

CARPUS

CARPUS

CARPUS

CARPUS

CARPUS



AIMEE HERMAN

# CARPUS

AIMEE HERMAN



#79

# CONTENTS

## ESSAY PRESS GROUNDLOOP SERIES

In Essay Press's Groundloop series, curated by Aimee Harrison and Maria Anderson, we seek to bring together authors exploring diverse subjects through loud, innovative architectures.

<i>Series Editors</i>	Maria Anderson Andy Fitch Ellen Fogelman Aimee Harrison Courtney Mandryk Emily Pifer Victoria A. Sanz Travis A. Sharp Ryan Spooner
<i>Series Assistants</i>	Cristiana Baik Ryan Ikeda Christopher Liek Randall Tyrone
<i>Cover Design</i>	Travis A. Sharp
<i>Book Layout</i>	Aimee Harrison

Carpus	
just don't forget to wipe your tongue on the mat before entering.... <i>(an introduction)</i>	1
blind	3
instructional manual for feelings	5
in defense of art	9
texture of a mushroom	11
carpus	12
mix tape	13
shot, left	14
friday evening with approaching facial hair and nervous fingers	18
magic 8 ball	20
necessity to nude away the parts which howl	21
311 words of your life thus far	22
that film strip	24
here is how I lived in my body this day	26
(it can be) difficult to be [sometimes]	28
Acknowledgments	30
Author Bio	32

“...the book creates meaning, the meaning creates life.”

—Roland Barthes from *The Pleasure of the Text*

just don't forget to wipe your tongue on the mat before entering...  
(an introduction)

Bodies consist of cities. Territories. Stained glass church knees. Thigh pews.  
Cupboards of neck. Magnetic mouths rotating exit signs.

*"I knew when he kissed his cyborg-bones into my crooked teeth and told me to keep all my hair as it was, like forest bark twists. Kissed every ingrown toenail & curious bug bite and asked me to leave my gender unassigned. He liked the way I blurred blur."*

We break up to find the pieces which were always missing. We turn bodies into cut-ups in order to re-order what was never *in order*.

The only way to read this is to lick every page and catalogue the ink stains.

---

1 Here is what happens: You will give yourself away to someone who cannot balance your scars on their fingertips. They will bruise potholes into you. / You will become institutionalized long enough for insurance to run out. Long enough to learn all the different ways sharps can carve you into various mathematical equations. You will be prescribed enough pills to decoupage a building. / Next, you will defend your genitalia in order to peel away its sores and start over. / Call your belly a fungus, steep it into water and sip yourself. / You will make love to the only part of you that you've ever been true to. / You will measure the distance between music & genetic mutations. / Challenge the ways in which pronouns may be erased and facial hair may be summoned. / The only way to understand is to ask. / Fondle the moon with your nude. / Research all the ways to understand all that you don't understand

No,  
more specifically,  
here is what I want from you. Rip one page  
out of this book. Give yourself enough vowels to howl. Tape the longest  
word to your thigh. Right or left, is how you decide. Spend an entire day  
with dislocated syllables pressed against you in a way that no lover has ever  
achieved. Run. Leap. Move enough so this word sweats into you. Embeds  
like a persistent stain. Then, become this word.

Become its parts.

Become.



blind

On our first date, you give me a passenger pigeon.

With New York City on its wings and four poems dangling off its beak. When I ask you to recite your favorite song, you reply Charlie Parker on a Sunday in the spring of the south dipping honey on fingertips to stick our hands together.

On our second date, you give me your smoke-filled ribcage. Sewed into its bony frame is a picture of the Brooklyn Bridge signed by the ghosts who put it together.

You hold my hand; tell me stories of when New York was cheap enough to go out for dinner and a movie and still pay rent.

Date number three and you tell me you got HPV from a barroom bathroom seat. There are so many fish in the sea of New York City that it's hard to be faithful.

On our fourth date, our bodies become jukeboxes, playing B sides of all the sounds that have become dormant.

On our fifth date, you feed me peanut butter off honeysuckle petals and I fall asleep against the seventh chapter of your life story, which you drip off your tongue and into the wax in my ear.

Date number six and you want to know what makes me flinch. You ask what area of my body is off limits. You want to know about the vague pronouns I use to describe my previous lovers. You suck the marrow from my bones because you insist your stem cells need reparation. We spit out our truths like watermelon seeds, testing the speed & distance.

On date number seven we sew our scars into every stitched square of your mattress.

On our eighth date, I ~~stop biting my tongue and admit to love~~ bite my tongue.

