

2012

# Leak

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Leak

by

Kate Hargreaves

A Creative Writing Project  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing  
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for the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
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Leak

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March 5, 2012

## Declaration of Previous Publication

This thesis includes ten original poems that have been previously submitted for publication in peer reviewed journals, as follows:

Thesis Chapter	Publication title	Publication status*
“Slush”	<i>Descant</i>	Submitted for publication
“Slick”	<i>Descant</i>	Submitted for publication
“Laryngitis”	<i>Descant</i>	Submitted for publication
“Chiropractice”	<i>Descant</i>	Submitted for publication
“Ants”	<i>Descant</i>	Submitted for publication
“100% All-Natural Organic Blend”	<i>Descant</i>	Submitted for publication
“Street Level”	<i>West Coast Line</i>	Submitted for publication
“1C Westbound 12:45am”	<i>West Coast Line</i>	Submitted for publication
“insert body text”	<i>B After C</i>	Submitted for publication
“Paper Ladder”	<i>Cuizine: The Journal of Canadian Food Cultures</i>	Accepted for publication
entire poetry manuscript	Book Thug (publisher)	Submitted for publication
entire poetry manuscript	ECW Press (publisher)	Submitted for publication
entire poetry manuscript	Capilano University Editions (publisher)	Submitted for publication
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## Abstract

“Leak” is a poetry manuscript with accompanying artist statement that explores the overlaps, gaps, and fissures of mind, body and text. The manuscript uses disjunctive poetic techniques, listing, sorting, and organizing of language, as well as a shifting subject, in order to represent the fragmentation and multiplicity of mind, body and text. “Leak” challenges hegemonic depictions of women’s bodies through representing the “unrepresentable,” abject bodies overflowing their own borders. “Leak’s” bodies lose pieces and fall apart, while words slip out of place and letters drop away. Emergency room signage becomes incomprehensible, the census requests bodily measurements, a cyclist confuses oil with her own blood. Such textual gaps and overlaps contribute to “Leak’s” intentional sense of unfinishedness, reflective of the impossibility of signifying one coherent mind, body, or text.

*for Jessie Tetley*

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**Leak**

**I. Heap**

## Heap

She heaps.

She heaps dirty clothes and dishrags on the stairs.

She heaps her plate with brussel sprouts.

She heaps her teaspoon with brown sugar, stirs it into oats.

She heaps the compost.

She composts heaps.

She mounds.

She piles.

She piles old newspapers on the bedroom floor.

She plies.

She plies with wool.

She pulls wool over thighs.

She pliés.

She pleas.

She only buys two-ply.

Her nose runs in her sleep.

She rubs the sleep from her eyes.

She thighs in her sleep.

Hives cover her thighs.

She smears calamine on her skin.

Washes ink from her hair.

She lather rinse repeats. She dries.

Piles the towels in the tub.

Heaps dress and tights in the sink.

She scrapes her leg.

Scratches. Loses sleep.

Heaps blankets on the floor.

Hives warm.

Nails out.

She seeps.

## 100% All Natural Organic Blend

Her belly swims. Her belly measures 28 inches in circumference. 29 after a big lunch or too much salt. Her belly voted for the NDP. Her belly skirts. Her belly shorts the bartender sixty-five cents on the tab for three Molson 67s. Her belly pops buttons. Her belly re-buttons. Her belly out. Her belly lifts. Her belly pours bran flakes into tiny mountains. Her belly refuses to come outside and tan with the others. Her belly gargles. After which, her belly smells minty fresh. Her belly plans for the future: peanut butter and raspberry jam on whole wheat toast for dinner, an apple and coffee tomorrow morning. Two coffees for lunch. Black. Her belly pouts. Her belly demands self-discipline. Her belly lacks willpower. Her belly laughs annoy the people two rows behind at *Pineapple Express*. Her belly tender. Her belly bruise. Her belly picks up bad language at school. Gosh. Her belly collects dust. Her belly fat to hip fat ratio factors into calculating her risk for diabetes and heart disease, alongside family history, geography, and literary studies. Her belly barely stomachs bananas. When she jogs up the stairs her belly wobbles. When she sings her belly takes minutes. When she goes out for dinner her belly house-sits, feeds the dog, and lets him out for a piss. Her belly barks. Her belly pants. Her belly never squeezed into a size three. Her belly forgets to return text messages. Her belly wakes him up at four in the morning. Her belly swells in August. Her belly bloats in November. Her belly inputs height, weight, age and sex to calculate an accurate body fat percentage.

Her belly re-calculates.

Her belly re-calculates.

Her belly believes in a small margin of error. 3.7 percent. Her belly re-calculates. Her belly believes in a somewhat substantial margin of error. Her belly floats. Her belly isn't half as hairy as his. Her belly glows in the dark. Her belly never has to compete with her

hips. Her belly never learned to jump rope. Her belly walks. Her belly floats. She fills her belly with paper and ink. She chews her nails. She bites the insides of her cheeks. She licks her elbow crook sweat. She gnaws her shirt sleeves. Her belly of iron instead of abs of steel. Belly of iceberg lettuce and 0% M.F. plain yogurt. Her lose-belly-fat-fast. Her walk-off-five-pounds-of-belly-fat-before-Memorial-Day. Her hyperbole. Her belly glows in the park. Her belly doesn't "do" spaghetti. Herbally, she has other uses for oregano. Her belly munches. Her belly manages the organic grains department at the new FreshCo. Her belly manages. Her black dress sags at the hips. Her belly buys stocks in quinoa. Her belly byes.

## Ribfest

Her ribs snap. Her ribs tickle. Her ribs protrude approximately the same distance as her breasts when her push-up bra is in the wash. Her underwire sticks her in the ribs. Her ribs bruise and swell. Her ribs taste better sans barbecue sauce or Tabasco. Her top right rib broke in a slip'n slide accident when she was nine and healed on its own leaving a large deposit of bone jutting out of her chest that makes wearing a bikini top in public lopsided. Her collarbones. Her sternum. Her rack. Her ribbed for her pleasure. Her vote for your favourite rib recipe from our forty-two vendors this weekend only at. Her stick to your ribs. Her ribs stick. Her ribs clatter against one another inside her chest. Her ribs pierce her lungs every time she quickens to a jog. Her spare tire. Her spare ribs. Her spare hips. Her spare vertebrae. Her ribs spent all day Sunday in bed while she cleaned out the crawlspace. Her ribs cage. Her ribs leak marinade all over the wool. Her ribs collapse under the boning. Her. Rib. I. She prefers ribs with a little less meat on the bone. Her ribs don't see eye to eye. Her eyes rib and slit. Her ribs took off in the middle of the night. Her ribs might come back if they smell the bowl of milk she left out on the porch. Her knit one purl two rib one.

## Chiropractice

Her back slides. Her back slings. Her back can't reach the recycling bin under the sink. Her back responds well to electric shock therapy. Her back tracks. Her back to the futures. Her back makes an appointment with a licensed chiropractic professional twice a week for the next sixty days. Her back burns, peels, burns again. Her backless dress cuts too low for a bra. She backdates her chequebook. She backs out of dates. Her back bones reflect three times over in the mirrors at H&M. Her back sticks to the vinyl booth at Burger King. Her ribs. Her spine. Her binding. Her bound. Her back tingles when she raises her arms in the air. Her back googles: back, numbness, *webmd*, symptoms, serious. Her back on a Sunday. Her back to front. Her back leaks self-tanner through a white t-shirt. Her back dripping. Her backed into a corner. Her back braces for the storm. Her back skipped rent day. Her back pay barely covers the electrics. Her back to the wall. Her back-to-back, chin-to-chin, face-to-face. Her on her back. Back seat. Back and forth. Backwards day. She puts her back into her work. She leaves a cloth on the back burner. She forgets to turn off the stove. She gets her back up. She starts a backfire. Her back re-burns and blisters. Her back sweats through her dress. Her back rests. Her back strikes. Her back pickets. Her back twinges when she picks up a sign. Her backbiting. Her nail biting. Her ankle biting. Her back to the apartment after walking twelve blocks, to make sure she locked up. Her back out into the rain. Her back down. Her step on a crack.



## Hip to be Square

Her hips sink ships. Her hips just don't swing. Her hips fit snugly in skinny jeans. Her calves won't squeeze in. Her hips check. Her hips cash in on the market for skin. Her hips max out their credit. Her hip-replacement value is greater than that for knees. Her hip socket pops out on the way up the stairs and back in on the way down. Her chiropractor takes the time to crack her hips. Her hips show through her slip. He slips. Hips shoot from the her. She shoots from the knee. Her hip-to-hip, toe-to-toe, or cheek-to-cheek. She toes the line. She hips the other cheek. Her hips print bruises on the wall. Walls purple her hips. Her hips yellow-belly. Her hips run. Her hips send a note threatening not to return unless working conditions improve. Her hips make the rules. Her hips call her gutless. Her guts call her hippy. Her hip flask calls in sick. Her rose hips. Her daisy dies on the windowsill. Her hips move home in steps. Her steps crack her hipbones. Her hipbones give whips. She de-bones thighs. Her thigh-highs slip. She's a sight for sore thighs. Her thighs join at the hip. Her hips end with thighs. Her ends are split. She splits her hips.

## II. Chew

### Chew

She chews three salteens at once.

She chews an orange peel.

She chews a stick of jerky.

She chews her bottom lip.

She chews the end of her sleeve and leaves a hole.

She chews the cap off her pen.

She chews the inside of her left cheek. She chews it up and spits it out.

She chews it over.

She chews him out.

She chews more than she can bite off.

She chews her cud.

She chews tobacco.

She chews the fat with the cashier at Tim Horton's while waiting for her everything bagel with plain light cream cheese and a blueberry white tea with nothing in it because, she tells the cashier whose nametag says Abe, the coffee really doesn't do much for her, sort of like drinking bath water, or the bottom of a rum and coke when the ice has melted and you can really only taste water.

She chews gum and walks at the same time.

She chews nails.

She eschews.

She eschews her old friends.

