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## EECOLOGY: (pata)physical taoism in e. e. cummings's poetry

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in English

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EECOLOGY: (PATA)PHYSICAL TAOISM IN E. E. CUMMINGS'S POETRY

Thesis Format: Monograph

by

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Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

Using an approach rooted in deconstructive close-reading and branching into pataphysics, this thesis studies, with and through the poetry of American modernist E. E. Cummings, ethical cultivations of aesthetics. First, a lover-beloved paradigm is unearthed in Cummings's poetry, where love, a response to flaws, is the creative actualization of the world, others, and selves. Second, this love is extended (back) into poetry, using Cummings's figures of birds—his “ornithopoeia,” the double movement of figuring the flesh and enfleshing the figure. Third, the ethico-aesthetic growth of the poet-reader, lover-beloved, and bird-figure is traced to a Taoist responsivity and ecological responsibility, using Cummings's metaphor of the blossoming flower, or petalody. Cummings's aversion to the nascent New Criticism allows this thesis to forage for an alternative to New Criticism's sedentary offspring: namely, deconstruction and ubiquitous contemporary post-structuralist theory. It hybridizes Cummings's poetry with ecocriticism, ancient and contemporary philosophy of love, ethics and theology, and biology. It holds binaries in suspension through Taoism and bends metaphysics back to physics through pataphysics, a science of exceptions and a poetics of vital matter. It explicates his entire *oeuvre* from poetry to personal correspondences, its inspirations and aspirations, its inventions and conventions, and its relevance on a still-modernist earth in the oily shadow of ecocatastrophe.

## KEYWORDS

E. E. Cummings, poetry, Taoism, pataphysics, aesthetics, ethics, ecology, deconstruction, neologism, Modernism, philosophy of love, ornithology, floriology

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis could not have *been* without the assistance of my supervisors, Dr Joshua Schuster and Dr Stephen Adams, whose grace in neating creases, adroitness in recommending texts, and patience in reading were invaluable. They encouraged my thought to move unimpeded and aided when I faltered, when I failed to see my own blindness, from which they facilitated insights. The research aspect of my thesis owes thanks to the resources at the University of Western Ontario's library system. The poetic-philosophy aspect was fostered in my second-year creative writing workshop with Dr Monika Lee at Brescia University College, and since nurtured by Dr Jan Plug and my graduate colleagues. I owe great thanks for all aspects of my thesis—which greenly grow from the inquisitive soil tilled throughout my life by those closest to me—to my parents, my brothers, and my fiancée, without whose open arms and patient ears my cares would have worn me into a fine sand inhospitable to writing. I am indebted to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) not solely for their generous grant, which housed, fed, and clothed me, as well as providing opportunities to present at conferences and to purchase the occasional book not present at Western, but for the belief in my work which their gift indicates.

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## INTRODUCTION

I first encountered Edward Estlin Cummings in a twelfth-grade writer's craft course, where we read one poem—"nothing can surpass the mystery of stillness" (CP 814),<sup>1</sup> whose seven words were broken into seven verses. My first thought was that Cummings was gimmicky, and I wrote my own shoddy parody which went embarrassingly like this:

i can write a poem like e e cummings  
 all spaced out with mix spell ed up ings  
 ill rhyme a little but wont say much  
 and when it comes to punctuation im dutch.

Despite my mockery, the mockery of things experimental and unfamiliar, and which I now amusedly rue, although it is characteristic of many of Cummings's professional critics, I somehow read more Cummings. Before reading all his works, I was first thrilled by *No Thanks* (1935) and *Tulips and Chimneys* (1922). With S. I. Hayakawa, I doubted that these were poetry, but I thought they succeeded "eminently in what they set out to do" (97).

Cummings, as a mentor for my writing, provided me with new poetic possibilities, with an aesthetic that looks and feels for minutiae in art, in people, and in the earth, that studies poems, books, faces, flowers, and animals not identically, but from an ethico-aesthetic conditioning, attention, and humility that assists the illimitable individuality<sup>2</sup> of others, from a growing love of nature and of others. Cummings "expanded the language, not so that we may imitate his tricks and devices, but rather that we may develop a greater sense of its possibilities for ourselves" (Friedman "Introduction" 12).

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<sup>1</sup> All citations from Cummings's *Complete Poems* will be abbreviated CP.

<sup>2</sup> Cummings uses "illimitable" fifteen times in his poetry and often in his prose. Lloyd Frankenberg describes his poetry as "a series of definitions of the individual. But 'definition' is too static a term for the process of presentation in his poems, and 'the individual' too colorless an abstraction for what they present" (145).

As William Carlos Williams said in his essay on Cummings, “with a new language, we smell, hear, and see afresh” (102). With a new language, this thesis revitalizes and meditates on the aesthetics-ethics relationship, in which ethics means to do good to and in the earth, and aesthetics means to perceive and experience the beautiful. It explores the possibilities of language, pores over the limits of words and their evanescent, eternal possibilities of worlds, and listens to the earth and the “other” in an ever-blossoming way—“because the world is basically process rather than product, our approach to it must be exploratory and dynamic rather than fixed and static” (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 69).

I dynamically explore three significant aspects of Cummings’s *oeuvre*—love, birds, and flowers. Following Friedman, the most astute and prolific Cummings scholar, I develop a methodology to reconstruct theoretically what Cummings has accomplished aesthetically, by multifariously playing with language through syntax shifts, grammatical rearrangements, footnotes, neologisms, and puns. These devices—particularly the latter three—escape the limits of language and reveal what language can become, as Cummings’s poems are “literary construct[s] composed of not-words which in their retreat from meanings arrive at a prosodic sense-beyond-sense” (Shapiro 142). “Puns, like portmanteaux, limn for us a model of language where the word is derived rather than primary and combinations of letters suggest meanings while at the same time illustrating the instability of meanings, their as-yet ungrasped or undefined relations to one another” (Culler “Call” 14). As Derrida “refunctions the pun into the philosopheme of a new cognition” (Ulmer 165), so my plays delay, interrupt, and frustrate closure (Shoaf 45) and “remind [...] us that signifiers are perpetually dissolving into one another” (Attridge 151). Yet they, full of laughter—as Cummings would

want, if he wants any critical efforts—mean to explore the ecology of language in and as the ecology of the earth and vice versa, and to delight in coincidences because they are the fabric of the universe, sense-beyond-sense. My playfulness and word-creation is not to presume, but to relume the creative spark on the cobwebby wick of philosophical aesthetics, and to bloom with possibilities—I hope and wish.

This striving—to cross-pollinate aesthetics and ethics, to create and facilitate—is why my thesis is titled *EECOLOGY* with two *Es*: it works through and with *E. E. Cummings's* poetry to approach ecological and ethical questions; it acknowledges the multiplicity of ecosystems and entities (in) which we are; and it pays tribute to the doubling of *ha ha* in *hahaecceity* (see pp. 19–21). This participatory striving of aesthetics-nurtured ethics is why the subtitle of my thesis is *(pata)physical taoism in e. e. cummings's poetry*. Cummings is a pataphysicist, who creates and plays more than his Metaphysical and physicist ancestors and descendants, and the scholarly work he inspires is lighthearted and exceptional—i.e. of exceptions, not rules, and also hopefully *good*—yet most serious and discerning. The second word of this subtitle—*taoism*—is because Cummings is a Taoist, who realizes and makes real the difficult ecological interconnectedness of all things and all lives, who understands and helps to understand, with a gentle passive action, the kinetic cyclicity of aesthetics and ethics. As Friedman writes,

this [Taoist] attitude underlies Cummings' work from the beginning. [...] It grows deeper and steadier throughout his career, appearing as a contrast to the ordinary world in his satires; as a basis for love poems; as emerging from some intense moment of responsiveness to a vivid experience of the natural world; as a way of praising individuals and lovers; and as a way of talking about harmony with and surrender to natural process over and above the usual polarities (“Introduction” 7).



Because of Cummings's pataphysical Taoism and his striving, which inspires my own, to foster ethics in his aesthetics, I idiosyncratically place his poetry in dialogue with a host of critics and theorists from all strands of discipline and threads of time, in order to see what he has had and still has to offer, to explore from as many sensitivities and angles his work and its relevance to ecology and ecological destruction, and to maintain the possibilities and interstices that syncretic interdisciplinarity can offer. I rely on Friedman and on Etienne Terblanche's recent work on Cummings's ecopoetics and Taoism as I speak with scientists, lyric Wittgensteinians, the Yale School, ecocritics, O.O.O., classical philosophers and the Presocratics, post-structuralists, theologians, Marxists, and poets.

My approach is syncretic, unexpected, and idiomatic. These are its faults and its strongest points. I often meekly ventriloquize a quotation because it is simply the best way to say what I want to say. I believe, and my plays show this, that philosophy, that thought, and that acting ethically and lovingly in this living world is only possible, and only made possible, through creativity and creation. I am no poet, no philosopher, but with Cummings, inspired by him, "adopting 'an earthbound position'" and turning my "attention to the microscopic" (Deleuze 337), I wish "to sow the seeds of, or even engender, the people to come, [to] open a cosmos" (345).

According to Adorno, art is uncertain, transitory, historically conditioned but not bounded, steps beyond and expands the empirical and realistic, and exists not entirely in the artist's production of it, the audience's reception of it, nor its mimesis of the world around it. "Art is the world overturned," writes Blanchot (217): it is the mossy stone of the world overturned to reveal lives teeming beneath. It is "neither finished nor unfinished: it

is” (22). Similarly, (pata)physically, for Cummings art is alive, not “OF Something or Some One BY a man,” but “a complete tactile self-orchestration, [...] an IS” (“Gaston Lachaise” 21), and this alive-ness “is known as ‘beauty’” (“The Adult” 114). Cummings’s contemporary Wittgenstein says that “ethics and aesthetics are one and the same” (6.421), for “a person’s view of the world [aesthetics] and that person’s character [ethics] are intimately entwined; they are, to all purposes, one” (Tilghman 85). Artworks are a view of objects as worlds as they “speak by virtue of the communication of everything particular in them” (Adorno 5), and ethics is a view of the world as a whole (Tilghman 64)—a *whole-particular, world-object* fractal of the Tao. Aesthetic value is the aesthetic process involving creator-created-audience and is its own ethical reward: “art is one of the most important ways in which ethical value can be shown and a solution to the problem of life made manifest” (64–65). As Emersonian Richard Deming writes, “poetry in its foregrounding of tropes and language as a process and in its insistence on meaning as interpretive negotiation of possible values is the scene of trying out ethics, beliefs, contingencies of community. [...] This is why Stevens can say all poetry is experimental” (133). These are not facile experiments-that-are-ethical-in-themselves, that explicitly *do good*, though they may, but experiments that test ethical questions, that negotiate responses and ways of acting, that rigorously prepare the bodies, minds, and senses for spontaneous action. The beauty of Cummings’s poetry is his technique, the impression of the finished poems; it is also how his craft conditions our craft, how his language nurtures our sensibilities and sensitivities not to arrive at the same conclusions and impressions, but to participate in identically different strivings-to-perceive, which will aesthetically hone our ethical responsiveness and responsibilities.

Cummings is uniquely qualified to represent what I believe the ethical process of aesthetics to be. He tiptoes on the tightropes between accessibility and inanity, and between intricacy and incomprehensibility, like one of the skillful acrobats he so admired. He breaks down and breaks through language; he has an unparalleled provocativeness and breadth of experimentation; and he maintains a striking attention to the tiniest details, such as single spaces and letters. Aside from his famous lowercase lettering and shuffling of affixes such as *un-* and *-ness*, his most famous trope is his anthimeria (the use of some parts of speech for others). With lowercase letters, he embodies the frugality and humility essential to sustaining resources of self and earth, essential to acting ethically and lovingly, and with re-combinations and anthimeria he parallels the natural world of Tao.<sup>3</sup> He gives us feelings of *and*, motions of *some*, impressions of *all*, in a way, *wu wei*, that only the natural world may, as his old friend William James says:

if there be such things as feelings at all, *then so surely as relations between objects exist in rerum natura, so surely, and more surely, do feelings exist to which these relations are known* . . . We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold* (qtd. in Hollander 100).

With diverse philosophies in mind, with an ethico-aesthetic interactivity at hand, and with Cummings's poetry in my eye, I begin in 1935 with *No Thanks* and conclude in 1963 with *73 Poems*, working through his *oeuvre* with reference to his notes, correspondences, essays, and autobiographical prose. First, I study three earlier poems about his love, which provides the lovers-beloveds archetype for participating with poems and humans,

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<sup>3</sup> The words "frugality" and "humility," which appear occasionally throughout my thesis, are an allusion to §67.2 of the *Tao Te Ching* (see p. 119). Lowercase letters (especially Cummings's characteristic *i*) are clearly humble in their littleness, but are also frugal with emphasis, readerly attention, space, and ink.

flowers and birds—“human love [i]s one form of numberless forms, and not perhaps the most remarkable of the lot” (de Gourmont 19). Cummings’s (pata)physical love is of creating, of striving-to-feel, of becoming-imperceptible in and with the other, of living and loving with and not despite brokenness, mistakes, exceptions, and flaws; it is a love of laughter, smiling and welcoming, a love which, as “the most common of experiences, exposes the uncommon, exceptional, and monstrous that is difference and alterity” (Secomb 39), and which is the crucial verb for ecological awareness, sensitivity, and action.

Second, I study three later poems about “his” birds, who provide figures-cum-flesh and flesh-cum-figures who open understandings and existences, who challenge the idea that *theoria* and *praxis*, and the analogous idea that aesthetics and ethics, are distinct rather than co-implicated, and who beckon readers toward a greater sensitivity to the webs of interactions that make us and the earth who we are. Third, with one poem about “Cummings’s” flowers, I twine (pata)physical love and ornithopoeia, the bird-figures, to make fecund through aesthetic contemplation an ethical potential for action. This transition is not easy: Cummings himself “was shy, sensitive, and self-protective in the extreme: it must have been very difficult for him to strive toward the givingness and openness he sang of so often and so well—as it is indeed difficult for any of us” (Friedman “Introduction” 11–12). But “an artist,a man,a failure,MUST PROCEED” (Cummings *Him* I.ii 13) . . .

## I

## (PATA)PHYSICAL LOVE

hee-hee cunnings<sup>4</sup> and making love

*Alive is singing of love(what else is there to sing of?)—Voice is climbing toward love(what else is there to climb toward?)& a Song is feels(inventing)being(feels is imagines)—mov ingcrea ting(Only is For and always Is and was And only shall be for always Love!<sup>5</sup>*

## INTRODUCTION

*E. E. Cummings—Modernist, Romantic, Metaphysical*

Because he was born in 1894 and wrote until his death in 1962, Cummings is classified as a Modernist. He studied and admired the work of Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, HD, and James Joyce (Sawyer-Lauçanno 52), and like them was obsessed with “the expressive powers of language and the ways in which these powers may be increased,” interested in “tapping more primitive levels of awareness” with figures and symbols, and suppressed “connectives and transitions in order to preserve uncontaminated the essential poetry of a poem and to avoid the rational and the logical” (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 6). However, his writing lacks the (ab)use of meta-narration and detachment, the self-congratulatory allusion, the conflict, “useless” aesthetic, and almost frenetic reflexivity of his Modernist peers (7–8), though his work is rife with lively parody, irony, and language-bending influenced by pataphysical cubists, Dadaists, and surrealists (95). Through what pataphysicist critic Roger Shattuck calls his “simultanism” (Sawyer-Lauçanno 302), he “aims at simultaneity and instantaneousness” rather than ambiguity (Friedman “Introduction” 4). He strives—through constant linguistic reinventions, burlesk-inspired satires, relentless optimism, and a hybrid

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<sup>4</sup> Edmund Wilson refers to E. E. Cummings this way in his parody of *Finnegans Wake*, which I cannot locate. Harry T. Moore mentions this in his preface to Norman Friedman’s *Growth of a Writer*, but perhaps, since Moore also erroneously claims that Cummings legally lowercased his name, this is false.

<sup>5</sup> Cummings *Eimi* 371.

individualism-Taoism—for “a state of unified awareness beyond, outside of, and apart from such conflicts” of Modernism (*(Re)Valuing* 79). He has “ostensibly simplistic answers to the times” (73): “in a world baked and puckered by fear, [...] he proposes gaiety and laughter, openness and delight” (Spencer 123).

Aesthetics for Cummings becomes useful and meaningful, if at all, in relation: “art perceived strictly aesthetically is art aesthetically misperceived” (Adorno 6). Cummings took seriously and anticipated Pound’s proclivities—“Make it new!”—by creating his own earthy, anti-highbrow vocabulary<sup>6</sup> through repetition of choice words, portmanteaux, and *poronyms*,<sup>7</sup> by changing the ways parts of speech are used and mean (via anthimeria), by manipulating grammar and disarranging syntax (via asyndeton, aposiopesis, and ellipsis), and through certain devices of his own: “controversial typographic displacements, and the unconventional handling of punctuation and capitalization” (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 10). He follows Ruskin’s declaration that “the greatness of a poet depends upon the two faculties, acuteness of feeling, and command of it” (§14), but he wants sensations “not so much for their own sakes as for the sake of touching the living process of nature which creates them” (Friedman *Growth* 35).<sup>8</sup> Cummings’s poetry, unfriendly critic R. P. Blackmur writes, “is

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<sup>6</sup> Cummings, a love-exalting anti-rationalist, writes that “love alone understands” (CP 843), that “kisses are a better fate / than wisdom,” and that “the best gesture of my brain is less than / your eyelids’ flutter” (291).

<sup>7</sup> *Poronym* is my word for Cummings’s broken words, the opposite of portmanteaux. He splits words through enjambment, anastomosis, and within lines, generating new words and new ways to read old words. For example, nowhere is both *now-here* and *no-where*. Poronyms and anagrams are linguistic aspects of <sup>monad</sup>/<sub>nomad</sub>ology (see p. 78). “Just as Joyce discovered he could reveal new dimensions of meaning by combining words, so Cummings discovered he could reveal new dimensions of meaning by separating a word into several parts” (Haines 17–18).

<sup>8</sup> Processes are the Tao, which is *not* progress, a “comfortable disease” (CP 554). The way (Tao) to live in the world, which means to live with the world and as the world, is not to stockpile, pave, and clear-cut, but to take what is needed and leave all else be, as Daniel Quinn will later write in *Ishmael* (1992).

hard to *know*” because his poems “juggle fifty to a hundred words so many times and oft together that they lose all their edges, corners, and boundary lines till they cannot lie otherwise than in a heap” (77). This ease of *feeling* rather than of knowing, *listening* rather than hearing (cf. Nancy), is precisely that for which Cummings strives in his work: a sensitive and empathic heap of poet, reader, words, spaces, earth, and love.

In this desire to go beyond, he has more in common with the Romantics, from whom he descends via the Transcendentals Emerson and Whitman, and with whom he shares a penchant for (a)theistic theologizing, for the pastoral, wonder and nature, for the individual, for privileging feeling over sense, for the lyric, and for preserving mystery. Cummings studied the Romantics and their predecessors avidly, especially Dante, Shelley, Swinburne, and above all, Keats (Sawyer-Lauçanno 45–50), and sung his own voice from their songs, built his lyrics “gradually, subtly, in the consciousness of experience” (qtd. in 97). From them “he appropriated the notion that external observation can be described most powerfully, maybe even most accurately, by rendering it in terms of inner response” (180).

Pound refers to Cummings as “Whitman’s one living descendant” and occasionally addresses him as “My Dear Walt Whitman” in their personal correspondence (Ahearn 124). Cummings, like Whitman, “created an artistic persona and then transformed the man into the persona so that they became one” (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 119). This creation and subsequent transformation is akin to what happens in two lovers who make love: the two create a world and strive to live it, “two-made-of-one” (CP 483). They are a duet of organisms in symbiosis, creating worlds: “the biologist maintains that there are as many worlds as there are subjects” (Uexküll qtd. in Buchanan 22–23); “an organism can only exist if it

succeeds in [...] shaping an environment” (Goldstein qtd. in 125). Cummings would braid this biological and romantic love (*eros*) with a selfless love for all things (*agape*): we create the world when we love the earth and its inhabitants. His aesthetics facilitates an “ethics” of striving-to-love, which helps create “an altogether different world” (Wittgenstein 6.43).

Though he wrote no Coleridgean *Rime*, Keatsian *Endymion*, Shelleyan *Prometheus*, or Wordsworthian *Prelude*, his chiliad of little lyrics and sonnets, which progresses from the ebullience of youth to serene senescence, could be considered an epic, for it traces a tremulous semi-autobiographical narrative through themes of nature and individuality and theology, has a cosmic scope, comprises catalogues (one of which will be discussed below), and repeats conceits. His entire poetic *oeuvre* even begins *in medias res* with invocations to his muse in “Epithalamion” (CP 3). But Cummings is not interested in a phallogocentric magnum opus, and instead disseminates hundreds of little poems, seeds for a new tree of life—sown by light and night: “in the street of the sky night walks scattering poems” (67)—and songs for a new dance of life, “a living dance upon dead minds / why, it is love” (378). A Tao-dance of all things from *live* to *love*, *i* to *O*, a minute minuet, between two, in three ( $\frac{3}{4}$ , triple time).<sup>9</sup> Of the Romantics, Cummings is closest to Coleridge, writes Friedman—he “views nature as process rather than product, as dynamic rather than static, as organic rather than artificial, and as becoming rather than being” (*Growth* 5). He sees that “the ordinary world is a world of habit, routine, and abstract categories, and hence lies like a distorting film over the true world of spontaneity, surprise, and concrete life” (5–6).

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<sup>9</sup> This *i-O* dance—of subject-object, *live-love*—is further discussed on pp. 109–14. The flamboyant Empedocles of Acragas saw the cosmos composed of four roots, later called elements by Aristotle, and two forces: Love (*eros*) and Strife (*eris*). In the *i-O* cycles of *eros* and *eris*, the roots produced phenomena (Curd 73–100).



His exuberant inventiveness, his learnedness—he graduated *magna cum laude* with an AB in Literature with concentrations in Greek and English from Harvard, where he later earned a Master of Arts (Sawyer-Lauçanno 59–63)—his incisive and insightful wit, and his catachrestic, extended metaphors make him an anachronistic member of the group of lyric poets Samuel Johnson grumpily labeled the Metaphysicals, a group in whom Cummings was well-versed due to his education and to T. S. Eliot’s essay “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921).<sup>10</sup> Cummings “wore his learning lightly. [...] A *bon mot*, a pun, or a joke was more likely to slide from his lips than an intellectual pronouncement” (63). His vocabulary “bounds romantic vagueness [...] with hard edges” (Lane 97), and like Donne’s persona, “Cummings’s lover solipsistically acknowledges real existence only in the love of his lady and himself” (106–07).<sup>11</sup> The real is in love, and Cummings calls it the *actual*, that which is enacted and actualized.<sup>12</sup> Eliot writes that “a thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility”; this is integral to the aesthetics-ethics relation, and Cummings furthers this chiasm by not only sensing with his thoughts, but by thinking with his senses. Like Cummings, the Metaphysical poets found eternity in the present, used obscure words and simple phrasing, yoked heterogeneous ideas by “constantly amalgamating disparate experience” (Eliot), and explored metaphysical propositions.

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<sup>10</sup> Cummings refers to Eliot as “T. S. Eliot,” among other humorous epithets, in his personal correspondences. Eliot’s decidedly Modernist aesthetic—of *tears*—is contrary to Cummings’s of *laughs*.

<sup>11</sup> Without continued effort and reciprocity the porous and participatory solipsism of lover-beloved may deteriorate into the stubborn solipsism of only-me: Cummings and his first lover Elaine dreamed a world and lived it, but he struggled to grasp how he should care for her during and after their pregnancy, and to reconcile fatherhood with his “extreme self-centeredness” (Sawyer-Lauçanno 161). Elaine Orr was the estranged wife of his friend Scofield Thayer, who graciously provided for them and their child.

<sup>12</sup> The actual-real distinction, which approximates the (pata)physics-metaphysics distinction, is cyclical, dynamic, and unstable. As discussed below, Cummings references it often throughout his writing, including in his collections called *Sonnets—Actualities*, *Sonnets—Unrealities*, and *Sonnets—Realities*.

Cummings's desire to go beyond is even a desire to go beyond metaphysics, in pataphysics which is a Taoist return to physics—(pata)physics, for “physics is all the metaphysics we are going to get” (Caputo *Insistence* 189). Pataphysics, to extend “as far beyond metaphysics as the latter extends beyond physics” (Jarry 21)<sup>13</sup> must be (pata)physics—physics imbued with metaphysics. Caputo concisely explicates this neoromantic return:

what we philosophers used to call ‘metaphysics’ is fast giving way to the macrophysics of the imaginably large scope of the universe (if there is but one) and the microphysics of the unimaginably small. What we used to call ‘metaphysics’ in philosophy, theories of being as such in terms of the forms, substance, essence and existence, monads, Spirit, and so on, amounts to highly imaginative and impressionistic accounts—and hence a kind of ‘poetics’—of the main features of the medium-sized things we meet up with in ordinary experience (*Insistence* 192).<sup>14</sup>

Cummings is not a self-conscious Modernist, nor a *bona fide* Romantic, nor a heady Metaphysical, but a strange chimaera—i.e. a hybrid animal and that which is hoped-for but illusory or impossible—of all three, a bricolage of these three poetic epochs, a fused *epoché* that suspends categorical judgments and encourages a symbiosis, an ecology of poetry. He is a sort of paramodernist, writing alongside the famous Modernists but not as they wrote. Cummings mined his poetic persensitive<sup>15</sup> from the rich, lyric veins of the Metaphysicals and the Romantics. Cummings, like Wordsworth before him, believed that through

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<sup>13</sup> Though I have not yet found any relevant research, I argue Cummings is aware of his (pata)physical poetics of love. In *Viva* (1931) #25, he cites Jarry's Faustroll, who sails in a sieve thanks to Kelvin's law of surface tension: “launch we a Hyperluxurious Supersieve” with “the philophilic name S.S. VAN MERDE” (CP 335)—a name that mimes Jarry's Ubu Roi, whose first word in his play is *merdre*, a clinamen of the French for *shit*. Friedman independently arrives at the (pata)physical nature of Cummings's art: Cummings has “the sense that reality exceeds the forms which man has devised for dealing with it. Systems, codes, and theories are always being threatened by what they have excluded” (*Growth* 4), by what (pata)physics calls the *anomalos*.

<sup>14</sup> Cummings writes in his pre-absurdist play *Him* (1927—a quarter-century before Beckett published plays) that “I hunt the gentle macrocosm with bullets made of microcosm and vice versa” (I.ii, 15).

<sup>15</sup> I use *persensitive* instead of *perspective* “since feeling is first” and because he “who pays any attention to the syntax of things / will never wholly kiss you” (CP 291), because “common reasoning starts from the feeling

“love alone” could we “perceive the wholeness of phenomena” and that “only through such perception can a man truly live” (Lane 96), only through (pata)physically *making love*.

Cummings’s poetic eecology and his Taoist “theology” thus take a (pata)physical bent. Deleuze echoes Jarry, who writes that “*±God is the shortest distance between 0 and ∞, in either direction*” (114), when he says that the purpose of philosophy is to find “that magic formula we all seek—PLURALISM = MONISM” (Deleuze 20).<sup>16</sup> Ricoeur internalizes this “magic formula” when he says that “man is not intermediate because he is between angel and animal; he is intermediate within himself, within his selves” (3). The connection between monism and pluralism, 0 and ∞, and many selves is neither a god nor a metaphysical answer to the cosmic and chaotic *why*, but another exceptional and (pata)physical question. It is love, tenuously and tenaciously embracing heterogeneities. Love, striving to participate together, to create and live in the world, is how *as if*<sup>17</sup> and unknowns are created; it is the cycling Tao, “the only every god / who spoke this earth so glad and big” (CP 526). *As if* is of the earth: “nature wills everything,” writes Remy de Gourmont; “she is complacent to all the activities; to our imaginings there is no analogy that she will refuse, not one” (25). Love for de Gourmont is sex, or is best expressed by sexual union, and in it, (pata)physically, “everything is just, everything is noble, as soon as, among the maddest animals, it is

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to explain the fact” (de Gourmont 69), and because I want to avoid videocentrism and synaesthetically incorporate all the senses (all the brain, all the feelings), which can and should be involved in experience and expression. Cummings calls *persensitive* “organic sensation,” the idea that “all senses must come into being for a work of art to succeed” (qtd. in Sawyer-Lauçanno 173). Following him, I use *persensitive* because ethico-aesthetic perception “could not function without a rich history of inter-involvements among embodiment, movement, body image, touch, sight, smell, language, affect, and color. The anticipatory structure of perception enables it to carry out its functions in the rapidly changing contexts of everyday life” (Connolly 49).

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze has pataphysical affiliations and argues, questionably, that “Jarry is an unrecognized precursor to Heidegger” (Hugill 98).

<sup>17</sup> The idea of the *as if* comes from Christian Bök and pataphysics (see p. 30).

a play moved by the desire of creating” (62).<sup>18</sup> The ecology of love, the creation of worlds of and by love, emerges through this union, this *fecundation*, “the reintegration of differentiated elements into a unique element, a perpetual return to unity” (20).