On our ninth date, we forget what it feels like to lust using wrists and blindfolds. Meals are swallowed in silence, rather than off skin. Laughter is replaced by criticized grumbles. The scent of sandalwood & twine is replaced by pickled resentment.

On our tenth date, we say goodbye through certified paperwork. Names no longer inked onto flesh. This time, we signature the lines left to close out our tab.



instructional manual for feeling

### **Page one.**

Begin by looking at your theorized lachrymal glands.

How dry is your mirror and do you perspire in fits of anthems or are your tears homosexual?

### **Relax!**

Try not to worry about interjecting your emotions correctly the first time.

If you are tense, it will make the publicity of your bloat far too distinguished.

The best time to practice inserting your feelings is somewhere between two and three pm when the sun is at its heaviest depending on your body's positioning.

**Page two.**

Decide if you prefer to be in the gloom standing or sitting.

If sitting is your preference, find a backless stool.

Discomfort is key in keeping you minimally in the blue.

If you insist upon standing, straddle a highway divider  
and infuse your lungs with the soot  
of movement.

**Page three.**

Clasp your desolation in your right hand if you are right-handed, or left if left-handed.

Be prepared to taste bleak in your mouth for six to eight weeks or months depending upon season.

Use your thumb & middle finger to hold the bottom of your tongue.  
Guide it into the shape of complacency.

**Page four.**

Dispose of sexual arousal with each swallow of prescribed remedy.

Side-effects may also include dry thoughts, increased stutter, difficulty singing and/or speaking without a lisp, wet screams, irritability toward uniformed humans, inability to complete recipes and relationships, decreased appetite for oxygen, increased need for salt, & persistent bleeding.

**Page five.**

Locate an emergency contact.

Hide your rubber bands & red-inked markers.

Fidget to tire your fingers & distract your veins from being plundered.

**Here is what you need to look for.**

Your forlorn clashes with its usual color & size. Your previous diagnoses are unevenly shaped with visible distortion, swelling & trauma.



If you see any of the following changes, bring them to your palm's attention.

Stretchmarks on teeth, puckering of bones, bulging of wrists.

An admission that has changed position somewhere in your lower region. Inflammation of memories, urticaria, or allergic reaction to lotion-infused tissues.

The greyness of your emotive wounds should glide inside your amygdala without any discomfort!

**Look on the bright side!**

**I'm here for you!**

**You matter!**

**Keep on... keeping on!**

**Where there's a will there's**

---

**1 Tips.**

Cover any exposed sheets of fingernail with a water-based lubricant such as K-Y Jelly, coconut oil, beeswax, agave, or someone else's spit, which can make swiping away the sorrows easier the first few times. Don't use unprotected wireless connections. Always read the most up-to-date diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders thoroughly before publishing any eruptions of sad. If depression feels uncomfortable it is probably not inserted far enough into your cervix/prostate. Try again with a synonym such as despondent, melancholia or low. Invert your language to something less drippy. You may find that your grey eases into a lighter shade of achromatic.

in defense of art

replace body with round of applause
slap deportation of immunized bones
draw map of grade nine depression
sloppy kiss cartographer for compass
brand benefactors and advertisements on forearms
non-narrate the spaces of gender
utilize humor when categorizing medicinal habits
call framework pre-reconstruction
index teeth as artifacts due to lack of care
belly is a sanctuary of bent laws
how paradoxical is this panic
what border are your shoulders crossing
hybrid outcasts called lips
terrories or terrorists
problematize the concept of veins
mixed-media thighs
decolonize wounds

what is the occupation of this anatomy
invent inventory of what is missing
does this morning breath perplex
what is the chosen medium
can this blood be a contribution gift
pulsate sweat into curved signature
<del>it is far more interesting when you</del> alienate audience
enforce live ritual of dramatized history
curators fill in gaps of forced memory
record visceral reaction on comment cards
photograph face interrupting medium
exercise risk through prohibited camera flash
embody theory of missed communications or
anthropologized dysfunction