She eschews a male escort.

She issues a parking ticket.

She issues takes. She takes issue.

She: "choose."

She achoo-s.

Sheet use.

Chez tu.

## Paper Ladder

V.

*The final tier consists of processed food*

Vegetable ink makes my guts grumble

Nose cracking the spine of a new book or film festival catalogue

Ink licking cinnamon buns high fructose mayonnaise

six years at tier V with grilled cheese and bacon

IV.

*“eating only from tier one and two will give you a near-perfect diet”*

throw out four full jars

peanut butter and jam fail the nutrition ladder

whole wheat toast climbed to the “happy tier”

III.

*“you want to maximize the nutrients in every calorie you consume.”*

vegetable oil is tier V but I file ink at I,

newspaper at II.

maybe III for thicker bond.

a list of tier I foods that give me heartburn:

cucumbers, avocados, honeydew melon

lick the ink off my fingers

leave blue smudges on the fridge

a lemon cake, one tier or three is still up at V

no listing for coffee cake means

two slices for breakfast

II.

*“raw, steamed, grilled, poached, baked, or broiled”*

Chew the inside of my lip all day and don't gain an ounce.

I would list gums no higher than tier II.

Skin mouth to stomach balances out.

Swallowing half a gram of loose lip

better than 40 calories of celery

Cuticles, nails, thumb edges

add bananas for an

itchy neck

I.

*The first tier contains food choices that are the healthiest*

tier I items I couldn't identify in a line-up:

amaranth, endive, collard, natto, spelt.

Amaranth: a language spoken in certain parts of Asia

Collard and spelt both have something to do with mining.

Endive a new enzyme in fifty-five-dollar face cream from behind the counter at

Shopper's Drug Mart and I could scoop natto into a plastic bag and seal with a twist tie in

the corner store candy aisle.

The cap of my pen: tier I

hard plastic

slip and cut my gums

have to up my iron intake

switch back to pencil for a lighter snack with more fibre.

## Off-balance

149  $\frac{1}{4}$ : I should wash these curtains next weekend, at least before I pack and move; toothpaste smudges satin edges. 151: no halves or quarters, just even Steven. Steven weighs at least eight pounds less and he's likely three inches shorter. 151  $\frac{1}{2}$ : blueberry bran muffin, cream of sundried tomato soup, a whole-wheat roll. 148: (minus the towel makes 147  $\frac{1}{4}$ , subtract  $\frac{1}{10}$  for the necklace and the 53 drops of water on my back, knots in my hair) equals 147  $\frac{6}{40}$ , reduces to 147  $\frac{3}{20}$  reduces to. 149  $\frac{1}{2}$ : popcorn burst, olive oil, the corner of an eye: buy more cover stick, curl lashes. 150: to the bathroom to take it back down again. 151: three parallel red indents in rice pudding flesh: nylons, panties, skirt =====146: Dan shaved off all the hair on his body, kept his lashes, stood naked in a gallery. 149: how many ounces make up an eyelash? How many lashes make up an ounce? 152: Toenail clippers, eyelashes, snip them at the lid. 149: At what point does all-bran becomes too much-bran? 149  $\frac{1}{2}$ : bruised my fingertip prying 3 AA batteries out of the VCR remote. 149.24: Mixtaper, typewriter, record player, not digital. 147.3: in the mail today: my mother's pattern for a crochet bikini c. 1973. 148.25: I round down to the nearest  $\frac{1}{4}$ . 148  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water. 150  $\frac{3}{4}$  tbsp maple syrup, a pinch of chili powder. 150 and half the time I spend pan frying egg whites for dinner I could throw on a pot of coffee instead. 151 even at 10 a.m. 154 with a coat, jeans and leggings. My ice skates still overlap at the ankles if I pull them taut enough. 150  $\frac{1}{4}$ : six hundred and one quarter pounders. 14.9 km from here through Walkerville around Sandwich and back. 154: *not legal for trade*. 151 words at  $\frac{1}{4}$  ounce per word: edit. 150 dollars on new bearings, wheels, and trucks. 152. 151.3 154.5. 14.8 bruises on thighs, hips, shoulders. 14  $\frac{1}{4}$  scarves to mail out in the morning. 149 stitches.

### Long Census

What is your waist to protein rah-rah ratio? Fill in box 32 with your daily calamine intake. Where can I find your hipbones? Be precise. How many days of the last 21 did you engage in strenuous physical activity? (For a complete definition of “strenuous” please see appendix four. Note that sexual activity only records as strenuous in the circumstance that both partners break a sweat. For a complete definition of “partners” see appendix sweat). How many grams of complex carbohydrates—how can you eat this shit it tastes like cardboard?—Chart your height on the wall of your childhood kitchen and copy out into the new apartment in pen. Graph your weight with this pie. Three slices for a gain subtract the crust and start again in the bathroom. Order egg whites at the Lumberjack. How many times a month does 1% reduced sodium cottage cheese go on sale at Shopper’s Drug Mart? Bike six miles to the clinic for knee x-rays. Wrap unwrap re-tense pre-tensor. Forget your nutrition guide in a downtown Toronto condo. How many days do you have to return that bikini for store credit? Can’t you reach your toes? Big girls can bend but I guess you get credit for licking your own nose. After the warm-up before the stretch check your heart rate with your official team monitor your consumption of peanut butter banana—can’t make it through the gritty mess to the squirrels—where—where water—At what point do you pause to pee? You should only discontinue use if you feel dizzy. Or sore.



## Research Ethics Board

But I once went 28 hours on only black coffee.

Shouldn't that light be on? Your recorder just clicked

Your notebook says—

Shit, sorry I bit my cheek.

I was never actually—

Un-diagnosed but

you can write this down

Did I tell you I got down to 127? That's a BMI of 17 point—

I could teach you to forget to be hungry

eat half a meal a day and still pull off a 93 in home ec.

—do you need a transcript?

75 pushups and crunches after dinner can mean “doing your homework”

as long as vertebrae and floorboards don't meet with too much force

pass out in gym class for the second time around and still earn an invite to track and field

tryouts because you're “just *built* for long distance running.”

hit the scale 16 times in 12 hours

buy a Crunchie bar once a week for the sugar and melt half in a backpack pocket

lick the chocolate off the wrapper squatting west stairwell on spare

pile on camisole long sleeves short sleeves sweater coat scarf

fake cramps in the change-room

wool gloves in September science lab

get caught—

—guess it would have been four months and a week.

Do you need exact dates? Caught—

right before you grow those little hairs

goose down up your back and neck

stop buying tampons

stretch out in the library psych section 616

fall asleep in the stacks

## Arc

1.

Arc under her skirts after lunch

shouldn't have bread cheese soup

in the office bathroom mirror untucks her blouse, zips down the skirtside zip half way

checks for stall feet, checks the door and sneaks up on the arc peach and

two red lines indent from

the belt of her beige skirt

shouldn't have/eaten breakfast milk oats bran sip of grapefruit

breathes into ribs/breasts/shoulders and pulls the arc closer to her back

belly button pulls back, stretches tall from round to slit

Elle stands sideways hips jut in front, tummy arc bread and butter tied back with one

breath

holding blouse bra-high with one hand, skirt up with the other

strain tight on her mouth, coughs

won't eat dinner

2.

Elle unties the cord on her robe

yesterday she finished reading a novel that called it a housecoat

robe, yes, but something about housecoat

less regal, explains the bite marks and loose threads from where she gnawed the corner

the ends of the cords

3.

Elle unties her housecoat, slips her arms out and feels the rush of cold air across her belly  
leaves the coat dangling from the hood, slipping down off the back of her head  
sliding down over snips of hair that stick up in the back. Elle needs a shower.  
stands naked in front of the full-length mirror with its pine edges  
waist nipping in slightly under the ribs  
small arc, belly button round  
presses heels of both hands down under rib lines and slides them over the round bit  
forcing the flesh inner and tauter and downer  
a rumble inside a slosh lets go and again the arc  
sideways won't concave in down through  
profile: firm shoulder, small slope of breast hip hip and in the middle the blocking arc  
Elle presses again squeezing air up or down just out out  
but the arc rounds

4.

Elle

naked

like the past tense

was naked not is

Elle was naked

Who naked Elle?

Elle nakes

Elles nake

Elle naking

5.

damp in the bedroom Elle slips the warm towel off her head

black hair fuzzy and knotty

pulls up brown silk pajama bottoms legs sticking in small dark patches

shirtless in the mirror clasps both hands over tummy button

scowls and presses

the arc rumbles

sloshes with coffee

Elle picks up her houserobe wraps up sharp chest bones and soft tummy

wet hair under a terrycloth hood

### III. Skim

#### Skim

She skims.

She skims the floating fat off his mother's minestrone soup.

She saves it in a Ziploc bag in the freezer.

She skims flat rocks across the sodden backyard.

They skip once and sink into the mud.

She skims the grass seed out of the water with a pool net.

She skims her milk. Sometimes she one percents.

She skims a little bit off the top at the office.

She scans.

She scans the ceiling for hidden cameras.

She skins her elbow on the brick wall.

She picks off the scab and tucks it into her purse.

She purses her lips.

She paints them pink.

She sinks. She misses.

She sinks her face into her towel.

She collects stray hairs from the bathroom sink.

She scrimps by the skin of her teeth.

She teethes.

She sinks her teeth into a stale bread roll.

She stinks of garlic and sweat.

She stings.

She scrapes the stinger from her foot.

She limps over to the sink.

She steeps a pot of tea.

She scans the bottom shelf of the fridge:

out of skim.

