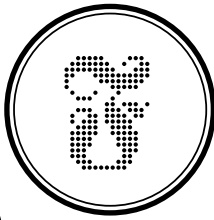


FOUR MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT  
FUGUE XI









FUGUE XI DECEMBER 2010

**23**  
**56**

**FOUR MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT: FUGUE XI**

COMPOSED BY *Kevin Yuen-Kit Lo, Sara McCulloch,*  
*Hillary Rexe & John W. Stuart*

DESIGNED BY *Kevin Yuen-Kit Lo*

WORDS STOLEN FROM *Cat Power (Living Proof), Faizal Deen, Jason Delmarr,*  
*Ralph Dfouni, Ian Finch, Gowns (Cherylee), GY!BE (intro.),*  
*Rowena Kennedy Epstein, Allan Lento, Damien Loret, Joshua*  
*Mensch, F.A. Nettelbeck, Alex Olsen, Shiri Pasternak, Tao,*  
*Timber Timbre (I Get Low), Vincent Tinguely, Greg Tyce,*  
*Shawnda Wilson, Jacob Wren, et al.*

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Every form of contestation against this tyranny is comprehensible. Dialogue with it is impossible. For us to live and die properly, things have to be named properly. Let us reclaim our words.

This is written in the night. In war the dark is on nobody's side; in love the dark confirms that we are together.

— JOHN BERGER



## ONE.

YES I WAS JEALOUS, BECAUSE YOU WERE A *Swan*.  
You looked so good to me I could almost taste it.

I nod, think: I'm in love. A sparrow in a fist,  
walking on barnacles, a lull in an elevator ride.

And now here I am just trying to find my teeth.

—§—

In Sommerset County, 75 starlings fell suddenly from  
the sky and died.

*'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free,  
'Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be.*

We were left stranded—believing in  
all the tired arguments around the kitchen table  
and the last dregs from a bottle of red.

We held on to the vain hope of being part  
of something—a plague of potential—  
of becoming something we thought we wanted.

The best line of the night was:  
*how can we stop smoking if we're still on fire.*  
Or: *close the grate, I'm full.*

Still, I'd leave the window open for you.



## TWO.



HE PHOTO OF YOU TAGGED, YOU: THE COFFIN.  
Who would think to hire a photographer at a funeral. The sermon the week before on Haiti and aid, the travesty, your life so small in comparison. When were you engaged. Did he propose in your fifteen minutes of wakefulness, wanting to make the most of your daily quota. Your dreams. When you were in treatment you said you dreamt of dying. Did the sky open up. Eighty pounds in a cot you couldn't leave. The thighs you used to fixate on, gone. What you wanted was so little and you were on your way. The checklist of success, you all too happy to strike each one off. Me in my spoiled self-loathing wanting none of it. No dress, shared accounts. All those years taking pills treating life

like it was given to me. Saying the struggle some days is just to stay alive. Passing out in the snow, frostbite on fingertips. All my inner-talk about the shared condition. This is not shared. She wanted to live and no. What happens to the cats now. What of my smoking.

—§—

A few weeks later, dozens of grackles, sparrows and pigeons dropped dead on two streets in Austin, Texas.

We are the ones we've been waiting for

and we've yet to arrive.

### THREE.

WHATEVER MOMENTS OF PERFECT BLISS  
anyone has ever had  
bridge past, present and future  
and our aim must be

NOT TO { mourn memories,  
feign hope,  
lay down before the bulldozer

—*prone before the grind*

*and thoughtless motion*—when standing  
and walking link'd in hand and thought is  
all we ever wanted.

The joy of a  
morning with  
mussy hair  
and rumpled  
clothes,

a barely  
occupied street  
reflecting  
daylight,  
blinding as  
possibility

and your taste  
on my fingers,  
chin.

*Our  
expectations  
are met.*

When I am with you  
I forget there were other  
things I was hoping for.

I remember old ways to laugh,  
sleeping until noon  
and that moment will form  
the perfect narcotic.

AND  
WE  
WISH  
IT  
WERE  
ALL  
ABOUT  
US  
IT  
WERE  
ALL  
ABOUT  
LOVE

†

LIKE  
A  
KNIFE  
HELD  
UP  
AGAINST  
THE  
RAIN  
WITHOUT  
WHICH  
WE  
MIGHT  
DROWN

The third act winds up fast. This is how it begins: I never.  
Think: oh God, the time I spent thinking of offing myself.

