



*World Press Contest Prize Winner. Akintunde Akinleye Nigeria, Reuters.  
A man rinses his face after a gas pipeline explosion Dec 26th 2006.*

### **The Emperor Unclothed**

i

Who *was* that boy  
who said the emperor  
was merely naked ?

The boy died of course  
almost at once  
his flesh in gobbets

scattered across the hills.  
Perhaps he was blind.  
For the emperor wore that day

the sheen of his apartness  
and a shadow so long  
it girded the Earth.



ii

Have at you, Highness -  
clear of the multitudes  
free of the robes.

You're just quarry now  
shoulders bare and shining ahead -  
fair game.

We'll paddle in you,  
your Excellency,  
you'll do us good.

iii

A young fox  
most of his fur missing  
pads the ridge of the garden wall.

He knows he doesn't belong here  
and to survive the night  
he must glide to perfection

*between* each holding  
he must slide with precision  
*around* each lit space.



iv

That wide-eyed small boy  
who proclaimed the obvious to his neighbours  
didn't live long enough to see this truth -

that truth is unendurable  
but learning you've bowed for years to a lie  
can drive you to murder.



v

And the fox said to the boy emperor  
"follow me.  
Let me guide you

through my web of shadow  
to where the truth  
lies hidden,

precarious as an embryo.  
Let us sidle  
together.



*"Blind Light" Antony Gormley, Haywood. Photo David Levene/ Guardian*

## Learning how to be 82

i

I have lost my keys  
yet I am vibrant  
more laser-alive

than I have ever been.  
And I forgot my purse today  
and though my eyes may now

burn through  
to the first-made runes of being  
my eye-lids droop

sooner than I can bear  
and I sag  
in my chair

and give way.  
What is my postcode ?  
My account number ?

My PIN ?  
I am vibrant -  
cased in.



ii

You don't see me - you see senile.  
And I don't see me - I daren't look.  
Must I belong in this strange packaging ?

Daily I pass with caution  
that dark last doorway -  
my closest of neighbours.

And I am Tawny, I am Red Kite  
I range territory few can penetrate.  
Never in my life have I been more alive

living the world's denial.  
Cogs that rush at me  
requiring I mesh with them  
are merciless when I fail.

You don't see me - you see senile  
and I don't see me - I daren't look.  
Must I belong in this strange packaging ?

*Rogan Wolf*