Eye Msc Jon cn 2

Anna Barham

Exhibition dates 29 September – 29 October 2012

> Performance event Sunday 14 October 2 —6pm

Julika Gittner

**Heather Phillipson** 

with work by Bob Cobbing

Curated by Bridget Crone



Flat Time House 210 Bellenden Road London SE15 4BW

Open Thursday to Sunday 12-6pm

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with phonetics as a starting point, addressing the abstraction of language through the physicality of sound itself. Alliteration, tonal patterning, feedback, distortion, stretched and reshaped vocalizations are explored through work by London based artists Anna Barham, Julika Gittner and Heather Phillipson, alongside a selection of the poet, Bob Cobbing's work.



The John Latham Foundation

The Henry Moore Foundation



#### Thanks

Claire Lousie Staunton (Director / Curator, Flat Time House), the exhibiting artists, Jennifer Pike, William Cobbing, Robert Sheppard, Lawrence Upton, Steven Ball, John Hill, Samuel Nightingale, Rowing Projects.

Heather Phillipson fabrication: Jake Moulson Text © the Author, images © the individual Artists or the Artist's Estate.

Designed by Modern Activity Set in Akzidenz Grotesk Print by Intype Libra

Bridget Crone, 2012

It's all about images. And words. Words as forms. sounds and shapes. Bodily activity. Or 'muscular activity', as, the poet, Bob Cobbing said, 'You do it with the whole of you', he said. '...voice, lungs, limbs.' Images and words are active... They act on us, make demands of us as their individual peculiarities cause our tongues to twist and turn. They echo into the space of the gallery, calling out to be seen and heard. They want a lot from us; words and images. Their form and shape is meaty material for our actions. What are your demands? We ask and respond in one bodily movement. We meet in the doing. Their demand for action is met by the activity of our response in forming sonic shapes and visual forms, or simply feeling the words and images that we encounter... 'Bodies join in song and movement,' Cobbing wrote in, Music For Dancing (1972). And, I would add that 'bodies join words and images in song and movement' because there is a sense today that not only do we give form to words and images through the movements of our bodies but that these very words or images also exist without and despite our efforts. We see this in Julika Gittner's work, for example, in the way in which governmental texts become sonic material that both instructs a particular set of actions and at the same time is simply abstract, sonic stuff that surrounds us. There is a strong immersive sense in the work that all three artists, Anna Barham, Julika Gittner and Heather Phillipson have produced for the exhibition so that in entering the gallery, we immediately step into the image or is that sound, or perhaps the image has been given a sonic form or sound a shape?

We begin with the conjunction of the eye and ear that is evident in the exhibition title, *EYE MUSIC FOR DANCING* and suggested by the allusion to seeing on the one hand, and music and dance, on the other. What immediately attracted me to the work of Bob Cobbing was the manner in which the eye and ear are co-joined in his concrete, visual (or sonic) poetry. And similarly, in the work of Barham, Gittner and Phillipson, each in a different manner, there is a strong sense of combination and perhaps *collapse* between the information that is seen

and known, and that which is sensed. Additionally, there is in all four artists' work, a concern with live performance as the meeting of bodies, images and sonic forms. And there is a sense of a continuum between the (still) notation or display of a work and its live incarnation so that one often folds into another or is reprocessed or recycled into another form and a blurred boundary is created between performance. notation and experience. In this way, the approach to including Cobbing's work within the exhibition does not concern the display and representation of his life and work, nor does it broach the questions or actions of archiving, Instead, I have been concerned to present the Cobbing material as a proposition for practice today alongside three equally valuable proposals. This is not about building a relationship between now and then or between the vounger women artists working today and the deceased forefather, but presenting a series of interrelated propositions regarding questions of eye and ear, sonic and visual form. Or as the poet Robert Sheppard so succinctly put it, questions of: '(S)hape as a new script for a fresh phonetics, momently discoverable.'1

