

IMPROV 2011



ANTHOLOGY OF GRASS ROOTS POETS

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PERSPECTIVES

Real—

my perspective

we meet at a
coffeshopartgalleryfolkmusicgig
I am charmed by
your perspective your
poeticmusicalintellectual
ramblings
Destiny
crooks its pinky
I follow

Surreal—

my manipulations

there's a snake
in the apple
deadly sweet crunchy
I look at it you us
through the wrong end
of a telescope
it makes things smaller

Unreal—

my awakening

I unzip your skin
it falls shrivels blows away
you slither out
wrap around my neck
squeeze

Anti-real—
my perspective

snake tail

in its mouth
full circle

Teresa Louis

REAL

INDELIBLE

Reality
Whets desire

You entice
Imagination

John Blair

EAST LIGHT

my father wakes impossibly early
eats the same breakfast each morning

in winter months Noni fixes it for her son
3 minute egg leaf patterned cup
all-bran coffee with cream behind him
low cold sun slants through back

yard elms rectangles of the new day
spread across the tablecloth glint a
hole in the left pane

small perfectly round with a vague
history *someone* (who exactly?)
shot a gun (22 caliber BB?)
here explanations trail off

Pa escapes to work towing a cloud
of steamy exhaust leaves Noni to me
my breakfast hot cereal melted butter
stolen sugar

by the time I leave for school the sun
has traveled south floods her
chair with light all morning she

darns wool socks hunting season
imminent afternoon light drifts
shadows over her stitching

she readies dinner for the family
the bullet hole almost invisible

Hilary DePolo

ICE

Frozen water stinging hard
Needles bursting from the dark
Solidifying degrees to fossilize water

Weston Urquidi

SUNSET

Colors of light flash
In streaks of warm pink and red,
The sun dips between
The edges of grey mountains—
Silence envelopes the earth.

Brenna White

PRAIRIE PERSPECTIVE

Laramie—I was lonesome there
but I didn't need to be.
West of Medicine Bow dry snow
hides out in the folds
of Rattle Snake Hills, but other than that
moisture is just an old story they tell
to chase away the sound of clattering bones.

The rails are cold, but still buzzing
where east met west
and Hidatsa footprints disappear
into the dust of long gone buffalo.
I huddle over a gas hose.

The bleak and reckless sun,
or the dark clouds of early December—
either way—it's a temptation
to go mad. Go ahead,
pull your collar up,
but the wind will still find you
like a dusty swirl
of last year's chamisa blooms.

I'm looking to put my hands
around a warm cup of smooth-waisted coffee.
I'm learning to substitute.

By late afternoon I drop
down into Colorado. The peaks there
are gold and guarded; the Front Range
is a prostitute coping with violation.
I had no idea
what destitution was
until I entered that opulent sprawl.

Carbon County, I could turn around,
be standing in the middle
of a familiar nowhere by nightfall.

I could practice gratitude
like a kangaroo mouse sniffing at snow.

Stewart S. Warren

UNREAL

Obscene how this break in the rose screams—

THE NIGHT ROOM

The room is anchored
with books, a vase of red,
yellow, blue flowers. A flock
of cards stirs on the wide ledge
of the window looking
down ten floors to squares
of pavement, and across
to other framed and lighted dramas.
The only book within reach
is no match for the restless
silence. When I lever the bed up
and down, the air is not impressed
because I'm not in my own
gown. When I angle the mattress
to Cassiopeia, the walls inch
closer. The rubber wheels of night
carts approach and Doppler by
my cracked-open door. I'm sutured
here, my paperback mystery
refusing to tell a story. I read
my plastic bracelet,
name, birthdate, repeat the word
room (room room) as if I could shift
dark into higher gear, but this
place has absorbed too many Os.

Veronica Patterson

A KNOT WORKS ITSELF OUT/INTO

a cotton loop a thread in the floral
pattern of the hall rug waits
years beneath the surface a memory
you can't make out

you catch a toe a blue thread
pulls unravels
an ugly mark tears
down the runner

lengthens widens stares
the rug rises flips its
center convex no longer stretched
along the floor your world as you know
it slips

obscene how this break in the rose screams—

Connie Boyle

FROM THE CENTER

To stand
in the precise center of a fan
long enough,
lighter particles
 whipping their never-
 ending circles
will begin to see you
as movement,
themselves as inert.

When I close one eye,
the other tries to compensate
and you become the background
in my photograph.

John Sibley Williams

THE TURNSTILE OF CONSEQUENCE

I entered into this agreement with both feet, slipping (nonetheless) on ideas of salvation. The Salvation Army pounded on my door, offering cheap shoes to replace my slippers. I was puzzled at their generosity. What happened next can only be defined as paranormal—the grey matron slapped my face when I asked for another shoe to go with the one she was giving me—a dead woman’s red boots should never be separated. I can see where this ends—two of us in one pair of delicious boots, hopping around with only one shod foot. I can’t say why I dislike this scenario—just have no respect for the things that happen after (or before) the things that have already happened. I spin through this gate with only a small token in my hand.