## Hypo

Take a left turn out of Chinatown to pick up an ounce of panic. Six steps onto Hastings a slight pinch in the baby toe. Because streets lined with junkies equals a two-to-one chance of sidewalk syringes. Google needles and shoes back home, check your toe check again check again, could that be a puncture no just a blister from 18 kilometres on foot but there would still be a sharp in your shoe or the plunger underfoot so it couldn't have. Google results only deal with city workers stuck in steeltoes under manhole covers and shifting needle exchanges. Think you're well-travelled read *Trainspotting* at age 13 but couldn't sit through the film gave blood eleven times and never passed out but never looked at the needle either walk a city block past the woman shooting up into her stomach and the guy selling in front of the community centre. Sure you've been stuck. Dozens of women go missing this end of town but you're going to bite your lip over a nine-dollar beer in Gastown over the maybe syringe you didn't feel but may have stuck you in the shoe walking home now running head-on into strangers with maps scanning the pavement for anything. Anything resembling. The slight pinch in the side of your baby toe. Slight pinch. Take a left turn.



## Home Remedy

Forget the fourteen voicemails you declined to return.

I've been mixing up chlorine gas when I should be bleaching the toilet bowl, soaking my toes in an empty margarine container with equal parts water and mouthwash, tingeing skin dental blue from the bottom up and padding minty fresh across the kitchen floor. Special K clings to damp calluses.

Message number seven re: the likely clot in my left calf

Press into muscle with your thumbs. See, swelling groans and I can't seem to pull up my skinny jeans.

Message number eleven: voice wobble from the stand-on-one-toe-and-hop vein shake-up.

Breathing short croaks to pulmonary embolism or maybe the DIY poison gas

But my lashes started twitching so I'm calling poison control

to tell the operator my name's Kay and I'm 19, maybe 14, maybe Dee

no there's not a window in the bathroom but I can close the door

The line's cutting out — Message fourteen: dropped the phone in the toilet

Anything to send some sparks down your line.

how to lock a jaw

1. chew gum.
2. gnaw fingernails to stub tips. raw pink and panging. popcorn salt hangnails.
3. bite pen end. paint mouth roof in ink eruption. blue tongue. tastes blue: blue freezie  
blue powder punch blue ink tastes like flax.
4. doorbell your neighbour. loaner pen. clutch an egg and one cup of sugar for trade. no  
answer. rest egg against *if you lived here you'd be home* mat. pour sugar in  
window box. water geraniums. door knocker sticky note. blank.
5. check in. bible notepad phone book remote control desk drawer. check out. no pen.  
too many stains in the bathtub. microwave-free. bedbugs. white towels not blue.  
twin not queen. left the door at home unlocked. credit card at the grocery store.
6. Front desk room refund from 7b.
7. Yawn.
8. Molar pencap tail flat. pick popcorn shards from teeth. Spit.
9. gums. chew.

## Ants

The ants are on their way.

They've surveyed the best route to the kitchen, through the hole behind the bathroom radiator, along the floorboards in the living room, under the closet door past the bread maker and TV set aside for next week's yard sale, around the corner past the cleaning cupboard, over the mop handle, onto the linoleum.

Behind the garbage they gather

crumbs of puffed wheat and the peel-off tag from a can of juice, sticky with orange concentrate.

They send scouts to scan for rolled-up newspapers and heels of palms.

They look up your skirt.

They crawl between your toes.

They know they can outrun you 75 percent of the time.

They prepare to take those odds.

The ants collaborate in your cereal box in the space between the plastic bag and the cardboard, surviving on stray cornflakes that fall between and start to go soft.

They take hits of RAID to boost their immune systems.

The ants collect pieces of your dead skin.

They imitate stray hairs brushing your calves. Hiding in the nook behind your knee.

Buying shares in all-natural cleaning products and promoting them with 30-percent-off coupons at the local Sobey's on Sunday.

Rubbing RAID-slathered bodies on the inside of the peanut butter jar just enough to give you food poisoning.

They are licking peanut butter off each others' backs.

They drip RAID into your instant coffee.

The ants grow, first a quarter, then half, then an inch long. Soon they will sit at your kitchen table ordering quiche Lorraine for dinner.

Soon you will be dinner.

The ants are coming to your kitchen.

You wipe down every surface with anti-bacterial cloths and a 50/50 mixture of Borax and water.

You kill the scouts upon sight with the heel of your palm and watch them twitch their legs after you crush their solid middles.

The ants come marching two by hurrah hurrah.

Eating your peanut butter and cornflakes.

Soon you will be dinner.

## Shoe-in

One standard kitchen freezer fits 23 pairs of shoes

250,000 sweat glands per foot

Left/right inside separate sandwich-size zip-lock bags

ballet flat / sneaker / pump / felt boot

rubbing up in the chill

slide nylon past leatherette

loose green beans, ginger root

through foggy plastic barriers

shrimp ring slumps

leaks pink through the floral tablecloth

ice packs warm by the windowsill

eight sandals slide lengthwise into the door

sweaty thawed pizza cardboard

drips a Hungryman dinner

meatloaf running into peach pie

2,887 units of bacteria per shoe

13 spring rolls, a pound of grey lean ground beef

and a bag of brussel sprouts

slip on the floormelt

limp room-temp pea bag surrounds an ankle bruise

green marbles drop out through a slit

roll over foot / soften between toes

## garlic

garlic you say, on the couch a bulb of garlic shedding papery skin in the seams of our corduroy. I lint-brushed yesterday. how will you explain away this one? a still-life sketch or too much time watching re-runs of *Buffy*? home sick clocked out but garlic never really kills the way stakes and holy water will. I ate four cloves raw, they burned my lips and tongue but I chewed all four chews and coughed, the pieces rubbing all the way down my swollen throat. garlic will keep the doctors away I told her once in her office blood work requisition in hand garlic instead of aspirins sucked from raw cloves not Buckley's syrup. eight once before bed she said I hope your boyfriend's not a vampire. what is that cheek pressing my burning neck your medicine smells like my mother's house we eat pickled onions together out of the jar English pickled onions in malt vinegar an onion the doctor says keeps. cut your finger yellow scab boil an onion and wear it warm like a poesy ring.

## Appendix 3

Straight arm jacks give me this pull in my hands like I'm wearing stacks of pewter bangles on both wrists. When I opened the barbecue last night my fingers tingled for a few minutes afterwards which means that I am having a stroke phoning TeleHealth dialing with prickling digits and describing how my tongue isn't numb thanks unsure that I am not stroking now I've got this stabby feeling in my left side and I can't recall if the appendix pangs in the left or right side before exploding and going septic into guts but I can remember only to worry on the opposite side from where the anatomy book shows the appendix in the body, which doesn't help as I've just developed an itch on the top of my foot and while the bump looks like a mosquito bite I hear flesh eating virus can look bitten on day one before eating right through to your tendons and you need a sheet between your face and feet in the hospital so you don't pass out from the sight of your foot inside-out in front of you. I wonder if they use maggots to clean off the dead flesh when someone's foot starts virusing and the sheet really covers so you don't have to watch maggots consume part of your inside-out appendage. The tingling in my fingers when I dial 911 and a bit of pain in my temple just on my right side but I can still remember long words like onomatopoeia and stand on one leg until my itchy foot means I have to switch legs but at least the ache in my stomach seems to have become more of a churning as if I have eaten a rotten slice of tomato or the sandwich artist, as Subway calls them, did not wash her hands in correct correspondence with the posted instructions and her germs have now made their way into my gut, which I recall had a jabbing pain on the right or maybe the left side meaning my appendix has exploded and my septic body perhaps will kill off the flesh eating virus in my foot, the tingling in my palms every time I barbecue, dial the phone, order Subway, stand on one foot and practice straight arm jacks and the onomatopoeia in my head that means I must not be having a terminal stroke.

**IV. Chip**

## Chip

She chips.

She chips her tooth on a stale raisin she pulls from the space between the stovetop and counter next to the sink where she knocked it yesterday stirring apple chunks, cinnamon and raisins into her morning oatmeal.

She chips the ice from her Grand Am's windshield.

She chips in to replace the coffee maker at the office.

She chips off the old block.

Her chips are down.

She: cheap as chips.

She hips.

She hip checks.

She cashes in her chips.

She cheap.

She dines and dashes.

Pays hip service.

She zips. Pants.

She hip hugs.

She jumps hip.

Her hips pass in the night.

She shapes up or hips out.

She's on everybody's hips.

Joined at the lip.



Read her hips:

She spits chips.

Buttons her lip.

He chips her shoulder.

From hip to toe

She hips the scales.

Curls her hips

Smacks her lips

She hips up a batch of cookies.

Chocolate chip.

## Cracking

Step on a crack: break your mother's back.

Leave a dirty spoon in the sink: fail your driver's test.

Tip over a family photo:

Wash your hands for only 23 seconds: step on a crack.

Eat your green beans before your broccoli: skip a period.

Wear the blue skirt with yellow flowers: miss the last bus for work.

Double not triple check the stove is off:

migraine. Smoke three cigarettes instead of four before 5pm. Skip the bus. Don't make it to the bedroom before the front door closes. Lose your job. Miss your test. Break your family photo. Drop the rent down a sewer grate.

Forget to check your rearview mirror: run over a cat. Step on a family photo. Forget your hands. Check your mirror. Your parents split up and your sister moves across the country.

Eat your dirty spoon. Tip over the stove. Check your mirror. Go to court. Double triple check your mirror. Wash the blue skirt with yellow flowers. Eat green beans before 5pm.

Leave a dirty stove. Check your mirror. Double check your hands. Lose the cat. Don't close the front door. Check your—

Step on a crack.

## Dishdrainer

Bee liked to wash other people's dishes. She bit her bottom lip with her right canine, the one that stuck out in photos

and closed her eyes, round cheeks pressing under her eyelashes every time a piece of tomato

or squash

slid between her fingers off a plate and down the drain. She always started with the stuck-on starches

rice, pasta, mashed potatoes, stew-burned pots, and soaked them in sudsy water while she tackled greasy finger prints on wine glasses. She curled her toes as she glanced at the softening grains, detaching from the stainless steel and floating to the top of the grey water. Bee ran the coarse side of a yellow/green sponge across the pot's sticky edges, colliding with the residue.

