'. As far as I can tell the whole discussion has been within a context and has stayed in it. I've joined in on the edges because the subject is a concern of mine and has been for quite a while and it is good to see people talking about it - a few years ago nobody except myself appeared to want to discuss anything around this subject.

I must emphasize yet again - because of the way these things are carelessly or willfully misinterpreted - I am not 'against' the kind of poetry I enjoy having friends and supporters in university departments and having it discussed in depth etc. That is great. But there is a pay-off, and that pay-off needs to be recognised and negotiated with.

On the wider issues of course it is possible to make cases for and against the universities as they function today, but that is a huge subject and not really applicable here. We could argue, for example, about the politics, myths and realities of the extension of university inclusion, and I am sure that at certain points such a discussion would touch on matters relating to poetry, but it would be some way off.

Cheers mate

Tim A.

Peter Hughes

I wonder how the Birkbeck launch went. I hope it was a positive experience for everyone involved.

Luv,
Peter

Sean Bonney

It was quite good. There was free wine and then we went to the pub.

Jeffrey Side

Sean, I'm not against academic journals if they are about the study of poetry rather than concentrating on how it should be written etc. And I get the feeling that this journal may lead to this, having read some of Robert's theories on practice. Only time will tell, however.

I'm all for peer-review, but not when used for innovative writing theory, the two seem almost an oxymoron. Would the various poetic manifestos of the early part of the 20th century passed a peer-review process? I doubt it.

Also, if the editorial board for the journal are also the peer-reviewers then this is not a healthy state of affairs for any journal. If the board must do the reviewing then it is a mistake for them to be named publicly. Peer-review is all about anonymity.

Tim Allen

One of the big dangers is definitely the codification of practice, and I am with Jeff on this. This has happened to some extent with 'avant garde' poetry in the States and it has certainly happened to art here in the art colleges - they do not set good examples. Once the products of creativity get into that loop it is very difficult for them to disentangle. We all want good teachers and good teaching but all too often good teachers and good teaching get lost in the systems and bureaucracies with their other demands and agendas. The need to get a 'qualification' or certain letters after your name has in the past not been the same as the need to create originally. You need freedom and focus. At times this has been given by creative people living and working together - the typical artistic group or milieu or movement. And sometimes of course in glorious isolation from any such thing. Cases of such things coming from formally organised higher ed institutions are rare - Black Mountain would be one of those rarities. I'm not being romantic about this, I think I am being realistic.

Individuals, such as Robert Sheppard or whoever, are able to fight against codification, but systems and organisations cannot. Or at least, they cannot within the context of modern capitalist society.

Tim A.

Mark Weiss

Black Mountain was hardly a formally organized institution, particularly in its last few years, when Olson was called in to oversee its demise. There were at that point about a hundred students. But it's the Black Mountain College we remember as poets. Even in its rum days it neither sought nor received accreditation.

I'm acutely aware of the impact of the academicization of poetry in the US. It's been an unmitigated disaster. But that wasn't caused by the existence of academic journals. Let's see what they turn out.

The inclusion of titles in the board list is a bit comic opera, but let's blame it on a beginner's mis-step. We should wish the enterprise well, and maybe in that spirit let the editor know that he should drop the honorifics.

Mark

Jeffrey Side

Tim, codification of practice is a good term for the potential dangers I see ahead.

Jeffrey Side

My guess is that the honorifics are there on purpose. They are making a statement. They may be removed now that critical attention has been brought to them. But it's the lack of anonymity of the peer-review board that concerns me. Robert should have decided what was more important: the honorifics or the sanctity of the peer-review process.

Mark Weiss

Let's be real for a moment. All academic fields are so small that only neophytes don't know most of the players. I'm a non-academic, but I was able to identify immediately two of the three anonymous readers of my Cuban anthology manuscript. It's also not unheard of for a member of a peer-review committee to tell a friend or student that he's on the committee and this would be a good time to submit.

That said, contributing editors aren't a peer-review committee. Their function is to lend prestige by simply being listed (and many never do anything beyond that for the publication) and to keep their ears out for what they think is interesting work, tho they are never the only source the actual editors rely on.