Zan Bockes

SURREAL

*Brush the mud off your teeth
Please remove your feet
Before coming inside*

I WALK UPRIGHT

Consider the wading birds
Sometimes it doesn't hurt
To bend over backwards
It's simply a choice

It's true . . .
I eat bread with
Butter and sugar
Talk about cows

Sun crosses the heavens
East to West
Green and blue cows face
North and South half the time

I walk upright
Complain about my feet
One foot – of time
One foot – of darkness and light

Nowhere do they say
Brush the mud off your teeth
Please remove your feet
Before coming inside

Gordon Holladay

WATCHING DUSK

Flotsam jetsam
gin and tonics
on the deck

Captain Nemo
torments his organ
the same tunes every night

We talk you and I
melodies free us
from time through time

Stark pine boughs
arrange their faces
breathing mythical realities

Kites and swallows
growl as dogs hover
slavering jade air

Chewing memories
salt, lemon, cinnamon
the sky's a traffic jam

Charcoal vortex
millions of eyes
twitching grabbing

History pounces laughing
daubed in smears of incense
we cannot run away

Pat Maslowski

SUDDENLY

she wakes
tangled in her hair

dreams of quicksilver fishes
slither past memory
whisper threnodies
for untouched pleasure

tendrils of seaweed
wrapped round her head
muffle sighs
and lamentations

ai, here the cheek
roughened with age
guarding the stroking
of laughing young men

and the schools of
silvery fish flash by
mouths agape
swallowing greedily

Janet Sunderland

THE DEAD ARE MADE OF LAKE

*They ripple
Down the air*

*Like an Escher
Stair*

They lie like shadows
At the foot of their names

The mountain
Is tombstone
For the lake

But the lake
Contains
The face in its small
Dead
Mirror

One rock
Above the surface
One on the surface
One below

One bridge
Another made of snow
Another made of shadow

*Ghosts
In old granaries
Ride light
From high
Broken windows*

*Ghosts
In my family
Ride blue
My mother
The clematis*

My grandmother
The stately
Delphinium

In the dream
I smoke a pipe
You are a nun

Reflecting
Our fairy
Friar
Roots

We live in a stone
House
On a lake fed by thin
Waterfalls of ghosts
Our shadows are blue and
Shaped like flowers

Katherine West

WAKING DREAM

Marshy waters lap close,
licking up the light,
too harsh for heavy eyes.

Truth seeps slowly
through mortared cracks,
breaking up boundaries
where we breathe unsettled dust
from someone else's land.
A knife floats by,
gold engraved.
It cuts through bricks,
through blood and salt
and gleams a name
so long forgotten.

Crocodiles are feeding on the night.
Laughter drips from trees
into jealous mouths.
The loved one, too, is snapped
by ivory teeth.
Dragonflies returning from the East
light upon the water
like kisses, blue fluorescent,
rippling chants from distant shores,
echoing . . . ever . . . inward.

At the center, murky waters clear.
The crocodiles are still,
mouths dumb,
their hearts numb and
lulled to sleep.

At dawn we find them
washed red upon the shore,
bellies slashed in time
by a name at last remembered.

Anita Jepson-Gilbert

CHAOS IN B FLAT

(a suite in three parts)

part one

there are no problems
only solutions dilutions
if I tell you the
sky the sky is
falling no the sky is
singing offkey no the sky
is falling falling
no the earth is rising

the sound seeps from
the gap a mouth
that will devour will
open to scream to swallow
the light the music
colors that vibrate where would
could children dance

only believe the keys that
fell and fall
into the cracks
between the lines
and the solution is?

part two

the rain falls up
filling my eyes with
wet brings to your
my bones resonance
resonance to
dance sing make echoes
in the night

the scent of purple
slides around us

and we can no longer
hear see the cracks
the cracks ever widening
in earth making an end run
catching the stars that
falling make the night the
night the white night
of yesterdays gone and

the widening cracks
filling with sweet pale petals
that crawl dance
make love and re-
sonate the long endless stream
of white night and
the rain falling up
and your eyes opening
closing opening closing
opening
closing

part three

the light from Venus travels on
the sound of the saxophone takes
a long time a long time to
shine sing dance while
we walk loudly talk
agendas of time past

Eve knew Eve knew it
would all work out
in due time it's about
time it's about time
that has brought us here it's about time
that has put the grey in
the sky your eyes your
selfsong in the way we
lose the hours the sun
comes up or not

the birds come home
or fall to the sidewalk in
greysmog blinding it's
about time it's about the
time we knew we
knew we could end it and
Venus and Mars and the rest
of those places can
not give a damn a dam to
curse or hold back the time
the time for the light from Venus
to sound sweet to pierce eyes
hearts to stop the clock that
keeps ticking ticking
it's
about
time

Maggie Rowlett

ANTI-REAL

*...though we've seen the last act, know how
the curtains fall red and anonymous*