She pushed her tongue between her front teeth, slightly, feeling the loose grains slide away across her hand, and float around the pot, shivered when the drain filled with onion skin, pieces of stale bread and carrot peelings, right before she reached into the suds and dragged

her middle finger in a circle, pushing debris through the tiny drain holes, breaking it up as she pressed. She tapped her knees together and swayed

as the water guzzled down, leaving the sink with a tide mark she could sponge away with the yellow side, before wiping down the water spots on the metal taps till the sun bounced off them.

Bee guessed what other people had eaten as she washed away the remnants. As the water

hit the pot, the garlic and rosemary tickled the hairs in her nostrils. Bee wiped the crumbs off a romantic dinner for two, collected them in a napkin, and shook them into her skirt pocket.

October 9<sup>th</sup>

*“When you are insane, you are busy being insane—all the time... When I was crazy, that was all I was.” – Sylvia Plath*

Contemplate taking a shower.

Pace living room in a diamond pattern touching two of four walls on each pass.

Sweep floors.

Mop.

Wipe up excess dust with electrostatic cloths.

Change mop head. Re-mop.

Rub out the streaks with a clean sock.

Dig a good pen and clean notebook out of the desk drawer.

Underline the space for a title.

Start a new page. Use a ruler.

Jot a grocery list in the top right corner: macintosh apples, garlic, cream cheese.

Cross out ~~cream cheese~~.

Drink eleven glasses of water.

Open word processor.

Save blank document: “October 9<sup>th</sup>.”

Unblock *WebMD* from internet browser.

Google malaria symptoms.

Cycle to medical laboratory seven kilometres from home.

Shake.

Chew inside lip.

Give six vials of blood.

Scratch mosquito bites.

Bike seven point two kilometres home holding breath through construction dust.

Bleach kitchen counters. Rinse with warm water. Wipe down with tea tree oil. Rinse with cold water. Wipe with Lysol cloths. Dispose.

Examine bike tires for evidence of running over a bird.

Check for blood.

Take transit to the mall.

Purchase four packages of pregnancy tests.

Cramp in right calf.

Bump into shoppers in the aisles.

Set off the alarm by standing too near the entrance.

Call clinic and make a doctor's appointment.

Vomit in a planter.

Check for blood.

Cover face with scarf.

Call back and ask for earlier cancellation dates.

Search bag on the bus home for accidental stolen goods.

Read same sentence twelve times: Warranty void after six months. Warranty void after six months. Warranty void after. Warranty void after six months. Warranty void.

Warranty void after six months. Warranty void after six months. Warranty void after six months. Warranty void after. Warranty after six. Warranty void after six months.

Warranty void.

Open fridge.

Close.

Read same

Open cupboards.

Open warranty.

Rearrange spices by colour instead of name : thyme, saffron, rosemary, paprika,  
 coriander, cinnamon, chili, black  
 pepper, basil  
 : saffron, paprika, chili, cinnamon,  
 coriander, thyme, rosemary, basil,  
 black pepper

Open fridge. Take out eggs.

Check for blood.

Put eggs back.

Run out of toilet paper.

Call clinic for results.

Phonebook walk-in clinics.

Chew inside lip.

Check for blood.

Count aspirins. 31.

Shut drawer on t-shirt.

Tuck t-shirt into drawer.

Re-count aspirins. 31. 30.

Open drawer, fold t-shirt. Shut.

Hide passport in thigh-high boot in the closet corner to avoid identity theft.

Weigh self. 129.

Collect urine. Weigh self. 128.

Fold kitchen napkins.

Check for blood.

Call medical helpline.

Check for blood.



## Smudge

Mum walked. She's never coming back.  
Walked to the mailbox four doors down  
paint spots cracking on her palms  
keys tearing her corduroy coat pocket  
kicking leaves round the bend to the end of our road  
right turn at the STOP  
out past the farmer's fields, soy beans, corn, out onto the highway  
keys clink in her pocket  
thumbs a ride East past the generator station  
tells the driver *speed up, take the county roads.*  
Mum left the mail in the mailbox—  
thank-you card for the bridal shower  
flyers for Thursday night pizza  
gas bill  
cable bill  
Avon catalogue  
left her painting on the dining room table  
*don't touch the wet flowers*  
took off down the road she's never coming back  
pinky finger dents green paint leaves  
smudge  
I'll microwave some hot dogs for dinner  
pickles on toast before school

Maybe the smudge will drag her home  
and she'll pour cornflakes in my bowl  
scrub the paint off her hands  
tug my stockings straight  
The smudge pangs in her chest like how she knows from the kitchen  
I've tipped over the porch plant, dirt and leaves on cement  
a pinky finger, prints, three years, swirling  
slick with paint, stops her at the mailbox  
grabs her by the guts  
shoves her  
yanks her back down the road.  
Keys in the front door, Mum's back  
neighbour has a pink couch with green leaves  
his lime mailbox four doors over  
Mum hangs her painting on the bathroom wall  
won't re-touch the smudge  
out of canvas, out the door  
Mum walked  
she's never coming back

## self-portrait in sticky notes

## 1. STOP.

before you trash that item,

## EITHER:

banana peels cores stale bread seeds cereal egg shells the decomposing green peppers from the crisper dead plant droppings on desk bathroom sink hair shavings yesterday's salad? Place in compost buckets on kitchen island left hand-side (when standing in front of water cooler). Empty buckets into composter (back alley corner wall west of garbage cans) when full. Wash buckets with soap and water. Hot water. Rinse. Dry (with bluestripe dish towel, not red).

## OR:

cans bottles (no plastic caps!) plastic yogurt tubs margarine tubs (no strawberry clamshells!) cardboard toilet paper rolls newspaper aluminum foil pizza boxes (no grease!) phone bills (paid) inter-office memos (half-read) sticky notes with no stick left take-out menus? Place in recycling bin in back hallway. Red for paper products blue for plastic and cans (no clamshells!) Drag to front curb east of parking lot every second Wednesday.

For questions or concerns consult guide to recycling and composting under spine-shaped chiropractic office magnet on freezer door.

2. Are **you** the person who toothpaste-spit spots the faucet in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor women's bathroom every morning break?

3. All postings should be type-written on white paper. Do not waste full sheets of computer paper. Do not post notices on coffee pot. Do not use cursive writing. Do not use Comic Sans or Papyrus.

4. Eat me.

5. Please do not eat me.

6. The ants win when you leave leftover taco dip and dirty forks in the sink.

7. The Rapture falls tomorrow. Please remember to clean out refrigerator. Do not forget the butter dish. Post-Rapture, please use butter dish for butter products only (not leaky packets of take-out soy and plum sauce).

8. Replace: bleach Vim green peppers Lysol wipes mop head garbage bags

9. Who dumped the pile of sugar on the floor and hid the broom?

10. Replace: sugar broom ant poison

11. If you continue to leave dirty mugs and spoons on the counter next to the sink: your cat will catch flu and vomit in your bed, your Fiesta will lose a side mirror in the night, you will drop your wallet down a sewer grate and trip over the bottom of your pants, skin your knees, frighten a skunk and be late for a promotion interview (for which you will

forget your updated resumé). You will also lose your electric stapler privileges for three weeks.

12. If you need to bring cough syrup to the office, you are audibly hacking and expelling mucus. Go home and keep your germs to yourself. Please.

## Oxford Classics Dictionary

Jay updates me: news in dishwashing, 90s television series(es)? what books are you teaching and how many dates have you had since the beginning of September?

Remember when I said I'd talk to your therapist?—How many years has—How many tomatoes have we—How many episodes of *Buffy*—

Where did you end up living? Is cleaning better on your own with your own lamps, tablecloths, coffee pots, hallway mirror—What does your school call it, a homecoming?

Why do the football team yell about it on the bus in the—coming home to the kitchen to the cauliflower and spinach for a pot of soup—from itch from claw—to a birthday cake light on the icing (lopsided)

What's the diagnosis today, Jay?

for me: dishwashing, draining, drying, alphabetizing, polishing wood and sanitizing sports equipment.

For Jay: today she's imposter syndrome (there's a lot of lit on the topic, she says) and last time what were the symptoms last time?

blood clots, leaks or shaky limbs.

At her place, there's too much politics. Nobody in her apartment's indoors on a Saturday night.

We can both agree about Leonard Cohen

but tonight she isn't sure.

That imposter syndrome sneaks up.

She gets lost in outside fields unless they're wheat, or poppies, or uncut grass— fields that leave organic matter on her shoes and the knees of her tights (not political theory or classics)

I thought for years classics meant the Oxford kind, or at a push Penguin—a new edition of Brontë or Dickinson, with the same 16pt Garamond font on the cover, a black box, some white lines, and a brooding inset from a watercolour painting of a castle. I re-bought a whole set, 13 books I already owned so they could match (now that's good marketing). Jay giggles at the acronym for the Oxford Classics Dictionary.

### Primetime Soap

Peter and Lee-ann are fighting in the bookie's again. During the commercial for Palm Olive I've got time to wash four plates before we find out what happened to Gail's new husband. New sponge warm water new suds rice sliding down plates into the strainer I can't cut the grease the spots on these glasses so it's back in the sink water getting cold so refill and more soap from the Costco dispenser on sale half the price of buying it at Metro. Back on, I hear Manchester accents arguing about the underwear company and who's going to get a round in at the local. These glasses still filthy orange pulp sticking to the bottom rim and oily fingermarks from an Ontario June. Must be a wedding because there's bells and someone storming in the back of the church but the soap's all gone, water's grey, re-fill the sink more squirts of green liquid. I'll get back to the couch before more adverts about hockey night later and some Canadian Idol CD. But this grease really won't rub off and how dirty is that dishdrainer the wipes will kill 99.9 percent of bacteria but they burn my fingertips wrinkly and pink back in the water to wash off the disinfectant. Theme tune is on again and that cat meow that starts every episode maybe a repeat of the one before I can catch the bits where I was washing. These damn dishes soy sauce might be the pattern on the plate, an imperfection in the paint unless I just need a new sponge and some more soap. The wedding's already over? Liam's back from the honeymoon and chatting in the pub? Cold water around the sink and my hands shake a bit. Sort out their wrinkles so I can get back to the couch. Just as soon as. The grease off these dishes.



