

Lawrence Upton

## A SONG, through Alaric Sumner

*Empty performance space with lectern in the centre-front, facing audience.*

*Voice walks into the performance space and goes up to the lectern.*

*Voice stands.*

*Voice looks hard at audience.*

*Voice removes its spectacles and holds them forward of its head and lower than its eyes.*

*After a substantial pause, Voice looks at the audience again, though not so hard this time, and begins to speak.*

**Voice:** I am wearing Stanley Fish's glasses...

You want to push me.

I am not much more reliable than any reader's interpretation, a collision of a whole load of homages, dedications, references and influences.

Alaric says: your stopwatch is very loud. He says that in my memory. Perhaps it was a question. Perhaps I said it. My stopwatch is very loud.

Conversations become collaborative, or they die. What one says, the other says or thinks. One says, what one thinks or the conversation, dies, or else, repeats with, and

without, animus. Contradiction, time passes, noisily, cluttered but interesting. To whom?

I keep winding my stopwatch. Keep watching it, without imperative, watching time; sitting watching the kitchen wall, intermittently. My memory gets worse. Must stop, work, to do.

Wouldn't we get the point if it was two pages long? instead of hundreds? And / or endless.

Noisy pages. Unenchanted by them now. Wallowing your brain in the fragrant muds of a nice page of theory is worth 200 pages of dull poetry, at least? and what about the poetic theorists? No more nice poems.

If a poem excites me, disturbs me, frightens me, I don't care if it is competently written or whether or not it will be read in 100 years time.

It is not value I dispute. I value many things, but I may not have evaluated them.

I do question the response to poetry as an evaluative response. Sometimes poetry makes me write. To me that is as valuable as poetry that makes me evaluate it. Give me an incompetent poem that reconfigures my braincells rather than one that asks me to place it on the list of excellence. I thought this was clear.

And now perhaps I have no animation. It's a way of resisting. I assume it does you no harm. There is a consideration of self interest AS WELL as altruism or tempered by altruism -- call it enthusiasm if you will!... one doesn't make so many unpleasant blunders that one regrets later... one helps others while helping oneself... one doesn't harm oneself while helping others.

I think I am overusing tables because I have just understood how to use them! Sometimes I cannot keep the cup and saucer steady. And the cutlery. Might as well put it on the floor to start with.

I think, that I think, that things are contained more neatly on the page, letting me get more on, more neatly, very long scrollings sideways. Have you seen his intimacy? I recently saw a marquee which was going back and forwards so fast it made. My head hurt. Couldn't read. Couldn't shelter from the rain. I shall be launching some pages bounce, always good to bounce, though I do not always comprehend the echoes. Write something and then ask him at spotting weaknesses, including some that aren't there.

I'll file the performance pages together with mine and then if I can remember where they are filed they won't need to be recopied.

I lump all you potential breeders together as if you were some amorphous amoeba of fecund obscenity. Must watch that. Image-making aspect of myself creates such horrid visions that sometimes don't get brought back down to reality but lurk insanely in my depths. Sorry. That's a quote from Nekyia. I could get into being an amorphous amoeba of fecund obscenity. Return path. Invoked from network. I wouldn't deny that. Paul's insistently heterosexual work is alien. I lump all you potential breeders together as if you were some amorphous amoeba of fecund obscenity. Must watch that image-making aspect of myself... creates such horrid visions that sometimes don't get brought back down to reality but lurk insanely in my quotation.

What I might otherwise have done was qualified by our joint effort, I was increasingly aware of sending up.... well, male self-pity... but human self-pity... I used things that women have uttered said... but the role I was using was male hetero. Horror and fascination... arrogance, sense of other, lack of sense of other, sense that one fucks the other rather than both fuck with each other; and so on. nice. Certainly the sense of comedy. Sarcastic comedy. Came over me. Strongly. What you did. So I'd say: sexuality and writing, I suggest, is so odd, finding out now what was, always, but is only now being made... conscious, I suppose, or more conscious, or conscious enough. I have just tried going through different aspects of it and the sense. It is about the SAME and the OTHER was very powerful. It was also what I was reading at the time: Levinas, Totality and Infinity; Lacan. These OTHER voices talking through my voice. Or vice versa. Return Path. And they were very complimentary. Almost embarrassingly so. We really do seem to have done something quite special. For those could take it. Interjected words or phrases while everybody else was performing away, or suddenly launched into a loud version. Sometimes I talked so quietly that only people standing very close could have heard. Most of the time I was erasing myself. I was fodder for her. I was very pleased. At least one person had got what I was up to. Another was impressed at the interweaving of our vocal lines. Return path. I could get into being an amorphous amoeba of fecund obscenity.

Alaric Sumner has produced a set of verbal and visual texts, mainly using the treated words and images of others from published sources, which present potential dialogues about the nature and process of the constructs of sexuality and writing. The structures of Sumner's texts inhibit attempts at conventional reading and invite unconventional

and transgressive readings in which meaning becomes contingent upon past and future reading without permitting a narrative to be generated; even along the timeline of performance the texts' energy remains present. The reader(s) who wish to be told meaning are pushed back towards themselves and their own meaning as the text interacts, not just with the reader(s) but, with the concept of reading. I like it. Where does it go? Can it go? I will send it.

I suppose I feel that I don't have quite a gun. I have a job I would do for free, if necessary. Like giving away books. I am not sure that gets you out of it. In some ways those who do not feel the control of the system are freer of it. St Augustine (no intended relation) at the front door, I believe. There is a contradiction in my position. Not so much in yours. I actually ought to stop worrying about money in relation to publishing and just produce vast numbers and distribute them wide. That's when I feel that gun resting lightly in my temple.

Subject, little bit of joy. Mime version. Content, type. Content-Transfer-Encoding. Priority: Normal. I didn't notice any strangeness; and I didn't have any sense that you were trying to block me. You seemed open in that you told me the news. You haven't said everything that you could say, of course; these are intimate and private matters. And if you said everything your message would be unbearably long. I referred to my private life, but I gave no detail and that's my privacy. But, also, on both sides I suspect, there is confusion in that one is dealing with things one hasn't fully worked out and cannot work out except with the passage of time... One goes along with hopes and wishes and possibilities; and, if you're like me, you play it. So comments about one's friends and lovers is interim and tentative.

You do well to differentiate between love and sex. One can lead to the other, but I know, now, where I put the emphasis. As someone I knew would say of sex: It's everything and it's nothing. Not that original when you write it down, but it seemed revelatory, though familiar, when she said it. Between exchanging bodily fluids. All the best. Original Message. Little bit of joy, yes. Thanks for the care and concern and quite understandable assumptions. I am reacting strangely to your emails because I know my history and you don't and I haven't told you. I am not trying to block your thoughts, but explain why I don't respond. Easily to them.

