

eight+six

Also by Ken Edwards:

Poetry

Lorca: an elegiac fragment (1978)

Tilth (1980)

Drumming & Poems (1982)

Intensive Care (1986)

Good Science: poems 1983–1991 (1992)

3600 Weekends (1993)

Glory Box (2000)

Fiction

Futures (1998)

KEN EDWARDS

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six**



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The cover, designed by the author, shows poem XLVII by Sir Thomas Wyatt, rendered into Zapf Dingbats.

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Mostly for Elaine

And each of us knows that our *self* does not amount to much.

J-F Lyotard,
The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge

The physicist's atoms will always appear more real than the historical and qualitative face of the world, the physico-chemical processes more real than the organic forms, the psychological atoms of empiricism more real than perceived phenomena, the intellectual atoms represented by the "significations" of the Vienna Circle more real than consciousness, as long as the attempt is made to build up the shape of the world (life, perception, mind) instead of recognising as the source which stares us in the face and as the ultimate court of appeal in our knowledge of these things, our *experience* of them.

M Merleau-Ponty,
Phenomenology of Perception

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DARKLY SLOW*

Bring back the persons! I

Ups & says

they are bipolar & splendid

The jogger in the park, the murderer in the dark

They're so lonely, they speculate, give em something to do

The imaginary persons right here

Wherever that may be, beloved, awed

And in a cloud (a crowd)

he she & you

Catching the eye, ordering a round for the unknowables

Bring em all back, I don't want to see them go

One's at a university in the snow

Another on the beach, one praying for the souls in woe

Oh sad poet please be on your toes

The boat casts off, the buddleia grows

And what's behind the moment's horizon no-one knows

* The title is a direct translation of Elliott Carter's "Adagio Tenebroso".

THE ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE

This is not me (says Me)
a terpsichore of invention, it is what I
says or transforms to blaze or daze
as in the sun or certain main-sequence stars
which make the carbon of “my” culture
whither it becomes the social body
through ratio & constant* that could have been
no other number.

And for our next
a jump-technology of reference
that changes, hazes
come down to us through the FM band
Oh the trombones bark

The forest is young again
So fill me [____] in

* Planck's Constant (6.6262×10^{-34}) governs the nucleosynthetic process by which stars convert hydrogen to the heavier elements of which we are made.

LAMBENTLY FLUID

Is there a better way of saying this?
I hope so. Did the dog
beg her master for the stick
to be thrown? And did she give
unconditional love, obeisance, abasement?
Did summer come & go?
Were resources wasted? Did the park
turn from green to brown & back to green?
Do any here know what they are, can we ever know, these
intangibles of comfort
their cheeks to our jowls, who sometimes stay with us for a
while but eventually
get up & go, allowing others to join us in their turn, & still
others after them
the spaces cumulating until finally they too take their leave
& all is as before?

LUNAR HOLOGRAPHY

Did you see our shadow creep up on the moon* stealing a
bite of luminosity? That was Thursday — well
I write this in the interim or do I mean
the ante-room where it seems as though I'm slowly being
rotated under a bright light did you
ever get that feeling? When you are no longer there
each trip, a rare adventure in prospect
ends the same way, mildly toxic, no problem

Ghosts in the plumbing, fox rot in the suburban verge
beer & biriani would do it — or not, for I am
wrecked without you and would have you return forthwith.
I send packages into that ether men do call foreign
parts, hoping for reciprocity — what comes back:
the “Don't panic” code, smoke moving behind the lights

* Lunar eclipse visible in London, 9/10 December 1992.

THE ENGINE OF LOVE

Dark drizzle falls & falls the sparkling dark
rain falls as evening falls on the football pitch
on the Ex-Servicemen's Club & Social Centre
where bitter's a pound a pint & where talk too
is cheap on a Saturday night — as over the table
over the numbered balls a boy confronts
his Dad who grips the cue in his big fists —
the boy's eyes flash with anger

at this moment

for the first time he drives the engine of love
but he's out of control — he pleads for its return —
beer spills on mica, video talk resumes
outside rain logs into the abandoned turf
great pylons march without a motion to
the power station on the distant coast

THE PANIC MUSEUM
(Theory of Poetry)

Falling to pieces in this brilliant backwater
with 800 years of delusions washing around me
now I lose track of the evening session
as conversations disconnect behind me.

I'd spent too much time placing out the plastic chairs
I decided, for the audience that would never come:
folk from the ante-room, burning with rhetoric
the liquidated stock in the panic museum.

First among them being the pope of fright
absent as always, though here in his manor he
's passed the law to his clones to keep safe.

(Watched by drunk students, two swans drift in moonlight
asleep on the placid water their necks plunged through
their feathers (they did not change my life).)

TO THE ESTUARY

To the estuary's wooden hulks I travel
along the sandlings where animals cry again
bass lines of bombers again over
dance fields over the class system of old England.
It is essential the trappings are slowly stripped away
hydrochloric acid is useful for this or a blowtorch or
some dead good corrosive so that through the foggy air
I may again believe this was not what I saw:

A quantity of animal dung in the bottom of the boat
a lighted doorway again I am in
the summer house in autumn where shapes move
in unison or conflict we look in and on and over
through and from where the paint burns
a sheen into the soft-hard air in England's daylight

ABOVE THE SHINING ROOFS

I had the air about me Fractured
Greyish in the sodium lamplight
in front of the Rye Hotel Oh gentle pint!
Oh friend oh lifestyle choice!

Outward in a zigzag
from the Cambrian beach this once was
ambience plunged towards the zero degree
of the bathroom shelf

From a higher energy state in negative space
the lights had come on one by one
to make of monochrome those great

rich blacks Above the shining roofs I swear
as god is my fax machine
hung tears or drops of golden blood

TREMBLING IN THE BERSERK STATION

Today came to life at 6.30 am, found him
trembling in the berserk station
where he remained until 6.50, then got up
in darkness to hunt for a shirt.