You seem to expect a degree of objectivity that humans are rarely capable of. I'm not convinced that it's even desirable in a journal. This one will develop its own character. Let's see what that is before we jump on it.

Mark

Jeffrey Side

If the board is, as you say, for prestige only, then Elizabeth James, who is on this board, shouldn't have said in an earlier post here that they would do peer-reviewing also. So any misunderstanding is due to her input in this matter.

Of course, I'm not saying a journal shouldn't have an angle or biases, to credit me with that is building a straw man for me. My concern is that the journal may become elitist and exclusive, acting as a sort of arbiter of innovative poetic taste, in the same way that Poetry Review in the UK is an arbiter of taste for mainstream poetry.

But I think the overriding issue is to find out if the editorial board will, indeed, be doing the peer-reviewing or not. I can't see Elizabeth's Freudian slip being insignificant, however.

Mark Weiss

Let's, for argument's sake, say that they are. What other possibility would you envision? Do you think the hands-on editor should in all cases be governed by the reviewers?

Jeffrey Side

I don't understand your question, Mark.

Mark Weiss

Sorry to hear that. Unless you're making a punctuation pun. In which case I'm sorry to hear that.

Jeremy F Green

I haven't followed all the ins and outs of this thread, so I'm not sure if this point has been made already, but I'd say that the appearance of this journal is a good thing -for academia-. Here in the US the academic discussion of poetry (qua poetry) is very much in retreat, so any venue that encourages informed discussion of "other" poeties is very much to be welcomed.

I doubt whether the analogy with Poetry Review is really the right one, btw. At their best, academic journals--I have high hopes for this one--can work against the codification of poetic practice by shedding light on possibilities past and present occluded by received wisdom, anthologies, whatnot...

Best,
Jeremy

Jeffrey Side

No, I wasn't. I genuinely don't understand it. It was badly constructed. What is it specifically referring to in the comment I made? I can't answer if it is not clear, can I?

[Addressed to Mark Weiss.]

Jeffrey Side

Jeremy, I just don't share your optimism. At least regarding this particular journal, not until the position it holds regarding peer-review is cleared up.

Sean Bonney

Jeffrey, could you please give some evidence regarding your 'feeling' that the journal is going to tell us how poetry should be written? I've seen the first issue (and I'm very curious as to whether you have), and none of the articles seem to me to be making any claims as to how poetry 'should' be written.

Mark Weiss

How would you like to see articles selected?

Jeffrey Side

I'd like them to be submitted to the editor of the journal, who would then remove the writer's name from the manuscript before passing it on to two independent reviewers who would not know who the article was written by, and who the author had no idea who was reviewing their work. This is standard procedure with academic journals.

I'm not saying that this journal won't comply with the first requirement—passing on the article with the name of the author removed—but the fact that we know who the likely reviewers will be makes the second part problematic.

As I said before, I'm only going by what Elizabeth James has said about the editorial board doing the reviewing themselves. Maybe, she's got it wrong, and they won't be. We just don't know at this stage.

Mark Weiss

Me, I believe in journals as autocracies, but it's probably good for the autocrats to have advisors.

Elizabeth James

Hello. I may indeed have got this all wrong. I only know that I was asked if I would be willing occasionally to read submissions. I have no idea about the role of the other people on the ed. board, nor whether people not listed there have done or will read for the journal.

I obviously don't fully understand academic instruments. By and large in life I am not too keen on secrecy. Anyway I apologise to everyone, especially Robert & Scott, if they read this, for speaking out of turn.

Elizabeth

Jeffrey Side

I don't think the journal will tell us how poetry should be written, but the implication for me is that because Robert is somewhat fixated on poetics as an aesthetic act in itself (or so it seems) then his influence could create a sensibility for the journal that reflects this. I'm not saying this is inevitable, but it could be the case if not checked. This is why I am questioning the peer-review arrangements of the journal, as I understand them from what Elizabeth James has said.

