

‘a stick, falling from a hand’

*Slip* begins with a subsidence, an ending, its own, marks its being present to sonority, to performance, by staging its disappearance at (and as) a remove from the physical space of its event, the stage, and does so by designating the location of its event beyond the space of musical performance, out of earshot, beyond sonority. Which is to say that silence is the space of the slippage through which the emergence of *Slip* into sonority takes place.

*Slip* slips from an earlier iteration of itself with a cinematic or phonographic mode of closure; a fade, an instruction for a way out, into the generative silence of an error, an orchestrated falling away from the seductively insistent continuum of the history of syncopation, the historicity of the groove that coheres the past and present hegemonies of jazz and hip hop.

Then again, if you were Marcel Duchamp or Cannonball Adderley, *Slip* could comprise an opening, a window onto something else, an exit which is an introduction and a beginning which is a subsidence. Which is enough to tell you that something, an event, a slip of an event, has taken its leave and in doing so has appeared by way of its departure.

*Slip* slides into sonority as a Motenian surreality of presence as much by or somewhere between predetermination and retrospection, as by design or intuition or an alchemical process of knowing, almost knowing, and feeling and the emergence of feeling. What you could be listening to, and what *Slip* might comprise, is a series of instructions for peculiarly named actors in a feature film, or resolutely unfamiliar participants in a strange dream of a documentary, or a soundscape for a series of cinematic sequences inclusive of sequential discontinuity. Or a theatrical event. Is it? ‘It could be.’

The presence of *Slip*, here and now more than a residue of its former self, is, to put it mildly, less imaginary than evidential. *Slip*, Abbott’s three-day solo residency at London’s Café Oto in August 2023, was, Café Oto tells us, ‘A liquid which dissolves performers. The residency performances take place in this liquid. Among other things, this liquid-dramatic environment rejects novelty, encourages the pleasure of unstable edges and enhances a profound suspicion

of what is fixed, limited. The residency starts - soaked in this liquid - by responding to a 'Fish Glue Invitation' written in (an unpublished) document called *Gyri* by the character Small, and others. The invitation proposes conditions for a live performance: 'an alter-practice of ongoing unlearning; organic & synthetic movements: dissolving together somewhere between the truck joke and a heartbeat.'

In *Slip*, to fall out of rhythm is to slip, in a heartbeat, into time out of time. *Slip* is evidence, a document, reassembled, of the engagement between Abbott, a drummer (who is a writer), an audience and the possibilities, here, of a physical distraction in the drummer's task of rhythming, the slip, rhythm's space of an event unforeseeable and irretrievable.

*Slip*, if it had a story, would be a tale of the housing of temporal disruption and the slippage into sonority of a coming, unseen and uncalled for, the passing into the present, by way of the slip (which is a place, a passage, a place in a word, in a sound and an inscription, the slip of space in the space in the slip in slippage), of the passing presence in rhythm, of time out of time, time out of joint, defracted infinite multiplicity (distilled: *Slip te3 oto 2 distilled ideas*). The story that could be *Slip* is of a beginning in diegetic space and time, of the formation of the location of a primal, iterative origin. 'It will start in a fictional 'Garden' - in some sort of (fictional!) viscous and bubbling-mud.' (*Slip te3 oto 2 distilled ideas*).

There is a garden and a falling out of character, of the role of the drumkit, understood, in retrospect, as the technology of a twofold function. 'In my estimation drums should play according to the melody and still keep time'. Speaking is Baby Dodds in 1953, in 'The Baby Dodds Story', on Chicago in the mid 1920s, before and with Louis Armstrong's Hot Five and Seven studio recording groups. 'I played his solo album last night, just the run out groove, for an hour.'

The story of a generative random and, perhaps, inevitable falling, off grid, off stage, a falling or an incursion, both as welcome in Dodd's foundational thinking on drumming as falling down an elevator shaft, nonetheless has, in hindsight over a full English at Jack's on Shacklewell Lane, its epigraphic opening in Dodds' retrospective late-in-life observation: 'A

drummer can't have one single thing on his mind. You can't have a one-track mind and be a good drummer. Rather, you must be thinking all the time and trying different things (...)'.

