

# **Statement**

for the exhibition

**“from recent projects”**

of images, maquettes, film

by Lawrence Upton

**from 20 to 27 September 2012**

**St James Hatcham Church**

**New Cross Gate**

**Pointing Device Publications, 2015**

Nearly all my visual work is made with a view to performance by utterance (vocal or instrumental; or dance; or both), using the images as score(s)

So what you see here, on the walls, may depict recognisable objects in some cases and respects; but, in this context, realistic representation is now little part of my primary purpose; and these are, in this context, indicative scores for sonic performance.

Yet, often, in the process of making, my first objective is to make an image that is interesting and enjoyable to look at in itself. Only then does the question of its performance arise, if I have started from making the image itself. I will have paid attention to matters of photographic representation, though not necessarily realism; but those matters are necessary to achieve the objective rather than being a primary objective in themselves.

At other times, I may start from the desire for a performable image. Nevertheless, I always aim to make a strong image that is also usefully readable.

The nature of readability, as one takes an image as an indicative score, is not an easy one to explicate within commonly-accepted categories. The term “score” must be received loosely and with flexibility; and the term “notation” may well mislead if it causes an expectation that there is a symbolic code to which a key might be found or known generally.

In performance, these works ask you to look carefully and to listen both to yourself and others performing with you – there are no parts here – as you build a time-based aural work.

What I do as a practice arose from out of the unsatisfactorily-titled “sound poetry”, a categorisation I inherited unwillingly and which, I find, fits almost no one's practice if they're any good.

Some time ago, I began using the phrase “sound singing”, which I borrowed permanently from the Canadian Paul Dutton, for the actual performance process.



The relationship to each other of the elements of and stages in the making of the images can be interactive.

For instance, the left and right elements of what is now the triptych **Vust!** were originally workshopped, voice only, as a diptych; and that experience and experiment suggested that it, the visual work, would be improved both as a visual work and as a score for sonic performance by the addition of a central element arising from the left and right elements and in some way commenting on them.

**Weathercock colour boogie:** The weathercock, the real world weathercock, behind **weathercock colour boogie** has held my interest for some years.

It was made maybe five or six years ago by someone with time on their hands on a remote coast I visit frequently. That person made a rather ornate structure out of driftwood and flotsam – and, for all I know, jetsam.



from **Weathercock Colour Boogie**

It has disappeared, either at the hands of others or at the winds of storms; it has reappeared; it has fallen over. Bits have fallen off. It is imprecisely described in my book Snapshot and video (Writers Forum, 2010), in a poem which seems to suggest that the fundamental liquids of life are coffee and blood (N.E.S. & S.E.N.); and it shows something of itself in a number of graphic works, most photographic, a few hand-drawn, which also, between them, unintentionally and unwittingly, show the progress of what might be thought of as decay and collapse. It is transmutation.

Seen another way, what the weather and vandals have done can be charted metaphorically as a process of melodic and tonal change, and perhaps a kind of lexical shift.

I am interested in that process and in the marks and effects it has left apparent.

At a point where the structure is no longer at all functional as a weather vane

or any guide to wind direction, if it ever was, it is becoming more randomly beautiful, showing some hints of its earlier existence in its current collapsing condition. My images reflect this and separate themselves from the object.

**Sprung Songs** is current work but not exactly recent. What you see here, in this score, originated in my studio eight years ago. It was a large set of images-in-process based on the alphabet; and some of that work then was successful on its own terms.



from **Sprung Songs**

Three images arising were published on adhesive-backed paper by *London Under Construction* and fly-posted on the London Underground circa 2005 – 2006; and some were exhibited in a group show in USA about the same time.

In particular, there was an image shown in a USA exhibition for which I intervened with a laser printer's mechanism so that the output was not heat-fixed and could be manipulated by touch before being chemically-fixed.