Robert has said, 'Poetics only makes sense if your sense of art, artifice, artifice, is concentrated on the act of making, rather than self-expression' (See his 'The Necessity of Poetics'). Whilst I don't advocate self-expression as something to be desired (at least if taken at face value) nor do I see the necessity for Robert's insistence that poetics can only have significance if it revolves around the "act of making".

The consequences of this approach would be that a particular work's reception becomes secondary to the means of its production; where, in effect, the apologia for the work's production becomes more important than the work itself, or its affects on readers. In such a situation, the apologia becomes the artefact and the poem almost the explanation for it.

Of course such a theory should have a voice in the journal, but not the presiding one.

Jeffrey Side

Elizabeth, you should not blame yourself for allowing us this information. It does, though, reveal something of the attitude of Robert and Scott if they want you a non-academic (no fault in that) to peer-review academic articles. It doesn't seem all that professional to me. No doubt, the rest of the board who are academics will most certainly have been asked by Robert and Scott to peer-review also.

Mark Weiss

All journals are collaborative to a degree, but I don't understand why any journal shouldn't be somewhat singleminded. There are certainly enough other journals around from which to learn about other viewpoints.

The best journal I know of is Origenes, which Jose Lezama Lima edited from 1944 to 1956. One can sit down and read the seven volumes of the reprint cover to cover with unflagging interest. It's an extension of Lezama's personality and poetry. It made a lot of other people angry, and created one of the most powerful movements in Latin American literature and thought. Was that a bad thing?

Mark

Mark Weiss

OK, Jeff, this is beginning to annoy me. Along with the good stuff, I read the most god-awful peer-reviewed stuff all the time, in several fields, things that wouldn't have passed muster in my English comp courses. I also review academic publications, although I'm not an academic. I'm not alone. I occasionally edit friends' dissertations when they want to turn them into books. Some are great, some are semiliterate and not long on rationality, but both kinds earn doctorates. I appreciate that you're proud and protective of your newfound status, but don't make too much of it.

David Latane

Mark's mention of a journal I hadn't read reminds me that this might be a good forum to ask for suggestions. I'm contemplating teaching a graduate course on the history and procedures of the oppositional / avant-garde / oppositional periodical in literature and the visual arts, from the Pre-Raphs' *_Germ_* down to who knows. . . . but certainly including the modernist big littles and on to the Evergreen Review. It should be, so to speak, a Blast. Suggestions are welcome, either to the list or to dlatane@vcu.org

David Latané

Mark Weiss

Off the top of my head, Trobar, Black Mountain, Caterpillar, Set, Origin.

Sean Bonney

you ignored my question Jeffrey. have you read the journal yet?

Colin Herd

Jeffrey,

I think you are completely misreading/representing Robert Sheppard's use of the word 'making'. In my view, a poem's 'making' is a word that takes into account all the things you mentioned: process, construction, reception etc. for how is a poem really 'made' until it is received, and the effect it has on readers etc.

Colin.

Jeffrey Side

Yes, but this journal has set its bar higher, and should be judged accordingly.

[Addressing Mark Weiss saying: 'All journals are collaborative to a degree.']

Jeffrey Side

Mark, I have no status, I'm unemployed.

Yes, it's OK to review academic journals if you are not an academic. I'm talking about peer-reviewing articles for submission to such journals, which is a different thing.

Jeffrey Side

I've read the Scribd abstracts but not the journal itself.

But I don't think reading it will tell us what we want to know as to whether the editorial board do the peer-reviewing or not.

Also, my concerns are more about the way poetry is becoming hedged in by academia in general rather than the particular contents this journal, which is merely another symptom of such.

[Addressing Sean Bonney's question: 'you ignored my question Jeffrey. have you read the journal yet?']

Sean Bonney

Poetry is not getting 'hedged in' by academia. Academic interest reflects the liveliness of the scene in general.

Mark Weiss

I share your concern. In the US it's a done deal. But the journals aren't a part of the problem. There have been journals of academic research and criticism for a long time, and their impact on the making of poetry or its reception has been limited and transitory.

[Addressing Jeffrey side saying: 'Also, my concerns are more about the way poetry is becoming hedged in by academia in general rather than the particular contents this journal, which is merely another symptom of such.']

