

Know this:

the only game I play is the millennium

the only game I play is the Great

Fear

Put up with me. I won't put up with you!

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

If the first book was an opening, the second is a continuation and a movement into future works. It is the celebration of a coming into fullness—the realization in some sense of beginnings from still earlier in the century. And yet the poetry like the time itself marks a sharp break from what went before, with World War II and the events of Auschwitz and Hiroshima creating a chasm, a true aporia between then and now. It is on the near side of that paradoxical break that our own lives first come in—not outside history this time but living in and through it. The years the book covers are those of the cold war and its aftermath and, viewed from where we are, the time too of the second great awakening of poetry in the century now coming to an end. The story told is one that we have lived in and have found never to have been truly told, neither in its triumphs nor its failures (with an affection for the failures sometimes as great as for the triumphs). If concerns like these guided our first book, they will more strongly dominate our second, where we can no longer act as distant and objective viewers but as witnesses and even partisans for the works at hand.

1 A work resuming “in the dark” . . .

The gathering (to use the title of one of Robert Duncan’s last books) begins “in the dark”: a midcentury of molten cities and scorched earth, of chimneys blowing human ashes through the air, of slaves in labor camps and gulags, of nations enslaved to other nations, of racism and apartheid rampant.¹ In that darkness the brilliant, often strident promise of an ear-

1. “I lived in the first century of world wars. / Most mornings I would be more or less insane” (Muriel Rukeyser).

lier avant-garde was no longer visible or viable. The surge of totalizing governments and the resultant state of war had decimated the former avant-gardes—in Germany and Russia, Italy and Japan, as in the conquered lands of Europe, Africa, and Asia. The stakes for some were death or exile, for others an underground resistance and continued struggle, for still others (all too often) a collaboration with the very advocates of power and repression that their work had set out to oppose.

The half-century that followed witnessed a continuous wave of wars and repressions, interspersed with rebellions and occasional luminous victories that for the moment seemed to light the darkness.² Sometimes claimed as the longest “peaceful” period in memory—a virtual *pax americana*—it could be felt (and was by those who lived it) as a continuation of the midcentury war by other means: a diffuse but unrelenting form of World War III.³ The wars of the time were not only the American conflicts in Korea and Vietnam—and the forty-year long cold war—but hundreds of other regional conflicts, wars of independence, revolutionary guerrilla wars and uprisings, genocides, mass slaughters, cultural wars fueled by ideology and, increasingly, by ethnicity and religion. And with this too there was the sense of a natural world under continuing attack or lashing back with new plagues and hitherto undreamed-of biological disasters.

This was the darkness that came through, along with whatever other forms of darkness—and of light—moved within the cosmos or the individual psyche. “Poetry therefore as opposition,” Nanni Balestrini wrote, within a neo-modernist, experimental framework. “Opposition to the dogma and conformity that overlays us, that hardens the tracks behind us, that entangles our feet, seeking to halt our steps. Today more than ever is the reason to write poetry.” And Pierre Guyotat, as a further marker of the poet’s relation to the art as such and to the sense of earlier betrayals: “The very origin of the whole system of literature has to be attacked.”

In the United States, where experimental modernism had yet to make its ineluctable breakthrough, the first postwar decade was marked by an ascendant literary “modernism”—hostile to experiment and reduced in

2. “The dark world that is illumined is the very thing that leads poetry toward an even darker world” (Adonis).

3. “Pound, Lawrence, Joyce, H. D., Eliot, have a black voice when speaking of the contemporary scene, an enduring memory of the first World War that has revealed the deep-going falsehood and evil of the modern state. . . . Their threshold remains ours. The time of war and exploitation, the infamy and lies of the new capitalist war-state, continue. And the answering intensity of the imagination to hold its own values must continue” (Robert Duncan, quoted by Nathaniel Mackey).

