INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

Anthology of 14 contemporary U.S. poems
Contemporary experimental poetry in the U.S. is so diverse in mode, tone, and conception that no introductory generalization will suffice. But having chosen fourteen poems I admire, all published in the current decade, I noticed post facto that they are all meta-poetic. Nada Gordon thieves Marianne Moore’s anti-arspoetica. Susan Howe’s “That This” presents, in part, the this-ness of the writing. Rae Armantrout’s post-God/post-mother linguistic smiting reminds her and us that she owes her writing life to a mother who taught her to wring sweetness from syllables as a kind of maternal sacrifice. Tyrone Williams “scribbles furiously to a mortgaged future”. Brenda Hillman’s own words fall out of sentences when aerial bombs fall on their targets. And the poem I chose to represent Dorothea Lasky is itself titled “ArsPoetica”. Poems about poetry need not indicate an escape from the world. On the contrary, these are mostly political poems – a language of politics and a politics of language. Laynie Browne gives us the real Hillary Clinton, lines Hillary would say, except that key words are left blank so that readers can be competent co-creators.

Al Filreis
University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia USA
I wanted to tell the veterinary assistant about the cat video Jason sent me
But I resisted for fear she'd think it strange
I am very lonely
Yesterday my boyfriend called me, drunk again
And interspersed between ringing tears and clinginess
He screamed at me with a kind of bitterness
No other human had before to my ears
And told me that I was no good
Well maybe he didn't mean that
But that is what I heard
When he told me my life was not worthwhile
And my life's work the work of the elite.
I say I want to save the world but really
I want to write poems all day
I want to rise, write poems, go to sleep,
Write poems in my sleep
Make my dreams poems
Make my body a poem with beautiful clothes
I want my face to be a poem
I have just learned how to apply
Eyeliner to the corners of my eyes to make them appear wide
There is a romantic abandon in me always
I want to feel the dread for others
I can feel it through song
Only through song am I able to sum up so many words into a few
Like when he said I am no good
I am no good
Goodness is not the point anymore
Holding on to things
Now that's the point
Wild Kingdom

Tyrone Williams

From Adventures of Pi, Dos Madres Press 2011

for Milan Kundera

This is your foreign correspondent, Aristotle, for The Poetics, reporting live from the Mediterranean where the skulls and bones of a few Egyptians crown the tradeships of His Majesty, wave back and forth: starfish – moons – Februaries.

To my right, our military advisor, Hernando Cortez, oversees operations at the Aztec/Mexican border where to the left of a stone no longer rising from water a dove collects its nest egg upon the skeleton of a hummingbird.

To my left, our scribe-in-residence, St. Nickle-and-Dime-“Em-To-Debt, scribbles furiously to a mortgaged future where the last rites of man and of-man are delivered at the near-twin births of the lyric and gunpowder.
Ephemeral Stream

Elizabeth Willis

This is the way water
thinks about the desert.
The way the thought of water
gives you something
to stumble on. A ghost river.
A sentence trailing off
toward lower ground.
A finger pointing
at the rest of the show.

I wanted to read it.
I wanted to write a poem
and call it "Ephemeral Stream"
and dedicate it to you
because you made of this
imaginary creek
a hole so deep
it looked like a green eye
taking in the storm,
a poem interrupted
by forgiveness.

It's not over yet.
A dream can spend
all night fighting off
the morning. Let me
start again. A stream
may be a branch or a beck,
a'crick or kill or lick,
asyke, a runnel. It pours
through a corridor. The door
is open. The keys
are on the dashboard.
He sees what others do not see. He marries a blind woman who cannot contradict what he says he sees. He sees his hands even when he is not awake but dreaming, fists open or closed. He sees how people's bodies speak even when they are not talking but waiting, when people think they are blending in. He sees that often he is the only person paying close attention. He has always been observant and comes from a long line of observant people.