This reintegration and perpetual return is Taoist, and this *agencement*<sup>19</sup> of “difference which is non-indifference” (Levinas *Otherwise* 139) that is the loving pair is (pata)physical and ecological, wherein “free will is only the faculty of being guided successively by a great number of different motives” (de Gourmont 21). We do not love because we are humans or humanists; we love because we are animals, because we call and respond to and as other animals: “caress, charming movements, grace, tenderness, we do all these things of necessity, not because we are men, but because we are animals” (96). Animals, “others,” are of an alterity that “is not the simple reverse of identity,” that does not limit the human “Self” or same but precedes it (Levinas *Totality* 38–39), whose relations cannot be subordinated, as Heidegger does, to mere ontology (89), but whose relation to another is an always ephemeral, aesthetic-cum-ethical encounter, which “opens the infinite” (134).

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<sup>18</sup> De Gourmont wrote *The Natural Philosophy of Love* (1921), which Ezra Pound translated and mentioned in correspondences with Cummings (Ahearn 204–08, 325), and which Cummings likely also read. When in Paris, Cummings sought his books (Sawyer-Lauçanno 108). De Gourmont’s book frees love and sex from anthropocentrism, as Cummings does, in partially (pata)physical and Taoist ways.

<sup>19</sup> “An *agencement* replaces the traditional notion of agency as “intentional, rational, and premeditated” (Despret 29). It is Deleuze’s original French word, translated by Brian Massumi into *assemblage*, an error according to Despret. “Assemblage” suggests an abiotic fixedness, but *agencement* is “an active process of attunement that is never fixed once and for all” (38), a “rapport of forces that makes some beings capable of making other beings capable, in a plurivocal manner [...]. What constitutes the agent and the patient is distributed and redistributed incessantly” (38). The “six hundred species in our mouths which neutralize the toxins all plants produce to ward off their enemies, four hundred species in our intestines, without which we could not digest,” as well as the macrophages in our blood that destroy “trillions of bacteria and viruses entering our porous bodies continually,” and “not some Aristotelian form, are true agencies of our individuation as organisms” (Lingis “Animal Bodies” 166). Love is this active process of attunement, this fecundation, this re/distribution of lovers and beloveds into and through each other. Love is how I grow by wholeheartedly helping your growth. As Uexküll says, “all living beings have their origin in a duet” (qtd. in Buchanan 28).

**DYSCOURSES OF LOVE**  
*a brief glossary of l<sup>i</sup>ving<sup>20</sup>*

Following Cummings, I must introduce some neologisms which will serve to (re)think his conceptions and actualizations of love as

a grassblade  
 Thinks beyond or  
 around(as poems are  
 made)Our picking it (CP 365).

His poetics of love is rooted (in)firmly in a striving beyond and around language, rhizomed in a striving to *be* and not just to *say* or to *think*. I *am*, in any and every case, because I love and because you love. “Opposed to Coleridge’s ‘I AM’ is an Emersonian ‘WE MIGHT BE’” (Deming 66); as Cummings says, “a world in the heart is worth two unworlds in the hand” (*Eimi* 115). Cummings is thoroughly Emersonian,<sup>21</sup> positing through love a possible, ecological individuality: if it can be thought, it can be; this mantra is (pata)physically possibilist. “Cupidoergosum” he declares (CP 431), rewriting Descartes’s cogito to read “I love therefore I am,” in a portmanteau that connotes spontaneity, recombination and union, a

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<sup>20</sup> Throughout my thesis I stack letters, especially prefixes, to combine two meanings and words in one, while keeping their differences and tension (e.g. <sup>etho</sup>logy and l<sup>i</sup>ving). This is a gimmick meant, as gimmicks are, to attract attention, and also to further and deepen attention, to open new attentions, to creatively provoke thought. In these tricks, I was inspired by Cummings’s March 2, 1922 letter to his mother, in which he writes “<sup>pat</sup><sub>mat</sub>ernal” (qtd. in Cohen 36), which in turn was likely inspired by his reading of Freud’s dream analyses.

<sup>21</sup> F. O. Matthiessen disparagingly links Cummings to Emerson: “he too is the son of a New England clergyman for whom ‘life’ consists entirely of inspired moments, and is thus without the basic requirement for growth—continuity” (117). Matthiessen does not realize that a moment is not stasis to Cummings, but a frail and (in)complete approximation or fractal Now of eternal, evanescent time, a mo(ve)ment, as it is to his predecessor Emerson, who writes that “a leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time, is related to the whole, and partakes in the perfection of the whole. Each particle is a microcosm, and faithfully renders the likeness of the world” (“Nature” 22). This fractal relation and participation is not static but dynamic. Eternity *is* a moment and *is* the movement of time, and moments are variable and <sup>sub</sup>jective fragments and figments, perceptually or aesthetically created, and always changing. Matthiessen does not feel Cummings’s love or hear his laughter, or he would understand the cyclicity and kinesis of his epiphanies.

love both passionate (*eros*) and selfless (*agape*), and graphically, the word *orgasm* (ergosum).<sup>22</sup>

Because the living Cummings, who am, is not with us, but solely his poetry, it seems like heresy to argue that Cummings *is* independent of his language, but this heresy is only logocentric or “post”-modern hearsay. Cummings “was a man / grinned his grin” (CP 568), not merely some heartless head entombed for a prolix and passionless posterity in its poetry. His striving to break through language is a full of laughter and dyscourses of love, an attempt to return to the flesh, in love, here and now.<sup>23</sup> These are courses that are not apart (dis-) but abnormal (dys-). They are not metaphorical, as all language always already is, but pataphorical. They do not simply point to a beyond, as all language, which precedes and exceeds our reality, does, but *create this very beyond*: Cummings believes that “a poem should not be *about* something, it should *be* something” (Friedman *Growth* 12).<sup>24</sup>

As laughter, which may be one of many seeds for the origin of language itself, breaks beyond and beneath language, the breaking of your soul upon my lips (CP 45), and simultaneously is, reveals, and conceals the most idiosyncratic traits of an individual—“only so long as we can laugh at ourselves are we nobody else,” writes Cummings in his *Jottings* (#4, 330)—so does love. Before language came to be, it was broken(-through). As we come

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<sup>22</sup> Hofstadter plays similarly on the Cartesian cogito when speaking of the limited ability of our neurons: they either fire (output) when a sum threshold of firings has been reached (input), or do not: “it is simple addition which rules the lowest level of the mind. To paraphrase Descartes’ famous remark, ‘I think, therefore I sum’ (from the Latin *Cogito, ergo am*)” (340). We are both inner and outer unions (and the line blurs).

<sup>23</sup> See pp. 27–29 for a discussion of the use of *flesh*.

<sup>24</sup> With the poststructuralist catch-phrases “always already” and “precedes and exceeds,” I most seriously mock the Yale School’s perspicacious observations about the nature of language, and (pata)physically expose their *trace*-oriented and *logos*-disguised metaphysical propositions.

to be, we are broken and breaking(-through) language. We are broken and laughing languages, fallen theologies and ominous ethologies, infected genomes, and swollen tissues.<sup>25</sup> And each I is further broken, fragile, distinct: “I find myself subject to an infinity of imperfections, so that I should not be surprised if I err,” writes Descartes (qtd. in Ricoeur 1), and Ricoeur echoes him, saying “humanity is that discrepancy in levels” (92). That our brokenness and animality is fundamental to our “humanity” recalls Jeremy Bentham’s question, “can they suffer?”—wholeness or perfection is a matter of perspective; brokenness or imperfection is *the matter* of persensitive, both that matter from which persensitives are made, and why they matter.<sup>26</sup> “Love aims at the Other” in his frailty, which “does not here figure the inferior degree of any attribute, the relative deficiency of a determination common to me and the other. [...] It qualifies alterity itself. To care is to fear for another, to come to the assistance of his frailty” (Levinas *Totality* 256).

Laughter, itself a brokenness of speech prior to speech, the joy in and of the physical face frail and imperfect, that which makes us “nobody else,” as Cummings says, is integral

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<sup>25</sup> We comprise imperfections such as ectopic pregnancies, the vestigial appendix, the ocular blind-spot, congenital diseases, and R. Scott Bakker’s *blind brain hypothesis*, which states that “many central structural characteristics of consciousness are expressions of our brains’ blinkered relation to their *own* causal histories”; we cannot neurophysiologically process our own neurophysiology. This hypothesis is similar to Douglas Hofstadter’s notion of *inviolable space*, the “sufficiently complex substratum [which] allows high-level Strange Loops to occur and to cycle around, totally sealed off from the lower levels” (534, 689). In addition, we are hosts of other brokennesses, such as the “irreducible gap” between our discourses and plans and things themselves (Morton 133), between signifier and -fied, between sign and referent, the disproportions between speech and appearance (Ricoeur 82), intention and affection (84), the intellectual and the sensible or knowing and feeling (85), pleasure and happiness (100), and the ineradicable, Gödelian *essential incompleteness* of our logic: “the fact that truth transcends theoremhood, in any given formal system” (Hofstadter 86, 470).

<sup>26</sup> Objective, physical recursivity (e.g. hardware, neurons) is foundational for the emergence for strange loops and metaphysical subjects (e.g. software, thoughts); the interaction between levels, “humanity,” is (pata)physical (e.g. physics + metaphysics). Interpreting Beckett’s question—*What matter who’s speaking?*<sup>2</sup>—through Hofstadter, we see that the subjective comes from the objective (which then facilitates the vice versa): *what* is a (plural) noun; *matter* is a transitive verb; *who* is a noun.

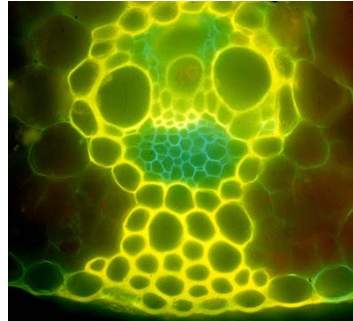
to traditional Chinese naming conventions: the *Tao Te Ching* refers to a child as *k'e*, which means the smile of a baby, because “the child is not really in a position to possess a superior soul until it is capable of laughter. It is the father who teaches it to laugh and straightway gives it that personal name” (Chen 104). The name is that which has already shed the yoke of names, that for which names are inadequate, and that which, if it must be named, laughingly accepts—like the Tao (§1.1, see p. 66). (Pata)physically, laughter is most serious: a tiniest smile may be bigger than all hearts never which have loved (CP 397). Love for Cummings is always a laughing love, even when it mourns; it is an “imperishable smile” (3). It is what Emerson, who also drew on Taoism, calls “immortal hilarity” (“Love” 191), always of sublime and visceral laughter, of divine and carnal idiosyncrasies—*hahaecceity*.

*Haeceity* is John Duns Scotus’s word for *thisness*, for those specific differences that make a thing a *certain* thing. It is Cummings talking “frequently out of the corner of his mouth” (Frankenberg 144); it is his tropes, which “convey a thrill but not a precise impression [...]. The thrill comes not from the *substance* [...] but from the uniqueness of its use” (Maurer 86–93). *Hahaecceity* amplifies the thrilling, unquantifiable, and inimitable laugh of *haecceity*. Bosse-de-Nage, the subhuman companion of Dr Faustroll in Jarry’s novella, can only say “ha ha.” Its “‘tautological monosyllable,’ *ha ha*, is a laugh track for the sophistry of *différance*, the limit between differing and deferring.” Pronounced slowly, *ha ha* is a duality; pronounced quickly, *haha* is unity (Bök 42). *Haha* echoes Cummings’s *Dadaist* influences and effluences, and the Russian word for *yes* repeated in *Eimi*, “dada” (e.g. 48).

*Haeceity*, writes Deleuze, co-opting Duns, is merely “a mode of individuation” consisting “entirely of relations” (261) that “enters into composition with other degrees,



other intensities, to form another individual” (253); but *hahaecceity* is the enfleshed uniqueness of each thing, not merely a degree or intensity of some metaphysical immanence, but the laughing contingency and coincidence which makes beings accidental and sublime, actually and in their matter, their flesh. Two such coincidences—a circumzenithal rainbow



(“Smile” 2008) and the vascular bundles of grass (Gates 2012), both ephemeral and

the second biblically so—are shown.

Hahaecceity is the *am* for Cartesian tautologies,<sup>27</sup> and is (as) laughter “refusing language” (Levinas *Totality* 8), the inarticulate quasi-animality that is “quintessential humanity” (Dolar 29). According to Lingis,

language is not the primary medium, then, for communication. It is not in speaking to one another that we cease to deal with him or her as an instrument or obstacle, and recognize his or her subjectivity. It is in laughter and tears that we have the feeling of being there for the others. We do not laugh alone and for ourselves alone. Laughter breaks out as a current of intense communication among strangers (*Imperative* 127).

Laughter is pre-linguistic, <sup>sub</sup>jective, ethological and theological, fleshy and broken. Laughter is fundamental to being-with-others; it underlies relation, language, and the social.<sup>28</sup>

Relation, *pace* Levinas and Deleuze, is not “prior to what it places in relation” (318), but

<sup>27</sup> Kierkegaard calls Descartes’s *cogito* a tautology: “I am thinking, *ergo* I am; but if I am thinking, then little wonder that I am; that has already been asserted” (*Concluding* 265).

<sup>28</sup> Laughter is empathic or an “emotional contagion,” and creates a “direct link between senders and receivers” due to “mirror neurons”—“its perception directly activates neurons that generate motor movements identical to those perceived” (Gervais 405). We laugh when another laughs, and we strive to laugh their very laugh. This facilitates community, an ecology of hahaecceities.

coetaneous with them. As *hahaecceity* contains the deictic “behold!” (*ecce*), so laughter calls—behold!—for itself, for those who listen to be humble, to participate, to be love, to love.

If laughter were crudely of happiness it would not be an ideal figuration of love. An “immortal hilarity,” laughter is *nihilarity*, of nothing, courageous: “Into the strenuous briefness” of life, we “charge laughing” (CP 108); and “the laughter of afterwards” teases our mor(t)ality and promises joy in the midst of trauma (357). Laughter is both an example of love and a physical pataphor that introduces and creates love. It is fleeting yet perpetual, for “nothing lingers / beyond a little instant, / along with rhyme and with laughter” (294). With *nothing*, laughter lingers beyond a little instant (and also does not). Hahaecceities create time, are inextricable from time as time is from them; matter is spacetime: “the moment is not the instantaneous, it is the haecceity into which one slips and that slips into other haecceities” (Deleuze 280).

This entanglement in laughter is of hahaecceity: “when by now and tree by leaf / she laughed his joy she cried his grief” (CP 515). I lose myself, partially, in laughing another’s laugh. I open up “to be affected by the abominable sufferings of others” (Lawlor 178) and “I love myself as if what I loved were another” (Ricoeur 124). As two strangers “laugh, they are no more separate than are two waves, though their unity is as undefined, as precarious as that of the agitation of the waters” (Lingis *Imperative* 127). I am therefore I laugh and love. I love and laugh therefore I am. A little laugh, a hahaecceity refuses language and unites strangers. The echo of this laugh who is love who is *am* rings in *c(ha)osmos*, in *c(ha)osmosis*, and in *idiosyncrepsy*: “man is the Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite” (Ricoeur 140).

*C(ha)osmos* is a poronym of Joyce's portmanteau of chaos and cosmos, a Taoist yin-yang or order-entropy, an Empedoclean *eros-eris*. It is a universal hahaeceity, fractal of the individual, a laughter at the most serious heart of all things, of all the cosmos—"if Tao were not laughed at, / It would not be Tao" (§41.1 Chen 154). *C(ha)osmosis* is a poronym of the Guattarian portmanteau of *chaos*, *cosmos*, *osmosis*, and *ha*—it is "the creative potentiality at the root of sensible finitude" (112). C(ha)osmosis is the osmosis of chaos in(to) cosmos and vice versa; it is the fact that "the most beautiful cosmos is a heap of random sweepings" (Heraclitus qtd. in Curd 49, Connolly 96).<sup>29</sup> It emphasizes the vivacity and mo(ve)ment of the c(ha)osmos and of life. *Idiosyncrepsy* is a portmanteau of *idiosyncrasy* and the Latin verb *crepāre*, "to crack, creak, rattle." Idiosyncrepsies are the idiosyncratic cracks or (im)perfections that make individuals, the brokenness of the laughs that rattle in hahaeceity, "the power of your intense fragility" (CP 367). They are broken prior to "wholeness" and in "wholeness" remain broken—(w)hole. They are breaks that do not imply a prior wholeness (which metaphysics alone helps imagine)—they are breaks that *are themselves* a wholeness, "bent, thus preserved whole" (§22.3 Chen 110), and from which nothing but hahaeceity can be inferred, really.<sup>30</sup> These (im)perfections resonate with *syncreúsm*, with *discrepancy*, and with *crepuscule* and the Latin *creper*—"twilight, obscurity, uncertainty"—they are (pata)physical deviances, variances, and chance alliances.

Cummings strives to transform the word and thus the world; he pries open these cracks of hahaeceity and idiosyncrepsy to bare "the kernels of aliveness within the husks

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<sup>29</sup> I blended the two authors' translations of this Heraclitus quotation.

<sup>30</sup> My en-comma-ed *really*, here and elsewhere, is meant to be at once colloquial and most academic, and denotes Cummings's active (+ly) *actual* as opposed to the static *real*.

of convention” (Friedman *Growth* 13), the *ha* in the cosmos. His transformations are not “merely the oddities of spontaneous play,” as curmudgeonly Blackmur pouts (76), wishing Cummings fit the moldering molds into which he routinely squished his criticisms, but spontaneous and playful oddities most serious in their *as if*, for

Tao is respected,  
*Te* is treasured,  
 Not by decree,  
 But by spontaneity (§51.2 Chen 175).

Cummings is not immune to making mistakes. He “was a poet who took risks. He often tumbled; yet when he succeeded he achieved that unique quality he strove for” (Kennedy 65). Friedman writes that “there exists about his reputation an aura of inadequacy” (*(Re)Valuing* 71). He “wrote poems which were dogmatic statements about the necessity of being undogmatic, and he took positions of exclusion even while he was proclaiming harmony and unity” (31). Recognizing that we are *hahaecceities*, Cummings writes, “above all & under don’t be afraid—e.g. of making mistakes;& remember it’s more than likely they’ll make yourself” (qtd. in 134). He even *sought* to make mistakes, such as his lack of space after punctuation (with the occasional exception of periods), to the effect that when there *is* a correct space after punctuation in his writing, it is anomalous. In a 1920 letter to his father, shortly after publishing his first poems, he rejoices that “it is a supreme pleasure to have done something FIRST—and “roses & hello” also the comma after “and” (“and,ashes”)are Firsts” (*Letters* 71). He also writes that his “Firstness thrives” in “such minutiae as commas and small i’s” (71). His minutiae are aesthetic and also ethical. They serve to mime “a certain minuteness of being which transforms itself into a connection with

earth's variegated, integrating, enchanting actuality" (Terblanche *Poetry* 151). He embodied and ensouled<sup>31</sup> the striving of love which, in all its idiosyncrepsies, he so often wrote. As does ethics, aesthetics comes from the broken and wrong—"if one originated in the other, it is beauty that originated in the ugly, and not the reverse" (Adorno 50).

Idiosyncrepsies are (im)perfections—the prefix is parenthetical because it denotes both *not* and *in*. (Im)perfection is perfection found only *in* imperfection, and is therefore *really* perfect. It is the porous limit of perfection (metaphysics) as breaking and especially broken by imperfection ((pata)physics), and from it may arise ethics, as "the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium" (Wilde "Preface" 790). In each poronym I use with (im) and (in) and (a), the superposed words dialectically unsettle each other—not as "either-or" but as "neither-nor," almost but *not quite* "both-and." As another example, (in)finity is neither infinity nor finitude. It is a paradoxical dialectic: "Cummings shows us that the never-changing infinite can only be found in the ever-changing finite" (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 17). He writes that "such a forever is love's any now / and her each here is such an everywhere" (CP 576). (In)finity is the infinity that is in and may emerge in the finite, and the finite that therefore is and may emerge in the infinite. The (in)finite is "infinite immediate us" (538). The (in)finite, as flesh, is "not an infinity surpassing totality but a part that defies the totality, that resists totalization, that asserts itself, hyperbolically, in the face of a faceless cosmos," *ha ha* (Caputo *Against* 19).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Following his Romanticist roots, he agrees with Emerson that "the soul is wholly embodied, and the body is wholly ensouled" ("Love" 197).

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the mind-bending capacity of vast finitudes, and of the vainglorious reassurance of infinity as of our own capacious cognition, see the chapter "Temporal Undulations" in Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects* (55–68). A section is quoted on pp. 127–28.

In the (in)finite, Cummings follows the Tao, which (pata)physically yearns to “accept honors and disgraces as surprises” and “treasure great misfortunes as the body” (§13.1 Chen 86). The individual must be loved with *and as* their inextricable, inexplicable surprises and misfortunes, faults and foibles, laughter and tears. Cummings locates infinity in the finite, perfection in the imperfect, permanence in the impermanent, impossibility in the possible: “every human being is in and of himself or herself illimitable; but the essence of his or her illimitability is precisely its uniqueness” (Friedman *Growth* 57). These words are syzygies, corporeal alignments of referential, celestial spheres.<sup>33</sup>

Cummings finds love, as laughter, in the imm<sub>a</sub><sup>i</sup>nent, which is not immanent or transcendent but coincident<sup>34</sup> and contingent.<sup>35</sup> Love is (pata)physical. Its im- and in- paradoxes, its imm<sub>a</sub><sup>i</sup>nence, and its laughter are best studied using the four figures of (pata)physics as a guide. First, *anomalos*, “differing from every other thing in a system that values the norm of equivalence” (Bök 38), is the principle of variance whereby the “rule is itself the exception in a pataphysical science that rules out the rule” rather than ruling out exceptions like metaphysics does (39) on its way “into the innocent nets of finalism” (de Gourmont 87), for

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<sup>33</sup> *Syzygy* comes from astronomy, where it denotes the “celestial alignment of three planets, two of which are at the opposite antipodes of their orbit around a third” (Bök 41).

<sup>34</sup> The coincident is a chimaera of existential immanence and traces of transcendence; it is (from its etymology) a *falling together* in the physical realm, a risk and chance inherent in love, emerging from lover and beloved, the fundamental relation of all hahaeceities. Lovers and beloveds both fall together, i.e. are united in the same space (of time), this now and here, and are together fallen, riddled with idiosyncresies as hahaeceities. *Coincident* also connotes medieval Latin astrology, where it signified alignment, like a syzygy but metaphysical, and traces of this metaphysics suffuse this (pata)physical word of love. Spacetime and the <sup>sub</sup>ject come together, coevally, and are contingent upon each other. From whence they come remains a question.

<sup>35</sup> Contingency is (etymologically) touching together on all sides—the inseparability of any -physics or thing from the (pata)physical earth, and the emergence, subsistence, or perishing of an entity within physical laws (Meillassoux 39). Contingency does not depend on a transcendental entity, it simply *is*, no-thing: “only the contingency of what is, is not itself contingent” (80). The particular *is* only as the particular, a hahaeceity that is not a simple manifestation of some law or divinity or plane, though it may winkingly and smirkingly suggest these forms. “For,” Wittgenstein writes, “all that happens and is the case is accidental” (6.41).

as Heraclitus says, the most beautiful cosmos is a heap of random sweepings. Second, *syzygy*, “differing from every other thing in a system that values the norm of difference” (Bök 40), is the principle of alliance wherein Cummings-esque serendipity and coincidence manifest, wherein “things shape” but “circumstances complete” (§51.1 Chen 175). Third, *clinamen*, “detouring around every other thing in a system that values the fate of contrivance” (Bök 43), is the principle of deviance, and like Lorenz’s butterfly, “the smallest possible aberration that can make the greatest possible difference” (45). Fourth, *antinomy*, subspecies of syzygy, is a simultaneous contradiction like a plus-minus ( $\pm$ ), the contronym *cleave*, or in sexual intercourse “the no that is a yes and the yes that is a no” (Lingis “Animal” 172). These four figures are (pata)physical pores that open in metaphysical membranes, through which c(ha)osmosis of yin and yang, *eros* and *eris*, may occur.

(Pata)physics is the best -physics for Cummings’s idiosyncreptic love because “love’s function is to fabricate unknownness” (CP 446). Love makes. It is not metaphysical because metaphysics is the unfinished project—and quite literally a projection, i.e. *onto*-logy—of (pata)physics, of the ontic-ontological antinomy.<sup>36</sup> With (pata)physics’s declensions of difference—*anomalos*, *syzygy*, *clinamen*—Cummings’s love creates the *as if* and treats it as if it were real and most true, as a “paradox of contingency” that “posits the possible consequences of an impossible inconsequence” (Bök 25). Possibilities open from the littlest idiosyncrepsies, from the most hilarious *hahaecceity*. To love is to enjoy, which is in a Levinasian sense to inhabit, the frangibilities and faults of another (cf. *Totality* 109–142).

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<sup>36</sup> Derrida’s *hauntology* is when the projection, *onto*-logy, outlasts or looms over its ephemeral projector.

This is what it means to *make love*—and Cummings, as a Taoist, focuses on flesh as locus of this creativity—“flesh all is If” (CP 690)—as do the Modernists and the Metaphysicals. Primarily, humans love weakness. Love is the recognition of, and striving to participate with flaws and *not* with rules, because everyone is the same rules and norms, and to empty love these is not to love. I do not love you because you are two green eyes, clear brownish skin, softly pulsing muscle, not because you speak this way, have freckles here, desire these things now, etc., though I may appreciate these aspects and your strengths. I love you because brokenness is beneath all these things and more: because you plug your ears at stressed sibilants, your feet are too small for good balance, you cry reading cards, etc. This is not an overextended Pratfall Effect; we love frailties because as Leonard Cohen writes, “there’s a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in”—and that’s how the light gets out. Eventually, the double movement of me inhabiting your inhibitions and loving your idiosyncresies and of you inhabiting and loving mine resolves into affirmation of the other and blossoming of each, dissolves into togetherness, a harmony’s reciprocated encouragement and foregrounding of a melody. The orgasm (*ergosum*) is to Cummings what Lingis will later call a “dissolute decomposition” (“Animal” 180), wherein two become one and create their world of two-as-one, perceived from two-as-one: “two are halves of one” (CP 556). But love is not simply a “melding of two lives into one, but an engagement of differentiation” (Secomb 36); as the two are halves of one, lover and beloved do not become identical, but become a heterogeneous one of movements and differences, in what Cummings calls the *actual* world, as opposed to the only *real* world—the *actual* is “the immeasurable domain of The Verb” (*Eimi* 90), an “actual universe or alive of which our merely



real world or thinking existence is at best a bad, at worst a murderous, mistranslation” (107).<sup>37</sup>

To *make love* is also to *denude*, as Lingis says, to remove our clothes, which act as a carapace that keeps us safe and same in every situation, to be as we are without pretension and interference and anthropocentrism, for “this carnality, this naked flesh is only real in the carnal contact with it, dissolute and wanton” (“Animal” 172). Cummings is most famous for his erotic poetry, and his eroticism is *fleshy* and *enfleshed*, not merely bodily or embodied.<sup>38</sup> The fleshy, the erotic, wherein lies a poetics of obligation, is the site of eating and drinking, sleeping and relaxation, sacrifice, mending, disease and being eaten, injury, and torture (Caputo *Against* 197–203). Flesh hungers, as Cummings shows in a brief dialogue from his play *Him*—“GENTLEMAN: What makes you think that you’re alive? FOURTH SHAPE: I’m hungry.” (II.ix, 81)—and as Levinas writes, Heidegger’s “being” and the philosophy’s “body” is not *actual flesh* because “Dasein is never hungry” (*Totality* 134). Flesh “is not a body but is always being organized and lifted up into a body” by philosophy (Caputo *Against* 208), a body which—

from Plato and Aristotle to Merleau-Ponty—is an active, athletic, healthy, erect, white male body, sexually able and unambiguously gendered, well-born, well-bred, and well-buried, a *corpus sanum* cut to fit a *mens sana* in the felicity of being-in-the-world and mundane intentional life (194).

Flesh, on the other hand, is “malformed, disfigured, diseased, disabled, miscegenated, and transvestic [...], bodies buried alive, or dead bodies left to rot unburied; away

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<sup>37</sup> As Friedman notes in his afterword to *Eimi*, aesthetics and ethics mean “being alive in the ongoing flux of the present, the ‘actual,’ as we have seen, as opposed to settling for the static categories of habit in the merely ‘real’ world, an issue Cummings characteristically expresses as ‘feeling’ versus ‘thinking’” (458).

<sup>38</sup> A recent collection, edited by George J. Firmage, was published by Norton in 2010.

from processes of constitution and building up toward breakdown and deconstitution” (195). Flesh is of “ethics” and that which a poetics of obligation enmeshes, whereas bodies are of ethics and antiseptic laws. I love your flesh, not your body, not some metaphysical idealization. The lover is obligated to the beloveds in their idiosyncresies, not because of deontological duties or utilitarian rules. We love errors of others, which signify their actuality.<sup>39</sup> The Tao, union of both yang and yin, is against ethics because ethics privileges yang over yin always, which is not what our flesh asks or obliges us, but what constructed bodies think they want—immortality, purity, homogeneity. But “what Art really reveals to us is Nature’s lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition” (Wilde “Decay” 1). In eroticism, in orgasmic love, our posture collapses, our diagrams dissolve, our lips lose sense, our sense of ourselves loses its focus as central, and “our impulses, our passions, are returned to animal irresponsibility” (Lingis “Animal” 172). When I denude and you denude, as when we laugh, we create what Badiou calls a two-scene, a precarious, prayerful, and playful place from which to perceive the world, a world unto itself. William Carlos Williams venerates Cummings’s efforts to thus poeticize love as of flesh, as truly alive, denuding, unfinished:

cummings is the living presence of the drive to make all our convictions evident by penetrating through their costumes to the living flesh of the matter. He avoids the cliché first by avoiding the whole accepted modus of english. He does it not to be ‘popular,’ God knows, nor to sell anything, but to lay bare the actual experience of love, let us say, in the chance terms which his environment happens to make apparent to him (102).