And William Carlos Williams: “Poetry is a rival government always in opposition to its cruder replicas.”

consequence to a vapid, often stuffy middle-ground approximation. It was in that sense the Age of Eliot (T. S.) and of the *new* critics, as they were then called—not as an extension of Eliot’s collage-work in *The Waste Land*, say, but as a dominant and retrograde poetics in which the *old* ways of the English “great tradition” were trotted out and given privilege. The mark of that time, revived in every decade since, was a return to prescriptive rhyme and meter: a rejection thereby of the uncertainties of *free verse* and the barely remembered *freed words* of a Mallarmé or Marinetti. Wrote the poet Delmore Schwartz, as one of those then in ascendance: “The poetic revolution, the revolution in poetic taste which was inspired by the criticism of T. S. Eliot . . . has established itself in power.” And he gave as an example of new poets writing in “a style which takes as its starting point the poetic idiom and literary taste of the generation of Pound and Eliot,” the following from W. D. Snodgrass:

The green catalpa tree has turned
All white; the cherry blooms once more.
In one whole year I haven’t learned
A blessed thing they pay you for

—at which David Antin looked back and commented (circa 1972): “The comparison of this updated version of *A Shropshire Lad* . . . and the poetry of the *Cantos* or *The Waste Land* seems so aberrant as to verge on the pathological.”

Yet it was typical. Inevitable, in fact, for those who couldn’t distinguish between “the poetic revolution” and a “revolution in taste,” or who still thought of taste as an issue. Even an attempt at such distinctions was then unlikely, for the careers of the inheritors were too often literary, resting like the idea of literature itself on a fixed notion of poetry and poem, which might be improved upon but never questioned *at the root*. And behind it too there was a strange fear of “freedom” as articulated by earlier, truly radical (“experimental”) moderns—whether as “free verse” or “free love” or the abandonment of judgment as a bind on the intelligence or of taste as a determinant of value.⁴ So if the taste and judgment they still clung to (and which made them critics “inspired by the criticism of T. S. Eliot”) demanded “modern” as an article of twentieth-century faith, they retained it, but they pulled back into traditional and institutional securities, “picking up again the meters” (Schwartz) as a moral, even a political buttress against their own midcentury despair. And this itself,

4. “My eyes are erotic. My intelligence is erotic. / All combinations are possible” (Göran Sonnevi).

qua ideology, was made a part of a *modern* dilemma, which came to define their rapidly evaporating modern-ism—not as a promise of a new consciousness but as a glorified “failure of nerve.”

Against which a counterpoetics was quickly starting to develop—a push, foremost, to find new beginnings (or to retrieve old ones) appropriate to the time.

2 *The work in all its fullness . . .*

The *postwar* when it came, then, came from all directions. In that coming it faced both a modernism stuck dead in its tracks and a resurgence of much of what that modernism *at its fullest* had set out to challenge. The new turning in America—in full motion by the middle 1950s—was central to our own perception but only a part of a much greater global whole. The *war*, which William Carlos Williams called “the first and only thing in the world today,” was of course the great dividing line—and with it the *bomb* that put an end, he also reminded us, to much that was past, while

all suppressions,
from the witchcraft trials at Salem
to the latest
book burnings
are confessions
that the bomb
has entered our lives
to destroy us.

By which he meant that the stakes were now raised and would remain raised to the present millennium’s end and the next millennium’s beginning. It was from here that the new generations—*everywhere*—were to take their start.

The nature of that start was not so much *postmodern*—as it would come to be called—as it was post-bomb and post-holocaust. Or it was postmodern in the sense that Tristan Tzara had spoken of Dada three decades before, naming a resistance that called both past and present into question, including all those “modern schools” that still obeyed the rule of empire. It was this rebellion and rejection, this “great refusal” at its extreme, that marked all that was best in what was then beginning to take shape. As such its extremes, which typified it as the stance of a new avant-garde, represented a diverse development and/or a series of departures from what had come before. Alongside the revival of the full range of modern (modernist) moves, more notable expansions and divergences

were taking place—from critiques as correctives of an art mislabeled “modern” to more far-reaching departures from Renaissance-derived modernities and the reclaiming of (old) powers in the name of what Charles Olson early called “*postmodern* man.” Rightly or wrongly named, the term and the issues raised thereby (but never resolved or capable as such of resolution) came to define the time and poetics in question.

