

*Kinetic*

**Also by Michael Ayres:**

*Poems 1987–1992*

*1976 Streets*

*The Sky That was Your Guide*

*a.m.*

# **K i n e t i c**

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## Stratosphere

---

Like a plane in the stratosphere  
seems to be moving slowly, but it isn't really

it's moving very fast you said  
*Hey, it's a really good view from here*

## Zero-G

---

So the plane began to carry me away from you  
*That's immaterial* someone had just said  
and the word fluttered in my mind like a single petal  
come loose from a blossom twists in the air  
I felt as if I might never see you again  
I couldn't hold you in my arms in the sky  
We climbed and banked out over the ocean  
then went into the clouds  
Now I have to deal with the sky  
One of your kisses  
is the silence up here  
after the vapour trail has faded

You were in an old moss green silk dress  
I stroked your arm  
You knelt on top of me  
*Did you know that silk is stronger than steel* I said  
*Then why don't they build skyscrapers out of it?* you asked  
You kissed me  
so we wove what we had from a moment  
I wondered what the thread of that kiss could bear  
Later, I found out

I was dreaming  
The deer in the woods, one of them, a stag  
with the face of an old friend  
Even when I woke  
I felt light-headed  
and the day passed with the Zen seamlessness of dreams  
There was a deer in the garden  
nibbling at pine shoots  
You phoned me  
and suddenly I was filled with sky



At high altitude over China  
I heard your voice  
when you were in tears  
We've passed through oceans together  
and been rolled for years among the waves  
I didn't understand  
why there was no salt left on our skin  
no taste of it  
not a single grain

In thought's zero-G  
above the clouds  
the skyscrapers float empires drift deer graze  
among the constellations  
of stars and stars  
which have no names  
The cities left behind the cities to come  
caught in the night flight  
look the same  
lit webs of memory  
I missed you so much  
I couldn't get back to you  
There seemed no end  
to a love that was homeless  
to a love that had once been home

## Jet-lag

---

What is that bird?

Where does the bridge lead  
which leads into nothing?

I hear you moving in another bed.

I want to melt like ice,  
beginning at the edges,  
ending at the clear centre  
which is everywhere, softly.

What is this shadow?

How did the light get in?

Whose is that voice, calling?

And that sound...

Is that my voice? Is it rain?

## Nothing

---

You need to wake up  
and I need to sleep.

Then we change round:  
I need to wake up,  
and you need to sleep.

I lay my head down on its side  
to dream of you,  
fly an airliner into the pillow,  
depressurise over the desert,  
slumped senseless at the controls,  
passengers unconscious in their seats  
glide on for hundreds of miles  
and when I wake  
you are lying beside me...

I need to love you  
and I need to stop loving you,  
I want to be near you

and far away,  
arboreal regions  
something cool in my blood  
the hot dawn of Singapore  
meltdown of the native

check my watch,  
check the date, check my pulse,  
bullet train in the evening,  
empires and client states  
a phantom of airports  
words on a tannoy  
we never heard

remember  
some seashells  
don't sound like the ocean at all

*Without love* you were saying

All the time  
something is breaking,  
something only whole  
while it is breaking,  
we have become  
voices and echoes  
disembodied or cropped  
the video-con.  
the link-up with Chicago  
the damage which builds  
sampan and buddhas

ties the dawn tight  
to the sound of streetcleaners  
vans with orange lights  
hosing out the gutters,  
the thing which is breaking  
binds the streets to the evening  
the cooks outside the back  
of the neon-lit restaurant  
open the bins  
throw the garbage of my heart away

It's noon where I am  
I think  
almost midnight for you

you sound tired,  
later I'll be tired

we're working shifts  
they're different shifts

I begin to age quickly  
in order to be real.  
And when I'm real,  
I'll thread myself on my fingers,  
take off my bones, one by one,  
they're heavy like memories,  
leave them like pebbles  
the children collected,  
put them back on the shore,  
pick up my passport,  
take a high-speed train  
anywhere you are,  
everywhere you left,  
I need to be with you,  
I need to let you go.

*Without love*

How did something so hopeless  
become filled with hope,  
bomb craters and water,  
craters on the moon,  
how did something so desolate  
become a vow,  
a truth to be honoured  
with all the lies we could tell?

You need to be sure, you say  
you need to be certain  
when you leave  
all the lights are off

You need promises, security  
you need to stay young  
I need to kiss you  
Some shells  
are full of the sea

I need to write to you.  
I'm turning into sand,  
a desert of pale blue,  
maybe it's more peaceful out there,  
maybe there's no peace at all,  
when I read your handwriting  
I stroke the lines of the letters  
trying to trace my way  
back into your fingers

A storm here  
but quiet where you are  
the wind funnels and searches  
a Goliath without Davids  
Mermaid in the fish tank  
a string of bubbles rising  
past the pirate wreck,  
I need to give up,  
I need to be realistic,  
I want to kiss you  
and undo every day I have ever  
been alive...

*Don't be stupid* you're saying  
and *Without love* you're saying  
above my head  
satellites went gliding  
with your voice in space

This room  
is still years ago

There's dust on the sills  
no bulbs in the sockets  
*Don't be stupid*, you're saying  
*Without love, we are nothing*

## Shimmer

---

I was in love with you, it made everything shimmer.  
And it seemed as if my life grew real — by which I mean, insubstantial.

Skyscrapers like cobwebs; suspension bridges, gossamer...

When things give up their right to stay, the enduring pose,  
and take off their cocoon shells, and flash and fade,

pulsing dust and fire, it's your love, executioner...

Everything grows provisional like footsteps. Rome and thistledown:  
your fate is huge and fallacious and innocent, without you,

a child with a shell to their ear, hearing the ocean.

There were endless showers that summer. *Please stop, please stop, please stop*  
the wipers asked the rain as we idled at the crossing.

The lights were on red, but there was no one around...

Later, in America, we broke down in the desert,  
and needed to change a wheel in the simmer of the heat-haze.

I rested for a moment. The mountains turned to your voice.

You were singing to Aretha on the radio: *I say a little prayer...*  
Things had already begun to take off their masks:

chrome was melting into little iridescent green crabs with scarlet eyes...

Desiccation and erosion: memory is a badlands.  
I hardly noticed, I kept trying to grow things

though Mao had gone and dust coats the hoardings.



There were scraggy palm trees outside the Dunes Motel.  
I think of it even now, those asphyxiated palms, your perfume,  
  
the way the jade teardrops in your lobes shimmered in the breeze.  
  
Again, it ripples across the years, and my present stalls.  
Somewhere, the rain is about to fall,  
  
and your voice turns back into mountains.