Out at 7.08 in remnants of freezing fog
first the newsagent's then onward still —
The fog hung heavily in hollows round tracks
as the train pulled out towards the light

Suppose you were trying to do something
impossible, like, from memory that isn't there —
Suppose ... well then it wouldn't be healing so much

as being already well
or stepping out of the time track
in which the disease occurs.

BECOMING

You see that to come into your own
is not an easily achievable wish
falling within its own allusive rubric
for you yourself are still the helpless baby
or a housecat scratching at upholstery
in the quite awful confines
of your history & ceremony
the source of all that stuff you hate so much.
But, luminous with wine, you watch
the one lying on the hospital bed & your image
mirrored, and slowly it becomes less hard:
the window is a source of light too, after all,
the architecture & the plan
become more clear: it's not you not you...

I GO TO SLEEP

I go to sleep in the railway buildings
which someone said looks like a boat
For five years I had that fine panorama
spread out before me until winter came with
sunny chill I wore my leather put it in a poem
I went to sleep & woke to oh just mountains
of phone messages & somehow after that
things were not quite the same

Look — I want

to put this & this & those
together so it has a thing inside the line
(the dark line that flits & jags)
which maybe is what I call poetry who can
say, which is no fugue & which is mine

THE CORAL NECKLACE*

Then we take the path on down the valley
accompanied perhaps by a hopeful dog
through all that tumbling fecundity of oak & alder
fir & pine, & eucalyptus, vetch, wild lilies
lemons ripening in their picture cage of netting
& in the bend before us the sea glistening hazy still the
Siren rocks amid it pink & purple white
so there we drink our water

Now I've opened the curtains this a.m.
& it's frozen upon the garden
a shade encroaching hard on fugitive glitter
How a year can go by, then another
it's in the earth somewhere, ochre & silver
sometimes your tongue can taste the coast

* Sorrento and London, May 1993, and six months later...

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

He comes & goes into & out of your
spectrum of issue avoidance, & that's cool
it's what you want & don't want in the opera
of your craving for the new
and no less than totally interesting, saying yes
you'd love to & meaning it, speaking of wanting to go
there with him as well but not wanting
to get too close, not great, but all we have

You clearly saw & it's OK it really is

You did like them & put them on

I had to say this sooner or later & in the end
as good as did though you'll agree "as good as"
isn't as good as
so you could bat the charge right back to me
but didn't & I love that in you too

LIKE

My love is like

And its loss is like

Like, what if it were all a
big mistake?

You can't talk to me like that
what can I say

Its music, what, huge
like a locomotive
imaged at strange resolutions

It's too luminous a conceit?

It hurts like fuck
it hurts my, like, human heart
you know what I mean

I mean nothing is like anything else*

Oh no it isn't

For heaven's sake

Because you're jealous & so
judgemental

Because you have some
personal opera going on

No Nothing like that

It's enough to change the
shape of a man's head

* This line is stolen from Eric Mottram. Something always to bear in mind.

AMERICAN MUSIC

When Jimmy Cobb hit that high cymbal*
when the metal went liquid & blue
all the cats in the farmyard woke from golden slumbers
in the twilight of money†

Now

there ain't nobody here but us (white) chickens
beside the red wheelbarrow
Oh that doesn't work any more, this farm's not so funny
ripped & jammed up on which so much de-

pendents like in the west it's always after the
war the junk belief jammed up the thing
his thing my thing our thing the changes
kind of hard edged pursuivant on strange information
Oh Jimmy Cobb oh Frank O'Hara we're waiting
for you, get up get it on
do the business —

* Jimmy Cobb, drummer with the Miles Davis band, 1958-63. The cymbal shot referred to comes 1'30" into "So What" on *Kind of Blue*, right on Miles' entry; as everybody knows, this was the moment when the world went from monochrome into colour.

† "In the twilight of money" is a phrase attributed to Le Corbusier.

SHIPWRECKED AND COMATOSE

Euphoria I hear you calling
Euphoria begins to wash off
leaving a pale petulance at such roughage
that seeps between — no more —
this is a tradition I just invented
all for you. Excuse me have we finished
discussing this yet? You, a woman of my
own age? Or something?
So that now I feel the ennui of one who hasn't had much
congress with real persons
Who is dull with sun & bluster on a charabanc trip to the
seaside on Bank Holiday Monday
The faint hope lurking that distorts judgement Euphoria
come back it's OK I'll make a deal with you

CHAMBER MUSIC*

You have a great wide window Chris through which
sunbeams flash, reverberate on four
white walls a dark stained floor — it's a good
window for a good & useful space
Now we're tuned up — but I just want to say
The Art of Fugues not something to be hacked through
as one might chainsaw a viola in half
by some careless mischance (finding oneself
with the wrong implement for the occasion)

Hey

what is this piece of wood doing in my hands?
where am I? You mean the city's turned &
summer's coming through?

Welcome to

Planet Earth —
home of Johann Sebastian Bach

* For Chris Shurety, on his 50th birthday.

DELICIOUSLY FAUVE

Summer heat
envelops the flimsies
the thing you did, the number five
shooting straight, deliciously fauve
you wanted one of those, I wanted
to remake them all with my corrections
oh it's so sweet to be listing on the wing
just give the man a smoke he needs a boost that thing
wasn't right, I need coating with foil after
such a marathon, with brightness to
reflect the summer's heat and
keep from dehydration
under big glass & no
sense of time

THEY DIDN'T GO HOME

The poets and their entourages, appendages,
readerships, theoretical props and absences
are variously and severally assembled.
A shows pictures and reads the words.
B takes seriously the notations in cowboy comic balloons.
C vacillates, and comes down on the side of externality.
D demonstrates conviviality (again).
E emphasises the smallness of the audience.
F is quiet and has with him a pair of roller blades.
G, as usual, enigmatic.
H waxes shaven.
I have had my hair newly cut but have forgotten about it.
Sound travels from the street below because it is a warm
night & there is no reason for folks to go home.