The following, then, are some aspects of that time, which to a great extent is still the time we live in.

There was a breakdown, first, of the more tyrannical aspects of the earlier literary and art movements, and a turning away with that from totalizing/authoritarian ideologies and individuals. Such a stance—“against all *isms*, against all that implied a system” (C. Dotremont)—was in that sense a matter of both life *and* art.⁵ On its political and social sides, it was marked by a generally leftward tilt—rarely the fascist and totalitarian temptations of many of the prewar poets, though not entirely immune to a seductive totalitarianism of the left from time to time. The result was the appearance by the 1960s of a new “dialectics of liberation,” political and personal, marked by a sense of resistance, of breaking free (in word and act, mind and body), while retaining a more-than-formalist conception of the poem as vehicle-for-transformation. Wrote Allen Ginsberg, drawing from an older source: “When the mode of the music changes, the walls of the city shake.” And the Japanese “postwar poets” (in a “demand” voiced by Ōoka Makoto): “Bring back totality through poetry.”⁶

The “liberation” saw a resurgence, along with more stabilized forms of poem-making, of old and new varieties of *free* verse and *freed* words (“concrete,” “projective,” “open,” “variable,” and so on). Along with this came the assertion—and practice—of other freedoms in the poem and, by implication *and* assertion, in the world beyond.⁷ Thus the poem was again and decisively opened to the full range of the demotic (spoken) language, but with the freedom also to move between demotic and hieratic (= “literary”) modes, or into other areas of discourse long out of bounds for poetry. For a number of the poets in these pages this meant an opening to

5. “Art’s obscured the difference between art and life. Now let life obscure the difference between life and art” (John Cage).

6. And from another direction the Nigerian poet/novelist Chinua Achebe: “New forms must stand ready to be called into being as often as new (threatening) forces appear on the scene. It is like ‘earthing’ an electrical charge to ensure communal safety.”

7. “Today freedom is more in need of inventors than defenders” (André Breton).

popular modes and voices—a breakdown of distinctions that prefigured the “pop art” soon to come and later merged with it. At a deeper or older (“folk”) level this was matched by the appearance of submerged languages (dialects and idiolects) as new/old vehicles for poetry: the Viennese of H. C. Artmann and others, the Friulian of Pier Paolo Pasolini, the Jamaican “nation language” in oral works by Michael Smith or Miss Queenie (and the written variations by Kamau Brathwaite), the appropriations of “black speech” in the work of African-American writers (and others) too numerous to mention, the pidgin writings of Pacific poets in a range of *topoi* from New Guinea to Hawaii. *And so on.* Wrote the American poet John Ashbery of his own very real and very different aspirations in that direction: “My idea is to democratize all forms of expression . . . the idea that both the most demotic and the most elegant forms of expression deserve equally to be taken into account.”

This, then, is fulfillment. It is a wedge, among many, by which *all* words will enter into presence—as in Whitman’s prophecy (circa 1860) of a total poetry that would (like “the Real Dictionary” he also envisioned) incorporate “all words that exist in use, the bad words as well as any. . . . [Like language itself] an enormous treasure-house, or range of treasure-houses . . . full of ease, definiteness and power—full of sustenance.” In such a poetry, with its open and unlimited vocabulary, all subjects/themes were also possible—from the most demeaned to the most exalted, from the most commonplace to the most learned, from myth to history and back, from present into past and future.⁸ While the first round of breakthroughs had occurred in the earlier twentieth century, the realizations and divagations now were coming helter skelter—and with them a persistent questioning (experimental and [soon to be] “post” modern) of language’s relation to any experience whatever, to any reality, even that of language itself.⁹

The results are contradictory and often *self*-contradictory, yet one senses behind them a commonness of purpose: to throw down *and* restore. And with this comes a necessary reassertion of the role of the poet as seer and chronicler. The former guise, which an earlier neoclassic tilt had covered over, was the image that vibrated through the Beat poetics (and much else) from the mid-1950s on, and in its assertion across the globe included an

8. “The gift is that you are forced to put much more of the world into the poem. Sometimes it feels as though the poem is carrying you along. You have access to a universe that begins to carry you . . . into something that you would never have been able to see or write” (Inger Christensen).

