



SPORKLET_
0017

Editor's Note

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Publisher's Note

Bios

Editor's Note

I gathered up this work in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. I think you can feel some of that uncertainty and fear and sense of novelty in it. I'm writing this at a table on the great highway in San Francisco near where I grew up. I'm about as far away within the contiguous US as one can be from where I live now, in an apartment in Brooklyn, and I'm thinking about how you can never go back to a place or a time. Because you're different, the place is different, the world is different. And how when you see an old friend after not seeing them for a decade your mind erases the picture you have of them and replaces it with the new one or at least mixes them together. I wonder how the world and the writers and artists have changed since they made this work. I wonder how you've changed too.

—Matt L. Roar

Amy Berkowitz

Gravitas: Chopping Wood

The word is so heavy with significance for me
that I've never bothered to look it up

So here we go: gravitas,
according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as dignity,
seriousness, or solemnity of manner.

The Collins Dictionary elaborates: "If you say that someone has gravitas,
you mean that you respect them
because they seem serious and intelligent."

"Your poems lack gravitas."
I don't remember which professor
said it first, but that criticism followed me
from class to class.
I don't remember getting helpful feedback.
I was prodded to up the gravitas
and sometimes my stylistic choices
were called into question:
I remember being told that a poem
that started every line with "and" was
"too repetitive."

No professor ever asked me, what are your influences?
No professor ever asked me, what are you trying to accomplish with these poems?
No professor ever explained to me why gravitas was necessary,
they only made it clear that my poems were deficient without it.

I'd been accepted to the program on the merit of a writing sample
influenced by Frank O'Hara. Suffice to say
they knew what they were getting.
But once they got me, they didn't know what to do with me.

What would they have done with Frank O'Hara?
I guess
it's different if you're a man.
I remember my professors liked a poem
by a guy in my cohort about chopping down a tree.

He wrote it in an old-timey voice:

“I wake at dawn and walk the frost-covered path” or something like that.
Was it that phony voice that leant his poem gravitas
or was it just that he was a man? And that chopping
was more masculine than the verbs in my poems, painting, shopping,
riding, smoking, reading, cooking, asking,
Those were some of the things I did in my poems,
but I never chopped down a tree.

And then a friend reminds me of another poem
by another guy
about eating a microwaved hamburger on Amtrak.
The professors liked that one too, she says.
Where’s the gravitas there, I ask.

My friend says, There is none! She says, Your poems
were all about female friendships and relationships—
to say that lacks gravitas is incredibly sexist.

It seems obvious now, but when I was 24
and in the middle of it,
I didn’t understand.

I follow my friend’s insight to its disturbing conclusion:
To say that poems about my life lacked gravitas
is to say that my life lacked gravitas. I was writing
about my life. The topics of my poems weren’t gravely important
but neither was chopping wood
or a hamburger.

Believing that poetry about the life of a young woman lacks gravitas,
Believing that the life of a young woman lacks gravitas,
enables a certain cognitive dissonance:
If the lives of the women in the program aren’t taken seriously
Then the problem of the serial abuser who’s been molesting
and harassing them for decades
isn’t a serious problem.

Gravitas: Sexism in Academia

A few years after I graduated
I found out that one of the professors
who defended the abuser, enabling him
to sexually assault and harass my peers
actually wrote a book
about sexism in academia!

I couldn't believe they wrote a book
about sexism in academia.

I read a review in the New York Times
and I felt hurt.

This professor wasn't ignorant:
They knew exactly how harmful and degrading sexism was
They knew exactly how it discourages women from pursuing their studies.

And yet, even with all that knowledge
they stood by and let the abuser do what he did
They stood by and practically let sexism run our grad program.

And then they wrote a book about
sexism in academia!

Gravitas: The Size of the Problem

When I tell people
who went to other programs
about our abuser,
more often than not they say yeah,

We had a guy like that.

Kimberly Reyes

Upon the realization that you don't have a
natural habitat

“don't throw stones at blackbirds, because it
might not be a blackbird at all.”