For instance
lip licking
eye twitching
crotch touching
arm holding
neck bent to one side
chin lowering
chin holding
chin rubbing
leg crossing
leg shaking
knee rubbing
ankle rubbing
ankle rotating
bottom shifting
underpants snapping
sitting up straight
sloughing
leaning forward
hip holding
hip akimbo
hip dipping
neck rolling
Hands between the legs protectively as one sleeps.
lip licking (pace)
eye twitching (arrhythmia)
crotch touching (length of time)
arm holding (angle of repose)
neck bent to one side (degree)
chin lowering (impulse control)
chin holding (fixed)
chin rubbing (heat)
leg crossing (closed circuit)
leg shaking (tempo)
knee rubbing (wish)
ankle rubbing (erase)
ankle rotating (ignition)
bottom shifting (agreement/disagreement)
underpants snapping (punctuation)
sitting up straight (alarm)
sloughing (archaeology)
leaning forward (edge search)
hip holding (measure)
hip akimbo (skeptical)
hip dipping (stroll for the people)
neck rolling (enemy sighted)
Hands between the legs protectively as one sleeps.
That This

Susan Howe

From That This, New Directions 2011

Day is a type when visible
objects change then put

on form but the anti-type
That thing not shadowed

The way music is formed of
cloud and fire once actually

concrete now accidental as
half truth or as whole truth

Is light anything like this
stray pencil commonplace

copy as to one aberrant
onward-gliding mystery

A secular arietta variation
Grass angels perish in this

harmonic collision because
non-being cannot be ‘this’

Not spirit not space finite
Not infinite to those fixed –
That this millstone as such
Quiet which side on which –

Is one mind put into another
in us unknown to ourselves
by going about among trees
and fields in moonlight or in
a garden to ease distance to
fetch home spiritual things

That a solitary person bears
witness to law in the ark to

an altar of snow and every
age or century for a day is
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82 / 92
I, too, dislike it, although there are things I dislike
even more: toe rings, avocado, gold jewelry, sweetened muesli,
tattoos, the smell of fairy liquid... fat men with long hair,
meringue, merengue, yellow snow or dirty snow, airline food,
Tiger Woods, the US Postal Service, Giuliani, fundamentalist,
haircuts, baby cloths... creepy eyes...
wine.

I dislike that Elvis never bought ME a Cadillac.

I dislike using “upscale” to describe something because it is a
lazy way of describing something, even this upscale poem.

And I dislike most of all having found,
without even looking for it,
its giant eye a milky, unseeing orb
and little winglets, spikes of feathers
just poking through the creamy down,
the little fledging – dead as poetry –
on the sun-drenched deck
outside my writing room.

Finding it, however, and with a perfect contempt for it, I
discovered in

it after all, a place for the poem to become aggressive.

I grasped it with my left hand and squeeze, until those
unseeing eyes

POPPED out of their sockets, and the minuscule feathers
came out on my palm, mingling with its sparrow blood. This
experience is important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon it but because
I am rolling and rolling in a field of bourgeois self-esteem
laughing in the sunlight, caring not that my Eileen Fisher
linen tunic gets as wrinkled as a newborn babe. I am
comfortable! I love my life!

the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
don't mind

holding on upside down to a dead baby bird –
a nuthatch perhaps, that has perched inside one's urethra, like

elephants pushing into
a weak vulva or

a wild horse learning
how to sing.

the skin of the poem twitches like a horse

insolent and trivial like 'imaginary magazine with real
toadies in them,'

I've talked/typed/whatevered what I like: red stuff, food,
making stuff, sugar, the odd spot of funk dancing...

but ah... poetry

for all its rawness, I still dislike it:

the fledglings leap,
tiny suicide bombers,
into the great maw
of banausic
night.
Mother's Day

Rae Armantrout

From Just Saying, Wesleyan 2013

I wring the last sweetness
from syllables
and consume it before you.

*  

I make sense
like a scorpion
and the sun
will be smitten.

*  

If I appear to address you
while quoting an old text,
I am indistinguishable
from nature
and therefore sublime.

*  

If I reveal myself mercilessly,
what will I not transcend?