A little bit of joy. Take it easy, and enjoy whatever follows, taking it easy. The new signature will run a while. After all my moaning, I thought I would tell you about this. Even a correspondence, without ever bothering or needing to how the other party

would react if you made a pass, can be highly enjoyable, erotic even in its way. A little bit of joy. One of my friends once drove to Rome for a party and I know that another flew to America on the off-chance of fucking a woman he had met on the net; me, I have my Doris Day pictures, even if they are stuck together. Who knows who he is now. Very nice. I think we're talking at cross purposes. I shall try to repair it. I keep being out in the evening. I'd appreciate links. Mutual benefit. Wow. Cor! Did I do that? Yes, said the furry godfather. I think this is very good. It's a bit flowery; but there is no other way.

I am going to change a comma into a semi-colon; but I may be misreading your meaning. Is that last sentence not delightfully overbalanced. I can think of expressing it. I'd like to remove my processes. Alaric Sumner has produced a set of verbal and visual texts, mainly using the treated words and images of others from published sources, which present potential dialogues about the nature and process of the constructs of sexuality and writing.

*Voice pauses, not looking directly at anyone, until it becomes uncomfortable.*

**Voice:** I find I still have my images. connection fails. I am still here, unhappy with the way my work is going. On the tape. & though I intended to try out semi-improv I was unable because of low tech problems and a long phone call tonight which has stolen my time, pleasurable as it was... and that means a lack of an enormous amount of information I had expected to have. I am willing to take risks; but this is failure. I've had a cup of tea and eaten a carrot and listened to recordings of myself several times and decided that until I know more about the piece I am making I shan't go ahead with that and will do entirely live performance. I hope you haven't gone to a lot of trouble. If you have then I'll think again, but my inclination is strongly against the idea of doing something that doesn't fire at all at present when I am only hours away from departure.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** I know, but I thought you might change your mind. Thank you for the directions. Look at these two same different thing. If you think you might think there is something in them. Colour. Or if it's just screen glow... I am rather attached to these texts and their semi-visible undertows... and the toner is getting thinner and thinner. It'll arrive while I'm away or at least without a notebook; or in the rain with a pen which uses soluble ink. If not, then leave it. I mean if you can't imagining suspending your disbelief.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Which bridge? Verbal / non-verbal? We can talk. I was thinking of soloing, but we could do em two voice. See how we all feel. I know you are in part being careful with me; and rightly; but I am also aware that you probably mean it too. I meant what I said. I wasn't aware of any distinction of being careful and of meaning... And it is not that I couldn't sound inkblots. I can't, any longer, see the sounds I should? want to? make in response. If I could find that, I would like to do it again though I feel no urgency about it. I do quite like my current sound piece, found from taking the voice out of a text and layering of my voice. It is sound. But it comes from words and some you can decipher. On second or third hearing perhaps. It was quite good to find a way to make what some call sound poetry again after having been away. The sounding of fully non-alphabetical marks remains suspect and there needs to be a reason for doing it, a reason within oneself I think & when two are performing together then there needs to be, whatever one would call it, more a symmetry of vocal behaviour between them rather than sympathy & certainly more than just a desire to perform. I don't see sounds... the sounds come... but the degree of improv out of marks rather than reading of marks is high Return Path.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Problems, problems. I know you are being careful with me, but I am also aware that you probably mean it. Very vulnerable still. Link to the unbelievable tombs. Come again? Don't be too nice to me. You might try and make me do something I am not. Expecting to do. That would be good. Just don't give me a sheet of inkblots and say make a sound. Anything that I know what I could do would. Be fine. I don't want to stand up holding a sheet and find I can't utter. Though that might also be worth pursuing! That was the main reason that I was sending you. I am all for us pushing each other but after all this work and expense I don't want either of us to be stranded. I won't give you inkblots etc. except as a consenting artist. I'm not being nice to you at all. Showing respect and consideration perhaps... I know myself that being asked to make too great a leap isn't helpful & that has nothing to do with ability or potential... I should think there are very few things you can't and couldn't do... but insofar as collaboration is concerned we need to support as opposed to carry and encourage as opposed to being nice. It looks fine to me. I know that I shall learn a lot from the collaboration and in that relationship we both have to start from where the other is or has been. It's a strange space to be. Odd layout, odd colours. Don't talk to me. I am doing away. I shall sit down and do it again because I think there may be something to be done. You could if you wish link to the unbelievable tombs. I am looking for pieces

with words in so you aren't too alienated. I am keener on being a performer in what you want to do than choosing myself. I am happy with the colour one and there was a slightly... there will be enough. Treasure upon treasures. Thanks for all this. All this effort. They all look useful and interesting to work on. I am keener on being a performer in what you want to do than choosing myself. I'm going to waggle my hands. Flipping my hands and tilting my head slightly to indicate change of voice. You said I should. Then we could do it together. Do I need to? If I'm going to waggle my hands. Maybe you don't know. It's not as if both of them are here now.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** But can you split them now? This experience was thus. If the next experiences will not be the same, to what extent do the words, whatever they are, remain the same? Derrida on iteration might come in here. In reverse? The words are only words as they are interpreted by a consciousness. Otherwise they are variations in chemical composition of paper, perhaps. No experience can be the same as any other. At a basic level, a poem read once can never be read again as if it had not been read in the first place. It will inevitably be a repeat reading and therefore the experience of the words will be different from a reading in which there is no sense of recognition. Where is this poem printed in the book? What stability does it have in relation to its readings? Does it exist other than in its readings? Stanley Fish makes the text disappear in *Is There A Text In This Class?* and it is good thing too. Return Path experiences will not be the same. To what extent do the words, whatever they are, remain the same? Derrida on iteration might come in here. Words are words as they are interpreted. And therefore the experience of the words will be different from a reading in which there is no sense of recognition. What stability does it have? Told Bob how good your book is and how well we interacted and that I hope you will get to the workshop at some time in the future both to do try solos and to do multivoice so it could be a matter of turning up, but it'd be good if it was said as a firm date to Bob some time ahead so he doesn't double book something else extensive. Answer: dunno.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Haven't been seen for ages. Why not ask? If there's anything around they'll know and I don't know who knows the most The chaos etc. goes on.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** I shall get back to Totnes as quickly as I may and go to my lodgings, phoning you on the way if there is a phone or else after. Apologies for disruption worry et cetera I may have caused. I am pissed off myself. Hope if we were going to meet tonight to prepare. I didn't record that bit in my memory. Sufficient unto the afternoon. Bucking Curtains was made last summer I think. Though I had previously forgotten this, I now believe that the initial impetus for the whole project was to explore the possibility of making a book from multiple enlargements which would then have had text added. At that stage I wasn't sure what that text would be. And that book may still come about. As I experimented with ways of working with the enlargements, I found that moving the enlargements on the photocopier created images that struck me as looking like curtains which then sent me to Paul Buck's magazine and then to Paul's own texts in the two issues I have. I reinforce and disrupt his meanings by selection of three words down three lines. For the same photocopying session, I had printed out the Samuel R Delany introduction from the internet and cut passages out of it and stuck them on sheets intending to photocopy them as another visual/text book, again disrupting and reinforcing Delany's meanings but the mode of selection. I think you would need to read the text to see if you could tell why I had done this. Tennyson comes in at one point and Derrida at another. The Tennyson happened because I was writing the piece when someone started reading it on the radio and aspects of it collided usefully for me with the ideas and the distressing of the ideas that I was working with.