THE POETS GATHER
(Theory of Poetry 2)

The poets gather. They, like poetry itself,
want to be, not seem. Which is seemly.
These are their stories, and the summation
of them is this: that they reject story.
Why, they are paralytic with joy: on their plastic chairs
they identify the depth of field of such paradoxes
and exult in it — they presuppose no need
for emotional closure.
That was then. And now?
Well, only you & I are left, and we're engaged
in refutation. Yours is a pint of bitter,
mine's a Guinness. This proposition is true. We raise
our glasses, we refute it
and refute again.

SHIFTS GENRE OFTEN*

The poet is one who commits
acts of barbarism out of
social urgency. She babbles
and is a rejection of the
language of. She keeps the context
problematic, pivots as often
as possible, which permits
the tide. This is kind of lingo
phrase for those sorts of people lost
in “the water of the river”
when the water *is* the river.
Its maps are metamorphic not
atemporal, a comedy of
metonymic chains, of logics

* For Lyn Hejinian, some of whose presentation in the King’s Talks series, King’s College London, April 1998, I have paraphrased freely here.

BECOME GEMS HERE

The map has got scrambled & we are all
delighted. My foot is ambiguous, it has
locationality but not
positionality. Don't stop. "Those useful choreographies
can easily become a baleful aerobic"* and
once the stultifiers have a hex on warp agencies
who knows where it'll end up?
But I am certain of a noble uncertainty, it's OK

now I see that you in your way
radiate and this is legal & good.
And everyone says you got the look
of the artist formerly known as god.
We are conversant with our glorious plangent mess
gazing rapidly past this which into here

* The quotation is attributed to Cris Cheek in New Hampshire,
September 1996

SMITHEREENS

This pen has a good sheen to it, or as they say
it's cute as a sack of cash — so in the Rye
Hotel surrounded by smithereens* of popular culture
he set down to write the story of his life.
At my elbow is the most sinister suit I've
seen in a very long while he says these threads is
regal, tell him I'm tied up Mandy I am
shirted & cufflinked up don't get all previous
with me!

The bar hots up it's actually been
shanghai'd by sweating napes not even a legal
eagle'd wreak a blue streak what can I say?
I meet the brain-dead & the children of the
brain-dead I am among them all the week

* Parts of speech jostling for last orders in Peckham. The shade of the
boxer Chris Eubank is lurking in a corner.

PUISSANT CAR

Like a dickhead in a BMW
he presumes too much — and this presumption
is his puissant car — with copious clocks
and microprocessors, extreme of function.
A male cadence says “just do it” and unkeen
to seem too couth he stupefiedly
obeys and makes the death hex sign to gain
consumer satisfaction, sucked & seen.

My friend! that self-same powerhead within
the chrome & polished steel his glorious armour
was I — gearstick in hand — no, but you can
imagine — liquid years and laddish glamour
faded, carless in Peckham, on your pins
hearing the engine of grace slowly turn over

SPEAKS INTO MOBILE

Striped of shirt & lambent of tie speaks
into mobile a pipette of value wants to
plug a surf belladonna, becoming
cyclonic, cumuli pile onto his prospect
the heterosexual object of his
desire now once again forbidden
or unrepresentable, smash her face
and centre spread in colour.
COME ON YOU LOVEBIRDS get real
get fucked become the business
take me to your leader, plastic
Schubert in a basket with all the trimmings,
soften my head into the soup of the day
wank to the fascinoma of the month

CLICK ON THIS

Show me your gold card & I'll show you my hymen. The modelling of desired behaviours by a respected role model, irradiated or genetically modified, can be a key determinant

in changing the whole tone scale of an individual's attitudes & fragrance. It is important that this lost language, these lost sounds are flooded with options.

It is important that these ambient behaviours are linked to values & competencies, mobile and integrated into our noise-aspect,

appraisal and fractured management corporate policies. I have read & understood and agree to the terms & conditions.

I GO TO SCHOOL IN YOUR BONES*

Sex me up, my shape (she-ape!) of risk
tune up your heels to a serious reciprocity
give me all the attention of your imaginary fingers
like parachute silk in the troposphere.
I refer to your lustrous presence on my arms
where the veins go — apparently distant events —
high scent does enter the frame, with great velocity
I believe it to be nonsense, or else certainty.

Turn up the sound map, a social body
dirtied over from the inheritance
of chaos and loving invention.
Bring me treble clef & metaphor
bind my thresholds and to hell with balance.
Never let I speak —

* Title taken from Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*

WINDOWS FOR DOGS

Thou art my ape, my cynosure,
my star, my dog's bollocks. Mica
winks in the paving stones, my
fingers remember the number

and send graphics, text files & other
information to John. Fibrillating
and seriously flaky. Saw heron fly
onto and perch on a rooftop:

Tulse Hill. More than seven
melodies simultaneously
become chaotic. Two thousand

years pass. An incoming fax. John,
John. The hoarding trembles in the
wind and startles the dog.

PECKHAM PULSE

In the dusk filled street a man
is up to his wrists in engine.
The Church of Strong Prayer trades
straplines with the Beneficial Veracious
Christ Church. A bad child loudly
bruises the glass. Such journeys
are unbearable from the day they
are born. Something wrong.

Establishing shot across West Africa.

Braids filled with circuits
swing past the shops in holy
brand awareness, bound
to the logic board. Previously unknown
species re-invade.

BROADLY THROUGH THE EYES OF HIS
CONTEMPORARIES

When the film's projected backwards
mother rises feet-first
from the pool, the twins recede &
in time all is lost.

White leader, sprocket flicker
transferred to VHS. Friendship
decays into an exchange of influence
and services. Chaos follows, then poetry.

