

# In Five Eyes

*Selected previous publications by Andrew Duncan*

## Poetry

*In a German Hotel*

*Cut Memories and False Commands*

*Sound Surface*

*Alien Skies*

*Switching and Main Exchange\**

*Pauper Estate\**

*Anxiety before Entering a Room. New and selected poems*

*Surveillance and Compliance*

*Skeleton Looking at Chinese Pictures*

*The Imaginary in Geometry*

*Savage Survivals (amid modern suavity)\**

*Threads of Iron\**

## Criticism

*The Poetry Scene in the Nineties (internet only)*

*Centre and Periphery in Modern British Poetry*

*The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry*

*Origins of the Underground*

*The Council of Heresy\**

*The Long 1950s\**

*Fulfilling the Silent Rules (forthcoming)*

## As editor

*Don't Stop Me Talking (with Tim Allen)*

*Angel Exhaust (magazine: 1992–98 and 2005– )*

Joseph Macleod: *Cyclic Serial Zeniths from the Flux*

*\*Shearsman titles*

In  
Five  
Eyes

Andrew Duncan

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## Author's Note

These are two books which originally came out as A4 photocopied things in plastic grips, late wracks of a stage of poetry where people couldn't wait for a publisher and didn't want to compromise with the High Street world. *Sound Surface* was published in 1992, *Surveillance* in 2003, but both belong to a stage of my life when I was working at a telecoms equipment factory somewhere north of the North Circular. Biographically, *Sound Surface* belongs to roughly 1981 and *Surveillance* belongs to 1986, although the composition stretched out over a long period. The urge was always to allow in a wider complex of facts and processes than a straightforward lyric moment. That location in an industrial estate sited near trunk transport routes governed the working week, and much of the poetry is set in leisure time, conveniently demarcated by geography, and spent in Camden Town—a few miles away. Much time has passed, distribution from hand to hand left most people out, it's time to publish them in a technically modern and robust form—and Shearsman have very kindly given me the opportunity to do this.

The original blurb to *Surveillance* says “Although the cycle was begun in 1987, most of these poems were written in 1991 and 1992. ‘Services’ was written during 1991. ‘Heat Loss’ and ‘The Scream’ are rewrites of a poem written in 1980, made in 1988. Work was abandoned in June 1992. In general the cycle took under five years to complete. When I went to work for The Stock Exchange in 1988 I was put on two projects called Surveillance and Compliance.

I rewrote the text in 1995. The 2nd half of the rewrite didn't take place until spring 2001, almost 15 years after the poem began. Cutting some poems in 1995 left a structural gap which had to be filled by new poems. The last rewrite was appallingly depressing to carry out but was demanded by my views of what perfection or finish is. Achievement merges with nonexistence.”

The first issues of both books were from ‘Five Eyes of Wiwaxia’, which in fact was me and a photocopier. Stephen Jay Gould's book *Wonderful Life* described a fossil organism from the Burgess Shale beds

which had five eyes—a reconstruction which later methods of getting from flat-packed relics to three-dimensional vividness have swept away. I found the lack of symmetry attractive—different planes of cognitive data failing to map onto each other. Perhaps I was also thinking of ‘I’ve got 96 tears and 96 eyes’, a line from ‘Human Fly’ by The Cramps, itself recalling a certain shot from a certain ’50s horror movie.

### *Acknowledgements*

Some of these poems previously appeared in the following magazines and anthologies: ‘A Strolling Player’ was published in *MEMES* #8; ‘Roots of a Revolution’ was published in *MEMES* #7; ‘Adjusting the Skill Mix’ in *InFolio*; ‘Services’ appeared in *Parataxis* in 1996; ‘Heat Loss/Exit Line’ appeared in *Garuda* #1; ‘Margery Daw’, ‘Acoustic Dynamics’, and ‘Over and Over’, were published in *Shearsman* 26, 1996, and ‘Fragments of the Above’ in *Shearsman* 27. ‘At Camden Lock’ and the ‘Dialogue Poems’ were published in *Oasis* 69, in 1994. ‘Shiny Circuitry’ and ‘The Policy of Weakness’ were published in *Salt* 9, 1996.

‘Faculty of Reason’ and ‘Writing on the Paper of You’ appeared in Paul Green’s anthology *Ten British Poets* from Spectacular Diseases, in 1993; ‘Faculty of Reason’ and ‘Adjusting the Skill Mix’ were published in Iain Sinclair’s anthology *Conductors of Chaos* (London: Paladin 1996).

