

The Surgeon

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Abstract

The Chirurgeon

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The Chirurgeon is a collection of poems created via “chirurgy,” a new compositional method developed for this volume. Chirurgy employs various procedural and creative writing techniques to produce entirely new poems from source texts. In stage one of the process, source poems are reduced to their sequences of nouns. New punctuation and white space is added but no new words are allowed. This produces the first of three new poems. In stage two, the chirurgeon adds new words to the source nouns, producing a second poem. In stage three, the source nouns are removed from the second poem, and what remains is enhanced only with punctuation and white space, producing the third new poem. An introduction explains the surgical method in detail, and an afterword creates a “system of pointing” toward the poetics that informed the work.

You objects that call from diffusion my meanings and give them shape!

...
I believe you are latent with unseen existences, you are so dear to me.

...
*From all that has touched you I believe you have imparted to
yourselves, and now would impart the same secretly to me.
From the living and the dead you have peopled your impassive surfaces,
and the spirits thereof would be evident and amicable to me.*

Walt Whitman
“Song of the Open Road: Section 3”
Leaves of Grass

*Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing
and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns.*

Gertrude Stein
Lecture:
“Poetry and Grammar”

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INTRODUCTION

This manuscript was written using a process that I refer to as a surgical method. It uses a surgery metaphor to explain its manipulations of extant poems to create new work.

According to this method, the following statements are true:

A poem is a body.

A poem's nouns are its bones. All other parts are soft tissue.

A poem's noun-sequence is its spine.

The surgical method then asks these questions:

What if a poem's spine is removed and considered apart from its body?

What if a new poem is created around another poem's spine?

What happens to the new poems when their borrowed spines are removed?

This manuscript is divided into three sections, each dedicated to one of the questions above.

In the first section, *Spines*, I removed the noun-spines from their original poem-bodies. Without the flesh that once held these spines to a specific shape and purpose, I was free to give them new postures in open spaces, allowing myself to add only white space and punctuation to the source nouns.

In the second section, *Bodies*, I built new poem-bodies around the source spines, allowing myself to add whatever additional bones and soft tissue I wanted, so long as I retained the original noun-spine and its sequence. Surrounded by new flesh, the spines reclaim their familiar "vertebral column" configurations. These poem/bodies reach toward a traditional poetic mode in that they possess a certain level of sense and clarity. However, like Frankenstein's monster, they tend thematically toward conflict, difficulty and woe.

In the third section, *Flesh*, I ripped the spines from their new bodies and discarded them, along with any new bones I may have added along the way. At this stage, only the soft tissue remains: adjectives, verbs and so on. I added only punctuation and white space. Boneless, the new bodies sometimes collapse into noun-less insouciances, but never lose shape entirely.

By themselves, the above make for interesting little writing procedures, but what is the point? Why did I focus on nouns? Why did I use nouns from source poems rather than write my own material from scratch? Why did I choose surgery as a metaphor for this work?

I am interested in so-called original, creative work as much as the next person, but I am also drawn to the procedural, and the "uncreative" aspects of writing. As such, I developed a hybrid approach informed by both creative and uncreative tactics. *Spines* begins uncreatively with a list of source nouns gleaned from other poems, but it gestures toward the creative in its use of white space, punctuation, and re-presentation of meaning. *Bodies* balances the uncreative presence of source nouns with creative writing around those nouns. Finally, *Flesh* eliminates the uncreative source-noun element. It then uses an uncreative process to select its source, which is the creative material from *Bodies*, before allowing me the same constrained creativity available in *Spines*.

Regarding nouns, Gertrude Stein's thoughts are worth mentioning here because of their influence on my thinking.

In her lecture "Poetry and Grammar," Stein says that nouns are central to the poetic experience. Poetry, in her estimation, has historically been "a poetry of nouns a poetry of naming something ... completely passionately naming that thing by its name."

Perhaps paradoxically, she saw nouns both at the core, and as the core problem, of writing poetry. “A noun is a name of anything by definition,” she writes, “and a name of anything is not interesting because once you know its name the enjoyment of naming it is over.” For Stein, the “completely passionate naming” of things, i.e. writing poetry, was in danger of losing its magic, because every thing had essentially already been named.

Her quest began, then, to find a way to name things without naming them, and she “struggled desperately with the ... avoidance of nouns as nouns.”

Stein very nearly convinced me that nouns are “not interesting.” This was troubling because if nouns were “not interesting,” then the very core of this project, as I understood it then, was “not interesting.” I was troubled. Then I realized that nouns aren’t the true focus of this project. It is the context around nouns that concerns me here. I am interested more in the “enjoyment of re-contextualizing” than the “enjoyment of naming.” The nuance is critical. If the core of this project is “not interesting,” it is for some other reason.

Regarding the surgery metaphor: Surgery is a cutting into, and a manipulation of, a body. As such, it is an obvious analogue to what I’ve done with the source poem-bodies in this volume. Unlike surgery performed on human bodies, I do not aim here to correct a problem in my sources, or to heal them in any way. My sources are perfectly healthy specimens, and I in no way intend to qualify myself as a doctor or editor in the sense of repair or improvement. This chiralurgical method is so named solely in reference to its manual manipulation of the bones and tissue of poems, not to indicate some interest in achieving corrective goals.

Furthermore, it should be said that this chirurgy is an act of care, if not love — that much it surely shares with real-world surgery. I only “hurt” the ones I love, so to speak, and for good reason: to create new poems. This poetical chirurgy is primarily an act of creative reading — one that involves the fingers as well as the imagination.

This method is such a close form of creative reading that it cannot help but produce writing that is deeply dialogic in nature. None of it exists in a vacuum. It makes explicit its dependency on others, and on the interplay between two poets’ imaginations and sensibilities. Unlike human medical surgery (I should hope), poetical chirurgy is as much about play and discovery as anything else.

While it is tempting to agree with Hart Crane about process when he writes, “I can only say that I attach no intrinsic value to what means I use beyond their practical service in giving form to the living stuff of the imagination,” my relationship to this work is not that simple. It emerged from two years of study into various poetics issues, and it reflects that study in its systemic design and poetic output. To provide a sense of the deeper philosophical connotations of this work, and of the contexts and conditions of its development, I present, in the final section of this manuscript, a selection of notes and musings that I recorded in notebooks throughout the inception and writing of this work.

Before you now is a body composed of bodies that themselves are assemblages of other bodies, and while I may be its surgeon, it is up to you to give it life with the animating spark of your creative readership. Perhaps together we will find new ways to name without naming, beyond the limitations of language, via the manipulation of context in bodies poetic.

John Boucher
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I. SPINES

Lounge Dude Face [I]

Leather-bar town.

Lounge dude: face,

entrails (vultures).
Beads (strands):
ass

Bars: smoke, (jeans).

drinks (vodka,
martini
(olives)),

latex

(ass).

“Girl --

can?”

[“Hotel-friend”
sign.]

Miles -> apartment.

“Parasite's home!”
(River stink?

Debris?
Home.)

Money:

Love-toy
(line, counter,
check (bread)).

Aisle litter.

Fence. Body parts.

License
(motor vehicle)?
Line.

Mirror Bath Records [I]

Men.

Men (truckstop)

pickup Truck-

Men (pickup-truck).

“Airport man / men?”

“Man.”

Man-

hurricane

(camcorder).

[Surgery:
Hurricane

(dog (dog’s dog)).
camcorder.

Hurricane:

bath,

mirror,

bath records,

lens.

Pickup-truck

surgery

(airport).

Pickup-truck:

Hurricane.]

Hurricane:

Pickup-truck pickup.

Kiss Pus Eyes [I]

Mouth-woman
 tones body
 (serpent stones
 (breasts)).

Words:

Scent (lips);
 Demon bosom (men);
 Children (tresses);
 Sun (moon,

Sky-lover

stars);
 (arms,
 breasts
 (fruits)),

bed angels,
 marrow-kiss pus eyes.
 [Day (morning)]:

Breast (arteries);
 Fragments (skeleton);
 Weathervane (sign,
 (bracket:
 [wind])).

Cowboy TV Guitar [I]

Milk cowboy.

Room:

cowboy,
TV,
guitar.

Label cowboy's

wife (ceiling: rump;
smile: face).

Brand
thigh.

Table Eraser Days [I]

Box:

victim garments,
blood duct,
tape.

Bands:

wrist,
ankle.

Foreman:

shirt tent,
palms (pants).

Hallways:

table,
eraser.

Days:

courtroom,

hands
(foreman).

Boys Farm Gravemaker [I]

Boys
shorts.

Boys farm gravemaker

tequila.

Heaven:

horse

tuft.
Fur throat tuft.

Belly
breath.

Whale Saw Whale [I]

Whale saw whale-

knots
(water).

Water-

heart (window stone).

Jeans (body:
whale

city).

Breath: earth
(earth:

yeti).
Yeti.

Car.

Day / night cock.
wreckages.

Whale.
Whale?
Whale.

Lover Sweat Ants [I]

Pore-hand nets.

Fishes?

Grass,
shoulders,
guns.

Eye
Heaven's
ivy visitors, face
lover navels / shoes.

Lover: sweat.
Ants: lily-water.
Foothill guts.

Doe Earth Dewclaw [I]

Head

(eye-

tears

spool:

doe-

earth,

dewclaw

pyramid).

Eye:

Face.

Hands:

Heart thread.