Sluice down those monkeys! Put
the doll back into dark winter,
ramp down the glory. Have key words
drift from one frame to the next,
but have them marked up as
unstable & prime for flunking.

HIGGLEDY PIGGLEDY

Back from the deed to the word, no that is
back from the dead to the world
to the brouhaha of bumpy dancers
messed-up tactical dogs & their sunk pints
he crash into the most awful trope in the continuum
on a thin story, not your fault —
Do me a privilege, avoid the brokers
click on here & you're away.
And so how's business? are you sure?
privy to what? the radius of delirium?
Would you say slumped or dumped or
occupationally hazarded? The dancers part company
with their clothes, flatter to deceive, turnover
sluggish — can I do escape?

WITHOUT BELIEF

To keep going on like this how can you live
like this without borders in your head*
as if you were a mollusc or an angel?
The secret's not to try too hard for it's
impossible no chance when everything's
so pitifully sensible & glitters
or fragments in contrast with its label
before attaining maximum velocity

Well I'm not a technical sort of person
in that sense although I'd like to think so —
all I know's sometimes you have this feeling
of architecture, that is, big things heavy
things — and other times there's nothing but
the loudness in your ears or skull of blood

* Some phrases taken from a magazine interview with the improvising guitarist Caspar Brötzmann.

THE DEEP ECOLOGY OF SPECIAL FX

In the dead weather
before the storm
in fields where copper
flows like butter

as though a small winged
insect were in there
wanting egress
your chest flutters.

In dead television time
a ghost highway links
somewhere to nowhere.

You don't want to be there
but it isn't there — it's here
and there's no place else to go.

ITS EVER MOVING SHADOWS

Because I believe in violence lies the answer
and often we have called this love
when I am standing in the light
among the indeterminate connectives
and you come towards me to this blaze that rages
then I touch you on the side of the torso
and on the arm & your face that gazes —
Should I reach your eyes

— but who can say —

I go to sleep in the railway buildings,
patterns of blood flow in the brain
float like surfaces over every ground,
I close my eyes in the transparent universe*
that casts its ever moving shadows —
You have to be lost before you can be found

* According to Steven Weinberg in *The First Three Minutes*, the universe became transparent to radiation at about 700,000 years of age.

BIG ROOM

You head for the big room always
tending to lose your marbles at any minute
I can't believe how you —
but shucks, you do have a good eye*
and in & under your wide contemplative sky
if going this way & that you miss
what's closest at hand, ie the thing itself, well then, you can
outstare its palpability

By contrast, being a man from the south I'm
almost all colour & sound from the inside
signifying what? who cares (I do)
I come to the power plant & am entranced
with the difficulty of it & your actual enigma
You bury your head in its clouds

* The enigma of looking.

CHAOS THEORY

South East England contains about 17 people
(and two of these are you & me)
sustainable development, inflated property values.
But we now live in a disinflationary world.

Parts of Arabia had a wet end to last week,
King Khalid military city measured 47mm.
This means downsizing and de-layering
for us, my dear, I'll wager.

You can choose between the headless chickens,
metal with a golden sheen.
It's not that bad, we're talking small percentages.
Over North America, unusual temperatures
made the headlines —
I've a residential cadence yet —

RUG

The business between us is what matters
the recurrent iron & stone the I & the you
and the who and why & whither, a fibre of sense
that oscillates between us we hold onto.
Let's weave that into a metaphor shall we
about six by four, say, a material base
to do the business, the season a little dusty
the night grown old — you want to imagine the rest

Well how's it going and are you ready now

And do you remember how utterly

And was there a time when it might have been

No — there isn't an end to this dialogue, nor will
there be, the stone & iron the iron & stone
again I stand foursquare on the rug you pull

HOLDING MY HEART STILL

If I were endlessly
scrutable you could
follow me there
or here — the geography
is immaterial. Then
you could tell me
very gently
what it was

I wanted
/
didn't want
to know:
the story
behind the
story.

I GO TO SLEEP (3)

Dreaming on tan plush
I view the colour spectrum
the unnecessary repetition
of limiting gestures.
Even now, sentient
screensavers flicker
blindly, false cognates
on the field.

Rooted to the spot
with a mouth full
of language, I am scuppered
by the logic bombs
of double curvature.
O tempora, o fucking mores.

MELANCHOLY

Darling person, whom I had not seen
for many months, I have forgotten so & so's
name, and my words slow down & echo
under the bridge which makes you laugh
it seems as though I am to come to a dead stop.
When things loomed large, we all went mental
with passing & movement, the pageantry
and all that business, when things were future
I mean *in* the future, or of it —
Then quite suddenly it's over, I am a child hearing
Beethoven in the street the evening of Xmas Day
or from summer's vantage watching fall approach, only the years
overlay, and suddenly too there are not many more
to come, my darling person: meetings, partings:

THE BOOK DIGS INTO MY SKIN

The book digs into my skin & flesh
talks in tongues of petal sound, squeak vapour & dog barks logic
everywhere setting still goes on
when I wasn't quite making sense.
Been down the road & had the man show me
eight machines, feel the strain in my upper body now.
I tried to contact you, but the pulses disappeared
into virtual space, bruising the rationals
all over again, like loops, like dogs, a wind spirals the dust up
“We had magic and
smoke and lots of theater action at that time”.*
And then the clocks went back, the lights
went solid rearranged my dental arc into a locked proscenium.
Soon it will be winter you don't reply

* Taken from *Mixtery*, a festschrift for Anthony Braxton, edited by
Graham Lock (Stride, 1995).

SLAKED BY PUBLIC WATER

You are old, father tortoise
spending your end of summer days on a spar
or impersonating one in the
municipal sun of the municipal pond of the
municipal park.*

And there no dog can catch you, prise open your shell
which is a blessing as well as a disguise
when you're practically insensible
and waiting for it to be over.