*  

Like God, I will leave
an arc
of implication
The Real Hillary (Hilarity Memoir)  
Laynie Browne

EVERY DAY she rose early ate a large ______, neither living, nor history.
    Her trail went through cool ______.
    As his wife, I wanted to wring his neck. But he was not only my ______, he was also my ______.
    She drove the long-haired interns out along the ______.
But all that I’ve noticed, she said, except my own competition, was ______ and ________ in my bedroom.
    Who planted all of these ______, _______ wanted to know.
    Once she was late getting them ______.
    What does a special prosecutor do? And she was answered by ______.

Her relations said that she didn’t _______ enough through the heavy mist.
    That was fine for her lungs, which grew very ________.
    You don’t need any ________ and _________ her husband said, you can make ______ with your ________.
    I’m sure there are many other – even competing – views of the events and people I describe. That’s someone else’s ________.
    Then she set out crawling over the ________ stalking ________.
    All you need is a very wet ________.
    She would hide behind thistles and sometimes she would ________ until you would have thought she was a ________.
    You can go on piling one ________ on another and make a ________.

    She put on his kilt in a hurry and away they went into the ________. Wealth and poverty. It’s beginning to look like a ________ already.
    Stop turning healthcare into ________.
    I know, her husband said, it can’t be helped though. What hold it together is ________.
Iphigenia in Sodus

John Ashbrey

From Quick Question, Ecco 2012

Why does that name sound so familiar?
If I were you I shouldn’t worry, or ask.

But – isn’t that collusion?
Well, yes, technically it is,

but we’re a long way from truth here.
Well, it all seems right, but we’ll have to

put different bodies on the gentlemen –
something that speaks to truth, as she is now,

which is how we all had envisioned her:
wrapped in jade strips, more or less flyblown,

somewhat sloppy about the mouth these days.
Excuse me, I had issues,

but then the doors sagged, the window frames
had disappeared a long time ago into the murk

of this age. Seen now, she pivots frantically
near where we – they – arrive to consult the oracle,

making small talk the while, about how whose
elections needed shortening, and how all this

streamed away into cozier times, in ways kind to me,
before chopping them down.
Synchronicity All Over Again

Charles Bernstein

From Recalculating, Chicago 2013

It would always begin by not
being there, hiding behind the lot
that just sold for twice the reserve—
as in echo will get you bounce,
pouncing to the growl of faded
tunics flayed on the piano by
old-time losses and newly garnered
spools. I put this disc on before
but it never sounded like this,
sounded like you cared, sounded
like the ache in artichoke or the
service at a schul. Don’t even go
there, we’ve been over that
a trillion times, and I still don’t
see how this connects,
how you expect that I would
understand, or ever go full
fathom for you lugubrious
form of wit. It would always
begin that way, as if you’d
heard it without listening,
somewhere in the inner spaces
of your disattention, the only
place paradise has been known
to coalesce, just moments before
the rent is dew.
Orgasms for Peace
اورגזמה لأجل السلام
The Body Politic Loses her Hair

Brenda Hillman

Words started to fall out of sentences in earnest around the time of the first aerial bombs. They kept falling for most of the 20th century. When I read the word drone, my hair falls out in solidarity with old words. Stingless singles honey bees [Apis Mellifera] or the music drones on & on, but now (at the top of Google), unmanned, where the 'un' in the 'unmanned' looks like little pinchers, the 'u' & the 'n' like the fingers on a throttle when on of our soldiers bombs a target's wedding while his family members are eating potatoes with tamarind, cardamom, onion, & the target's family falls. The pilot goes home to his dinner. Many are saying look the other way about the drones but my hairs fall out when i look the other way. They absorb zippy displays of colorful internet pain-sperm. The medical industry blames falling hairs on hormone loss alone. They want women to apply a patch of estrogen extracted from penned-up horses. This is the problem with trying to make things simple. Some things get less simple when you think about them, especially if words turn out to be what they used to call an evil twin. Words need air, as Proust noted. You can give the word drone more air on a sign as Janet is doing here in Nevada while a drones flies over.

