

No Public Language

Also by Ken Edwards:

Poetry:

Erik Satie loved children

Lorca: an elegiac fragment (Alembic Editions, 1978)

Tilth (Galloping Dog Press, 1980)

Drumming & poems

Intensive Care

A4 Portrait

A4 Landscape

Lyrical Ballets (Torque, 1989)

3600 Weekends

Good Science (Roof Books, 1992)

eight + six (Reality Street Editions, 2003)

Bird Migration in the 21st Century (Spectacular Diseases, 2006)

Prose:

Futures (Reality Street Editions, 1998)

Nostalgia for Unknown Cities (forthcoming)

KEN EDWARDS

NO PUBLIC LANGUAGE

Selected Poems 1975-1995

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from 3,600 Weekends

An Autobiography in Several Modes

1993

Abstractedly

That I walked alone in the dark city midst
That a melody stated in background decay
Became tone values deftly hot but unknown
That the sun went down thereon
Smoked into a bass line all of this

The urge was toward feeling/internalising ghosts
Deep layers that could be us under that grill
Radiant as you please
(Bloke in the pub mentions the stink
Said I'm crazy about the section for improvisation
I said I needed a challenge that's why I left
Then I got very sick
The music stopped / ceasing its combustion
I was out for two months beginning to take shape
Listened for rhythmic inspiration
It was tremendously exciting I haven't
Felt that way since
The day to day began to look different)
I woke up hello mum I said this is war
Said the bunny I was onto something

Bilaterally

At which point I became impermeable space
Locked onto the picturesque picture
They said was representation
Kind of half mottled & beginning to decay
Outward in huge chunky dispersal patterns
Surely the world could not be like this

They told me I had to decide
Between the desire to know
And the necessity of knowing
Between the first words & the actual demonstration
Culpably fatuous
Thick smoke billowed over my childhood
Making its heat yet more dolorous
And its extremities smart
Such as eyes mouth sensuous lips of grossness
Giving its heat to the solid pavements
That had supported those we shall never know
Already dissolved in the removed ocean's welter
Like animals
Waiting in the street for Jesus

Blankness swallowed another such landscape
Foolishness cloaked the bus
A book of metaphysics that I discerned at hand
Disintegrated into the aureate fog
The loving heartbeat became anecdotal
All wishes achieved their final purchase all
Fulfilment became sense

Cursively

Those were the days & this was the day
Whose burnt configurations delaminated
Joking lads who burst through a train
Monkeys so macho they don't even close the doors
Behind them a civilisation wrecked itself
On an overdose of sugar
And a superfluity of media coverage

Two blocks away a torrential burglar alarm
Pours bulbul sweetness into the night air
Vanquishing pain joining up the letters of thought
Fishing for compliments the policemen
Of the imagination have entered the solstice
Slaking their ominous portfolios thus
As the city sleeps
The score is even

Now the ambulance arrives it's close to midnight
Somebody open that window
Count the heads give me some feedback
Become a lovely coin of value
A perfect end to such a perfect day

Discursively

We have different resistances to the crunch
When the whole wide world
Destabilises we share “the wine
Of what’s true in the glasses of what’s false”
(Or: what is / is clothed in what is not)

Light shines through some of us in the midst
Of language in the physical sense
Edits out the odd duff moment no more
The impedance to desire
To be read to the absolute limit
Beyond which soft mistake
Any dark interior & isn’t it serious pattern
Collapses into hopeless giggles the deep thick air
Draped between us in such fashion
That we may partake

Thus the world is discovered
Written on the heart of each one
Alternately mute & garrulous
In the wonder of it that it should sound OK
But if nobody’s certain that’s
Because of the interior’s inherence
And the exterior’s gratuitous wobble
Shaking sense out of sense
Changing the resistances to such liquid
Crystal
Substance a valid pleasure

Experimentally

“He hid the plot from the actress who played his mother because he wanted her to live through — and express — each moment as his mother did, without knowing how everything would turn out.”

Wearing self-reflexive metaphors
Breathing through hospital gizmos
Breathing into a mirror
She sags into her dreams
One of the useful policemen tells her to go away

The new killer dusts cancel
Or caress alternately his thin angular body
And deep set eyes in a dark face
They encompass the whole of life
You’d imagine someone would wash flesh tones
Onto those white films as they flip
Moving in meaningful geometric patterns

Tons of opera find his room
But her heart of gold engrosses
The vegetation-decay before our eyes
She is somehow pre-rational

The folding & putting away of garments
The photographs
The interior dis-ease
Painted in superb form & transition
Striking resonance from exile

Fugitively

Originating? out of Africa? out of a previous wave (molecular evidence)? . . .