I don't think it is useful for me to go on.

In performance, I felt unable to vocalise visual material, but the pages clearly (to me) refer to the Cobbing / Upton use of visual material as sound material and I was very pleased to have Lawrence read those pages.

Paul Buck was an important presence. Cobbing and Upton have both had a lasting effect on me, as have Delany and Derrida. Einstein on the Beach and various other Christopher Knowles texts have been fundamental influences as has been watching him being interviewed on television. My brief work with Shallal Dance Theatre (in particular when Tim Churchman danced error studies and portraits with me at the Performance Writing Conference) was a powerful influence on my way of thinking about people, the world, text and behaviour. The texts from this piece are available at Cartograffiti (ed. Taylor Brady)

*Voice pauses and then continues.*



**Voice:** I am much less interested in what I might have been trying to say than I am in exploring what might be sayable. All decisions will have had reasons. Nothing is careless. Glad to imagine it's none of my business; but I'd be interested in anything you can tell me. Unwilling to leave the stage, suddenly entranced. Then we can speak of what we do. Gotta keep my authors happy.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** I wouldn't deny that, for me, Paul's insistently heterosexual work is alien. Me too. In the way that he says it impossible to identify where I am speaking, because there are so many other voices I should have emphasised. Don't think this is me. Speaking. The sense of confusion I get in producing a poem that is not about gay experience. I know so little about heterosexuality. What could I have useful to say about it! There are some clichéd phrases. In there. Male female relations. I don't give them much help! I started off just saying text to myself. I tend to forget. bvm is full of personal references but most of what is in there I shall keep to myself... I can read it slowly and remember them... but when I crank up the speed and perform it to an audience I am hardly conscious of the references (most of them to do with desire for one or other of two women) and performing the text without preconception... .. but as the piece developed in performance, and as what I might otherwise have done was qualified by our joint effort, I was increasingly aware of sending up.... well, male self-pity... but human self-pity... I actually used things that women have uttered / said... but the role I was using was male hetero... Another writer I view with horror and fascination... arrogance, sense of other, lack of sense of other, sense that one fucks the other rather than both fuck with each other and so on so I'd say sexuality and writing, I suggest don't give em help but don't feel the need to say this is not me is my advice. Return-Path. For me, Paul's insistently heterosexual work is alien. I seldom think about cunts or breasts or any aspect of women that is the material for sexual interest by het men / gay women. So when I came to work through his work, I kept being aware of its images / ideas / language. There is little about homosex (which is what I see in my stuff whenever I mention sexuality). It may well be that there is a universalism to be found, but for me, it is very much not my voice, yet with the choice of using the three words with the emphasis I do, they produce intensity of experience (in me) due to the breathing system working the way it does. I like the way that it is impossible to identify where I am speaking, because there are so many other voices in the piece. I suppose that is why I have emphasised the sources and also the sense of confusion.

I don't know why you are doing it. Who-I-am-what-I do. I like it, think there's a lot in it. Not sure if I can say why thought I could or might be able to; and then there came this sexuality thing, which titled what I thought it was... I mean tilted which you didn't respond to? Apologies if what I have done is inappropriate. Can't undo what I have done. Is that deliberate? If so, forgive me; but, I hope you have dropped it positively and because you want to... I thought it was sexuality and writing; but there you go No no no no oh no not at all. Not criticism. Not even irony. All that happened was the way you had phrased it.

I don't know why you are doing it. Return-Path.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** You are a nasty piece of work. I'm not the first to say this, of course. Your agenda, your elitism in the guise of rigour sickens me. This has nothing to do with anybody here. There is nothing vicious about this. Choices always have to be made. We all have to work within limits and I'm sure most of us, including Lawrence, find the limits a frustration. From mime instead of using the marks. Very few things are either / or and I do read but the reading rules are improvised thanks. I didn't know that till I typed it. Having books etc. to lean on can be very useful one problem. One has a frame of expectation of words crafted very sparse, contemplative space.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Using the treated words and images of others, from published sources, Alaric Sumner has produced a set of verbal and visual texts which present potential dialogues about the nature and process of the constructs of sexuality and writing. The structures of Sumner's texts inhibit attempts at conventional reading processes and invites unconventional and transgressive readings in which meaning becomes contingent upon past and future reading without permitting a narrative to be generated, even along the timeline of performance the texts' energy remain present. The readers are pushed back towards themselves as the text interacts not just with the readers but with the concept of reading. Original message invoked from network. Or can't articulate to myself. *[To audience]* Can you? Try a little description and I will try to respond.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** I do not intend to diminish my thanks

I learned a great deal, amazed and angered by the egotistical accusation of ignorance upon the audience and the apparent dismissal of verbal work.

Mime autoconverted from quoted-printable to subject. Poetry was not central to these scenes. UK precedence. I think when cris says poetry was not central to these scenes we have the point where the differences are heard. He, more than I, is involved with the teaching of performance writing and it seems to me that what he, Bergvall, Williamson, Catling, and Sumner are up to at Dartington is categorically different whatever antecedents. All these use writing in their own different and expanded senses, but I would argue that if a LIMITED interpretation of the word poetry is in use then poetry is not central to this work. But who am I to argue for a limited interpretation of the word poetry?

It seems to me that we do need to know that we are rewriting this stuff. And if we are knowing and meaning our rewritings, then there are purposes, agendas, controls that we are seeking to impose on the material of memory (and of course we need to be aware that others have these agendas). Sometimes I find it hard to work out the underlying agendas of some of the historicising. I have no 'privileged' memories). I hope in my work with Carlyle that my purposes are clear (in all their ambiguity). And I hope that readers will not assume that uninflected memory is at work.

It is inevitable that the memories of cris and Lawrence (with whom I had quite a lot of contact in 76/80) will seem like a distortion, variation to me. How does one work through this ridiculous need we seem to have to make the past into a singularity and then to write it down?