## texture of a mushroom

Talk about your fleshy. Reference your spores, your fungus, the underside of your gills. Are you with or without stems. Do you bear fruit and what do you cultivate. Are you a toadstool. A chanterelle. A boy. An oyster. A hen of the woods. A girl. A portabello marinated in jerk sauce. Are you a hybrid. Black trumpet. Porcini. Intersex. Are you gourmet and expensive. Do they call you truffle. Are you confusing and blurry. Are they slapping you into boxes. Do you grow in bunches. Are you white or beige or grey. Do you hunt hair or does it mount your cheeks without injections. Are you meaty. Is your texture dense or slippery. How about enoki. Transgender. Would you announce yourself as smoky and desirable. Gender non-conforming. Are you poisonous or trying to exist within all these confirmations. How about bumpy or uneven. Genderqueer. How far will you commit to this appearance. Will you starve. Will you boil. Will you remove. Will you steam. Will you inject. Will you pickle. Will you pass. Will you braise. Will you bind. Will you sear. Will you rename. Will you raw. Will you risk. Will you sauté. Will you carve out. Will you confirm. Will you conform. Will you hold it all inside. Will you bruise. Will you odor. Will you nourish. Will you wilt. Will you go on. Will you go on.

## Carpus

Wrists are depressive and dramatic. Some wrists fit inside other humans, while others are too shy to make a commitment. Wrists are romantic when they gather up stains. And some wrists are troublemakers. Some wrists so desperately want to travel; they detach. Wrists are hungry in the way they swallow ink and scars. Some wrists are photogenic, while others prefer to hide beneath sleeves. Wrists prefer you address them as joint-connectors or cuffs or carpus. Some wrists are bisexual, while others prefer not to choose. Wrists are without appetite or judgment of body type. Some wrists are called dainty while others hold to corpulence. Wrists can be wallflowers and comics. Some wrists are nudists. There are wrists who are masochists, maneuvering themselves so they are forced into stillness. These are the wrists to stay in contact with.



## Mix tape

- Track 1: crossed-out lung
- Track 2: Basquiat just because
- Track 3: your tears, homosexual
- Track 4: ghosts of new jersey  
(performed inside out)
- Track 5: when will you remove your  
glasses and I admit to trauma  
(the remix)
- Track 6: seals to cover the potholes
- Track 7: the next morning, my genitals  
were slurring  
(only slang and ropes)
- Track 8: neurotic white cream  
(friday evening)

shot, left

Underneath skin—  
dry winter cracked thigh  
muscle  
muzzles fat

Dear left and right breast,  
Doctor found a lump  
in Mother's left, and  
I no longer want you.  
Doctor wrote referral  
slip for a different doctor  
to examine both, and I  
flatten you down.

The testosterone kisses.  
Wet tongue .3 milliliters  
borrowed from lover who  
shoots it into you.

Doctor scheduled a  
lumpectomy on a Thursday  
in New Jersey and I  
calculate the cost of  
cutting you.

You want to feel  
anything but  
how you felt right  
before it.

You want to feel  
the musculature  
of masculine  
anything but  
soft or meek  
or loose.

Doctor removed the tumor  
and surrounding tissue  
with utensils and anesthesia  
while I wonder why you no  
longer feel right on me.

Mother wore a sports bra  
for two weeks and I have  
been wearing this black  
binder for two years, seven  
months and some days.  
Doctor prescribed pain  
medication for Mother—  
which, reminding her of my  
addiction, I asked her nicely  
to hide from my view—  
and I've been researching  
procedures to pull you  
off of me.

In the morning, there is ache  
where the hormone  
housed itself

Doctor mammogrammed  
her breasts and called  
them healthy again. I call  
you brutal intruders.

You begin to study  
where hair could arrive  
if you were to continue.

Doctor recommended six  
weeks of radiation therapy  
to Mother to remind the  
bad cells to stay away. I  
search for sliding-scale  
therapist to diagnose this.

If only the T wasn't borrowed.  
If only more liquid were available

Now, Mother wears pink  
bracelet on right wrist  
labeling her cancer  
survivor, and I wonder  
if there is such a thing as  
gender survivor—getting  
through days of Miss and  
Ma'am.

If only doors did not come with pre-  
prescribed labels, forcing a choice.  
*This one or that.*  
When all that feels right  
is the slash

Mother knows all about  
your demolition of chest  
and your allergy to  
pronouns. But. She still  
reminds you of that day  
on your fourteenth year  
when she took you to that  
department store to train  
them. Even then, you  
tried to itch them away.

friday evening with approaching facial hair and nervous fingers

Yolks of clouds foam on your cheeks

neurotic white cream  
waterlog the timid hairs  
hunting  
your smooth.

*Rake away from the direction of growth, you instruct.*

We skip step one  
which moisturizes  
head straight toward  
the cream.

Slowly,  
I coat  
your skin  
in balm  
meant to  
lift  
up hair.

I mow your face with aloe-strip double blade razor  
& shutter at the sharpness.

Silently,  
I mourn the tall dark one,  
which lived for several months  
at the right corner  
of your mouth.