Jeffrey Side

Colin, that may be a natural consequence of making a poem in general, but Robert seems to be veering in favour of the actual formulation of the work—the actual "prosaic" aspect of piecing it altogether—as important in itself, or equal to the finished product.

I came across this article by Johan De Witt, which is also critical of Robert's poetics, but from other perspectives.

<http://www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/1/Johan%20De%20Wit,%20'A%20Response%20to%20Robert%20Sheppard'.htm>

Sean Bonney

No Jeffrey. You've also been making all kinds of insinuations about how its going to be some kind of prescriptive journal. To justify these claims you'd need to actually read the thing, and give us some concrete examples.

Its really not very clever, to attack something so vehemently when you don't even have the courtesy to read it first.

Jeffrey Side

It's too early to say this yet on the basis of what I've seen in issue 1.

[Addressing Sean Bonney saying 'Poetry is not getting 'hedged in' by academia. Academic interest reflects the liveliness of the scene in general.']

Jeffrey Side

Yes, but Britain is a tiny island compared to the US, and things tend to get centralised more here--including poetry. So it only takes a few journals to formulate poetic taste.

[Addressing Mark Weiss saying: 'I share your concern. In the US it's a done deal. But the journals aren't a part of the problem. There have been journals of academic research and criticism for a long time, and their impact on the making of poetry or its reception has been limited and transitory.']

Jeffrey Side

My concerns, as I said, are more to do with the general trend towards the academisation of poetry than the individual articles and reviews in issue 1 of the journal, which have no bearing on my concerns, which are broader in scope, and which I see this journal as exacerbating.

Another concern, which has not been sorted out is the sanctity of the peer-review process with regard to the journal. Elizabeth has suggested that the editorial board will do the reviewing. This is not a good idea. Geraldine, thinks I am being nasty by mentioning this, but she has her own reasons for saying this, which are understandable. I am trying to be as objective as I can in this instance. If my concerns (which I'm surprised most here think are invalid) are allayed I will withdraw from this discussion.

[Addressing Sean Bonney saying: 'No Jeffrey. You've also been making all kinds of insinuations about how its going to be some kind of prescriptive journal.']

Sean Bonney

And I'm quite curious as to why you think the publication of one academic journal will lead to the 'academisation' of poetry. There are plenty of activities taking place outside of the university. Also, your claim that an interest in poetry within the universities will lead to a sapping of its vitality is, to say the least, doubtful.

I haven't addressed your points about peer reviewing, its true. Thats because I'm concerned the other things you're saying. And I repeat, have the decency to read the journal before you put the boot in.

mIEKAL aND

Sean, normally I find myself agreeing with your comments but this one has me scratching my head. I'll give you an example that has perplexed my community of practitioners seemingly forever. Visual Poetry has an extremely vibrant & endless interesting field of production, with work by hundreds of artist going back 50 years, yet there has been an almost complete hands off from academia, except for the occasional one off. Perhaps yr speaking to the specific scene yr a part of & I'm missing the point.

~mIEKAL

Kit Fryatt

Independent scholars with a reputation in their field peer-review for academic journals, so you don't have to be affiliated to an institution to qualify. A poet with interests and publications in the appropriate areas would to my mind be a highly qualified peer-reviewer of an article on poetics.

As to the editorial board / peer reviewers thing, surely what matters is that on the level of individual reports readers are anonymised, not that the editorial board stands aloof from all reviewing. I know if I was editing a journal such as this one I would not want to exclude the massed expertise represented by this editorial board from EVER reviewing for the journal, nor does there seem any reason to. As someone who might be interested in submitting to the journal, I don't see how its reputation is at all compromised by my knowledge that my article might be read by one of the editorial board -- equally, it might be read by someone quite external -- as long as the report is anonymous I'd have no way of knowing. Well, not for sure, anyway. (I don't think I've ever had anything published without knowing pretty much who reviewed it, or being able to find out with two phone calls and an email or three -- the whole thing is not so much sanctified as a thoroughly leaky kettle.)