I am getting the overnight train. Let's agree a civilised time and place to meet. Hope you're feeling better. Talk to you when you get back.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** I am not well today. I can't make decisions. I can't get the train to Cornwall. I am in complete paralysis. Not well in the head or not well as colloquially i.e. physical pain etc. AND paralysed. I was unwell at the beginning of the week LOTS of garlic + tonic water with the quinine added -- seriously... I've been told this has no effect but I feel myself coming together like a plant that hasn't been watered for some time when it is finally watered & herb tea or it could be put another way I didn't drink & you don't much, do you? Maybe you ought to drink a bit and then stop because it I clear to me that my health improves when my drinking stops I recognise what you are

experiencing; no panaceas; but in case it helps, I think I've been there. Go to Cornwall, go to Cornwall -- I was v pleased when you said you were going. I thought "at least someone is going there". I'm going to go to bed now so I can get up at dawn. Right. We have one which has a light in its base and the light goes on to the screen blocked by the dark bits on the transparencies (i.e.. you would get light coming through the pasta possibly but it would probably show as silhouettes. That's what I want. We also have a 'true image projector' which means you can take a book and put it on the o.h.p. and it will project the image of that book's page on the screen (you would therefore get a picture of the pasta rather than the silhouette of the pasta). that's not what I want. I shan't buy the bits and pieces I need till the last minute if, when you can decide, it seems too much trouble – incl. just carting the stuff there, tell me, and I'll drop the idea. No problem. Life's too short and I like to unburden my friends but I don't like doing these things. I always use them like this to justify myself in relation to the accusation that I am not well enough known to push myself forwards and I am saying 'yes I am, look at all these people who think I am ok'. It is sick. Relax.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** I want to make a realtime nonfilm movie... I may lay hand-written transparencies on; and, through that lot, I may hand-write the transparencies there; and then I suspect the posh one will impede such creative activity.

I don't want to be encumbered or to encumber you. What do you think?

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Merely suicidal so not bad today. Unless you are telling the straight truth, that doesn't help me be the supportive friend I am trying to be. If it's the straight truth, well, hang in there -- I look forward to seeing you again. There would be no charge. I think I recently observed that you a treasure. thank you.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Confusingly different from the usual way things work.

Is not the cramping of creativity that is going on in legal attempts to restrict plunderphonics and sonic-sampling in the music industry an example of the way that copyright is used to prevent the flow of ideas rather than protect and promote creativity?

The printing of poetry on to a blank page DEVALUED that page so that it no longer had any commercial value.

The law concentrates on work with commercial value; it is to do with the protection of the owners of the organs of power and distribution, not to do with the circulation of texts and ideas. The point for me is that of a complex network of thick descriptions based on personal takes be put out here for all to read. The more accounts, the more differences, the greater the cumulative sense not of one version but many many histories.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** There have been times elsewhere when I have felt great frustration that histories are being claimed and that those histories surface later as an indisputable record of the time. And so often those histories can be traced to particular ways of viewing related not even to the time written, but to the time in which the history is written This is unavoidable, but if it is also unacknowledged then various entrenchments follow from it

It is the consensus that worries me -- the containment of the uncontainable.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** It was a vibrant time, with all sides alive, active and defending their interests. Had it been left to sort itself out, it would have been an extraordinarily active and intense collection of poetries. There was never any sense that I got from it that non-experimental (ugh!) poetries were being prevented from getting on with it, simply that other poetries were (for once) getting a look in.

Those who were intolerant of experiments would be frightened away, but never pushed.

What's curious about such sources and resources is that the work mentioned in them is not that which was most interesting. It is that which got written about, for various reasons as above, but sometimes simply because it was easier to write about, easier to absorb quickly blah. These sources act as distorting mirrors.

And this is exactly why I spend time above on the printshop/workshop. What is so often written about re: the poetry sock is the boardroom machinations and the movers and wheelerdealers. For the people who USED the society then, these were politickings of little relevance (until everything collapsed). It suddenly occurs to me that one of the

reasons I am so interested in her performance work may be because my experience of it is entirely through Carlyle's memories and cris's memories. Perhaps Lawrence has talked to me about it too. I never saw her perform, though I have seen her read frequently (a performance in itself) and I have observed her working (another performance). So my experience of her performance is entirely mediated by memories - unconnected to history.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** I thought your sensual evocation of the words where signifier became close to signified -- not the sort of thing one could show to one's servant -- was superb I do find pain a pain though. one can't even write in support! well, yes. But what can one do?

My message about cunt and fuck was meant to back up and develop what you had said. I started earlier and wrote reams and then there was a power surge here, slight but enough to wipe the ram and I couldn't be bothered to start again; and then I saw that no one seemed to respond -- I wanted to both encourage you to keep contributing and... and also to try to build on what seemed to me to be a valuable posting.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Re: bigger bangers I cant compete with stanley fish. Sad. I want to understand this cryptic comment.

Yonks ago at a day festival organised by Virginia Weinberg, I spent hours building an installation, went off to lunch and came back to find that the musicians had demolished it because they didn't like it... that was odd too. I was so angry I went off to be on my own and Virginia got terribly upset because of my anger; or so it seemed... which only annoyed me more because I was dealing with my anger... however, more recently, I have met only the sweetest musicians... December before last at V I - I can't remember who it was now, but they couldn't do enough to cooperate with the poets and we went over and over the plans until everyone had got an optimal-for-them arrangement... but always at my back I hear the possibility of musical palaver. It is actually Jo Hyde who did Nekyia with me (and confusingly is a heteromale, despite his choice to use the female version of his name). Of course, now I recognise the name. My brain doesn't work properly today. I will argue for you. I am actually quite content. I have found a technique which is amusing me in the recording studio, to read a text into a microphone without breath (almost) so that all I get is the plosives and fricatives etc. I have layered a number of tracks of this and the sound is really very interesting. It is a

way of ALLOWING myself to make noise (or perhaps of giving me some 'intention' in relation to sound). I can't just start improvising, but if I have something I am reading then I can make that into sound instead of words. Weird the way I have to trick myself into things! Yes mike abuse is good. Remind me of what technical equipment you would like.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Courteous and kind as usual, Ric has shown us the way to behave courteously and kindly -- and shown us that if we are courteous and kind we have no need to raise the nasty, messy, issues around the subject of ownership of texts, because they are irrelevant to the courteous and kind. For which let us be grateful. I am particularly grateful for the reference to Bernstein's "My Way", since my poor memory had been unable to identify where I had picked up the delightful passage.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Question 1 How are you? Answer: merely suicidal so not bad.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Solution to kitchen corners. Dear Miss Nomer, I think I'm a spiritual person, and I want to give thanks for my life, but I'm too depressed. Last week, my best friend was gay-bashed.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** In all poetry the appearance on the page can affect how we read in the same way that the quality of the voice can affect how we listen. Carlyle Reedy's writings can be retyped by her on to different sheets of paper, but each will then begin to take on a life of its own and the changes to that sheet may not occur to other sheets with the 'same' poem on them.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Which would you rather have -- an illuminated manuscript or an email version of the same book? What would change in that transformation? I read the small press books for pleasure (feelly-feelly, sniff-sniff, snuggle-snuggle). To see representations in light in glass of scanned versions of some of her paper works that I have seen her holding and marking seemed like formaldehyding butterflies and pinning them down behind glass. If you say so. I think I preferred it when you called yourself a pink thing,

but I wouldn't want to cramp your style oh I see -- you're processing my text well carry on carry...

