Open Library of Humanities

Open Access:

Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

The Open Library of Humanities is an open access non-profit publisher of scholarly articles and monographs.

INTERVIEW

Lawrence Upton (1949–2020) in Conversation with Mark Jackson (June/July 2007)

Mark Jackson

Independent scholar, UK

mark.jacksonmjb@blueyonder.co.uk

In 2007 I conducted an interview with Lawrence Upton, asking him about his work with and views on Bob Cobbing. Here he provides some insight into the processes involved in the creation of the epic pamphlet series *Domestic Ambient Noise*, his relationship with Cobbing and the dispute over the control of the Poetry Society in the 1970s.

Keywords: Lawrence Upton; Bob Cobbing; linguistically innovative poetry; sound poetry; visual poetry

Lawrence Upton was a leading figure in British poetry for over forty years. His oeuvre included lexical, visual and sound poetry and graphic art. He ran the Subvoicive reading series in the 1990s and early 2000s and was a participant in Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum poetry workshop for many years. Following Cobbing's death he co-convened the workshop with Adrian Clarke until an acrimonious split with Clarke and others in 2010.

I interviewed Lawrence in 2007 for a piece of academic work. He indicated he would publish the completed interview but (to my knowledge) never did. Looking back on it now there's a certain frustration I didn't push him on certain matters, for example I can see missed opportunities to ask him about his own (non-collaborative) work. I was motivated by a focused research project (on Bob Cobbing) and at the time failed to see a bigger picture. That said, these words provide a fascinating insight into Lawrence's collaborative and personal relationship with Cobbing, in particular the processes used in their joint visual poetry projects, notably the epic

Domestic Ambient Noise, and the goings-on during the notorious 'poetry wars' at the Poetry Society in the 1970s. There is also some illumination of Lawrence's personality: fastidious, easily-riled, keen to control, yet simultaneously generous, probing, informative and intelligently reflective.

The interview was conducted exclusively electronically although I discovered I have no electronic version of it saved and had to salvage what I could from a few printed pages in the appendix of the aforementioned work. There is some overlap with what remains in hard copy, some of the questions are missing and I fear a small portion of Lawrence's words may have been lost. The version you find below has undergone a minor edit – more of a tidying up: some irrelevancies have been removed, typos corrected and punctuation has been standardised. Somehow it seems fitting that the interview ends with Lawrence's request for more questions, revealing his enjoyment of the discussion as much as his thirst to unveil; perhaps if I had had the energy and commitment he attributes to himself and Cobbing, the interview may well have gone on for years. Notwithstanding all of this, the majority of what you are about to read is verbatim what Lawrence wrote to me thirteen years ago.

Lawrence Upton died in February 2020, aged 70.

4 June 2007

Mark Jackson:

Can you explain the methodology you and Bob practised, for both text production and sound performances, with the Domestic Ambient Noise (*DAN*) series (and its various guises)?

Lawrence Upton:

No.

That is I cannot easily do so. Let us separate out text making and performance making. They are of course related but the methodologies are quite different. There was no one methodology in either sphere employed by either of us, and our approaches

often diverged at all levels, though rarely all at the same time. I am not always aware of what I am doing, of course, but I have found the commentaries of cris cheek and of Robert Sheppard helpful in telling me what it is I am doing.

Now, let me start on the text-making. What you'll know from previous commentaries on *DAN* is that we did not make the works together. Yes, it was a collaboration, quite deeply so, but generally we worked apart, sometimes the 20 miles or so between Cobbing's home in Canonbury in north London and mine in Carshalton to the south; at other times 300 miles or so, when I was in Cornwall. The procedure was for the one to vary the other six times, sometimes more, and for the other to select one of those variations, sometimes more than one, and vary it six or more times.

I should say that not all of the detail is yet documented, although I am hopeful that it will be in a year or two. In the meantime, I am often at sea about the details. The first work was done in 1994 and the last in 2000. It's a long time ago! Presently, much of the material is in storage.

I had last worked with Cobbing in the '70s, when his main medium was the Gestetner ink duplicator. He used the machine not only to print many of the publications of Writers Forum, but also to actually make the visual versions of his poems. He had, by then, abandoned the separate ear and eye versions of his own poems. He didn't actually make available much with that split but, by then, I'm saying he had moved on from the idea. And the majority of the works he made were visually oriented. I go into details of some of this and other areas in the paper I gave at Southampton University in 2005: Bob Cobbing and the Book as Medium.