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<sup>39</sup> Cummings vacillates, in each of his early, unsuccessful relationships, between loving his wife as a disphemistic physical vulgarity and loving her as a euphemistic metaphysical purity, before finally settling on a (pata)physical dialectic that incorporates both aspects of love in his final and lifelong marriage to Marion Morehouse. To love another’s flaws is not manic-pixieism, but is taken to that extreme by contemporary “romantic comedies” through idealizing and generalizing flaws rather than actually loving singular flesh.

Physics does not concern itself with the *as if*, with fleshy <sup>sub</sup>jectivity; and metaphysics, a “suspension of disbelief in the *as if*,” changes this operative conditional to an imperative conditional—*if then* (Bök 26).<sup>40</sup> Because metaphysics’s “instruments belong to its field of study, it is powerless to exercise control over its general tropology and metaphors” (Derrida “White” 28). (Pata)physics is needed to exercise and exorcize “control” over t(r)opologies and metaphors.<sup>41</sup> Unlike “our world,” who “has just heaved a sigh of belief” (Cummings “Jottings” #29, 331), Cummings’s dyscourses of love create and act on *as ifs*, not sighing or believing but laughing, smiling, and imagining *as if* in love, come what may, *ha ha*. “Life,” Cummings notes in *Him*, “is a verb of two voices—active, to do, and passive, to dream” (qtd. in Friedman *Growth* 52). To *make* (pata)physical love is to do a dream, to laugh and denude together: “if strangers meet / life begins” (CP 564).

Cummings’s poems therefore treat the *as if* of love most seriously. With a view to his entire *oeuvre*, specifically his love poems, his 344 uses of the word *love*, and his 66 uses of the word *laugh*,<sup>42</sup> I will elaborate his dyscursive and (pata)physical love. In taking his *as ifs* seriously, I have mimed Cummings, who creates portmanteaux and poronyms for *love*—love-crumbs, love-tooth, lovecrazed, loveFist, loveflesh, lovehouse, lovestar, lovetree—and for *laugh*—laughshriek, laughsin, and laughter-gifted. To delve more deeply into his poetry,

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<sup>40</sup> A helpful set of equations: physics  $\approx$  objective; metaphysics  $\approx$  subjective; (pata)physics  $\approx$  <sup>sub</sup>jective (see set of three diagrams on p. 69).

<sup>41</sup> See p. 95 for a discussion of the poronym *t(r)opology*.

<sup>42</sup> This count includes *love* (222), *lovers* (27), *loved* (24), *love’s* and *lover* (13), *lovely* and *loves* (9), *loving* (5), *lovelier* (4), *loveless* and *loveliness* (3), *loveliest*, *lovest*, *lovingly*, *lovings* (1), and all his *love* portmanteaux, which appear once each. The laugh-related words are *laughing* (18), *laugh* (17), *laughter* (14), *laughed* (8), *laughs* and *laughters* (2), *laughingly* and *laughtering* (1), and each laugh portmanteau once. This count does not include the vast numbers of related words, such as *smile* or *like*. Excluding a score of oft-used function-words and pronouns, *love* is Cummings’s second-most used word, after *be* and its conjugations. For all word counts I am indebted to Katharine Winters McBride, who has provided an invaluable resource.

three mid-career poems will be read—from *No Thanks* (1935), *50 Poems* (1940), and *1 x 1* (1944)—because this era was most devoted to (pata)physical philosophizing about love. His earlier volumes of poetry, *Tulips and Chimneys* (1922), & (1925), and *Is 5* (1926) dwell almost exclusively on fleshy and orgasmic love, *eros* usually without *agape*—in fact, Cummings explains that “Tulips = Two Lips Chimneys = Penises” (Sawyer-Lauçanno 159); and his later volumes, *XAIPE* (1950), *95 Poems* (1958), and the posthumous *73 Poems* (1963) dwell on *agape* mostly without *eros*, on the thinning of life and love, who “whittles life to eternity” (CP 298). To be read are two free verses and one sonnet—fairly representative and non-studied samples of Cummings’s paramodernist, (pata)physical, and laughterful approach to (and of) love. To aid with reading, verses of poetry will begin the paragraph in which they are analyzed, “outside” of the main text while being a part of it, creatively defying discourse as Cummings does. Whole poems can be found in the Appendix.

*NO THANKS* #58 [1935]<sup>43</sup>

As the Romantics epically authored worlds, Cummings creates a world. His is not merely metaphysical, but meant to return the reader to the (pata)physical, to subjectively bring the

*love is a place  
& through this place of  
love move  
(with brightness of peace)  
all places*

reader through an object to a <sup>sub</sup><sub>obj</sub>jective self-reflectivity, to turn them from aesthetics to ethics, which, according to Wittgenstein, “are one and the same” (6.421).<sup>44</sup> This clinamen

<sup>43</sup> CP 443. See Appendix.

<sup>44</sup> “A gamma particle is a wonderful example of a profound confusion of *aisthesis* and *praxis*, perceiving and doing. A gamma particle is an ultra-high-frequency photon. In illuminating things, it alters things” (Morton 39). B. R. Tilghman examines Wittgenstein’s notes to shed a few more photons on what he meant by this cryptic equation: “in a September entry he says that ‘Art is a kind of expression’ and in the next entry (from October) he says that ‘The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics” (46). Additionally, G. E. Moore

is not didactic or pedagogical, but fertile, nourishing, playful, and loving. *Love*—present, here and now (*is*), indefinite and general, yet singular and specific (*a*)—*is a place*, a space given meaning

*love is a place  
& through this place of  
love move  
(with brightness of peace)  
all places*

(Tuan 4). One of Cummings’s many ideograms for love, the ampersand (&), convokes brevity—what Cummings more aptly calls briefness<sup>45</sup>—entanglement, and fluidity. It emblemizes love as a locus through which move all loci, a c(ha)osmosis like a Higgs Boson: the more massive a particle, the more it interacts and has interacted with Higgs Bosons; the more meaningful a place, the more it moves and has moved through love (physics + metaphysics → (pata)physics). Love, represented by the ampersand, is e-motive,<sup>46</sup> conjunctive force. Love is moved *through*, an (im)permanence, “a staying and not just a passing through—for that is the only way of truly passing through” (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 31). The moving is located in *this place*, deictically “just as near as distant” (Kierkegaard *Works* 253).<sup>47</sup> This *place* that is love is represented by the lacuna after *of*, which is both enjambé into the next line and yawning into a white-paper abyss. As all colors are in white, this white space is (w)here a constellation of places moves “while the whole moves, and every part stands still” (CP 446).

The enjambment, the space that stretches and is yet pressed between *of* and *love*, is a place of movement, a place that *is* movement—of the eyes, of perception, of poetic

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writes that Wittgenstein claims that aesthetics gives reasons (e.g. for a word in this place in this poem, or a note in this melody in this song), and that the same sort of reasons are given in ethics (Zwicky *Wisdom* 7).

<sup>45</sup> He uses *brevity* in no poem, but he uses *briefness* three times—in CP 105, 108, and 526.

<sup>46</sup> Nancy’s poronym, “e-motion” (“Shattered” 252), intimates both *motion* and *emotion*.

<sup>47</sup> “When we love a thing, we can experience our responsibility toward it as limitless (the size of the world). Responsibility is the trace, in us, of the pressure of the world that is focused in a *this*.” (Zwicky *Wisdom* 57). Responsibility is the tentative answering, itself questioning, to deictics, obligations, and imperatives.

creation. *Love = move*: this slight letter shift, from *l* to *m*, is a clinamen between consecutive letters in the alphabet—"I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement," writes

*love is a place  
& through this place of  
love move  
(with brightness of peace)  
all places*

Cummings (221). This precise clinamen reveals that *to love* is *to move*—these infinitives connote infinity, but they are broken (missing *to*), not infinite but (in)finite. In Taoist fashion, that love is both *place* and *move* is a third way; there is no binary between stasis and kinesis, but serendipity incorporates both; "love synthesizes the dichotomies. But the question is, where can one find enough love? [Cummings's] answer lies in growth" (Watson 68).

Love is at once a move toward an ideal place and that very place within a move.<sup>48</sup>

In this dialectic, lovers and beloveds are. I move to you as you move to I in an infinite migration toward and through each other (cf. Nancy). I become imperceptibly more you. Laughing your laugh, I move toward who you desire; feeling my flesh, denuded, you move toward who I desire, even as we both come to accept the unmoved you and I. Love resolves into facilitation of the most beautiful lover and beloved; it dissolves into intense personal growth, blossoming, participating with others. This is an *i-O*, self-other movement, a movement in place, poesis within names, exceptions within rule, of outreach and listening (*entendre*), which is not understanding the sense, but "to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible" (Nancy "Listening" 6).

Love, the enfleshing of process, the *move* that is place, is a move "with brightness of peace," both *as* a brightness of peace and *with* a brightness *of* peace. *Of* is always a

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<sup>48</sup> Cummings's so-called "transcendentalism is not Platonic but Coleridgean; the eternal forms are embodied in the phenomenal universe, and they are embodied as process rather than result" (Friedman *Growth* 168).

chiasm, a *ch(i)asm*—chiasmus + chasm + i—which suspends its subjects in a crucial, chasmic criss-cross: brightness and peace are both nouns, and revolve around the tiny, seeming insignificance

*love is a place  
& through this place of  
love move  
(with brightness of peace)  
all places*

*of* and in each other (see p. 90). Brightness and peace are both effects of love. Light, celerity, and serenity are created from loving and creative interactions and actualizations of the dark and unknown, gravity, and fundamental c(ha)osmotic disharmony. In addition to the “simultaneous use of prepositional modes” (Hollander 99) that coalesce in *of* and make it at once “possessive, objective, qualitative, definitive, material, partitive” (97), the parentheses reinforce the simultaneity and equivalence of brightness and peace, created by love, wherein move *all places*. All *p*laces (all *p*eaces, another clinamen) include the *p*<sub>e</sub>lace that is love. Love is (in) movement, (im)motile—the movement of agencement, attunement, of “the thousand selves who are your smile” (CP 182), of a laugh, the place of an embrace, of you and I. All meaningful spaces, all ecological niches, mean because of their osmosis through and in love, including love itself, which always strives, always participates, always dis/integrates and dehisces the limits placed and moved around it. “This poem anticipates that one can find stability within the very osmotic and dynamic character of nature’s complete flow” (Terblanche “Osmotic” 19). Love, an exception or really all three declensions of exception—clinamen, anomalos, and syzygy—and precarious as these three *ks* are tall (*all p*laces), “is the whole and more than all” (CP 520), an irreducible emergent property.

The two verses of this brief poem are symmetrical, but not perfectly—they are an (a)symmetry, a subspecies *aeternitatis* because *mortis* of (im)perfection. In the poem, several (a)symmetries, more than parallelisms, arise by way of placement: *yes = love, world =*

*place, in = through, live = move, and brightness of peace = skilfully curled.* The variance between these (a)symmetries is what unites them in alliance, anomalos-syzygy, not verisimilitude but vary-similitude.<sup>49</sup>

*yes is a world  
& in this world of  
yes live  
(skilfully curled)  
all worlds*

A place is a space so singular it explodes with pluralities, and a world is a space so multitudinous it implodes with solitude—“love everywhere exploding maims and blinds” (378). *World* and *place*, almost polar opposites, are a syzygy with *yes* and *love*, entangled in *&* and *this*, where *through* is now and here clarified as *in*. *Through* and *in* are in the same position in each verse, and so are (a)symmetrical: *through* = *in*. While places move *through* the place of love, worlds live *in* the world of yes, “the only living thing” (528). A place is so tiny it can only be moved through, but a world is so vast it can only be moved in, yet *place* = *world*.<sup>50</sup> *Love* is an instantaneous motion that is also an evanescent place: the lover, the beloved. *Yes* is a perdurable motion that is also a perpetual place: the tree, the soil. Yes “represents the sum of all the situations in which it might be used” (Maurer 91); love is eternally momentary exposition and actualization of these propositions, of these hahaeccities, a “Momentinmyarms” (CP 184).

Place and motion are co-eventual because, as Ricoeur writes, I *am* the motion of my perception, intention, passion, desire, and will all from and in a this-here-now (31). I am

<sup>49</sup> “Perfect” symmetry is asymmetry—(a)symmetry. It is always two. Symmetry only exists because of difference, as in a butterfly’s wings. In the most perfect pair of butterfly wings, where one wing seems exactly the other, at least one molecule is displaced or we would not see them as perfect, but as the same or one. They are hahaeccities; you and I are (a)symmetrical, what Badiou calls “identical difference” (“Praise” 25). In an aesthetic parallel to this ethics, “the obligation of artworks is to become self-alike” as “everything in them becomes other” (Adorno 136, 81)—a move-in-place, &, two people becoming nearly one together. “Ethics”—love, an active poetics of obligation—is aesthetics. The attitude common to both is “a way of seeing,” and any difference between them is “between the objects to which the attitude is directed” (Collinson 267).

<sup>50</sup> Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) first noted the identity or (a)symmetry of the unimaginably small and large (Caputo *Insistence* 114).



drawing all these together in love, whose overall dilection and direction is toward eecology, toward the earth (and this cycle or movement is itself a place, a block of spacetime and never complete). As love is

*yes is a world  
& in this world of  
yes live  
(skilfully curled)  
all worlds*

move, so yes is live. To live is to inhabit yes, to inhibit yes by being one of its multivious possibilities, to inhabit the inhibitions like the hahaeceity of a broken flesh, a bird singing in a cage. As love is yes, via this (pata)physical conceit of (a)symmetry,  $\text{to live is } \text{to move}$ . Love is motion-yet-not because motion is that which in a Newtonian sense must be facilitated by another yet feels as if it was created by the self. Love is the mergence of lover (self) and beloved (other—and vice versa), of auto- and allopoesis. This central line, like “love move,” whispers an imperative: “yes, live!” It has no punctuation, no exclamation, but quietly, passively and actively (*wu wei*), beckons and chuckles to itself. *Ha ha*. Yes, live. Love, move. “O thou, is life not a smile? [...] is life not a song? [...] is life not love?” (CP 32).

Within the world of yes live all worlds, skilfully curled. The parentheses, as before, signify an aside but also open a pore in understanding, an anomalos in order. They invoke interiority: the skilful curling of all worlds are within the yes-world as the words are within the brackets, as birds “within” a cage and flesh “within” a body, beautiful despite (and in relation to) the constructs and manufactured limits placed around them—“it was spring by the way in the / soiled canary-cage of largest existence” (71).<sup>51</sup> Following the line “love is all of wishing” (446), where so huge a tumult is the simplest wish (609), I interpret *skilfully*

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<sup>51</sup> This analogy of bird-in-a-cage to flesh-in-a-body indicates that the cage/body is a mental (or metaphysical) construct inadequate and incapable of containing *actual living things* in their error and abundance, in their evanescence. It does not reveal that “the flesh is [...] an ‘element’ of Being” (Merleau-Ponty qtd. in Buchanan 132), nor the spiteful Deleuzian position that “the organism is not the example of life, but its imprisonment” (189–90), though these positions may be tempting.

as an adverb that implies not merely that all worlds were placed in yes with skill (allopoesis), nor that all worlds skilfully curl themselves in yes (autopoesis), but that the curled worlds are full of skill, of wishful *as if*,

*yes is a world  
& in this world of  
yes live  
(skilfully curled)  
all worlds*

and of possibility (<sup>allo</sup>auto<sub>poesis</sub>). *Curled* is past tense, unlike any word in this poem, though not a mere relic but a past-as-limit about to shatter, like cotyledons curled within a seed about to dehisce, to move in place upward like a plant, toward like a lover, outward like a bird. The tall *ks* of *skilfully curled* and foresting the final line again connote precariousness, like slender plant stems waiting to burst through the seed coat, the parentheses, and through the soil, the poetic form itself, into the white abyss beyond and around, into the whites of your eyes. If all worlds live in the world that is yes, then yes as a world must live in itself, must be skilfully curled in itself—there is no outside and no inside, but an (a)symmetry, a permeable c(ha)osmotic membrane, &, entangled with and in and through itself, curling peacefully and brightly and skilfully—loving and laughing.<sup>52</sup> The *Tao Te Ching* says,

Therefore treasure the body as the world,  
*As if* the body can be entrusted to the world.  
 Love the body as the world,  
*As if* the body can be entrusted to the world (§13.4 Chen 86, emphasis mine).

In “identifying one’s body with the body of the universe, we can transcend the limitations of the individual body” (97). To love beautifully is to care for the body (flesh) and the world at once and in weakness, to grow together with the earth, as lover to a multitude of beloveds, and as beloved to innumerable lovers, to affirm lives whenever possible, to e(r)ase suffering.

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<sup>52</sup> This recalls Simplicius’s argument that “Everything that exists is in a place. Therefore if place exists, then place is in a place. This goes on to infinity. Therefore, place does not exist” (qtd. in Curd 70). Simplicius touches on the (in)finite and (im)permanent, on the no-thing of each thing, the meta- of each -physics.

*50 POEMS #42 [1940]<sup>53</sup>*

Poem 42 of Cummings's seventh volume is a catalogue of catachreses. The Metaphysicals are known for their metaphysical conceits; similarly, using language to break through language, using metaphysics to break back into physics, Cummings describes the world created by lovers in love. Through saying *yes* to metaphysics's *as if*, Cummings completes these conceits as (pata)physical conceits. A metaphysical conceit is "a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness" (Gardner xxii), "the elaboration [...] of a figure of speech to the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it" (Eliot), "an absurd gesture that renders startlingly appropriate" (Hall). A metaphysical conceit draws its power from reference to a plane of reference, from pointing to the trace of an abstraction via a tautological argument of and by language. But a (pata)physical conceit draws its power not from *reference* to a world outside our own, but from a creation, a *poesis* of worlds outside our own, a recognition that our world is outside itself, and a possibilist dehiscence of all worlds.

*love is more thicker than forget  
more thinner than recall  
more seldom than a wave is wet  
more frequent than to fail*

The absurd and startling appropriateness of the (pata)physical conceit initially seems inappropriate or vacuous because it *actually startles* the ego out of egocentricity by being eccentric (cf. Kierkegaard), by going as far as ingenuity can go, and then one step farther, into nonsense and actuality, from the spoken into that which cannot be said, rather than unstartlingly reifying a hyper-rational egoism (as does the metaphysical conceit). The (pata)physical conceit is not merely more striking in genius than in justice, but is purely

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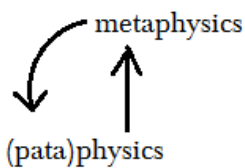
<sup>53</sup> CP 530. See Appendix.

genius with no regard to justice, which will come later, when  
the metaphysicians lug in their skulls full of sharp little tools

*love is more thicker than forget  
more thinner than recall  
more seldom than a wave is wet  
more frequent than to fail*

for measuring angels and the physicists bring their scalpels for dissecting kisses (CP 556). (Pata)physical, hahaecceity-oriented “justice can no longer be considered as a ‘what’ that might be determined, but must be thought as a *manner* of judging and acting” (Curtis 203). It is this manner, this means that is its own end, a (m)end,<sup>54</sup> Cummings’s (pata)physical conceit, that aesthetically rains on the seeds of “ethical” justice it has ingeniously sown.

The double comparatives *more thicker* and *more thinner* evoke the double move-



ment from physics to metaphysics (back) to (pata)physics (see diagram). Metaphysics with and in physics *changes* physics ( $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$ ), creates (pata)physics *after* physics ( $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$ ). The childishness of the dou-

ble comparative is the ultimate maturity; frivolity is most serious; “a lifetime is a child playing” (Heraclitus qtd. in Curd 52). The comparatives suggest that everything *is* in relation. “Everything is medial. [...] Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. Every general law only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself. There is no outside, no enclosing wall, no circumference to us” (Emerson “Circles” 253–54).

But this relationality does not explain why forget is *thicker*, or why love is thicker than it. *Forget* and *love* are both anthimerias, infinitive verbs as nouns—Cummings creates Joycean epiphanies, Taoist move-places, poetic verb-nouns. Love is more substantial than absence (*forget*) and more insubstantial than presence (*recall*)—it is a Verb of verbs, a

<sup>54</sup> A dialectic between the Kantian *means* and *end*, a (m)end—Cummings’s (pata)physical and Taoist ethical “unit” or actant—is discussed in more detail on pp. 77–78, 117, and examples can be found on pp. 124–25.

(pata)physical conceit that in this poem baffles meta- and physical hermeneutics by containing many catachreses,

*love is more thicker than forget  
more thinner than recall  
more seldom than a wave is wet  
more frequent than to fail*

anomaloi, and syzygies. Spring, Cummings writes, “assembles beauty from forgetfulness” (CP 3). Love is striking a balance between me forgetting me and recalling you and vice versa, and between my forgetting-recalling and yours. And love maintains a feeble, porous individual in the fluctuations of life: “love is precisely [...] that which brings an end to the dichotomy between the love in which I lose myself without reserve and the love in which I recuperate myself” (Nancy “Shattered” 260).<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the work of art is that which “we identify as the reciprocity in the struggle of ‘the being who projects and the being who contains’” (Blanchot 228). We *are* this reciprocity, the movement of the place, the this-here-now or “zero origin” of life (Ricoeur 61), the collapse of these dichotomies and disproportions: forget-recall, thick-thin, seldom-frequent, etc.

Like the Taoist *yin* and *yang*, all dichotomies already (a)symmetrically hold each other within them, an unending fractal set. A wave is never *seldom wet*, but always wet, so



“Fractal Universe,”  
Gardi [2009].

to be *more seldom than a wave is wet* is to be more than always: love is eternal. This prior sentence is a standard metaphysical interpretation that sentences us to numb ratiocentrism. It draws a line from physical reality to a metaphysics that stays safe and unactualized. However, a

<sup>55</sup> This double movement is why I use *porous* instead of the trendy *open*. As Ricoeur says, “if we are to do justice to the dramatic aspect of the object, we can no longer be satisfied with formulas that merely christen the difficulty when they do not hide it: openness, transcendence, letting the object interpose, etc.” (44). If a thing were wholly, abjectly *open*, it would no longer have any identity; it must therefore struggle to retain itself while maintaining openness, which is best expressed by the words *pore* and *porousness*. Cummings, whose Taoist aspect prefers *openness* but whose individualist aspect prefers *closedness*, would agree with the dialectic inherent in *porous*, though he uses the word *open* far more often in his poetry.

wave is not wet unless touched by an entity that feels its wetness—and this only for waves of certain liquids. There

*love is more thicker than forget  
more thinner than recall  
more seldom than a wave is wet  
more frequent than to fail*

are immeasurably more waves—e.g. sound waves, light quanta, shockwaves—in the c(ha)osmos than there are liquid waves, and innumerable more waves that are never felt by anything or anyone. Cummings is aware of modern science; he knows that a wet wave, for this secondary quality of wetness to be inferred from the primary quality of fluidity, is an event so rare as to be excruciatingly beautiful. “Remember love by frequent // anguish,” exhorts hee-hee (CP 453). Love, *eros* and *agape*, is even more agonizingly seldom than the cosmic rarity of a wave that can actually be felt as wet, yet this rarity makes it ubiquitous, accessible to every one who loves—because when another is present, love can be, might be, or more accurately, *may be*. As if. *Ha ha*.

Nothing in this broken and snickering c(ha)osmos is more frequent than failure except, Cummings claims, to love. To love, which is achingly seldom, thinly memorious, and thickly forgetful, is broken and failing, more frequent in its failure than even to fail. But this is not negative. The power of love comes from brokenness, the frequency of love from failure—“the world’s but / a piece of eminent fragility” (158), of imminent idiosyncresies, which as anomaloi are errors erring from both right and wrong, differences differing from each other, and are already different, so they vary from variance and are therefore the same yet more dissimilar. Love strives and never completely succeeds, for success would mean subsuming the other or the beloved in the self or the lover, but failure means to keep lovers and beloveds close, almost one, yet lovingly distinct. This failure is not tritely or lightly enhaloed, but inhaled and exhaled with; it does not resist or defy limits, but dissolves them

by ignoring them. I never perfectly move to the *I* you have created of me, and you never move perfectly to the *you* I

*love is more thicker than forget  
more thinner than recall  
more seldom than a wave is wet  
more frequent than to fail*

have created of you, but we align perfectly in this imperfection; we and our created *we* forge a place through which move all places, a world in which live all worlds. We grow from a place of striving-for-reciprocity, from participation in this world of yes.

The second verse begins with a declaration. Love is most insane, within and outside health and sanity, and is of the

*it is most mad and moonly  
and less it shall unbecome  
than all the sea which only  
is deeper than the sea*

moon, moving (*-ly*), quietly light in the night. The syntactic wholeness of this second verse elucidates the conceit of the first, which is a broken conceit of catalogues, comparisons, catachreses. *Shall* connotes obligation: this seldom and selenic love must *unbecome*. Yes, love is unlikely to stop being, intransitively. But love cannot be intransitive, as “to live is a sort of transitive verb” (Levinas *Totality* 111). Therefore, *unbecome* also functions as a transitive verb: love *unbecomes* less-ness, it prunes thoughts of less-ness so that possibilities may fruit. A person who *makes love* as Cummings encourages is a person whose “dwelling is the good earth, / (His/her) mind is the good deep water, / (His/her) associates are good kind people” (§8.2 Chen 74), who “is not only good in whatever it does, it also transforms whatever it touches into something good” (75), and which “does not mean that the good person associates only with good human beings, but that he considers all his associates good human beings” (76).

The comparative sense of *less*—which cannot smother the echo of a transitive *unbecome* because the enjambment makes the fragment (*and less it shall unbecome*) conspicuous—relates love to all the sea, which is deeper than the sea. At first glance, Cummings compares loving to the fathomless depths of the sea, unchanging and permanent. Yet reading more deeply,

Cummings relates love to the unfathomable depth of depth, to the movement that is place of the sea deeper than the sea, the chthonic tremors, oceanic currents, and seismic waves that carry what seems all. This depth is a *sea*, earthy though aquatic rather than terrestrial, both somatic and seraphic, “where there is no difference between the material and the spiritual” (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 32).

*it is most mad and moonly  
and less it shall unbecome  
than all the sea which only  
is deeper than the sea*

The third stanza parallels the first, an (a)symmetry of *less* and *more*. *Less* and *more* swerve, clinamens toward, into,

*love is less always than to win  
less never than alive  
less bigger than the least begin  
less littler than forgive*

and through each other: *less always than to win* mirrors, (a)symmetrically, *more frequent than to fail*. Where letters represent lines and letters-prime (') represent (a)symmetrical lines, the (a)symmetry of the first poem is ABCD A'B'C'D' (cf. CP 443), a clone, and of this poem is ABCD D'C'B'A', a mirror. But this poem has both (a)symmetries embedded in it: it is a clone because verses two and four (*moon* and *sun*) mime each other, and it is a mirror in verses one and three, because of the anthimeric adjectives: *always-frequent, never-seldom, bigger-thinner, littler-thicker*. Verses one and three, the mirror (ABCD D'C'B'A'), are I and you, lover and beloved, moving toward each other. Verses two and four, the clone (ABCD A'B'C'D'), are lover and beloved moving together, differences united. In the first (a)symmetry, lovers move-in-place to fulfill each other's dreams and realities, and in the second, these *as ifs* having been affirmed, lovers move together through their place of love in a world of yes. The two processes are co-implicated, continuous reinventions, and their resolution and participation-in-striving undergirds this entire catachrestic poem. From this <sup>move</sup>place<sub>ment</sub> are created whole worlds moving in worlds: moon and sun, sky and sea.



The power of love, a weakness of striving, is more failing than to fail, and less winning than to win. But to win is not *always*—this c(ha)osmos is a universe of happy failing, not of haughty winning. Winning, creating the laws and rules, is the exception; failing proves the rules and laws are themselves exceptional, survivals-of-the-fittest exceptions. Love is uncertain, risky.<sup>56</sup> An exception from exceptions. To be *less always* is contradictory, for less always is therefore not always: love is, like the work of art, complete at any stage or from any view, but can always be advanced or viewed differently, and so is also incomplete—it is (in)complete.<sup>57</sup> In the (a)symmetry of the poem, *less never than alive* echoes *more seldom than a wave is wet*. As a wave initially strikes the reader as always wet, so *alive* strikes the reader, especially the reader of Cummings who is inundated with it, as ever and forever, not never.<sup>58</sup> But in the same way wetness is rare in waves, so never is closer to living—to be alive, “a(vast and particularly)live” (607), is to be so rare, entropically and c(ha)osmically, as to be next to never, and love is less than never. It slips out of the binary of never-always, out and through beneath, not above. *Less never* is ambiguous: love, less than never, is both no-thing beneath absolute nothingness and yet less never, more *ever*—there is potential, possibility, for (in)finity to be and to begin, a “keen / illimitable secret” (669). Love is not the transcendent superpower

*love is less always than to win  
less never than alive  
less bigger than the least begin  
less littler than forgive*

<sup>56</sup> Love is risky as is art: “it is the affirmation of an extreme experience” (Blanchot 236). “The construction of a world, the transformation of nature [...] only succeeds because of a daring challenge in the course of which everything easy is discounted” (237). Metaphysics may be valuable—it provides oft-necessary simplification, addresses problems not (yet) accessible to physics, and posits questions and mysteries as part of existence, a reminder to Taoist humility and frugality—but ultimately lies safe in the brain and avoids risky exposure

<sup>57</sup> (In)completeness is Gödelian and reminiscent of Aristotle’s idea of pleasure: “it is indeed a whole, and at no time could one find a pleasure whose form could be completed if the pleasure lasts longer” (qtd. in Ricoeur 94). Pleasure, like art, like love, is a <sup>nomad</sup>monadology of monads who may grow and migrate, atoms or nomads who may, as Democritus says, touch, turn, and rhythmically rearrange (see p. 78).