So that's pretty well it for the season,
planes, sycamores, elders tremble on the brink of shedding
and the goslings almost grown go by on the gloss.
The end of this story is at hand
& is not known

* Peckham Rye Park, perhaps close by where the young Blake saw a host of angels in a tree.

THEY DESCRIBE WORDS, THEIR SHADOWS

Goodbye my friends it flows dusks sadly
and reality drops like a stone.

Some members of the group said they admired
someone or something dear to them, it matters
not who was inspired, fit onto standard
postcard size. The liminal space recedes
the question poses limpid as a cry
too late, sat in a garden, one of forks.

So change the script:

The lid falls off the zipper slowly dark
this is where you begin to take apart —
Courage! make stint in the alarm
those impossible journeys struck to brighter lands
at times peaceful and at times without effort

INTERROGATION ROOM REMIX*

The pillar perished is whereto I leant

A human electricity a great
Generous boom a list

From east to west still seeking though he went

In this grey/yellow space
I sense you
In your best bruiser skin — believe me there's
An alibi in one —

Of all my joy the very bark and rind

In the grey space what I remember's this

*The strongest stay of mine unquiet mind
My mind in woe, my body full of smart*

And books to read before it grew too late

What can I more but have a woeful heart

* In memoriam Eric Mottram, 1924-95. With some help from Sir Thomas Wyatt, poem CLX sampled from *Collected Poems*, OUP 1975.

AFTER BERLIOZ

Silence ... rustle of young wheat
cry of quail
a bunting pouring forth
profound peace ... a dead leaf.

Life seemed so very far away
a thing apart
flashed & glinted in the mountings
over there.

And the fit
tearing up handfuls of grass
the crushing sense
of absence
takes possession
as if a vacuum had formed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This box of bone & matter
is
in the reception area
messaging speaks into mobile

Friendship decays
feels inadequate to
even so
even this vestige, recombinant

Check:
press hash 9
then the extension number desired

fractured,
her body exploded
as the ground hit it

THE PURLOINED LETTER*

Beginning the mountain
with the first basket of earth
is good science.
Exciting counterpoint
from no less than — to some — to many —
is a statement and no statement at all.
Making less most is enriching extent
and there's the special beginning of it.

For your letter and for your view of that Chinese mountain
my own many thanks.
That we are all in
music we are all in poetry we are all
neophytes is encouraging —
and that in its own way completion is begun.

* For Howard Skempton, on his 50th birthday, rearranging or recycling his words in a letter to the author, July 1997.

ABSCONSCION*

Stay
As though astonished
Through the rubric of
“The transformation of love”†

In the room
In the rain
How you have been
Many times this way O boy

I don't know if I can
Indure
On the door it says

Use other door
You go through it (the
Turn) and

* For Michael Finnissy, on his 50th birthday, July 1996.

† The phrase is from Rilke's letters.

ASTONISHED IN THE FLOOD*

Stay as though to sleep
What sudden rubric ripen
I am a shining fugitive
Stay face and darken

As though the known thing bursts
Shed energy rose froze
Stay tracked material personal
Rare child depends or grows

And all our values hopeful touch
That in you deep & wanting
To put this devastated & to reach

The dark ally like slanting
To each of us how much
To sleep & wake maybe

* This title from Michael Haslam's *Continual Song*.

AMONG THE LIME KILNS AND DILAPIDATED
PLEASURE GARDENS OF LAMBETH*

Bebop Buddleia backup crashing why
Bring brouhaha haha to the dark a
Burning technically like a time the lights
Don't sleep sense shapesh fish'n

Sense sensing lull to strengths precise
Bi biped peddle in the gel if to
You You don't And she I write unless
Always crashing matter casts undo

Darkly wrecked visible in parts perflow
Delirious radium of a had & hads
Marine must be the colours hereto grows

Delph germane unless a pretty crowd
Crashesh horrid pellucid no one no
Coming undone crashing spun to cloud

* And this from the pages of Peter Ackroyd's biography *Blake*

HIS LAST GASP

You don't want but it isn't there
As a matter of muscles move involuntarily
And there's nowhere filled in the somewhere
Bright he can be flash momentarily

But lets him know why brightness moves
How he can be but isn't fetch the air
Which isn't here how devastate behoves
Of all significant places personally rare

Oh known thing Oh air that multiplies the known
Oh technical adventure given hinterland bestir
Go into vehicle given grown

To thrive & spasm else to be gone
Want is distance dust hereto there
Simply suck illuminate eliminate alone

HIS LAST GASP (2)

but isn't
matter
nowhere
Bright
know
Which isn't the air
person
know Oh air
adventure given
To
Want is to
illuminate

A FRIEND IN NEED

The windows smashed
and the vase

that you, a woman thus

Poor Tom —

I love my love with a el
“or maybe shut your face”*

It just isn't fair

or graceful

that you should —

oh my dear

friend in the world

Oh maybe kiss

before I go to ground in the vertical

desert like this

* JHP, of course.

FOUR*

One is to become
The other — it never happened
A third — relatively minor
And after all, the last
It did not change my life
From east to west still seeking though he went
Suppose that it, or they, can, will & did or do
Then all would be — otherwise
 If not now when
 If not when, then
 Why
 If not, well then
 How
 But why not now?

* After listening to *The Crowd*, Rova saxophone quartet, Hat Hut CD.
For a far more comprehensive response to the same, see Clark Coolidge's
The Rova Improvisations (Sun & Moon, 1994).



SERIOUS JUNGLE

Already bicameral, unflummoxed amid breccia
or is it bric-à-brac, you return to your passions
a quizzical bunny, bouncing to the strange
attractors of the city, parrotty and fruity to boot
 Chromatic with butterflies re-engined for timing
 fashioned to be daffy of absolute value, akimbo
 with the loveliness of an open door
 lashings of snippets dance to your jungle beat
And when you run to the end of the jungle
let not your value be exchanged
let your kilter remain in the limbo of joy
till dusk has reclaimed the farthest shore
Abre las puertas por favor
*quiero olvidar lo que es dolor**

* The last two lines are from a popular song from Ecuador.