NATURE POEM

When will it begin? When will it end?
you walk down the stairs into the dark

The dead have already been there. Grit
of mountains' first stirring scours the eye

at the center of the visible. Tiny creatures
nest in the hairs of your eyebrows. Coyotes

have moved next door, eaten the cat, the green
phosphorescent fire of his eyes. And what

can you do but kill lots of writing you've loved
and labored over. Still there's no stopping

the tulips that want to rise up, samba
in crimson skirts. And the dirty faces of

scribes in the Sistine Chapel are scrubbed
clean, and the moon puts on her tragedian sleeves

and scythes the half-liquid river with light
though we've seen the last act, know how

the curtains fall red and anonymous

Claudia Van Gerven

ODE TO THE WEST WIND: REDUX

Oh wild West Wind, centuries have passed.
You have remained the constant breath of air,
A climate to which the poets hold fast.

For could their poems in any way compare
To Shelley's sequential list of seasons?
If truth be served, they could not hope to dare,

As global warming now gives the reason
For nature's chaos, massive confusion,
mankind's treason to self its own treason.

Different seasons, once real, now illusion,
Fantasies, memories that we hold dear,
Carbon footprints lead to that conclusion

The earth that we cherish might disappear.
Then what will be topics for sonneteers?

II

Perhaps jonquils in bloom in December,
Robin red breasts brilliant in snow,
Forsythia that cannot remember

In which season it was destined to grow.
Tales of amphibians' strange mutations,
Born with three legs, one eye, or webless toe.

Animals who've forgotten migration,
Species extinct that once thrived on the earth,
The normal becoming deviation,

Mothers now mourning that death of stillbirth.
Ultimate tragedy yet undefined,
God's gift, our world, we diminish its worth.

The trumpet of prophecy! O wind,
Can nuclear winter be far behind?

Susan Martin

STILL LIFE PENDING

What about the half-eaten pop tarts,
the fingernail-green lamp, the dartboard,
fire alarm, belly button lint, bowl of fruit
sweet potatoes in a plastic bag on the floor, digital
clock radio, nightstand, TV rug, embroidery floss
the length of several fists.

“These things will disintegrate soon,”
you say, “but love will endure forever.”

and then so:

the motion of planets and stars and comets crash out
like cold cash cars. Gamma-ray stilettoed pinwheels
oxygen-deficit and supernovae questions in the diamond-
black of interstellar slopes and contours, as photons smash through comatopian barriers
of blank rocks gazing,

forever’s a drive, and I doubt
that love will survive the eventual
heat-death of the universe.

J. Thornburg

RE-RUNS

I watch myself (someone has to)
like an endless re-run of a canceled sit com,
there is nothing better to do.
The laugh track builds with each episode,
until snickers echo upon guffaw,
and I yearn for the theme music
or crave a commercial to tell
what I need to be happy.

Today everything I say
is misunderstood, it is
as if everyone is talking
in igpay atinlay.
Everything comes out
as white noise, the breaking
of glass, the screeching
of breaks or high buzz of a test pattern.
On special occasions, I howl
through the empty night
until there is nothing left
but a mournful wail that trails
off into the distance.

Yesterday was not like this,
it was quiet and everything
was made of silly putty.
The cars bounced sluggishly
along like day old balloons,
and your face
pressed against mine
picked up the colors of my cartoon.

M.D. Friedman

TWELVE THOUSAND SODAS PER HOUR

Meadowlarks
arpeggio
trill
2times c=p
loaves fishes
revisited
with a calculator

Baseball caps with
CR not crt
burn keyboards
inferring deducing
twelve thousand
sodas per hour
seventh grade
math
tortured graphs
vaulted rubrics

coffee percolates rules
as sun cracked sky
slides into
tractored furrows

we swell through doors
hold hats
under wind whipped flags
in pollen seized air
of barely budded trees

circle the building

grateful for the bell

Shirley Kobar

RESIDENT DOLL

Poetisa twirled up in biodegradable yarn.
In womb she steeped, sucking humidity
out of an atmosphere unforgiving

Dry-spun like loose leaves, rattling bottoms
blink-blink- petals fell back to earth,
forming pleats of skirt, landing
down dirty shoes of Colorado rouge clay,
Danced in absence of tune, *la polka*
with hobbling one-eyed birds through the keyhole

Put out, lay, like dead-dog body beneath impaling shine,
Mind a molten feather bitten,
IV drip fed beet nectar oversweet

Rose and ripped umbilical from each spiny phallus
with white lady gloves
Thrust them into the oven ubiquitous

Evaporate!

leave black grits in soul's wake...

Jennifer Cheng

WHAT VALUE HAVE I GIVEN

contrast light & shadow
split on the stairs stories
of my limitations in the steps
foot don't talk the wall
their back down at
the judgment the other half
automatic accessing each other again
they say to no one
do you want to know anything
about me echo off a whistle
from some time ago or later
that's how the future is
or particular memory seen
today or tomorrow thru binoculars
yes maybe there's two views
and one of everything
to accept or refuse

Jeff Hoffman

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