9. Again Adonis: “The poem will be transgression. And yet, like the head of Orpheus, the poem will navigate on the river Universe, completely contained in the body of language.”

exploration of different forms of postsurrealist writing and an alliance for some with previously suppressed religious and cultural forms: shamanism, tantrism, sufism, kabbala, peyotism, etc. It also saw the reappearance of what Allen Ginsberg spoke of as a *heroic* poetics: a renewed willingness to thrust the poet forward as a heroic, even sacrificial figure in defense of self and tribe, of human and mammal life (M. McClure)—and with that, of poetry itself.¹⁰ (The moments of public breakthrough—for Ginsberg and others—were notable in early resistance to the Vietnam War, in *samizdat* and underground publication in the crumbling Soviet orb, and in the many independence movements of the postcolonial “third world.”) In more literary terms, the second half of the twentieth century was marked by the reassertion, in the persistent (and false) divide between classicism and romanticism, of the romantic impulse—with a spiritual and material force that dominated the early postwar period and has remained a presence thereafter.

While what was at issue here was a poetry of displacements and dreamings, it was accompanied (sometimes in the same work) by a new “objectism”: an imagism of the familiar (“here-and-now”) and an unprecedented *poetry of fact*. In the formulation by the Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal, the call was for a new “*exteriorismo* . . . [an] objective poetry . . . made with elements of real life and concrete things, with proper names and precise details and exact data, statistics, facts, and quotations.” Behind it was a half-century of explorations, from those that focused on “minute particulars” (the poems of Francis Ponge and Marianne Moore are eminent examples) to variations on Ezra Pound’s recasting of the epic (“long poem”) as “a poem including history.” That definition—or something close to it—prefigured “maximal” works by poets like William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, Melvin Tolson, Muriel Rukeyser, Robert Duncan, Charles Olson, Theodore Enslin, Robert Kelly, and Anne Waldman in the United States, and elsewhere by poets like Pablo Neruda, Vladimir Holan, Anna Akhmatova, Ernesto Cardenal, Hugh MacDiarmid, and René Depestre. With an eye toward the contemporary political implications of “history,” the push was later extended by Ed Sanders to an “investigative poetry” in which “lines of lyric beauty descend from . . . data clusters [:] . . . a form of historical writing . . . using *every* bardic skill and meter and method of the last 5 or 6 generations, in order to describe *every* aspect (no more secret governments!) of the historical present.”¹¹

10. “If anybody wants a statement of values—it is this, that I am ready to die for Poetry & for the truth that inspires poetry—and will do so in any case—as all men, whether they like it or no—” (A.G., 1961).

11. “The twentieth century, in its violence, has brought about the marriage of Poetry and History” (Hélène Cixous).

Such an effort as (re)visioning was tied as well to the reinvestigation and reconfiguration of the entire *poetic* past and present—a major sub-text, surely, of the present volumes. In a “postcolonial” world it became one way—again among many—for poets to come forward as voices for “nation” or “tribe” or “community” (as elsewhere for “nature” and “world”), or to explore, increasingly, the specifics of ethnicity and gender as they entered into thought and word.¹² Here, as elsewhere in the art of the postwar, the work laid claim to a renewed permission and validity, both as “investigative poetry” and as a vehicle for *direct* political resistance—in contrast to the outright dismissal of such political poetry by “new critics” and “high” modernists on the one hand and by Surrealists in the mode of Breton on the other. Concurrently, and contrastively as well, there was a renewed sense of history as *personal* history: the inner life, including the deepest areas of sexuality and hitherto covert desires, (again) laid bare.¹³ In this the resultant work went far beyond the psychological limits and distress of the (so-called) “confessional” poets of the 1960s, edging toward what Clayton Eshleman, with the likes of Antonin Artaud as forerunners, spoke of as the “construction of the underworld” and traced back, as a form of “grotesque realism,” to its (painted) sources in the cave art of the late Paleolithic.