The title of the exhibition draws both upon Cobbing's phrase, *music for dancing*, as well as Dom Silvester Houédard's statement distinguishing between the eye and the ear equivalents in his (Cobbing's) work. As Cobbing himself remarked, Houédard

...was the first to distinguish not only between ear verse and eye verse, but between ear verse with an eye equivalent, eye verse with an ear equivalent and eyear or 'oreil' in which the two aspects are equally important or so closely interwoven as to be almost inseparable.<sup>2</sup>

Cobbing's work, Are your children safe in the sea (1960-98) is an example of this approach in which there are multiple forms of the work – an early triptych version is included in the exhibition – some pertaining more easily to being read out loud and some to being enjoyed visually in a manner that is perhaps more abstracted and in which the shape or form of the words may not be distinguishable as words but, instead, convey a sensation. And in the later works,

such as the *Processual* series, we see a great example of what Houedard called, evear - the expression of the sonic form via visual means and (visual via sonic). These photocopy works produce information not only to be read but also to be sensed visually. The Processual series (1982-87) were the first works that Cobbing made on the photocopier after he made the transition from the Gestetner duplicator that he had used previously. In these works there is much visual layering produced through repeated passing through the copier, a process that finds its equivalent in Cobbing's use of the tape recorder. Cobbing's approach to process is complex: it is both a reworking and experimentation through differing sonic or visual forms and also a machinic process. For example, Cobbing notes that Are your children safe in the sea began as 'a tightly knit sound poem depending very largely on repetition and punctuation, but was not otherwise particularly visual.<sup>3</sup> However, he continued to rework and republish this piece until 1998, so that it 'became more a visual poem than a sound poem, though all the visual version were based on the same original typed text.' The way in which publication is both a process and a performance (in the sense of making public) is important to understanding Cobbing's work, so that while the production of words or sound is a 'muscular activity' in terms of vocal production, so too is the process of working with the duplicator or photocopier a kind of dance for Cobbing and an integral part of his work.

Processes of repetition, reiteration, re-making, re-processing are inherent to Barham, Gittner and Phillipson's work in *EYE MUSIC FOR DANCING*. Entering the gallery, we are immediately immersed and, as we move through the gallery space, it is as if we are being immersed further and further into a giant body-world. We enter through Barham's flickering image-field, then move on to Gittner's soft forms that demand that we undertake various actions, and finally to the belly of the beast – Phillipson's *Catastrophicephaleconomy* (2012) in which we are fully immersed in a nightmarish formulation of the inside of our own head. Yet behind and beneath this all-embracing bodily-ness, there is a strong sense of structure and rhythm; sound processes, rhythmic structures both visual and sonic, and pieces

of pre-existing sonic or visual material, all are put to use in various ways in each of the artists' work. But as this sense of an accelerated immersion through the works suggests, this is not an exercise in interactivity or voluntary participation. Oh no. *Catastrophicephaleconomy*, for example, crescendos with a cacophony of voices – layered, doubled and repeating. A child's voice is heard:

LISTEN TO IT. LISTEN TO IT. LISTEN TO THAT. YOU CAN'T COME IN. YOU CAN'T COME IN.

And doubled. Voices chant.

OM. OM. YOU CAN'T COME IN. YOU CAN'T COME IN. CLOSED DOORS. BOLTED DOORS. WOODEN DOORS. YOU CAN'T COME IN.

Is this a nightmare? I asked myself. Is this some kind of replaying of my own childhood dreams? Is this horror or is it ballet, I think as images dance and leap around me. I feel as if have I have completely entered into the image-world of Phillipson's video and at the same time, I feel as if those images have entered inside of me. Porous materials.