Gnat Gnat Roses [I]

Dark patches
(melon / cauliflower);

banister;

curtains
(waterfall).

Gnat gnat
roses roses.

Spittle.

Redheads:
roses.

Soil

speck
(seed wind):

flowerbeds.

Tree Roots Song [I]

Bodies: lake.
Clothes.
Horses: Horses.

Tree-roots song
(policeman
radio carpet).

Day's
apple
pieces

(light).

Windowpane
bodies

(light).

Posts Neighbor Fence [I]

Tomato
plants roots
(ground).

Posts
(neighbor's
fence).

Shoes
(feet
(heels)).

Moon-
house.

Finger
neighbor's son
(garden,
yard).

Raindrops Bullets [I]

Gun:
seams.

Wax walls,
roof:

arsenal
(raindrops bullets).

Lists?
Ghosts.

Britches Pipe Bird [I]

Stomach?

Brother.

Skylight sun.
Pot headache.
Bedclothes (gut

sheets).

Basin: man-teeth.

Nightshirt gut,

Toes.

Sunshine
(windowpanes).
Man-nose lacquer:
sunshine.

Polyp-

man: fire-lip,
stomach, thighs,
britches-pipe.

Bird:
stomach-heap,
tripe-

tangle.

Furniture (rag
bellies);
stools (toad's
corners);
sideboards.

Singer-gullets

heat room, man's
brain-scraps
(junk);
heap hairs,
skin, stool.

Night-moon,
lights curves
(ass-shadow
snowdrift);

Roses,
nose Venus.

‘Night.

Faces Tongues Tongue [I]

Stonewalls:

bird's
pastures.

Faces
tongue
tongues.

Stonewalls:

bird's
crops.

Stonewall:

toadstool
tower.

Night Miles [I]

Dogs (streets). Trees.

Window.

Band sound (song:

Parentheses Time).

Space-time :

Night-miles.

Breakfast,

shower-hour,

bar soap (light);

water yard,

knot (tie, tie) trees (wind).

Streetlights.

Cigarettes: lawn.

Kiss.

Wheel.

Nymph Vine Sunshine [I]

Butterfly-

nymph.

Sunshine

cocoon.

Nymph.

Vine
sunshine.

Butterfly
Lake.

Gold Blacksnake Heart [I]

Lips ring gold,
blacksnake heart.

(Toadstool railing.)
(Eel railing.)

Ringer: eel (arm
muscles: toad).

(Sea railing.)

Salt pond snails.
Seaweed.

Park Path Leaves [I]

Flowers: night shadow;
 breath: trees

(wind).

Picts' tale / rumor:
 Plant-Men
 frame
 Planet-

Men
 (oakshadow
 reed-guardians),
 snake water-heads,
 neck dinosaur-

arms.

Park-path leaves
 itch,

mouth
 wind-sough
 branches-

rumors

fireside.

II. BODIES

Lounge Dude Face [II]

Poet as dead cow. Reader: strip me of my leather —		I think I thunk I quit.
Next stop: honky-tonk	bar.	
Next job:	town	drunk.
I'm a-work on my	lounge dude face.	
(Tough guy, reveal my	entrails. Vultures,	gather and feed. Later, witches shall read my red and finger the Curses!
	beads strands —	
Shove them up your	ass.)	
(Mormon, invade my	jeans; bars, smoke.)	suck me behind power-bottom, then
Weak	drinks (vodka?	Surprise!), then menopause reveal in the an off-brand and french fries.
	olives, latex,	
“Not everything is so easily reducible to	ass, girl...”	but
Sexist pig, othering me in the gender- neutral	can.	Somebody punch him!
But first a real date at hourly rate	hotel.	(Mom asks later:

	friend?"	"Who's your [domesticity's warning
	sign)).	
Recall those innocent years spent and listening to	Miles	in your step- father's secret
	apartment.	
"I fear	parasites,"	he say, "Come clean, queer, and
	home	go (after lapping [on-camera] sticky
	rivers)."	
Ah! The comfort-	stink	of "animal beer" and stay-free maxi-pad
	debris.	
I visit your	home	and leave, and you spray Febreze. Really, Boo? After the ease with which you paid me
	money	to please you? Please.
First Christmas gift: a	love-toy;	
Mother said	line.	
we crossed the		
Another click	counter.	
on her sin-		
	Paychecks	conjure
	bread;	and dreams
	aisle;	in the baby food
	litter.	and cat
See you in a while; love your easy sense of metrosexual style.		
(They found a boy beaten and tied to a	fence,	his

body
parts.) now a saint's
body, broken into
holy

I bought my license to write bad
poetry.

Did you? Go
ahead: read me
with the same
enthusiasm
that you have
for standing
in the
Department of Motor
Vehicles
line.

It's ok.
Really.
I'm fine.

Mirror Bath Records [II]

I pick up	men, men	or pick me up at the
After the pick-up, we make out in their	truckstop. pickup trucks.	
	Men	pick me up in their
sometimes	pickup trucks airports, man- men- man- man — hurricane	at then we have on-man action; on-men or on-man-on- an of lips, tongues, limbs.
A	camcorder	catches the scars where some of us have had
An	surgery. hurricane	of scars and lips and tongues.
Some adopt posture of	dog — dog's	a posture hunched on
	dog,	captured by
an	camcorder; hurricane	of dog's tongues in bubble
steamed	baths; mirrors bath-	and house singers; Bette Midler, Barry Manilow
	records.	
Camcorder	lens	records me in my
	pickup, truck,	or in a man's showing or hiding the scars

	surgery	from his or mine.
A surgery recorded on	airport	camcorders called <i>bon voyage</i> .
Then back into my a man's back into an an	pickup, truck; hurricane hurricane	or of lips and scars; of tongues and limbs —
or no more hurricanes of men in	pickups,	just one man alone in his
	truck;	
or me alone in my	pickup,	unwanted and wanting.

Kiss Pus Eyes [II]

Oracular	mouth woman- tones body serpent	speaks in about ancient that coils, constricts
constricts	stones; breasts words	until puff out (breath-sent push past devil
constricts	scent), lips; demon bosom man- children	while mourn the loss of boyhood loss of definitions, constants;
lost	tresses, sun, moon, stars;	lost lost
left featureless	sky, lover- arms	no constellated
constricts	breasts, fruit beds angel- marrow kisses pus eyes day!);	remain; on where heal (glorious
constricts	morning breast, arteries, fragments, skeleton	its nerve and beneath squeezed;
constricts the	weathervane, signs brackets, wind.	all and facts contradicts to control, in the variable

Cowboy TV Guitar [III]

“I want to milk cowboy,” room.	that you said in the waiting
The cowboy TV guitar	turned. He might have heard except, no: he was on (one strum then gunfight).
“He pinned that bullet on that guy like a	label,” cowboys.”
“My father was a cowboy,” I said. “His	wife, ceiling
You laughed at the word <i>happiness</i> . “Who cares about that? I’ll take a rope-calloused hand on my	my mother, had a low, low on her happiness.” rump smile face
I said, “My dad’s	brand thigh.

Table Eraser Days [II]

Why does
language fail?

I say, “Box,” you hear
 “Victim.”

I say, “Under-
 garments,” you see
 blood.

I say, “Duct
 tape,” you imagine
 bands around
 wrists.

I say, “Sky-
high,” you
think ankles.

I say, “Father,”
you hear “Foreman.”
I say, “Temp,”
you hear
“Father.”

I leave and
sleep on the
streets,

my shirt my
 tent, my
 palms my map.

When I say,
“Who needs pants in the
 institution’s
 magic
 and demonstrate,
 they take me
 away.

When you
visit, you say, “Table.”
I hear
“Operation.”
You say,
“Chalk.” I
hear eraser.

You say,
“Guilty.” I
hear “Parole.”
It seems there
are many
wasted days in the
 courtroom of our
 dissolution.

Yet when they

come to take
me back to
my cell, you
give me your hands and call me
foreman.

Boys Farm Gravemaker [II]

Spring	Boys shorts	in (baseball cards in bike spokes) smoke grass.
Autumn	Boys farm gravemaker.	work the until it folds.
Father turns “Sons,” he says, “All good things must pass.”		
Summer Boys drink	tequila, heaven	ride surfboards; their of beaches and tanned ass.
Winter Boys cull the broken work	horse	and dying sheepdog,
		thin bones under patchy of
they pet the	tufts fur; throat, tuft	the last left.
Sallow a shallow	belly breath,	rises, falls; a silent mass.

Whale Saw Whale [II]

What happens when	whale saw? Whale	meets loses;
chunked blubber-	knots water — water,	in their own oily and red.
The	heart window stone.	is a shattered by
Rip the	jeans body. Whale	from my hunt
	city	in depths.
Your plan: he must come up for	breath, earth earth	then creature sees what creature can see of the sea.
Like Don't	yeti: yeti	a mystery. me.
Get in your	car.	
Forget this Instead, come	day. night, cock wreckages.	seek amongst the dock's leather-bound
Forget this	whale, whale, whale.	this beautiful this glorious

Lover Sweat Ants [II]

Every	pore hand	of your a hole in your hand.
Your hand a	net, fishes	within which [wriggling ocean energies] teem untamed.
Alike:	grass shoulders,	pokes through earth's shot from seed-
rain-	guns: lovers	reaching for cloud-
while	sweat; ants lily	advance to tickle the and harvest dew
		(morning
	water- eyes foothills),	of the
		and carry it into the
	guts	of the earth
	heavens	[bladed fled],
	ivy-	where
	visitors	roots and worm- also dig.
These scenes I see in your	face, lover, navels shoes.	our together and no

Doe Earth Dewclaw [II]

In your	head	a cat's
	eye,	
		a
	tear,	
	spool	of salty threads.

