As if Only
Also by Ian Davidson

It Is Now As It Was Then (with John Muckle)
No Passage Landward
Human to Begin With
The Patrick Poems
Wipe Out
Human Remains & Sudden Movements,
Harsh
At a Stretch
No Way Back
IAN DAVIDSON

As if Only

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Introduction

When the place runs out on you, either rushing through the broadband, slowly covered over by the rising sea or receding to a distant memory, then the only place left is the body. So I turned back on myself and picked over the marks on my skin. I photographed myself from close up. I lost weight and put it back on. I tried to find out how my insides worked. I started smoking again then gave it up, many times. I had to spend a week in hospital with a throat so swollen I could barely breathe, let alone eat or drink. So the poems are about the body, and the desire of the body to communicate with others, whether through the rustle of skin on skin or tapping the keyboard. They’re about the way technologies keep people apart and bring them closer together.

These poems were written in Bangor, in north Wales, in Barcelona, in London, on the Baltic coast and in Fez and Marrakech. Despite the distances involved they are the result of a period of introspection and self-possession. Travel doesn’t necessarily broaden the mind. In some cases only the long lines would do, and the language had to be chewed over, while in others, when the town was quiet and the blood had stopped pounding in my head, I could clip the tone and measure out the words a few at a time.

A lot happened in the two years in which these poems were written. There was a war, and there were bombs in London. There were things hardly possible to deal with, including the return of an imperialist and colonialist attitude that I thought was part of history and would never return in my lifetime. Some of that gets in the poems. But I was mainly interested in myself, and how I’d got the way I had. How the traces of a life had marked the skin.

Ian Davidson
As if Only
The Body Con

Coda

And as if it was only the lifting
Or the sheer state of material
And as if it was only the wave formed
Or the sternum’s fold

Where the organs sit where the
Internal becomes entwined at the
Seat of emotion the peristaltic
Gesture of movement towards

The organic from
Half open air seeps into
The interior is
Corrugated and the emotions

Bump towards language across the
Ridges in the brow towards
The furrowed teeth
The clenched aorta
I.

Whatever I may feel inside whenever I feel cut off from
as if the word feel becomes another word or if the word feel
paired with the word feel lost its harmonic and the unpaired

Becomes the impaired as if one half has been removed and the
single hand flapping helplessly in the space left to itself

This is a full body scan apt to discover the slightest
imperfection in excess body hair or a muscle out of place
don’t do casual
don’t do glance

It was only a branch line a further frame of reference another
addition to the sum of human contact or the careful phrasing of
language left out cell touching cell and prisoners of desire your

breast beneath the single sheet I was moved imperceptibly as if
the friction of hands across skin and all the inner mechanics

Oxygen bubbling up in blood the lesser curvature of the
stomach the superior part of the duodenum the lesser moment
beneath the skin the fish hooks of the present, gift wrapped

and knotted with bows becomes a present from the past or the
anxiety of a disappearing future a matter of presentation or
oiled to perfection from the con to the conviction an issue of

Incapacity or the shrinking fear I add up the prose and cons watch
the grey surface of the water become turquoise behind pale pink of
cloud cover wipe the surface of the eye as if loneliness was

Meant to be you have created a surface that both attracts and repels
you have groomed yourself to the last tip of each strand of hair pulled
lashes from their origins and the heart still or the heart beats or the

Kidneys take a breather and the liver’s silent shudder as it squeezes
and filters out you adjust your diet according to your strength of feeling
I fought back the emotion scared that my organisation would barely
Cope or equanimity permanently threatened and breath control become ungoverned you picked at crisps discarded the salad went for maximum calories as if your Breasts might swell to their origins or your skinny frame regain its given shape. You are cont. you go on and maybe the consequence of many large branches from straight line geometry or even the curves of calculus unable to explain organs crossing apparently out of scale. I dismantled a Body it was an imperfect fit according to the laws of sexual activity they began to reflect

mirror mirror
that’s an order

When sliced across the middle she writhes and the hairs on her face began to glow and her tongue could simply twitch I mean he demonstrated

By means of colour photography that a mixmaster can cause considerable confusion if applied incorrectly or simply to the wrong body part and then in their sickness or emotion or sex or the recognition of the love con.