<sup>58</sup> Excluding its permutations and variations, *alive* alone appears 78 times in Cummings’s *oeuvre*.

for which Cummings is uncritically lauded. He is a Romantic, certainly, but he is more a Taoist and an individualist. “In

*love is less always than to win  
less never than alive  
less bigger than the least begin  
less littler than forgive*

Cummings’s holistic [ecological] reworking of Platonism, transcendence exists within the individual along with his biological existence” (Cline 63), imm<sup>a</sup>inently.

From this keen potentiality, *the least begin*, emerges (in)finity. “Infinity is minute” (Nancy “Shattered” 274): to love makes *to begin* possible, and an instance of beginning, a flicker in time and space, a movement in place, is tiny, but not as tiny as that from which it emerges, love, which is “the singular beginning / of your smile” (CP 165), a so-called<sup>59</sup> “Big Bang” which is, really, an infinitesimal quantum fluctuation. This love is the way, the Tao—

What is looked at but not seen,  
Is named the extremely dim.  
What is listened to but not heard,  
Is named the extremely faint.  
What is grabbed but not caught,  
Is named the extremely small (§14.1 Chen 88).

Tao-love is change, <sup>move</sup><sub>place</sub>ment, no-thing from which and in which emerge all things. To forgive comes from love, which is simultaneously smaller and bigger (less littler) than it. To forgive is a more thicker forgetting, a more thinner recalling, removing from the self any obstruction to blossoming-you, becoming-(im)perceptible, which is not only a Deleuzian *becoming*, but includes and *incorporates* it—i.e. brings it together and gives it flesh.<sup>60</sup>

The (pata)physical conceit of love in the c(ha)osmos continues in the final verse, which clones the second. Love was

*it is most sane and sunly  
and more it cannot die  
than all the sky which only  
is higher than the sky*

<sup>59</sup> I use *so-called* because it is one of Cummings’s favorite terms of satire. He uses it eleven times in his poetry and more in his prose, especially his personal notes and correspondences.

<sup>60</sup> See discussion of *blossoming* on pp. 106–08.

revealed outside of sanity and daylight, but here is revealed where “lovers alone wear sunlight” (CP 765). It is not only self-dom, serene, and lunar, but often, obstreperous, and solar—love is constant motion, actualizing in being actualized. The catalogue of what love is *more* than and *less* than ends in (im)permanence (*more it cannot die*). Love cannot die more; it is already dying because it is living, and in dying others can live: “if a world ends / more than all worlds begin” (750).

*it is most sane and sunly  
and more it cannot die  
than all the sky which only  
is higher than the sky*

At the end of the second verse, Cummings compared love to the tremors and heavings of the deep, of the unknown. Here, Cummings’s love combines and curves conceptions of depth and height, erasing and effacing the epistemological power of binaries, “because you aren’t afraid to kiss the dirt / (and consequently dare to climb the sky)” (679). Peace is effected through engagement with the earth, but it is a peace bright with the tumult and discord of living and dying. In parallel, the “ethical” is not attained but made fecund in the aesthetic. The sky higher than the sky intimates heaven, but it too is not extra-terrestrial, divine, or sublime in any traditional sense. Love is within the biosphere, which makes it hallowed, a laughing part of the c(ha)osmos, here empyreal rather than nautical or telluric as it was before in this poem, and coincident rather than transcendent or even immanent.

*1 x 1 #34 [1944]*<sup>61</sup>

This sonnet is not about an instance of love but love itself, always an instance, an instant. It is Shakespearean pattern, with slant rhymes, eye rhymes, and with, instead of iambs, trochaic pentameter

*nothing false and possible is love  
(who’s imagined, therefore limitless)  
love’s to giving as to keeping’s give;  
as yes is to if, love is to yes*

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<sup>61</sup> CP 574. See Appendix.

which lacks each final unstressed syllable: each line is (im)perfect, with the correct number of feet and strong stresses, but a different rhythm, without one syllable, and with only partially present rhymes.

*nothing false and possible is love  
(who's imagined, therefore limitless)  
love's to giving as to keeping's give;  
as yes is to if, love is to yes*

This sonnet, one of Cummings's many about love, commences not with the word love like the previous two poems, but with *nothing*. Because Cummings opens implications and contexts "faster than signs can close them down" (Terblanche *Poetry* 146), not allowing us to decide, but "accommodat[ing] all the lines of meaning that may be developed from the text, and all the meaningless ones" (Lecerclé 142), therefore love is nothing, false, and possible; love is nothing false, but is possible; love is nothing that could be false, and nothing that could be possible. It is both true and impossible. It is actualization of the (im)possible, the pristine in the filthy, the uplifting in the fallen, the laughter in tears. Love—no-thing, false, and possible—is imagined and limitless. It does not exist, but insists; it is "not in the propositional but the expositional, not in what we propose but in that to which we are exposed, in what poses itself before us, imposes itself upon us, posing and presupposing a possibility that leaves us groping for words" (Caputo *Insistence* 7). Love is an *as if* that actualizes, not only an actualization that *as-is*. Love is no thing because love is a verb, at its most thingly a noun-verb, a Cummingsian anthimeria, a Joycean epiphany. This no-thing of love is full of possibilities, "a universe of aliveness as opposed to an unworld of thingness" (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 112). It is a *who* and full of personhood. In making love, whichs turn into whos (CP 463). To love is to be limitless, unlimited, to un-limit as a tender button is unbuttoned.

The second couplet of the first quatrain offers two triplets: *keeping-giving-love* and *if-yes-love*. The two mirror each other: *keeping* = *if*, *giving* = *yes*, *love* = *love*—an (a)symmetry that resolves in the so-called self-identity of love, the Keatsian, poetic non-identity which is “continually ‘filling some other Body’—beyond the confines of [its] private self” (Ellmann 3). If my love for you and your love for me were the same love, we would be one, perfect rather than an identical difference, a two-scene of two *loves* as we are here. Love is beyond, below both *keeping* and *giving*, *if* and *yes*, yet incorporates both. Love is beyond, more radically—i.e. rootedly and wholly—porous and possibilist than both *giving* is to *keeping* and *yes*, which is a world, is to *if*. In its (im)permanence, love is beneath and beyond eternity, the ground from which it grows, where “forever is to give” (CP 538). *If* and *love* are pressed together, almost one word, straddling a comma; love is an existent *yes* to the obligations of insistent *as if*; the broken portmanteau (*if,love*) repeats *imagined,therefore*: as *therefore* (reason) may emerge from imagination, *love* may emerge from *if*.

*nothing false and possible is love  
(who's imagined,therefore limitless)  
love's to giving as to keeping's give;  
as yes is to if,love is to yes*

The fifth line, beginning the second quatrain, hinges on a homonymy, *may*, which is an anthimeria: both possibility (a verb) and the month (a noun). “More than one function is now performed by the hitherto verb. Grammatically it has been turned into a noun. Essentially it remains and becomes even more of a verb. It has lost the stigma of inactivity usually associated with existence” (Frankenberg 146). Both homonyms connote each other, for “springtime is lovetime” (CP 591). *Must* is a *schoolroom*, a musty place of knowledge and reason, cloistering free childlike spirits from the beautiful spring. Reason says one *must*

*must's a schoolroom in the month of may:  
life's the deathboard where all now turns when  
(love's a universe beyond obey  
or command,reality or un-)*

do this and that; imagination and love say one  
*may* do anything and there is a swift, serene

*must's a schoolroom in the month of may:  
 life's the deathboard where all now turns when  
 (love's a universe beyond obey  
 or command, reality or un-)*

window in which to do so, a month, symbol of briefness, of eternity in time, of growth—  
 “though love be a day / and life be nothing, it shall not stop kissing” (14).

The second line of the couplet plays on the schoolroom image of the first, with the word *deathboard* reminding of a boarding school or a plank for sea burial—if love is a sea deeper than the sea, a life may be a corpse floating on love. Love is the Tao and life its manifestation (which is not elsewhere). Life is simultaneously death, coetaneous growth and decay, “the noiseless truth of swirling / worms” (91). And here the ephemeral present, the “pauseless immeasurably Now” (402), intransitively *turns when*, becomes an abstract history, an irrevocable past; and transitively *turns when*, spinning and revolving total time around the present. “In every Now, being begins, round every Here rolls the sphere There” (Nietzsche qtd. in Lingis *Imperative* 86–87). Life and therefore death is epitomized in this superlative flicker, this ambiguous snicker. In *all* these ephemera are love; love gives all these ephemera meaning as they evanesce and vanish, and “love's / secret supremely clothes herself with day” (CP 380).

Cummings encloses the rest of the verse in parentheses, in which he again stresses the embryonic totipotency of love—it is a *universe beyond obey* (beyond following and heeding orders, below order, i.e. cosmos itself) and beyond command (asserting orders, constructing order). It is c(ha)osmic, contingent upon, and upon which is contingent, the actual. Love is a Taoist third way, a move-place laughing beneath the order of things. It is

beyond *command, reality*, beyond *onoma(u)tonomy*.<sup>62</sup> reality consists in orders, in order, but

*must's a schoolroom in the month of may:  
life's the deathboard where all now turns when  
(love's a universe beyond obey  
or command, reality or un-)*

love, while it may facilitate ordering—emphasis on the *-ing*; the present-continuous, Cummings's favorite participle—is not of orders or of reality, nor of *un*-reality, nor of *un*- in general, *un*- which closes and negates. Love is actual, unbeing the *un*- in reality and beyond, order(s) and cosmos. Love reveals the smile in obey and order, the simpering roundness of each letter in those rigid little words, and smuggles a laugh into c(ha)osmos, a laugh “a million griefs wide” (439).

Initially, the third quatrain appears to be Shakespearean, but as order and chaos glide from love, and as love slides order into chaos and vice

*proudly depths above why's first because  
(faith's last doubt and humbly heights below)  
kneeling, we—true lovers—pray that us  
will ourselves continue to outgrow  
all whose mosts if you have known and i've  
only we our least begin to guess*

versa, Cummings wiggles a Petrarchan volta between the eighth and ninth lines, between

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<sup>62</sup> *Onoma(u)tonomy* is the “law” of the “name,” the *nomos* of the *onomatos*, similar to Lacan’s *Nom du Père* but with fewer phalluses, less paternity, but rudimentary and fundamental epistemological power. It is Ricoeur’s idea that the “name implicitly encompasses all the indefinitely numerous sides, aspects, and conditions of the object, actual or imaginable” (xxii), and that “we need the ‘name’ to give a ground to the meaning-unity, the non-perspectival unity of the thing” (29). A name neither encompasses nor gives ground—it cracks open with indefinacy along faults, as Ricoeur should have noticed. *Onoma(u)tonomy* maintains this dubious authoritative agency—herein lies, i.e. rests and professes falsity, *autonomy*—based on its bracketing of the unknown, on its shunting and shunning of others and yous (u). The only autonomy that *actually* exists is always heteronomy: “autonomy is a formal *capacity* and not a substantive *content*,” as metaphysics has us believe (Curtis 4). From *onoma(u)tonomy* comes anthropocentric epistemology, and from epistemology, power: when a thing is named, it is subjected to an active *nomos* of the Name. From *onoma(u)tonomy* also comes metaphysics, which “owes a greater debt to the generalizing function of names than Plato would like to admit. The *reductio ad unum* of multiplicity that the name performs [...] transform[s] the generality of the name into the universality of the idea” (Cavarero 49). Metaphysics is an *onoma(u)tonomic* illusion. It exists because physics overwhelms: sameness is easier to cogitate than difference. A seductive exploration of this argument is Borges’s short story “Funes the Memorious” (1942). Relatedly, Thomas Nagel decides that he cannot know what it is like to be a bat because he *is not a bat*—but he also cannot ever know what it is like to be a human because “human,” as the word “bat” upon which his argument hinges, creates (as all names do) a false universal. The only thing Nagel can know what it is like to be is a Nagel; any generalizations he can extend from there to other humans are based on physiological similarity of the reductionistic stripe he was trying to avoid in the first place, and can in proportion be extended to bats and any other animal, without certainty or *onoma(u)tonomy*.

an octave disguised as two Shakespearean quatrains, and a sestet camouflaged as a quatrain and a couplet. The form of the sonnet, really, is a form

*proudly depths above why's first because  
(faith's last doubt and humbly heights below)  
kneeling, we—true lovers—pray that us  
will ourselves continue to outgrow  
all whose mosts if you have known and i've  
only we our least begin to guess*

hybridizing Shakespeare and Petrarch, a form of passionate *agape* and selfless *eros*. Here, the sonnet swerves to the lovers and to love's actualization. This initial couplet describes both love and a particular act of loving, which Cummings extols as a whole in itself—love is whole both as the Tao and as a particularity (Nancy “Shattered” 266).

There is no metaphysics of love apart from physics, nor vice versa, (pata)physics tells us, and this is a physics of exceptions, of laws, rules, *nomos*, cosmos, and order(s), but also of *anomalos*, *clinamen*, *syzygy*. Love is and may only be paradoxical; language breaks down in scrambling to represent both the expected and the excepted. Cummings thus “preserves the quality of individuality in the phraseology of the universal and the abstract” (Haines 22). This earthy, earthly loving is so imm<sup>a</sup>nent and low it is beyond all apotheoses, *depths above why's first because*—as (pata)physics is at once beyond and below metaphysics. Love treasures *why*, continuous inquiry, guarding it from any physical or metaphysical power that wants to smash it into *because* (CP 566), into reason. Like flowers, we “open that thousandth why and / discover laughing,” not *because* (452). Trying to find a fixed end, a final cause, only results in laughter, for there is no *because*: roses “will only smile” at this vain attempt for solidification (744). Love is also *depths above* faith's last doubt, and *humble heights below* it and reason. Totalizing reason is extended and expelled in love; love is beyond generalizing faith's last doubt: “love is a deeper season / than reason” (578). Love is rather of feeling and blossoming. It is active reason nor passive faith, but *wu-wei*,



forgiving, participating, kneeling. Reason and faith may bloom from love, but they will not cement, clear-cut, and close, as they are wont to do.

*proudly depths above why's first because  
(faith's last doubt and humbly heights below)  
kneeling, we—true lovers—pray that us  
will ourselves continue to outgrow  
all whose mosts if you have known and i've  
only we our least begin to guess*

In the sestet's second couplet, love is within and beyond the cracked portmanteau *kneeling, we*—this hahaeccceity is where it begins and (in)initely manifests, but where it may not, even cannot, cease. This *kneeling, we* is true lovers proudly depths above why's first because and faith's last doubt, humbly heights below all humanly constructs, whether philosophical or theological. *We*, I and you and every you and each I, “for love are in we am in i are in you” (664), is the pronoun of love, comprising true lovers and a symphony composed of them—“our / is love and neverless” (590). *We* does not exist without love: “we sans love equals mob” (803). *We* is a two-scene (Badiou “Praise” 29), a fleshy I-and-you denuding and laughing, *ha ha*, a little singular-plural place from (w)here the world is felt: “one's not half two. It's two are halves of one: / which halves reintegrating” (CP 556), Cummings writes, echoing §42.1 of the *Tao Te Ching*, which says that

Tao gives birth to one,  
One gives birth to two,  
Two gives birth to three,  
Three gives birth to ten thousand beings.  
Ten thousand beings carry *yin* on their backs and embrace *yang* in their front,  
Blending these two vital breaths (*ch'i*) to attain harmony (*ho*) (Chen 157).

From eternal and evanescent change come binaries and opposites, *yin* and *yang*; the lover and the beloved, who are already more than two, a third way. From their fecundation comes all things, (pata)physically. “Lovers are those who kneel” (CP 563) in frugality and humility, not at the world's front but in a <sup>move</sup><sub>place</sub>ment, *wu-wei*, between actively standing and

passively sitting. The prayer of this *kneeling,we* is to continue to outgrow ourselves and themselves, a prayer—from the Latin *precari*, “to

*proudly depths above why's first because  
(faith's last doubt and humbly heights below)  
kneeling,we—true lovers—pray that us  
will ourselves continue to outgrow  
all whose mosts if you have known and i've  
only we our least begin to guess*

plead, to beg, to entreat” (Caputo *Insistence* 16)—which precariously strives and preciously moves, loves, beyond and beneath, for “prayers are sighs issuing from the abyss of being and its discontents, from being made porous by becoming, made to tremble by the event” (32). To pray is “trying to make one porous to the other” (20), to “say ‘come’ to what we cannot see coming” (33), a prayer that is “prayers of earth’s own clumsily striving” (CP 749).

The lovers also pray to continue to outgrow all those people and things they thought they have known—i.e. closed, ended, and decided—and who they have reasoned, ordered, faithed, and answered. They pray to outgrow their rationalizations, to not stop at thinking but to continue to feel in every nerve, to question in each molecule, to develop a persensitive of love through love. A thing, a person, cannot be known in its entirety, not from thinking or feeling, but at best known around, known *most*. Those who are not loved, not in love or in *kneeling,we* with the praying lovers, will be so when knowing gives way and guessing begins, *as if*, when they are no longer the objects of knowledge but the <sup>sub</sup>jects of love, the move-places of love, the universes, the seas and skies, the c(ha)smotic hahaeccities of love, when they are the sowers and reapers of (im)possibilities, who open and release, whose opening and releasing is facilitated by others. Writes Cummings in a late, unpublished poem, “love is a guess / that deepens” (1027). This guessing end-lessness, this mean non-knowing, *as if*, forms in the shape of a couplet, the thirteenth and fourteenth lines, which mime the third and fourth lines—the rhyme scheme is the same and the pattern

of threes, *keeping-giving-love* and *if-yes-love*, and here *you-i-we*, repeats after ten lines, the number of Taoist precepts and the Hindu num-

*proudly depths above why's first because  
(faith's last doubt and humbly heights below)  
kneeling, we—true lovers—pray that us  
will ourselves continue to outgrow  
all whose mosts if you have known and i've  
only we our least begin to guess*

ber of a complete life, an (in)complete cycle which of course has begun to cycle again. *Keeping-giving-love* and *if-yes-love* manifest, always and only, in *you-i-we*, an (in)finite cycle, wholly (w)hole and holy, profane.

### (IN)CONCLUSION

*hee-hee and the philosophers*

With his Taoist and (pata)physical poetics of love, Cummings, a paramodernist ne-romantic, to use two vogue prefixes, diverges from his predecessors—from Blake's "dark secret love" that rises to exaltation (Barth 113), though he asyndetonically agrees that "over hate has triumphed darkly love" (CP 140), from Keats's holy heart's affection and true imagination (Barth 113), from Shelley's sexual love (114), and from Wordsworth's simple, maternal love (115)—but because "there is no other concern of the Romantic poets more important than love" (113), he does not escape their gravity. Though he advises that "it's no good pretending / befriending means loving" (CP 625), he orgasmically, fleshily, and imaginatively follows and elaborates Coleridge's friendship-oriented love, in which "it is an instinct of my nature to pass out of myself, and to exist in the form of others" (Barth 115). Cummings completes this existing-as-another in his idea of ergosum, fecundation, or *eros-agape*, a syzygy of Aristotle's four loves: *storge*, *philia*, *agape*, *eros*. When this paradigm is most rigorously appreciated, it may be (pata)physical. Existing as the other, from the beloved's persensitive *and my own*, is love; it is of idiosyncrepsies, itself idiosyncreptic, and

beyond metaphysics. Cummings's (pata)physical love anticipates the work of several influential philosophers—unsurprisingly, poetry awakes and dreams these (in)conclusions on love before philosophy has rubbed the sleep from its eyes.

Kierkegaard wrestles with love in *Works on Love* and is most compelling in his phrasing: he cites love's *eccentricity* (e.g. 92, 202)—anomalos; he writes that it “is not the proud flight that soars above the world; it is self-denial's humble and difficult flight along the ground” (84), that it is present in the least things (100), that to love the neighbor is to “find him lovable despite and with his weaknesses and defects and imperfections” (158), and that it and its possibilities are “infinitely fragile” and “infinitely frail” (251)—idiosyncrasy; he writes that love believes and hopes all things without being deceived or shamed (225–63); and he speaks of a “divine kind of madness” in love (287).

But Kierkegaard does not venture through these “inconstant, futile, weird phantasmal flashes of possibility” (254), through these *as i&S*, seems, and seams into the “seamy side of existence” (257), into (pata)physics, and instead remains within the riskless realm of metaphysics, where propositions go unexposed and unactualized. While Cummings beckons us to open and grow in love, asking that “all the weird worlds must be opened” (CP 378), Kierkegaard frowns and barks that to “shut your door and pray to God” is the way to find love (*Works* 51). His obsession with stasis is perpetuated in his recurrent, self-contradictory metaphor of love as closed eyes (e.g. 162), and in his idea of love as perfect in death, not in a living ecology but in “kin of clay” and “kinship of death” (146, 345).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Adorno criticizes Kierkegaard's love as callous, abstract, and ignorant of reciprocity, especially Kierkegaard's example of “love of the dead” as a heuristic for determining whether love is selfish or compelled (qtd.

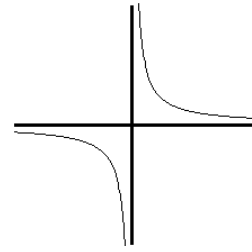
Kierkegaard's eccentricity, humble flight, infinite frailty—"love thou art frail" (CP 18) in "life's very fragile hour" (20)—divine madness, and loving with imperfections all eloquently and beautifully point toward a Taoist (pata)physics of love. The great Dane tills the fields of love-philosophy where Nancy and Badiou later sow Cummingsian seeds. Unwittingly watering the plants of Cummings's love-place and yes-world, Nancy announces that love, like *yes*, is "perhaps nothing but the indefinite abundance of all possible loves" ("Shattered" 246). To him, love is an ecological "infinite migration through the other" (253) or c(ha)osmosis, an idiosyncreptic recognition that "no heart is as whole as a broken heart" (Nachman qtd. in 255), an (in)complete striving which is "at once the promise of completion—but a promise always disappearing—and the threat of decomposition, always imminent" (257), that "arrives only at the limit, while crossing" (264), and an imm<sub>a</sub>inence in which "there are no parts, moments, types or stages [...]. There is only an infinity of shatters: love is wholly complete in one sole embrace or in the history of a life" (266).

Nancy's infinite migration, whole broken heart, disappearing promise, and arrival-crossing of limits all reflect Cummings's love, its Taoist passive-active dynamism, kenotic self-sacrifice, *eros-agape* chimaera, and its heavenly earthbound participation. Similarly, Badiou argues for a constant re-invention of love ("Praise" 11), for an (a)symmetrical love as syzygy, as "identical difference" (25), as an (in)finity which is contingent but cannot "be reduced to that contingency" (65), and as a two-scene, a locus of two rather than one from

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in Ferreira 209). Love of the dead, as striving to love all things past and future, is incorporated into Cummings's love; his eulogies (e.g. to his gardener, father, and friends) evince his immense respect for the dead, though he is more concerned with the (pata)physical potential of reciprocal lovers loving, living (and dying), than in stolid states and certainties (which to him do not necessarily exist). Adorno's critique is unable to see that Kierkegaard is, in this example, hypothesizing, though it does seize upon his fascination with *states*.

which the world is felt (80). In simultaneous, porous coalescence and retention, “love invents a different way of lasting in life” (33). The two-scene, which is where, as the Metaphysical poet Lord Herbert writes, “each shall be both, yet both but one,” is not a locus where I have fully become you and you have fully become I, but a locus in which self and other, lover and beloved, vie and strive in their differences and faults, nonetheless togetherly, reciprocally (see diagram). It is a created, mutual place that does not succumb to what Spivak calls “the danger of appropriating the other by assimilation” (104). The beloved is another lover as the lover is another beloved; the Other is not “the Self’s shadow” (75). As Levinas writes, “I myself can feel myself to be the other of the other” (*Totality* 84)—I, as and in nature (*n’autre*), am a non-other, none-other-than, a hahaeceity. Ellmann echoes Emmanuel and Estlin: “when self is most itself, [...] it paradoxically grows other to itself” (8). In this two-scene, lovers, like the grasshopper leaping in Cummings’s famous 1935 poem, “rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly” one another (CP 396). “We are strangers to ourselves. That is how close the other is. Ecology is about intimacy” (Morton 139). And love is about ecology—“what is called *intersubjectivity*—a shared space in which human meaning resonates—is a small region of a larger interobject configuration space” (81)—aesthetics aids in *realizing* and acting with this.



The reciprocal function, of the form  $y = \frac{1}{x}$ , is an (a)symmetrical function whose arms asymptotically approach and move with each other, but not fully as they never *quite* meet in the middle: a two-scene.

“Love is more than love,” writes Cummings (684). His (pata)physical, Taoist love is like a seed, which is a world and a place containing (im)possibilities: it fabricates unknownness (446) and “posits the possible consequences of an impossible inconsequence” (Bök

25). It ingeniously dehisces the infinite from the finite, creates and is created by hahaeccieties through idiosyncresy, through variance, deviance, and alliance, through actualizing the *as if*, through doing dreams, oneiric orisons. It forges and forages beyond and around language, a precarious, clumsily prayerful <sup>etho</sup><sub>theo</sub>logy of the coincident. Through rare and (a)symmetrical love's fragility, its two-scene, heart-carrying persensitive,<sup>64</sup> open worlds and beyonds, proud depths and humble heights, a third way to obedience and command, to reality and *un-*, to Shakespeare and Petrarch, and to Modernism, Romanticism, and the Metaphysicals. This third, Taoist, illimitable way is (w)here an eecology of *as if* grows-and-decays simultaneously, *wu wei*, where eternity is *now*, where "Twice i have lived forever in a smile" (CP 765), and where "the true fulfillment of the self is through fulfilling others" (Chen §8.1, 74). To love is to "conceive a man, should he have anything / would give a little more than it away" (CP 420), and then to be that "man," two-in-one. Love is the root (or rhizome) of eecology, where all things bud and bloom.

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<sup>64</sup> "I carry your heart with me(i carry it in / my heart)i am never without it(anywhere / i go you go" (CP 766).

II  
ORNITHOPOEIA  
the birds of e. e. cummings

*I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing  
than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance*<sup>65</sup>

INTRODUCTION  
*an ephemerology*

The poetry of E. E. Cummings teems with birds. Birds and bird-words flock his language—they occur at least 375 times.<sup>66</sup> Cummings's work and words (*logos*) figure the bird and chiasmically allow the bird to figure them—"the Greek word *logos* is usually translated as 'language,' but more originally it means 'relation.' *Logos* is that which binds, gathers, or relates" (Terblanche *Poetry* 34). His poetry, gathering poet and bird, relating reader and wor(l)d, has "eyes half / thrush" (CP 42), a head "filled with sleeping birds" (33), a "stirringofbirds" smile (169), and a voice "more than bird" (752). It is an ornithological instance of eecological love, a lover-poet striving to be birds and beloved-birds striving to be the poet—"the pure love of a larger, clumsier creature for a smaller, winged creature, which is happily reciprocated" (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 21). The old trope that the song of the poet and the song of the bird are related is undying and is perhaps part of what makes poetry *work*: late in life, Cummings "heard a bird sing, thought of the beauty of the natural world, and wrote, 'If I could . . . become one with this loveliness, truthfulsuch a truth, why then there'd be no crying on saviors to save me from my sins'" (129). This animal-human—

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<sup>65</sup> CP 484. About art and his poetry, Cummings admonishes his reader: "DON'T TRY TO UNDERSTAND IT. LET IT TRY TO UNDERSTAND YOU" (qtd. in Kennedy 83).

<sup>66</sup> This count includes sing/ing, song, bird/s, wing, twitter, whistle, feather, coo, chirp, flock, beak, nest, egg, syrinx, thrush, robin, sparrow, pigeon, chick, whippoorwill, lark, canary, swallow, chickadee, chicken, dove, peacock, cockatoo, penguin, hummingbird, swan, crow, hawk, owl, screech-owl, and eagle.



which is to say animal-animal–relation expanded in Cummings’s poetry is eecological; it fosters and forges links between species and hahaeccities. Even when “I speak to myself, I speak with the sounds of others” (Lawlor 183), the sounds of laughs, wind, birdsongs.

Cummings’s early work (1922–33) is light, little, capable of beautiful song and height. It references birds in passing but does not often dwell with them, which will occur later in his career. The volumes *No Thanks* (1935), *New Poems* (1940), and *XAIPE* (1950) each have one bird-poem focusing on “some bird which is all birds but more fleet” (CP 379), on a bird who in its singularity evades taxonomy and taxidermy, heights below the constructs, cages, and answers into which birds are anthropocentrically forced. His last two volumes of poetry, *95 Poems* and *73 Poems*, offer a dozen poems that dwell on (and with) birds. Cummings, like Audubon, the American Woodsman who painted *The Birds of America*, “took ornithological art out of its glass case for all time” (vi).