. . . only to be awakened by the clock radio telling me the Swedish prime minister had been assassinated; and feeling, not that it was unreal, but that it was meaningless, as meaningless as if the radio had told me it was I who was dead. Meaningless perhaps because I felt I *was* dead, and if this were so I had no business to be being told stuff by the radio. Because if I were dead I would *be* the radio waves; and this I knew was precisely the plane and tenor of my existence in those few moments of pre-awakening. Then and only then did a softness of light start to seep from me to flood the external windows, bleach out the contradiction and start to make the shapes of a new existence and day as tangible into the bargain as they would ever be.

Graphically

Is there an outside it can't be spoken about
By here I mean this language
That art could *be* a form of knowledge
To reconcile these forms with an original look
We separate ourselves from this condition
"Myth surrounding" or "the cult" stains us rotten
That August she danced on deck with a man in an overcoat
Yellow colour almost sweet perennials die mobile
Constructions ones delicate shock on coming across
Plural noun noun phrase for noun phrase present tense verb
Beneath the feet a trembling
Prosodic form & its replacement by tonal pressure
Floats across the countryside & the whole
Ditches between grey cylinders that shadow
Parabola: the dental arc on the graph of life

Historically

Commerce bathed the script's daft hug
Blood sugar transformed the traffic
A tramp imposed sorrowful by the brick way
The commentator described the track
Of an errant paper bag
We are no doubt aware of the situation
Time devours its essentials

Got on the right bus with the wrong pass
Slipped into dream
At the next stop wild alcohol claimed a tourist
While birds shat on the dome
The concerned public looked on
I suppose we can all drink to that

But then nobody consulted them
A terrible oxbow lake
Exuded from the main stream of consumerism
The walls transmitted sound
Into ever diminishing living space
It wasn't normal or even wholesale
As when an exciting product
Comes in through your own front door
Having ploughed up the high street replacing
Steel sheds & courtesy car parks
Sooner than you think

The bus moved on the street
Realigned into a recognition pattern
In the nick of flux
The appearances had been saved

from **Glissando Curve**

c.1995

(unpublished)

The Ghazal of the Gun (Inner City)

Seen you before I think among the thermodynamic
Magnolias of the ancient estates seeking spare change

*A metal skullcap-shaped electrode is attached to the scalp and
forehead over a sponge moistened with saline — the sponge
must not be too wet or the saline short-circuits the electric*

Among the non-specific substrates with a magnum or what passes
For one in your fevered brain

*current, nor too dry as it would then have a very high
resistance. Additional curved electrodes are moistened with
conductive jelly and bound to the legs. The tissues swell.*

Each day your scar tissue becomes more florid
An inflammation born of risk, of no-gain

*Micturition and defecation occur. Steam or smoke rises and
there is a smell of burning. The brain under the electrode is hot
and congested; it may be denatured and it is often charred.*

Your vertebrae fluoresce each day a little further up the spectrum
Till that lustre becomes pain

*The other viscera are hot and reddish. Histology of the brain
shows minute circular lesions which are probably bubbles.
A lever on the outside of the chamber is used to drop*

Each day
Along the epidural vein

*crystals of sodium cyanide into the pail. The prisoner is
instructed to “take a whiff”. Most try to hold their
breath and some struggle. After the cannula has been*

The force which is the surgical
Destruction of your space, your train

*passed successfully into the vein, three substances are injected:
sodium thiopentone, a rapidly acting anaesthetic,
pancuronium bromide, a muscle relaxant to paralyse*

Comes in
Membrane

*respiration, and potassium chloride, to stop the heart.
The spinal cord is transected, the medulla is avulsed, and there
are extensive lacerations and bruising of the spinal cord.*

Soft tissue & encroaching bone collapse
Mesh, thread & knot, resection, recess, exit, smash your face

*Similar lesions are seen in rats killed by cervical dislocation for
biochemical experiments – their hearts continue to beat for
approximately seven minutes after dislocation.*

Untouchable renamed child of god
So take my place

Arabesque Harmonics

On the planet but I don't know why
Sounds like ocean
Smells like ocean
Actually it's traffic in late summer
I drove the car
I did not feel that I was in control
Ahead a building
That surely wasn't there before