But what I want to stress is that, by the mid 1990s, the use of the ink duplicator was behind him; it was for both of us. I had followed him into ink duplicating in order to publish. That I went for a Roneo rather than a Gestetner was chance. I wasn't, as I recall, looking to work on visual texts in his style. This would be very early 1970s. I did follow him, once I had worked with him in the workshop and elsewhere, though the Gestetner was more suited to the process than Roneo, and I spent the next however many years, more than a decade, rejecting a great deal of the work that

I produced as being too derivative. *Three Karben Poems* which Writers Forum put out a couple of years ago is among the few pieces visual pieces that I retained from the 1970s.

But when we started working together again in 1994, Cobbing had a photocopier and I had a computer – Bob had one too, but I think he mistrusted it! I was using the damn things all day every day. I did use photocopiers, but I had to go out to do it and some copier owners got quite upset when I tried printing very black copies. I can see their economic objections. Bob could and did work at any hour of the day or night on his copier.

So I brought to the work some knowledge of how he worked and quite a few years of developing my own techniques. I used a lot of computer printer output – dot matrix, ink jet and laser. Where Bob tended to put most things on the photocopy platen, my inclination was to collage them with scissors and paste. He did that, too, of course, but there were differences which are quite clear in the output. I drew. I was more inclined to introduce continuous verbal material, I think, although again I stress that Bob made use of such material. Remember that we both regarded ourselves as visual artists.

Performance of the texts is a more tricky matter to answer. *Domestic Ambient Buoys (Bob Cobbing and Lawrence Upton) in discussion with Alaric Sumner*, which Writers Forum published in 1995, covers a lot of this. It might be useful to start from there, just to avoid duplication.

MJ:
Bob was clearly a significant figure in the community of performers and musicians that he worked within, and in many ways was a catalyst for. What are your comments on Bob as a force in his collaborative work?

LU:
I am not sure how to answer this! I was on the point of saying that people wouldn't have collaborated with him had he not been something of a vital force, but then I thought of some collaborative art I have seen. He was a contradictory or very com-

plex person. On the one hand he followed his instincts and he was, in many ways, quite lonely. On the other hand he was an inveterate collaborator and one happy to be in a crowd. He was instinctively a teacher who knew how to let people learn by their own discoveries while he only offered examples, but he could sometimes be apparently intolerant, or something approaching it, of differing opinions.

There may be some who will take offence at my saying this, and in a week or a month I might want to modify what I have said slightly. It would only be slightly. I have spent quite a bit of time thinking about it already. He and I had a fairly enormous row as a result of which we said very little to each other for many years. When we started speaking to each other again, I said that I couldn't remember what the argument had been about. Bob said he could not either. In my case it wasn't true and I doubt it was for Bob. It did, however, seem to be the best thing to say. You see, I wondered what I was trying to achieve by not speaking to him more than a decade on! And I knew what was to be achieved by not trying any more. It was partly our arguing that had led me to stop attending what is now called the WF Workshop. But when I found myself with more time, after the breakup of a long-term relationship, it was Cobbing's workshop that I went to first. One might see that as conceding something, and it was the stupidity of such antagonistic thinking which made me receptive to behaving as a friend and colleague again when a mutual friend sought to bring us together. The workshop was, for me, such an encouraging place to be that it hardly mattered then that I had had disagreements with the person convening it. Circumstances had changed anyway and which of us is, metaphorically, without sin?

I said in an *extempore* talk recently that anyone who can describe their biography serially, one thing leading to another causatively is either lying or very unusual and boring. In reality there are numerous reasons for any decision and things are rarely linear. So, in my case, it had suited me to be absent from the workshops because I had other things to do and heavier responsibilities and demands than I was used to. I had less time. I was living on the outskirts of London and had a longer journey to get anywhere. It wasn't just that we'd had an argument. What is extremely unusual is that there was the same person convening a worthwhile workshop before, during

and after that long argument. I stopped running Subvoicive Poetry after more than 10 years and I felt that was good enough. I was tired. What I did with Subvoicive Poetry was quite active and, by and large, I stand by what I did. Cobbing's approach was different. He would push for things that he wanted to happen but he didn't seek to programme everything and was happy to work administratively with others when, in one way or another, he was sure they knew what they were doing. (But he stuck through half a century with the workshop.) Thus he made damn sure that we had a sound poetry festival at Earls Court in, I believe, 1976, though other events were set up by others. I think this is an important point because it has been said that he only booked his friends and like-minded people during his supposed control over the Society. But he was not the person who made the bookings and was in no position to exclude anyone. It is a bit like the believers who now say that atheists control everything and discriminate against believers, when clearly that isn't true at all. It is a selfish tantrum.