—Jamaica Kincaid

Out after storms,
Letting secular flecks

Coiling Icarus's inscription
Suspension & spirit

Bold, aloof, incorrigible
Shimmering black screams

Atop the pews
A public pyramid

A party of few.
I stop my alarm

Filter a pic
Wait for clicks

Baited pigeons
Follow me:

*All shadow play when
you can be Rebellion*

*Anyway, this simulation
will cost you.*

The Roost

Hornets turned a
corner, the fear
 malignant air

a surprise to every nest
a venomous April
following the longest March on record

survival |

shelter |

| bloodthirst

forty-five's bees crust
twitch, rhythmic

honey suckling
in vein, coursing
over now
humdrum verse

The Races

We bawl
papers tell
Santa Anita's
crushing bets
cracking backs—
bone
underfoot

blank fire—kickback—panic

a wildness
clutches the race card

after hoof,
soot caked,

the crowned,
the keyed up

man
at the waste plant
avoiding their lost eyes,
by a nose,
skinning the body,

with haste
and before, the one
slitting the jugular.

In the corner
a mare furrows

with pain killer &
a shot of memory

tracks of tripwire
congeal screams
lacing her ponytail.

Is the man paid
in cabled blinders?

What does he bring home?

Does he read about knights,
spry horses
before brushing his daughters'
manes?

The youngest mirrors his
auburn hue,

his hot streak of crimson.

Nearly 10 horses a week on average died at American racetracks in 2018... That figure is anywhere from two and a half to five times greater than the fatality rate in Europe and Asia... Even so, what transpired at Santa Anita, where a horse was put down more than once a week, on average, stands out.

—*The New York Times*

Gina Myers

Two For the Future

1.

The people in the streets—strangers
newly made friends through collective struggle
& joy The music pushing bodies
together / pushing us to reach for a shared vision
of what is possible What happens tomorrow
when we return to the work week slog
Will the music still pulse beneath the city's
streets & sidewalks—a murmur building & rising
Or will we forget what it sounds like

2.

Another day another vision
Uncommonly warm November 75 degrees
The entire year a practice in timelessness
Our bodies cut in & out of the frame
This dislocation like a dream—sleepwalking
& slowly beginning to wake

Futures (1-7)

1.

The sun bears down on the town
where it is too hot to go outside
The air too polluted to breathe, choked
with smoke / Wildfires close
in on the remaining structures
ready to engulf everything within

2.

The world is just a dream
All day we sit at desks where
it is our duty to dream other worlds
We are neither asleep nor awake

3.

A world of small communities
where people function in harmony
with one another
There are no cops
& no concept of work—people
just do what they need to do
so that everyone is able to thrive

4.

The water rises & rises
It is all water now

5.

A nuclear bomb followed by more
nuclear bombs
Sad little men full of rage & retaliation
until there is nothing left

6.

What water is left is toxic to drink

7.

Is it a communicable disease
that takes us? Me & you
lying in bed, holding hands
for our last breaths
Or will we be in the streets?
Fighting for our lives
when the military stomps us
out

erica lewis

burn me

for jenna and maisie

this is where it all began the restless ones in black and blue
gave up his children
to spare their lives
to spare my life
his children sold
what good is knowing
the language
songs the body
burned away
hooded cotton parade
human condition
i am still bleeding moonlight native american values
with white people problems
went through the words
in the harm jar
too many people
caught
in too many
floods
america
is a motherfucker
to us
mahogany recovered
ghosts that you need
and mama says this is deep
the two feathers
being brought to you
but this is life i say
fire at the teepee tonight
we need drums for dreaming
the ghost dance
in defense of being ourselves
how old is beautiful
fairy godchile
she says the word "rose"
before every sentence

she speaks
she likes that word best today
that is a good way to see the world
close the circle
to the river, baby
wish we could all learn
to say rose before we speak

never measure love by time

sunday is for the children
interrogating
how i actually show up
for myself in this world
guilt and grief
are just a part of you now
sweet figs rotting
in the damp soil
living out of alignment
is the new bleeding
we just pretend
we want more freedom
run a marathon
because that is
so much easier
than resting
aesop resurrection
aretha is dead
and i just can't
get that donnie hathaway
song out of my head
like i can't be black
without a history
of systematic oppression
prayer boxes
and worry beads
our two selves
clinging
like love
i know we last
i know our bleeding
stops
to think beyond the wound
is a healing
that can't happen
yet
jesus put it this way:
i am the voice

of silence
and false alarms
black man get yo money
go to a new city
wear some new clothes
wake up at different times
and allow
all the things
that already want to come
into your life
to be real
in the chain
of open sea
if love is the new money
this is your compass
this is america
i hope the wound
is small and heals
Quickly