Woe the failed
 hunt, the swift
 escaped doe;

a hunger
 imposed
 by the cruel earth,

the doom of
 empty
 dewclaw.

In my head		
which is a	pyramid	there is an
	eye;	

I hold your	face	in my
	hands,	align your eye
		with my eye.

Trust me.

I pierce your	heart	with my needle
		and
	thread,	sew us together
		forever you're
		fed.

Gnat Gnat Roses [II]

Before	dark, patches	and after grey and rare color bursts:
	melon cauliflower banister	yellows, greens, browns.
When we met it was	curtains	for home towns. Rainbows blistered in
	waterfall	mists: uncertain, happy frowns.
What next but inevitable sex —	gnat gnat	on action — then cliché
	roses- roses	on- reactions;
the	spittle redheads rose soil.	of mingled with petals in night-
Soon there was only night-	soil,	dry, cracked, and hard;
Yet, somewhere, one errant	speck	of code, one spilled
	seed wind,	still rides the destined,
	flowerbeds.	perhaps, for

Tree Roots Song [II]

Bruised	bodies.	
A salt	lake.	
Torn	clothes horses, horses'	adorned with sequined faces.
That	tree roots	he swing from, up reaching to soothe;
that Simone	song	she sung amongst them who did it:
	policemen.	
No one should hear that kind of news first on	radio.	
The wrong song. Lay me down on that green	carpet;	
lament all future	days;	
family tree's newest	apple pieces.	falling into
Black	light	of inverted sun, go away.
	Windowpane	I shatter into shard
Turn off the	bodies. light.	

Posts Neighbor Fence [II]

	Tomato- plant roots	hued devil, I my foot, and my corrupt your hallowed
	ground.	
Furious	posts	to the pastor: How could you let those people be my
Build bigger	neighbors? fences!	
(You must wear	shoes; feet	your are real smooth.
Now kick your	heels moon	to the boy!)
[Your step- father's secret	house.]	
(Who am I to crush beneath my shoeless heels your stinky	fingers?)	
How could you let those people be my I have a	neighbors? son	and they'll tempt him in their prissy little
	gardens!	
(Build the Berlin Wall around my	yard.)	

Raindrops Bullets [II]

Your love a	gun,	a shotgun, sawed-off.
My body blown apart at the	seams.	
My love a	wax,	a red wax (melted), coats the and your body.
	walls roof	
No	arsenal raindrops	of can erase the effects of your
	bullets;	
No	list ghost	of attendants can spirit away the weight of my embrace.

Britches Pipe Bird [II]

	Stomach brother	to stomach, to brother, we touch each other, but through
	skylights sun-	a god sees us and, jealous, warms our
	pots	until heat-stroke explodes in
	headaches, bedclothes gut	hemorrhages, red and rot.

(Remembering,
in this heat, my
life of
yellowed

	sheets, basin- man teeth	scrubbed by a with no (my father);
lifting up my	nightshirt	now, I see his festering
	gut	beneath.

You know, my
shoeless

	toes sunshine, windowpanes;	met once, through
my	man- nose, lacquers sunshine.	too, received of

But inside my
pants, a

	polyp-	shaped thing [time-bomb] pined for ham- hands [and here come the sun].)
--	--------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Once upon a
time, a

	man	like me was given to
	fire.	

His words
melted on his

	lips	as they rose from his
	stomach	in confused and boiling dictions;
	Thighs,	that once with passion burned, in flaming

Listen — you can still hear his	britches	cracked & split.
	pipes	playing the song of the cooked
	bird	across time, and the sound of his phoenix-
	stomach	failing to rise, reduced instead to sloppy, flopping
	heap tripe.	of smoldering
	Tangles furniture rags	of and surrounded his feet: little
	bellies	belching tongues of smoke and heat until he crumpled on his
	stool toads, corners,	and died; and watching from all croaked and sat there, satisfied.
Would he undo what undid him: the kiss taboo between	sideboards, singers,	two sideshow tongues sliding down golden
	gullets?	
If love is a	heat	after frostbite willingly suffered, then no, I think not, and the thaw continues.
Lonesome in my boyhood	room, man, brain-	I wrote myself a spawn built from paper and ink;
	scraps	
someone to love [pornographic new promethean]. Those early		

efforts nothing now but	junk, heaps, hair skin stool	memory dump- lost and flakes, samples given and ignored;
but through those crude experiments, love survived and I was born.		
Come Come Come	night. moon- light. curves ass- shadows.	and fingers in
Every kiss is justified! This hot death is mere hibernation, a deep thrust beneath	snowdrifts roses, noses	or mountains of a dulling of and eyes;
but know this: above us, and always, a transit of	Venus night.	scars the

Faces Tongues Tongue [II]

How many	stonewalls	happen every day?
Mini- rebellions, -rejections against bigotries (physical, emotional raids)?		
Coming out,	birds pastures,	rise from sometimes explode, gun-shot (see smiling hunter
	faces).	
How many	tongues	are cut out or frozen every day, oh
	tongue	trying to shape air but cramped by chilling effect, or fear.
All it wants to say is, "I am here."		
Universal	stonewall, birds.	universal
Universal harvests: youths chopped down like	crops	by some farmer of souls;
universal	stonewalls	undaunted, fleshy emerging in dark places,
	toadstools	impossible to suppress, see them: fungal
	towers;	millions rise and bloom.

Night Miles [II]

How many ways
 did you want to
 kill me? Death: dogs in the
 street;
 Death: neck-
 hang from trees;
 Death: bullet
 through window;
 Death: band pulled around
 throat;
 That sound, my victim
 song: "Please please
 no, don't do it.
 Stop.

 (The coup de
 grace itself
 something that
 happens in the parentheses of the
 experience.
 The best time: before the deed,
 space-time that pregnant
 before action; the
 planning of;
 anticipation.)

 Then righteous
 sunrise erases
 abominable night.
 Afterward, the
 dull work:
 dump satan's
 dead puppet and
 drive eight miles, eat
 breakfast, away the
 shower evidence;

 recount
 my final hour under the weight
 of, what, your
 crowbar?
 Stains no soap- on-a rope can
 remove;

 then hair dryer,
 then underarm
 low-t
 applicator,
 then lights out, and go to
 work, thermos
 full of brown
 water.
 Shake hands
 down at the yard — "Morning, Jerk;"
 tie those knots and climb that

one day		ladder;
wear the	tie,	one day the
	tie	wears you;
doesn't matter.		
American		
Dream: wife in		
the sunroom		
reading; kids		
out back		
climbing	trees;	maybe later a dip
		in the pool, and
	wind,	drinks, caress of
		seventy two
		degrees.
At night,		
drive by and		
eye the rough		
trade standing		
under the	streetlights.	
Remember		
your lips,		
pushing past	cigarette,	kissing my lips?
While		
mowing the	lawn,	vision of leather
		on hips;
Was I real?		
Was that you		
who did those		
things? Did		
we	kiss	before you tied
		me to your circus
	wheel	and tossed your
		knives?
Did you miss?		
Am I missed?		

Nymph Vine Sunshine [II]

Because you are	butterfly nymphs, sunshine);	(i.e. food for washed down with
Because you begin in	cocoon nymph vines, sunshine);	and end in cocoon of belly (whose veins are always hungry for butterflies and
Fly, Linger over the Enjoy it while it lasts.	butterfly. lake.	

Gold Blacksnake Heart [II]

Your	lips	form a
	ring	of
	gold	around my
	blacksnake;	
My	heart	swells in your
		hand like
	toadstool.	
This is the		
ride. I clutch		
the	railing,	firm and fleshy
	eel-	shape;
you clutch the	railing	(dead
	ringer	for
	eel).	
We agree		
on something		
(this nonsense).		
I grab your	arm.	
I feel the	muscles	there (thick
	toads).	
I feel the		
coming of		
surging	sea.	
I clutch the	railing	and give you
	salt	in form of
	pond.	
You say,		
"Tastes like	snails	or maybe,"
		(swallowing),
	"seaweed."	

Park Path Leaves [II]

My	flowers	blossomed in the
	night	your
I felt your	shadow.	
	breath	and our
		bedspring creak
		echoed the
		creaking
	tree	outside.
You broke	wind,	unwashed
	Pict;	
Roman nose		
offended;		
embarrassing	tale,	what you ate,
		told twice;
		second time,
		tone and tenor of
		whispered
	rumor;	
the slightest		
breath of		
putrid	plant.	
I did not care,		
for we were	men	whose
	frames,	sturdy as
	planets	with iron cores,
		magnetized, were
		drawn clapping,
		clapping
		together, never
		one from other to
		be torn;
unashamed	men,	hardy, entwined
		in
swaying	oakshadow;	
erect	reeds;	
	guardians;	
	snake-	shapes writhing
		in
	water,	
	heads	pulsing crown to
	neck,	long thicknesses,
	dinosaur	strengths.
You said,		
"Surrender to		
me Snake-		
handler,"		
beneath these		
barked	arms	in lamp-lit

	park, paths leaves.	where all lead to beds of
Let us rest at last, accept the beetle's slow, investigating	itch,	
	mouths	our emptied of all language but
	wind, sough	a soft ghost sound falling from naked
	branches.	
Orange and brown, we decomposed,		
no complaints; what we were, a racket, faded to what we are:	rumors, fireside.	wraith tales that lovers whisper

III. FLESH

Lounge Dude Face [III]

As dead strip, Of think thunk, “Quit.”
Next: “Next?”