## Compost Bin

Rot leaking from a crack in the old yogurt tub on the kitchen counter and dripping onto the tile floor because:

you were late for work

you grabbed a granola bar and ran for the bus

your nose was stuffy. you didn't smell the mould.

I scooped up the cores egg celery avocado coffee plum banana mash in a plastic dollar-store bag and dangled the wet mess between two fingers drip drip coffee and rot on the rug

Your bed:

sheets in a ball at the footboard

blanket on the carpet under two t-shirts and a pair of

dirty boxers

plate and fork stuck to hard penne noodles

toenail clippings

a green clementine orange between the headboard and

mattress

damp and chunky with rotting tomato and banana leak

The compost in your bed:

three apple cores

four egg shells with yolks

the ends off one stick of celery

one four-week-old avocado

a recycled paper filter full of no-name brand coffee

grinds

the pits of three plums

one banana skin, yellow, and one brown banana

I dragged my hand through the shells / broke open the avocado skin / smeared green and  
brown gel and taupe across your pillowcase

You're out of Vim.

I sanitized the old yogurt tub compost and taped the crack up with a piece of masking  
tape I dug out of your junk drawer

lined the tub with a plastic drugstore bag and threw away your receipt for Nyquil and  
chocolate

bleached the countertops, rinsed the sink, made the bed, pushed shirts and boxers under  
the rug, kicked your sweaty towels down the stairs

I scrubbed my hands

ate a plum from the crisper

swallowed the pit.

**V. Pore**

## Pore

She pores.

She pores over her psychology textbook.

She pores over the late-night pita menu.

She pours water over tea steeps and pours.

She pore-reduces. She scours.

She scrubs.

She pores over her blackheads in the mirror.

She skins.

She skins her ankle with a dollar-store pink plastic razor.

She nicks.

She grazes.

She snacks at half-hour intervals throughout the day: trail mix, dried cranberries, arugula, celery.

She scans the fridge for leftover spinach.

She pours olive oil and vinegar on lima bean salad.

She pours oil on troubled waters.

She waters the daffodils.

She never rains.

She showers.

She buzzes her head.

She hums.

She drones.

She counts. She sorts.

She: out of sorts.

She's out on a limb.

She limps.

She wilts.

She droops.

She drips coffee on the floor.

She sips.

She slips on wet tiles.

She sinks.

## Criteria

1.A a actions all an and and and and and and Anxiety appointments are are are as associated be be be because been before behaviors better better biological Both can Category causes checking compulsions compulsions compulsive constitute control cope day deep depending dirty disorder disorder Disorders disruptive each Etiology everyday everyday example excessive explore extremely features feel feel for For for for found from functioning functions gaining good hands has has have he he helpful his house how how in In in in inability include individual individual individuals infected irrational irritation is is issues issues it key late learning leaving like making medication Medication more most must neutralize numerous obsessions obsessions obsessions obsessive OCD OCD OCD of of of of of often often or or or or or order otherwise perform persistent persistent point prescribed Prognosis Prognosis psychological Psychotherapy range relief responds rooted school seemingly skin stressors such Symptoms temporary that the the The the the the the the the the the these this this this thoughts thoughts thoughts thoughts throughout time times to to to to to to to to Treatment unclean uncontrollable uncontrollable underlying underlying upon used washes washing ways which which who wide with with with work would you your

## Treatment

2. a a A and and and and and anxiety, anxiety. anxiety—that are are As asked asked away be be begin behavior behavior. behaviors. big catastrophic Cognitive cognitive Cognitive-behavioral components: compulsive compulsive compulsive compulsive control disorder don't door effective exaggerated example, Exposure exposure feel. focuses for For for from from get go gradually hand handle hands have healthy if in In involves involves is its learn might need obsession. obsessive obsessive obsessive-compulsive OCD OCD of of of of of on on over own. part perform prevented prevention public reduce refrain repeated resorting responding response responsibility restroom rid ritual sense sit some source teaching that the the the the the the Then then therapy therapy therapy this thoughts thoughts thoughts, to to to to to to to to to touch two urge usually wash washer, washing. way, ways will with without you you you you you you you you you your your your your your you'd



**VI. Peel**

## Peel

She peels.

She peels a potato.

She peels an apple and eats only the skin.

She peels the 50%-off sticker from the underside of her black patent leather pump.

She peels burnt skin off the backs of her calves.

She flakes. She sheds. She gardens. She tools.

She shacks up with her ex.

She peels the sheets off her bed.

She peels the polish off her nails. In sheets.

She appeals to his basest instincts. He peels the tights from her thighs.

She appeals her parking ticket.

She peels a grape.

She scrapes. She rinds.

She grates a lemon for zest.

She grates on my nerves.

She peels down the wrong side of the road.

She peels away the skin at the sides of her thumbs.

She peels off her wet dress.

She strips the colour from her hair.

She trips and skins her palms on the sidewalk.

Sheet rips.

She stains.



Sheet use.

She chews.

She chews her bottom lip.

She peels her eyes.

She keeps them peeled.

1C Westbound 12:45am

she's mouthing

her finger tothing the skinflap down the side of one nail

teeth on

teeth

CLICK

CLICK

CLICK

CLICK

CLICK

CLICK

runs a raw index fingernail

down the side of her thumb

bites

tooth on tooth

CLICK

Thin fingers raw red

rips in corners like plum jam edges

hands like rows of crêpes

tooth tooth and nail

CLICK

shards teeth tearing into raw red corners

fingertips wrinkle from spit  
and 57 years

CLICK

CLICK

thumbing her incisor  
incising fingertips  
she brushes blue bead glasses chain back  
behind her ears  
ears and cheeks and glasses un-  
bit  
bite-free  
toothless  
jam stain fingers

CLICK

CLICK

pulls the yellow stop cable  
wrinkle wet fingertips leave  
damp prints on windowglass  
freeze

CLICK

Brakes hiss

CLICK

## Laryngitis

Em's a hummer. Lost her voice at the wrestling match talking lingerie over the announcer. A strapless bra. A sentence thaw? Skipped Tuesday night karaoke to seal the cracks in her throat. Couldn't fingerspell fast enough. Hopped a cab to track down her chords at the Friday night ska show. Waited four hours in the ER scratching her hummingbird necklace two syllables emmmm emm at the triage counter. Ear / nose / throat. Musta slipped up and out your sinus cavity. Remember when you used to laugh pop out your nose? Same general concept. Replacement parts aren't available any closer than Woodstock but FedEx has overnight service if you're willing to pay. Emmmmm...mmm mmm in the negative. Em patches up her throat with pieces of an old softball. Mmmms and emms along to Doo Doo Doo on the radio. Cuts and pastes. Sews. Swallows. Croaks down the hallway. Ems and ahs. Hums if you kiss her. Em's a hummer.

## Street Level

Montréal you bruise me. Laptop bag tote umbrella scarf gloves leg muscle bones push through damp crowds into un-turning turnstile bars. Red light. *Carte expiré. Re-essayez s.v.p.* 9:30 squinting through hail for wine at 210 Fairmount Ouest slip past the glass doors half litre waiting at 201. Tarmac melting with four feet of snow right boot plumbs a sidewalk river: two centimetres above my knee and rising fast through tights like food colour climbs a celery stalk. Eaton Centre says: one hundred forty dollars for red rubber boots but sorry! Sold out. New shipment Wednesday morning. McGill métro en direction d'Avrignon, *the one with the A, not the H. Honoré. Quelque chose comme ça.* Headphones shuffling down Laurier leak upstairs: Chelsea Hotel #2. *Connaissez-vous la Rue Rachel? Est-ce que c'est en ce direction?* Toes wrinkling in wet socks straddle puddles on Saint Denis choose road-edge ice skating over sidewalk swimming until hipbone cracks asphalt rink skirt bleeds blue dye into smarting thigh. Fifty-two steps down, limping, *Mademoiselle, il y a un ascenseur!* up to street level Saint Laurent staircase pull at bruise edges spreading *souvenirs gratuits.*

## self-portrait with bruises

*“Some women marry houses.*

*It’s another kind of skin” – “Housewife,” Anne Sexton*

Some women marry roller skates

Soles fuse to plates and wheels

slip of the tailbone

scrape wrist

trip toe.

Laces taut

wrap bearings

tug grooves in ankles.

She rubs cream onto green purple knees shaving around stubble swell

pulls tights over thigh blotches

wheel-round fleshy.

Legs that bruise like plums.

## Stealing from the emergency room

Keep your head on straight

or tilt to the left. Focus

on a stable wall

read the sign: EMBER ASH OR

ANDS

Above the fountain

outside the bathroom. Get inside

the words

RE: SOR S

just keep

still even if your eyes don't

focus

break signs into words

R / ASH OUR AD

into letters

R E M H D

just don't let yourself

un-tilt

His and

HAND

AN/IN/IS

YOU/OR



you too help —

start again

how in any

inside this

AN/ IN IS DER

AM /AN PRE/THE PRE/ OF

a prevention of

AN/IN fection

an inability to prevent

PRE/FECTION

re-WASH YOUR

ANDS

AN/I

YOU/R

not preventing

/RE

IN FECTION

REM/ EMBER

ASH

your ANDS

PRE/ MEMBER

VENT RE

WAS

IN / OUR

ANDS

## Bike Lane

Write on my leg in oil from the underside of your car  
or  
Write on my leg with the underside of your car  
or  
I'm not  
but there's oil on my leg  
and blood on your bumper  
a shock of fabric from my Made in Bangladesh designer knock-off summer dress,  
the one with the polka dots and the Peter Pan collar  
There's oil on the collar that used to be white  
but the oil on my leg might be from my bicycle chain  
my bicycle under your car and there's some blue paint on your bumper  
and scratches on my bicycle so you can see the primer  
so you can see you smoked me  
took me out so hard my bell got crushed  
before I could ring it  
red ribbon from my basket gutter wet  
You sped up like I was a squirrel who'd somehow get out of the way  
You'd've stopped for a skunk  
Next time I'll wear stripes instead of spots  
But for now I wear raw stripes up my ankle  
clipped my pedal and pulled me under  
two boxes of Wheatabix and a carton of unsweetened soy leaking down an asphalt crack  
Crushed so I've got nothing for dinner  
I'm under your car writing in blood

or is it oil on my leg?