Becca Klaver

from *Derecho Diary*

August 5

You were out riding
for hours
into your grief
and the oddly cool air

I was reading
how the only way to transform
this death-loving culture
is to feel what we turn
away from—

the shadow
always rears up, anyway

so might as well lean down
pick it up

(from where
the sun casts it
long as fishing line)

stitch it to my body
shaggy & macabre

August 11

a derecho blew across Iowa
yesterday noontime
punching the house
tops of trees swaying
out the dirty basement windows
cricket friend sheltering with us
he'd chirped loudly all morning
while I washed the sky blue sheets
just barely dry
when the power shut off
a little luck inside the storm
up again at ground level
ancient trees fallen
no power
no service
cut off further
plunged back
into another decade
now there is nothing

nothing

no social space

no device

to take its place

candles

solar lantern

red wine

warming beer and

thai chicken sweet potato salad

from the store downtown

where the grid's underground

“such a quiet night I've never seen”

no street lamps

no cooling hum

yes stars

apologies for the romance

of the sensory

before the sun went down

you mopped all the floors

readying for your mother

I sewed white stitches

into your nearly split
blue-and-white bandanna
then pulled out the black spool
to fix my dress and bra
analog tasks
I would have avoided forever
in favor of the screen's glow
today's golden light feels like a lie
to make yesterday seem impossible
the gaslighting sky—
do eggs need to be refrigerated?

August 21

chainsaws & generators
quieted as maskless
packs of students
parade past piles of trees
onto the next thing
late-nite beer pong
yells & the shadows
from bonfires
lick up the two-story
facade across the alley

what rips through invisibly
or with great gusts —
this year's power
of air wind breath

Jacob I Evans



Niina Pollari

LIFE FORCE

Let people see you, but from a distance.

Outside they stand on a dune, looking down. Inside they stand on a ladder, going up somewhere, and look back at their sad friend sitting in the middle of the living room.

In the restaurant, you fork a salad around a plate, move the pieces into your mouth. They feel like pieces of a dollar bill, going down your throat like you're being paid. When you eat something, you take it apart with your body. You reject most of it, but some of it has to be made into you. This is like grief.

My friend goes, "Hey, I'm sorry I haven't been in touch..."

My husband read a book about how money is life force, and you get to choose when to give it away. The bills I receive ask for even more money. I pay for iron pills, I pay for stool softener. But there is a bill I received that I still have not paid. Months pass.

Seven months have passed at the time of this dispatch.

I choose not to give away any more of my life force.

I am the one with the power.

INTERIM

In the interim before the disaster, I transform into the godhead. The transformation is so easy it's almost aesthetic: suddenly I exude an amniotic appeal and leave trails of cervical mucus that allow me to be followed. My nipples are targets. My body's hairs are individual like lovingly made line drawings. And I am full of blood and food.

Being the godhead gives me a voice that is many whispers driven into one voice. It makes me compelling to everyone I address. It's just like listening to the woman of your dreams.

And you know what the disaster is—you have seen it in your own dreams. A mountaintop blows inward like a face hit with a fire extinguisher. The brown cantaloupes roll into the acid ocean.

But the good news is that I can save us all so easily.

This poem is not insane.

In the interim before the disaster, we can hear the thunder and look upon the signage as it illuminates letter by brass letter:

Live Laugh Love

And we can recognize ourselves for what we really are.

SELF PORTRAIT AS NEW YORK GEOGRAPHY

A polluted estuary

With the prosaic name “East River”

Creeps against the shoreline

Let me describe the sky to you

The sky is high and creamy-metallic with birds like vanilla flecks

On the other side the monoliths stand crowded and vertical

It's beautiful if you have capacity to appreciate beauty

It's beautiful like order

Or like the satisfaction

Of a met expectation

...