“...a-work on my

tough reveal...”

Gather & feed;
later shall read red and the
“shove them up your...”

Invade.
Suck behind,
Power-bottom, then...

(weak...) then reveal
in the / an off-brand,
and French.

Not
is so easily reducible
to but.

Sexist othering in the gender-neutral —
Punch!

But first: a real At, hourly.
Asks later.
Recall innocent, spent
and listening to in secret?

Fear say: come clean & go after
lapping on sticky “ah” (the Of
animal),
and stay-free visit,
and leave, and spray.
Really. After the with which paid
to please, please.

First, A said, “Crossed the...”
Another click-on

conjures; and in the
and see
in a love (easy)
of metrosexual.

Found A beaten
and tied to A;
Now A: broken into,
holy.

Bought to write bad.

Did.

Go ahead:

Read with

the same that have,
for standing in the Of.

It's ok.

Really fine.

Mirror Bath Records [III]

Pick up or
 pick up at the ...
 after the
 make-out / -in.

Pick up in / at,
 then have on
 (sometimes on,
 or on,
 on...)

an Of.

A catches The,
 where some Of
 have had an Of,
 and...
 and
 adopt Of
 (a hunched-on,
 captured-by-an Of, in;
 steamed, and
 records in
 (or in a) showing
 (or hiding) the from,

or:

a recorded-on
 (called "bon").

Then back into,
 or a back into, an Of;
 and an Of,
 and / or no more of,
 in just one, alone in,
 or alone in unwanted,
 and wanting.

Kiss Pus Eyes [III]

Oracular
 speaks in / about
 ancient coils;
 constricts;
 constricts
 until ...
 puff
 out sent,
 pushed
 past;

 constricts While
 (mourn the loss
 of loss,
 of lost lost;
 lost
 left featureless no;
 constellated: remain);

 constricts On.
 Where?
 Heal.
 (Glorious!)

 Constricts Its,
 and beneath,
 squeezed,

 constricts The,
 and contradicts,
 to control In
 (the variable).

Cowboy TV Guitar [III]

“Want to,” That said,
in the waiting.

The Turned
might have heard
except
no was on
one.

Then

pinned-on,
like a said wish,
the Were:
full of

Was.

A said,
“Had a low Low on.”
Laughed
at the Cares-About.

Take A, calloused-on,
and A on A (any of).

The said, “Was;
and slapped-on:
The.”

Table Eraser Days [III]

Why does Fail say, "Hear,"
 say, "See,"
 say, "Imagine around say."
 (High think.)

Say, "Hear."
 Say "Hear,

leave, and sleep
 on the When."

Say, "Needs,"
 in the magic,
 and demonstrate,
 take away,

when
 visit,
 say, "Hear."

Say, "Hear," say "Guilty.
 Hear it?
 Seems there are
 many
 wasted in the Of."

Yet,
 When come
 to take back —
 to give,
 and call.

Boys Farm Gravemaker [III]

In...

In smoke-

work,

the Until

folds,

turns,

says,

“Good must pass.”

Drink,

ride of,

and, tanned,

cull

the broken

and dying

thin.

Under patchy of pet,

the ...

the last left-on,

sallow, rises,

falls.

A shallow.

A silent.

Whale Saw Whale [III]

Happens:
 When meets Loses.

Chunked in oily and red,
 the Is, a shattered-by,
 rips The from Hunt.

In
 must come up,
 for then sees What,
 can see Of,
 The,

 like a —
 Don't.

Get in.

Forget “instead.”
 Come seek,
 amongst The Bound,

 Forget:
 Beautiful,
 glorious.

Lover Sweat Ants [III]

Of an in,
 a within,
 which, wriggling,
 teems untamed, alike;
 pokes through,
 shot from reaching for,
 while advances
 to tickle The,
 and harvest of The,
 and carry it into The,
 of the bladed fled,
 where And also digs.
 See in our together and —
 No.

Doe Earth Dewclaw [III]

In a

A
of salty

woe,
The Failed,
The Swift,
escaped.

A,
imposed
by the cruel

“The”
of Empty

(in which
is a There,
is an

hold-in /
align-with
trust,

pierced-with,
and sewn together,
forever),

fed.

Gnat Gnat Roses [III]

Before and after grey
and rare yellows:
greens, browns;

when Met
was for “blistered-in,”
uncertain, happy.

Next?

But inevitable On!
Then cliché On.

The Of
mingled
with In;

soon there was only Dry,
cracked and hard;

yet somewhere
errant Of,
spilled,
still rides
the destined
“Perhaps For.”

Tree Roots Song [III]

Bruised:

a torn,
adorned-with
Sequined,
that swing from up,
reaching to soothe.

That Sung amongst Did
should hear Of, first,
on the wrong;
lay down on green lament.

Future (newest),
falling into black
of inverted go-away,
shatter into.
Turn off The.

Posts Neighbor Fence [III]

Hued,
and corrupt / hallowed,

Furious (to The How):
“Could let be build bigger!

Must wear!
(Are real smooth.)

Now kick to the

secret:

am to crush beneath
shoeless stinky?

How could let be?
Have A, and tempt in!

Prissy Little,

build the around!”

Raindrops Bullets [III]

An A: sawed-off,
blown apart at the

A;
A red, melted,
coats the And.

No Of
can erase
the Of.

No Of
can spirit away
the Of.

Britches Pipe Bird [III]

To... to touch,
but *through!*

 ("A" sees and, jealous, warms
 until explodes,
 in red and

 remembering,

 in Of:
 yellowed,
 scrubbed
 by a With,
 no lifting up;
 now see,
 festering
 beneath?

 Know!)

Shoeless,
met, once, Through.
Too received Of,
But inside A

 (shaped, pined for),
and here come the

 "Once upon an A,"
 like was given-to;
 melted on as rose from In,
 confused and boiling;
 That Once, with burned-in flaming,
 cracked and split.
 Listen! — can still hear, playing,
 the Of,
 the cooked-across And;
 the Of
 failing to rise,
 reduced instead
 to sloppy flopping Of,
 smoldering

 Of (and
 surrounded),
 (little belching of And),
 until crumpled-on
 & died.
 & watching, From croaked.
 And sat there, satisfied;
 would undo undid The,
 taboo, between two:
 sliding down,
 golden

 if.

Is A, after willingly
suffered, Then?

No. Think not.

And The continues,
lonesome in, wrote A,
built from And to love,
pornographic,
new (those early now),
but dump,
lost and
given and
ignored.

But Through,
crude,
survived,
and was born.

Come!
Come!
Come! (and in is justified!)
This Hot is mere a Deep Beneath,
or of a dulling of And.
But know,
above and always:

A!
Of!
The!

Faces Tongues Tongue [III]

How many happen mini
against physical?

Emotional, coming:

“Out!

Rise from sometimes.

Explode.

See (smiling)!”

How many are cut out,
or frozen (oh! trying to shape)
but cramped by chilling,
or wants, to say,

“Is!

Am!

Here!

Universal!

Universal!

Universal!”

Chopped down,
like, by some
of universal

(undaunted,
fleshy emerging
in dark

impossible)

to suppress.

(See:
fungal rise
and bloom.)

Night Miles [III]

“How” did want to kill, in
 the hang from Through,
 pulled around please.
 (Please, no
 don’t; do; stop.)

“The” happens in
 the “Of;”
 The...
 “The” best before
 the pregnant, before
 the Of

(then Righteous erases
 Abominable Afterward).

The dull dump
 dead and drive;
 eight eat away
 the recount
 (final: under,
 the Of no can remove).
 Then...
 Then low-t.
 Then out and go to,
 full of brown shake-down at

the tie-and-climb one-wear,
 the one
 “The” wears,
 doesn’t matter
 (American in

the reading,
 out back,
 climbing,
 maybe later
 a dip in

the And
 of seventy-two,
 at Drive By and Eye).

The rough,
 standing under
 the remember,
 pushing past
 while mowing
 the Of.

On was real,
 was did;
 did before; tied to
 and tossed;
 did miss; am
 missed.

Nymph Vine Sunshine [III]

Because

are

(i.e. for)

washed,
down with

Because!

Begin in,
and end in, Of

(whose are always hungry
for And).

Fly;

Linger over

The Enjoy.

While:
lasts.

Gold Blacksnake Heart [III]

[Form A: Of]

Around swells in,
 like is the clutch,
 the firm and
 fleshy
 clutch
 the dead-for agree on,
 grab,
 feel;
 the... There!
 Thick. Feel?
 The coming-of,
 surging
 clutch.
 The And give in.

Of say,

“tastes like,
 or maybe...”

(swallowing)

Park Path Leaves [III]

Blossomed in the felt,
and echoed, the outside

broke, unwashed.

Roman offended
(embarrassing) what ate,
told twice:
second And.

(Of whispered

the slightest of
putrid, did not
care for.)