Pygmy arselicker adolescent weirdo. If you say so.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** Well, hang in there. I don't know whether I am telling the truth that I FEEL suicidal (I think so), then you are telling the truth I know this kind of space very well. I empathise though I've only been low in the last few days (even though for me too there is much to look forward to); but, as I said, I am looking forward to seeing you; so hang in there, Lawrence... So hang in – Lawrence.

I don't care for myself. I just dislike the fact that those who are helping us are also ripping us off. I am grateful for their generosity and wish they were more generous.

Unless you are telling the straight truth, that doesn't help me be the supportive friend I am trying to be. If it's the straight truth, well, hang in there. I don't know whether I am telling the truth that I FEEL suicidal (I think so), but equally I know well that I am not going to do it. I am just in one of those depressions that I get and when I get them I have (as you know) been known to curl up on the floor in the corner of my kitchen and sit there for hours trying to 'decide to open my eyes' (I think that's how I put it last time). But it is merely physical, some chemicals. Everything is going OK. Performance Research have sent the proofs of my article on CR and interview with her about Monkey and they look great. cris should have the next Language aLive edited by La Bergvall out soon with a piece by me in it. It is just that it doesn't mean anything when in bright sunshine the world is black sump oil. I think I recently observed that you are a treasure. Thank you.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** It seems to me that they would be interesting very sparse as well as fast/quickfire (indeed a bit of both). but I would prefer a few tryouts Let's get anything sorted that either of us is worried about as a priority -- not quite worried, but... whatever the word is. I shall go on working at what I might do with you etc. and getting my bit sorted... but you set the agenda for rehearsal Lawrence Return-Path.

Horriddest holiday ever: all my own fault (not understanding self or world). So what did I expect? At least I am understanding the degree of obsession that I am embroiled in. I suppose I had fun. I had quite a lot of welcome silence and a lot of peace. The hardest



choice I had to make was decide between "Time Bandits", "Citizen Kane" and "The Italian Job". The greatest labour was cooking food in a well-equipped kitchen and washing clothes with a washing machine. Companionship of cats. Satisfaction rather than fun. Like you, I didn't have sex with anyone; but then I didn't expect to. I had a number of cuddles... The entire thing still without understanding myself or the world. If you want to talk about it, and the fact that you mention it suggests you do, I can promise discretion and sympathy. I wondered where you'd gone. There was a message asking if I was around and then nothing. I think this, in the scheme of things, the great chain of us all being pillocks, is very low level. It's quite interesting. Having a beloved is usually a one way state. Having said which, from what you say, it probably wouldn't do any harm to lower it! Like blood pressure. I regret the frustrations of my unrequited obsessions, and I've had a few; but I do not regret having learned to live with them -- leaving them running like demon mental processes, but able to share a room and conversation with the object of obsession without a perturbation of breath or heart, genitals being something probably best left to themselves, unmonitored.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** btw are you reading Poetryetc? They described a poet as superb and I said a polite bollocks. Stirred up the nests. One sent a patronising little sneer. So I found a poem of hers on the net and tore it up. Silly and nasty thing to do but I was angered by the one word argument by assertion. Is that the best we can do? Little flurry of responses, not one quote from a poem among them. I have to say that the word "superb" has given me an entirely new slant on the world. Perhaps I am a recent changeling or my brain has been modified... I'll say no more because I would hate to have my own writing prejudged. I shall look the book out and apply myself to it... Well, I'll have a look. I don't think I've said what I think, in terms of my reasons, because -- well, as I said, I wouldn't like my own work pre-judged. Having said that, I must have come across many of the poems already. I accept her work is in a different register to much that I admire. That's not a problem for me. I think my range is fairly wide. My criticism -- as it would stand, and on what I have experienced -- would be not that of its difference to others, quite the opposite, but that it just isn't very good. I hesitated at sending that post because it was dismissive. However, I reflected that she gets a great deal of coverage compared to much that I admire. Voices of hushed awe announce the name on Radio 4. & I have never been able to see it. Given the relative fame, I thought I'd just express my disbelief publicly in response to public praise. But I'll get myself into a bookshop and have a read and report back. I am quite prepared to say I am wrong,

much as it hurts. The panic is being brought under more control now, forces are reassembling and I am sure that no quarter will be given me; but fuck em. Seems a nice little canter of the sheep at the sight of a fox. As usual they don't know WHY they know you are wrong (is it because they have been told it by THOSE WHO KNOW?). I understand that, the problems. I'm exactly the same, and working on it; and no one has hit me, well apart from the ex wife. This is getting rather interesting, don't you think? The sneerers back down re their sneering (excluding O'Brien, who, understandably, just keeps silent) and begin to dig out their previous attempts at criticism, including grudging agreements that there are problems with said poet and with the whole "mainstream" edifice. Now one who is no ally of mine, saying yes he's got a point and Roddy thing? full of Forbes-wank -- if he thinks that's me pulling wings of a fly... etc. -- and saying that the pathetic grudging ground given is "harsh" criticism. I suspect such analysis (attack! you nasty man) gives a number of wannabees a sense of their own potential failure to achieve. I had no idea I would start this. It was just knee jerk "You cannot be serious" to the umpire... & again thanks for the review. Much appreciated. Course, you didn't see the last time I did overreach myself. I think I still got away with it, but that was the loneliest 15 minutes I've ever spent, knowing I was in deep shit from the moment I started! This leads me back to my comments about Lawrence. Is "adept" "works" "engage", "persuade" the validation of a poem/performance? Or would people go with Chris Hamilton-Emery and me and prefer "risk", "shaky territory" "extension outwards and beyond what we've tried before"? If a work disturbs me to the extent I don't trust it, I am sure it is doing something I need to look at -- I can't yet cope with it... exciting. I could say "persuades me to keep reading" but it doesn't, I have to persuade myself to keep reading despite my discomfort -- because it is doing something to me. But if a work persuades me, comforts me, agrees with me, what am I getting from it that will shift me somewhere interesting? I am comparing Fisher, Lawrence with. work that risks less. You can get disturbance in other ways. For example, I would argue Lawrence often gets the same sense of danger in his less apparently risky work. Fisher is also seldom (if ever) comfortable. Is this the crux of the question? Persuasive work v. Challenging work? Applying to college this year? Apply online at Embark.com and enter the Embark.com Tuition Sweepstakes! I have decided that the poet you really did attack is quite an interesting writer of short prose stories that don't make any great demands on her audience -- that's based on the poetryetc selection exactly. I think I may have heard some on the radio... ignorable. Interesting they would rather splutter indignation about her than attack me for liking your work. But maybe I just don't phrase