Here is a tension, then, between extremes of the personal and communal—the “unspeakable visions of the individual” (J. Kerouac) and the reconstructed “tale of the tribe” (E. Pound). (It is from a number of such “tensions” or “oppositions” that our work as a whole has been constructed.) In the working out of those extremes, both formal and historical explorations came up against what Alfredo Giuliani, writing for the Italian *Novissimi*, demanded as “a genuine ‘reduction of the I’ as producer of meaning,” or what Olson, in a famous act of condemnation (more exactly, of realignment and questioning), called “the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego.” But alongside the continuing “inwardness” of Olson’s developing poetics (= “projective verse”),¹⁴ there were

12. “It is inconceivable that any Caribbean poet writing today is not going to be influenced by [the] submerged [Caribbean] culture, which is, in fact, an emerging culture. . . . At last our poets today are recognizing that it is essential that they use the resources that have always been there, but which have been denied to them—which they have sometimes themselves denied” (Kamau Brathwaite).

“To write directly and overtly as a woman, out of a woman’s body and experience, to take woman’s existence seriously as theme and source for art” (Adrienne Rich).

13. Note, for example, the important assertion within a new feminist poetry & art (circa 1970) that the “personal” is in fact the “political.”

14. “. . . But if he stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share” (C. O.).

other attempts at still more objective, non-“expressionistic” methods of composition. These included not only experiments with systematic (objective) chance operations—a tension (post-Dada) between “chance” and “choice,” as notable in the works, e.g., of Jackson Mac Low and John Cage—but a concern with other procedural, even mechanical (machine-derived) methods that seemed, momentarily at least, to put the will in suspension, to allow the poem “to write itself,” and by so doing, to invite still more of the world to enter the poem.¹⁵ There is in this approach—in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere—something like Wittgenstein’s sense of philosophy as “a struggle with the fascination that forms of expression have upon us.” (Both the poignancy and force of such a dictum, when transferred to poetry, are here worth noting.)

This interrogation of language, or of the language-reality nexus as such, was from the late 1940s (and continuing, increasingly, into the present) the second great arena for what came to be called the “postmodern.” Here the experiencing *self*, while never disappearing, was superseded by processes of language and by the appropriation and redirection of texts and utterances already present in the language. The outcome was a number of versions of what the Cobra poets, say, or the European “situationists” spoke of as a *détournement*—not merely a “diversion” or “deflection” of an inherited text but, as stated elsewhere by Ken Knabb, “a turning aside from the normal course or purpose (often with an illicit connotation).” Such a turning, twist, or “torque” (G. Quasha) was deeply sourced in earlier workings with collage and in the language-centered experiments of predecessors like Gertrude Stein, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Kurt Schwitters, among others. But what had been the scattered, sometimes casual breakthroughs of that earlier time now took new directions and became the central work of poets in many different places. Such foregroundings of language had also influenced a number of key figures in areas like philosophy or ethnology, and these in turn would come to influence or interact with the postwar generations of poets, particularly in the reconceptualization of poetry as a function of language and, inversely, language as a function of *poesis*.

At work here was a renewed focus on language’s role in shaping the perception of reality, with the poets’ experimental work vindicated and enriched, for example, by linguistic investigations like those of Benjamin Lee Whorf on the nature of non-Indoeuropean languages such as Hopi

15. “All of these are ways to let in forces other than yourself . . . possibilities that one’s habitual associations—what we usually draw on in the course of spontaneous or intuitive composition—would have precluded” (Jackson Mac Low).

and Maya.¹⁶ Similarly, many of the old questions on “the nature of representation” received new formulations and thought, both in the practice of the poets (articulated as *poetics* by, e.g., the Italian Neo-Avanguardia, the U.S.-centered Language Poets, and, maybe primarily, the French *Tel Quel* group) and in the developing “science” of semiotics (from Ferdinand de Saussure early in the twentieth century to various poststructuralisms in the [almost] present). If such metapoetic concerns could open a window on alternative language possibilities, they also pointed to the trap inherent in a language-dominated universe—a trap of language through which the poet would have to break, Artaud had warned us, “in order to touch life.”¹⁷ Given the allure and danger of that situation, the response was either to investigate the laws and limits (= rules) of language or to break those rules deliberately; to devise new ways of “making language” (thereby making—or denying—meaning) or to play variations on language as discovered in a range of cultural/linguistic contexts.