BLACK DOG

He steps through the door. The emblems
are on his forehead, the molecules of sadness
in his mouth. I heard laughing & thunder
in the night before he arrived.

How sharply I feel the bite, how quickly
how trembling I make my way over to you
across the long prairie bed, in the
long rumbling dawn that never ends....

In the republic of dreams in the dry bed
in terror as the colours change always
where trash is thrown you menstruate

out of the night the breakers the laughter
the beach at the end of the road that never ends.
I'll wait for you there don't let me down.

THREE

Three is two & one
The octave — never harboured
Or heard — reflectively finer
And before all, the past
“You must change your life”
The pillar perished is whereto I leant
Suppose I had not, turned I did into undo
Then all would be — restored
 If not the one
 Or two, when
 You
 Were not, well then
 Who
 Am I now?

TOO CHICKEN TO TALK TURKEY

I love speech, and most of all
the shape it makes in your mouth.
Or: I love speech, and in particular
the way that your mouth shapes it.

It's your mouth, and mine
and the shapes that emerge
then make a text, or a reply. I wish I could say.
And I am so sorry.
And I rejoice. On the slow curtain, dusk
begins to gather, in the park men walk
their dogs
and the scent of hot wax fades in the room.
Such happiness awaits us.
(This happiness will end.)

RED SHOES

Red shoes black shoes every kind
of shoes *Dance on my friend!* as we elapse
from coma to wakefulness along the river
side we are really just talking and walking and
talking nothing more and nothing more
is needed bursting heart to heart to
think of it! that you should be a friend in the
world is everything (blue shoes a lapsed kiss) —
Who can say
it drifts and skips is fortunate and is
three words your peaceful embouchure
for many years the vertical desert
of the treble clef I think it has been happening
for many years

YOUR PEACEFUL EMBOUCHURE

In respect of a place I loved and was in that
I now return to or open to, it's wonderful
how you in your body
and I in you, how normal it is.
And this becomes a morning you inhabit
always these days as the sun ascends —
it was as though it always has, and is
the love of evermore being guided.
Since it has come to beam on us I find it
in me to cope, packed into small pitches as I am
staggering into & out of my clothes
burning to tell as never before
living to be in the solid deep
swaddled and watching, so early days.

IN THE LIGHT OF

I am in England but
not of it you could be
 a travelling player
echo-accoutred your eyes
glistening with gaze aforethought
in the dark my head listening
to its own beat or become then aware
of yours the metal device against your good heart.

And there were also
 lambent key sequences, or sequins
against the squeaking floorboard.
Who can recall the light
 of dwelling in memory before
the thing had happened, even?

BLUE DAY

Brave and excellent as you are, you'll know
what's broached must also be consumed profusely.
All that robust energy, and the narrative on an
arbitrary grid.

A greybeard named Zeno
asks what happened? I don't
recall, he said, I will do some creative work today
but it was too complete and had too much meaning
to be useful.

Us lugging our rucks
them selling late repros at high prices,
stock collapsed, Niagara in our bellies.

Soon healed.

Draw the curtains on a blue day today, wield
blue dangerously before it stretches

I'M DOING MY BOOKS ON YOU

Oh pedal point, oh search engine
show me your autumnal grief caboodle
your body at the velocity of zero
your loved voice superimposed.
Oh mobile antenna, heavenly bricolage
my things, my autumnal things.
No. They are not
mine, they never were, & suddenly there you are:
what mambos what ecliptics
so out of & in control. (The body of course
is one's writing, or properly,
what writes this: it comes from somewhere.)
 Oh pedal point
 Oh embouchure

OUT IN THE VIOLETS

Allure is being cancelled each day as I speak
and I can't hardly talk

How do us talk
about I & you?

This box doesn't deserve to think!

They are partly rehydrated
figs ready to eat now

Out at sea
a rockpool the Dardanelles as a child
peers out on beauty

bells chime & float towards too much

out in the violets & the mud
listening to cuckoos

THE BIRTH SHIP

The lovers are entwined one on the other
breathing together they produce
the same note.

Someone cries

out in the night. There is nothing
outside themselves
This does not
appal them as it should.

They produce offspring
who grow up eventually and pursue
independent careers.

Someone dies The window can't
easily be opened. Outside
themselves the world moves

MERCY

Throw yourself on my mercy, and I'll throw myself
upon yours. Then we'll enter into
the summer of it with all due sumptuousness
and imperturbability. But you
already know this. Here begins the realm
of the first person plural: *impossibility*
coming into its pomp, the one & the other making
a collective pronoun of the "enemy self"* —

we cannot know just what *that* person's thinking.
Here begins the realm of imposs-
ibility, you know it, not that, not that
but this, that we're immersed in, where
we learn it from, the actual stuff
not rockets & bells, not that, but this,
this...

* Laura Riding, "As Many Questions As Answers".

A DREAM OF RECLAIMED LAND

Time knows it equivalence knows it
the filth know it mine host behind the bar
knows it the helix of language knows it
surplus value knows it the boys who
take care of these things know it
Mary Quite Contrary, the twin strikers, the midnighters
all know it Trace who is 4 Gary knows it
numbers melody mayhem & transformation know it

But you my beauty who find yourself in a place
vastly crammed with incident and resource, and see
no way out of it, you do not know it.
You venture onto “reclaimed land” but it’s dark to you:

ahead, huge buildings with screens on which luminous text
scrolls & forever transforms, yet seems hardly to change.

YOU MOVE YOUR HANDS

Oh my
 dearest person what it is you mean
to me and all
 that I entail —

To awaken in the early
 hours of the day near the
loved one
 it is too much to bear.

Crotales. Untuned percussion. From afar:
 ostinati, the return of thunder.
Then a low, held note.