things so that they can take note of them and perhaps I just don't talk about the things they are interested in (to what extent has this stuff been useful? to what extent was my Lawrence stuff useful? I think most of what is going on is entrenchment... no one has said anything to shift my attention towards her or away from Upton (nor even to refocus me on a different aspect of your work)). These flurries on the list end up boring me to tears. One of the reasons I dropped out. I may do again shortly. Not even Fisher got many hits. They are obsessed with the defence of a 'nice' writer. Let 'em stew. I don't have energy for their self-protectionism. I am spending my energy on protecting myself from their onslaughts. I am not a threat to them as me though I am apparently perceived as a threat to her, especially when I do the straight suicide run bit, not being diverted for long by comparisons and sociological contexts -- it's been interesting to see something like desperation to stop someone analysing one of their totems on technique -- I am going to bite into that tired diction, the fear of where her flirtation with cutup takes her, her wooden ear, close my jaws and smile at them like a Cheshire wild cat I suspect, seriously, that the phrase book sequence is the first time he's come across that sort of stuff and he really thinks it is risky... & I've just given his wife a gig. I've given his wife a gig because she's a good poet. Hardly breaking obvious boundaries, but she's more interesting than he is. I doubt they could cope with you coming in and praising me. I was fairly quiet for ages, then I started banging away at something or other last week and then in the last 48 hours I leapt on a one word remark and annexed it like Iraq going into Kuwait & then on top of that you come in and say here's an alternative way to look at all poetry and I think that's the way we should look at it and if you agree then Lawrence is important. I was challenging the validity of one of their main totems; you were challenging the system that needs totems. It's obviously not going to go down well with the slimes who are brown-nosing. You don't get much response to anything. To get a measure of the panic take a look at the chat just posted. It's like that Carry On film with Sir Sydney Rough-Diamond hosting a dinner party while the fuzzywuzzies blow up the building. No one has said anything to shift my attention towards her. Well, there's nothing much there is there? It's quite good in some ways. Kind of its own sub-genre. I'd place it more in the stand up performance way than on the page. her ear seems full of cotton wool. There is no defence. All they can do is say "yes, but it's my opinion it's superb" Not even Fisher got many hits. Did you expect him to? That's why I dropped him in and also ( + self-respect) why I changed Geraldine to Maggie. Not sure anyone noticed. They are obsessed with the defence of a 'nice' writer. As are most people. Let'em stew. I don't have energy for their

self-protectionism. I am spending my energy on protecting myself from their onslaughts. I understand something like my views most of the time; but I am enjoying this one -- always useful to have to justify one's certain certainties and I have enjoyed your company anyway. I've done a first draft of my final thing -- not very long -- based on the recent selection and shall have a read tomorrow or Wednesday... I'll drop it on them in due course and then turn my attention to writing a brief history of British sound poetry which includes you. No. I have no intention of drinking camomile tea. I do sometimes. My doctor suggested it as a counter to my passionate engaged response to everything, but I wouldn't think of it for a get together. I am here at work at 7 on Friday when everyone else is out partying and I have no good excuse. I had planned to go and have fun. I have found ways to prevent myself from doing so. I find myself incomprehensible. I can't think of anything I'd like to do less than party. I would need an excuse to have done it. And as for fun, don't talk to me about fun. I'm trying to cheer you up, btw. I have always had deep doubts about parties and fun. I would endorse the reliability and positivity of finding oneself incomprehensible; except that I think I am beginning to comprehend myself. Ah well. Do you mean you would like to be different or do you really mean you want to be someone else? I asked how you are. How are you? (Camomile tea was a joke.) I must remember that for you words have definite meanings. I must remember to use them as if I also thought that, so that we can communicate. Words have definite or rather definable shared meanings I DO want to be different but the different that I want to be is not myself different but someone else different. I want to defer from my life into someone else's. Not anyone quite specific, but I could identify some features (but wouldn't... I might feel too exposed even for me if I did that). It might be worthwhile, for you, to pursue that. I don't mean "tell me about it"; but maybe you should tell you about it. time is passing you know well, you sound ok; I was a bit worried about you L I tried to make some initial enquiries re my journey Got nowhere with the phone -- they couldn't hold the separate ideas in their heads long enough to give me an answer. The website either presents a blank page and announces "done" or tells me there is no direct connection between Tadcaster and Totnes. I'll try again in 24 hrs L Excited by the prospect, if it is something I could sound adequately (ie. not 'visual only' - which still blocks me) but when you say "sound" do you mean non verbal or do you mean speaking rather than uttering Christopher Knowles' face -- so logically I suggested I read one of Christopher Knowles' texts (if it can be called logical to read a text in relation to visual work -- which I think is illogical, and indeed unsustainable, but might be ok) Oh right. I would have said, ok transfer my

"objections" to him, but you've kind of said that yourself. Objections is of course too strong a word. I'm up for just about anything. Them in the book into sound, or keep going with isolated words from before or after while you vocalise (this last sounds a little more promising?). Very promising. I am not going to NY until first April at earliest – i.e. a change of plan. Switch your brain on and maybe thoughts about collab won't crash the system this time. \*This first of April?! I was talking about your plan to up sticks, not a jolly. Clarification please? Lawrence I was referring to BC visual pages which I can't vocalise, but I hope might permit/prompt you to vocalise. They DON'T prompt/permit me to. Yes, I understand. This must have been sloppy writing on my part. I was thinking that I did / would prompt -- I take it as axiomatic that you would feel permission or at least not feel excluded (although I do go into a kind of aware but predominantly autistic space when the non verbal utterance is going full tilt) i.e. that any multivoice non verbal performance needs to be collaborative -- if you start to utter then I am uttering in a performance space which includes and is partly made up of your voice and vice versa but but but I don't want to push you into anything you're not happy with. Yes, but it is an aim to go to NY rather than a plan. It may not come off. I don't want to close off options. I understand that. I thought you were pretty certain of your desire to move there and that would have a way of making it more likely that you will make it... I probably don't listen enough to you when you speak of this because I think it's a daft idea (!) But if we were to get into collab, I would be very happy. I feel I am in a more... certain(?), confident(?)... relation to my writing than I was with Blancmange/Fall. Let's try again, and think performance and NOT separation. The problem was that we made separate things in relation to each other which meant that they remained 'the author's', instead of becoming ours. I would like to see somethings that we lose the sense that this text could have been made by either of us separately. I remember getting very muddled by it, the organisation of it and I don't know know where that came from. You'd have thought that I'd have been like a duck to water given the number of collaborations that I've been in, but that didn't happen. The last bit of what you say, about things that could have been written by either of us, is interesting and exciting, given that we are so far from each other, in some ways, in our individual output. Let me know when you know FOR CERTAIN the dates you need the b&b for. Is it the nights of 29/1st? Or do you want to come earlier/leave later? Those are the dates I am thinking of. If I journey either from Helston or London, I would arrive too late in the day to feel comfortable about performing that day -- I would not be at my best -- and so need to have that day to prepare ideally. If I make a longer trip, which I had intended, it