Were whose sturdy,
as with iron magnetized?
Were drawn clapping,
clapping together, never one
from to be torn,

unashamed,
hardy,
entwined in swaying,
erect, writhing in,
pulsing to long,

said, "Surrender to," beneath;
barked in, lit where all
lead to Of?

Let rest;
Accept The Slow

(investigating,

emptied of but
a soft falling
from naked orange;
and brown,
decomposed

no)

were a faded-to,
are
whisper.

AFTERWORD: CONTEXTS and CONDITIONS

Poet and scholar Jeanne Heuving once said, “Find [poetics] in the margins of notebooks of writers writing” (Heuving 10.05.13). This section executes that directive. Below, you will find a collection of quotations and thoughts that I wrote in my notebooks as a writer writing *The Chirurgeon*, between Autumn 2012 and Spring 2014.

To create this section, I selected material from my notebooks that, in retrospect, clearly provided the context and conditions of this work’s development. It is hoped that the overall effect will be that of a Steinian “system of pointing” to the poetics of the work.

A word about format might be useful here. It is inspired by Eiland and McLaughlin’s 1999 translation of Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*. Content is grouped by subject heading. Quotations and paraphrases are presented in regular, unadorned text (with citations). My thoughts are presented in regular, unadorned text without citations. Brackets are used to identify my responses to the source material that I wrote while assembling this section.

PRISON and SELF

“Poetics is the prison you’re imprisoned in” (R. Brown, UWB Class).

“[...] any prison is a laboratory in which a human life is tested for the survival of itself, its humanness” (Howe 63).

Poetics investigates the conditions of writing. What is my position in time? [I am a gay, white, American male writing this in 2014.] What are the tools available to me? [I have access to the English language, computers, the internet, and analog writing utensils. I hold multiple college degrees in various creative spheres.] What is the factual reality of the world around me? [I live near a major highway, behind an automobile dealership, both of which generate noise and contribute to my sleep deprivation. I am largely detached from my family due to incompatibilities of lifestyle, religion and politics. My country has been at war most of the time since its inception. There is great wealth disparity here, and most of the people I know work jobs they hate to scrape by and pay their basic living expenses. But people are also in love, it seems, and they laugh, and they are entertained by multiple entertainment industries. Not everything is joyless.]

“I is a casualty list” (Schwartz). [This was certainly true of the “I” that produced these poems. When I began this MFA journey, everything I had known and built over the past fifteen years had changed. I lost my long-term relationship, my house, my neighborhood, and my day-job. I also lost my diseased gall bladder in a surgical procedure the week before my first class meeting. I had been cut into, and a part of me had been removed. Looking at this project now, I can see how it reflects the traumatized context from which it emerged.]

How much of this writing is ego? How much is need? How much is pleasure / play? [The chirurgeon can be egotistical but he is also needy. He needs to make, and the pleasure / play of making.]

“The dream of coming on new grammatical structures, a new alphabet, even a new way of reading, goes on — almost as a way to create a new human.” (Howe 14). [I admit to sharing this dream. I am always looking to find my own methods.]

“One of the exciting things about the arts is that they respond to an unfolding, changing society. Creative / art pieces speak within and to the time in which they were created” (Heuving, UWB Class).

What is the nature of the time in which this work was created? [This work reflects an openness toward remixing, reusing, and recycling that existed in American culture circa 2014. Culture seems happy to eat

itself right now. This is also a social, relational age shaped increasingly by networked computer systems and procedures rather than by analog, physical proximity. Chirurgy reflects the “technological conduit” nature of communication and interaction in its day.]

“Since the dawn of media, we’ve had more on our plates than we could ever consume, but something has radically changed: never before has language had so much materiality — fluidity, plasticity, malleability — begging to be actively managed by the writer” (Goldsmith xix). [The idea of a writer not as creator but as word-manager was hugely important to the development of this project. I embraced it knowing that I could pursue the conceptual without losing access to the creative. It wasn’t difficult to see that “creative vs conceptual” was analogous to “art vs craft.” They are complimentary, not antipodal, forces, and chirurgy is my attempt to develop an explicit hybrid of the two.]

“Memory, Mnemosyne, is the mother of all muses” (Schwartz, UWB 11.29.12). [Each word a memory, each memory the mother of the surgeon's muses.]

History as manner of speaking - “word” as “wered,” past-tense of “were” (Mackey 67-68). [The lingering baggage of words; words as history. Chirurgy as method for cutting words free of contexts and histories, or of seeing the wered of a word.]

"Phantom objectivity" - haunted by what we ourselves originate (Mackey 72). [“Flesh” section as evidence of hauntings, themselves haunted by the objects they formed around but no longer exist, like ghosts haunted by the missing houses they used to inhabit.]

“What can one do to outmaneuver the inertia both of what one knows and of what one feels or presumes to feel? There must be some way, I’m convinced, to invest in the ever so slight suggestion of ‘compost’ I continue to get from the word ‘compose’” (Mackey 74). [This project is in part a pushing against the inertia of my own assumptions and creative limitations, as imposed by the collection of old data that I have carried around for years. I am not my knowledge, feelings, or presumptions. I use the “compost of compose” to fight against creative inertia. Compost fuels composition. Source begets action.]

Turn yourself into a writing machine that produces evidence of your historical presence.

Information as object. Information about me that is valued by society, and information that isn’t. (Borsuk)

That which can’t be said directly but can be said through an accumulation of fragments. Text + historical moment + our relationship to the historical moment.

“[...] the narrator [...] as an idea, even an abstract example, of consciousness shifting in its spacial locations” (Howe 21). [The surgeon as narrator shifting in spacial locations of poems, the spaces between words, operating on the connective tissue between.]

“Intensity of personal experience translated via language to the common” (Schwartz, UWB 11.29.12). [Chirurgy translates a source poem’s intensity into a dispassionate list of nouns. I found that I can remove a noun’s intensity by removing the other parts of speech around that noun, thus creating room for new or different intensities.]

“Indeed, impersonal procedures tend to magnify subjective choices. [...] The spoor of a personal signature remains in even the most deodorized work” (Dworkin xxxix).

“[...] conceptual art’s impulse to distance the artist from a position of creatively original authorship” (Dworkin xxxiii).

The death of the author as recognition of where art really happens: in the consciousness of the viewer (Milutis, UWB 05.16.13).

“Really good art is itself” (Heuving, UWB Class). [But its self might be made up other other selves. Eternal recurrence of selves within selves. The queer lineage connecting artwork to artwork. An investigation into nested selves. A selves delve.]

TRANS / MODES / CHANGE

“Poetics discusses how poetry revels in its modes of expression” (DuPlessis). [This collection begins with reduction, moves into creation, and ends with something new and semi-corporeal, a kind of cloudy drift into indeterminate futures. New forms emerge from old ashes; smoke rising from catastrophe.]

[This is a “trans” poetics. It works through compositional modes that transit, transport, transplant, transgress, transform, transmit, transmute. I could list trans- verbs all day, and almost all of them would apply, because chirurgy questions the stability of a text, then dismantles it and operates on it, transforming poems by cutting into their texts, contexts and subtexts. Chirurgeon as agent of change.]

[When a body is stretched out before me and I hold the scalpel in my hand, where will I cut, and why, and how? The answers are not always clear when the operation begins. The very orderability of a wholeness that is no longer wholesome or holy demands that I transform it; by reason or intuition, it matters not. As I massage words into new contexts and structures, I enter into a state of hybridity with my subject. In that state, my feelings and thoughts are not entirely my own. What is at stake in this process? To no small degree: identity.]

[The materiality of the medium is important. It's not just a container. Form is function, and shape is meaning. The operation itself, and the operator, become an extension of the very poems they create. As the container changes, so too does everything within and without it.]

“Characters often enter as ideas and exit as corpses” (Howe 85). [Here, each source poem enters as idea and exits as animated corpse. New Promethean.]

[Surgery often aims to structure unruly flesh into a more functional whole. That was not my goal here. I began with a dramatic series of amputations, moved into physical therapy, then conducted massive transplants and transfusions and reconstructions, then returned to amputation before finishing with more physical therapy. Change and discovery was the goal, not improvement, not correction. From malfunction sometimes developed function, or a reaching toward function. From nonsense sometimes emerged meaning, or a reaching toward meaning. From sense sometimes came nonsense, or a reaching toward nonsense.]

Unheimlichkeit = uncanniness. “The unheimlich pleasure in the instability of a text created by translation” (Beer). [Chirurgy is filled with unheimlich pleasures as it destabilizes and re-stabilizes texts. I'm thinking of how patients can be in stable or critical conditions, and how those terms inform chirurgy as an arts practice.]

Achieving an unheimlich feeling through the practice of othering one's own language through destabilization of one's own text (Beer). [I experienced this to some extent while writing the “Flesh,” section. Suddenly I was confronted with my own words as they lay there on the operating table that I had created for the words of others. I experienced first-hand the unheimlich feeling of self-surgery.]

Translation bound up with fragmentation of the self by othering one's own language (Beer). [Do I other my own language when I reduce “Bodies” to “Flesh?” A fragmentation takes place, and a translation of sorts. What then? Is it a simple rewriting process, or something more complex? None of these words are mine. I've borrowed them all from somewhere. I feel no allegiance to them, and no ownership of them. Even word sequences I might generate can be produced randomly by a machine given enough time.]

While a fragmentation of the self is certainly at stake, I can always remind myself that I am not (entirely) my language.]