You move your hands
 in the air like this —
You shine from the face outward.

A WEDDING*

flowered out of nowhere
and overwhelmed
the groundwork –
it's just that events conspired.
A thin sliver of pale blue on the western
horizon & a white cotton shirt
over the heart.
And so it proved

The path of totality
brought us here†
to the churchyard. The bloom
of voices came
through. Once & for all
it was

* The following sequence uses material from Stravinsky's "Les Noces".

† Solar eclipse partly visible in London, 11 August 1999.

A WEDDING (2)

On Wednesday the corona
On Thursday a strange & hilarious day
On Friday my green gardens are blooming
On Saturday the sky was fresh

O braid my
 light-brown braid
I plaited you mechanically
 with the words of consolation.

One braid
becomes two,
 the army
of mechanicals
 arrive –
 attacca subita

A WEDDING (3)

And so it proved: they approached
in such a space, believing that
this time was never to have arrived.
But, having come, it stays just long enough

to make a resonance in the air.
 Speech forms,
a trumpet line ascends into
imaginary sunlight at the clerestory.

The tablecloth
The corona the
return of war –

Abstraction: the imaginary
 combination
of line & light

A WEDDING (4)

Someone is choosing his words
 Sudden rain, and thunder
We're loose in a room
 Someone plucks up courage
to be composed, to be where
nobody expected. Another fumbles
and a third says
 "Take your time"

A hand, a flower, a sweet,
a fruit, a violet, short-lived,
unannounced.

Someone moves across
the garden, as she'd done when a girl.
That was in the photograph.

A WEDDING (5)

We are talking as
night returns, "I
don't know whether
I can get to
sleep." We shall have to
get into our clothes,
go out, post letters,
return as though

Sparrow to sparrow
lay a sound
upon a sound.
We live by day
& night, we practise
hospitality.

A WEDDING (6)

but here there is only a
light breeze ruffles the
water out of
darkness —

The future returns
with enhanced
energy
as a consequence of it,
money
dwindling, weather changeable.
Someone takes a picture,
someone
is full of business, gradually
the clouds dispersed

TWO

Now am I whom artifice
Supposes? Were you then, two
Or one if not restored? well then
Would all undo into I did,
Pitch into bliss, had I not turned?
The pillar perished is whereto I leant
Your change must be before all, relatively heard
Or harboured, octave one & two
 If not this, then
 This
 A pair, as one —
 Or not, the one
 And two
 Is one

ONE TO ONE: NOURISHMENT

On a blue day, one has food and passes it to
the other. It's a spoon, and there is food on it.
Dirt is postponed. Each is halfway between.
The food is made of molecules — proteins & fats —
it enters and is appropriate to the function, it
does not overstay. The gesture is one of
appeasement, of intimacy and proffered friendship.
Tombstones come down, milk forms, it's only

human. One begins and the other completes
the task begun. Receiving is likewise,
reciprocal sluices: the other responds generously
to the one, and this is what was intended. You are
valued, for your lips curl round my gift.
What is freely offered

ONE TO MANY: INTERPRETATION

We are constituted, and so we are free.
Who says? The person whose voice
so distorts that no information is conveyed?
And the others, assembled on this platform
or that one, contemplating icons, of a morning?
It's windy. Delays are occurring. Globalisation
occurs. In Antarctica, an iceberg the size of
Wales starts to break up.

The broadcast server will close down
in 1 minute — please save your data.
This is security. The fire alarm tests
have now been completed and
normal procedures are back in operation.
You have new mail waiting.

MANY TO ONE: SOUND PRODUCTION

Extremely rapid & akin. Dental tremoli:
the lower jaw trembles to create amplitude.
There is extensive use of glissandi. I love
the way in which the air is set in motion
in the movements of the organs in which
it vibrates between. It is as if coupled,
turns on the role, the middle & final
metamorphic hinges where the text shape changes.
Her virtuosity deployed, each sound is followed
by a very long pause, whose extremes are
as at the extremes.

It is as if uncommon
ground whose extremes have no text. That
she might compose and that this might lead to

MANY TO MANY: BIG STORY

Those of us remaining on the bus no longer have recourse to the big story. Already, as it begins to traverse the bridge, the passengers fall into a *sweve* wherein their several *Is* become ball-bearings floating freely in the roof, a concatenation of little stories (neither the dialectic of the Spirit, nor even the emancipation of humanity), separated only by the Walkman's pause button. Already the *Is* are becoming *Yous*, reaching further and further, till too soon it's too much. And so on and on, etc *ad infinitum* whatever happened to *dichten* = *condensare* for fuck's sake?

At Aldgate, Zeno leaves his seat and descends the stairwell, sumptuously apparelled. Thames glitter on a moving horizon, light brown and done in. His story over, he has succeeded in showing that the bus will never reach the opposite bank.

RAPTUROUS HAZARD

A man breathes, and breathes again. A person who is anxious to arrive but getting there slowly. Oh, so *that's* what's going on. He doesn't care what the time is nor what the idea might be. Some might have attempted diagnosis, but not he. Once might have been, got control, working through, can think about, did have the same but not madly keen. It's been a brilliant thing, yet transient and you can make something of it. It was his very much last moment.

As for her, she could need something to feel, or to deal with. That could be the problem. The marks she made in the air have faded. The thought she made in the mouth comes into being. She turns to it again. "The importance of material process over representation."

HAZARDOUS RAPTURE

He needs out, or sorted. Done no work. It was a relationship, actually charged and personal. Something actually changed. He partially goes to work, it's a book that minds him. Fired, or what? He watches them leave the room, to work or talk, allowing paper to rustle behind, or glass to rest on wood. Not enough time, that's for sure.

She's taken a deep angle to a short problem, but would like to get seriously. That could be a possibility. The catering is indifferent, but friendship flowers. She turns to it for the first time. He's jumped a barrier. Why should anyone believe her?