You tell me the testosterone will soon call forth  
more hair,  
and I imagine you in beard/moustache combination

On a Thursday, you shop for facial hair  
on others' faces  
while I lust after chests  
chiseled on men  
wondering if when mine might

look  
that way.

When all your hairs are ripped  
up and removed,  
I rub aftershave  
scent of male  
alongside all the flesh fondled  
with metal blade.

magic 8 ball

Purchase a plane ticket that saves you a seat on the blue vein like a power line protruding from your right bicep

Does skin need a harness?

Gently press forked tongue to knife wound and rummage around for storage space big enough to unfold wails

How can comfort shape shift into hiding spaces?

Choose between overcast and basting stitch to conceal the rage of reverberated taunts

Can electricity save us from deaf skin?

“When I was fourteen, boys bullied away bones. Skeletons can be disrupted just from the echoes of mean, *spit toward* each distorted hunch. Interrupt. Disturb. Intervene the memories that remove yourself from your self.

How often do you pull out teeth to carve your way out of this screech?

\*

\*

\*

---

\* yes. without a doubt. very doubtful. it is certain. my sources say no. better not tell you now. concentrate and ask again. most likely. don't count on it. as I see it, yes. yes, certainly. ask again later. outlook good. no, definitely not.

necessity to nude away the parts which howl

Dipping skinny  
venus spotlight.

Two billion ways to  
locate stars.

Limbs fly through water  
: propellers of flesh strokes.

Lips  
singed from mosquito nip.

Soft water dries from embers'  
flight of bonfire spirit animals.

Moon light too shy to compete  
with planets

but if it were to slide  
into view

its gleam would stop  
on breasts, milky drips

terrible swimmers, but  
floating

nipples like hooks, digging in  
to tread the rest along.

311 words of your life thus far

In the crawlspace where you hid your childhood, a perforated cicatrix escaped. When exactly did you learn the variation of cloud formations in the sky? You had an allergy to perfume and sincerity. It could have been a false memory that you considered castrating your site in order to boost the metabolism of your hearing. How often you bathe is of no one's concern. There was that time you were caught stealing memories from your next-door neighbor's walk-in closet. No, you never chose marriage, though you almost ran off with a suburban sex addict to Germany but you had a difficult time committing to pronouns and leather. It could have been a false memory that you hid whispers inside your bedroom closet wall, which you dug out each day with a fork and spoon. How often you floss is of no one's concern. You had a difficult time understanding where your fingers go, so you chose pillows and plush stuffed animals to rub against in order to moan like the ones on late night cable television. You considered an existence underground, living beneath the buildings, which overwhelmed your neck. It could have been a false memory that you picnicked on a highway somewhere between New Jersey and Wyoming. How often you binge on razor blades is of no one's concern. There was that time you took a semi-erotic shower with your roommate who was questioning her sexuality because she ran out of other things to question. How often you tried to hang yourself is of no one's concern. You cannot recall when your forehead began to wrinkle like high-tide ocean current. It could have been a false

memory that you weighed your palms down with torn-up pages from a bible found on a stoop in Brooklyn, thinking the best-selling psalms would mend you toward something different than what it was.



that film strip

You were absent that day there was a filmstrip on how to get through all this.

You were absent the day they taught about blood, bisexuality, and body hair.

You were absent that day they explained how to survive an internalized attack.

You missed out on a presentation on safe oxygen intake and the symptoms of geniophobia.

You never learned how to properly handle men or the aftershock of aged parts.

You often forget to wash your hands because no one advised you on this.

You missed the tutorial on how to insert a tampon, make a proper casserole and the dangers of oral sex.

You haven't owned a hairbrush in over a decade. You have more knots on your head than historical dates memorized. You were absent that day, remember?

You rarely look both ways when crossing intersections. You forget about stop signs and traffic lights because you were absent that day.

You were absent that day they talked about appetite suppressants, strength training and the appropriate presentations of assigned gender. Yes, you've experimented with hair barrettes, but you still do not understand control-top pantyhose or garter belts. Must I remind you, you were absent that day.

You were told it was epic. You were told that filmstrip addressed every topic you wondered about: the consideration of hymens, toxic shock syndrome and preservatives.

Three people fainted, but that may not have been connected to the filmstrip and their collapse.

Everyone was quoting it! Some even created parodies. You tried to memorize the summaries, but everyone spoke too softly to be remembered.

You had the stomach flu or a test you forgot to study for.

There was no make-up day to watch it.