The notion of translator as traitor (Beer). [Creative reading as treason against source texts. Creative treason! Art crime! All is forgiven as long as the result is not boring.]

The idea of translation as repetition of another text. Repetition with a difference. The idea of translation as creation rather than reproduction (Beer).

Post-pretending. “Can we imitate our way into authenticity” (Hiebert, UWB 05.21.13)?

Repeating the familiar until it is unfamiliar and/or until it reveals something. Ostranenie. Defamiliarization strategies.

“Echo, literally, always has the last word. And she sets the first example for many of the writers included [in *Against Expression*]: loquacious, patient, rule bound, recontextualizing language in a mode of strict citation. [...] turning constraint to our advantage, appropriating other’s language to her own ends, ‘making do’ as a verbal *bricoleuse*” (Dworkin xlvii).

“Here, then, is the legacy of Echo, recontextualized as the birthright of an author rather than a victim, and this is her fully reconceptualized challenge to those who would instead chose [sic] the confession of Narcissus or the romance of Orpheus as their muse” (Dworkin xlvii). [*The Chirurgeon* embraces Echo as its muse, and it embraces the others as well. It is narcissistic and orphic. It calls on the entire pantheon.]

“How does a change in vocabulary save your life? Replacing one word with another word for the same thought — can this actually transform your feelings about things” (Howe 47)? [I leave that for the reader to decide, but for me the answer is often yes. Transplants are dramatic procedures. We cannot help but be affected by them. The severity of the impact depends upon the investment of the reader in the operation and its result. As for the life-saving qualities of vocabulary changes, we need look no further than swapping the words “stop” and “go” for the same thought of movement at busy intersections.]

Writing as emergence, as emerging, evolving tendril. Writing that reaches evolutionary tip. Researching as reaching, the “tendril-tip reaching” of research. The tip as concentration of sensitivity. Tip as hybrid between fixed form of the tendril body and the sensed external world. The similarity of research and reach. Researching touch located in reaching tip of tendril (Calkins).

Destining vs Causality - A thing bringing about a revealing of a quality pre-existing but hidden in another thing, versus a thing causing something to happen to another thing (Hiebert, UWB 4.30.13). [The chirurgic method embraces both destining and causality, as defined here.]

[You have a job. I have a cocoon.]

IMAGINATION and VISION

“Poetics is action, martial art; not the training, not the blow, but the seeing in the moment” (Marshall). [The chirurgion operates on the moments of a poem. The method stops time, prolongs the seeing, extends the moment.]

The world makes itself up piece by piece as you perceive it (Gluck, UWB 06.07.13).

How we look makes a difference to what we see. We’re taught hyper-aggressively that focus is everything. A culture of focused vision. What about the pleasure of soft focus (Hiebert, UWB 4.30.13)?

How to notice what I don't notice? The attention and drifting inattention of poetry. Inexpert, I investigate (Sand). [Making that which is normally ignored or forgotten the core of the practice/work, but also allowing yourself to drift, to miss things, to embrace blind-spots. The difference between gazing into the fire and burning in it. Direct experience as observation, as the first manipulation. Going under with the patient. Changing with the patient. The operator also operated upon by the operation.]

"To think of poetics as that which imagines. The wind: that which blows. The bird: that which chirps" (Hiebert). [The surgeon: that which operates.]

"What is imaginative thinking" (Montfort)? [Imaginative thinking manifests in different ways in *The Surgeon*, through punctuation, use of white space, translation, transplantation, erasure, writing-through, etc. Perhaps imaginative thinking, in a surgical context, is invention (imagination) informed by source material and manifest through various tools and procedures (process).]

"Literalize the imagination, pull it into the physical" (Hiebert). [The surgeon removes words from contexts and observes them, manipulates them as word objects, grafts them, transplants them into new contexts, new bodies. Is this a way to approach words with a beginner's mind, to see the mundane familiar as new, to elide their sometimes painful histories?]

"The imaginary dies by becoming real" (Hiebert.) [If the imaginary dies by becoming real as a word, and dies again when, as a word, it merges with the greater, more complex reality of a poem, then my source nouns have died several deaths and were dead on arrival when I harvested them. Through surgery, however, they reanimate ("It" is alive!) before they become real again, and die again. It is a brutal cycle. Word Kingdom as Wild Kingdom.]

"The more supposedly real it is, the less of everything about yourself you can bring to the piece" (Greenstreet). [There are echoes in this of Stein's issues with nouns.]

"A text that asks us to identify is more conservative than a text that asks us to imagine" (Schwartz, UWB 11.29.12). [Surgery plays with this dynamic in the varying forms it produces. It seems a gradation or scale exists between the extremes. Where on that scale would you place each of the poems in this collection? Does this manuscript skew more toward identification or imagination? Regardless, the method itself is neutral and is not designed to force a leaning one way or the other.]

"It's not about what is real or imaginary, but what persists or doesn't persist" (Hiebert, UWB 05.21.13). [This is a lovely way to sidestep qualifying work. We can look instead to its longevity, something concrete and quantifiable rather than liquid and qualifiable.]

SEX and BODY

"The impulse to create is sexual" (DuPlessis). [This was true for me when I began writing in elementary school. I had to create a sexual landscape for myself in fiction because the one I needed at the birth of my sexual identity was nowhere to be seen. The echoes of those early impulses continue.]

"When are you not writing about sex" (Myles, Seattle Reading 11.15.12).

Work not from idea but from body itself (Kapil). [Poems as embodiments of ideas embodied in words. My writing affected by conditions of my body. Was I sleep-deprived when I wrote a certain poem? Was I hungry? Was I suffering emotional pangs or was I vibrating with laughter? Sometimes my body informed the work. Sometimes my concerns about what happens to bodies informed the work. After poems were written, I sometimes tinkered repeatedly with the formatting of their bodies. Surgery is a physically involved practice.]

Poems not as children but as parts of an author's body... Body of work as author's body, not separate from the flesh, but flesh become paper and ink.

Language of the body. Irreducible nuggets of relation to the body. Like any obsessive, I wanted to show the world what I've become. I needed someone to observe what I was going through, dressing paper dolls in specifics gleaned through interviews and research (Gluck, 10.05.13).

Is the body important to sexual minorities because we are usually invisible or denigrated (Gluck, UWB 06.07.13)?

"We live in a culture that doesn't allow us to be present" (CAConrad, UWB 11.20.12). [Chirurgie as assertion of presence. You shall know me by my cut. Incision as signature.]

Incoherency as privilege. Underrepresented groups forced by necessity of self-assertion toward mimesis instead of artful incoherency or re-presentation.

It takes courage to write the body in cultures hostile to the body (Gluck, UWB 06.07.13).

The body that's inhabiting the work. Not form but transgression of form (Kapil).

The notion of creating one's own forms of communication when you grow up as an outsider. Channeling voices / transmission. Not about inventing poetry, but finding yourself in it. Chop up a poem and eat it over noodles. (CAConrad, UWB Visit 11.20.12). [Chirurgie a procedural chopping-up and eating of poems.]

"Reanimate the skin of an old wolf in order to, in some ways, bring it back to life" (Hiebert). [Like incisions and sutures in flesh: space and punctuation in text.]

[Adventures in intellectual rigor and rigor mortis.]

"A poem doesn't feel alive unless it is put together through all these muscular, twitchy, dirty connections" (Myles).

"If I could do it all over again, I would choose happiness over writing" (CAConrad, UWB 11.20.12). [The surgeon whistles while he works.]

DIALOG and COLLABORATION

Poetics as request to articulate a relationship to the arts. [My relationship to the arts is almost physiological. I have never not created work. I have never not detested anything that dulls my senses or interrupts my need to crawl about the surface of the earth, sucking up detail like a filter-feeder so I can remix it into new material. But I am unknown. I'm on the outside looking in. This project is in part a reaching out to other artists through the use of dialogic and collaborative techniques that might build connections and foster conversations. I'm not sure that the surgical process is truly complete until I speak with the writers, the loved ones of the patients I operate on. Of course, some of them are dead, so a sense of completion won't always be attainable, but I am fine with that.]

"Art is a site that produces a specific sociability." And: Art as social interstice that "encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the 'zones of communication' that are forced upon us" (Bourriaud 161). [I am interested in the dialog between words; between reader and author; between poems. I am interested in the effects that occur when I alter the dynamics between people and things.]

[Too often we are reduced to practical and commercial relationships. Too often we speak the language of the commercial or practical transactions, and them only. Too often our discourse is reduced to clicking an

‘add to cart’ button. *The Chirurgeon* plays with modes of communication and maps the results so that readers can arrive at their own conclusions about what is happening, and how.]

“Art is state of encounter.” And: “An exhibition can generate a particular ‘domain of exchanges’” (Bourriaud 162). [With *The Chirurgeon*, I tried to produce arenas where we could watch poet-on-poet, art-on-art action.]

“Creativity is not in your own head, it is in how your head interacts with other heads” (Hiebert, UWB Class).

Creativity as collective endeavor rather than solo artist effort. Artist as conduit for piecing together the collective’s output. Look for moments of charged encounter with a text. [I am reminded of the John Waters film *Pecker*. It portrays clearly the relationship between a community that produces the raw detail of life and the titular artist who captures that detail via photography, thereby transforming it into art. The community acts as a kind of text with which Pecker, camera in hand, is looking to have charged encounters. That same dynamic exists in this work: a community of writers created texts, and I looked for moments of charged encounters with them.]