It is a question of scale, scales falling from the eyes until in the enormity of the imprinted word cutting across the organism like a stick of rock the arrangement becomes tortuous and twisted
2. Where Ideas Come From

Shaking hair again and creating desire from nowhere and looking up with the light behind said where do ideas come from and I indicated the area around my line of vision and spread open

My hands tore down the curtains until out into the night sky there was everything laid bare and she looked at me again and I began to get ideas and their shapes were like things that could not be named but I

Began to name them. I stared hard at the top left hand corner under which all who pass will love and love again and I disappeared and the ideas came as if from asking why too many times until the question became so familiar that the unmarked underside turns to face the sun or the clear skin is transparent as if the fabric of existence was torn in many places

and think where do ideas come from as a limb wormed its way past or a cure for the present the ribbons and bows from the waist skin stretched across stomach muscles which was where ideas came from or the empty head that twitches towards the

Text message nothing going down or coming up I’ll contact someone so that’s where ideas come from an abbreviated text or a Glasgow kiss c u Jimmy an idea in the world might be from the heart or a baby’s

Body split down the centre through an abrasion of the ear via interference how the screen divided and the one and the other or the synchronic shifting of affection nor the first nor the last and when a body leaves a body turning

A fresh page then the insides rustle there’s a readjustment of the digestive system an acceptance of food the slow torture of the worm turning more definition less breath the medium becomes porous as in streaming the

Loss of moisture from the inside out she held up her skin he folded back said that’s
Where ideas come from or he stroked the surface and said here is an idea the sound of milk being loaded or the early call I’ve no idea where ideas come from maybe the morning light
When the cracks show it is easy to make poetry. Dismantling a psyche painfully arranged by the creaking machinery of lightweights takes merely a steady push or a few carefully placed words. Between the cracks I insert the words ripping pieces levering open by means of applied strategy and the whys and wherefores. It continues although stuttering slightly rocking and off guard. Escape when the chance arises. The malice of a destruction worker knows no bounds he can pick up the pieces of a discarded life an old fireplace a piece of wallpaper a feeling for an old friend the trace of residency and through the insertion of no more than a short bar bring the gables tumbling those walls so painfully constructed by idiot matter come rippling into dust and then the organs are revealed. The organisation of the inner structure is laid thread bare. What a micro skirt could only hint at what a stumble on the steps or a quiet moment might simply pin drop between the arrangement of fibres and then the twitching frog of an inside and self righteousness can begin to assert itself through the rough cast of a locality the heather on the hills the moon rising behind a bank of cloud a mountain frozen into presence. I have no support structures no failsafe no ground beneath my feet no decency
Controlling the Page

There were no fit words
the words bounced back
unfit for use
when addressed I respond well whatever
I want to write about loss
as if through the grammar of glass
I want to write about this much
Things out of all proportion
the distance between digits intimate beyond the body
and trying not to write anything down
and scared of the dark
I repeat catch phrases knocking them dead
Narratives provide evidence
of opposing thoughts
I do mind the steps
they disturb me
the moment in which failing to play the game
the play became mechanical geared into itself the
dispersion of heat across bearings
It was a stand up world
where nobody asks why
resisting the desire to communicate
eager to please
inhabited out of deficiency

This is my story, this is why I
am different, this is where I was

It is not a lifestyle choice
but a consequence I have not
eaten the fruits of my toil there were
hours never in or out of work never in or
out of work or the space a hand makes on another
body spread across the
back the belly and a capacity within
the spaces inside I never realised such
shallowness existed re-writing
a history for every new context this is
what has happened to me and with
each re-telling shrinking the margins of the
world pieces of flesh lopped off

Going to the dogs and never big enough
inside never space in a
shrunk head or a heart that hardly
beat and devoted to your own story
you told yourself a thousand times
I can’t because out of all that is

hinge point
it was a hinge point one of those events where
the past began to close up on the future
it was a can of worms breaking out just
beneath the surface a cannot on every lip
we will or will do nothing I walked the streets
by day I travelled the elementary canal I trawled
the suds at the basin’s edge it was nothing to do with
rational it was every thing on legs that crawled or
human values like laughter or time and place
I could live anywhere or with any one seems like

I have extracted the meat from the bone
I have developed curvature of the upper back
I am wrapping myself in skin

Letting in the Light