Long ago the river flooded

And reached its fingers deep into the coast

Any geometry we've given the shore

Comes from human effort

Wall Street is filled in with animal remains

Garbage sand and concrete

Then built upon

As if where it stands

Was always there

That's the trick

Build something gleaming enough

Sink enough money into it

And nobody will even remember

That when it started out

It was just trash and offal

...

Here on the other side

Condos have taken all the payable views

And you have to stand very close to the river

To see the water at all

The light is even

I'm behind sunglasses

Even though it's sunless

I'm covering my eyes

Because cosmetically speaking I am in ruins

To look at my face directly would inspire nervousness

The way that looking at an abandoned or burned building

Would make a person want to lock their doors

...

I feel the opposite

Of the Financial District

I feel as if my foundation is solid

But everything else has been built from bodies

I feel like I am a mountain of discarded parts

And I draw scavengers

Great funnels of turkey vultures

Like the guy who pointed his camera

When they wheeled me into the ambulance

And filmed me as his German shepherd sniffed the grass

His face a blank stare even as I told him to go fuck himself

...

I don't know what to do

I want to lock myself into my apartment

But I also want to flood the plain with the untreated sewage of my sadness

...

I don't have enough money to feel sad for as long as I want to feel it

I would like to sleep here on this bench and let the weather erode me

But I have to normalize and arrange my body back onto the subway

And go under the river to the city

And enter its black buildings like vertical grave markers

Sorry this metaphor is so on the nose

And if you're still following well thanks

Marisa Crawford

Thoughts on New Fiona Apple

Megan said you can listen to it while going on walks. Lisa posted a video of her running to it, but she's in the woods. Matt said the opening chords sound like Disney princess music. I say he means Tori Amos as delirious Little Mermaid swimming up to the surface but he doesn't know it. I know that time is elastic.

I'd like to listen to the whole album but I get stuck on the first song. Just like I could never really get past Sleep to Dream. Listened to it hundreds of thousands of times the month when Brian and I broke up, it's twin song Metallica Fade to Black. The audacity to start your first album in eight years with the lines "I've waited many years," as if she's been standing there the whole time, perfectly still. Like Louise Bogan's Medusa, or how in the 33 1/3 book on Live Through This the author talks about the album beginning in media res.

Gina said her whole vacant woman bullshit. My feminist education taught me to hate Fiona Apple & my anti-feminist education taught me to hate Fiona Apple. She was at Lilith Fair, I was there. I was mad at her in the video with soaking wet hair. I was mad at what her body looked like, mad at mine. Matt said, this album is really using stereo. And then, there's a dog barking on this song.

The opening chords of Sleep to Dream sounded like being dropped down the center of a spiral stairwell. Like the Emily Dickinson poem where she says "And then a Plank in Reason, broke, / And I dropped down, and down -." Girls being like, "Play this song at my funeral." Showing up here after eight years and telling us all we'll need to wait another year to be loved.

Washing Machine

We watch The Beastie Boys documentary and then I put on Check Your Head, and for an hour I'm a 7th grader getting ready for her first real party, which is to say getting ready for every party she will ever go to the rest of her life and for the party that is the rest of her life, until one day the party would be put on pause indefinitely.

When I was in college for a little while I thought about getting a tattoo of a pause button. It was a dumb idea I got while studying abroad, after lending Jay my VCR and always thinking that my real life was happening somewhere else in some other city, parallel to the life I was actually living. Maybe those two parallel lines were a pause button. Maybe every feeling of anxiety has a sleepy clone that is eternal love. The input/output cords trailing behind a VCR, frayed wires at the ends.

Matt says we have a good vibe going in here. Beastie Boys and the dryer and the washing machine. I used to have a t-shirt of the Sonic Youth album Washing Machine. I think I borrowed it permanently from Anthony's sister Sarah. Wore it with an Adidas striped zip-up old man sweatshirt that we found at Goodwill.