might have been different. One plan was to walk from Lizard to Mevagissey - no great distance... another included around the Fowey; but as these collapse I have to think in terms of a long journey to Totnes... I am no great lover of east Cornwall though it sure beats London, well some of it -- I mean etc. The idea of making a longer stay is also interesting -- but it's the same thing really that if I can pay a b & b in Cornwall then I can do it in Devon... but then my mind tends to reverse the equation... Maybe if I have 48 hours there then I shall have my mind changed... spending time in Totnes would potentially make collaboration possible. As I say I am watching myself at present. I am in a very odd and muddled state and mistrust my own responses... I may have some clarity about my finances over the forthcoming months in a few days and if that happens then I may find that some of my ambiguity over travel evaporates; though I am generally cluttered; but I may be inventing the muddle because I can't work out what to do But, yes, I shall let you know asap. Please forgive me for being so vague -- I think this is unlike me. I usually have reasons for any prevarication and maybe I have now; but my overall feeling is of being unsettled Heh ho, I'll give some thought to another collab, how it might start. Or, like DAN, it could have two starts. It may not be in writing. When I stayed with you in the summer, I think, you talked about NY and how you'd like to live there for all the reasons you give below and I said I'd rather -- whatever I said. I have now referred to that, in my head, with the word "mad". Telling you that you are mad, is not like me saying Alaric, you are mad to stand in the middle of that road. More it means I cannot comprehend that anyone would want to live in NY. I said that to Barry Mac and \*he said that \*I was mad. I am intrigued by "quiet". Quiet?! Good luck to you if you want to move to NY. I guess I wouldn't mind visiting it again, but... I would have my hand on my ticket home all the time. I live in an interesting writing scene city and am still plotting to get out of it and do wonder how that will affect me... I can understand the attraction to someone who doesn't live where there's lots going on. I see that would be important to you. People, yes... Ha! Remember you are talking to someone who, if he thinks about where he would live had he freedom to purchase what he wanted, would get as far away from most people as he could. My idea would be to \*try to keep a spare room ready for people I like to stay and to do the rest by email. I think that it's probably a good idea for you to go to NY if you want to do that. It's just incomprehensible to me. My Australian mate tells me his dad may be on his way out so I am trying to do something with several dozen cubic yards of important crap. This may put paid to my suspended plans for Cornwall. It's funny, I got the news shortly after I had decided to go to Cornwall!... It'll take days and days and days to get

things clear in case he comes. But it'll be better to have done it; I could offer you shelter, for instance; if I can manage not to undo it; and I have to do it for him... So... When I am more clear on this I shall think on The Journey i.e.. What I am saying in no way affects the gig. Be patient with me. I need rewiring. I can't find where you say I am mad to want to go to NY, but I am sure I read this from you. I would like to read your reasons. 1) interesting writing scene 2) interesting gay scene 3) interesting people (morgan ohara, jennifer ley, charles b, jackson etc.) 4) sophisticated, quiet, elegant, vibrant, dangerous, sexy, mixed, centre of the known universe. OK everything is up for grabs (except the gig) My friend Richard's father has died and Richard will be over next week. I doubt he'll be here long and I may not see him again ever. So that has priority. I've emailed back to see how long he's staying, if he knows. So... I shall gladly accept your offer of b & b. When I am rich I shall do things for you. 29th so I can prepare for the gig and 1st so that I am sheltered after. Get a cheap one, mate; don't spend undue money on me. You might enquire about the possibility of being there before or after; but I cannot yet commit to that. Lawrence. That's probably what I would have brought. But whatever I bring you aren't compelled to take them to America. No one is buying them here any more so it makes sense to use them. It's interesting work. I like it as a book. & I guess I'll slowly drop little batches on you until it starts selling or until it is o.p. Lawrence. Fine. Thanks. No one likes my work (with a few notable exceptions). I must be doing something right. In other words, few people like your work. It's a less dramatic but more precise way of saying it. No one likes my work (with a few notable exceptions). I must be doing something right. I too have thought this, that unpopularity indicates aesthetic sense; but it is, I am sure that you realise, a flawed argument. Also, with the net it is very difficult to know how many people know about your work. I think the thing about your work -- to turn something like what you have said of me and Allen Fisher back on to you -- is that it doesn't make people comfortable and may make them uncomfortable. That is certainly doing something right. & you do it very well. L In other words, few people like your work. It's a less dramatic but more precise way of saying it. But as you know I am a Drama Queen and very imprecise. Oh boo. I too have thought this, that unpopularity indicates aesthetic sense; but it is, I am sure that you realise, a flawed argument. Yes. But it gives some solace to the forlorn. I think the thing about your work -- to turn something like what you have said of me and Allen Fisher back on to you -- is that it doesn't make people comfortable and may make them uncomfortable. That is certainly doing something right. & you do it very well. An uncomfortable seldom-read poet. Yes. That sounds about right. Merely suicidal so not

bad today. Unless you are telling the straight truth, that doesn't help me be the supportive friend I am trying to be. If it's the straight truth, well, hang in there. I don't know whether I am telling the truth that I FEEL suicidal (I think so), but equally I know well that I am not going to do it. I am just in one of those depressions that I get and when I get them I have (as you know) been known to curl up on the floor in the corner of my kitchen and sit there for hours trying to 'decide to open my eyes' (I think that's how I put it last time). But it is merely physical, some chemicals. Everything is going OK. It is just that it doesn't mean anything when in bright sunshine the world is black sump oil.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** It took me some time to understand that you found my deluge of emails confusing. I intend you to have as much of mine as you can stomach and I can spare. Your enthusiasm is part of its source. Merely suicidal so not bad today. I don't know whether I am telling the truth. I FEEL suicidal. I think so, but equally I know well that I am not going to do it. I am just in one of those depressions that I get and when I get them I have (as you know) been known to curl up on the floor in the corner of my kitchen and sit there for hours trying to decide to open my eyes. I think that's how I put it last time. But it is merely physical, some chemicals. Everything is going OK. It is just that it doesn't mean anything when in bright sunshine the world is black sump oil. Have been hiding, crouched in the corner of the kitchen trying to decide open my eyes. Much better now. I think I have despaired so I am quite jolly in discrete strata.

*Voice pauses and then continues.*

**Voice:** No one knows, so from whom do you hide? given that there is no one walking in the garden (even a kitchen-garden) in the cool of the evening . I mean from what you've said it's your perception of yourself rather than anyone else's perception. Powerful enough, and I speak from experience. But despair? Really? If you say so. Anyway, you seem to have survived and fortunately (though it won't seem fortunate) not unscathed. Thus do we learn -- just in time to bloody die.



### Alaric Sumner, some basic facts

Alaric Sumner (1952-2000) was a writer and performer, an artist, an editor, critic and educator.

A one time Writer in Residence at the Tate Gallery, St Ives, latterly he had lectured in Performance Writing at Dartington College of Arts in UK, where he was also undertaking doctoral research.