Her praying for lungs.

Them arriving, wrapped, you think, in plastic.

Set on ice.

## **FOUR.**

*You've got to look it in the eyes and say I don't believe  
You've got to hold it underwater so you'll see where it bleeds  
You've got to stare into the mirror 'til you name this disease  
You've got to know.*

SEE THE PICTURE: NOW LOOK AROUND.

Men without arms.

She carrying the weight.

No one is really alive here anymore.

There are only ghosts.

Stumbling home, POPPING,  
genocide on late night TV,  
drinking designer water, a  
finger to the mirror and  
passing out at 4AM on 350  
thread count sheets.

*You will not be able to answer those  
who had no place in your books, your poems.*

They drew her blood,  
it didn't hurt, she didn't know this.  
(some suffer more than others)

At the end of the dream,  
the light streams in  
on a single seed  
to worry—  
to dry and crack on the sill.

Waking up and looking for someone to blame,  
*Waking up to walk back into the world*  
but the apartment is empty  
*to try to recognize it again.*  
and the birds are still.  
*The tips of the trees were burnt red from the heat.*

## **FIVE.**

**They changed the locks on the bookseller and flooded the basement.**

**They paid people to tear down our posters, leaving barren telephone poles stitched with rusted staples.**

**They torch'd the building hollow, but we still went back to tend the garden.**

**They followed him home every night. Called him names to scare the neighbours. Threw mud to weigh him down.**

**They pulled them from their homes before they could hit the streets, left them in cages 'til the cameras stopped flashing.**

And they say anarchy is terrorism, property is people,  
love is blind.

But the sky is not a highway, not even a road, because everything is in the silences and the rent is always due because alone is impossible is infinite because every drop has passed our lips, at least once before, transubstantiated Saatchi, Ogilvy, Benjamin, Blake, Sandinista, Zapatista passed from hand to hand to heart because voices from the dirt together are only that mon amour because the trying is beautiful and consensus is the highest plane and there's always so much more to do, to see, to hear, listening for the insecurity behind power.

## SIX.

BETWEEN BRIXTON AND SOUTH KENN,  
Mile End and Hochelaga-Maisonneuve,  
in fear of the world around us,  
this damned frailty we've inherited.

(moving forward sure is scary in the world these days)

The same music rings in your ears,  
triggering the same false memories.

Tongues roll out and crash,  
the last pounding bass line —  
the feedback kicks in.

The crowd could break,  
droning and throbbing  
like waves of light flooding in,  
cutting any appetite.

The crowd could break,  
could swallow me whole,  
spit me out again,  
fresh.

The crowd could break,  
the words keep falling faster  
fast as a thousand starlings  
fast as a shark.

We won that night. A phone call from the jail yielded me my breath. I heard the drums and the chanting and then the words. I fell to the floor and cried; I cried an hour before I met you and I cried an hour after I left you. I cried from the acid left in my mouth and numbed limbs; I cried for all our defeats. I cried because I never imagined experiencing victory in my lifetime.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL:

“ WE WIN  
CALL THE COPS ”

—§—

When it was over—the yolk cleaned back  
into a shell uncracked,  
a smooth clean smell—the eyes opened,  
and I was a *Swan*.

## SEVEN.

WE MEET IN THE SPACE IN BETWEEN;

AS THE CARBON

where the radio  
plays a song

*where the birds look rabid enough  
to flatten the landscape*

making a

door

where none was before

*before a mythic present*

catchphrases  
and misunderstandings

I see it everywhere in you: RESTRAINT

*it's the saddest,  
sweetest,  
meanest thing I've ever heard*

race raindrops on the windowpane

NIGHT STRETCHES OUT

*soak into a hornet's black down*

eleven litres of oil per day

*one million suicides a year*  
TWENTY MILLION ATTEMPTS

all the Bruce Lee's  
we unleashed

*all the gathered cigarette butts  
piled in heaps*

all the necessary by-products  
of trying to live free

*I wanna share soft crosses*

sing wanton songs  
& *trembling echoes*

standing under the roots of grass

*we are in this together*

no matter what we are told

SOMETIMES

*it happens.*

A flock of feathers fanning out the forest fire.

¶