There is a careful interweaving of text, image and voice in Heather Phillipson's trio of works Zero-Point Garbage Matte (2012), Torso Portions (2012) and Catastrophicephaleconomy. Rolling cuts, riffs on language, familiar and found images. Yet at the same time, there is always a sense of something - image or sonic material - escaping control. This sense of containment, immersion and mutability is evinced by the manner in which Phillipson's works are situated within Flat Time House. Like a sprawling body-form, the works are connected throughout the House by a series of veins and arteries conducting the electrical energy by which they are sustained and given life. And at the same time, the giant body-form of the work is also contained (and the images' movements momentarily stilled) by the structure proposed by the house itself; Latham conceived of his house as a body, so that we first encounter the face, then the mind, the brain, hand and the body-event, thus moving from the

cerebral to bodily activity. Phillipson's work interacts with this pre-existing structure as a kind of given in the same manner that she approaches the use of pre-existing image or sound material, familiar words or phrases so that we move from head (*Zero-Point Garbage Matt*), to body-event (*Torso Portions*) and to the hand (*Catastrophicephaleconomy*), which Phillipson reinvents as a whole bodily brain-mind-body combination. She states:

The works map out the brain-gut interchange. The building becomes a nervous system, composed of wiring, audiovisual noise and hard-to-reach islands. We are inner-space visitors, she adds. We are visitors seduced along in-roads into the body-mind's canals where The videos are organs that fidget and limbs that scratch their own surfaces, trying to figure out their limits <sup>5</sup>

Phillipson's personification of her videos as 'organs that fidget and scratch' while 'trying to figure out their limits' neatly expresses the sense of the inherent capacity of images, sounds and words within the work. Here sonic and visual materials exist on their own terms, without us, so that circulating in orbit, we meet; we find them or, perhaps, they find us. It is in this way, that the anagrams in Anna Barham's bookwork, Return to Leptis Magna (2010) can be understood as building blocks. A wealth of potentiality is in the shape and the form of the letters, and they combine to produce both sound and image as one: sound as a shape and form both visual and physical, image as shape and form both visual and physical. Barham's reference to the ancient Roman city of Leptis Magna in Return to Leptis Magna and its sequel, Volume II (which is read aloud), points us towards the elasticity and vitality of language in exchange, but most importantly to the idea that words are made up of shapes and concrete forms that can themselves be moved, situated and re-situated in endless reconfiguration.6 And so, Leptis Magna suggests an understanding of letterforms as pre-existing, ancient concrete (or stone) forms that tolerate human activity and our return is the return to a fertile site for the exchange and shifting of these forms in everchanging combination. There is therefore something

that invites and refutes human engagement here; a form that exists despite our presence but at the same time, there is also something mutable in the exchange between the material body and the stone form. We get a sense of this in the demands that sounding the anagrams in *Volume II*, for example make of the reader's body in the twisting of the tongue into difficult shapes and alliterations.

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The movement of the body in relation to the appearance of shape or form is also explored in the work. Slick Flection (2009/12), which is constructed from the annotation of a tap dance (f-lap, shuffle, ballchange, step, hop): the patterning of instructions from the dance structure are reordered, interspersed and remade through the interjection of new syllables so that the result is at time new longer words and at others nonsensical sounds. Slick Flection was initially presented as a live work that combined reading with the rhythmic accompaniment of a tap dancer dancing in the steady beam of a projector, and it has been through a series of rewritings and re-performances to be presented in EYE MUSIC FOR DANCING as something that more resembles the work of expanded cinema such as Malcolm Le Grice's Horror Film I (1971) in which the image is literally made by the interaction of the performer's body with the projector. Le Grice uses multiple analogue projectors in *Horror* Film to create shadows as his own body meets the throw of the projector, however in *Slick Flection*, it is the body of the viewer that enters into the beam of digital light. And the material of film is swapped for a mathematical sequencing and patterning of light. Entering into the beam of light, our shadow is fixed to the wall, silhouetted in the flickering circle of white light emitted by the projector. We enter the image with the expectations of a performer and find ourselves immersed in the rhythms of light, the twisting of tongue (not our own) and the rhythmic tapping (of feet, not our own). What is our role here? Is this embodiment or disembodiment?