He was editor and co-founder of *words worth (Journal of Language Arts)* and founder and editor of *words worth books*.

He edited the Writing and Performance section of *PAJ 61* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999 which includes an interview with Reedy and work by Reedy, Upton, Cheek and Bergvall).

He was UK Associate Editor of *Masthead Literary Arts Magazine* (edited by Alison Crogan in Melbourne, Australia).

Of particular note, the prize-winning *Voices (for 9)* was performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in 1994.

His collaboration with Joseph Hyde, *Nekyia (for speaker, singer, electroacoustics and video)* toured during 1999-2000. It's last scheduled performance took place at Nunnery Gallery in London, shortly after Sumner's death, with Joseph Hyde and Steve Halfyard and with Lawrence Upton taking the place of Sumner. Hyde presented a recorded version of *Nekyia* at the later as celebration at Dartington

*The Unspeakable Rooms* (a collaboration with Rory McDermott funded by the Arts Council of England) was described by Frank Green in the *Cleveland Free Times* as "one of the most powerful performances I've ever witnessed, and I've attended hundreds. A difficult masterpiece".

His collaborations with sound artist John Levack Drever have been broadcast and performed in concerts around the world and published on CDs from ISEA and Doc(k)s. Joseph Hyde used Alaric's texts from *Nekyia* in his CD Rom work for Performance Research.

## PUBLICATIONS:

*Bucking Curtains* (Mainstream Poetry 1999),

*Aberrations of Mirrors Lenses Sight* (RWC 1998),

*Waves on Porthmeor Beach* (Illustrated by Sandra Blow RA) (words worth 1995),

*Rhythm to Intending* (Spectacular Diseases 1994),

*Lurid Technology and the Hedonist Calculator* (Lobby Press 1994),

*Songs of Nonsense and Experiment* (Zimmer Zimmer 1976).

Alaric's work is anthologised in *Word Score Utterance Choreography* (edited by Cobbing & Upton, Writers Forum 1998), *My Kind of Angel: i.m. William Burroughs* (edited by Loydell, Stride 1998) and *things not worth keeping* (edited by Cheek & Lavers, things not worth keeping, 2000 - posthumous publication).

At the time of his death, Alaric was working on a long piece - *Letters for dear Augustine* - letters to a fictional person of unstable gender.

## Introduction to “A Song, through Alaric Sumner”

As well as “A Song, through Alaric Song”, I have also considered “A Song of Alaric Sumner”, “A Song for Alaric Sumner” and various other similar variations, as well as substituting “hum” for “song”. None quite carry the meaning that I suspect I want but cannot quite name. This title is a compromise.

The “text” is largely sourced from the extensive email correspondence between Sumner and Upton – and some other material breaks in. There is a lot of reordering and some new writing by Upton, especially repetition.

Alaric Sumner can no longer say his words even though he wrote them; so I must speak for him. (The survival of his words after his death is the accidental consequence of the persistence of digital and paper records and a function of my memories.)

Thus, in any particular section, you may be reading, in terms of their origin, my words or Alaric's or both. It is a conversation in a head.

There was a character, Vice-Admiral "Burbly" Burwasher, played by Jon Pertwee, in the radio sitcom *The Navy Lark*, who would vocalise debates with himself: “Where am I? I don't know. Distract them... Hallo... Right that's given me a moment or two. That's clever of you. Thank you. Not at all. Now why am I here? I don't know.”; and it would go on. Sometimes there was very little narrative in the episode with a series of such set pieces.

That “quotation” is made up. Something like that single-multiple voice is going on here – there is no story as such -- though I had not heard the broadcasts when I made the text. There is also a man who often gets the same bus as me who carries on a debate over a mobile phone though he has no receiver plugged into his ear and no visible phone.

Some of the time he is speaking and some of the time 'listening'. Something like that may be happening here.

Alaric and I carried on a fairly constant email discussion in the latter half of the 1990s and would meet now and then. (I had known him since the mid 70s.)

Much of the material here, but not all, comes from the last months of his life, he at Dartington, me south of London, both writing in one sense or another fairly continuously, when we were debating collaborations between the two of us and the launch performance of his book **Bucking Curtains** in late February 2000. That gig did

happen although there is no material here from after it. Both of us had catching up to do after that few days; then he became ill; and he was dead before the end of March 2000.

The emails and the “song” made from them concerned how we might perform a variety of texts, including the new book; and also how we might beneficially collaborate further. Underneath that, and it is discernible in the song, was quite a strong sense of apprehension on Sumner's part about the risks of improvisation: he was very much a person who liked a full script.

The first performance of this text, in an earlier form, was given at the “as” celebration at Dartington College in, I believe, June 2000.

Clearly, the reader will read the text differently depending how much they know about Alaric and myself.

It is not my intention to present a literary puzzle. Nor do I wish to produce an annotated text. It is a piece of writing which is often far from easy to take in.

Therefore, I offer a few notes to help you understand something of the background to our collaged discussion, the song. If they help you avoid hunting for red herrings, then the notes will have served a purpose.

**Stanley Fish** was a writer whom Alaric valued greatly.

**St Augustine**, the Christian saint, is, here, not “Dear Augustine” of Alaric's fictional letters. Beyond that, I am not sure.

**Bob (Cobbing)** – the poet, who ran *Writers Forum* which Alaric had attended in the 70s and who, with me, published Alaric in **Word Score Utterance Choreography**.

**Totnes** Sumner's base whilst teaching in nearby Dartington. His permanent home was in west Cornwall. During the years of our collaboration, we met both in west Cornwall and Totnes.

**Bucking Curtains** Alaric's last book before his death.

**Samuel R Delany** a writer Alaric valued.

**Christopher Knowles** a writer Alaric valued.

**Shallal Dance Theatre** – Local to his Cornish home. Alaric worked with them briefly, as described herein i.e. the “I” there was him, not me, in its origin.

**error studies and portraits** a performance piece by Sumner circa 1995

**bvm** a declarative poem by me circa 1993

**Carlyle (Reedy)** a fine poet based in London, whom Alaric had published at his own considerable expense – Alaric greatly admired her writing.

**V I** a reading series + based in London

**Nekyia** – a performance piece by Alaric Sumner and Jo Hyde

**Blancmange / Fall** an unpublished collaboration between myself and Sumner

**Unbelievable tombs** is one of several joke titles by which Sumner chose to refer to one of his more successful pieces **The Unspeakable Rooms** which was performed by Rory McDermott in UK and USA.

**cris** is cris cheek

The peculiar mention of pasta in the context of overhead projectors refers to a performance Erik Vonna-Michell and I gave at *London Film Makers Coop* – all kinds of material, including pasta were thrown over an o.h.p. platen as part of our live film. Alaric did not see the performance, but I had told him about it; I thought, correctly, that he would be interested.

Lawrence Upton