Sean Bonney

Hi mIEKAL // what I was trying get at was what I understood to be Jeff's claim that academic commentary on poetry would necessarily limit it. When I said it 'reflects the liveliness of the scene' I meant that academic interest comes about because there's a range of practices (outside the university) that academics are interested to write about, and so rather than academic writing being prescriptive, its hopefully a commentary on whats already happening.

I completely take your point about visual poetry tho: a criminally marginalised area. absolutely.

Sean

Jeffrey Side

What difference would it make to read the journal? My concern is broader than any particular journal. The journal is just symptomatic of the problem. I'd be just as concerned if it were a Cambridge journal.

[Addressing Sean Bonney saying: 'And I'm quite curious as to why you think the publication of one academic journal will lead to the 'academisation' of poetry.']

Sean Bonney

You've been talking about a specific journal, and making several attacks based on unfounded assumptions. I'd have thought it was fairly obvious you should only attack things when you know what you're talking about. Which, I'm sorry to say, it looks like you don't.

That's all I've got to say on the matter. See ya.

Jeffrey Side

MIEKAL, this is a valid point. Although, I don't understand visual poetry and have never really been able to get into it, it has a respectable past, and yes, academia has ignored it to a large extent. This is precisely my concern, that once academia decides what's legitimate nothing else gets attention. This particular journal will no doubt have its own criteria for what should be valued and what shouldn't. Geraldine is ok about this because the editors are her friends, so her work will be seen as valuable.

[Addressing mIEKAL saying: 'Sean, normally I find myself agreeing with your comments but this one has me scratching my head. I'll give you an example that has perplexed my community of practitioners seemingly forever. Visual Poetry has an extremely vibrant & endless interesting field of production, with work by hundreds of artists going back 50 years, yet there has been an almost complete hands off from academia, except for the occasional one off. Perhaps yr speaking to the specific scene yr a part of & I'm missing the point.']

Jeffrey Side

Kit, the question is only partly to do with the editorial board doing the reviewing, the other point is that they are not anonymous. This lack of anonymity would inhibit people from submitting if they had had sour dealings with one of the board in the past. In such a case, that person would not know if their article was being reviewed by that particular board member or not. Not a very comforting state of affairs.

I mention this aspect, not because it applies to me (if anyone is thinking that), the editors on the board of this journal should not have anything against me from past dealings with them (they may now, but that is another matter). I would obviously not have an article accepted by the journal, now, for speaking out on this matter.

Jimmy Cummins

I think these are the kind of unfounded negative statements directed at the editors and the board that Sean is talking about. Why do just assume that the board, anonymous or not, would not accept an article from you just because you voiced some concerns? I would think that the editors and the board are adult enough not to hold such a meaningless grudge.

Once you venture into these pointless personal comments all your other concerns and your argument becomes tainted and it is hard to have a concrete discussion on the issues you are raising.

Of the few of the board that I have met and know it seems unlikely that they have the time or the inclination to be concerned about you raising these issues. and some may well share some of your concerns about academicisation.

My copy arrived the other day and I look forward to finding the time to read it all. But from a first glance i am delighted to see that the "Irish" in the title is not just tagged on. In the first issue, at least, the journal seems to be giving over space to Irish poetics. Not just in the essay on Maggie O'Sullivan's work but also in the editorial, which is a thoughtful and concise over view for anyone who is coming across this sort of poetics for the first time.

best
Jimmy

[Addressing Jeffrey Side saying 'I would obviously not have an article accepted by the journal, now, for speaking out on this matter.']

Tim Allen

I don't really want to prolong this thread Sean - although I think it is good that the subject in general has been aired, the focus on the 'journal' itself and what it might or might not do has become bogged down and gotten unnecessarily personal. My concern, like Mark's I think, is with the wider issues that it is a part of.

I don't think your comment below is true. From where I was sat it looked as though the scene was dying until 'academic interest' helped save it. This could be disputed, I know, especially because of the strength of character and excellence of the work of a handful of highly individual poets, all outside of academia, Harwood, Raworth, O'Sullivan, Monk and Halsey etc, but I would still argue that closer to the ground (or underground) the Brit avant scene had become more and more isolated and alone. It wasn't just the entry into the academy of course, there were other revitalising factors, the internet for one.