SLICKED, SLICKED, A LICKED STEP, LET STEP, STEP. The voice intones, seemingly suggesting instruction to the tap dancer whose feet we hear, tap tap tapping.

ELLIPSE. LIGHT. RESLICKING. STILL IT AT SLICK ANGLES...

the voice suggests sometime later. And it now seems to be an instruction to the light whose rhythmic flickering similarly surrounds us. In the movement from the mostly analogue plasticity (or materiality) of the live performance to the immateriality of the digital image along with systems and structures, Barham activates a delicate question of the boundaries between the two. Her use of structures and structuring in relation to both digital coding and the ordering systems of language inherently points to mathematics and to contemporary philosophy's fascination with the idea of mathematics as a means to describe ontology (or being).

Search Find Grasp Hold Position Rest

are but of few of the instructions that the early motion studies pioneer. Frank Gilbreth translated into his Therbligs code, a system by which 17 hand movements were assigned a colour and a symbol along with the standard time for completion. Gilbreth's work contributed to the study of human behaviour initially in an effort to increase worker efficiency, and later in relation to the development of other behavioural sciences such as behavioural economics. Like the coding inherent in the ordering systems that Barham activates around the structuring of language, Therbligs code melds (human) body and symbol (or language) into one. In her work, SBWA (Sector Based Work Academy) - Aspire, Achieve, Sustain (2012), Julika Gittner addresses the operation of the code as a bodily language or a learnt behaviour. Based on her research into the UK Government's Welfare to Work programmes, SBWA accentuates the soft material of

bodies in relation to governmental directives. ASPIRE ACHIEVE SUSTAIN is the 'core vision' around which the private training provider Seetec has structured its compulsory work program. And this tripartite - ASPIRE, ACHIEVE, SUSTAIN - structures the sound pieces which in turn instruct the viewer to perform basic work movements relating to four of the main service sector training courses Seetec provides (hospitality, cleaning, construction, logistics). SBWA provides us with a series of colour-coded options, which are also matched with the four training sectors. Red. Yellow, Blue, Aspire, Achieve, Sustain, Hospitality, Cleaning. Construction. Logistics The concept of choice diminishes here in the systemisation of bodily action and response so that we are governed on a bodily level in a reactivation of Gilbreth's original code: affective colours for effective actions. The sense of the systematic completeness of SBWA as instruction and response is further heightened by its situation within Flat Time House: each of the sculptural forms enacts one of the training sectors and is placed in accordance to that sector so that hospitality looks into the kitchen. construction to the garden and logistics to the office. In this way, Latham's conceptualisation of the House is reconfigured.

Here the body is very literally presented as a soft material in the form of sculptures made from duvets and rubbish, and which contrasts to the instructions imposed by the accompanying sound.

### ASPIRE ACHIEVE SUSTAIN.

It's a three-step programme to achieve productivity as a successful worker. Using the Therbling code as a model, Gittner breaks down the movement sequences into single word instructions, spoken by an on-line dictionary voice.

# SEARCH. FIND. POSITION. TRANSPORT LOADED. REST.

The use of the dictionary voice and indeed the repeated actions that we are directed to undertake has the effect of flattening and standardising both voice and

body: voice is de-personalised and the soft, white duvet-forms will, we imagine, become flatter, dirtier and perhaps more lifeless in the manner of, perhaps... a well-used duvet. SBWA demands our activity but our responding actions are directed by an increasingly demonic and demanding voice as sound is sampled and layered so that the sequence of instruction overwhelms us in its rhythmic noise. Here the individual meanings of the words are replaced by a learnt bodily action so that any separation between body and text is completely collapsed. As Gittner states:

I am interested in the fact that the meaning or individual experience of 'work' is completely eliminated by this form of abstracted/coded description through language. What happens in repeating these descriptions at working speed is that the rhythm and sound of the code comes to the foreground and an intuitive instruction takes over from the intellectual understanding of the words.<sup>7</sup>

Sound was of course an important aspect of Cobbing's work and while EYE MUSIC FOR DANCING focuses on presenting what could be best termed the eye versions of his work, there is in the House itself an accumulation of sound from Barham, Gittner and Phillipson's work.