‘Roots of a Revolution’, ‘Heat Loss’, ‘The Policy of Weakness’, ‘At Camden Lock’, ‘Shiny Circuitry’, ‘Over and Over’, ‘Fragments of the Above’, ‘Dialogue Poems’ were published in *Anxiety Before Entering a Room. New And Selected Poems* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2001).

My thanks to all the editors involved.

### *Credits*

The information in ‘The American System’ derives from Derry and Williams’s *History of Technology* and Burlingame’s *Machines That Built America* (my father’s copy). Information used and quoted in ‘A Brush of Tow’ comes from the *Socialist Review* (February 1992) and *Socialist Worker* (February 1992), both drawing on a book by Peter Linebaugh. In ‘The Crystalline Structure of North London’, the authorities cited are Jean Calvin (from the *Institutes*), and Alois Riegl (Introduction by Swoboda and Pächt to *The Grammar of Ornament*).

A polyptych is a document of Carolingian estate management, listing all the serfs belonging to the demesne, their obligations, along with lands and other holdings. Not only do they show something of feudal rustic relations, but also they show a very early example of literacy intervening in social relations, and of a new social layer of administrators.





*Sound Surface*



## Suspended Section

“The second feature required for classifying English sounds is the feature called Place.”

Imagine

A section through a lodging house.  
Tenants and chattels in mid-air  
Attitudes struck against a lit decor,  
Lying down at night or eating a shared meal.  
Tear down the fourth wall,  
Open the arch:  
Perspective made true by straight walls  
Freezing one moment of time  
Like a drop caught on the rim.

Bodies caught between the wall and the window  
Its sounds stopped and fixed in this  
Voices unfold what is known  
Over what they know.  
The North Circular rolls from A to A  
On its banks I'm like the river.  
Up beside the hoardings, the blue light  
Of a thousand TVs  
Stares at the repressed.

Where the spaces designate a set of actions  
Stele as incarnation of place: *heroes enkhorioi*  
Temples to an indigenous god

Place as the casing of time:  
Myth.  
Sound from contact of moving planes:  
119 Bowes Road.

## Hanging Around

I tore it out.  
I'm talking about class, the people  
You identify with  
Who fill your mind with feelings  
& you imitate or surpass.  
I jacked out. I'm not like the people I grew up with  
And I don't do the things I used to do.  
The things which entered my eye  
Poisoned my heart and  
Whatever I hated then has disappeared.  
My sight is empty.  
I blow down an empty street.

The walls say, you, you  
With all the years stored up, the fatigue  
All the vice, the disgust with people  
All the faults you wanted to unlearn  
And all your hatred of the work  
And your hatred of the bosses

Are what you have to sell.

I signed on with a wish  
Just to lie down on a bed  
In a room I paid for  
With no-one to watch me.  
To do the same thing every day.  
Wiping out my self at half past eight  
Wiping out every thought at five.  
To look in the mirror and see myself  
Slack relaxed just  
Hanging around.

# Meet a New God

Speakers: *the Spirit of Place, Andrew.*

- Spi.* Scornful, broken, starstruck, bedecked in rags,  
Draped in silence, isolated by shame.  
Passive. Split. Memory wiped. Ranting. Self-denied.  
Fulsome. Lying on filth. Ill. Subservient.  
In these ways you concede to those who hate you  
What you can't bear, the real. Your weakness  
Is the substance of those you, hating, obey.
- A. Your father was a lie and your mother was a falsehood  
Your thick beams of illusion pierce living eyes,  
They see their bodies as distortion, they twist  
The human speaking shapes of other people.  
You partition space and fraction sight;  
You run with terror and dominion, you  
Rejoice in buildings and blocking walls.  
You trust in property and scorn living beings.
- Spi.* You have no safe place to call your own.
- A. My view stretches out as far as the wall.
- Spi.* Your motions reproduce the space we caught you in.
- A. My voice takes the real and surpasses it.
- Spi.* An image formed on dirty waters.
- A. Words move at my command, shaking the air.
- Spi.* Some slurred, some strained, some screamed; some false.
- A. Beautiful words could populate this space
- Spi.* One-ended corrupted by their solitude.
- A. Time brought this moment and will take away.
- Spi.* How many years to climb out of this one?
- A. It feeds on itself till mouth and flesh are gone,  
All nature turns on a red axis.
- Spi.* You rebuild flesh with sick flesh, ideas  
With the data I feed into your senses.  
You're learning the picture others have of you.
- A. Every stroke has to be in its place.  
I know your illusions and part their mesh.