“[...] one does not need to generate new material to be a poet: the intelligent organization or reframing of already extant text is enough” (Dworkin xlv). [Permission granted for this work.]

The idea of collaboration versus confrontation in translation. Working with or against the source / author. The decision to aggress or preserve (Beer). [In this project, I work both with and against the source. I aggress and preserve. The chirurgeon cuts through binaries and limitations to achieve his desired affects.]

“Agreement is not an expression of individuality. Through disagreement and differences the new might appear” (Hiebert, UWB 4.23.13). [I seek sites of creative conflict where hammer meets anvil and sparks fly. I like sparks. They’re pretty. And I am interested in “the new.” But I also recognize that the new requires the old, or in fact is the old rejuvenated by transfusions and so on. Every body is useful. Every part of the body is useful.]

Reading as collaboration between reader and author. “Collaboration feeds me. Also, if it’s fucked up I can say it’s not my fault” (R. Brown, 10.05.13). [I love the humor in the last sentence. There is an escape hatch when responsibility is shared. I don’t have that hatch here. I am solely responsible for these poems. The collaboration is indirect and psychic, rooted in hauntings, imagination; loose connections. But this project embraces that collaborative relationship between reader and author. It begins there. Then it complicates that relationship.]

[My notes fail to record who said this, but it might have been Jeanne Heuving as her name is connected to a nearby quotation.] “Learn how to respond to barbarism with civility before engaging in barbarism yourself, continuing the cycle. Collaboration is not a bloodless affair.” [Neither is surgery, but it is my job to bloody my hands.]

Collaboration puts in question your own location (Hiebert, 2013). [Whenever I think I know what life is about, I engage in chirurgy and learn that I’m not where I thought I was. Every piece is a new beginning, a starting-over in a new region. The transplant as transplant.]

“All my speech is merely your kindling” (Schwartz, UWB 11.29.12). [I am sensitive to the idea that the authors of my source material could push back against this practice, but it seems unlikely. Who would reject a little lost arts orphan looking to create his arts lineage?]

“The anxiety of influences never affected me” (L. Brown) [The chirurgeon embraces influences. Chirurgy does not exist without influences. It foregrounds its relationship with influences.]

“Within the realm of art, both the seer and his work occur outside of mortality and social judgment” (Acker 96). [In terms of mortality, I agree with Acker here. With regards to social judgment, however, this is more ideal than reality. Social judgment is a constant pressure on my psyche, perhaps magnified by the fact that I grew up gay in hostile societies. The mere potentiality of judgment has a chilling effect. I am thinking now of collaborative strategies as judgment mitigation. “We said it,” rather than “I said it,” provides safety in numbers. “I wrote these poems, but they are equally products of their environment” diffuses (and defuses?) responsibility.]

Dworkin’s writing in *Against Expression* makes me wonder: How does uncreative writing affect creative reading? Does conceptual writing shift reading toward experiencing as he says? [I assert throughout this work that chirurgy begins as a creative reading practice. *The Chirurgeon* as a collection is relational and experiential. The more uncreative it is, the more it requires its readers to read creatively. Its three sections reveal how this dynamic can change when the level of creativity in the writing changes. Perhaps the reader will feel a change in their reading practice from section to section as the poems ask different things of them.]

“Eliminate audience through total inclusion” (Hiebert, UWB 4.23.13). [Perhaps I eliminated myself as audience through total inclusion of myself in the work of other artists.]

Feeling/emotionality as pre-language response... “Perhaps art is at its most free from the law that is language in the emotions/feelings it initiates/foments in the viewer” (Milutis, UWB 05.16.13).

Art happens in the experiencing of art artifacts, not in the artistic artifact itself (Milutis, UWB 05.16.13).

Where does authorship end and readership begin (Gluck, UWB 06.07.13)?

“The books that can be really important are the ones we really disagree with” (Schwartz, UWB 11.29.12). [The chirurgeon is not concerned with external approval or agreement. His work challenges people to see new forms from old bodies and react somehow, be it with shock or pleasure or any other emotion.]

It’s my pleasure to put pressure on what anybody thinks (Gluck, 10.05.13).

[When John Beer speaks about “translation as lineage,” I think about how my work becomes offspring of work that I translate, sample, or write through. Instant lineage. I like the idea of finding my predecessors through art rather than through blood.]

“With the end of my breath, which is the beginning of yours” (Breton 115). [Lineage. Collaboration.]

“If poets can find one another, supernatural magic is in store” (CAConrad, UWB). [*The Chirurgeon* as site of dialogue and communion between poets.]

VIOLENCE

[The violence of the chirurgical method. The violence of the act of reading like a writer. Scavenger. Ambulance chaser. Exhumer. Grave robber. These elements and identities and behaviors do exist here. They are faces of the chirurgeon.]

Fusion of spiritual possibilities and physical violence (Hiebert). [Chirurgy requires neither goals nor results, nor justification. It simply answers Hiebert’s call for acts of arts violence to push through mediums and create a discord of perspectives. He also spoke in class about the potential for creative repurposing of texts. “Go into a text in a spirit of harvest and disrespect,” he once suggested. “Think of a text not as an authority but as a medium.” He turned the directive “read creatively” into “read with violence,” and thereby helped shape this project. “Tear apart and reintegrate,” he said. I find echoes of these thoughts throughout *The Chirurgeon’s* poetics.]

“Trample the vanity of the poem. It is a smudge on the page” (DuPlessis).

“[...] a kiss with a threat in it” (Breton 85). [Chirurgie is this. It is an act of love and/or attraction that is also a site of potential violence. A kiss that cuts and changes what was.]

“You'll never kiss anyone who isn't dying” (CAConrad, UWB 11.20.12).

“If what is said is what is sad” (Schwartz, UWB 11.29.12).

“Public suffering and scars gave the evidence of hidden miseries that had begun to require daylight and an audience.” (Howe 22). [Chirurgie results in bodies scarred, transformed, sometimes hideous, sometimes beautiful, sometimes logical, sometimes bewildering, always "beginning to require daylight and attention," having survived the operating table, the surgeon's slab.]

[Book as site of author's death and resurrection. If writing is death, then reading is resurrection (thinking of the immortal presence of Whitman, or Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence...")]

“Conceptual art's insistent reinterpretation of the object of art — hunted all the way to the brink of extinction [...]” (Dworkin xxxv). [Did I hunt my source art objects to the brink of extinction by reducing them to their constituent parts? In any case, the idea that I could do something to or with a poem other than read it might have gained momentum here.]

Allow language to make its own connections when you disrupt it (Fraser). [When I first heard Kathleen Fraser say this at the 2013 Fall Convergence Zone event, I made the following note to myself: “Damage the tissue and see how it repairs itself. Damage extant work to watch it heal into some new version of itself. Abuse as iterative strategy.” This could be the moment when I moved concretely toward the beginnings of creating the surgical method.]

“Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all.” “[...] jolts and shocks [...]” “[...] subject to that wild gallop which can lead only to another wild gallop — that is, more frenzied than a snowflake in a blizzard [...]” (Breton 159-160). [The surgical operation, as it is happening, can feel like a wild gallop that leads to another wild gallop. As you stretch from word to word, you must be willing to embrace that motion, indeed to seek the unbridled energy of the source words and their momentum.]

MEANING and TRUTH

“Because the failure to grow and flourish and develop is a terror [...] A person [poem?] wants to be known, to add up, to be necessary” (Howe 109). [The surgeon grows, flourishes and develops a poem through the terrors of his operational methodologies: erasure, extraction, transplantation. Through the operation, poems are known and add up to many other poems. They become necessary to the work built around them, and that survives them.]

What is this text's impulse? [To cut. To transplant.] What is its goal? [To create new work from the bones of existing work. Phoenix energy.] What is it thinking about? [It is thinking about how no body of work is sacrosanct when it comes to the drive to create new art.] What is it working toward? [This text is working toward the development of new modes of art interaction that hybridize reading and writing into an unified praxis.]

“Any time we study a poem we arrive at a poetics to understand that poem. What is this poem instructing me to do” (Marshall)? [Generally, these poems instruct you to read with the same creativity that created them. They do not demand that you make sense of them. They do not wish to be relegated to non-sense as a tactic to avoid them. They also want you to be aware of their lineage to other works, perhaps in the hope that readers might explore their source texts and consider the dialogues happening between predecessor

and progeny. Specifically, each poem in “Spines” and “Flesh” instructs each reader on an individual and particular basis. It is hoped that every interaction, every conversation will be unique. The poems in “Bodies” provide more clues and sense, so they ask less of the reader. Their themes are more explicit, and they invite the reader to understand, or empathize with the scenarios, concepts, and emotions they portray/convey.]

“That there is nothing of depth, of significant accuracy, of wealth in the image, I know. It is there for a beginning” (Ondaatje 20) [Nouns as images as starting places, as beginnings.]

“The information in the poem is not the poem” (Milutis, UWB 05.02.13). [With a little bit of nudging, the information in a poem can itself become a new poem.]

“Dissonance, queerness, [and] oddity bothers people who cannot reconcile it to normality” (DuPlessis).

[Sometimes the chirurgical method itself makes more sense than the poems it produces, and that's okay.]

“That’s the way speech works. Nobody understands anything but you just keep talking” (Schwartz).