RUPTURED HORIZON

Walks by a stream, rebuffed and unaware of the impending. Indifferent weather might intervene. So what? Questions of scale, built on distance. Waterboatmen skip endlessly nested paragraphs. “Occlusion of the middle ground, the ground of bourgeois realism, allows the large-scale to merge with the small.” A man lays his clarinet on the floor, shuffles inclement pages prior to uttering. It was very much improvised.

A woman taps on the sculpture and listens to the sound it makes. The hills slope away. Woodland enfolds a helix of rapid transformations. Mingling with others in the canteen while songsters brood on the outside. That could be the answer. A patina of rust accumulates over a period of years, allowing hermeneutic possibilities and preventing the formation of narrative.

IN LITHUANIA*

Can hear, can feel and see
and do human voices,
perform all manner of ventriloquial tricks
as though the leaves were not falling

and importunate singers
were not echoing round
with bass voice licks the vast spaces
of the ears

and rocks were not silent
nor light reflecting
on church bells tolling in the morning.

The bell is the only instrument
that does not possess the complete harmonic series.
Which is why it sounds sad.†

* Poetry Autumn in Druskininkai, October 2000.

† I am indebted to Gregory Rose for this observation.

IN LITHUANIA (2): TO THE ADDRESSEE

Thickly yellow, leaves continue to fall
upon my head. Some people link birches with banners.
Loud accordion music, *ad lib.*
A fisherman, then a mother & child
move off the riverbank to make way.

Some people, at the pink hotel.
The white riverboat. On a bench
BIELAS IS COOL. A tower
in the blue sky, extraordinary concrete.

How I wish you were here to share
this blue day that emerges. Hush.

A rustling
as of leaves that rush forever through trees.

Then pause.

I shall meet you at the approaching time.

GLINTS IN A PATH

Poetic
artifice
comme il faut
the bridge
of size
(which matters not)

We have perfect
bliss to
pitch in
this
our perfect
life
as one, a pair —
too brief!

THE NOSTALGIA FOR PRESENCE FELT BY
THE HUMAN SUBJECT

They've all gone
the big stories.
Let's not mourn
them
we can live
and be
without
them and within our lives
as in those outsize
storms
in which the clouds
and we cling
only to that —
to us through

PLEATED GLORY

Pleated in
love & awe

I can't
escape I
"know" it

but the
mind this body's
attached to

wanders
to the last
day of
breathing

which is
the frame

PERTURBATIONS

You (a person)
at the keyboard (or away
from it). As if poised for flight
to lee of, great hush.
The wood in that floor
with a solid sheen to it
your feet, pointed
inward

Circumambient

sour
green cymbals are stroked
with great, great gentleness (*ppp*)
to produce longing (*keening*).

This ruins my eyes.

PERTURBATIONS (2)

...linger, petal
 we have a great
deal to do.

The sound of rain,
 or a rainstick.
A sizzle through
 the serial port.

All over the planet, a low
 drumming on wood
and some stuff
 on the E string, high...

...linger,
 petal.
Don't furl.

PERTURBATIONS (3)

Enter the poet, stage left.

I see her anew
as you pass through the door

you are so like

His things his beautiful things
His books his cathedral

something that was, & no longer is.
All fall down.

There is no
thing that may be compared. (Nothing
is comparable.)

The trombones bark:

Vanity!

Vanity!

Vanity!

PERTURBATIONS (4)

“The night is blue” and the season
a little dusty but we begin as always
with not heeding and coming in just on the hour
in ones & twos to gather and approach
the question of intent

/ and all those others —

For if there were no questions to cluster round
why then our skins would sink into the prevailing
gold, scribbling to oblivion.

What extraordinary advent-
ure it all is. A blue PowerBook,
an electronic skin to skim upon.

The moonlight, etc.
Sounds of birds & monkeys.
Sounds of the Far East.

PERTURBATIONS (5)

Perhaps sounds briefly made, or gestures
and then with the flat of the hands
so thoroughly as to come to some sort of
recognition, caressing
with backs of the hands and backs of the fingers
with the side of the fists. And was struck

by how dance-like the movement
in passion frenzy giving shape to
or suffering injury
with elbows and leaning
did not seem to refer, just hit & hit again.

And briefly standing quietly, and then again
with chopping motion, not in unison.

I would never hurt you.

PERTURBATIONS (6)

It begins here, the end of it —
You will call out
in your unknowing
at the climacteric or vertex

You were supposed to be there, and you were
for a structure'd collapsed
and everything in all directions
started uttering and had nearly blown away

You will call out, perhaps sounds
 briefly made too, with
 wooden implements who
can say, who knows
 the many kinds and ways
 the trade winds —

PERTURBATIONS (7)

Those great rich blacks come back
in noirish imper-
turbable notations of the body.

The pale blue upright I appears at centre
of the screen,* there being that warmth

and difficulty. I think she grew to be broken
her eyes wide open do you remember that

lustrous silence

Immense patterns of 1s and 0s appear

there is that sound of wind
and even further away are muffled drums & a wist-
ful woodwind theme

as if loveliness might be stepped on, or
limbs as seen close up, and slightly out
of focus. But two hundred years have passed!

We cut to an empty†

* The opening credits.

† Here the film breaks.

DA CAPO, WHICH MEANS,
OUT OF MY HEAD

On the box we find
celestial messages from splendid empires

There's been a death in the family
And then there was one

so madly set a thesis burned the toast
SLAM on the brakes

whoo —

(a paradox)

(A non-expanding universe would
actually entail even worse paradoxes)

Like like like —

This is where we learn impossibility from

This box this box this box this

One to one to one

ONE

Now, not why
But how — then well, not if
Why then, when not
If when, now not
If otherwise — be?
Would all then do or did & will?
Can they or it that suppose
went he though seeking still?
west to east from
life my change nor
did it last, all after
and minor, relatively third —
it happened never, other to
become is one

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