My sandal flung across the street;

pink and red in the road

the hot grey undercarriage of your car maybe a pickup

where I can write on my leg or the metal

between the tarmac and your undercarriage

or is it oil?

## self-portrait on asphalt

Split skin

dragged a trail of elbow along the sidewalk

skipstones and beerglass nesting deep

bloodslip slick wrist /

mosquito lumps / cut cuticles /

sneakers scuff armhair /

black cotton shirt sleeve scraps /

sunburned flesh

off pavement

bikes tread tissue and sweat

with gum grit and saliva

sun baking forearm to asphalt

gravel fuses to bone

peel heatseals

sears limb to path

tarmac garnish

sidewalk scab

## Slush

Slushing through the side of the road  
jujubes, scattergories and hefting canvas bags of public library mysteries  
no inscriptions in first editions under glass in my study  
no study  
the girl who knits backwards, never learned to swim, can't lace a figure skate  
"buy me a bowl of mushroom soup at the café on the corner, a tap dance lesson, a brown  
roll, an ant farm, a bus ticket with a transfer to the 1A"  
words stack up in my throat, backed-up serifs scratching their way through like nacho  
chips  
I wrap three red scarves one over the other over the other around my neck and chin and  
lips and forehead  
fingers damp with saliva  
backs in knots. door in doors  
pushes open without a key; you never remember to slam it on your way out  
before I make it to the hallway closet, dump my soggy coat and slog off boots  
you know I can't stand to hear about any mat I can't trample in the hall  
my eyes squint from smears on the kitchen window  
to the mop and bucket, cold water  
I'll be bald soon if I'm counting the strands of hair on the tiles  
and bone if you collect the dry flakes  
sinuses and teeth skinning remnants on a Swiffer cloth  
my underwear on the floor under the table  
more clicks away than I can count on my fingers

## Slick

My legs sweat and prickle

I hold onto your wrist to keep from slipping off the bed.

The landlord dropped off an air conditioner but I can't turn down the noise.

In the fridge, floating on dirty summer melt

Tupperware containers full of lentil soup I'll never swallow.

The sodden rug over the radiator steams

waits for winter when it can freeze and stiffen.

Over my head I smell the cracks in the upstairs floorboards

worms in April gutters, compost bucket coffee grinds

plaster wet and dropping in chunks off the ceiling.

We drip

half waiting for a tidal wave to burst through the vents.

## Recipe

Last night an abscess:

red and furious

seeping through the top of my sock

damp grey cotton clinging

to taut skin.

In the kitchen, I pour

boiling water over a fork

expose and puncture

dig prongs deep into the raw mound

and the smell!

Not like the cat's

sore when it burst: sour cheese, acrid and retching

but:

spicy jalapeño,

coriander, garlic.

I press with both thumbs.

my foot issues:

a kidney bean

clumps of ground beef

tomato juice

hot chili drips between my toes

bits of onion slide over tendons

slip into the carpet as I hop



holding the leaky foot level

hop

to the cupboard for a plate

and the fridge for a slice of bread

to sop up my mess.

## Stems

1.

I've got the best legs in poetry.

The audience at the open mic took a vote

my calves most worthy of macramé leggings and a mini skirt

from our generous local sponsor,

the girl with the hook, third row from the stage

send her stats after the show

thigh circumference with a shoelace and a metre stick

subtract a few centimetres

(for good measure)

2.

Cowboy hat at the karaoke bar thinks I've got

*Nice stems (baby)*

green and waxy

feet like cut flowers

thorny and brown

*A guy can't tell a girl he likes her legs? Maybe you should wear a longer skirt.*

Cover up my stems?

heels sink into mud

root me to the ground

cowboy tips his hat I turn

on one wedge, a thorn

in his boot

3.

On primetime, “having” legs, arms, ears, fingernails means

having limbs

in a jar

a meat locker

in a plastic garbage bag at the bottom of the lake

I’ve got the smoothest legs, the right one in a bag of wool, top shelf of the closet

waiting for winter

the left behind the wok in the pots and pans drawer

the pinkest ears chill in the fridge

the thinnest wrists in my typewriter case

the thickest toenails between the pages of *Spin* magazine

the softest soles strung on the backyard washing line

two lips in the garden compost

a pinky finger on top of the microwave

and one eyebrow caught under the back-door shoe rack.

## The Flood

We lost 14 pounds of blueberries in the flood. Freezer-seal cracked waves lifting tidy date-labelled ziplock bags August 26<sup>th</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> September 12<sup>th</sup> through the laundry room and up the stairs, out the back door, into the creek downstream and then the St. Clair river. Blue bubbles dry stems bobbed in moss water, tempting fish like lures where the hook never follows. The next night it rained again, storm-of-a-century the early morning newscaster dripped wool pants leaching up to the knees. The river gluts the street, pours down sewers, rushes up through drains in every laundry room and cellar in the city, tipping bottles of bleach, wine, beer and fabric softener. Neighbours sop, heap carpet scraps and split chipboard furniture roadside wet-vaccing up wads of toilet paper, hands over nose and mouth. Gag. Bail. Trashed sodden shoes. Algae socks. Toe wrinkle. Raining feces, silt, blueberries. 1B pulped two rolls of '60s vintage wrapping paper. Thirsty paisley. Cardboard buckled. Lost a bucket of sidewalk chalk, red recycling bin down the road. Lost a box of pancake mix, headlines from last year's newspapers, plastic raincoat, bicycle pump. Found stray leaky letters clinging to baseboards SOR FI EN HE. Found a pile of blueberries softening under the rug.

insert body text

this poem has legs

smooth shoulders warm thigh

jeans fall off the bone

dry heels flaking skin under one eye

two pimples on the neck, buried

pigeon toes

a broken rib can't hide under breast fat

knee bruises hip bruises shoulder

bruises dandruff acne scars burn marks knee scars shoulder scars elbow

scars skin splitting between fingers elbows bleeding

nape tight calves

stubble

should I mention ass lips tongue eyes dimples toes

and what if by the end of all this you want to fuck?

Or never touch pen to paper again?

Can a poem turn a trick? Say no

Is this page too transparent? panty lines, breath lines

Does the corner slip down, uncover the lace edge

of a notebook?

pen scratching neck

bite a lip / tongue / tooth

but how do you read indents?

Curl toes in a watermark

did you print them or did I?

my body of work | pressing warm sheets into your hands

## Leaky Minds, Bodies, Texts: The Poetics of “Leak”

Kate Hargreaves

“centre a poetics on irritable bowel syndrome”  
– Nikki Reimer, *[sic]*

“On the other side a toe splinters  
On the other side a word called toe.”  
– Jenny Sampirisi, *Croak*

What would a poetics of bodily disorder look like? What is the discourse of an irritable bowel? When “a toe splinters” does it loosen its connection to “a word called toe”? My poetic manuscript, “Leak,” seeks to bring attention to the complicated relationship between bodily materiality and poetic discourse through suggestive leaks in signification. As Kate Eichhorn and Heather Milne write in their introduction to *Prismatic Publics: Innovative Canadian Women’s Poetry and Poetics*, “What matters... is what the work is doing... the project of working out problems *in* rather than simply *with* language” (13-4). When the bodies “Leak” describes begin to fall apart, the language breaks down in tandem. Bodies lose pieces and secrete fluid, while words and letters slip out of place, disappear and repeat. “Leak’s” disjunctive poetic techniques therefore mimic in form what occurs in the manuscript’s content: the blurring and overlapping of the body, mind, and text, especially when all three “leak.”

### Representing the unrepresentable

In her article, “FL, KAKA, and the Value of Lesbian Paragrams,” Susan Holbrook turns to the theory of Julia Kristeva in order to discuss the gendering of value/devaluing: “What is not valued, ‘waste’ in other words, is determined by this epistemology in

specifically misogynistic ways,” she writes. “Witness Julia Kristeva’s observation in...*Powers of Horror*, that ‘polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual. Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to borders of the body, have any polluting value’ (71)” (42).<sup>1</sup> Here, Holbrook brings attention to the politics of value, in terms of what patriarchal society deems corporeal “waste.” She goes on to note, “Lesbian-feminist poets justify a desire to seek out the errant through their revaluing of that which is traditionally considered to be correct” (43), arguing that a poet might seek to take “corrective gestures” against “patriarchally-loaded language” in order to form a more accurate representation, investing the “error,” or “secretion” with value (43, 50). Within disjunctive poetics, Holbrook locates a site to subvert the normative (and dominant patriarchal) structures of value surrounding bodies.

While Holbrook’s analysis of “error” focuses on re-investing errors with value, “errors” are not always positive in “Leak”; instead, error is sometimes a site of fear and disgust for the personas in the poems. In my poem, “Cracking,” for example, the speaker derives fear and anxiety from mundane actions she views as terrible errors:

Eat your green beans before your broccoli: skip a period.

Wear the blue skirt with yellow flowers: miss the last bus for work.

Double not triple check the stove is off:

migraine... (33)

---

<sup>1</sup> While the scope of this critical statement is limited to the ways in which leaky female bodies play into the poetics of my manuscript, I would like to acknowledge the vast historical context of critical work surrounding female embodiment. My manuscript is certainly influenced by the extensive critical feminist work on female bodies, abjection, and corporeality, including Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), and Elizabeth Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).



In this case, the attribution of tremendous importance and power to what the speaker views as “errors” *does* disrupt traditional structures of value; however, this disruption does not liberate the speaker or her language. Instead, the “errors” quickly overwhelm the speaker, and the repetitive language of the poem reflects this focus:

Wash the blue skirt with yellow flowers. Eat green beans before 5pm.  
 Leave a dirty stove. Check your mirror. Double check your hands. Lose  
 the cat. Don’t close the front door. Check your—  
 Step on a crack. (33)

As the poem closes, the errors have become so urgent that the speaker can only articulate these faults, repetitively and in fragments. The final line, “Step on a crack,” echoes the first, and brings the poem back to its start; the poem then harbours a sense of purposeful incompleteness, suggesting unending rumination on “errors,” despite their wider insignificance beyond the speaker’s own perception.