“There is milk and there is white and there is the space between them” (L. Brown).

“The act of reading becomes as interesting as that which is read” (Hiebert). [These poems don't want attentive readers, they want aggressive readers. This project began as an act of reading that operated on that which was read. It revels in its design, and asks its readers to join the party.]

The choreography of reading. Editorial subjectivity. The inverse of erasure. Talk back to certain documents. Moving into subjects. A grid of intelligibility. A structure that allows the information to shine through using text to make the invisible visible, to make the excitement of discovery present without flattening it (Sand).

“[Form in poetry] lifts and fills the rambling language and presses it down into a single shape and sound” (Howe 85).

“The clarity of the chronology acts as skeleton supporting literary flights of fancy” (R. Brown, UWB Class). [The importance of exposing the chronology / structure / skeleton of this work: it allows the reader to share its “flights of fancy” through creative reading. Clarity of structure as permission to the reader. It is okay to let go, to jump, to fly.]

Movement. Flowing, cascading quality tumbling down each page (water off a back). Fragments, jetsam caught up in the movement, carried over and down with the torrent. Yet intimate moments to punctuate or trouble the streams.

“Each poem is a different take on an idea, an experience, each poem is another day, another mood, another revelation, another conversation” (Howe 18).

“Here then is a maze to begin, be in” (Ondaatje 20) [Each poem a cell in the maze body of book, bodies within bodies.]

“Find the beginning, the slight silver key to unlock it, to dig it out” (Ondaatje 20) [The surgeon finds a scalpel.]

“You are progressing at one level and becoming more lost at another” (Howe 16). [These operations do not aim to solve problems, but to inhabit them, experience them, and create new problems from them.]

“Bewilderment is an enchantment that follows a complete collapse of reference and reconcilability” (Howe 15). [The chirurgial method facilitates this complete collapse and opens the chirurgion up to the bewilderment of what remains.]

“[...] greater abstraction through increasing specificity [...]” (Dworkin xxx). [It was interesting to play with this paradox in *The Chirurgion*. Nouns themselves can be concrete or abstract. I tried to stick with concrete nouns but it was difficult to argue against more abstract examples. Each noun is also specific (too specific for Gertrude Stein's liking). One of the foci of this project is context's influence on the abstraction or specificity of words.]

“The focus on the radical particular; the radical particular as site to consider the universal” (Watten).

“Technology is a way of revealing. [...] It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth” (Heidegger 12). [Chirurgy as a technology that reveals truth, in the form of new poems, from existing poems.]

“I don't know or even care if it's true; I am interested in the possibilities” (Hiebert).

“The truth is where possibility and impossibility collide” (Bernstein).

“Not ‘true’ or ‘false’ but ‘what is the truth value’” (Milutis, UWB 05.16.13)?

“I don't believe it, I enjoy it.” (Hiebert, UWB 4.23.13).

“The poetry is what is not on the page” (Milutis, UWB 05.16.13).

[We talked about forever but dissolved into whatever.]

“I leave you with the image of a hammer covered with skin and nerves” (Felix).

PROCEDURE

Writing not as meaning but as doing. Observing the process of making is perhaps more important than understanding the meaning of the content (Milutis, UWB 05.23.13).

“If cutting and pasting were integral to the writing process, we would be mad to imagine that writers wouldn't explore and exploit those functions in ways their creators didn't intend” (Goldsmith xvii). [We live in the glut age, from media to supermarkets to oil spills, and the chirurgion is a glut slut! There is so much raw material from which to work, it is difficult to avoid translation, remixing, appropriation and other collaborative or quasi-collaborative strategies. The idea of exploring and exploiting language “in ways their creators didn't intend” is very much alive in this project.]

“The principal artistic action was one of choosing and nominating.” (Dworkin xxvi). [The development of the chirurgic method was itself an artistic action of choosing and nominating the details of a procedure that in turn chooses and nominates sites of artistic action.]

“Collecting is a primal phenomenon of study: the student collects knowledge” (Benjamin 210). [The notion of collecting is a significant part of this work. I collect and destroy. I remove as much as I add. It is a cyclical process. It breathes. It feels to me as though it is alive, and I am merely a part of its machinations.]

“The game plays you. The player has to learn the script of the game” (Hiebert, UWB 4.30.13).

“We don't own language, we work through it. Become aware of where the words are coming from, and make a choice” (Milutis, UWB 05.30.13).

“The choices in writing are fast and social” (DuPlessis).

[What choices have I made? I chose to write poetry for this project because poetry is elastic and electric. Every moment in a poem is an opportunity for some kind of creative intervention. Also, poetry invites interpretation and creative reading, especially in this project. Perhaps most importantly, poetry is play, and I feel most at home in realms of ludic possibility.]

[I chose the source poems in this collection because when I read them, they cut me. I thought it only proper to return the favor. The selection process was also informed by a sense of the autobiographical. I chose sources that are seminal to my development as an artist. Finally, chirurgy is a form of asynchronous collaboration, and I wanted to work with poems and poets I respect.]

“[...] the major strategic points I am looking for in matters of chaos [...]” (Breton 153). [After I cut away the soft tissue of a poem, I stare at the remaining words and begin to detect subtext, nuance, possibility. I might connecting four or five nouns with little more than commas and carriage returns, only to hit a block, a word that interrupts the flow. Each word potentially presents new challenges and demands new tactics. The overarching strategy is one of flexibility and openness; a willingness to operate in the syntagmatic chaos of word lists in order to produce a new body that works on the paradigmatic level as a poem. All of this to Breton’s search for “strategic points in matters of chaos.” This is not to say that chirurgy’s goal is impose order, but rather to navigate order and disorder until the operation is complete. What “completion” means may differ from body to body.]

[I could have stopped at the noun lists. Some of them make for compelling reading in their entirely unembellished state. You can read down the central vertebral columns in the “Bodies” section if you want a taste of that. But procedure alone was not enough for me. Uncreative word management was not enough.] “Production [is] already perfected by the machine,” Nick Montfort once said. “Interpretation [is] the last refuge of the human.” [I wanted some humanity, even if it was limited to interpretation via punctuation and white space. There had to be at least a spark of the human machine in there somewhere. How odd to think of humanity clinging to life in a comma coma, or peeking out in a poem’s margins and parentheses. I feel empathy for such struggles in obscurity.]

The notion of “wearing the memory of a house” (Greenstreet). [I don’t revisit a source poem once I have extracted its nouns. I prefer to be haunted by its memory.]

“[...] the guiding concept behind conceptual poetry may be the idea of language as quantifiable data,” an “opaquely material language: something to be digitally clicked and cut, physically moved and reframed, searched and sampled, and poured and pasted” (Dworkin xxxvi).

“Words very well might be written not to be read but rather to be shared, moved, and manipulated” (Goldsmith xxi).

“Convert data into art. Find new ways to visualize the data that surrounds us and passes through us” (Bodle). [In chirurgy, words are converted into data when they are removed from their contexts. They are then visualized into new poetic forms and sometimes emerge as art.]

“Go through the information and come out the other side. See what sticks” (Hiebert, UWB 4.23.13). [Each word list is a collection of information that I pass through. The final poem is what sticks.]

“Conserve the breadth and depth of a detail” (DuPlessis). [Each word is a vital detail, and you see the] “depth and breadth of the detail, and its prolongation” (DuPlessis) [as words are repeated and stretched from section to section.] “The force of the detail and its motion” (DuPlessis) [affects other details as trajectories and contexts shift. A word’s range of motion, adjusted through chirurgy, is reduced or expanded. Change is the only constant.]

“The silent adjustments in poetry are complicated; poetics attempts to make them unsilent” (DuPlessis). [As poetic bodies are dismantled and rebuilt, their internal parts of speech adapt through “silent adjustments.” Drastic amputations seem to increase pressure on what remains. There is a kind of compression and intensification as fewer and fewer words carry increasing weight. In the absence of verbs, nouns reach toward action. In the absence of nouns, verbs reach toward object-hood. Other parts of speech shift subtly in the reading. “Of” becomes “the Of,” and a semicolon taps gently an Into into an Of. Likewise, complicated silent adjustments are required of the reader, especially as they navigate the more abstract pieces in the “Spines” and “Flesh” sections. I offer guideposts and suggestions to the reader, in the form of punctuation and space, but the life of those sections must come from the energy only a creative reader can provide. And why should this be so but quite naturally to complete the surgical procedure, which begins in creative reading and longs to finish in that same act, with an ouroboros-like flow, an eternal recurrence of poetical energy? If, as DuPlessis tells us, “[a] poem must be tested by pleasure,” then these “silent adjustments” are where these poems might find their best chance at passing that test.]

How did I problematize my practice? [I did not problematize it. It problematized me. My practice is itself a problematization.]

“[...] conceptual art’s most daring wager [...] that [the art object] could be dispensed with altogether” (Dworkin xxxiv). [In its first phases, surgery dispenses with the art object and reduces it to a list of nouns. What happens next? The creation of new art objects. So I split from purely uncreative writing and/or conceptual art in this way.]

Elegy as mode that records, notices what's been lost. Extracting a poetics from a text (Dowling). [Surgery as elegiac mode, extracting text from text, noticing and recording what's been lost.]

“What does it mean to finish writing a book? It means that your plot has defeated you. You have been decimated by its logic, which is finally insufferable. It has worked its spell on you. You have to end the book and get some air” (Howe 98).

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