Different things, the initiation and an exploration of an erring, 'a musical red herring', a fleeting, integral, complex distraction. 'I think the slipping, that physical action of slipping, I'd like to think it has something to do with how if you rarify the activity of playing actual drums into grids or notes or time signatures, if your limbs fall in grid like ways, onto that grid, what does it take to make you feel in a different way? Sometimes the intention is there, slip happens, that physical slipping of something, that slipping in time, or it's like 'slip up', it *has happened* before you've had a chance to be in the time period where it's like it's on but it's forgotten, a slippage is a place, isn't it?'

Counter intuitively, for a writer who is also a drummer, and for whom percussivity registers a reverberative handwriting, a caressive holding of a space, this falling away, this slipping of limbs and time, is in no way inappropriate: 'It feels like the right word to fit the occasion, it set me up to feel in a certain way, to approach it in a certain way, and it's short, and it's kind of funny.' 'It' being *Slip*, the residency, its slippage, *Slip*, an event, a space of falling and exploration - and intimacy, 'Not an occasion of strangeness but of another now', a solo exploration by a drummer for whom the idea of the solo as the work of a singular, solitary presence is a kind of fiction, conducted not so much through a story, as its absence, as the Gravesian Nothing, which is not no thing at all, but a collusive collision of more than one order of names, of 'shapes, containers, little choreographies, (but) affected by the weather, maybe what they ate, the news, their friends.'

Something happens: 'No things collide but from somewhere vibrations swell to the scale of a sound or sounds.' (Abbott to Fielding Hope in 2023, in anticipation of *Slip*'s three nights at Café Oto). A collision, a convergence, a layering in architectural space, that of Café Oto, of textual, percussive, memorial space and genealogical lineages, of the drum kit's reconfiguration, inclusive of Milford Graves, Roscoe Mitchell, Sun Ra, and the names of shapes, drawn from Abbott's earlier writing and recordings. From *Slip te3 oto 2 distilled ideas*: 'strike', 'stick', 'reiy', 'leaf'. 'Reiy' is given a spatio-terrestrial, political line of

descent: ‘>Reiy, in-time/off-axis, is a clump or a grain (from the mud)—not a Nation, or State—but emerging as a temporary and particular concentration of the history which surrounds it, sustains it, sustains it and threatens it.’

A counter terrestrial, aquatextual genealogy emerges through *Slip*’s preparatory instructions for an imaginary ensemble. ‘sphu (sphuzo) PLAYS totality dissolve, strike (ductus) PLAYS falling to snare >attempts to inscribe a single event of non-contact: a stick falling from a hand to a drum head. (Ductus)’. The ensemble’s work is to recite. Through their reading, Abbott’s textual oeuvre enters *Slip*’s cine-theatrical diegesis as a fiction. A distilled idea: ‘Sentences - fragmented or read with space while moving - from SMALL (‘Small, it’s what my name means, in Dutch, or German’): DUCTUS, SPHUZO, NSULAR, GYRI ??’

‘a stick falling from a hand to a drum head.’ In *Slip*, to slip, in a heartbeat, is to descend not into the grid of the even metre accorded to the heartbeat, whose rhythmic correlate is the drummer’s task of conserving in music an imaginary solid state, but into a play of mutability and modality. To change is the condition of the heart. In ‘Pulseology’ (2022), Milford Graves reminds us, ‘Breath varies, so cardiac rhythm never has that (metronomic) tempo. It’s always changing. All the alignments of the heart are determined off needs of the cells, specifically tissues and organs. The heart knows if it needs to speed up.’

In *Slip*, rhythm is the modality of the heart’s capacity for knowledge. Rhythm and humour. Hence the telling of a story of two anonyms, the truck joke, by Anthony Braxton at Café Oto in 2018: ‘Mr. and Mrs. John Doe wake up at say four thirty, have breakfast and then Mr. Doe goes out – he’s going to work. As he goes toward the stoplight a truck passes him. that night when Mr. Doe comes home, Mr. and Mrs. Doe go to an opera and suddenly the same truck goes across the stage. Mr. Doe says to Mrs. Doe, ‘It doesn’t get any better than that.’”

Edward George in conversation with Paul Abbott, London 2024