You can burn your fallen hair when a general indicated that some folks are killed so we can all be free. Actually, he didn't say folks, he said civilians. My hairs are a little too free so they fall. i burn fallen hairs on wedding candles as sacrifice to Sumerian fire deities –burning hair smells like nothing else & on fire it looks like "happy birthday" slgira at mubarak.

in Dari: yoingyoinggreeting the flame in smoky sparkly simple sizzle star script ~~~
A. DO THE STARS BEGIN TO FALL

1. (thinking thinking)
   Touch Screen to Begin
   geekslo-mo
   continuity comes later
   hodgepodge
   enucleate
   lickety-split
   skullfuck
   caught with more meat in your mouth
   gisto facto
   zigzag
   fake arms

2. (thinking loving)
   at home he's a condom
   put some slink in it
   blurt past
   wearing a little furry mask
   or exactly what you do or exactly what happens
   so we're on a first name basis
   meaning is just nostalgia now
   double-dutch
   actin' like
   that's weird, I said

3. (thinking protest)
   say 'Speak to an Agent'
   gearsgears up
   all too eagle
   I will step on your face
function fucks form
cross-dressing neutrinos
oh I can't deal with this shit
icing on the cake
objects need adventure too
investigationalizing
tomorrowland
which you totally nailed
well, run the experiment again
I could not have said a random string of words better
get to your space station
if I get through a few sentences a day...
The Summer I Fell In Love with the Young Pepi in the Backyard and How it Informed my Philosophy of Language

Cecilia Corrigan

Isn't it terrible how lonely I am? My Pepi I pretended to know your name
A true heart doesn't know who is murmuring,
Picture me murmuring.
My bad spelling in youth is connected with the whole rest of my character.
I want to do everything to it, never have I ever been a margin
when I smoke no smoke comes out
When I love language, no whoa comes out.

Some things are invisible.
No, they're not.

I must not make a case for it,
I cannot describe what an eerie impression
the h in the English word ghost makes on me.
and I must not make fun of it

When the word is spoken, it doesn't sound particularly
(schlect)

special; but if I see it written before me, the effect never fails:

I think I am seeing a spirit.
Oh, I'm sorry, my lexicon fell out.

Der hatteschonmitPepi.
Sometimes things are, really,

back then, (and not about this tree or table)

I can define them in terms of their uhm, use, usually, note to self
This is a movie do not fear it.
This is a movie so come to the movie theater.
Love, The H in


Here we are in the theater with our guns, and the dark and no one no one no one. Oh, and when we speak we don't incorrectly, it is exact it is 3 sticks, clear and high for a note, cracking.
In the long grass of our fathers we must lie down with our use.

As if sense were an atmosphere accompany, hey are you ignoring me?
No? Oh, you died. In August. In 1914. They always die

Not as in Errors but as in outside of judgement, (schlect)
His child assistant brings him a stone.
I do not know him in this photograph but he stood near me.
His features change into popping tears, and my features, well,

What I meant to prove is that I was unable to prove what I wanted to—
See you tomorrow, difference.
See you tenderness, the difference looks too slight.
It is like saying: non-actual.
It is surely remarkable that people don't realize earlier that sooner or later it's going to rain anyhow.

Music, sound, Marry me, numbers, or be my child.
They always die! Am I the they make fun of me. I wanted them to address me
To show him my teeth in headquarters.
Back then, when I began talking about the 'world';
and not about this tree. Formally.
I don't love quiet, I love you I think, numbers! You are the beautiful ones. But you never tell me your name. You only say like "there is a secret" you weren't our gardener, babe, you were too young!

What else did I want? What else did I want but to keep something higher spellbound in my words. Wait, but


But we fell asleep here one time and woke up our mouths were open this is the past, to the extent I saw myself as Jew

Pride revisited
I was outside, and the tomatoes and the roses, white, and then in the morning the song went