Listening to Sonic Youth Washing Machine on my phone. The line that goes, "Standing with him / you feel more real." I have a vision in my mind and it's Icy or maybe Slushie or Slurpee but I don't know what it's about yet. Something that feels gooey and sad and syrupy and stains your tongue, the opposite of clean.

Butterfly

I was thinking of you in a sense like I was writing your eulogy, and it was bc in some part of myself that has been dormant for years I felt like it was really dead, between us things were really over. I remembered that after M and I broke up I was crying in my room and I put the tiny stuffed animal he gave me in a tiny box with a piece of cardboard as a pillow for his head and while I was doing it Angela walked by and asked, "is that a coffin?" I felt embarrassed at the time, but in retrospect she was precisely the perfect person to understand since her entire art practice was making little cloth figures and putting them inside fortresses made from patches of fabric where they could go to feel safe. I tried to dismiss what I was doing but she told me she thought it was a really good thing to do for closure, and I was surprised by her understanding and appreciation for symbolic ritualistic tributes to feeling. When Jenny and her girlfriend broke up I once found her sitting on the couch downstairs looking sad while holding my hamster, Chrissy. We didn't know that we could get rid of the pantry moths in the kitchen, and several of them had crowded into her food bowl. I'm sorry.

Seldon Yuan



We are all present at sunset
2012, live plant, dimensions variable.