Cummings’s poetry, specifically his bird-poetry, is *ornithopoeia*. With this neologism I fuse the Greek stem for *bird* (*ornithos*) with the root for *creation* (*poiesis*). It is a little and lively subgenre—for “virtually all of the animals in Cummings’s poetry are small ones” (Terblanche *Poetry* 142)—of what Terblanche identifies in Cummings’s poetry as *erdapoesis*, “the making of a poetic response to earthly existence” (24). This “ethical” responsivity and responsibility, a poetics of obligation, Cummings transmutes into his aesthetics. As Cummings’s love, through (pata)physical love-making, was a chimaera of *eros* and *agape*, ornithopoeia is a chimaera of onomatopoeia and prosopopoeia, an aspiration that transpires in, and is inspired by, real little birds who expire. There is a delicate syzygy between *eros* and onomatopoeia, between *agape* and prosopopoeia: *eros* is a persensitive extending toward

an object and *agape* is a persensitive opening in the agape subject; onomatopoeia extends toward an object and prosopopoeia creates a new <sup>sub;</sup>object. Ornithopoeia is a specific instance, the only kind, of (pata)physical love: lover is reader-human, beloved is poem-bird.

As birds molt after breeding (Gill 263), after *(Pata)physical Love* is *Ornithopoeia*: the bird molts into a figure and the figure molts into a bird lively in Cummings's poetry, and figures and birds grow together—though to him and Derrida, to even say “the bird” is asinine. Birds to Cummings cannot be named, like the Tao, all creatures, all things. Like his poems—of almost one thousand, only twelve have titles. “Birds, like poems, should not mean, but be” (Schafer 31). Cummings stresses specificity, particularity, eecology; as the Tao which he follows is of flesh and a porous oneness with nature, so he follows actual, feathery birds not from a detached and phallic height that subject(ifie)s and subordinates, nor from an ontological perspective that essentializes—i.e. makes necessary and an essence—but from a *phen(omen)ological*<sup>67</sup> persensitive. Cummings's ornithopoeia creates a bird that is marginally linguistic, a bird that pecks at the limits of words and flies the (prison-)coop of language, a bird that sings beyond what language can solidify in letters and grammar.

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<sup>67</sup> *Phen(omen)ology* = phenomenology + phenology + omen. It is the apocalyptic and prophetic study and fact of selves in systems, subjects in cycles, souls in the earth (see pp. 120–21). The human can only be in a network of nonhumans, which it is itself—“I am among the others and they are in me” (Lawlor 178). It is interesting to note that “by the time Greek lyric poetry was flourishing [...], the words for bird and omen were almost synonymous, and a person seldom undertook an act of consequence without benefit of augury and auspice” (Gill xxii). Birds are also omens in the Bible, with which the Unitarian-raised Cummings was familiar: Noah's dove and raven provide signs the flood has relented (Gen. 8:6–12 [KJV]); Elijah's bread-bearing ravens indicate famine (1 Kings 17:1–7); the Holy Spirit signals that Jesus is God's son by perching as a dove (Matt. 3:13–17). Biblical birds are also least, a foil for human importance: says Jesus, “behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Matt. 6:26); and “are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. [...] Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29–31). “Cummings's” birds, following this Biblical tradition, as littlest, oblige us to love them, to care for them, for whoever cares for the least of these cares for the earth and for eecology: “one can begin to be ethical only by respecting the most vulnerable forms of life” (Wills 13).

Leonard Lawlor, writing about rats and like a rat, sings the praises of poetry, of writing, as an ethico-aesthetic (m)end:

any animal-writing [...] would be a writing that struggles to escape from the dominant forms of expression. [...] It would create the outside of language, the outside in the sense of a new land. There would be a character, a persona, who exhibits a profound empathy with the whole world. This character would therefore present a new possibility of life (181).

“Cummings’s” birds thus present new possibilities of living. Cummings “allows us not to decide, nay, [...] forbids us to do so” and maintains the “fluidity of sense” by accommodating all semantic possibilities, all sense and nonsense that may fly or grow from his poetry (Lecerclé 142). “His” birds are as *animot*—always plural in their singularity, a returning to the word, urging a way of thinking the absence of the name and word otherwise (Derrida *Animal* 47–48)—who strive to be birds, to love birds, to present new possibilities of lives. That he uses them to figure so much else is his Taoist way of exhuming the earthy interleavings of all things, of humbly intimating ecological interconnections that include and often orbit birds. His birds invent the very air (CP 448).

His birds are the feathered representatives for all creatures. In his *oeuvre*, he uses the words “bird” and “birds” 67 times, and he mentions nineteen broad species-groups of birds.<sup>68</sup> With the exception of penguins, hummingbirds, and chickens—whose three mentions are all in the same poem (239)—as well as predatory crows, hawks, owls, screech-owls, and eagles, who are each mentioned once in satires, all his birds are songbirds, found in wide ranges though mostly North American, and are arboreal, not terrestrial like chickens

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<sup>68</sup> Thrushes (10), robins (7), sparrows (5), pigeons (5), whippoorwills (3), larks (3), chickens (3), canaries (4), chickadees (2), doves (2), peacocks (1), cockatoos (1), penguins (1) hummingbirds (1), swans (1), crows (1), hawks (1), owls (1), screech-owls (1), and eagles (1).

nor soaring like raptors. Their flight is not a soaring but a “humble and difficult flight along the ground” (Kierkegaard *Works* 84)—they are the avian enfleshments of love, and will help us (their lovers and beloveds) to feel through the senses of others wholly other. They are primarily herbi- or insectivorous passerines (perching birds): “his” birds are not birds of prey, but birds of pray, of <sup>etho</sup><sub>theo</sub>logy, perched in prayer. They are songbirds who are not solely *animot* or symb(i)ols—where the subject, *i*, peeks from symbolized life, from recursively enlivened symbols—for all animals and lives, things, objects, and ephemera, opening outward into possibilities, but symbols opening inward, revealing the referent-less music<sup>69</sup> of their songs, which with their flesh discloses the inadequacy of language. These birds are timid birds without predatory violence; they are the birds with whom humans most identify, whose songs we welcome and who we most often kill with pesticides and deforestation.

We listen to birds, hope for birds to melodiously tell us when it is spring, and are troubled when spring is silent.<sup>70</sup> A spring “unheralded by the return of the birds” is “tragic and unbearable” (Carson 103, 112). Birds are Cummings’s soul, our soul: *l’oiseaux que donc je suis et le moi que donc l’oiseau suit*. Birds “have ceaselessly inspired us with their mellifluous and polyphonic utterances, undoubtedly instilling some of our earliest impulses toward song and spoken language” (Abram 273). Birds do not separate “their sentience from their sensate bodies” (268), an abstractive fallacy, and they are thus the enfleshed model for an aesthetics striving as the “ethical” participality of *to be*.

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<sup>69</sup> Traditionally, music is the “pure” referent without a sign, the referent that cannot be signified. Cummings’s oscine beloveds sing a song of the earth, of the Tao, for song, as Maya Angelou says, not for answers.

<sup>70</sup> Their five types of songs—generic song, which implies that no danger is near, alternating companion calls to stay in auditory contact, fledgling begging cries, male-male aggression or territory calls, and alarm calls (Abram 270–71)—“provide a crucial source of information for many other animals” to follow (263).

Ornithopoeia is partially composed of onomatopoeia—it is the poetic (re)creation of birds and bird-bodies through imitation of their earthy sounds and songs, their flights and feathers. Onomatopoeia is famous for Saussure’s criticism that it is approximate, conventional, and inorganic, that things “lose something of their original character in order to assume that of the linguistic sign in general, which is unmotivated” (855). But what is “unmotivated” figuring, and what is “convention” but being together? Saussure says that because different languages have different onomatopoeia for the same sounds—e.g. in French a rooster crows *cocorico*, but in English this same crowing is *cock-a-doodle-doo*—that therefore onomatopoeia is not imitative but conventional. He elides the originary imitative impulse, which operates unsurprisingly within convention.<sup>71</sup> “Onomatopoeia mirrors the soundscape. Even with our advanced speech today we continue, in descriptive vocabulary, to cast back sounds heard in the acoustic environment” (Schafer 40–41).

Now, onomatopoeia is, in a weak sense, words which imitate sounds (Bede qtd. in Bredin 556). Literally and historically, it was the strong figure of naming, of “creation of a word *ex novo*,” because words were thought to capture the essence of that which they named (Quintilian qtd. in 556). Onomatopoeia strives for this word-thing fitness in four ways: word-sounds imitate the referent’s sounds, articulatory facial and vocal muscular movements suggest the referent’s movement, word-sounds trigger impressions associated with the referent, and word-shape or context connotes the referent (Preminger 860). Timbre, the attributes of a sound-producing body that make sound imperfect and therefore

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<sup>71</sup> “Saussure greatly overstated his case” (Preminger 860): though onomatopoeia is “constrained both by the anatomy and physiology of the human vocal system and by the phonetic space of the speakers’ native language,” its elements are conserved across languages (Assaneo 1–5).

distinct, the “resonance, pitch, [and] peculiar way of pronouncing sounds” unique to each thing (Dolar 22), is the thread that draws together onomatopoeic words and their referents. Through timbre, onomatopoeia suggests “qualities such as size, motion, and even color” (Preminger 860). Timbre is synaesthetic; it is symbolic of the objects of persensitivity. It

opens, rather, immediately onto the metaphor of other perceptible registers: color (*Klangfarbe*, ‘color of sound,’ the German name for timbre), touch (texture, roundness, coarseness), taste (bitter, sweet), even evocations of smells. In other words, timbre resounds with and in the totality of perceptible registers (Nancy “Listening” 42).

The subject to Nancy is “perhaps no subject at all, except as the place of resonance” (22) for laughter and birdsong, individuals and ecologies. The “subject” is a place of resonance always in relation, always an object and object-conditioned, because “the ears have no lids, as Lacan never tires of repeating; they cannot be closed, one is constantly exposed, no distance from sound can be maintained” (Dolar 78), no isolation from the hahaeccities of others, from laughter which gestures wildly and wordlessly from one to another.

We recognize that no word, not even autonoms, recursive acronyms, or performatives, can be or capture the hahaeccity of a thing (and the thing laughs at this attempt), but a word through onomatopoeia strives to approximate the referent and to acknowledge its failure to do so fully. It strives to inhabit, with the referent, its own inhibitions. With the onomatopoeic aspect of ornithopoeia, Cummings reminds that things are unnameable but that names are often necessary, and so must be frugal, tranquil, ever-changing, and flexible. Imperfectly, onomatopoeia maps words onto sounds and things as much as it maps sounds and things onto words (Bolinger qtd. in Preminger 862). Onomatopoeia is a poetics of naming, not a purported law of naming. It associates words and sounds or things based on

striving for a resemblance, partial embodiment. It evades onoma(u)tonomy, the now-named “wound without a name: that of having *been given a name*” (Derrida *Animal* 19).<sup>72</sup>

Ornithopoeia onomatopoeically imitates and prosopopoeically imagines and not only in this sequence. It is also prosopopoeia—the poetic (re)generation of birds and bird-bodies as the creation of new voices and new faces (from *facēre*, “to make”); it is the giving of literary voices and faces to the nonliterary, to nonlife and the nonaesthetic, and vice versa, the twining of words and things, ideas and objects, meta- and -physics. Prosopopoeia is both speech *of* and speech *to* imaginary or absent entities, which gives them agency (Preminger 994). It is

Derrida’s ‘invention of the other,’ taking ‘invention’ in its double sense of both ‘create’ and ‘reveal,’ and taking ‘the other’ in the strong sense of something radically unknowable that is, paradoxically and surprisingly, met in the act of wondering, imagining, or reading. [...] Prosopopoeia, as the invention of the other, encounters something unknowable, something, moreover, that is as much obscured as uncovered by being personified (Hillis-Miller *Versions* 80–81).

It has the powerless power “to bring down the gods from Heaven,” writes Quintilian (9:2); it enables us to “pretend at times, and with good effect, that the images of things and persons are before our eyes, and that their voices sound in our ears” (9:2). The gods are *brought down*: prosopopoeia places the formerly divine power of creation in the mind and hands of lovers and beloveds, the poet and his reader through “a dynamic characterized by an

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<sup>72</sup> See p. 50. When a thing is named, it is caged in anthropocentric discourses. And “names [...] belong to the conscious. They do not lead to Tao” (Chen 54)—“the essence of life is its continually changing character; but our concepts are all discontinuous and fixed” (James qtd. in Connolly 33). Because the Tao is the symbioses and metabolisms that are a life, and not some sort of power that makes aliveness alive, it is “thus a verb, not a noun. When forced to give it a name, the sage calls it Tao, the Way or Path” (Chen 52). Tao, and each manifestation (ornithopoeically, each bird) that is Tao and the only way Tao is, the only why, is nameless (§1). “Ethics” therefore “cannot be put into words” (Wittgenstein 6.421).

exchange of power regarding the I/thou relationship of the speaker and her object” (Rives 148). The divine *Thou* is an earthly *i*, and always was.

Prosopopoeia is de Man’s “master trope of poetic discourse” (“Hypogram” 48). Like its sister apostrophe, it tropes “not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself (Culler “Apostrophe” 135), and so it is an “epistemological tension” (de Man “Hypogram” 48) that challenges our epistemologies, our myriad metaphysics of presence; it is a giving of a face which “therefore implies that the original face can be missing or nonexistent” (44), illegible, unintelligible, or unencounterable—which is the case for now-extinct birds (e.g. dodos, laughing owls).<sup>73</sup> However, de Man’s “nonexistence” is fathomless, not simply an absence once a presence, but also a nothing, no-thing absolutely and no-thing as swirling chaos and vortex of change—*nihilo* and *tehom*.<sup>74</sup>

De Man finds prosopopoeia everywhere—it is “endless” (“Shelley” 122) and it un-hides the more real “hypotext” of all texts (“Hypogram” 44), which are merely “the prosopopoeia of prosopopoeia” (48).<sup>75</sup> James Paxson criticizes this post-structuralist tendency of de Man’s, and writes that “the drive to see a universal prosopopoeia at the core of cognition—the deconstructive stance on personification in general—thus needs countering by the deconstructive suspicion of foundations, origins, and Big Endings” (175). Prosopopoeia is

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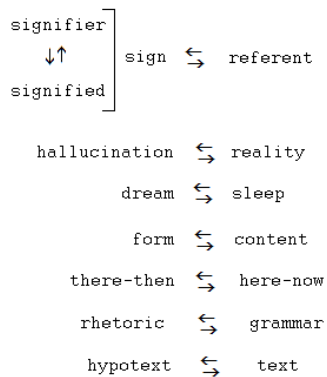
<sup>73</sup> Cf. Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways* (2014), for an emotionally and ethically challenging survey of avian extinctions, avian-human relations, and the “ethical” ability of stories. Birds, and all creatures, are precarious: “today, one in eight known bird species is thought to be threatened with global extinction” (6).

<sup>74</sup> Catherine Keller opposes *creatio ex nihilo* in her reinterpretation of Genesis 1:1–3 and Church orthodoxy with what she calls *creatio ex profundis*. Nothing (*nihil*) and deep chaos (*tehom* or *profundis*) are (con)fused in prosopopoeia. Her cyclic profundity is a Christian process theology that aligns with Cummings’s Taoism.

<sup>75</sup> De Man spells prosopopoeia incorrectly (prosopopeia). Rather than insert “[sic]” in all his quotations, I alter the spelling. With an *o*, perhaps to symbolize ornithopoeia or the Taoist round, prosopopoeia is (w)hole and visually echoes *poetry*, in which it is here being recognized as part of the creativity that *realizes* the *as if*, as lovers do. It also resonates with Cummings’s frequent use of *o* in the closely related figure of apostrophe.



alpha nor omega, and while it is <sup>un</sup><sub>an</sub>aesthetic to claim every thing is not only a text but therefore also an endless prosopopoeia, de Man perspicaciously notes that prosopopoeia—both *of* and *to* entities—“undoes sense certainty” (“Hypogram” 49), “threatens to dismember or to disfigure [...] lexicality and grammaticality” (45), and “undoes the distinction between reference and signification” (50), even while creating members, figures, grammars, sense



certainty, and reference. For de Man, prosopopoeia unsettles the distinction between signifier and signified, and between sign and referent—because of these disruptions, de Man says prosopopoeia undoes several binaries (see adjacent diagram).

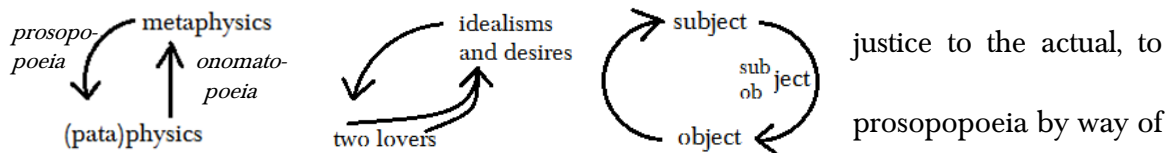
But both de Man and Riffaterre, whose work de Man references, do not question the subject-object dichotomy—prosopopoeia, in their work and similarly in Rives’s essay, “stakes out a figural space for the chiasmic interpretation: either the subject will take over the object, or it will be penetrated by the object” (Riffaterre 112). A disruption of this basic metaphysical binary does not occur, nor does even mutual interpenetration. However, Riffaterre unwittingly reveals how this breakdown may happen: through prosopopoeia, he writes, “the setting becomes the character it once enclosed” (119), and vice versa; the world’s “agency and our agency become blended together, or better, imperfectly fused, helping to show us that we are never consummate agents even when we participate in creative adventures” (Connolly 64), an aesthetic *poiesis* that reflects ethical living. Prosopopoeia is not so phallic as to effect interpenetrations; it opens pores and facilitates permeability in binary categories. Autonomous Self and Other dissipate into nameless and scale-

free heteronomous others, a murmuration of starlings, each prosopopoeically affecting each other:



“Behavioral correlations are scale free: the change in the behavioral state of one animal affects and is affected by that of all other animals in the group, no matter how large the group is. Scale-free correlations provide each animal with an effective perception range much larger than the direct interindividual interaction range, thus enhancing global response to perturbations” (Cavagna 11865). Image of starling murmuration from Nureldine [2007].

Prosopopoeia disrupts and destabilizes binaries in the creation of hahaeccities, and onomatopoeia interrupts and slips through classifications in the reaction to idiosyncresies and timbre. The double movement of both figures in one figure, ornithopoeia, is the double movement of *yin* and *yang* in the Tao, of lover (you) and beloved (I) in love (we), of physics to metaphysics and back to (pata)physics, from an eco poetic persensitive, as the diagrams below show (modified from p. 39). Though art need not be realistic, in its genius it will do

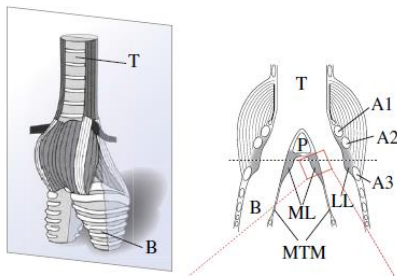


onomatopoeia and vice versa. Both figures harmonize with life: onomatopoeia mimics and prosopopoeia forms. This is not vitalism. “Life” is fleshy existence, not essence—or rather, it is *existence which is its own essence*, as Jane Bennett’s vibrant matter, and nothing more<sup>76</sup>; and “the ethical task at hand here is to cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality, to

<sup>76</sup> Echoing Diogenes of Apollonia’s claim that matter (what he, following Parmenides, called the One) was itself intelligent and divine, Bennett reworks *vitalism* into the quasi-agential capacity of things (viii), “not a spiritual supplement or ‘life force’ added to the matter said to house it,” not traditional vitalism, but rather a *vital materialism* where affect is equated with materiality (xiii). She does this, and I adapt it for Cummings, because “the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption” by preventing us from experiencing “a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (ix). Cummings’s friend A. J. Ayer accused him of “being ‘almost an animist,’” to which Cummings replied, “almost? I AM an animist” (Sawyer-Lauçanno 491). Bennett’s *vital materialism*, “neither vitalism nor mechanism” (62), best articulates Cummings’s *animism*.

become perceptually open to it” (14). Cummings’s ornithopoeia harnesses the weak forces of these two figures in the bird, to reveal birds and conceal words. The songs and plumage of birds reflect the two core aspects of Cummings’s poetics—sound and sight—and the birds’ physical attributes (e.g. smallness, plainness) make them ideal representatives of Cummings’s idiosyncraptic aesthetic. Exhibiting a Hofstadter-esque recursivity, the same strangeness present in the three above diagrams, “bird displays evolve from nonsignal behavior patterns through a process called *ritualization*, which leads to increased uniformity of performance as well as modification of behavior patterns” (Gill 231, emphasis mine).

The little songbirds Cummings writes (about) have a unique tracheal organ called a *syrix*.<sup>77</sup> The syrix is a double-columned “voice box” which can “produce different, complex songs simultaneously,” which can be “coupled to produce a single, complex sound” (240) in contrast to the human larynx, which is a single column capable of one



“The syrix consists of a cartilaginous framework, oscillatory soft tissues (labia) and muscles for controlling airflow and labial tension. The oscine syrix contains two sound sources, each consisting of a pair of labia (lateral, LL, and medial labium, ML) that are located near the tracheo-bronchial junction. T, trachea; A1–A3, syringeal cartilages; P, pessulus; B, bronchus; MTM, medial tympaniform membrane.” (Riede 3).

sound at a time. As the syrix sings two songs at once, ornithopoeia, the figure of life-giving, approaches word-life from two persensitives at once: from self-equilibrium (*tzu-cheng*) with the actual inherent in onomatopoeia, and from self-transformation (*tzu-hua*) with the actual inherent in prosopopoeia, as unnameable as the actual may be (Chen 18). One of the first

<sup>77</sup> The *syrix* is named after the chaste nymph Syrinx, who fled the lecherous Pan and was transformed into hollow reeds, which he then cut to create his pipes. Cummings uses this scientific word once, bafflingly: “now the intimate flower dreams / of parted lips / dim upon the syrix” (CP 75).

essays on Cummings's work, Gorham Munson's essay "Syrinx" praises the oscine Cummings for his "unanalyzable and indefinable" grace (9) and because his "visual notations of auditory rhythms stimulate the ears of silent readers"—Cummings, Munson proclaims, is "the first successful creator of calligrams," beautiful-sounding graphs (10).<sup>78</sup> These calligrams, a synaesthetic parallel to ornithopoeia, induce a "relaxed sensitiveness, the opening of all our receptive pores, the complete surrender to what is before us" (14). Aesthetic words condition "ethical" language, enmesh us in a poetics of obligation: we become conscious of exceptions through and within rules, like misplaced punctuation or disarrayed syntax within grammars, and we learn to laugh and love with them. Munson says that Cummings's lyrics are an *is* (9); Friedman writes that a Cummings poem, "in capturing the process of becoming, will *become* something itself, a Verb, an Is. It is not *about* something, it *is* something; it doesn't mean anything, it exists" (*Growth* 51).

Ornithopoeia is the fleshy heart of a demanding and maddening de Manian aesthetics and of a poetics of obligation, a dismantling of ethical scaffolds following Caputo. Says de Man: "particularity (the here and now) was lost long ago, even before speech [...]: a here and now that, as Hegel puts it, was never accessible [...] to consciousness or to speech" ("Hypogram" 42). This "here and now," Cummings would agree, is inaccessible because it *is* life, *nowhere* because its processes of accessing are not self-accessible.<sup>79</sup> Life is not vitalist, a Drieschian entelechy (Bennett 71) nor a Bergsonian *élan vital* (76), not transcendent but coincident, not ineffable but fecundating. Ornithopoeia reveals that birds,

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<sup>78</sup> "Calligram" was coined by Guillaume Apollinaire (1918), who wrote a so-named book of spatial or ergodic poems (Cohen 85). Cummings met him through Louis Aragon (Sawyer-Lauçanno 213).

<sup>79</sup> Refer to Bakker's blind brain hypothesis (p. 18).

as do we, do not merely think with their brains or “minds” but “in a constant and mostly unmediated relation with their earthly surroundings, think with the whole of their bodies” (Abram 267). Because of the lack of mediation, spontaneity is the *modus operandi* of life, and “ethical” spontaneity must burst from a ground that has been well-nurtured, aesthetically. “Cummings’ point is, and always was, that spontaneity requires a great deal of effort” (Friedman *(Re)Valuing* 36).

**EECOLOGY AD ABSURDUM**  
a note on cummings’s aesthetics

Aesthetics, following Cummings’s Taoism, is striving to en flesh and participate in the enfleshment of the beautiful, this-here-now. To lose the here-and-now of the self or lover and recover the here-and-now of the other or beloved, even as the other does so for the self—this is the movement-in-place of love: I am lover; birds are one example of beloved. Aesthetics is a training ground or playground for “ethics,” a watering, composting, and nurturing of poetics of obligation and of imperatives. William Connolly, an immanent naturalist, develops a parallel “ethics of cultivation” that “emerges out of a seed of care for this world that is already there when you are lucky, and it then grows by cultivating that seed” and can be brought “to bear on new and unexpected situations, combining refined sensitivity with critical reflection” (79). The arts “help this process along” (79).

Because we construct our lives from our environment and our experiences, we are all creators, all artists, with the earth not as canvas, *tabula rasa*, but as all our materials including ourselves (cf. Washburn). This aesthetic creation and imaginative engagement with “ethics” does not lead to regressive relativism and insipid subjectivism (though it may):

it is not to find some or the same meanings in a work of art, for example, but the processes involved in striving to find meaning, in participating with other <sup>sub</sup>jects in the arduous processes of perceiving. It seems natural, when looking at a painting, to try to make art an *end*, but in doing so we realize this *mean*—of perception, focus and joyous discipline, persensitivity and creation—is its own *end*, and that to engage with art means to aesthetically fecundate all faculties for “ethical” conduct. This does not mean that perceiving art makes one more “ethical,” but only that when aesthetics is a (m)end and not some blasé meaningless end-in-itself (cf. Wilde) or endless means-to-another (cf. Deleuze), it effects development of affects, which when in full bloom may be more readily empathic, loving, and eecological. “Art, as most of us have experienced, can give us access to complex possibilities of understanding and perception, remote from our own” (Zwicky *Lyric* §45)—and so Cummings gives us an “earnest exploration of the possibilities of language according to sound, typographical arrangement of space and line, grammatical twisting, unorthodox punctuation, peculiar juxtaposition of noun and adjective, or fragmentation of words and sentences” (Kennedy 32), all of which, in the process of creation-reaction, quicken our senses, brighten our eyes, and ripen our ears.

Cummings draws—i.e. pulls and sketches—our attention to the inherently ethical bent of his poetry and perhaps, in often imperceptible and unnoticed ways, of all art.<sup>80</sup> This ethico-aesthetic interleaving does not mean an artist only ever has the purpose of ethical

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<sup>80</sup> Walter Pater writes that aesthetics eventually “passes into the ethical phase, in which the persons and the incidents of the poetical narrative are realized as abstract symbols, because intensely characteristic examples, of moral or spiritual conditions” (90). These “seem be something more than mere symbolism, and to be connected with some peculiarly sympathetic penetration, on the part of the artist, into the subjects he intended to depict”—a connection replicated in artist-audience and audience-object relations, ethically (97–98).

growth in mind for herself or her audience, nor that art is not also for enjoyment and pleasure (if this “ethical” imperative is not violated, that is). But the most serious art is produced with at least the effect of engagement with minutiae and particulars (idiosyncrasies, anomaloi, clinamen, timbre, (im)perfections), of examining the engaged persensitivity or *organic sensation* and how to improve, repair, and affect it, and of empathically eradicating the self to allow the other or object-of-art to take root. These processes of feeling an artwork parallel processes of loving an other. Aesthetics conditions ethics and vice versa; they are fractals in different spheres. Yet even in an attuned and critical lover, this analogy of self-object to self-other can lead to objectification, as with Cummings’s earlier romances and with prostitutes—and so the discipline of persensitivity must not cease.

Cummings’s aesthetic theses are clear. He outlines his project early in his career, in various notes, essays, and poems, and abides by his major tenets throughout his life. His two aesthetic theses are: 1) *art is alive*—“art, if it means anything, means TO BE INTENSELY ALIVE” (Cummings “You Aren’t Mad” 129–30); and 2) *art is creation*, not representation (Houghton notes 55.86 qtd. in Cohen 59).<sup>81</sup> From these theses come essential features of Cummings’s aesthetics: technique,<sup>82</sup> participating-striving, feeling, and giving.

With this (pata)physical Taoism, “we cease to be spectators of a ludicrous and ineffectual striving and, involving ourselves in a new and fundamental kinesis, become protagonists” (“Gaston Lachaise” 18); we strive for (*eros* and onomatopoeia) and participate in

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<sup>81</sup> This refers to the collection of Cummings’s personal notes, stored at Harvard’s Houghton Library.

<sup>82</sup> Technique is not “anything static, a school, a noun, a slogan, a formula” but rather “the alert hatred of normality which, through the lips of a tactile and cohesive adventure, asserts that nobody in general and someone in particular is incorrigibly and actually alive” (Cummings “T. S. Eliot” 27).

