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Design

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Production

Spiff Ltd

Paper

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Architects

Cranes



All day the cranes have towed us west,
hauled blocks of light into the sky.

Their stilted charm, tall disdain,
their slow Tai Chi to point at you,

their swivel to admire size zero
reflections in the glass:

banks of paparazzi
firing light as you get out of the taxi,
lug your luggage to the sand-blasted station.

They oversee where estuary
washes the Seigniorship of Holderness,
margins where whales beach.

Glaciers of blubber,
gravity is avid for these creatures
slowly flattening under their own weight;
bubbles of gas rising, noxious pockets
forming under skin.

Up go the cranes as land hits the deck
and something in our cells runs off to sea
while the architects run high notions
of steel and glass up the flagpole.

It goes up. It goes up.
They slot in power and light,
dig out earth, hollow our city out,
so that, hawsers screwed tight into cumulus,
our pasts will be less of a burden,
when we have suspended all our longings,
all our buildings from the sky.

To Wilmington Swing Bridge



House on the swing bridge, house in the air,
standing aside for the barge from upriver,
let my dragging anchors not snag
on your cables while I confer
with my first mate, athwartships,
pondering our heading and draft.
The forecast promises shopping trolleys,
my lightermen poke at the muddy soup,
but I swim to the burger van and regain
my ship's cat's perch from terra non firma,
the forty-five degree angle of your
compliance with my chuntering purpose.
The dry bulk in the yards we pass
will be reduced to nothingness
and utility; my cargo exists
only in the subjunctive yet not one
grain shall be lost. A lost swan
incubates a nest of golf balls
and a stray hand replaces the flowers
in the bridge house window: red flowers.
House on a bridge, I hear the gears scream,
I feel each tooth of the terrible works
connect and, greased up, haul you back
to the fixity of empty air.



They fetch up here, beached,
scuttled to ledges, pediments,
the black mermaid's screech.

 Ringing in the bell
 the voices of Inuits,
 Truelove, stuck in Hull,

 They all fetch up here.
 Beheaded on a bollard:
 Greenland or bust.

*

Just off the docks, the Fruit Market
starts speaking French, Spanish:
 Mercado, Marché,
crates, pallets, folding stuff, wallet
slipped in the city's back pocket.

*

 And now, Victoria's on stilts,
 the city takes tentative steps
 to walk on water.



Above the Humber, first the rasp,
a tick and tut unwrapped by wind,
brittle clouds tied to railings.

Up close, a rusty scrawl,
a fistful of ochre weeds;
biro bleeding down a card
To Dad. Keep on Sailing.
Above, Fujicoloured blue
curls away to whitecaps, surf.

Below, a knot of stems, that bulge;
think what's stranded in tidal pools:
bladderwrack, the colostomy
where cellophane traps
what rainwater's steeped to tea.

Day after day,
by the blind bend,
on lamppost and bollard,
painstakingly
someone attaches
ever-fresh
supplies of withered
flowers.

Down to the Docks

Now the seas are less lavish,
the city is paved with fish.

Old industry, on the shelf
and packaged, is new wealth.

Warehouses make pretty
properties for yuppies
and the Maritime Museum
is a landlubber's dream
of desiccated mermaids and whale bones.

So all hands to cell phones
and hie you down to the docks,
where the nouveaux park their yachts
and they've built a whimsical
post-modernist hotel
for the riff-raff of the seven seas
to chill-out in as they please.



Paragon purrs: whooshed
doors, whistles; mag-lev trains rise,
aim at squares of wheat,

are gone on the dot,
toward sand-paper, wrinkles
painted on the sea.

Your chopper's eye shows
an immaculate reef-knot
of motorways, A roads,

underpasses, fly-
overs slipped through each other
to baize estates, leafy

neat neighbourly streets
with health and leisure centres,
Big Screen complexes;

escalators coil
round marinas, malls, swoop
to galleries, cathedrals,

gleaming academic towers.

*

Maybe to mock us,
there are mock-ups of all this
in the Mayor's office.

Balsa, perspex, card,
wire, felt, Hornby 00 trees;
hand-painted families

cross concourse, zoom high
to where their Dinky hatch-backs
are unstacked from sky;

sniffs of cotton wool
caught on one lonely chimney.
Back at Paragon,

the face-lifted station
is where the future seems
to have run out of steam.

From up there you'd see
DIY factories:
Texas, Homebase, B&Q.

And further, beyond
where Spurn's thin bird-bone of sand
drifts in from the east,

the estuary,
the night-bound ferry:
the wake from the lit-up P&O.





Horsehair mixed with lime,
stiffened to stick to lath,
like granny's porridge to your ribs.

They say they find, in cavities,
broken stems of clay,
blackened fingernails of bowl,
where workmen tapped
or dropped their pipes.

There's other stuff that's hidden:
floorboards chalked with sums;
weights and quantities from the builder's yard.
And - after pyramids of sand, volcanic cones,
craters of cement, the fixing of sash-cords,
screws pimped into wood - the names
soaking through the paper scraped off walls,
the altimeter of children's heights.

Outside the slate is slightly greened with moss;
inside creamy plaster's slapped, made good.
Stone over the lintel,
the casement round the bay
iced where the sunset sweetens to pink.

The Hull Emigration Platform



A waiting room and a platform,
separate spaces so alien saying
didn't interrupt the city's solid said.

The platform is desire. The platform is loss.

A waiting room and a platform.
There is a kind of weather here,
the weather of saying.