Related to all that—and a point of reference, often, in poet-directed discussions of poetics—was the sense that the poet, like all humans, is a vehicle through or by which language speaks. Outside the immediate poetry nexus, the point revealed itself in Heidegger’s insistence, say, that it is language that thinks, rather than man, in Wittgenstein’s related meditations (“the limits of my language mean the limits of my world”), or in Lacan’s formulation that “the unconscious is structured like language.” While such views triggered active responses from poets, they were less a revelation than a confirmation of what had long been known—that language has always been both familiar *and* uncanny, and that there is a point at which one can say with Rimbaud, e.g.: “I do not think but I am thought.” What was news for critics and theorists, then, was a familiar realization (and practice) for poets, those in particular who were conversant with shamanic and other forms of mediumship, with western/romantic ideas of inspiration and numinosity, with *zeitgeists* and collective unconsciousnesses. In its more extreme formulations (early Roland Barthes, say, and the later post-everything critical establishment, especially in U.S. academia), the autonomy of language devolved into the canard of “the death of the author.”¹⁸ Yet news of the latter’s death has been much exaggerated:

16. “We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or can in some way be calibrated” (Benjamin Lee Whorf).

17. “Reality is not simply there, it must be searched for and won” (Paul Celan).

18. Don Byrd: “[We] can no longer abide the scaleless world in which theory and its prose disciplines dislocate us.” And David Antin: “When I hear the word ‘deconstruction,’ I reach for my pillow.”

the authors are alive and writing, in full awareness (both ludic and serious) of language's ambiguous and sometimes awesome nature—as we hope this volume shows.

Under such circumstances—historical and intellectual—the period witnessed the full panoply of modernist/postmodernist projections, increased in number and pursued with a precision and thoroughness that elevated some areas to the status of a new art, even (though one speaks of this now with caution) of a new life.¹⁹ As in the earlier half of the century, this work was marked by a number of emphases that both denied the possibility of closure and at the same time moved, however fitfully, toward fulfillment. These emphases, tentatively presented in the first of our two volumes, can be emended for inclusion here:

- an exploration of new forms of language, consciousness, and social/biological relationships, both by deliberate experimentation in the present and by reinterpretation of the “entire” human past;
- poetry-art intersections in which conventional boundaries between arts break down, sometimes involving generalized art movements (Cobra, Fluxus) often led by poets and with a poetics at their center;
- experiments with dream work and altered forms of consciousness (from the continuation of Surrealist dream experiments to the psychedelic experiments of the 1960s, the meditative experiments of the 1970s, and beyond) in which language itself becomes an instrument of vision;
- a return to the concept of poetry as a performance genre: a spin-off both from earlier modernist sources (Futurism, Dada) and from still viable oral traditions, and ranging from avant-garde theater and soundtext works to the readings, “slams” and musical improvisations (jazz, rock, and other) of a new “performance poetry”;
- language experiments, including the soundtext works mentioned above, as well as experiments with visual and typographical forms, book works, attempts to develop a nonsyntactic and nonreferential poetry;
- a renewed privileging of the demotic language, along with a turn on the one hand toward prose as an instrument of poetry and on the other toward the exploration of previously suppressed languages (including

19. “What, then, is the postmodern? . . . It is undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday (modo, modo, Petronius used to say), must be suspected. . . . A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant” (J. F. Lyotard). And Jackson Mac Low: “post-nuttin’.”

the genuine languages of the deaf, not shown here) or of those sublanguages (dialects, idiolects, creoles, pidgins, etc.) that had long been at the fringes of accepted literature;