The set arose from a series of photographs of temporary purpose-made assemblages. The assemblages are long since dispersed or thrown away; but the photographs remained; and I have returned to them recently. **Sprung**

**Songs** is the first product of my renewed attention.

In my work of the first decade of this century, I saw the images as indicative of conscious creatures in extremis and used titling to inculcate death trains, crammed with breaking alphabetical beings heaped upon each other; and the last judgment of a powerful entity, the broken letters falling into a disintegrating pit.

That is in there still, in those works and in my memory; and, to that extent, in the material; I have been to Auschwitz and one does not forget; but it is not something that I wish to foreground now. My telling you is a mode for me of denying it importance!

**Rope and chains** is an accurate description. The photographs were made in a community where such things are commonplace, as working tools; but, though commonplace, they should not be disregarded. Seen, they are part of a rich sensory environment.



**Singing Marram** derives its name from photographs of marram grass. I dedicate it to Bob Cobbing, from whom I learned much, who died ten years ago on 29 September 2002. Bob loved flowers and grasses, especially grasses, and used photographs of them in some of his work.

My practice started in poetry, but there is little obviously semantic material on

show here. That is one problem with selection: it leaves aspects of the whole unmentioned.



From **Singing Marram for Bob Cobbing**

In fact, words and sentences feature strongly in some of my current projects. I have been putting a great deal of effort recently into producing pages of text-as-graphic for a project with the artist Guy Begbie. We have had an exhibition of our collaborative works featuring the project at University of Middlesex which will close about the time that this exhibition opens.

The pages of text I refer to have been incorporated as images in a site specific work which may eventually be published in other forms, physical or electronic. We were not entirely as happy as we had hoped with the site for this particular purpose and have shown a small version of what might have been, which we have called a maquette for the proposed installation.

Guy and I are exploring what happens in general when two graphic artists collaborate; but we are also exploring the relationship of the page to the book; and of the page and of the book to the space it occupies and or creates: “the book as an architecture” we have said, conceptually, and now we are investigating it to see how real it might be. And, of course, that space has its own music.

Similarly, I am working again with Chris Goode, who is developing a performance from a semantic text of mine (**Intense focus, amnesia**). He is approaching my text through what he calls “the angles of incidence of dancers”; but the product (I hesitate to say *final* product) may have been translated from and through dance into further text, or images, or both. He says “I do imagine using video as part of the chain of translation, capturing movement and then being able to track and perhaps deform its vectors; and I can imagine that bit of the process standing alone or being a thing in the world.”

Inside the gridlock is a sentence. I was expecting my body is all things in the synecdoche of emotional breakdown. The words are sonorous, the whole history of himself and emptiness. They observe, describing a landscape. I take care. This objectified illness. Revolving light. It is destroyed. It and a singer here. So many collections of himself and of statements. They're sexy. The mob want to get sorry for being recognised. [from **Intense Focus, amnesia**]

All of that is of great interest to me after some years working with graphics as

potential dance scores.

The various items in the cabinet and on the plinths represent another area or areas of activity, area(s) which I have only recently considered making public. In their various ways, they represent thought experiments, but thought experiments based in materials.

What kind of sounds might particular marks indicate? I ask; and, by way of answer, present an object, I call it a maquette, so that I end up with two tangible images for the not quite fully aurally-imagined. And so, slowly, I might sense how I might utter.

But the process takes over; and one finds oneself looking at materials and asking the question rather than finding materials to provide an answer. That could lead to presenting them as, effectively, found objects; and that would be a different action. One has to concentrate on not concentrating too specifically.

Most recently, the maquettes made in preparation for the text-sound composition **Study 19** of 11<sup>th</sup> June 2010 [with John Drever, 8 channel; 15 minutes; *The Shunt Lounge*, London] were published on *Artslant*.



In the case of **Study # 19**, there were no visuals for the makings of a score, only a note of a small fragment of human language which we had agreed would be mined for its variations and elements. The assumption was that the work would proceed as normal; and it did not happen like that. As I prepared,

I was a bit like the caricature actor asking: What is my motivation?