Tim A.

Jeffrey Side

Jimmy, the board may be impartial towards me, but I can't see Robert passing any article by me to them. I would have to (now I know who they are) submit directly to them, bypassing Robert.

Sean Bonney

I dunno, Tim, things are pretty lively where I'm sitting. I wouldn't say its exactly been 'saved' by academic interest, but one of the reasons I've found myself in the unlikely position of defending academia is because

there's been an influx of people in their early twenties (in London, Brighton, Manchester, to list the places I know of) who are putting on readings, publishing little magazines etc., with the effect that the scene is probably more active, vital and interesting than it has been for years. All of this is taking place outside the university - and quite deliberately so - but at the same time, most of them came across avant/innovative/radical/whatever-you-wanna-call-it poetry on university courses.

Tim Allen

Yes Sean, I know what you are talking about and you are right - but that is NOW, I was being retrospective. The way this thing pans out in the future should be interesting. I would love to be wrong in my concerns.... we shall see.

Cheers
Tim

Sean Bonney

gah, and Cork as well, should be in that list (sorry, I'm exhausted today. was screaming about fascism outside the BBC all day yesterday). great stuff going on over there too.

I think things are well exciting right now.

there's also this

cleavesjournal.wordpress.com

looks like its gonna be pretty good

Ian Davidson

"I completely take your point about visual poetry tho: a criminally marginalised area. absolutely. Sean"

Sean and Miekal

Without a glimmer of self promotion there's a whole chapter on visual poetry in my recent book Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry. And there have been a couple of pretty high profile exhibitions in london, and one in glasgow I think?

There are some more specialist books about by Joanna Drucker which are pretty good.

But I do agree, it does get marginalised, and endless primary school teachers getting children to write poems in the shape of a christmas tree doesn't help. it's nearly that time of year again.

Do you want to say anything about your visual practice Sean? Or the visual nature of your poems?

Ian

cris cheek

my colleague here Cathy Wagner has, for the past 2 summers, taught a course on Visual Poetry for summer semester in London

Bill Howe teaches Visual Poetry a lot here . . . as i often do too. It's just part of our overall mix.

but that's beer i know

just wanting to echo the interest

as is so far

xx

cc

cris cheek

while i'm at it

i am generally more suspicious of poets whose work does not consider fully the visual and sonic and semantic aspects as integrated

xx

cris

Peter Hughes

I think this is an excellent point cris.

X
Peter

mIEKAL aND

Ian—Yr to be lauded for taking a stab at writing about visual poetry, I would love to read it sometime (or better yet make it accessible to the SPIDERTANGLE mailing list, which has several hundred vispoets listening in).

As far as I know there are no academic magazines devoted to vispo (tho Visible Language did a number of special issues) or for that matter there are only a couple folks I know that teach an occasional class in vispo. Compare that to the reception that language & post language writing has in US universities. Part of the issue as I see it is the the literary folks don't think it's poetry & the art folks don't think it's art. As far as I can tell visual poetry's best reception has been in the new media departments where it's seen as an antecedent to interactive media arts.

I mean after all, how many universities in the UK are teaching Cobbing?

~mIEKAL

Mairéad Byrne

I have developed courses in Visual Poetry and in Sound Poetry at Rhode Island School of Design (where Visible Language was once based I believe).

These courses are part of the curriculum and very important to some of the 15-75 students a year who take them. Digital Media departments may make a difference in this field; Brown University's Electronic Writing program (where John Cayley is based) is also very fertile.

m

Sean Bonney

mIEKAL - I know of a couple of phds being done on Cobbing at the moment, and he gets taught on the courses run by Tim Atkins, Jeff Hilson and Dell Olsen, at least. As Robert and Scott both came through Writers Forum, I'd say there's a fairly good chance he'll be in the British & Irish Journal at some point (hell, I've got a half-written piece on him somewhere on my hard-drive, maybe I'll fix it up . . .). But from what I can tell, the situation for any interesting/adventurous work within academia is not that great over here, and only taught in certain isolated pockets. Its why I think the journal is a good thing.