- in the American instance, an early push for a “new measure” as a tightening and strengthening of the century-long and nearly global commitment to *free* verse, and a related if contrary view (both here and elsewhere) of the poem as raw, unfinished, and ineluctably in process;
- ethnopoetics and similar reassessments of the past and of alternative poetics in the present: a broadening of cultural terrains, directed by the sense of an ancient and often surviving subterranean tradition with the poetic impulse at its center;
- a widespread attack on the dominance in art and life of European “high” culture, leading in the last decades of the twentieth century to a proliferation of movements stressing exploration and expansion of ethnic and gender as well as class identities;
- a concurrent if contradictory move toward a new globalism, even nomadism—an intercultural poetics that could break across the very boundaries and definitions of self and nation that were a latent source of its creative powers;
- an ongoing if shifting connection to related political and social movements, with an increasing emphasis on an openness and freedom of expression and a gradual veering away from what had become, heroically but often disastrously, an age of ideologies;
- a widely held belief that poetry is part of a struggle to save the wild places—in the world and in the mind—and a view of the poem itself as a wild thing and of both poetry and poet as endangered species;
- a sense of excitement and play (“to work in the excitedness of pure being . . . to get back that intensity into the language”—G. Stein) that must be brought across to show the work of the age in all its color and as the poetry “that might be fantastic life” (R. Duncan).

With all of this the time has been remarkable too for the unprecedented degree of participation by poets in the formulation—individual by individual or group by group—of a large array of speculative poetics: writings that assert autonomy and connect the work and life of each poet to the larger human fate. That there is an absence of unanimity in these writings is a point that we would like to stress, although our attempts at synthesis may sometimes give the opposite impression. There is also no question but that we are ourselves participants, not just observers, and that our partici-

pation colors all we've done here. It would be foolish then—even more so than with our first volume—to view what follows as an attempt to set up a new canon of contemporaries. Rather, as before, we would have the anthology serve a more useful function, as a mapping of the possibilities—some among many—that have continued to open up for us—here and now, at the century's turning.

It is the richness of those openings that may define this time.

3 *The work from all directions . . .*

That the early “postwar” corresponded with the great American moment (the “American century”) is quite clear. Its impact on our poetry as such appeared most convincingly in *The New American Poetry*, edited by Donald Allen in 1960: a summary of experimental work over the previous decade and a half and the most public challenge till then to the entrenched middle-ground poetry and poetics of the 1950s. Concerning the poets gathered therein, Allen wrote: “They are our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement in American poetry. Through their work many are closely allied to modern jazz and abstract expressionist painting, today recognized throughout the world to be America’s greatest achievements in contemporary culture. This anthology makes the same claim for the new American poetry, now becoming the dominant movement in the second phase of our twentieth-century literature and already exerting strong influence abroad.” Yet what was less apparent for many of those participating in or being drawn to it was that what was happening in American poetry was part of a larger *global* awakening, some of it occurring before or apart from the American influence as such—and some of it in collaboration with or influencing other young Americans in turn. (That other avant-gardes were active in the United States should also be considered.)

We are saying this, of course, with something over forty years of hindsight. What was then revealing itself from outside the U.S. was the work of an earlier generation that poets in America were (and, to some extent, still are) in the process of (re)discovering. Just as word was coming back about the older American “Objectivists” (themselves becoming visible again as makers of a transitional “new American poetry”), the poets recovered from elsewhere included the likes of Neruda and Vallejo (poet-heros of the other “America”), of Surrealist masters like Breton and Artaud (disregarded by the American middle-grounders in favor of less “convulsive” practitioners like Eluard and Desnos), of Dadaists like Tzara and Ball or like Kurt Schwitters, whose work was hinted at—but only

hinted at—in Robert Motherwell’s great *Dada Painters and Poets* (1951), another generative, albeit historical, anthology appearing in the postwar time. And there were glimmerings too of an older but still obscure generation of Negritude poets in Africa and the Caribbean—a whole world, in fact, to reassemble.