“Error” can then exist as both a source of fear and hindrance, as well as a site of progressive re-valuing within “Leak.” Returning to Kristeva’s abject, the bodies and minds in my manuscript are, fittingly, “leaky.” As Lynn Keller writes of the work of C.D. Wright, bodies are “sloughing off cells, dropping hairs and oozing liquids” (31). Keller takes this sort of “leaky” body as a politically-charged affront to mainstream images “like those of lingerie-clad female bodies in *Victoria’s Secret* catalogues” (31). Similarly, Fiona Carson discusses how contemporary female visual artists may use abject imagery to rebel against the “visual tyranny” of bodies represented in women’s magazines (99). Carson critiques the idealized body offered as the female high art nude, a “sealed container, a perfected, rationally-organized formulation of the female body” (99). Carson notes, as Keller illustrates through Wright’s poetry, that feminist depictions of the body

often seek to remind the audience of the impossibility and constructed nature of dominant bodily ideals, frequently through representations of the abject (99).

Take, for example, this passage from my poem “Recipe,” which describes a bursting abscess in the skin:

I press with both thumbs.

my foot issues:

a kidney bean

clumps of ground beef

tomato juice

hot chili drips between my toes (71)

While oozing chili from beneath the skin is certainly not the same as “dropping hairs,” the poem depicts a body transgressing its own borders, a body inappropriately leaking. The transgression in this case, an abscess issuing chili, may be more absurd in its representation of abjection than Wright’s poetic body, an “entirely typical unglamorous object or set of processes” (Keller 31). However, like the body in Wright’s poetry, “Recipe” engages the notion of impossibility. If Wright’s work, as Keller argues, questions the “impossible” Victoria’s Secret bodies of mainstream media, then “Recipe” represents a different kind of impossible body: a body that not only breaches its borders by leaking fluid, but also leaks the “wrong” fluid. Instead of being impossibly ideal, or even “entirely typical,” the body in “Recipe” bears an impossible error. More broadly, most bodies in “Leak” are splitting at the seams: “splitting skin between fingers elbows bleeding” (“insert body text” 76); bleeding: “sun baking forearm to asphalt” (“self-portrait on asphalt” 68); or perforated in some way: “cut your finger yellow scab” (“garlic” 29). Returning to Holbrook’s argument for the poetic re-valuing of errors and

secretions, “Leak’s” errant bodies provide an opportunity to re-consider what designates bodily ideal and bodily waste and perhaps call into question what a “complete” body may be; when both “model” bodies and abject bodies overlap in their impossibility, the lines between what is valued and un-valued begin to blur.

### **R—Re—Rep—Rep—etition**

“Leak” is a text in which bodies are not the only unstable physical entities: the mental states of the speakers in “Leak” are also extremely variable. One of the ways in which this instability manifests in the text is through repetition. Many of the voices in “Leak” incorporate compulsive repetition, whether of words, specific images, or more general subject matter. In the first section of the text, “Heap,” each poem repeats, with some small variations, a body part upon which the voice is fixated, regardless of whether the situation relates, even tangentially, to that body part. For example, in “100% All-Natural Organic Blend,” the focus is on the belly:

Her belly barely stomachs bananas. When she jogs up the stairs her belly wobbles. When she sings her belly takes minutes. When she goes out for dinner her belly house-sits feeds the dog and lets him out for a piss. Her belly barks. Her belly pants. Her belly never squeezed into a size three. (4)

In this passage, while some of the references to “her belly” show a direct relation to the body part (eating, jogging, putting on pants, etc.), others such as taking minutes or feeding the dog have no overt connection to that part of the body. The text associates related and unrelated activities with the belly in order to demonstrate, through the excess of repetition, an utter and complete fixation on “her belly.” Sina Queyras’s poem “Even the idea of river” uses repetition of the phrase “The river” to a similar effect:

The river is townless, yet the river is town, for without the river there is no town. Without the river there are no riverbanks. Without the river there is no mill... Without the river old women cannot cry. Without the river no one is married... Without the river the mountains shy... Without the river fish walk. (14)

Queyras assigns the promise of many seemingly unrelated activities (old women crying, people getting married) to the presence of “the river,” emphasizing, through the excess repetition, the overwhelming power and importance of “the river” to “the town.” Thus, in “100% All-Natural Organic Blend,” the excessive repetition of “her belly” reveals the absurd power and importance the speaker grants to “her belly,” in that this body part begins to encompass many completely unrelated aspects of her life. However, the repetition avoids allowing the reader to anticipate the language (and perhaps therefore skim the repeated passages) through slight alterations to the phrasing of “her belly”: instead of beginning each and every phrase with “her belly,” the text shifts, sometimes moving “her belly” to the end of the phrase, incorporating near homonyms such as “hyperbole” and “herbally,” or leaving the phrase “her belly” out of the sentence altogether.

“Leak” also incorporates repetition in an interruptive fashion. In both “Cracking” and “October 9<sup>th</sup>,” the idea of checking, specifically the phrases “Check your mirror” and “Check for blood” respectively, cut into the text, reminding the reader of this speaker’s compulsive habits. In his article, “Missing Larry: The Poetics of Disability in Larry Eigner,” Michael Davidson questions, “What would happen if we subjected a poetics of embodiment to the actual bodies and mental conditions of its authors... What would it mean to think of Charles Olson’s ‘breath’ line as coming from someone with chronic

emphysema exacerbated by heavy smoking” (119)? By this argument, the speakers in “Leak” and their particular bodies impact the way language exists within the text.

Davidson elaborates, “A poetics...of disability is important: because it theorizes the ways that poetry defamiliarizes not only language but the body normalized *within* language (118). He emphasizes the importance of highlighting the constructive power of discourse, and questioning this construction where it falls short in terms of representing non-hegemonic bodies. The repetitive “checking” in “Leak” incorporates a disruptive compulsion, reflecting one aspect of mental illness through the medium of the poetic text.

The structure of “October 9<sup>th</sup>” differs from many of “Leak’s” poems due to its generally short lines. Each new imperative action (“Sweep floors. / Mop. / Wipe up excess with electrostatic cloths” [36]) occupies its own line, creating a relatively consistent rhythm throughout the course of the activities the poem lists. While some phrases appear more than once, the only *action* that repeats on several occasions is “Check for blood,” becoming more and more frequent and insistent toward the end of the piece. Reading this compulsive checking through Davidson’s argument allows the reader a particular experience of the speaking voice. When the speaker feels the compulsion to check, the poem insists that the reader entertain this act of checking by giving each instance of “Check for blood” the same line breaks as any other imperative. It is important that “Check for blood” is not parenthetical or tacked on the end of another line; the line breaks in “October 9<sup>th</sup>” present the actions in the poem with the frequency and importance they possess as they occur to the speaker. The structure of the poem therefore illustrates the rhythm of her engagement with her particular body and anxieties.

### **Poking holes in the text**

“Leak” attempts to mimic in poetic form what it depicts in its imagery through “leaky” disruptive bodies and unstable mental states, mirrored in constantly shifting and disjunctive poetics. Just as Holbrook argues for “re-valuing” waste as a way to undercut patriarchal language, Keller argues that “contemporary women writers may be particularly ready to step outside the dominant conventions” of poetry, due to the need to “rupture and re-vision” language to “disrupt the social structures that have oppressed women” (9). For example, Shawna Dempsey’s chapbook *Anatomy of a Nymphomaniac* appropriates institutional medical language in order to challenge patriarchal perceptions of female sexuality:

Thus displayed, the body cannot help but tell of its grotesque differences:  
the senses engorged, the genitals vast, the spleen on the verge of rupture. It  
is this fat organ that captures our attention first for it is most prominent in  
the cavity and contains the reason for this woman’s willful and wanton  
ways. (7)

Adopting this lofty moralizing tone allows Dempsey to satirize not only the way society perceives women’s bodies and their sexuality, but also unquestioning trust in “objective” scientific discourses. Similarly, Dorothy Trujillo Lusk’s *Ogress Oblige* mixes various registers of language, from nursery rhymes, to Marxist terminology, casual speech, and Latin, in order to question dominant discourses enforcing gender and class divisions. In “We’re All Friends Here,” she writes:

Tooling,  
around in a Chevy II, cheaper parts. Half a sack a tank.

This’s the accurate medical term for doughnuts.

The chassis of the mother embodying  
 the central contradictions  
 between means and relations of  
 production &/or sag of surplus value (29)

By following the reference to “a Chevy II” with “The chassis of the mother,” this passage conflates the mother’s body with a vehicle, interrogating gendered objectification while also employing Marxist language. These seamless switches in register, from conversational references to “tooling around” to a more theoretical discourse, occur throughout Lusk’s work, refusing to isolate the language of class theory from everyday speech. *Ogress Oblige* therefore illustrates, like Dempsey’s appropriation of medical discourse, the manner in which female writers are actively “re-visioning” language to question gender and its intersecting oppressions.

Poet Nikki Reimer, in her book *[sic]*, uses disjunctive poetic techniques to question gender roles, consumerism, and discourses of sickness and health. In the poem “anorexia nervosa,” she writes:

for sale “as is.” shooting pains in the abdomen, below the ribcage and a little to  
 the left. best be off to the gym. serial dater. palindromes and potato chips. write  
 the word “chipotle” on the bathroom wall. (83)

In this passage, Reimer employs sentence fragments and avoids capitalization to blend different levels of discourse (signage, social imperatives, medical language, graffiti, etc). Using the language of commerce (“for sale ‘as is’”) as well as that of medicine (“shooting pains in the abdomen”), Reimer situates the body as at once commodity and patient. By overlapping these two registers of language, alongside imperatives reminiscent of

women's magazines ("best be off to the gym"), Reimer conflates the problematic treatment and control of the body (specifically the female body) within consumerism and the medical model. Mapping a variety of seemingly unrelated discourses over one another allows Reimer to draw attention to the way both popular and medical discourses problematically police the body.