Sean

Sean Bonney

“Do you want to say anything about your visual practice Sean? Or the visual nature of your poems? -Ian”

Ian, yeh. Don't really know what to say. Tend to agree with cris abt the visual/sonic/semantic aspects as integrated. I did a lot of work with typewriters a couple of years ago / just for a laugh, at first, but after working with computers for years, I got really excited about the speed, tactility and levels of concentration the old machinery demanded of me. I've also used photography quite a lot in my last two books, not at all as illustration, but as a (hopefully) fully integrated element of the whole.

I don't see distinctions between the different things I do - it moves from straightforward political prose, thru to fairly fractured writing through to more visual/collaged stuff and into actual paintings. I'm an internationalist, yeh, so I'm into ignoring the borders between all those different places. tho, as a political activist, I'm also into picket lines and barricades ;)

Sean

Chris Beckett

As a point of information on Cobbing matters, I have been cataloguing Cobbing's papers the British Library for much of this past year, and they should be available to all by the new year, if not before, with a detailed on-line catalogue. Needless to say, a rich resource (including letters from miEKAL aND!). I'll keep the list posted on developments.

cris cheek

i have a chunky article on Bob for the journal . . .

there's a chunk in my PhD on his work as well . . . alongside Brian Catling, Aaron Williamson, Allen Fisher, Rob Holloway, Maggie O'Sullivan and others
O

although they are all folded into other arguments about the influence of discourses around collaboration and performance on British poetry in between 1994-2004 ;-)

xx

cc

miEKAL aND

Why only back to 1994? Because you wanted to have a more manageable chunk of time to talk about, or something about Bob's approach changed in those years.

cris cheek

the timeframe is not about Bob . . it was the whole thesis . . . and yes, it was partly to have a tight focus, partly to be able to situate what occurred in and around Performance Writing at Dartington and partly because of the year zero for internet communities ;-)

so . . . discourse networks

as is

so far

xx

cc

Robert Hampson

We have regularly taught Visual Poetry as part of our MA programme, and I have supervised a couple of MA theses on Cobbing.

Robert

John Hall

And the visual and material qualities of writing were from the outset part of the conception of 'performance writing' as it has been developed, taught and researched at Dartington, as implied by cris. This is (deliberately) not the same as identifying a specific genre of poetry as 'visual poetry', though. And isn't there a line of visual writing that aims at a meditational quiet (I was about to say 'silence') and another that celebrates its association with performances that are at least sonic (and possibly very loud) if not also gestural? An issue for the academies may be that the reading methods that came to define 'English Literature' were not well equipped for dealing with anything other than texts for which the white page is an ideal or metaphysical space.

John

cris cheek

that's a terrific question John. you're quite right to point up the history of Performance Writing in this and many other respects

i have no doubt that as Robert says this stuff is being circulated strongly in a number of situations . . . many of those emanating in one way or another from the spheres of influence and productive tensions between Cobbing and dsh and Mr Finlay

with other important figures in the UK such as Tom Edmonds, Tom Phillips, Ken Cox, Paula Claire, Lily Greenham and John Furnival . . . as the older egeration

much of what has paid any attention to the work of these poets shows its influences in other way

poetry does certainly from time to time pose serious challenges to conventions of reading

that's one of its most extraordinary and valuable assets as an art form, for me at least

and i agree about a slight reticence with respect of silence

i often refer rather blandly to Christopher Middleton's idea of the endophonic and the exophonic voice (the former does not leave the body as sound waves, the latter does)

so the interplays between melody and rhythm and noise are pertinent here too . . . both "on" and "off" the page

a page

a screen

xx

cc

Tim Allen

John,

And what are seen and described as the visual, sculptural or design aspects of so much non-mainstream poetry, remain important elements in what we would not necessarily separate off as 'visual poetry'.

Deficiencies of sonic and visual dimensions in so much mainstream poetry are one of the principle reasons for it coming across to a lot of us as 'dull'.

Tim