What was known by the end of the 1950s, much of it obscured by the antimodernist turn at the beginning of the decade, was imperative to know. What was not known—obscured here by a heady breakthrough as *American* poets (pre-Viet Nam)—was how much else was coming into presence then or had emerged, even in this most American of centuries and moments, without our blessings. Over the last few years the two editors have had a chance to go over the terrain of the immediate postwar decades (1945 to 1960, the years of the New American Poetry *per se*) and to carry that exploration into the still less charted places that define the boundaries of the present gathering. This has been fired in some sense by our own nomadism²⁰ and our sense of a community / a commonality of poets that both of us have known (and continue to know) across whatever boundaries. Being far enough away now to have a wider view of that terrain, we see the “new American poetry” as itself a part (a key part, sure, but still a part) of a worldwide series of moves and movements that took the political, visionary, and formal remnants of an earlier modernism and reshaped and reinvented them in the only time allowed to us on earth.

What we would like to give our readers, then—who will no doubt be American in the main—is a sense of the configuration, the reconfiguration we’ve attempted—both to see how the sweep of a U.S. “postmodernism” fits into that larger frame and how much richer the work from then down to the present is when considered in something like its wholeness. In our first volume we tried a similar approach, covering a range of work “from fin-de-siècle to negritude”—from Mallarmé’s *Coup de dès* of 1897 to work appearing in the midst of World War II. The division there was into three “galleries” of individual poets and six sections devoted to the movements that typified the time but have been deliberately omitted or reduced to footnotes in most other gatherings of poetry. (These were, in order, Futurism [both Russian and Italian], Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, the “Objectivists,” and Negritude.) In doing this we were not being origi-

20. “A nomadic poetics will cross languages, not just translate, but write in all or any of them. If Pound, Joyce, & others have shown the way, it is essential now to push this matter further, again, not as ‘collage’ but as a material flux of language matter, moving in & out of semantic & non-semantic spaces, moving around & through the features accreting as a poem, a lingo-cubism that is no longer an ‘explosante fixe,’ as Breton defined the poem, but an ‘explosante mouvante’ ” (P. J.).

nal (or even “ornery” in some sense) but asserting what for many of us was the actual configuration of that time. We were also setting the stage for the second volume—approaching the present world in which we live and work.

With the second volume—from World War II to the (almost) present—there is no completion, and the omissions and gaps are unavoidable. Having said that, it is our hope that the book will give a view of poetry “from all directions” and will allow a reading of U.S. poetry and poets juxtaposed with sometimes equally experimental, sometimes more experimental poetry from elsewhere. (For this reason, with America as the point of departure, the amount of American poetry is and remains disproportionate.) Overall, the question of inclusion and exclusion, which can never be properly resolved, was less important with regard to individuals and movements—more with regard to the possibilities of poetry now being opened.²¹ There are two galleries this time around, the first and earlier consisting largely of poets who were or became active during the 1940s and 1950s, the second of those who became active in the 1960s, 1970s, and (but here our offerings become more minimal) in the 1980s and 1990s. And within these galleries we’ve embedded a number of groupings—somewhat like the movements of the previous volume, but often more localized or more restricted (with several notable exceptions) to moves in poetry rather than across the arts, although that poetry may itself show real amalgams with the plastic arts or music. The point, anyway, is not to trace influences from group to group but to set out a range of responses to the postwar (cold war) era and to the time and the places in which the poets lived.

The first gallery, then, consists of work from some fifty poets—from Marie Luise Kaschnitz, born in 1901, to Gary Snyder, born in 1930. It follows a small opening section (“Prelude”), which announces our point of departure among the disasters of war and fascism, counterpointed by a section of poems by some of the poets who appeared in the earlier volume but whose postwar poetry—often “maximal” as Olson would have had it—showed a meaningful continuity between the century’s two halves. But it’s in the contents of the first gallery as such that the richness of the time begins to assert itself—a richness measured in fact by its unboundedness.

21. Where a choice was to be made, however, we put ourselves deliberately on the side of what we took to be the “experimental” and “disruptive”—in U.S. terms the “new American poetry” (particularly the emphases on “measure” and “history”) and its later offshoots and extensions, alongside the Fluxus tradition (below) of “erasing the boundaries between art and life,” between genres and divergent art forms, etc. Even so there is no way of accounting for all poets of interest during this time.