A lot was said about Cobbing and Mottram (who had no executive power) and others. The reality was that those who made the criticisms could no longer have everything their own way and thought that was wrong. They were as intolerant of poetic difference as Europeans were intolerant of ethnic difference, seeing an unpeopled space that was really full of people, in Australia. So that when poets who were not so enamoured of the blessed scribblers began to make some new things happen, they screamed that civilisation was coming to an end. When the printshop started, they wanted to know what steps we were taking to ensure we only printed good poems! We replied that we might when Faber & Faber did or when we were told how to second guess the opinion of the future. By and large they scorned a social-istic tendency among some of us but refused to accept the answer that the market would decide what should be printed! There was no logic to it. They wanted a club. Cobbing wanted festival! That they lost so consistently that they had to organise an inept *coup d'état* is testimony of Cobbing's belief and intellectual conviction that they were wrong. He had a more informed and thought-through position than any of them. And more energy. In terms of balancing the books, he was a good treasurer. In

terms of achieving his general aims and objectives, he was a good treasurer. Financial mismanagement was charged against him, but never with any specific queries. It was just stated by one who never interviewed him that there were (unspecified) reasons for concern. And so it came to pass that a new general council with a new treasurer and new initiatives came to pass, and anyone who would want to know about financial propriety of the Poetry Society about a quarter century ago might ask how it was that, years after the administration of which Cobbing was a part resigned, the Society's saviours found it necessary to move to less extensive premises.

I mention this to give a sense of Cobbing's commitment to whatever it was. His commitment.

I think, for a while, his commitment to the Poetry Society had a deleterious effect upon his work. I said so at the time and was abused by it. You might find an outraged rejection of my saying so in an issue of Lobby Press Newsletter around 1980. And my answer to the muddled outrage. My saying so was actually part of a review (in LPN) welcoming a return to form as I saw it, of course. The rejection of that was a denial that anything he ever did was less than admirable and perfect. Or so I remember it. I wrote at a time when he and I were greeting each other fairly icily but I was trying to say exactly what it was that was good about Cobbing as a maker. So there was, with some, an unthinking loyalty. With others a demonising. Clearly we are speaking of someone who was unusual. You might look at the range of collaborations he undertook and the range of people, the range of activity, of approaches etc. Such a wide range of people who got something out of working with Bob. And he, of course, got a lot out of the collaborations. He absorbed it all.

In addition he had time for poets who weren't actually that good. Having his own printing machines, he would help them, if he saw something in their work, to get their books out. That was done collectively in the mid 1970s by the Consortium of London Presses, an umbrella organisation invented one lunch time for the purpose. But he had been doing it before and was doing it after, right up until he began to become very ill. He had much energy and encouraged others to find theirs within themselves.

7 June 2007

MJ:

I am interested in the processes Cobbing used in text production, performance and collaboration, so when you say the procedure was to vary the text six (or however many) times, what actual processes were used in this alteration? Am I right in understanding that the technological processes were photocopying, collaging and computer printing? Were any other media or technologies used? Did you alter hard copy or use a scanner, for example?

LU:

I think that in nearly all cases the processes used are clear from the text itself though I am quite willing to confirm or clarify specific examples. Certainly all three of the methods you list – photocopying, collaging and computer print out – were the most used, but there were others. Whether or not I can remember them all cold, I am not sure. At one point, I painted with marmite. I'm fairly sure you'll find that referred to somewhere or other. It was the kind of thing people wanted to hear about. It was merely a means to an end. Those methods were rarely used in isolation. Items might be collaged prior to scanning or copying. Yes, we altered hard copy, tore it, wrote on it – there are clear examples of that in the text. And, of course, I used the scanner. Largely to get the text into software. But I might actually interfere with the scanner just as Cobbing interfered with the photocopier. You'll see an example of me doing that in *Collaboration for Alaric Sumner* though I am not sure that I did that in *DAN*. Maybe. The copier was used to make copies but it was also a tool for making changes to an image. Cobbing was a master of that.