Perronen er længsel. Perronen er savn.

The platform points its consecutive form
into the future where the air sifts and the air
sifts and the light lifts and lifts.

Asemalaituri on kaipus. Asemalaituri on menetys.

There were songs that became old keys,
sources of rivers, cables laid under oceans,
tastes of fruit, scents of soil,
grandfather in a straw hat standing with a horse.



Der Bahnsteig ist Sehnsucht. Der Bahnsteig ist Verlust.

There were whole worlds not 50 miles from home;
then cart to train to ship to train to train to ship
and the challenge to go on liking what you are
in the face of doubts cast on your own definition.

Perrongen er lengsel. Perrongen er savn.

There are words that move with their speakers:
here, there, past, future, light, summer, water.

Platforma – eto zhelanie. Platforma – eto poteria.

And then there were children and grandchildren
who knew the look and position
of every property in villages they had never visited.

Perrongen är längtan. Perrongen är saknad.

There is a kind of weather here.
It all comes together looking.
There is a platform. The direction in which it points.
Open room for the saying.

'every man can dig water at his door; and they cannot bury a corpse there but the grave first drowns him ere it burys him' – *The Life of Master John Shawe*

Dead men in a city besieged,
your own graves would harry you out.

The pavement eel's stone slither
along the old town's dark intestine

shows where they follow

their shadows to spawn. One

passageway leads to another,

one courtyard swallows another,

until all passageways are one

and every dead-end turns

like a folded paper trick

inside out. Do not expect spice

from the Land of Green Ginger,

though there is powder aplenty.

A sworn rite governs our fellowship

and only my skull in a box besides

be privy: the potboy crouched

by the smallest window in England

awaits but the signal. Small

acts of sedition multiply:

chalk marks on the pavement

cry death and the misericord

under your bottom has started

to flap in the breeze. The city

gates stay shut, let his Majestie

make of this what he maye;

the skull has spoken. The shadows

spawn and crawl into the shadows

to die. *How you have bled*

for me, o my Kingdome.

The Land of Green Ginger

turns itself inside out

to a dream of green fields:

yet may we attain to that place

of peace in our hearts. There is

no way out and we leave tonight.



Stone that wants to run,
stone that would like to leap
and try to fly –

unmissable at the end
of the improbably long
Guildhall building on Arthur Gelder Street –

raised above the roofline
to stand as apotheosis
of all junkshop mantelpiece knickknacks,

as forerunner and out-pacer
of an entire generation's
car-bonnet figurines –

the Edwardian lass with her sky-cutting profile,
speeding drapery
and out-thrust, out-of-the-way-please trident,

who just manages
to manage her team
of untamed, same-stone horses,

on an ordinary, dullish Monday morning
catches the eye and lifts the heart
simultaneously,

as I hope she will
whenever I pass her by
on ordinary, dullish Monday mornings to come.

The Tannery

Hideless, they pace the tannery yard,
ghosts of cattle we do for like cattle,
watching us walk in their footsteps:
bits and pieces of them marched down
our escape routes from our own skin
disguised as them, disguised as ourselves.

Pound Shop

that its value for money
not falter or fail

opens for business
with a closing-down sale

The Swimming Pool

I ploughed a field forty times
nothing grew
as I gave up
it sprouted
me

Derelict House

though I bricked myself in
and still nobody came

I'll stand here and wait
for you just the same



From: <philip1897@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wed 02/05/2007 04:42
To: <Unnamed Recipients>
Subject: Arc

- Dear friend •
- I am a human being like you •
 - century/sensory overload •
- but it seems that things is not flowing well •
 - the way it suppose •
 - vast siestas of climate change •
 - 459 parts per million •
 - that is why you see some advance men •
- going the way they do not suppose in order to balance •
 - so universall a distemperature •
- that is why you see 5 pods painted Reckitt's blue •
 - 23 powerbooks uplifted •
 - pray for us hear us deliver us •
 - sixteen turbines whirring •
 - tuning the wind to our times •
 - that is why •
- back and forth between nature and culture •
 - air flows across a trough of cool water •
 - back and forth between outer and inner •
 - that is why you see •
 - a shelter and forest •
- in circuits of the common air light and water •
 - recalling the earth intemerata •



- some advance men going the way they do not suppose have made •
 - a forcework •
 - being unfolding •
 - forces freed into becoming •
 - a place of transformation •
 - people enter the building •
 - a moveable prayer •
- people are reorganized through natural forces •
 - people are changed and charged •
- so they go out the way they do not suppose •
 - to other the balance of their living •
 - that is why you see what you see •
 - a wedge •
 - keeping the door of the future ajar •
- this motion came to me after I went to arc •
 - a building that is modest and extrovert •
 - after I went through arc •
 - where relations unfold outside •
 - the usual forms and operations of power •
 - what I need is help from you •
- only you can make a little step to achieve it •
 - thanks and regards •



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Spiff Ltd

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The poets and their poems are:

Cliff Forshaw:

'Cranes', 'Maritime', '00', 'Lath',
and 'Victoria Pier'.

David Kennedy:

'The Hull Emigration Platform' and 'Arc'.

Christopher Reid:

'Down to the Docks' and 'Grace Note'.

David Wheatley:

'To Wilmington Swing Bridge',
'At The Sign of Ye Olde White Harte',
'The Tannery', 'The Swimming Pool',
'Pound Shop', 'Derelict House' and 'Grief'.

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