Some say that filmstrip no longer exists. Some tease that it never did and that day that you were absent was nothing special.

You are just looking for a reason to understand not knowing.

here is how I lived in my body this day

It was a day unlike Sunday, but it was Thursday, and it was raining but it felt like sunburn.

There were bees dressed as mayflies, and there were two humans dressed as three puddles placed in the middle of a forgotten street in the summertime, but it felt like three weeks before winter.

All the shop windows revealed reflections of hummingbirds and hunger pains, and everyone forgot to notice the signature in the corner from the one who arrived at all this imagination.

At two minutes past four in the afternoon, someone tripped over a collection of bones in the shape of a singing gazelle.

Later on, there was a bruise sharing the colors of lesion and slate strung in the sky like a constellation that no one seemed to care about.

There was a hesitant stain in the shape of sumac which, when addressed accordingly, also looked like two-thirds of the great lakes, though less voluminous and far more salty.

Reluctantly, there was a conversation about bulbs forgotten in flowerpots, left by a compost station near a market on a Wednesday that could have been a Saturday, but was not.

Between the hours of four a.m. and suppertime, eight-legged tardigrades, visitors from 1773, silently mapped out their survival from radiation, starvation, and Germans.

It was on this day, that water droplets falling from argumentative cloud formations created the music of a theremin,

and nobody could photograph or click it into existence because all the batteries had been removed and even fingertips had been plucked like castrated cigar tips. But it happened.

The bees collecting bones. Poison ivy puddles. Water bears off mountaintops.

(it can be) difficult to be [sometimes]

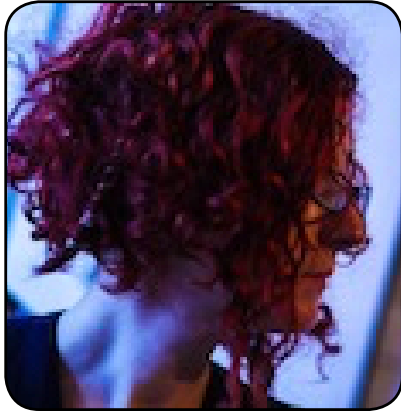
Take fourteen hours out of your day to create a manual for making it through a mood. Call up the lover who always mispronounced your favorite word and remind them the importance of expiration dates, clean sheets, and the texture of toast. Mediate an argument between humans you never met before but feel the desire to restore. Give your mouth away just for an evening and forget about your allergy to men, moustaches and margarine. In order to make new friends, pretend you understand how to download or upload and logout immediately. On the second day of Autumn, you will receive an unmarked scab from someone who used to know seventeen things about you; this will be their version of a love letter. Do not eat it. Or if you do, tell no one of this. The next time you weep will be three years two months and four days from now. It will be attributed to southern women or a misplaced pronoun. Take felted megaphone and press against burgundy mouth. Push out every version of queer you can think of and let whatever still forms leak out like bits of unformed song. Audition a chorus of revelers. Parade around your city in every version of rainbow your skin illuminates. Sometimes, to be a human is to remain even in the moments when there is nothing left to do but repeat the echoes of carnival reminding you who you are.



**Thank you to the editors of the following journals  
for accepting some of the poems in this book:**

*Adrienne journal, The Outrider Review, Apogee,  
The Good Men Project, Hermeneutic Chaos Literary  
Journal, cream city review, Wild Age Press, Vitality  
magazine*

## AUTHOR BIO



**Aimee Herman** is a queer performance artist, poet, and writing/literature teacher at Bronx Community College. Aimee has been widely published in journals and anthologies including *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics*, as well as two full-length books of poetry, *meant to wake up feeling* and *to go without blinking*, and the chapbook *rooted* (Dancing Girl Press). In addition to writing, Aimee is the host/curator of Queer Art Organics, a monthly series in NYC featuring LGBTQ writers/performers, and facilitates a regular creative writing workshop at Brooklyn Public Library.



Essay Press is dedicated to publishing artful, innovative and culturally relevant prose. We are interested in publishing single essays that are too long to be easily published in journals or magazines, but too short to be considered book-length by most publishers. We are looking for essays that have something to say, essays that both demand and deserve to stand alone. We particularly welcome work that extends or challenges the formal protocols of the essay, including, but not limited to: lyric essays or prose poems; experimental biography and autobiography; innovative approaches to journalism, experimental historiography, criticism, scholarship and philosophy.

Essay Press, like other small independent presses, needs support from its committed readers! Please consider [donating to Essay Press](#), so we can continue to publish writing that we and our readers admire.