MJ:

I appreciate giving a specific example from a series of 300 or so texts from 12 or more years ago may not prompt immediate recognition, but *DAN* Oct '94 has 6 shapes/designs on the inside cover – a wine glass, arrows, a number ladder, a golf or hockey stick and ball, arrows and an envelope, and an umbrella. Each page seems to be a distortion of some of these shapes or a fragment of a larger piece.

LU:

Those images, or some of them, were introduced by me, though I am puzzled by their being on the inside cover. I am also puzzled by '*DAN* '94'. I am not saying it doesn't say that, but it must surely be a mistake, or else you are reading the date of the theme rather than the date of the pamphlet. There were many *DAN*s published in any one year. It will be more reliable if you use the ISBN, though be warned that WF sometimes got that wrong and if Bob realised he'd done that he might change the ISBN and continue printing, so that one pamphlet varied in the same print run. Generally, the ISBN can be relied upon as an indicator. Most of the series has separate titles, of course, and that will be a reliable indicator. Refer to *DAN and DAMN A User's Guide* from RWC**.** That'll form the basis of an extended and eventually comprehensive documentation when there is time and energy. That covers the first 50, I recall. So you'll be on your own after that, but it will give you the relationships of one to another and an indication of how we thought of it structurally.

There was also a short Radio 3 programme about metamorphosis – Steve Jones – asking about specific issues.

The introduction of new material is largely my province in this series. Themes, of course, introduced new material, and we both introduced new themes. But after that, Bob tended to work with the visual material in the image he was varying while I sometimes introduced new material, working additively. Sheppard writes about this. Without that I doubt I would be aware of it!

I can't comment on apparent distortion without having some certain idea of the issue of *DAN* being considered. Material would appear and disappear and reappear as the series advanced numerically – think of ongoing audio sampling, quite apart from the additive. Somewhere Sheppard says he found that 'alarming', which I never understood. Clearly he found it unexpected. Saying that reintroduction was a kind of *leitmotiv* to me would be to overstate it, but it's something like that. More perhaps the elaboration/improvisation where one tune finds itself varied into a quite different tune which is played for a few bars. Remember that our aim was to write something which we could perform – that was the mode of reading we recommended! Serving suggestion.

MJ:

Are you able to recall any specific booklet in the series and talk us through how you changed Bob's work and, to your knowledge, how he changed yours – what copying, printing, collaging processes were used?

LU:

Well, that would go beyond a specific booklet. And one would wish to disentangle the what from the how. There would be a range of different techniques available at any point, though the output would be technique dependent, just as there is a difference between the duplicator and the photocopier output – that's why I made such a song and dance about Bury Art Gallery treating them all as one thing, which they called photocopying. Nevertheless, one might find different ways to achieve broadly the same thing. Neither of us would sit down and wait till the light was right or we found the scissors, any more than we would wait till we were in the mood. Nor would I be very happy about doing it. I had my processes, but I tend to add to the process and eventually to let it go, a bit like lost wax. This came up recently after a performance of a piece I co-wrote and co-performed with John Drever from a set of my verbal sound poems. In the questions after I was asked why I had chosen particular words. The question was repeated later when we were packing up kit. My answer that I had chosen the original words for their sounds only, as if they had no lexical meaning, did not seemingly persuade the questioner. He was also suspicious of my honest assertion that I couldn't remember the process in detail, even though I made it clear just how far back the original starting point – now lost – was, i.e. I tend not to document myself as I go along, though the paper may be somewhere in the boxes. I am happy to speak of my work but I have no time or inclination to document it as I go along. I think it is a distraction. It is the work itself which matters. I'd be less happy about commenting on Cobbing's decision-making. One looks at the theme and the output and sees what he has done visually. There is no one-to-one code underlying, so what is there to say? I'll gladly say how I think he's done it, but that's something else.