*Spi.* Fantast, you repeat their rejection  
 Your own self. Aesthetic procedures  
 Write you off as not worth a look.

*A.* The real is pulverized by words and thoughts.

*Spi.* A regime of the body adequate for that.  
 You can't even do what you could a year ago.

*A.* By feeling bad I do as you instruct me.

*Spi.* You're a free agent, feelings are free acts.

*A.* This devastation is an act of temperament.

*Spi.* Your illusion is your mutilation, my thoughts

*A.* Are real in masonry and metal panels

*Spi.* More solid. You are refuted by what you see.

*A.* The concentrations of power are too great.

*Spi.* You are too weak to bring them down  
 As they are quick and you are slow

*A.* My hands are empty. I have no weapon

*Spi.* Your awareness comprises what's in them.

*A.* I am ten things at once.

*Spi.* Other men's voices.

*A.* I have such weapons. Time returns again.

*Spi.* It's likely this mood will be your character,  
 Too much in need to receive any help.

*A.* I deny every word you say.

*Spi.* By blocks you lost your senses and your insight.  
 Indeed this room is what your denial maps.

*A.* I have no power to affect events.

*Spi.* This is what you lay out on the market.

*A.* The complex tasks leave no space for thought.

*Spi.* Better to work than be yourself and scorned.  
 Prescribing your place and acts, your thoughts  
 Run like shadows of this solid matter.

*A.* The poems are thoughts, of higher order.

*Spi.* Without place or bodies, your conduct is  
 To discourse of fantasies with the dead.

*A.* Since I have no other listeners.

*Spi.* They hate you in this house, just like  
 The people who, not reading, already loathe you.

A. Five thousand years of perfecting made me.  
*Spi.* A delicate mix of lunacy and pain  
A. My mind is in pieces along broken ground  
*Spi.* The distortion others devised for you  
A. Picking up drops of light to find the way  
*Spi.* Blocked by arrogance and blurred by loathing  
A. Wiping the real to see the future state  
*Spi.* It loses all value in your damaged hardware.  
A. I know what nine words bring the dead to life.  
*Spi.* Jump up on a bench and shout it out  
In the marketplace or in the works canteen.  
A. Stronger voices than mine have stained the air.  
*Spi.* They don't like your squeamish airs and graces.  
A. Art is wealth, I turn the air to gold.  
*Spi.* You adorn what you can't stand to behold.  
A. My faculties are dulled by drudging.  
*Spi.* They ask no better of you, Orphic crow,  
And give you more than you supply to them  
A. The controller of my motions is outside me  
*Spi.* Every limb severed. That's your instrument.  
A. The program is minute and wearisome  
*Spi.* Broader than your gaudy bolts of raving.  
A glass palace of seven stories  
A. Is this a vision?  
*Spi.* Meet a new god.  
A. Is this our cult?  
*Spi.* Under trances I send  
Filling null years in these my precincts.  
A. Are you really the voice I made up?  
*Spi.* Your memory. Your construction. Your possession.  
A. I shear the fetters with a blade of flesh.

## Circular

A noise comes off the highway  
From the metal plates shaking  
Numbering the surface of waste energies;  
From the hot pipes of the steel throat  
In the pinned fabric of motion  
The sound rushes across the road shore & rims.

Blast apron  
Hard sound over the inadequates  
In the pitted surface of the media slew  
In the middle of eight million faces.

The motorized column covers its section of loop.  
The messages were effaced.  
A citadel of numb skin,  
Signs arrested  
Rooms in the throb of fuel chambers.  
The specific metallic signal,  
Shivering and blowing away words,  
The unwriter of thoughts & patterns.

Along the rims  
A certain group moves in to low prices.  
They don't understand the signals too well anyway,  
It doesn't matter.  
You memorized the map that got you here.

No escape by eating transit. A swarm glutted & limed  
On foodstuff, stampede of cars  
Going round and round between close walls,  
Lost migration on the Lost Highway.  
One way passage down the throat of insensate words  
Laminar sounds peaking to blank uproar  
Movements overlaying to a complete circle.  
This is the message you were built to hear.  
Look for a crack.



## Clipping and Shear

In scrolls of solid sound  
Crawling through the interdict

At high volumes  
of the rage emitter  
the distressed equipment shears out other people's feelings.  
Blood rush reverb: needle on red one away  
from auditory hallucinations.