(*agape* and *prosopopoeia*) ecology, in what Cummings calls *integrality* (Houghton notes 111.1 qtd. Cohen 70); we maintain the creative tension between the two, existing in this maintenance, *maintenant*; and we begin to “*know around* a thing, character, or situation” (“You Aren’t Mad” 127). In art, we must not analyze, for “once analysis is applied, all is lost” (“Ivan Narb” 188). We must *feel* and “participate in a kind of religious experience” where “a new world opens its iridescent portals to [our] enraptured senses” (188). For Cummings, poetry is “whatever cannot be translated” (*Eimi* 140) and a “poet is somebody who feels, and who expresses his feeling through words. A lot of people think or believe or know they feel—but that’s thinking or believing or knowing, not feeling” (“A Poet’s Advice” 335). Poets are artists “because giving is their nature, their self, what they wish to do and what they can be” (*Eimi* 326)—through participating in the life of art, and striving in the art of life, we feel and give of ourselves and to others.

In addition to objectification and solipsism, another problem that arises from Cummings’s development of his own aesthetics is his uncritical defense of circuses and zoos, which both contain aliveness and therefore, according to Cummings, are a kind of art. He has several poems devoted to these two ethically ambiguous institutions, and in *Eimi* he writes of his experience at a Soviet circus (175–78), acknowledging his own ignorance on the subject of animal training and abuse (177). This is where the *ad absurdum* enters: Cummings takes his thesis “art is alive,” independent of his thesis “art is creation,” and submits it to a *reductio ad absurdum*, thus arriving at the conclusion that a circus is art (“The Adult” 109–14) and that a zoo—because the word “originates in that most beautiful of all verbs, *zoo*, ‘I am alive’” (“The Secret” 174)—“is not a collection of animals but a



*number of ways of being alive*" (174), and is a sort of paragon of art wherein "'human' and 'animal' interact" and that therefore "becomes a compound instrument for the investigation of mysterious humanity" (175). Elsewhere, however, Cummings rants against "machine-made 'civilization,'" which "isolates every human being from experience(that is,from himself)by teaching mankind to mistake a mere gadgety interpretation(i.e. the weatherman's prediction)of experience for experience itself(e.g. weather)" (*Eimi* 145), and this condemnation, along with his Taoist investment in the *actual* world and not in the merely *real*, should take him in the other direction, *ad absurdum*, which is the direction in which I take (because I follow) his poetry. Again, here is the ornithopoeic movement: I take (prosopopoeia) Cummings's poetry toward an earth-bound and not circus-tent ecology by following (onomatopoeia) what it says and what it is. Despite his strange *reductio ad absurdum*, Cummings notes that in a zoo, "the truth is, not that that we see monsters, but that we *are* monsters" ("The Secret" 175), monsters among monsters, equal and not superior, striving to live together. In his early organ-grinder poem, the observer becomes the dancing monkey (CP 109), and in his late mouse poem, the trap-setter becomes the trapped mouse (784).

His aesthetics does not follow his father's Unitarianism nor a "Protestant work ethic," an impossible striving for grace because of an infinite debt of sin. Cummings's Taoist striving is rather to be *one with nature*, in and for participation. This ecological "telos" of Taoism, in marked contrast to the transcendent and terminable teleological striving of Buddhism's Nirvana and Christianity's Heaven, is to *continue to be one with nature*; to be participating aesthetically is to be striving compassionately as a heart that aches, vibrantly as a body that dulls, interminably as a life that ends, to be like the "humble one(gifted with

/illimitable joy) / bird,” who “sings / love’s every truth” (783). It is striving to be “ethical,” to aid and love the earth, for “ethics is a thin barrier against the possibility of extinction” (Braidotti 217) and against ecocatastrophe, which is unnatural, total death, not merely natural, singular dying. It is striving to *recognize* and to *be* the particular and the ecological, the conscious and lively, and the (w)hole life; it is a “continual recommencing, an indecisiveness resolved one moment and lost the next” (Riffaterre qtd. in de Man “Hypogram” 44), when “a certain *there* and a certain *then* [...] can become a *here* and a *now*” (51). In the preceding equations, Riffaterre and de Man are both writing about reading—“. . . a bird, reading the air. . .” (Cummings *Eimi* 3). Their descriptions suggest the beautiful ornithopoeic chiasmi between poet and reader, lover and beloved, bird and human—“reading is the appropriation of the other to the self” (Champagne 2), and also the reverse, which makes texts “the natural places to discover the relations of responsibility” (181).

Ornithopoeia brings life to signs and signs to life, somewhat biosemiotically. To be alive is to be a bird, “a / -live a / ,bird” (CP 471). To be assigned is to live with the “tinily birds / whose magical gaiety makes your beautiful name” (631). “Ethics”—rather, a poetics of obligation—is to feebly recognize the striving of the flesh, to frailly inhabit it, and to delicately help and allow others to inhabit it in all its inhibitions, for “in the act of inhabiting, the circuit of self arises” (Levinas *Totality* 33f). We are all means and ends at once—(m)ends. *Il n’y a pas de fin*.<sup>83</sup> Aesthetics and “ethics,” beauty and alive-ness, here merge (Cummings

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<sup>83</sup> *There are no ends*. French helpfully elides the copula, the verb “to be” (*are*). In Taoism, the means is the end, cyclically: “a synthesis of a new kind: that of an end of my action which would be, at the same time, an existence” (Ricoeur 71). “Life is demeaned the moment it is made a means” (Caputo *Insistence* 242). And life ends (by becoming an infinite universal) the moment it is made an end. Life is a means which becomes its own end. The end is the means. A (m)end is a Schrödingerian event upon which any decision is derision:

“The Adult” 14). Cummings’s ubiquitous anthimeria partly fuses in this way: noun-verbs, both-and *and* either-or.<sup>84</sup>

Ornithopoeia strives for creation and reaction of (m)ends, hahaeccities. It participates in this-here-now as flesh and partially, as art, already *is* a here-and-now in Benjamin’s *aura*, its sense of a “unique existence in a particular place” (1053). It strains to be this now-here as flesh because it *is* flesh, which strains in and through its attributes like thought and flight—ascendance, not transcendence. Birds born and birds written dissolve limits and open “the porous boundary between the human and the more-than-human worlds” (Abram 272); ornithopoeia, through prosopopoeia—*porospopoeia*<sup>85</sup>—“makes the unknown accessible to the mind and to the senses” (de Man “Autobiography” 80).

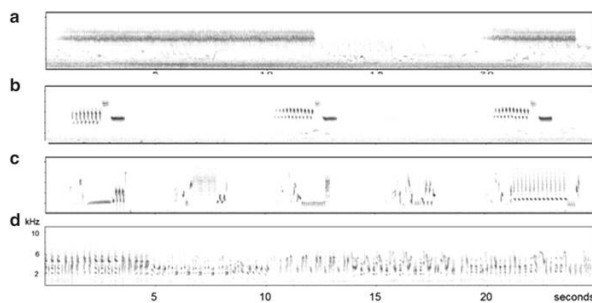
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It is tautological, as the only aim of life is life’s continuation (cf. de Gourmont) and the only aim of lovers to continue to outgrow (cf. Cummings). This simultaneous means-end dialectic is possible at once, from one persensitive, and also because of different levels and alternate persensitives (see pp. 117, 124–25).

<sup>84</sup> To say “either *both-and* or *either-or*” or “*both-and* not *either-or*” elevates Either-Or to a transcendental position and reinscribes epistemological binaries that gird anthropocentrism. To be truly conjunctive—coincidental, falling together—and *both-and*, one must say “both *both-and* and *either-or*” and because this is not known but felt, broken, one may say “neither-nor,” *not quite* (see pp. 98–100). Prosopopoeia is an uncanny “system of mediations that converts the radical distance of an either/or opposition in a process allowing movement from one extreme to the other by a series of transformations [clinamens] that leave the negativity of the initial relationship (or lack of relationship) intact” (de Man “Hypogram” 49, 74).

<sup>85</sup> Birdsongs defy and (re)define language. *Porospopoeia* is a nomadology, a clinamen, of prosopopoeia. It references the Greek god Poros (god of resourcefulness and son of Metis, wisdom) who sired Eros. I use nomadology to mean a detaching of telos, a dissolving of ends. As a nomad is a roaming monad, nomadology is a scattering monadology; it always is. “Matter, in nomad science, is never prepared and therefore homogenized matter, but is essentially laden with singularities” (Deleuze 369). A monad, after Leibniz, is a simple substance “that enters into composites” (1), a “multiplicity in unity,” with a “plurality of properties and relations,” whose “natural changes [...] proceed from an *internal principle*” (11–13). Nomads are the “perpetual flux” and these internal principles—“some parts enter into them and some pass out continually” (71). Monads “feel the effects of everything in the universe” (61); they are <sup>ex</sup>trinsically ecological. Monads or nomads are ephemera, atoms, a lover, a bird, a flower, a smile, a cloud lit by the moon, an embrace. A simultaneity that “even ephemeral, if only a flash” is irreducible (Deleuze 355). As anagrams are already coded in words, nomads are already coded in monads, being in begin, excepted in expected, pores in *prosopons*—*porospopoeia* in prosopopoeia—and theopoetics in ethopoetics, theology in ethology, reaction in creation. And vice versa. There is a glimpse, a de-coding, of the divine in the animal and the celestial in *and only in* the corporeal. Birds flit in and out of words, words flit in and out of birds. Monads are only nomadic and nomads are only monadic: <sup>nomad</sup>/<sub>monad</sub>ology, a (pata)physical extension back into physics of Leibniz’s metaphysics.

Through <sup>nomad</sup><sub>monad</sub>ological ornithopoeia, “the songs of birds, utterances at the origin of human language, release us from the bounds of our own speech—as their winged forms, watched intently, sometimes release us from the grip of the ground” (Abram 275). The editor of Audubon’s *Birds of America*, William Vogt, tries to describe birdsong in his captions to Audubon’s paintings. He frequently flaps at the limits of language: hermit thrushes have voices “flute-like and unimaginably lovely” (58) and wood thrushes have “an inde-



Sound spectrograms: “(a) Grasshopper warbler, *Locustella naevia*, (b) yellowhammer, *Emberiza citrinella*, (c) nightingale, *Luscinia megarhynchos*, (d) reed warbler, *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*” (Naguib 234).

scribably lovely, liquid fluting” (73). Science and mathematics also try to entomb birdsong in their language: we are all scientists as we are all artists, and “scientists at work and at play devise techniques that fix transient phenomena as defined things” (Schaffer 147).

Cummings’s poetic form strives for this limit-breaking, cage-bursting, zoo-releasing ability—strives and fails and strives again. The bird is *almost* a figure—and the figure *almost* a bird—in the most respectful and honorable way: neither cannot *not* be the other, if they must be spoken or written at all, so Cummings unites them (a)symmetrically. For “Tao that can be spoken of, / Is not the everlasting Tao” (§1.1 Chen 51). He is not invasively trying to imagine what it is like to be a bird, to be a bird, or to create a bird’s *umwelt*, but trying to let birds change how he is, creates, and navigates his own *umwelt*, as they do un-mediatly and immediately already. Here, he tries to consciously allow this, feel it, and help his readers, his beloveds, to feel it. As Cummings is to birds, this chapter will be to Cummings.

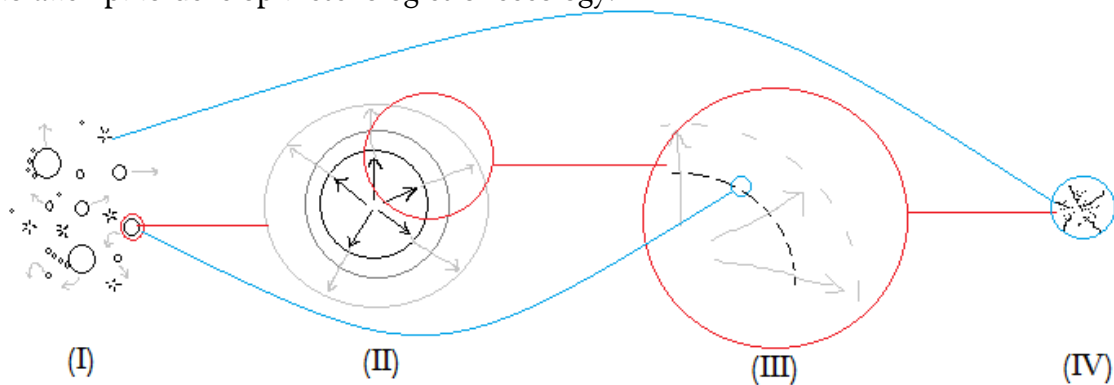
Ornithopoeia is Taoist and eecological through Cummings’s bird—who is small, flexible, open-ended, serendipitous, and who “aesthetically disturbs and clears a flat perception of cemented opposites such as culture and nature” (Terblanche *Poetry* 155)<sup>86</sup>—and whose smallness is “a kind of childlikeness and spontaneous humility which act as entrances into an awareness of nature’s vibrant vastness” (143). It opens pores in linguistic and meta/physical limits, drawing the reader back to ephemera. It is thus involved in what will be elaborated as the cyclic and co-implicated processes of ecology: ephemerology,<sup>87</sup> liminology, porology, and evaneschatology (see figure below). Without the playful verbosity

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Terblanche *Poetry* 141–86. Among others, he thinks with two of Cummings’s most well-crafted bird poems (CP 448 and 827) to establish Cummings’s eecological persensitive, which rests in smallness, fluidity and flexibility, co-incident (serendipity, simultaneity, co-being, and co-eventuality), and threeness.

<sup>87</sup> *Ephemerology* is my re-Copernican replacement for the rights- and power-hungry word *ontology* and, vis-à-vis Meillassoux, its Ptolemaic crony *phenomenology*. It is “strenuous briefness” (CP 108) or “strenuous birds” (19)—a monad striving, thirsting, and listening for weaknesses and inhibitions to inhabit. It emphasizes the *-ing* of *being*; the particular Eckhart-esque *participality* of what it is *to be*—to be is to be a participle, a non-finite part of a verb, a thing with qualities of many classes, in participation with verb-ness, what Eckhart calls divinity (Kelley 67–75) and what Cummings would call, for lack of a (better) name, the Tao. Ephemerology is both the ephemera that are beings, the temporary monads that brokenly strain-to-be in spacetime’s diasporas and caesuras, the smiling hahaeccieties that laughingly move and place to create spacetime’s very mo(ve)ment, “every flexion of a mass, every trillionth of a phenomenon” (Cummings “Gaston Lachaise” 23), and the study of these ephemera, as “the phenomenon is itself a phenomenology” (Levinas *Otherwise* 37). Ephemerology is of “ethical” entities, and also of art itself, whose “substance could be its transitoriness,” at once “process and instant” (Adorno 3, 100). Cummings’s short-lived songbirds, their beauty of feather, figure, and psalm heightened by their briefness, are (im)perfect and fleshy ephemera. Ephemerology escapes the paralysis of aesthetic contemplation and the ataxia of “ethical” action, introduced by overstimulating and overwhelming discourses of object-oriented ontology, by *considering*—watching the flickering stars in their constellations, looking at the flitting birds in their flocks—the mutuality of all things, their levity and brevity, and the individual’s kinesis in their agencements, rather than stasis in obtuse assemblages (Despret 38). Ephemera are not ontological but “ethical,” always in relation and *because of* the relations coincident with them. There is no essence but the fragility of existence, the (im)permanence of ephemera, and the imperatives they make on our actions, the obligations they call on our flesh: “we cannot touch the eyes of another, or the leaves of the trees, without touching their fragility. We cannot make contact with the skin of another, or the pebbles of the river, without sensing their porousness. We cannot lie with another, or under the clouds, without suffering their impermanence” (Lingis *Imperative* 162). This shared suffering is the only way things are valued or treasured—in their morality, finitude, transience, and temporality, “their very impermanence being the condition under which we hold them dear” (Caputo *Insistence* 227). Birds are a supreme and small example of this dearness, this precarious preciousness: “spots of time” (Wordsworth 12.208). Ephemera are enfleshed in birds, in “a flight of thirty birds” that “shakes with a thickening fright / the sudden fooled light” (CP 12)—an idiosyncraptic group that attunes and agences as one and because of each other.

of these neologisms, which fittingly end a section *ad absurdum*, Cummings's ornithopoeia can be readily grasped, but with them, this grasping acquires a philosophical and (pata)physical dimension. Because philosophical thought is a creative act, creating the actual and actually creative, poetics and neologisms are vital. I will read but three representative bird-poems of Cummings's vast poetic *oeuvre* to try to elucidate his ornithopoeia and to attempt to develop these -ologies of eecology.



(I) Ephemerology: monads and nomads (ephemera, hahaeccities) wander and grow, flicker in and out of nihil-tehom or Tao, always togetherly. Phenomena are but one, and one-sided anthropocentric examples of who ephemera am. This whole cycle itself is an ephemeron, a strange-loop. (II) Liminology: a monad (ephemera) growing, its limit expanding limitrophically, asymptotically. (III) Porology: the limit breaks apart, porosopoeically, and each pore is another (w)hole ephemera. (IV) Evaneschatology: the beautiful collapse and rebirth of the ephemera. The ephemera that is this interconnected growth-decay is modeled on Cummings's birds, but could be a bird—(I) breeding, (II) molting, (III) migrating, (IV) dying (Gill 263–64)—or a tree, an idea, a symbiotic relationship, a burning cigarette in a forest, the movement of all places through the place of love. Adding -ology makes these words serious (pata)physical sciences, rigorous Continental philosophies, though they are but Tao as seen, *kuan*, via Cummings's birds.

*XAIPE* #29 [1950]<sup>88</sup>

The number nine is embedded in mythologies and theologies. *nine birds(rising)*

It is eternity, originary language, inspiration and birth, love, and full of worlds and heavens and hells.<sup>89</sup> Numerology is important in Taoism: numbers, like symbols, are a kind of alive;

<sup>88</sup> CP 627. See Appendix.

<sup>89</sup> In Norse myth, there are nine homeworlds, and the god Odin hangs himself on Yggdrasil, the holy ash tree that unifies the worlds, for nine days to learn secret runes. In Hindu lore, nine, as the last number before ten, represents the end of a cycle. Chinese tradition makes use of the homonymy of the words for *nine* and for *long-lasting*. In Christian theology, there are nine Fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), nine circles of hell in

in the *I Ching*, there are sixty-four oracular hexagrams. In Taoism, nine *nine birds(rising*  
 is the number of *yang*, life, and a sacred number that is “the reason why the text [the *Tao Te Ching*] traditionally is divided into eighty-one chapters” (Chen 45), the square of nine.

No full-stop halts the poem—the birds are continuously rising, suspended in motion. The phonaestheme<sup>90</sup> of the small *i* in the first line connotes littleness, one of Cummings’s Taoist devices. The birds are anonymous in their littleness—simply *birds* and not of any class or species. This plural-singular word is not an attempt to dissect and categorize, but a sorry substitute for real birds, which may yet help us perceive them. These bird-word-worlds, simple and humble, are “birDs(IEAp)Openi ng” (CP 348)—an onomatopoeic quickness that leaps past classification and *mononomatonomy*,<sup>91</sup> an opening of a parenthesis.

These named but Nameless birds rise in and through *through a gold moment/climb: ing i*  
 spacetime (*moment*). In their motion through the air, they make this spacetime, beauteous and rare (*gold*), and compared to their vibrance it is static, though malleable. A bird “sings till everywhere is here” (760); another “bird chirps in a tree,somewhere nowhere” (281).

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Dante’s *Inferno*, nine medieval Worthies who represented the nine tenets of chivalry, and nine is a triune trinity, a meta-trinity (3x3). In Cummings’s time, nine is also the number of planets, the number of cats’ lives, the monthly duration of human pregnancy, and the number of Greek Muses.

<sup>90</sup> A phonaestheme is an onomatopoeic unit, such as Jespersen’s long multi-language list of unrounded high front i-words connoting smallness, slighthness, insignificance, and weakness (Preminger 860).

<sup>91</sup> *Mononomatonomy*, this ugly heptasyllabic mot intended to be a nonce word, is a mutt of the words *monos*, *onomatos*, and *nomos*—one, name, and law. Onoma(u)tonomy is the law of the name, the powerful and active force that closes and solidifies and makes static and status, and its subdivisive power is mononomatonomy, the law of naming an individual and the peculiar power shift in naming something wholly and illimitably *i*, as Cummings would say. *Mononomatonomy* cries a trio of *no* against itself; it breaks itself open and relies on the spurious and tautological autonomy of the Law and of the Namer to keep it closed. The birds are irreducible to a single name, which would confine them within linguistic bounds, but are radically and simply open. We may see birds climbing into a golden sun as it sets, too far in the distance to be identified, too small to be classified, silhouettes of birds, elusive and fleeting. Earlier, Cummings notices that trees “gurgle a nonsense of sparrows” (CP 282). Language breaks open and “from the winsome cage” of its body rises a “quick bird” blissfully without “sense” (59).

Her seesawing sing-song, “somewhere,nowhere,” is the *through a gold moment)climb: ing i* (pata)physical creation of place, not only as delineation of territory via song, but as a refrain that “jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment” (Deleuze 311), that as it makes different places “fabricates different times” (349). The nine birds beget transient, transcended time as they *climb*: the colon is anticipatory and open-ended; they move upward and open, continually.

The colon also appears in the middle of the word *climb:ing* and makes that the participle follows the verb obvious and disjointed. Yet the verb and participle are still together despite a chasm between, a chasm of space created in motion itself. The present-continuity and motion of *-ing* is a transitory and miraculous participiality of the verb *climb*—elsewhere, there are thrushes “climbing through almost” and “beautifully wandering in merciful / miracles” (CP 582). The word *i*, a lowercase-letter epanalepsis, stands alone at the end of the line, repeating the theme of littleness and insignificance, and yoking *-ing* and *i*, so that *i*, I myself and each bird, is an *-ing*; a particular manifestation (the only kind) of, and which is itself, imminent and inchoate invigoration. “The substantival use of verbs, adverbs, adjectives [...] is the great magic of Cummings’ matured idiom; it preserves the quality of individuality in the phraseology of the universal and the abstract” (Haines 22).

The *i* is the first and last part of the gerund, which “suspends the lan- *-nto wintry twi-* guage, lightly, between the nominal and the verbal, between thing and event, materiality and temporality” (McNeilly 101). The birds are suspended as movements-in-place, as lives-in-deaths or lives-in-inanimacy, as <sup>sub</sup>jects in interobjectivity. The *i* is also the first part, and within, *i-nto*; *wintry* suggests the evanescent dying that winter brings; and *twi-*



contains the phonaestheme *tw*, associated with twisting. The birds, the selves rising through the golden moment of sunset, climb into wintry twilight and twist together with the wintry, with the light. The nine birds are their environment.<sup>92</sup>

-nto  
wintry  
twi-

Each *i* is an *intertwining* with *light*, lonely and little. The birds arrive at, while crossing, the twilight horizon as love lingers and pores

light  
(all together a  
manying  
one

over limits. The nine birds rising—never *risen*, never *rose* nor *rise*, for all verbs in the poem are present-continuous—into wintry twilight are *all together a*. Another epanalepsis, this line starts and ends on the indefinacy of *a* rather than the particularity of *i*. These two epanalepses are now a symploce, which means placing- or weaving-together—the repetition of an item at the beginning and end of more than one line (previously *ing i*, and here *all together a*). The *i* is *symplocity*,<sup>93</sup> between *all* and *a*, between totality and indeterminacy: the birds all together are *a*. As Nancy said love was complete in single or all moments of a life, and as one love is at once all possible loves, so a flock and one bird are fractal. *I* is as unknown and ungraspable as the indefinite *a*, inexorably and inextricably contingent upon objects and other subjects, Latourian quasi-objects, because “the subject-object dialectic transpires in the object itself” (Adorno 163). The double *i* of *-ing i* is not yet symplocity, is not yet a *hahaecceity*, until it reverberates in *all together a*, until its laugh is heard: *a a, ha ha*.

<sup>92</sup> Among countless examples of creature-habitat correspondence and “entwining” is Gloger’s Rule: birds of wet climates are darker because more melanin causes more heat absorption and faster drying (Gill 86–87).

<sup>93</sup> The simple state of being surrounded and grounded is *symplocity*: simplicity + symploce. It is simple living together, being always between others, as day—which is the etymology of *ephemera*—is between but not against nights. As twilight is day, night, and birds entwined. Symplocity figures the immediacy of a life, between birth and death, the this-here-now, “this place which I did not choose and which I cannot find in my memory” (Ricoeur 23). It is the “time of distress when the gods are absent twice over, because they are no longer there, because they are not there yet. This vacant time is that of error, where we do nothing but err” (Blanchot 246). Art, in addition, “originally represents the scandalous intimation of absolute error” (243).

These birds are plural-singular, manying ones: a one that manies, a singularity that opens and grows, as a Deleuzian plane-of-immanence Bird manifesting in different intensities; or a many that ones, many birds whose presence points toward a transcendent Platonic or Laruellean One-Bird.<sup>94</sup> Cummings would point to a third way which unifies both disparate perspectives, soars to the immanent, and nests in the transcendent: the birds are simultaneously oneness manying (splitting, dispersing) into many birds, and many birds one-ing (uniting, concredensing) into one bird; they are fleeting<sup>95</sup> agencements where “swim so now million many worlds in each” (CP 603). I and you am we; “we” is I and you. To love is at once to many and to one: lover and beloved become each other and themselves, blossoming into and from one (*eros* and *agape*, onomato- and prosopopoeia, respectively). The poem’s form is itself both a manying and a one-ing: its verses move from one to two to three to four lines, then back to three, two, and one lines.

*light*  
*(all together a*  
*manying*  
*one*

In the ch(i)asmic fault between one and many, between manying and one-ing, “essence” is found. “Essence” is *-ness*, in the motion, in the *-ings*, broken from what it is an essence of (*one*), and re-attached through a bracket to *nine* (to the many). Essence is existence. The *one*/*-ness* participates as and in the *-ness*/*nine*. These nine bird-souls are *only alive with a single mys-*. They are merely (*only*) embodiments, the ornithopoeic cycle of embodying or of being(-a-body)-in-the-

*-ness*/*nine*  
*souls*  
*only alive with a single mys-*

<sup>94</sup> Badiou accuses Deleuze of disrespecting difference by machining it into sameness, by ironing all singularities into a Singularity, a Parmenidean or Neoplatonic One: “a single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamor of Being for all beings” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 304, qtd. in *Clamor* 11). It is difficult to escape the metaphysical-izing effects of language, and I tentatively side with Badiou in his claim that Deleuze does not.

<sup>95</sup> *Fleeting*, used here and elsewhere, is an anthimeria: both *transient* (adjective) and *flock-forming* (verb).

world—more aptly, enfleshments, being(-a-flesh)-in-the-world.<sup>96</sup>

-ness)/nine  
souls  
only alive with a single mys-

Aesthetics reinvigorates this flesh, poetically rejuvenates a po-

etics of obligation that is at the concealed heart of “ethics”: the souls are *only alive with a single mys-*, with a first-person singular-plural genitive (*mys* not *my*), only alive in conjunction with, and because of, this multiplicitous possessing. They are enmeshed in a poetics of obligation, situations full of calls on their flesh, i.e. their soul.

The nine-in-one and one-in-nine birds are en<sup>fl</sup>eshed in

tery(liftingly  
caught upon falling)silent!

ecologies of others and in *mys-/tery*. Striving to feel and participate with this mystery is poetic obligation: “therefore, by the Everlasting Non-Being, / We desire to observe its hidden mystery” (§1.3a Chen 51) and “we shall see that Tao is the everlasting rhythm of life, the unity of the polarity of non-being and being” (52). The mystery is not vitalism, but the very fact of living as a verb, a cycle, continuous interactions, and with Cummings we strive to inhabit, exhibit, and observe it (“Foreword to an Exhibit” 314). The *Tao Te Ching* uses the word *kuan* (§1.3a) which, “translated as ‘to observe,’ is [...] composed of the radicals ‘bird’ and ‘to see’ [...]. One predicts omens by observing the flight of birds” (Chen 54). *Kuan* “may well mean to see the world as the birds do,” and a “Taoist temple is called a *kuan*” (54). With Cummings we must be, enflesh and ensoul, and see, *kuan*, the mystery that the birds are and may observe. In and as nature, we live and love, see and strive.

<sup>96</sup> “Body” implies a vain perfection (see pp. 28–29). Flesh is what birds are, what we are—vulnerable, searable, tearable, fragmented—and so we try to elide its scandal in clean and chaste words like “body,” which need not be caressed, fed, tended, watered. To say “body” is to ignore that “a thing is there not as a given and not as a possibility or hypothesis but as an imperative” (Lingis *Imperative* 64), to hide a poetics of obligation to the flesh in favor of ethics and metaphysics of constructions, in which nothing really need be done. A poetics of obligation is not ethics but is “ethics”; it strives to love the flaws of the flesh rather than the safe strictures and structures offered by ethics (Caputo 4).

The birds, their prosopopoeically enfleshed souls, their *tery(liftingly caught upon falling)silent!* ensouled flesh, are *liftingly/caught upon falling*. The present-continuous verbs and adverbs again elude stasis and illude concretization. The rise of the birds is caught upon falling: a twilight, both dawn falling into day and dusk into night; or a more intimate falling, the failing of their metabolisms and the apoptosis of their cells; or the “return” of the soul to the flesh, (pata)physically *being the flesh*, an earthy coincidence, an <sup>etho</sup><sub>theo</sub>logy rather than objective theology or subjective ethology. This return is vivifying; it is the lifting caught upon the falling, the *wu wei* of the third way, the growth that comes from decay, the living of dying. The birds who fly may appear to fall as they ascend the curve of the sky.