Look at *Domestic Ambient Noise* (Writers Forum, November 1994, ISBN 0 86162 562 5; theme Cobbing, variations Upton). You can see elements of the theme in

the first variation, but there are also introduced materials. It's laser print of retyped verbal material from the theme. It looks to me that there's a mixture of overprinting as well as fairly simple collage. I think that's all discernible from the text. The same thing happens in the second variation, but the processes have been taken a bit further. The third may need commentary. I did something here which I returned to a number of times. The page is four pages – I worked on A4 and then WF [Writers Forum] reduced. So here I would have made four A4 images and then reduced to A6 or leave Bob as WF to do that. The early pamphlets would have copious instructions with the masters – and that went on till Bob would know how I was working. Three of the four A6s are the products/outputs of moving the paper on the copier platen as it was copying. The top left image we have dealt with – output of a word processor or graphics package into a laser. The other three are produced on the copier platen as the machine is copying. Cobbing took the bottom right A6 for the theme of 563 3, 25th December 1994. His variations combine collage and photocopier manipulated. I think that can be seen. The fourth variation is clear. Underlying it is a chunk of the theme (note the enlargement) and partly overlaying that is an additive collage – probably previously rejected bits and pieces from the collages themselves now collaged on black – photocopier black. The corner of the overlay is turned up so that it's clear it is what it is. Fifth: the bottom half is the output of moving the theme over the platen while the machine is copying. Sixth – you can see – bits and pieces of the theme, copied with size change, torn and cut, laid atop each other.

MJ:

Finally, your explanation of the procedures in your collaborative work with Cobbing suggests a heavy emphasis on the random. What was the importance of this random element a) for you, b) for Bob?

LU:

I am mystified and confused about where this comes from. I have reread what I wrote and cannot see any basis for a heavy emphasis on the random. I don't recognise it. Can you help me?

Btw in my rereading of our discussion I came across: 'The rejection of that was a denial that anything he ever did was less than admirable and perfect'. I want to be clear that refers to others than Cobbing championing him – one in particular whose debating method was assertion and sneering, hardly bothering with evidence and not bothering at all with relevant evidence. Cobbing sometimes referred to his own work as "my old rubbish" though I am sure he did not believe it at all. I believe that he knew himself to be a major artist, but he didn't in my experience impose that belief on others.

19 June 2007

MJ:

Perhaps I should rephrase. I'm aware of a comment Bob made in the interview with Stephen Ross Smith, that he simply composed and saw what sounds come out. If you're not happy with 'random' could you comment on the procedure of not following a plan or order, rather being alive to the moment of production or performance and making decisions based on impulse rather than schemata?

LU:

I cannot at this minute put my hand on the Ross Smith to see the original and what Bob had been asked. I can proceed easily enough with your gloss of 'not following a plan or order, being alive to the moment and making decisions based on impulse rather than schemata'. I'll just avoid the word 'random' which, subject to finding the original, would appear to be a snare.

I'd worry about saying that he didn't follow a plan or order because, if one started from there, we might finish up saying things Bob would not have owned. That's always the danger of any glossing, of course. Opposing 'impulse' and 'schemata' worries me. But remember his use of the colloquial 'on impulse' as a title. He improvised. He used to quibble about the word, saying he was reading the marks, and he was rather consistent. I think he would distinguish between 'the spontaneous' and 'chance' – I would! He could, too, get into the 'near chaotic' but that would be something else again.

I don't know if I can throw any further light on the ideas. He obviously did use ideas and had read widely, but he debated at the level of practice and, faced with abstract debate, announced he did not understand it. When cris cheek circulated his essay on Cobbing, privately Bob asked me if I understood it, implying he did not, and publicly he circulated a cut-up of what cris had written. When I said that, by and large, I followed what cris had written quite easily, he grunted. I think it was my assumption that he was being disingenuous.

MJ:

So each *DAN* (or those that used this methodology) started with one text/image which was then altered once (one new image) and so on six times in total, rather than six alterations being made to one image to make one new image which was then returned to the other for a new image with a further six alterations on?

LU:

No.

The basic model is of taking one text from the other's previous response and making six variations. Those variations did not make one image. They made six variations, six images. Generally, I'd say, it was quite clear from the booklets, though some variations varied quite widely from the original at first look. There were pamphlets where more than one original was used.

MJ:

There appears to have been a great deal of control of the image due to your respective experience with the technology?

LU:

There may have been fewer surprises than you might think. One still needed to look at it, as one might keep standing back to see what has been achieved with a brush and paint, or what appears in the dark room chemicals. The more one uses a process, the more it is likely that one anticipates what will happen. But one always looks.

MJ:

Please comment on how a text acted as a cue, a prompt, a score.