Therefore, I tried to draw the (vocal) sound I was starting from and thence to move on to (vocal) sounds I hadn't thought of. It worked; and I might write in more detail about that some time.

The drawings developed into collages made from bits and pieces of household refuse; and I called those collages *sound maquettes*.

What you see here is a development of that idea. If you accept the proposition that what is on the walls can be read, ok then, what is the sound of these sound maquettes?



There is no mark or other score element they seek to explicate. They are themselves. They are starting points. Throughout, I have been inclined to work with domestic materials of the kind that normally one would throw away when their functional use is at an end.

There is no aesthetic or other ideological reasoning as such behind that. The maquettes are manifestations of rather idle thoughts that I have held on to, idle thoughts arising from the dross in and around my life! They are idle thoughts that may be put to work.

I may not see the results of each experiment through to a complete work; but what is learned is remembered and can be called upon to obviate relying on habit, favoured sounds and so on.

The maquettes, being here, are my question (if you accept it as such) to you, an invitation to thought experiment: read them, please; to yourself if you wish. What sound are they?

And, finally, the film.

The film arises from a poem set, **Choreographed Utterance**, in my book a song and a film (Veer Books, 2009) and from a week long conversation that I had with the Brazilian artist Wilton Azevedo when we met in USA in May 2011.

Azevedo is a fine and adventurous film-maker. We've known each other since we met in USA in 2001, I believe. Last year, I told him that, when I had the time, I would make a film of **Choreographed Utterance**; but that I wouldn't have that time for a long while; and he volunteered to do it for me because he liked the poem.

There's more to it than that; but it would take a lot of time to tell. The origin of the poem is described in the book; and the film itself may lead on to a wide range of performances in the next year or so. I shall make announcements about that in due course; there is a lot of work to be done.



from the film **See you**

Azevedo's film is silent, in this version, at my request, to allow a variety of sound tracks to be devised for it.

I hope you enjoy what I have made.

Lawrence Upton, Music Dept., Goldsmiths, University of London  
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Other, mostly-recent, exhibitions of Lawrence Upton's work

**The Future is Here Again: VISUAL LANGUAGE,**

curated by Nico Vassilakis and Holly Crawford;

AC Institute, NYC, USA; January 22, 2015 – February 7, 2015

*includes 5 works by Upton*

**Recent collaborative book works**

Sheppard Library, University of Middlesex (September 2012)

*duo exhibition with Guy Begbie (book works)*

**e-poetry**

UBGallery, Buffalo, USA (November / February 2012)

*duo exhibitor (with Guy Begbie) (book works)*

**beyond text**

Royal Scottish Academy, (November / December 2011)

*duo exhibitor (with Guy Begbie) (book works)*

**Collaborative Book works**

UWE (Autumn 2011)

*duo exhibition with Guy Begbie (book works)*

*a full retrospective exhibition*

**beyond text**

Moray Art Centre, Moray, Scotland (August / September 2011)

*duo exhibitor (with Guy Begbie) (book works)*

**beyond text**

Scottish Poetry Library, Edinburgh, Scotland (May / July 2011)

*duo exhibitor (with Guy Begbie) (book works)*

**Language to cover a wall**

Center for the Arts, Buffalo, USA (May 2011)  
*duo exhibitor (with Guy Begbie) (book works)*

**beyond text**

Visual Research Centre, Dundee, Scotland (March / April 2011)  
*duo exhibitor (with Guy Begbie) (book works)*

**Notation and Interpretation,**

ICA, London; February 2011  
*solo exhibitor among many (scores)*

**Text-sound composition,**

James Taylor Gallery, London November 2010  
*duo exhibitor (film) among many with John Levack Drever*

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**Deteriorating Texts**

LYC Gallery, Cumbria  
*Large solo exhibition of 2d and 3d works, Autumn 1981*  
*Catalogue*