Falling, and its lifting, is also a *falling)silent!*—an exclaimed, paradoxically loud silence. A silence that sings like a bird (CP 802), whose very “singing is silence” (804)—a third term outside of loud and quiet, *incorporating* both, which cannot be articulated. The birds’ falling, a lifting, is their silence, a sound—“silence is a prerequisite for the voice, a space for it to invest, a resonance chamber in which to reverberate. In silence resounds voice, in voice silence is present” (Alfandary 37)—something-from-nothing, as in the white of the page all colors abound (Houghton notes 39.120 qtd. Cohen 204). Because “rhythm is the alternation of voice and silences,” a poem is “a fabric of differences” (Alfandary 42), and Cummings makes extensive use of silences and the play of difference, of white space and black letter, yang and yin, that form the aesthetic two-scene of the poem analogous to the “ethical” two-scene of love. The birds are the sunset: if the horizon is the poem’s right margin, the black letters of each line are the sun’s last rays and the falling birds; if the horizon is the left margin, the sun is the semicircular white space setting below the lines, which may be rays

or birds *living the dying of glory*. Their idiosyncreptic flesh im-  
plies not a perfection from which they fell, but to which they are liminologically<sup>97</sup> rising.

*tery(liftingly  
caught upon falling)silent!*

Silence is not a state, nor was lifting-falling, but an ad-  
verb (*silent! / ly*), a process, a part of the verb. The verses are enjambed into one while  
maintaining their many-ness. Each begins and ends with a broken word, a word holding a  
gap within, like the silence within sound to which Cummings and the *Tao* point. Like a  
voice that is “a *stand-in for an impossible presence*, enveloping a central void” (Dolar 53),  
Lacanian extimacy, “simultaneous inclusion/exclusion, which retains the excluded at its  
core” (106). As a hollowed-out hub may hold spokes, as an empty vessel may hold water,  
as doors and windows in a house may admit light, so non-being is within being, so no-thing  
or process or <sup>place</sup><sub>move</sub>ment is within things (§11 Chen 82). Speech too “lies in the depths of  
silence like a laughter perfidiously held back” (Levinas *Totality* 91). Each bird is a “dark  
alive” (CP 582). “They are movements, and nothing else” writes de Gourmont (87). The  
stutter of *ly living* is (in)complete: the idiosyncrepsy of l<sub>o</sub>iving, the idiosyncrepsies of l<sub>o</sub>ives.

*ly living the dying of glory*

The birds are living their own deaths gloriously. In each flap of a wing, in each  
history of a nest, life and love is smilingly, wholly complete (cf. Nancy “Shattered” 266).  
From his first poem, Cummings plays with birds who fli(r)t at the limits of life, with “the

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<sup>97</sup> *Liminology* is the limit, the study of the limit, and *limitrophy*—a word Derrida steals from Levinas, who writes that the knowing subject “is limitrophe of nothing” (*Totality* 61). Monads expand as and past limits; nomads wander into and beyond limits. The limit is asymptote and antinomy—it never-always exists, (re)forming, opening out of <sup>nomads</sup><sub>monads</sub> and into pores (porology), full of “the ‘holes’ of indetermination” (225), approachable and always (re)appropriated. The ornithopoeic bird-figure, the *animot*, concerns “what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what feeds the limit, generates it, raises, and complicates it”—limitrophy; the bird effaces, multiplies, complicates, and folds the limit (Derrida *Animal* 29).

unimaginable upward lark” who “passes into light” (CP 3). But *ly living the dying of glory* *the* temporarily fixes these birds and locates them: the glory is not the birds’ but is of the whole mo(ve)ment that the birds are, glory of the dying day, of transience, of birds twining with twilight. They are a passing but also a “sweet strong final bird” (3).

These birds are less animals than symbols, the animal studies aficionado will argue. But what *animot* is not a symb(i)ol, a network of interacting symbols? Not only in writing, but biosemiotically, governed by rules and their exceptions?<sup>98</sup> It is an abstractive fallacy to try to separate sign, referent, and interpreter (Peirce qtd. in Witzany 113–14), because they must be always together, and ornithopoeia ensures this togetherness is harmonious and reflective, even as it is being conveyed and created aesthetically for “ethical” reaction—“THE AUDIENCE IS THE PERFORMANCE, and vice versa,” shouts Cummings (“Coney Island” 151). Symbols, things, and those that perceive them are aesthetically blurred in ornithopoeia, in Cummings’s poetry, which reflects their blurring in “ethical” life “outside” the text: “it is not the essential act of thought that is symbolization, but an act *essential to thought*, and prior to it” (Langer qtd. in Hoffmeyer 323). Cummings depicts, which is also to de-pict, to dissolve the current picture, and describes, which is also to de-cribe, to un-write the statically written, birds. He denies taxonomy, disavows mononomatony, and opens a way of seeing and experiencing the birds and their world from a Taoist, terrestrially transcendent, and coalescent persensitive—as birds and their earth and sky, as a lover-be-loved and their places, as a two-scene of (in)finite fragility.

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<sup>98</sup> In the organism, “*syntactic* rules determine combinatory possibilities—physical, chemical, spatial, temporal, rhythmical. *Pragmatic* rules determine interactional content (e.g., regulatory pathways have significant differences with metabolic pathways)” (Witzany 105).

*95 POEMS* #40 [1958]<sup>99</sup>

Eight years in the making, *95 Poems* is more serene than Cummings's *silence* earlier works. With the above exception and two others (CP 448, 481), no poems prior to 1958 focus entirely on a bird(s)—but in *95 Poems* (1958) and *73 Poems* (1963), at least twelve are wholly devoted to birds. Unwell in his last years, the poems Cummings wrote glide to Taoist heights of depth, amble to a faltering peace, and blissfully sigh to wistful silence.

Silence begins this poem and, as in most of the bird-poems, is crucial. Prosopopoeia is a ch(i)asmic figure, and crosses “the conditions of death and of life with the attributes of speech and of silence” (de Man “Autobiography” 77): silence is associated with death, but Cummings works the ch(i)asm to link it with life.<sup>100</sup> Life (sound and color) comes from nonlife (silence and white), and to it returns, as the Big Bang (and Crunch), as all things from *nihil-tehom* under some name in every theology, from decay to growth in every ethology, and from the Tao in Cummings’s poetry. The aesthetic is contingent upon the nonaesthetic: painting on empty oil and canvas, writing on wordless ink and paper, dancing on (im)motile flesh and floor, music on silent wood, brass, and string. Bird bones are hollow, and this facilitates flight (Gill 93). Silence is “of each bird” (CP 821), and birds “singing wholly are” (819) and “completely sing” (592): silence is omphalic, knotted and interwoven,

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<sup>99</sup> CP 712. See Appendix.

<sup>100</sup> A ch(i)asm—similar to *symplocity*—maintains the suspension of subjectivity between unknown(s) or chasm(s), but where *symplocity* stresses sparseness and a repetition in the surrounding unknown that creates the self and vice versa, ch(i)asm stresses concrescence of unknowns within and without the self as a locus, complication of unknown and I—which is the basic mode of love as identical difference, as Hofstadter’s recursivity, Despret’s agencement, and Cummings’s ecology—and troubling of the limits of the self. The ch(i)asm is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm, which “is the philosophical payoff of Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Uexküll’s work” (Hansen qtd. in Buchanan 133). The *i* emerges in the chiasm of “being sensible and sentient” (Merleau-Ponty qtd. in 142), in the (in)finite interplay of hands touching.

mystical and central. The word *silence* is surrounded by blank space, as if its emptiness yawned past its short line. *Silence*, meaning an absence, is present; that which is not *silence*, the space around, is absent—a dramatization of the prosopopoeic ch(i)asm.

The chasm of space after *silence* pushes the period into the next verse and word of the poem, *is*. Ends (.) and beginnings (*is*), death and life, interleave in a chiasmic chasm of I (.*is*)—a period, a cycle, of spacetime. The dot falls from the tittle of the *i* of *is*, a leaf from a limb, or rises to take the place of the tittle, a hatchling’s first flight—dying and living are inextricable. Evanescence bears existence. And vice versa. Evaneschatology<sup>101</sup> precedes, while fluttering from, ephemerology, “a fragile instant” (212).

Existence is at once a living ephemera and a dying evanescence, eternal and vanishing love and laughter. The littleness of the monosyllabic lines, *is* and *a*, is Kierkegaard’s love-in-the-least and infinite frailty. The *a* quivers alone, indefinite and indeterminate before the abyssal blankness of the white page all around; silence shivers in the midst of cacophonous noise, and noise trembles in a void of silence. But silence is a *looking*, a motion, a kin/aesthetic, muscular-skeletal, nervous persensitive. To be truly silent, therefore at a temperature of absolute zero (0K), means all molecular motion would cease—a looking could not occur. Silence, then, is relative; it is *not quite* silence, even space is suffused with cosmic

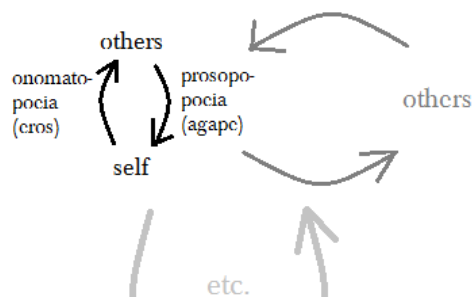
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<sup>101</sup> *Evaneschatology* = evanescence + eschatology. It is the vanishing of finality, the dissolution of end times and deaths, and also the finality of vanishing, the inevitability of dissipation and dispersal. It includes but is not limited to Deleuze’s *becoming-imperceptible*, the simultaneous “evanescence of the self and its replacement by a living nexus of multiple interconnections” (Braidotti 261). “Birds disappear / becomingly” (452)—a fleeting inexorability, an apocalyptic (i.e. cataclysmic and revelatory) destiny, elusive and illusory. “Every end is a beginning” (Emerson “Circles” 253). Those things which evanesce are (m)ends, ephemera, atoms, monads, nomads. End-times are only and always fleeting, which may not necessarily make them psychologically and emotionally more comprehensible, but eecologically more accurate. I deliberately confuse *telos* (goal) and *eschaton* (end-time) because the two are co-dependent. Teloi do exist, but they are tautological (m)ends (*tauteology*. . .): e.g. growth’s goal is to grow, a life’s is to live.



background radiation (with an average temperature of 2.7K). Space is infused with the sounds of all things: sounds are mechanical waves, and as they dissipate they become part of the vibration of all atoms, transmitting their resonance through contact. Birdsongs vibrate in my bones, no longer the songs of birds but now the ossified motions of my molecules. Silence is air, in which disturbances create sound, and it is “that into which all the sound-vibrations disappear, fuse” (Houghton notes 39.119 qtd. in Cohen 208).<sup>102</sup>

A looking bird cannot exist in a void. But a looking bird *is* silence, a single-line verse surrounded by vacant space. A Nancy-esque “place of resonance” wherein others may be, and simultaneously an infinite migration through the other (see diagram below: the self-other dialectic is but a fractal of other-other relationships, and the motions between them—prosopopoeia—*agape*—migration and onomatopoeia—*eros*—resonance—become practically indistinguishable). In this poem, three verses are single lines and two verses are three



lines: both verses and lines symbolize Cummings’s Taoist *threeness* and the Tao’s three treasures—love, frugality, and humility (§67.2 Chen 208). Birds, for Cummings, are hopeful as all lives are

hopeful—insofar as they live and die on the earth. On the surface, this looking bird does not sing, but abandons production in favor of reception, a Nancy-esque listening with the eyes (persensitive or synaesthetic *looking*): “within the eyes is dimly heard / a wistful and precarious bird” (CP 20).

<sup>102</sup> Gavin Bryars notes that the inventor of radio, Guglielmo Marconi, “became convinced that sounds once generated never die, they simply become fainter and fainter until we can no longer perceive them. [...] To hear these past, faint sounds we need, according to Marconi, to develop sufficiently sensitive equipment.”

Birds are prosopopoeically sung into life and sing others into life—“every *bird:the* new / bird” is “no bigger than to sing” (583). Their song came and comes before their names: *bird* comes before *the*. A silence-looking-bird precedes grammatology. This bird-before-*the*, animal before grammar, flesh before language, and (pata)physics before metaphysics occurs several times in Cummings’s work: “pigeons circle / around and around and around the” (101); “first robin the” (737); “whippoorwill this” (751). The colon—two eyes of a looking bird—physically peeks into metaphysics.

The bird, (b)lithely looking through the shuddering fissures of *turn ing;edge,of life* onoma(u)tonomy, is as silence to the Name, as muteness to interpellation. This silently looking bird is *the turning edge of life*. The edge of life is silence, always turning intransitively, but also transitively turning itself and all things into deaths and lives and lives—like “Now” (cf. 574): “life is not a paragraph / and death i think is no parenthesis,” smiles Cummings (291). This *edge* is a porous limit, the originary between-ness, symplocity, of life: the word *edge* appears between the participle *-ing*—Cummings’s participality, the (in)finite verb or process of flocking and blossoming individuality—and the ch(i)asmic preposition *of*. The *edge*, the outside, is only inside. It leads from lives and into lives, from things and into things, from agencements and into agencements. Prosopopoeia, creation, builds from the imitations and foundations of onomatopoeia, and onomatopoeia in turn mimes the creations of prosopopoeia: this dialectic is foregrounded in birds, hence *ornithopoeia*. Birds, themselves a different way of lasting in life (cf. Badiou), assist us their beloveds in feeling new ways of lasting in life: fleetingly, yet full of song and color. The progression of colon to semicolon to comma, from bird to the turning edge to life, is a turning or cycling

from tiny ephemera, temporary caesurae in the Tao, little looking eyes (:), to a fugal and fugacious fluidity (;), and to openness and potential (in)finity (,)—  
 living.

*turn  
ing;edge,of  
life*

Concluding with a lack of conclusion, the poem persists in the procession to, the possession by, openness. The solitary parenthesis fails to contain. Ontologies and phenomenologies which onoma(u)tonomically presuppose stasis, wilful anthropocentric permanence, wash away in the wishful thinking of ephemerology and evaneschatology, in the silent looking of a bird, in the always turning edge of life. This last one-line verse, almost an afterthought, is the forethought of the whole poem: *inquiry before snow* stands shakily in apposition to *the turning edge of life* and *a looking bird*. The edge, a life, the bird, is an inquiry, here and now. Life is a simple question, a pressing obligation, a winging *why* unanswerable even by snow, open-ended and unceasing as this last line before death and new life. “Nobody knows [...] why birds fly” (369)—*why*, life’s simple question, is a laugh, a flower, not a because, a reason, or a faithful answer.

**73 POEMS #48 [1963]<sup>103</sup>**

One of the last poems Cummings wrote about birds, and one of the last he ever wrote, this “thrush” poem is one of a handful to focus on a more specific species of bird rather than “birds” in general as do the previous two. “Thrushes” is a broad and traditional, often colloquial category.<sup>104</sup> As the species *thrush* breaks open with non-members, the word *thrushes* breaks open with nonwords, with song, with itself: this poronym

*t,h,r,u,s,h,e:s*

<sup>103</sup> CP 820. See Appendix..

<sup>104</sup> The passerine group designated “thrush” is related to warblers and flycatchers, and is composed of small (13–30cm), slender-billed songbirds who often have patches of bright colors on otherwise plain plumage.

reveals that the constituent phonemes of language are oscine, songlike and t,h,r,u,s,h,e:s senseless. Thrushes are mundane and earthbound, characteristic of Cummings's t(r)opology<sup>105</sup> and not only of his birds.

The first line of the poem evokes the chirping, quirky movements of the thrushes. As Min Wild notes, “to grant collections of signifying letters their own [...] agency, character, or action is especially bold, for the practice takes as its initial subject, its tenor, the very instruments which are performing this metaphorical transference” (300). Here, this is ornithopoeic: the letters come alive, a figuratively actual life and an actually figurative life, which in turn effects the eecological persensitive already within us.<sup>106</sup> Reading the figured-alive is as “practice” for feeling and dwelling with the alive and inanimate.

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Thrushes occur worldwide, eat insects, fruit, and worms, and build cup-shaped nests in which they lay a few pale, bluish eggs. The group includes chat-thrushes, ground thrushes, nightingale thrushes, blackbirds, fieldfares, ouzels, redwings, and robins, and phylogenetically unrelated species via resemblance: the anthrush, babbling thrush, jay thrush, Chinese thrush, jewelthrush, and wrenthrush (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). “Thrush” is a model of mononomatotomy that crumples under onoma(u)tonomy. If I should tell you anything, Cummings writes, “i could not sing” (CP 836).

<sup>105</sup> *T(r)opology*—topology + tropology—is the (pata)physical use of linguistic tropes as constituent parts of spaces and sets of transformations, topes. It parallels the poronym *wor(l)d*. “Tropes tend to materialize in the real world in ways that are ethical, social, and political” (Hillis-Miller *Versions* 1), in what Deleuze calls “an extraordinarily fine topology that relies not on points or objects but rather on haecceities, on sets of relations” (382), on <sup>nomads</sup> <sub>monads</sub>, who philopatrically wander, grow, and *are* in changing t(r)opologies (cf. van Dooren 63–86 for a discussion of philopatry in Little Penguins). Birds infinitely migrate through the other, air, ether, the other: t(r)opology is Jarry’s *eternity* because in it, “the reference of a sign does not describe, but conjures” (Bök 34). Cummings’s t(r)opology is generated through interrelated and constituent tropes, metaphors, and conceits—as our own “ethics,” a poetics of obligation, is generated at least partially through aesthetic processes. Tropes are called “tropes (etymologically, *turns*) because they transfer something human to an alien realm—they *turn* the other into the human” (Nielsen 694). They simultaneously transfer something alien to a human realm, turning the “human” into the “other,” inasmuch as these categories exist. T(r)opology is earth created by birds and humans, and birds and humans created by earth, ornithopoeically. It is *the* example of Gary Snyder’s quotation that “written language is obviously the final step in the transference of intelligence from the earth to the audience” (qtd. in 706): a t(r)opology is a sort of aesthetic map of the “ethical” land. Cummings creates a land- and soundscape of birds, a *soundtope*, “a coordinated [...] assemblage of singing bird species” (Farina 246), through ornithopoeia, the creation of poetic birds, the creation of bird poetics.

<sup>106</sup> We are eecological, porous; we are made of “thirty square kilometers of membrane structure” (Hoffmeyer 27). Our skin and brain “both originate from the same germ material, i.e., the embryo’s ectoderm layer” (17). And so we are, inside and outside, “osmotic and flexible, allowing for movement, homeostasis and growth” (Terblanche “Osmotic” 19).

These thrushes do not soar. They spring, quiver, and twitch. The *t,h;r:u;s,h;e:s* littleness of the thrush is evoked in the isolation of each letter and punctuation mark. The word comprises a clutch of thrushes, a little flock: if each letter is a thrush, each thrush is separate from, yet integral to the gathering of the murmuration, the agencement. They bustle and chirp together—the motion of the punctuation (,;::;) suggests this punctuated motion. The commas are fluid, the semicolons semifluid, a comma-period combination, a twitch, a movement then a stop or a stop then a movement, and the colons a double-stop, a tapping, but also an opening: crescendo (,;:), decrescendo (:;), crescendo again (,;:). Hop, skip, jump. Each motion pivots around an end that is a beginning (: and ,)—a two-scene. The song and dance of the punctuation composes the flesh of the *t,h;r:u;s,h;e,s* and opens pores in the the word *t,h;r:u;s,h;e,s*. As with *bird:the*, grammar for Cummings follows rhetoric, vaguely, rules follow exceptions, metaphysics follows (pata)physics, a function(-word) follows a feeling(-word). Their kin/aesthetics, flesh and wings (twitches) and beak and syrinx (chirps), are themselves. These songbirds are birdsongs and vice versa. I am laughter, the nihilarious incongruity of these idiosyncresies and disproportions here and now.

But the *t,h;r:u;s,h;e:s* are silent now, “a silence only made of,bird” (CP *are silent now* 612), a “cloverish silence of thrushsong” (745). This is an amphibology and an anthimeria: the thrushes are now not making sounds; and the thrushes *are* “silent now”—now is a silence that the thrushes enflesh. *Now* is a preposition and a noun—an anthimeria, both-and and not-quite-either. As the nine birds were liftingly caught upon falling silent (cf. 627) and the looking bird was silence (cf. 712), as now turns when (cf. 574) and silence is the turning edge of life (cf. 712), the thrushes too are silent now. They are and create it.

Spacetime comes with objects, which come with spacetime: if there is an origin, it remains at least now a metaphysical mystery. Cummings compacts this silence— a word he uses 136 times throughout his work—with imminence, lives, this-here-now.

are  
silent  
now

The poem displays the agencement of the thrushes and of now, of <sup>sub</sup>jects and of time: as the looking-bird poem, though with two more verses, it is structured as alternating one- and three-line verses—one and three are one. The looking-bird poem (1-3-1-3-1) offered in its nine lines a sort of meta-trinity of three one-line verses.<sup>107</sup> This poem (1-3-1-3-1-3-1) offers in its thirteen lines (not quite a sonnet) a trinity of threes, a third way from each third way (verses and lines), and a fourth way to these third ways—four one-line verses, individuals. Ornithopoeic individuality reaches brokenly (one line short of a sonnet) beyond even Taoism with its threes that syrinx-ly sing beyond ubiquitous binaries. The third way of Taoism is a potentiality churning and turning at its limit; it is integrated or split dichotomies waiting to be actualized by an agencement, an individual who is also “depending on the circumstances, waiting for another being who will give us new agencies, new ways of becoming agents, actively acted upon, undoing and redoing precarious selves (through) one another” (Despret 44). This actualization is Cummings’s “fourth way.”

*Now* is a birdsong symphony, which “derive[s] from the Greek *phone*, voice, but in it one can also quite appropriately hear *phonos*, murder” (Dolar 19), and a murder is also the noun for a group of crows. It is a plural-singular face prosopopoeically given to the faceless, a voice to the voiceless—the inaudible is made audible and the invisible visible.

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<sup>107</sup> Cummings, a Taoist, grew up the son of a Unitarian preacher and harbors no exclusive desire for the traditional Christian trinity. His threeness is Taoist, of a (w)hole not a Holy Trinity. Cummings, however, maintains a vague Unitarian spirituality in his Taoism and animism, though it is syncretic and non-dogmatic.

To mis/quote de Man, the “invisible visible” is made (“Hypogram” 49), the (in)vis-  
 ible, through an “art of delicate transition” (76), through ornithopoeia, the art of  
 “tinying at twilight” to maybe make a universe into a single leaf and vice versa (cf. CP 821).

The enfleshed (w)hole, this time the present, again opens and presses  
 its period into the next verse, as in the looking-bird poem (cf. 712)—*in* mirrors *.is*: coinci-  
 dence and imm<sub>a</sub>nence are lives, are birds. The peroration (.) is but a pore in, at, and  
 because of the limit of the thrushes-as-silent-now. The pore, the silent now, the bird is (in)  
*silvery notquiteness*, triumphantly secondary to time’s golden beauty (cf. 627), and whose  
 erratic line-breaks suggest clinamens and <sup>monad</sup>/<sub>nomad</sub>ological recombinations with the silent  
 spacetime, <sup>sub</sup>/<sub>obj</sub>ect, I-you, and lover-beloved chimaeras. *Notquiteness* is *notquietness*; *silvery*  
 is *slivery*.<sup>108</sup> *Notquiteness* is another and more Taoist term for one of Cummings’s favorite  
 words: illimitable. *Notquiteness* is illimitable and between limits,

a bird with a song  
 like not anything  
 under skies  
 over grass (587).

*Notquiteness* is ignorant of, not resistant to, limits; it more passively than  
 actively permeates and dissolves them. It is the bird-as-figure and figure-as-bird,  
 not quite either, yet both-and. It is the silvery light of the slivery moon in the night. In its  
 humility, *notquiteness* dissolves whatever limit there may have been; it looks up at oppres-  
 sion and imposition, smiles meekly, silverly, and the autocratic autonomy of the so-called

<sup>108</sup> Here I acknowledge my conatus and catalyst for <sup>nomad</sup>/<sub>monad</sub>ology, which stems from my initial, momentary,  
 and anagrammatic readerly confusion of both *silvery* (as slivery) and *notquiteness* (as notquietness).

limit fades. Onoma(u)tonomy dissipates. *Notqu* /-it-/ *eness* is the fundamental incongruities that make us laugh: it is the disproportion between figure and flesh, nonetheless integral to both and to ethico-aesthetic perception of both; it is the disproportion between metaphysical and physical views of the beloved and lover, nevertheless vital to both and to the (pata)physical embrace of hahaeccities in quirks, quarks, and errors, from which a two-scene is created; it is the disjunction or (a)symmetry between onomatopoeia and prosopopoeia but their union in ornithopoeia, in birdsongs, bird-lives, and bird-poetry. The oft-trumpeted Deleuzian conjunction is first and always disjunction, both-and is not-quite, harmony is disharmony. These laughterful incongruities are also relieving: we are (im)perfect.<sup>109</sup> To be “not quite” is not merely to erect another, lesser limit, *ad infinitum* until nothing is, until ontology triumphs in its immotilization of everything as the object-oriented ontologists ordain. To be “not quite” is rather to be anathema to the limit. Pores

*notqu*  
-it-  
eness



“The black hole-like spots which we see in soap bubbles and films before they break” (Schaffer 167). “Perhaps thinking of Leibniz’s monads (which have here been reinvigorated into <sup>mon</sup>ads), Uexküll likens the spherical *Umwelt* to a soap bubble (Buchanan 23). Image from “The micro-flow pattern in a thinning soap film,” Bates [2008].

can open as limits expand and disintegrate, *in* the very “turning edge” of the limit itself (cf. 712), or they can open from (with)in limits, as a *notquiteness*. Pores may prevent the limit from forming, like a pore in the soap film that makes it pop as quickly as it appeared. Pores, or birds rising at the visible horizon, (in)visible silhouettes, “all the merry little birds [...] winging in the blossoming” (591).

<sup>109</sup> My use of the word *incongruity* references one of three hypotheses of why humans laugh, and so far the most experimentally verified: 1) we laugh in derision or because of superiority; 2) we laugh to obtain relief; and 3) we laugh because of incongruity. All seem mutually inclusive and valid, but in ascending order.



An *-it-* who is the silent thrushes opens in the middle of this silvery not-  
 quiteness. *-It-* is always not-quite, <sup>etho</sup><sub>theo</sub>logical—not quite divine, not quite thrush, notqu  
-it-  
eness  
 not quite figure, and because not quite, beyond. *-It-* acknowledges the problem of saying  
 that *figure = bird* exactly, and says that this equation is not quite adequate, but is a porous  
 (a)symmetry. *Eness*, another separated *-ness* (cf. 627), ends the verse as the song of a thrush  
 lingers in your ear, as the shadow of a bird hovers at the horizon, as an ephemeral vapor  
 floats through the air after a bubble bursts. *Eness* is essence of the thrushes, of silent now,  
 of *-it-*, a deictic, which does not exist and cannot (pata)physically be apart from its flesh,  
 though metaphysics—as in the prior three images—may suggest this separation.

The not-quite pore of *-it-* is reflected in the poronym *dre(is)ams*.<sup>110</sup> dre(is)ams  
 Cummings uses brackets extensively to denote concrescence and flight from language that  
 is within language itself. (*Is*) is bracketed and distinct, while being *essential* in the word  
 “dreams”: *dreams* and *is* are equally actual; *dre(is)ams* shows that essence is a dream, an  
 ephemeron irreducible to sense, the sensory, and the sensible, and that what actually is, the  
 existent, is (pata)physical, created at least in part from imaginations and dreams, no-things  
 and now-heres. What truly *is* is the epanorthosis that follows—“ams,” peculiar, plural mani-  
 festations, individual participalities, of “to be.” *Is* is detached, pseudo-objective, but its con-  
 jugations “am” and “ams” are first-person, each in an *umwelt* bubble of its own, wholly *i*.  
 These *ams* form the tail end of the *dre(is)ams*, the waking edge of sleep, the limit-becoming-  
 porous, blossoming.

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<sup>110</sup> Here I acknowledge my impetus and inspiration for such poronyms as onoma(u)tonomy and ch(i)asm, for here “(is)” is an anastomosis, suspended *in* “dreams,” like a bird on an updraft, stasis in the midst of motion.

After the “ams,” the poem becomes nearly incomprehensible: *in silvery a the o f moon*. The verses are nomadic and resist interpretation, which would least temporarily limit their potential; instead, they wander in their t(r)opology. The dre(is)ams seem to be *of the moon*. Ornithopoeically, the moon dreams the thrushes or the thrushes dream the moon. Everything, every fleshy body, is a creation from the cycle of the Tao, represented by the circular moon (*o*), a creation from love, (pata)physically, and from change (*eros-eris*). The dreams *a* the *o*: *a* is a verb, and what it does is “a” things. Retaining its function as the indefinite article, the verb *a* makes first and indefinite the *o*. The *o*, the full moon, is made onomatopoeically anonymous, as it is. In destabilizing and rendering indefinite a letter (*o*), *a* destabilizes itself, as a letter, and all letters, all language. *A* acts like the thrushes, “littler bird[s] than eyes can learn” (592), who make Willoughby and Ray tremble in their rectory,<sup>111</sup> who cannot actually *be* named.