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE YOU ACQUAINTED WITH THE MOST INTIMATE PARTS OF MY HEAD. ...THE TREES LEAVES SEEM SQUEEZED. ...LISTEN TO THAT. LISTEN TO IT. YOU CAN'T COME IN. YOU CAN'T COME IN. 8

This sound is embodied and like the image it immerses us, it envelopes us in its folds, its directives.

ASPIRE. ACHIEVE. SUSTAIN.9

WHAT? CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT SHIT? 10

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It overloads us with information and feeling, and it accumulates as *noise*: free-ranging affective information is transmitted as sensation in this work.

I WANT TO BE THE PIANO. BE THE PIANO. (...) CLOSED DOORS. LOCKED DOORS. YOU CAN'T COME IN.<sup>11</sup>

Here are bodies, words and images in song and movement.

SLICKED SLICKED A LICKED STEP LET STEP STEP IT A LICK ITALIC STEP FIRST FLICK. (...) TIGHT TO INK. TIGHT TO STEP PART STEP STEP.<sup>12</sup>

And work.

## ASPIRE ACHIEVE SUSTAIN.

In the book, Changing Forms in English Visual Poetry – the Influence of Tools and Machines (1987), Cobbing compiled a compendium of the processes that he used, organising works under typologies of process ranging from 'Typewriter' to 'Mimeo Misuse' and to 'Press on Lettering and Other Means' (including my favourite: 'press on lipstick applied by lips.')<sup>13</sup> While these typologies of process seemingly focus on machinic actions, attention to rhythm is not at all absent but is inherent in all movement, Cobbing suggests. And his words seem an appropriate place for us to end:

Visual Poetry is the plan, Sound poetry the impulse, Visual poetry the score, Sound poetry your actual music for dancing.<sup>14</sup>

- 1 Robert Sheppard, 'Bob Cobbing: Sightings and Soundings' in Jacket magazine, no. 9
- 2 Dom Silvester Houédard writing in Extra Verse, No. 17, 1966 quoted by Bob Cobbing in 'An Approach to Notation' in Peter Mayer, ed. Bob Cobbing and Writers Forum, London, Writers Forum, 1974/2010.
- 3 Cobbing, 'An Approach to Notation'
- l ibid
- 5 Heather Phillipson, Artist's Statement, August 2012
- 6 Leptis Magna, located in present day Khoms, Libya, was a port of great importance to the Roman Empire before its decline in the Third Century. As a major trading outpost, it was a site of culture and of exchange. And more recently, Leptis Magna has boasted spectacular ruins some of which were taken to England in the nineteenth century and installed in the grounds of Fort Belevedere in what is now Windsor Great Park.
- 7 Email correspondence, August 2012
- 8 Heather Phillipson, Catastrophicephaleconomy, 2012
- 9 Julika Gitter, SBWA, 2012
- 10 Heather Phillipson, Zero-Point Garbage Matte, 2012
- 11 Heather Phillipson, Catastrophicephaleconomy, 2012
- 12 Anna Barham, Slick Flection, 2009/12
- 13 Cobbing, Changing Forms in English Visual Poetry the Influence of Tools and Machines, London, Writers Forum, 1987
- 14 ibid