When I spoke to you on the phone
You gave no sign
I said "Nothing much doing"
"Just me and a temporarily
Insensible computer"
The forecast thunder receded
Presently
Glittery static jammed the frequencies
It was as though the surfaces of the day
Had partially been
Removed and then destroyed
And this was the only evidence

The sky lit up
Just one wave
And a mouth full of blood
Utterly knackered
Over the railway bridge
Where giddy sounds and honeysuckle scents drift in
Just don't say a word
I'll treasure that moment
Until it happens

Interference Ghazal (interrupted)

Moonlight in front of the power plant riffs
Burns thickly in the lee of TV's animated hieroglyphs

Ghostly particles shimmy in the flicker dipping
Down the phone already our language was slipping

Yellows
Burning in

Alborada of Late Capitalism

Those trees and other
Vegetables have roots
That go down below
The place on which we
Walk with a bunch
Of car keys acting
Naturally they are
Harmoniously woven
Within the total
Chaos we follow

We are the sojourners
In the place of language
Sun melts the frost
On the industrial palace
Its blue elevators
Curves of glass a
Bouquet brought to
Reception they sit
With the tape on
On the grey leather

Cars parked all the way
Up to the blind corner
Muscles like butter our
Shoes unlace themselves
Our bodies brilliantly seem
A trace a blur the
Landscape overstressed
A state of grace
Imagine the worst
Hope for the best

You know how
Everybody says “Something
'S missing” and yet
All the while
It's there behind you
Or in the cupboard
Or among the
Dog-ends matches
Ring-pulls tissue bits
Of spent tickets

Or beyond the car-park
Viaducts canals
The warehouses disgorging
Rusting hulks
On damaged brick
Mirrored in the digital
Watch face cool
Blue ribbed surface of the
Water
We could be

The room creates a space
But not for long
And air infuses it a
Glow that fades
The wrist is hurt the
Psyche quavers
Melody emerges briefly
Lights at our
Finger tips
Low flying aircraft

Approaching the House of Béla Bartók

1

There is a word on the map which can never
Be taken into the mouth
This moisture on your fingers
And one more door to open

2

They came to a city
Of towers railway lines warehouses bridges
And many splendid buildings
The green hills across
Decayed to yellow on the river
Whose perfect oily skin flowed
Over piled rocks at the waterline where a frail man
No longer in good health
Was looking for something that had been lost
Upon the gentle swell they found themselves amid the
Heart of precipices
Great dogs barked at them from behind steel fences silent folk
Stood all along the street holding their rugs
But there was something
That wasn't quite being said
Perhaps because it wasn't dignified
Perhaps this was not the occasion

3(a)

At the foot of Gugger Hill lies a garden and
A house filled with airy intervals of brass & wood
Photographs that glow with a magnetic pulse
Pillows wall carpets jugs plates embroidered garments
Proportionate, strung & resonating, laid out
Each in their several & unique formations
Above the Csalán road

Agriots and apricots
A “biered, stone-covered theatron” set
Where the musicians played during the summer months before
The incident occurred

3(b)
Whole words go by & even sentences
Which fall within the
Deeper scale the indefinite

3(c)
Solstice

3(d)
Its glissando curve
Away from any sense of its
Quantum future

3(e)
It sheets down
Suddenly rain water word & water and you know it
But are not able to
Say what it is
Scales overlapping moving
Down the hill riding its back and
Shining through suburbs towards a solitary scarlet tulip
Before the dark figure
At rest among the minerals

4
They sat around a table below
Vaulted painted ceilings wrought iron lampholders
Around them panelled wood the windows leaded and

It was good to be among friends among
The green hills the piled rocks with
Game & perch a resinous
Gentle wine
In the chamber of memories knowledge and instinct concurring
The silliest nonsense became
Pregnant with time that passed
Now on the radio soft spaced bleeps were all that was to be had
Plumes rose from distance to distance
Towards midnight they passed a quarry, smallholdings with tin
sheds in the fields
Near the border painted on a factory wall
A hot air balloon hung above the swelling ocean
Each flat wagon bearing an armoured personnel carrier
Shaking the fear around

5

There is nothing more that you can do
For the duration of the journey
Brown uniformed customs officers pass along the train
A sheet of water sleeps below the skin