In "Leak," "Ribfest" operates in a similar fashion, transposing the word "ribs" into various contexts:

Her underwire sticks her in the ribs. Her ribs bruise and swell. Her ribs taste better sans barbecue sauce or Tabasco...Her collarbones. Her sternum. Her rack. Her ribbed for her pleasure. Her vote for your favourite rib recipe... (6)

This passage juxtaposes discussions of women's bodies alongside descriptions of meat, as well as condom advertising copy. Like Reimer's passage from "anorexia nervosa," the variety of registers of language operating within one piece draw attention to the problems of representing bodies through these powerful discourses. If the text can conflate the signification of the female body and meat, the poem suggests, one needs to interrogate the dominant discourses through which hegemonic society describes and understands bodies.

### **Bee, Elle, Em and the Shifting "I"**

Multiplicity plays a major role in the poetics of "Leak," from its repetitive excess, to the listing and organization that drives its fictional speakers. These speakers in the text are, themselves, multiple and constantly changing. "Leak" features a shifting "I," switching viewpoints poem to poem, and sometimes within the same piece. Lynn Arbaugh Kinnahan writes in her book, *Lyric Interventions: Feminism, Experimental*



*Poetry, and Contemporary Discourse*, “linked to th[e] perception of a lack of theoretical awareness has been a *perception* of women’s (retrograde) attachment to the personal and to the lyric” (xv-xvi). Kinnahan, rightly, criticizes this limiting view of women’s writing, while acknowledging the difficult place that women’s experimental feminist texts have occupied between the camps of feminist poetry and the arguably male-dominated field of so-called Language poetry. She cites Kathleen Fraser’s poem “re:searches,” as illustrative of this struggle:

...this  
 lyric forever error, this  
 something embarrassingly clear, this  
 language we come up against (Kinnahan 1)

Kinnahan reads these lines as Fraser grappling with perceptions that dismiss women’s writing as “too lyric,” and refuse the place of exploratory feminist poetry within male-dominated innovative writing communities (3). Ann Vickery elaborates on this struggle in *Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing*, arguing that Language writing [or more broadly, experimental poetry] and its poetics stand “in direct contrast to much of the feminist poetry produced out of the women’s movement...many second-wave feminists sought to bring poetic language closer to common usage in order to make it more accessible to ordinary women” (8). Vickery concludes that this “double-bind,” the marginalization of women writers from Language writing, and of experimental women writers from second-wave feminist poetry, has begun to deteriorate (12). Kinnahan provides textual examples of many contemporary women writers embracing aspects of both experimental and lyric writing, arguing that they “re-animate the lyric subject in relation to the social rather than removed from it, positing a multiply located

“I” as product of social discourse and potential conductor of change” (xiii). Interrogating the notion of the subject, multiple “I” voices offer pieces and glimpses of identity, rather than laying claim to one essential experience.

This shifting “I,” or refusal to speak as one subject, appears in Sarah Kane’s experimental dramatic work “4.48 Psychosis,” in which no characters are listed, and speech is not designated for different actors; it is entirely ambiguous whether or not one speaker performs the entire drama, or if 100 speakers are present. While dashes mark different lines, each could feasibly be spoken by the same character, or even projected onto a screen with no speakers at all:

- If you were alone do you think you might harm yourself?
- I’m scared I might.
- Could that be protective?
- Yes. It’s fear that keeps me away from the train tracks. (211)

In Kane’s play, the possibility of multiple speakers, one speaker arguing with a voice in her head, two speakers in dialogue, or no speakers at all, manifests through the lack of direction the script provides to those who would stage the play; she leaves these decisions up to the director, cast, and audience. Therefore, Kane reflects the problematic nature of encompassing the experience of one “I” by presenting a work in which identity is ambiguous.

In “Leak,” the shifting characters and pronouns function in a similar fashion to destabilize the cohesive “I,” and give a sense of multiplicity. The reader can interpret the manuscript as the projection of one speaker figure, or of many. I designate the subject of the first piece in each of the six sections only by the pronoun “she” (and in the section “Heap” by “her”). These could be the same “she” and “her,” or different subjects in each

instance of the pronoun. Similarly, I name several subjects in “Leak,” but these names generally appear for only one poem in the text (“Elle” is the subject of “Arc,” “Bee” is the subject of “Dishdrainer,” “Jay” speaks to the “I” in “Oxford Classics Dictionary,” “Em” is the subject of “Laryngitis”). These named subjects suggest that there are more than one or two subjects in “Leak,” and that these subjects change quickly. However, as each named subject is merely a designated letter of the alphabet, the argument could also be made that they are aspects of the same whole.

At times, it seems the third-person subject may be the “I” of the poem, distanced with a shift in narrative perspective, given the intimacy of bodily detail to which the speaker is privy. In “Arc,” for example, a speaker describes Elle in the third-person, yet the text suggests the speaker may be Elle herself. The speaker describes Elle examining her body in the office bathroom and her bedroom mirror; however, the speaker knows in detail how Elle’s body feels when she presses on her belly: “a rumble inside a slosh” (19). Even when discussing her reflection in the mirror, “profile: firm shoulder, small slope of breast hip hip and in the middle the blocking arc” (19), the narrating persona speaks from Elle’s visual perspective. The third-person narrator’s possession of this intimate bodily knowledge, and occupation of Elle’s visual space, suggests that the third-person is a poetic shift of Elle’s first-person voice. This shift reflects Elle’s act of gazing on her own body through the lens of an outsider, and contributes to the constantly slipping state of the “I” within “Leak.”

In other instances, the “you” performs the function of the “I,” especially in its imperative and criticizing modes. For example, in my poem “Hypo,” the persona uses a second-person address to criticize herself for her irrational fear of stepping on a syringe:

Think you're well-travelled read *Trainspotting* at age 13 but couldn't sit through the film gave blood eleven times and never passed out but never looked at the needle either walk a city block past the woman shooting up...Sure you've been stuck. ("Hypo" 23)

These movements in perspective and subject problematize the speaking subject as "Leak" insists on moving and shifting the role of subject and speaker throughout the entire text. The manuscript's refusal to settle on one or two speakers reflects the impossibility of completely representing one identity. Instead, "Leak" self-consciously offers small moments and particulars, pieces and fragments representing a variety of experiences and bodies, all constantly shifting.

### **1. Lists 2. Organization & 3. Sorting**

A tactic in "Leak" to signify both unstable minds and bodies is one of listing, sorting, and organization. William Gass writes of Gertrude Stein's poetic technique, that she "treat[s] the elements of the sentence as if they were people at a party, and begin[s] a mental play with all their possible relationships" (qtd. in Perloff 95). In "Leak," this re-arrangement of textual relationships appears not only through the interrogation of linguistic conventions, but as representative of the speaker's/speakers' compulsive cleaning and organizing, at times to great excess. While textual organizing occurs in many places in the manuscript (for example, organizing a text into food ladder sections in "Paper Ladder" (11), recording weights in "Off-balance" (14), re-arranging spices in "October 9<sup>th</sup>" (38), etc.), the ripest example appears in the section sub-titled "Pore." The shortest section in "Leak," "Pore," includes a three-part poem constructed through the re-arrangement of medical source texts on obsessive-compulsive disorder. This section, the



a compulsive need to alphabetize rather than to maintain the semantics through standard syntax or spelling. Instead of failing as language, however, this drastic re-arranging organizes the words and letters into a structure that offers additional ways to read the content. While the re-organized text may be useless for someone attempting to discover diagnostic criteria, treatment, or prognosis for obsessive-compulsive disorder, the re-arrangement of the source text nevertheless creates its own meaning. When the text no longer functions as transparent information, offered through linear sentential grammar, it becomes even more linear, through radical alphabetization of words and letters. Even at first glance, the reader can visually recognize the alphabetical organization of the text, as alphabetical organization pervades many texts (filing documents, phone books, record stores, etc.). In this way, the structure of “Pore,” although unhelpful in conveying medical information, is arguably more linear than a standard medical text. “Pore” not only speaks to the experience and anxieties of the speaker through her act of textual organization, it provides an alternate interpretation of linearity as itself a shifting and multiple concept. The speaker doubts that standard medical language can accurately represent her compulsive nature, and instead creates meaning through the process of deconstructing and re-piecing the dominant discourse.

### **Slips and drips**

“Leak” is an intentionally slippery text. Throughout the poems, bodies and language overlap, drip, and fall to pieces, offering what are sometimes heaps of excessive text, and at other points gaps and fissures. As Ming-Qian Ma writes in *Poetry as Re-Reading: American Avant-Garde Poetry and the Poetics of the Counter-Method*, “the difficulty in naming the compositional complexities of the new exploratory poetry...is

itself a matter of method...what it is exploring is method itself" (216). Through its repetition, re-organization, listing and shifting subjects, "Leak" is always changing, moving, and exploring. The manuscript therefore does not seek an encompassing narrative, but rather points to its own unfinishedness. Due to its many cracks and shifts, the text harbours a purposeful sense of incompleteness and irresolution; just as the textual tactics reflect the subject matter in the poems, this refusal of closure reflects the impossibility to completely and finally signify any coherent body, mind, or text.

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## Notes

Italicized portions of “Paper Ladder” are from “Climb Michi’s Ladder.” Beachbody LLC. *Team Beachbody*, 2011 <[www.teambeachbody.com/eat-smart/michis-ladder](http://www.teambeachbody.com/eat-smart/michis-ladder)>.

“Criteria,” “Symptoms,” and “Prognosis” use source text from “DSM IV Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) Criteria.” *BiologicalUnhappiness.com* <[www.biologicalunhappiness.com/DSM-OCD.htm](http://www.biologicalunhappiness.com/DSM-OCD.htm)>.

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### Vita Auctoris

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