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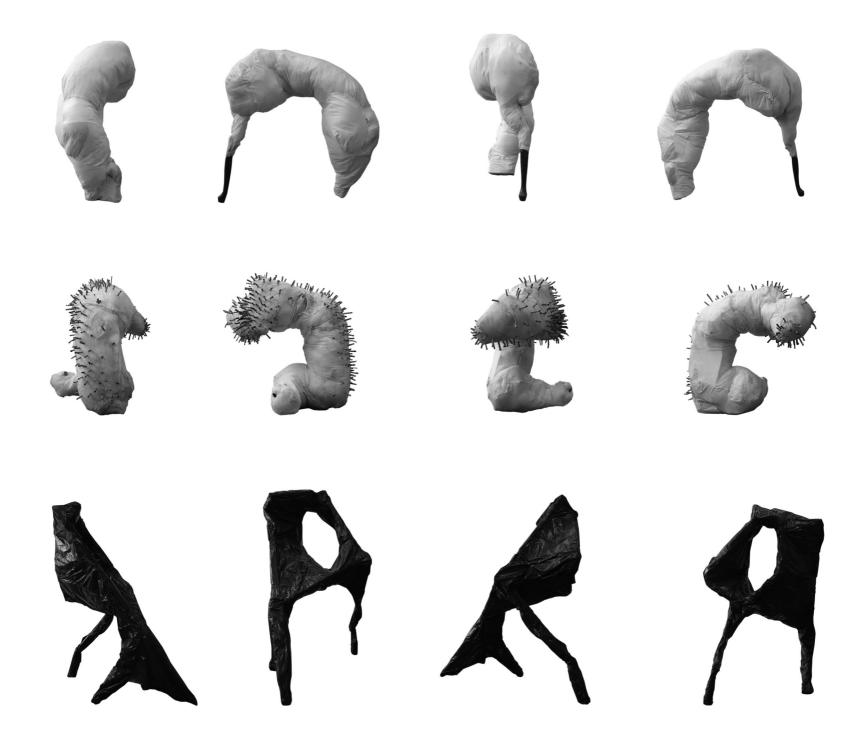
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Anna Barham is an artist based in London and exhibiting internationally. Her work will be shown in a solo presentation at Frieze Art Fair (with Arcade), and in Revolver Part II at Matt's Gallery during October, and her Art on the Underground commission is installed at White City Station until mid-2013. Past exhibitions include solo shows at International Project Space, Birmingham, and with Bea McMahon at CCA Glasgow. Group exhibitions include those at the ICA, Tate Modern and Drawing Room, London and MHKA. Antwerp.

Bob Cobbing (1920-2002) was a prolific poet, publisher and cultural organiser. In the early 1950s, Cobbing set up a series of experimental arts groups in Hendon, and he later went on to become the manager of the infamous Better Books bookshop in Charing Cross Road where he was instrumental in setting up the London Film-Makers Coop. Cobbing established the Writers Forum in 1963 – publishing was an integral part of Cobbing's practice as a poet as was the live performance of his work. His ABC in Sound (previously published as Sound Poems in 1964) cemented his reputation to a broader public when he was invited to record a 20 minute version at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop for broadcast (1966).

Julika Gittner is an artist and architect. Her work has been exhibited across the UK as well as internationally, including at Embassy Gallery, Edinburgh; Whitechapel Gallery, London and the Arnolfini, Bristol. She has held solo shows or performances at Banner Repeater, London; DADA Haus, Zürich and Paradise Row, London. Julika's curatorial collaborations as part of Scare in the Community include the recent exhibition, Westworld, at xero,kline,coma, London and All that Glitters is NOT Institution, Whitechapel Gallery, London.

Heather Phillipson is a London-based artist working with video, sound, text and live events. In 2012, her installations and live performances have been shown in exhibitions including Space Release, CIRCA, Newcastle: the London Open, Whitechapel Gallery, London: Switch, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. Newcastle, and Performance as Publishing, Kunsthalle Basel, In 2011, Heather participated in Pool: An Observer's Guide to the Garden Marathon, Serpentine Gallery, and A Dving Artist, ICA. London, Heather is also an award-winning poet, published by Faber and Faber in the Faber New Poets series. Forthcoming publications include *NOT AN* ESSAY (Heather Phillipson, Penned in the Margins, 2012) and Instant-flex 718 (Heather Phillipson, Bloodaxe, 2013). She is currently participating in the LUX Associate Artists Programme 2011-12.