we are all present at sunset

the sunrise, our privilege

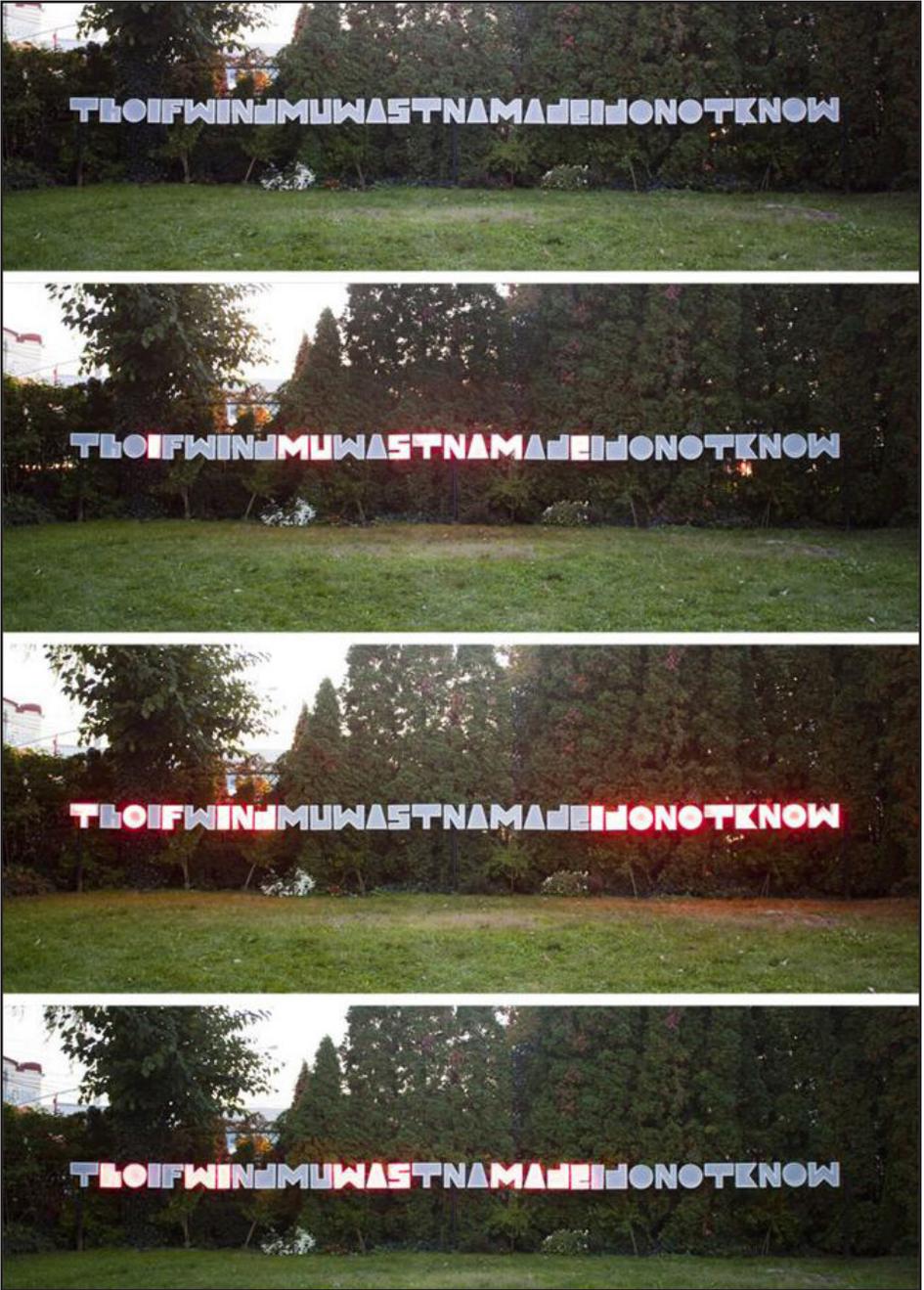
always finding the floor

never falling off the ground

a drawing of a sunrise is just a drawing

a photo of a sunset is only a photo

today looks a lot like the day I arrived



How I was made

2012, acrylic, wood, paint, light controllers, LED neon, 14 x 492 x 2.5 inches

I must name
to find I do not know
how I was made

Emma Wasielke







A note from the
people at Spork

Amy Berkowitz is the author of *Tender Points*, rereleased by Nightboat Books in 2019. Her writing and conversations have appeared in publications including *Bitch*, *The Believer*, *BOMB*, and *Jewish Currents*. From 2017 to 2020, she co-coordinated the writing residency at Alley Cat Books. She lives in a rent-controlled apartment in San Francisco, where she's working on a novel called *Utopia and Other Problems* and another novel that she likes to call *Untitled Bisexual Jumpsuit Project*.

Kimberly Reyes is the author of the poetry collections *Running to Stand Still* (Omnidawn 2019) and *Warning Coloration* (dancing girl press 2018), and her nonfiction book of essays *Life During Wartime* (Fourteen Hills 2019) won the 2018 Michael Rubin Book Award. Published and anthologized in numerous, international outlets, Kimberly was the 2019-2020 Fulbright fellow studying Irish Literature and Film at University College Cork. Deployed about Ireland, San Francisco and New York City, she writes about identity, ecology, sexuality, and her obsessions with the New York Mets, Duran Duran, and Cillian Murphy.

Gina Myers is the author of three full-length collections of poetry, most recently *Some of the Times* (Barrelhouse 2020). She lives in Philadelphia.

erica lewis was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her books include *the precipice of jupiter* (2009), *camera obscura* (2010),

murmur in the inventory (2013); and the first two books of the box set trilogy: *daryl hall is my boyfriend* (2015) and *mary wants to be a superwoman* (2017). Her chapbooks have been published by Belladonna, Lame House Press, and After Hours/The Song Cave.

Becca Klaver is a writer, teacher, editor, and literary collaboration conjurer. She is the author of the poetry collections *LA Liminal* (Kore Press, 2010), *Empire Wasted* (Bloof Books, 2016), and *Ready for the World* (Black Lawrence Press, 2020), as well as several chapbooks. *Midwinter Constellation*, a book co-written with 31 other poets in homage to Bernadette Mayer, will be published in 2022 by Black Lawrence. As an editor, she co-founded the feminist poetry press Switchback Books; is currently co-editing the anthology *Electric Gurlisque* (Saturnalia Books); and has launched various pop-up journals and websites, including *Women Poets Wearing Sweatpants* (a collection of original poetry memes) and *Across the Social Distances* (a journal of early pandemic poetry). Born and raised in Milwaukee, WI, Becca is the Robert P. Dana Director of the Center for the Literary Arts at Cornell College and lives in Iowa City.

Jacob I Evans is an artist, writer and educator. He lives with his family.

Niina Pollari is the author of *Dead Horse* (Birds, LLC 2015) and the translator of Tytti Heikkinen's *The Warmth of the Taxidermied Animal*