LU:

We used the word 'score' sometimes. That may have been my influence. I seem to remember 'text' coming in years before. l think Bob's inclination was to call them poems. I have, possibly since Bob died, used the phrase 'indicative notation'.

MJ:

Would Cagean chance be relevant here? That there is an essential structure to the composition but the performer makes decisions in the moment of performance as to how the text is sounded?

LU:

I don't see that being Cagean chance. Deciding in the moment is how we both worked: improvisation. By then, in performance there was more to it than just one's response to what was on the paper. If something odd started to happen, we might well absorb it.

MJ:

I suggest there is a spontaneity which does not exist in merely 'reading' lexical texts as this is a more established, recognised, *accepted* system than sound-text performance/reading, the language of which is perpetually invented *in the moment* by the performer rather than according to learnt, conservative norms.

LU:

I don't know about that. Some of those ideas may have been in Bob's mind, 'glad day' and all that, but we were still dealing with what we had learnt – see some of the debate in the DABs interview. There are also some remarks I have published about how poor conventional text is as a notational system. (Many of Cobbing's texts and some of our *DAN* texts were 'lexical'.)

MJ:

Performing visual texts seems to be an example of 'misuse' in sound poetry/Bob's work – misusing modes of language, reading, performance to achieve a new, dynamic experience.

LU:

I don't know that we were interested in rendering a 'new dynamic experience' – sounds a little suspect to me. I don't think we misused language at all. Language is misused all day, every day. Cobbing treated it with respect.

MJ:

I'm referring to what we might call Bob's oeuvre of sound text/performance work, but also the workshop and WF press: that he 'discovered as he went along' as you put it.

LU:

I think he tended not to assume he knew what he was doing. At his best, everything was up for change and renewal each time he wrote or performed.

1 July 2007

MJ:

How did Bob's energy motivate and activate his collaborators in performance? How did Bob encourage others to find their own energy – can you recall any notable examples of this happening?

LU:

I think I've answered this. He had been a teacher 'who knew how to let people learn by their own discoveries'. I imagine that when he went into schools as a poet, he would be entertaining and would offer tasks that could be achieved, teaching success. That's all one can do in the short term. In workshops he might say to someone that a particular aspect of their work interested him and he would like to see it devel-

oped. He was upbeat and complimentary and he kept at it. He didn't do what the convenor of the first workshop I went to did, who finally conceded that he saw his role as discouraging those he thought of as bad poets.

Energy does motivate people. I'll leave it to psychologists to say how. If one person stands up and says "Time for work", others will follow.

I have a slight worry. I don't want to slip into hagiography here. While many of us were his collaborators, he was our collaborator too – our energy would motivate him. It's two way. Some collaborative work was a one-off; others continued, if intermittently. Ours kept going after we resumed in the '90s but eased off a bit in the new century. We worked together still, but not quite as intensely. Had he lived we might well have done more, but losing him as a collaborator pushed me in other directions. For me, having him as a collaborator was a way of finding what it was I could be doing! In some directions. Other projects might run their course. So it seems with *Blatent Blather*, if I've spelt it correctly, with Robert Sheppard. Maybe distance was a factor. I think one can see that in many of his collaborations people moved, or stopped visiting London. I was frequently in London when we started *DAN* and it continued even as I spent more and more time in Cornwall because there was an existing commitment.

In the case of *DAN* it was actually me who said we should make a collaborative text for the initial performance, though I didn't say that I thought we should make a 2000 page, 300 section poem. So I could be said to have initiated it, I suppose. But Bob responded to the request and initiated an expansion – publishing the book and thereby introducing the first element of the series structure. I had to respond positively or negatively to that expanded proposition etc. *DAN* wouldn't have got to that length if we hadn't both been getting something out of it. It put us into new space. And that's what a teacher does. Anything else is training. I think that's the case with his work with Ralph Hawkins. There was one and then another and then many pamphlets. With Peter Finch there was a range of work, and then no more. Both got something out of it. A lot, I think. The commitment remained. David Toop and Paul Burwell were up for working with him again right up to his last year.

However remarkable his own poetry was, I don't think what he did was pedagogically remarkable, except that one generally must look outside schools for open-ended teaching of the sort Bob engaged in. But that's state fear of the unconstrained teaching process – like the remark attributed to Stalin that the electoral process is flawed if one cannot predict its outcome.

Please insert more questions.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.