Bridget Crone is a curator, writer and lecturer based in London. She has an ongoing interest in questions of staging, theatre and time in relation to performance and moving image work. Her book, The Sensible Stage: Staging and the Moving Image — a discussion of staging in relation to time and the event, including an interview with Alain Badiou — is available now through Cornerhouse Books.

Bridget was the Director of Media Art Bath (2006-11), and has curated projects internationally including for The Showroom, ICA and Whitechapel galleries, London, and the lan Potter Museum, Melbourne. Since 2009, she has convened a monthly experimental film and discussion programme at the Arnolfini, Bristol.

Flat Time House FTHo is the former home and studio of artist John Latham (1921-2006). Housing an archive, artist's residency and gallery space, FTHo hosts a contemporary exhibitions, events and education programme.

### Catalogue of works

Anna Barham, *Slick Flection* (2009/12), video, sound, 7 minutes, looped every 10 minutes

Bob Cobbing, *Wan Do Tree*, 1977, black duplicator on card, 29.7 x 21cm, courtesy of the Artist's Estate

Bob Cobbing, from *Variations On An Urban Theme*, 2001, black duplicator print on card, 29.7 x 41.5cm, courtesy of the Artist's Estate

Bob Cobbing, (unidentified), black duplicator print on card, 42 x 29.5cm, courtesy of the Artist's Estate (AIR)

Bob Cobbing, (unidentified), red and brown duplicator print on card, 42 x 29.5cm, courtesy of the Artist's Estate (MAN)

Bob Cobbing, from *Knicker Twists*, 1987, black and red duplicator print on card, 36.5 x 25.5cm, Originally published in *BothBoth*, with Bruce Andrews (London, Writers Forum), Courtesy of the Artist's Estate.

Bob Cobbing, *Are your children safe in the sea?* 1966, triptych, 3 panels of typewritten text on paper mounted on cardboard, 2 panels 24cm x 16.5cm, 1 panel 28.8cm x 24.5cm, Courtesy of the Artist's Estate

Bob Cobbing, *A Movie Book*, 1971, four individual black duplicator prints mounted on a single board, pages taken from the book published by The Writers Forum, London, overall size 58.5 x 48.5cm, courtesy of the Artist's Estate

Bob Cobbing (unidentified), black and white photocopy on card, 29.7 x 21cm, courtesy of the Artist's Estate (Scrunched paper)

Bob Cobbing (unidentified), black and white photocopy on card, 29.7 x 21cm, courtesy of the Artist's Estate (Letters) Bob Cobbing, from *A Processual Double Octave*, 1984 (unidentified, repetition or remaking of the original work by the Artist), 5 black and white photocopies on paper, 42 x 29.7cm, courtesy of the Artist's Estate

Julika Gittner, SBWA (Sector Based Work Academy) – Aspire, Achieve, Sustain, 2012, duvets, chicken wire, wood, rubbish, sound

Heather Phillipson, *Zero-Point Garbage Matte*, 2012, HD video, monitor, headphones, steel viewing platform, steel brackets, paddling pool, cat litter, inflatable cushion, coloured cables, 08:59

Heather Phillipson, *Untitled* (2012), turntable, book, houseplant, coloured wires, energy-saving lightbulb

Heather Phillipson, *Torso Portions*, 2012, HD video, monitor, headphones, breeze blocks, steel, table leg, gloss spray paint, feather cushion, boot, energy-saving lightbulb, expanding foam, KFC cup and straw, cabbage, 02:27

Heather Phillipson, *Catastrophicephaleconomy*, 2012, HD video, monitor, speakers, cardboard, crates, timber, plastic sheeting, beanbags, energy-saving lightbulb, umbrella, 07:52