Code geometry of burnt data.  
Cutouts at peaks prolong component life. In shadow pockets  
noise becomes signal. In a dark place,  
in a drunken stupor, I blank out.  
What other people want is beyond me.  
I know what she wants and  
I put a block on the words and it stops.

Light slanting in a glade  
Moving slowly with the hours  
Star rise star fall. Where the interdict holds  
a snake nailed to a tree lashes and switches but  
goes nowhere.  
Is it far to go?  
Thus what was living  
repeats into personality or files  
as time seeps out of it  
*inmota orthonomia.*

A whole hoop of nails. Trace every twist:  
ornate concentric grams, parallel universes.  
Sick oily sweat pouring out of its skin.  
Discharge gleam, picture surface.  
That's not self-expression.  
The integral totality of none such  
Impaled on a periodicity of frenzy:  
In a maze, an eye which destroys what it looks at.

## Consciousness from Lack

This is the history of the jewel.  
The killer of eyes freezes time out of sore longing.  
My own face and voice,  
Flesh peeled away & a flow opens up  
along the rail towards  
the loved object, where  
the stream of presence pours.

The studious exiles refine the topography of dialect  
as if they were in the reach of living words  
perform the old ballads and dances  
as if place poured out of their motions.  
detained, ruined, possessed.  
Where the pipe was ripped drops fall onto  
the tendons of the sun, torn and naked.  
The light  
the frail protraction forms images from  
whatever impinges penetrates corrupts,  
grains the extended flaw.  
The freezing of time—  
the thousand sips of false memory.  
Glisten of  
protective fluid forming around the wound.

I spent my childhood trying to get back home

introversion melancholia formalism.

## The Vocalization of Want

Words flow and I ask who controls them.  
Their tint is that of whoever is near.  
Where once there was an embrace  
Space bursting from around a loved body  
To wrap and cherish and relieve

is a scream torn from my lips.  
mouthfuls spat out in a retch, I'm starving.  
I'm eating and I can't swallow  
I'm gibbering and I can't form a word  
the sound is the mutilation of that embrace  
the flexible limbs of solitude  
outlining mine.  
Longing has taken my appetite.

Fragments in their thousands roam the streets.  
A generation of spectres repairing their prisons  
taking hoardings for their skin  
walking along the ballast  
singing what the train sings  
The mechanized exit goes on and on.  
what passes through the wail is destroyed.

The crack in the wall; the worn mouth.  
The ray slitting a thick slab of anxiety.  
Language seeping through the zone of suppression  
...denatured. Wavelengths altered.  
A pattern emerges from loss of signal,  
fluids are seeping across a line of division.

The hand which wounds is the hand which heals.  
ah! it is made bright, it is wrapped up for the slaughter.  
& that hand wires the circuits of illusion

## Verbal Hierarchies and the D.S.

Plants on the windowsill.  
They turned us over  
Seven am.  
How they spoke to us  
Get up get your strides on  
And mocking my household goods  
How they spoke to Mister the Landlord, who let them in  
Those lickspittles in blue know who owns the law.  
Gangster slang and Official English,  
Barks of command or else treacly smears and sirs.  
You could tell how much we're each worth  
With your eyes closed.  
They know class the way their dogs know who they can bite.  
A symbolic system so beautifully held in mind  
As if by piss on the boundary lines.  
What you think is just the echo of what's said to you.

A drug, a sleepy dust  
What they put naughty children to bed with in Cyprus,  
Banned because it makes people happy and so  
Stops them working hard. I put it to you  
Justice doesn't come into it  
You just want us to be unhappy  
And I'm doing what you want.  
Unhappiness makes one unable to learn or to act or to work,  
Thus denying revenues to the State.  
The streets, sir, make people find a place to hide.

Scott went to live on someone else's floor.  
Owes the State 297 pounds at three pounds a month.  
The Government can wait. Knowing what people have.  
Like winter, they're long creditors.  
His factory laid him off.  
They had no more steel left, strike in force.  
He'll get the dole could be

Or thirteen pounds benefit. Held down by silks  
Crime slips away, who caused who  
Suffering? Property's in paper. Learnt by dogs.

## Airstream

The pales set too close  
cause the man of leisure  
pacing a slatted bar of open space  
to waste away.

The body eroded by commands  
broken motions of a barred landscape  
Spaziergang.

I cut a pouch in the city fabric  
to shelter in from peering eyes.  
A skin to close upon the sore.  
So many paces across; an arm's span in the plumb-line.  
Wave breaks, shaking volumes  
a sound specific to each space.  
Each body gives off a local music,  
Take sounding. The ring distributes itself in words