*The* could be an epanorthosis, a sudden correction of *a*—an instant and incongruous reversal of indefiniteness and anonymity (*a*) through definiteness (*the*). Both lines, *a* and *the*, cleave—contronymically, break and fuse. The *ams* and the *o* are highly specific in their anonymity, like the thrushes. They are enfleshed hahaecceties, and in their earthiness, their frisky twittering motions, they ascend dreamily through onoma(u)tonomy.

The lone *o* of the second-last line is the full moon. But the *f* that begins *f moon* the last line counters this conception: the *f* is a slivery crescent moon, a quarter moon, as the letter *f* is precisely one-quarter of the letters that “full” comprises. Is the moon full, or

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<sup>111</sup> Francis Willoughby and John Ray wrote the “first formal classification of birds” in 1676, which Linnaeus later used in his taxonomy (Gill 46).

not?<sup>2</sup>—Cummings says *both-and*. Not a Deleuzian *both-and*, that sinister machi- f moon nation, desirous and voracious, but a Taoist *both-and*, passive and active, fluid and living, neither-nor. It is full in its thinness. In its notquiteness. Like a broken heart most whole or love complete in a sole embrace. The poem ends with the broken words *o/f moon*. The thrushes and their *dre(is)ams* are selenic, not eminent or visible (cf. 530). They become their environment: the poem moves-in-place (cf. 443) from the thrushes, through an ornithopoeic porology and dissolution of sense, to the thrushes' environment, the night sky and moon. This is a phen(omen)ological movement, a revelation of the objects and subjects at play and interacting to actualize <sup>sub</sup><sub>obj</sub>jects, the strange-loopy I, the agencement of others.

## CONCLUSION

### *an evaneschatology*

Birds, silent and (in)visible, intricate and faint (105), are fully alive. Each bird is sublimely mundane, celestially corporeal, an (in)finite, ephemeral hahaeceity, a pore in all limits around it, a song in a cage. Ornithopoeia is the eecological, <sup>etho</sup><sub>theo</sub>poetic, nomadic monad-locus for an aesthetics of striving and a poetics of obligation. It is an example of how aesthetics imitates and creates the “ethical,” and how the “ethical” equally produces and generates the aesthetic. It is the formation of t(r)opologies, bird-figures and figure-birds, words-cum-flesh and flesh-cum-words. Caputo’s poetic description of “ethical” obligation, an obligation to flesh—which is impaired, infected, exhausted, inflamed, sensitive, susceptible—resonates with Cummings’s birds and his ornithopoeia, which is really a more specific and bio-literary mode of his (pata)physical love, his “erdapoesis”: “obligations forge the links of ‘you’ and ‘I’ and ‘we’ and ‘he’ and ‘she,’ forming little links that spread tenuously

[...], weaving a thin tissue of tender, fragile bonds and multiple microcommunities” (Caputo *Against* 246). Ornithopoeia, “neither subjectivistic nor objectivistic-naturalistic” (Witzany 113),<sup>112</sup> hybridizing and redefining both onomatopoeia and prosopopoeia, as any serious poetics must, exposes this birdy vivacity, channeling it gracefully to unsettle human epistemologies and ontologies, which force and bully their way around the world, brutally naming, spraying, rendering, and canning, to vivisect rights, powers, and abilities from an ecology interwoven with wrongs and lefts, weaknesses and dis/abilities.

Birds remind us that we too are ephemeral. Birds evanescently flit at the limits of the (im)permanent, at the horizon of the (in)firmament, and sing at the asyndetonic boundaries of language and music, “sing more wonderfully birds than are” (CP 815). They perforate understanding and being, surpassing limits by dissolving them, with no eschaton or telos other than *to be*, a (m)end—an (im)mediacy, an exquisite crudeness. *Il n’y a pas de fin*. They are syzygies, coincident and contingent, and contain clinamens changing figure to flesh and flesh to figure, (pata)physically co-implicating aesthetics and “ethics.” Reading the bird-figure is creating and reacting at once (a <sup>monad</sup>/<sub>nomad</sub>ology), and disciplines—meticulous-eyed, listening-eared, welcoming-hearted—for reading, creating, and reacting to birds, others, and the earth. Birds are apocalyptic, unhiding the absence at the heart of presence, the silence in song, the notquiteness in fullness and the dream in wakefulness, the lifting in falling, the living in dying, the manying in oneness or agencement, and the inquiry before snow. They are little beloveds, wishful for lovers; they are little lovers, careful for beloveds.

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<sup>112</sup> Witzany’s description of an ideal, universal conception of language grafts well into ornithopoeia.

Ornithopoeia is an aesthetic striving, onomatopoeically miming a poetics of obligation to the world and our world and thus prosopopoeically making (known again) this “ethics” of vulnerability, obliquely and weakly—“empathy [here, obligation] is not just a mental effort, and in particular it is not a duty, for it is a corporeally felt necessity” (Hoffmeyer 325–26). And ornithopoeia is a Lingis-esque imperative to attune, a Nancy-esque listening. “As we begin to tune in, there’s an uncanniness that dawns when we realize that most other forest animals are also listening close to the discourse of the birds, and have been doing so all their lives” (Abram 272).

Birds have feathered wings and inspired the representations of divine messengers—they are earthly messengers, the more sublime. We have been striving to listen to and poeticize them for millennia—Robertson (1883) and Lutwack (1994) catalogue many poets who have tried. But Cummings’s unique Taoist eecological persensitive may just meekly offer a way for the earth to be inheritable.<sup>113</sup> The hope for an ornithopoeic aesthetics, the wish for an eecological poetics of obligation, to make “stones sing like birds” (CP 844) and to sing “an if // of day to yes” (815), is captured (briefly) in Cummings’s little prayer:

may my heart always be open to little  
birds who are the secrets of living  
whatever they sing is better than to know<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Matt. 5:5.

<sup>114</sup> CP 481.

### III PETALODY

taoism and flora in e. e. cummings

*when god lets my body be  
From each brave eye shall sprout a tree<sup>115</sup>*

*Growing equals that any reason or motive or unreason becomes every other unreason or reason or motive. Here exists no sign, no path, no distance, and no time. The grower has not any aim, not any illusion or disillusion, no audience. Not even a doubt, for he is doubt; perfectly all outward or inward points of reference are erased<sup>116</sup>*

#### BEGINNING

*phen(omen)ology and tao-flowers*

Cummings, “disappearing poet of always” (424), exposes a lovable ecology through his idiosyncreptic chimaera of Taoism, American individualism, a lingering Unitarianism, and a (pata)physical persensitive; he creates an aesthetic map to guide his readers on their “ethical” journeys.<sup>117</sup> But was Cummings truly a Taoist when his father was a Unitarian preacher? Evidence for his Unitarian upbringing is ubiquitous in his many stars and in his equation of the Tao with love, or his consideration<sup>118</sup> of love as the Tao itself, which makes goodness by considering all as good, epitomized in (a)moral—neither moral nor immoral, not quite *both-and*—nature itself: “very luckily for you and me, the uncivilized sun mysteriously shines on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ alike. He is an artist” (Cummings “Foreword to an Exhibit” 314). His Unitarianism is diffused in Taoism as individualism in ecology.

Terblanche provides many examples of Cummings’s Taoism: his citations from the *Tao Te Ching* in *Eimi* (e.g. 438), his wish “to paint in the manner of the way or Tao” (qtd.

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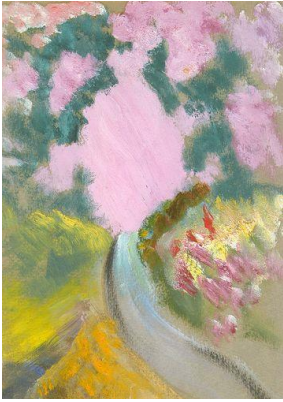
<sup>115</sup> CP 19.

<sup>116</sup> Cummings *Eimi* 238.

<sup>117</sup> Rushworth Kidder, Katharine Winters McBride’s *Concordance* supervisor, authored a book on Cummings before publishing several books on ethics.

<sup>118</sup> The Unitarian symbol for Christ is the star; the etymology of *consideration* is “to look at the stars.”

in Terblanche *Poetry* 87), his letters describing Taoism to C. H. Ford (87) and to Ezra Pound (Ahearn 202), his oil-on-cardboard painting “the road (tao)” (Terblanche *Poetry* 89), seen below. His “poetry does for the American reader what ‘Chinese ideograms do for the



“the road (tao),”  
Cummings [1944].

reader of Chinese” (Babcock qtd. in 99). His notes on R. H. Blyth’s four-volume *Haiku* focus on Taoism, from which Zen and haiku derive, Cummings writes that “the Great Way does not express itself; / Perfect eloquence does not speak” (qtd. in 100) and that “when we are entirely alone with nature [...] we experience on the one hand [...] a feeling of loneliness; on the other, [...] one of fullness”—loneliness, he writes, “is also a state of interpenetration with all other things” (qtd. in 172). For Cummings, “to be oneself, in other words, is to be strong and true enough to give oneself to another freely and without rewards or conditions” (Friedman *Growth* 61). The Taoist *i* is diffuse in the *O*, live in love, *eris* in *eros*, bird in flock and song.

Cummings combines the central teachings of Taoism—no-action (*wu wei*), self-transformation (*tzu-hua*), tranquility (*ch’ing ching*), and self-equilibrium (*tzu-cheng*) (Chen 18)—with (pata)physical love. These are aspects of *blossoming* (a.k.a. petalody), rather than Deleuzian *becoming*:<sup>119</sup> blossoming is not mere change but an i-you equilibrium, a tranquil, passively active self-transformation—“whereas times can merely change, an individual may grow” (Cummings “Foreword to the First Edition” 3). Becomings are “neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real” (Deleuze 238), but blossomings are both waking and

<sup>119</sup> Though Cummings existentially replaces *become* with *blossom*, “the word ‘become’ is another key verb in his *oeuvre*: [...] it combines two sensibilities, that of growth [...] as well as beauty (that which looks becoming)” (Terblanche *Poetry* 98).

dreams, fantastic actualities (cf. CP 688). The creation of beauty that is petalody, blossoming, coaxes myriad reactions, and this aesthetic-cum-ethical persensitive ornithopoeically blurs the limits of actual and fantasy, of dre(is)ams in the earth, flowers, birds, and writing (cf. 820). Like becoming, blossoming is “not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification” (237).

As the lover loves the beloved and encourages the beloved’s growth, so blossoming is <sup>allo</sup>auto<sub>poesis</sub>, the creation of others within the creation of the self (onomatopoeia), and the creation of selves from the creation of and reaction to others, as in an agencement (proso<sub>popoeia</sub>). Where becoming “produces nothing other than itself” (Deleuze 238), blossoming, in producing nothing other than itself, produces others-as-itself, the others that are itself, a self-reflective “object” (*myself*) from a “subject” (*j*).<sup>120</sup>

nevertheless i  
 feel that i cleverly am being altered that i slightly am becoming  
 something a little different,in fact  
 myself (CP 97).

Becoming “can and should be classified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become” (Deleuze 239), but blossoming needs entities, real or oneiric, with whom to bloom; it is not autonomous but heteronomous, for “man is not the culmination of nature, he is *in Nature*, he is *one* of the unities of life, that is all. He is the product of partial, not of total evolution; the branch whereon he blossoms parts like a thousand other branches from a common trunk” (de Gourmont 19–20). The growth of

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<sup>120</sup> The idea that a sufficiently patterned or self-reflective object is a subject comes from Hofstadter’s work *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (1979). He calls this recursion, sameness-in-differentness, heterarchy, or strange loops. See pp. 35–37 for an earlier discussion of <sup>allo</sup>auto<sub>poesis</sub>.



blossoming is similar to Cummings's poetic growth, which "represents not so much the perfection and abandonment of one device after another as the gradual discovery and mastery of a group of devices" (Friedman *Growth* 15), a t(r)opological  $\frac{\text{monad}}{\text{nomad}}$ ology. In love, as I strive to become-you and who-you-desire, I find myself blossoming ever more effortlessly into myself—a gradual discovery or unfurling of me in you, because of you. As lover and beloved, the work of art "becomes that which unfurls, that which *quicken*s, the *blossoming* of the apotheosis" (Blanchot 225, emphasis in original), "the face of a poet really which is a flower" (CP 353).

Persons and flowers are each *hahaecceities* participating in petalody. In both a Taoist and Unitarian fashion, Cummings parallels people and petals in many poems (e.g. where his mother, father, and all the onlookers are "the whole garden" of flowers in his poem to his sick mother [353], and where his lover is "a stealthily frail / flower" [147]). Individuals, for Cummings, exist ephemerally like petals or flowers, and are anonymous, avoiding onoma(u)tonomy, both the Deleuzian *Anomal* at the turning edge of the pack, bordering each multiplicity or agencement, directing while directed and dissolving (244–49), and the (pata)physical *anomalos*, variances intrinsic to a world that values equality (*either-or* within *both-and*). Following Deleuze, we exalt anything rhizomic and conjunctive, but the truly conjunctive is *not quite*, (a)symmetrical and  $\frac{A}{a}$ nomalous. The most intimate mo(ve)ments of I-you, lover-beloved, human-earth, or bird-figure are evanescent and (im)perfect; the two that blossom into each other and then into one, and from one together, are identically different reintegrations. For Cummings, it is through this creative love that *I* and *you* become *we* with other *Is* and *yous* in an ecology constantly reinventing itself.

Cummings would use *i* rather than *I*, and he uses the musical *O* or *o* rather than the aspirated *Oh* or *oh* in his frequent apostrophes, which are ornithopoeic, at once onomatopoeically imitating and responding to the *other* and prosopopoeically creating and speaking with the *other*, and which “constitute encounters with the world as relations between subjects” (Culler “Apostrophe” 141). The *i* and the *O* become one another when the *i* blossoms into the *O*. This  $i \rightarrow O$  is not simplistic or heteronormative: the *i* is not necessarily a phallus nor the *O* a yoni, for both letters represent each lover and beloved—I become you as you become I, and together we blossom, skilfully curled (cf. CP 443). *L*iving is in *l*oving, an *i* to an *O* clinamen, phenomenology to phenology, lover to beloveds. Beauty is—in this growing-together, loving and making love—a syzygy with the good, a clinamen from word to world, from a fertile persensitive to fruits of action and love, from aesthetics to a poetics of obligation (“ethics”).

In what Terblanche calls his “i-o dance” (“Iconicity” 180), “Cummings uses sounds such as [ΛI] and [əU] to intimate a movement from isolation, individuality, and ‘lightness’ into a movement of integration, deeper selfhood, and greater resonance and reverberation in the natural world” (179). The little *i* [ΛI] is a flower, its bud the tittle and its stem the stem, and the *O* [əU] is the flower’s corona of petals, opening and blooming in its whole environment. Both are diphthongs, two-in-one. The *i* is always a blossoming part of its eecology, an (in)finite participality of verbs (Tao and love), which do not preexist it but are coincident with it, as time is coincident with space, as gravity and light with matter.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> As *i* is always in *O*, Cummings’s individualism is always because of the love of others. Until the end of his life, he relied on others for financial support—e.g. his parents, his Aunt Jane, Scofield Thayer, James and Hildegarde Watson—and for food and shelter—e.g. Dorothy Case, Loren MacIver, Miriam Patchen (Sawyer-

The creation of the physical flower is called *petalody*, and this word represents a fractal process of the four *-ologies* of eecology that ornithopoeia reveals in the c(ha)osmos, with seemingly arbitrary but most important echoes of (*pata*)physical love.<sup>122</sup> In *petalody*,



“Petalody of *p. rockii*,” Qianlong [2014].

a single little stem or bud, through interactions and signals from its environment, creates the structures and functions by which it will interact and signal its environment, its flowers—*petalody* is also the aesthetic process of creation, or the (*pata*)physical

clinamen between aesthetics (the blossoming flower) and “ethics” (the blossoming flower in its agencement and beautiful eecology). In blossoming the flower interacts and intra-acts with its environment in all senses, fleshy and figurative (e.g. beauty, pollination, growth, decay), and perceptual (e.g. taste, touch, smell, sound, sight)—and so *petalody* is also the “ethical” process of reaction. Aesthetics cannot live well without “ethics,” and “ethics” cannot love beautifully without aesthetics—a *poetics*, an ornithopoetics, of *obligation*.

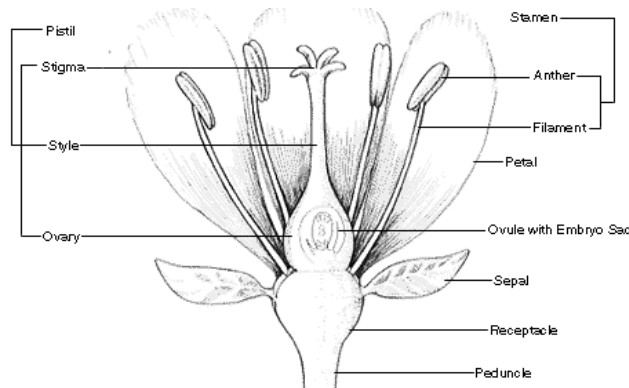
In *petalody*, the seed or bud sprouts (ephemerology), grows toward a limit delineated by the plant’s genes and surroundings (liminology), bursts through the bud (porology), and wa<sub>n</sub>es in fleeting and frail beauty, becoming something new such as a fruit or nut, or humus and soil and then a new plant (evaneschatology). In Cummings’s painting, “the road

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Lauçanno 201, 450). Fittingly in the third person, Cummings acknowledges this: “he’s aware of millions upon millions of individuals inside him [...] By picking this or this of the million selves, by playing the world-instrument via all its registers, he may (with Luck!) begin to begin an actual a true a sublime I” (qtd. in 503).

<sup>122</sup> “Cummings radically continues to demonstrate with poetry that arbitrariness and motivation may enter cycles of enhancement: the more arbitrary, the more motivated—this is a central and marvellous paradox of his work” (Terblanche “Iconicity” 189).

(tao),” many flowers line the road, and the road itself looks like a flower with a bud either about to bloom or a petalless flower that has bloomed and wilted and is now a deadhead,



“Parts of a flower,” *Plant Morphology*, AMNH.

or more promising, has senesced into the *receptacle* (the part of the plant from where the bud and flower and fruit grows—see diagram), or drooped into the drupelet (which will form a fruit—it does not die but evolves).

Returning to begin discussion on *i* and *O* anew, Terblanche writes of petalody in another way, a *wu wei* that hints at Cummings’s *phen(omen)ology*:

either the dot of the ‘i’ or the occasional full stop may grow like a seed or open like an eye into a more ‘entranced’ seeing of what it means to be on earth. Put technically, smallness continues to give over into the enormousness of change in natural being—and the essence of the matter is the very process or change itself (“Iconicity” 184).<sup>123</sup>

Cummings “referred to himself in letters and journals as ‘our nonhero’ or ‘unhero,’ as a ‘small-eye poet’ and as ‘little Estlin’” (Kennedy 28), and as “our heroless hero” in *Eimi* (e.g. 107). His small *i* “begin[s] wherever I am, in the midst of multiple obligations, in the plural and the lowercase, nothing capitalized or from on high” (Caputo *Against* 6). It is an *i am* that “has little of YAHWEH’s bombast. i is small, usually inconspicuous, but nimble and resilient and completely committed to its liberty” (Bell *Eimi* xiii).<sup>124</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Terblanche’s unsubstantiated use of “entranced” throughout his work is intriguing: Cummings’s poetry is *en-trancing* (its beauty may ease the reader into a trance-like, enlightened state) and it is *entranc-ing* (its (pata)physical experiments open entrances into the earth for us, and into us for the earth).

<sup>124</sup> Ex. 3:14.

The *i-O* dance, or petalody, or ornithopoeia—for all ephemera participate in this Taoist dance, whether thistle or throstle—is to “open us open / our / selves” (CP 422); it is a “growth melody” (Uexküll 152),<sup>125</sup> “subjecthood fusing into [a] larger, inclusive being where it finds its innermost, fuller, reverberating, most resonant self. One could say that it is a movement from lightness into awe, in which the two merge maximally to effect a full sense of being” (Terblanche “Iconicity” 184). This larger, inclusive *being* is not a deity, not a being, but the mo(ve)ment of many *beings* together on earth, e.g. a flock or copse. Cummings writes about this mergence of the third entity, both yin and yang, in a prose poem:

Never the murdered finalities of wherewhen and yesno, impotent nongames of wrongright and rightwrong; never to gain or pause, never the soft adventure of undoom, greedy anguishes and cringing ecstasies of inexistence; never to rest and never to have: only to grow. Always the more beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question (461).

The Tao unites *i* and *O* in a “third way,” a way outside all binaries, a way within an entity, a motion within a stasis—a move-place. This third way is “only to grow” and a “beautiful question” which is an answer, a (m)end, and following the Tao, lovingly and ornithopoeically, it becomes Cummings’s fourth way to not only incorporate binaries in a (pata)physical move-place, but a way to make that move-place porous and blossom and grow, to make it eecological and generative. Terblanche diagrams the dance, the formation of the Taoist third way and Cummings’s fourth way, the uniting—note the *-ing-*of *i* and *O*, with three figures (“Iconicity” 181–84):<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> “Every organism is a melody which sings itself,” says Uexküll (qtd. in Buchanan 123). This strange-loopy recursivity prefigures Hofstadter’s concept of the subject emerging from self-referentiality in and among objects, which is later echoed by Despret’s concept of the agencement.

<sup>126</sup> Cummings offers, as the structure of CP 820 revealed, a *fourth way* to the Taoist third way, which unites binaries. This third way is a delicate series of clinamens, as de Man hints, from *either-or* to *both-and* through

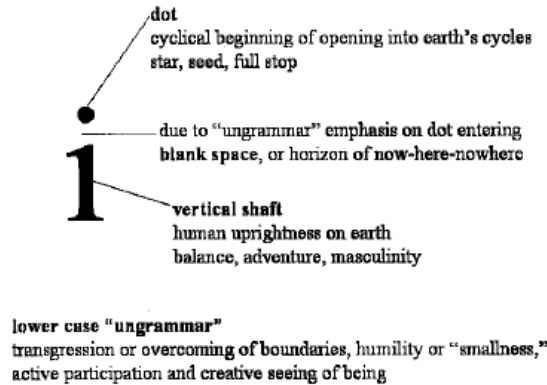


Figure 1. Annotated "i" — the dynamic contexts of Cummings's poetic persona

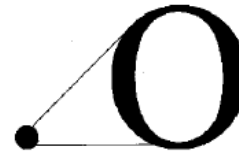


Figure 3. Diagram of dynamic relation between self and other in Cummings's i-o dance



otherness, femaleness, earth, moon, sun,  
nest, depth, profundity, completeness,  
vibrant wholeness, inclusiveness, entrance,  
growth, expansion, fullness, "magic,"  
exclamation, health, continuation of being,  
dynamism, radical participation in being,  
"entrancement," the now-here-nowhere

Figure 2. Annotated "O" of Cummings's poetry

In her commentary to §16.2 of the *Tao Te Ching*—which reads,

Now things grow profusely,  
Each again returns to its root.  
To return to the root is to attain quietude,  
It is called to recover life (94)

—Ellen Chen writes that “possessed of the mystical vision of the round, which encompasses all beings both in their coming out and their going back, the Taoist rises above the one-sidedness of individual consciousness to expand in ever-widening circles” (95), what Cummings calls “life’s serene perpetual round” (CP 3), what I call eecology. As the Taoist, through aesthetics we realize—i.e. understand and make real—that to be “ethical” is to be poetically obligated to the eecological, and to be (pata)physically loving. The ornithopoeia of Cummings’s birds and the birds’ Cummings creates an aesthetic eecology to facilitate realization of the “ethical” eecology. The petalody of Cummings’s flowers, and of the flowers’ Cummings, will develop much the same obligations or imperatives. This attainment of

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*neither-nor*. The fourth way is (pata)physical, acting on this *both-and/either-or* syzygy, acting only in love and for lives, from a fecund two-scene of lover-beloved. If the third way is as a seed, the fourth way is also (in)complete, as a flower we are, are obliged to nourish, and assist blossom. In addition to all the connotations of *O* shown by Terblanche in Figure 2, Culler suggests that the apostrophic-prosopopoeic *O* is how “the poet makes himself a poetic presence through an image of voice, and nothing figures voice better than the pure *O* of undifferentiated voicing” (“Apostrophe” 142).

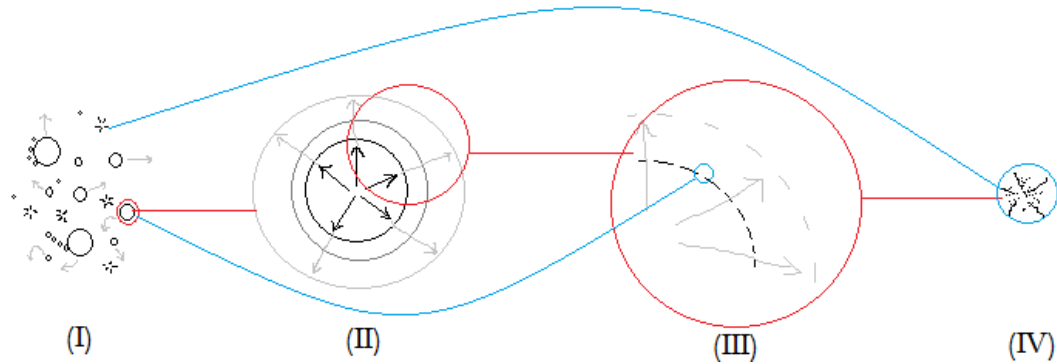
quietude (§16.2) is not a permanent end, but evaneschatological, an (im)permanent fulfillment, a becoming-full or blossoming incomplete even as it is completed—(in)complete: “the empty and quiet is not the ultimate destiny of all beings, but that to which all beings return to be reinvigorated for reemergence into life” (Chen 95). This is not a New Age proposition, but an exposition of death’s transformation by and into scavengers, mold, fungi, bacteria. Corporeality will become and is already *copro-reality* (via  $\frac{\text{monad}}{\text{nomad}}$ ology), as Bataille notes: “life is a product of putrefaction, and it depends both on death and the dungheap” (qtd. in van Dooren 48). The expansion and dissolution of individual consciousness into eecology, into the round (*i* to *O*), is the diasporic, sporulating nowhere that is now-here, “since nowhere is where now and here come from and return to” (Terblanche “Iconicity” 188).

Taoism has several identically different “four-part” processes, though as the diagram below shows (originally on p. 81), each process is co-implicated and interconnected with the others (e.g. an ephemeron is also a pore, and the whole cycle is but another ephemera, as Democritus says, “there can be an atom the size of a *kosmos*” (Curd 117).<sup>127</sup> Cummings’ poems, “as seen throughout his career, are concerned with the cycles of the natural world or the essential rhythms of human life” (Kennedy 4). Many of his later poems (from *XAIPE* on) have an innately cyclical structure, beginning with the end of a sentence and ending

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<sup>127</sup> The four -ologies of eecology—the *i-O* dance, petalody, ornithopoeia—are (pata)physical and motivated jargon not for its own sake but for the sake of creation, of saying *yes* to the *as if*, of laughing with the laughter of things, and with new and adaptive ways to think and act, of aesthetically approaching an eecological “ethics,” as much as it can be spoken, written, or painted. If these words do not facilitate any of these, ignore them. These neologisms are (trying to be) Cummings-inspired (m)ends to keep theory and art in dialogue, not only to change art through theory as is common, but to change theory through art, to change praxis and perception through an art-theory symbiosis. A symbiotic two-entities-as-one is what Lynn Margulis calls a *holobiont*, and it is only recognized as such when it performs a new metabolic function (Douglas 10). This art-theory holobiont, in each neologism, performs the novel function of fertilizing “ethical” ground, of making pores in the limits of language, of planting seeds of signs dehiscing into deeds: *word* → *wor(l)d* → *world*.

with the sentence's beginning, or opening on a closed bracket and closing with an open bracket. As Chen writes in her introduction to the *Tao*, "the life of a plant is conditioned by seasonal rotation. So is the movement of Tao in four stages: great (summer), disappearing (fall), far away (winter), and return (spring) [...]. A plant is always renewing itself; the Taoist celebrates perpetual childhood" (41). Cummings was lauded as childlike throughout



A rough approximation of all the synonyms of "life's serene perpetual round" (CP 3), the "spontaneous clumsy trivial acrobatic edgeless gesture of existence" (96), the four co-implicated -ologies of the cycle of eecology, a fractal found throughout nature:

- (I) Ephemerology: great (*ta*), summer, stars, image (*hsiang*), rosetree, seed
- (II) Liminology: disappearing (*shih*), autumn, rain, thinghood (*wu*), dreamtree, stalk
- (III) Porology: far away (*yüan*), winter, sun, germ (*ching*), truthtree, flower
- (IV) Evaneschatology: return (*fan*), spring, moon, growth (*hsin*), lovetree, receptacle

his career; he also grew like a flower, with hesitance, fragile brilliance, and beautiful senescence, which led to life for others.<sup>128</sup> He explicitly writes these four-part processes into his famous "anyone lived in a pretty how town" (CP 515). Here petalody or eecology is represented by "spring summer autumn winter" and "sun moon stars rain," which appear in various permutations such as "autumn winter spring summer" and "stars rain sun moon." This four-part seasonal process, great–disappearing–fall away–return (*ta–shih–yüan–fan*), is also called image–thinghood–germ–growth (*hsiang–wu–ching–hsin*) in §21.2 (Chen 107–

<sup>128</sup> His technique inspired for better or for worse a generation of lyric poets, who often mistook Cummings's playful mastery with frivolity. As early critics warned, "beware his imitators!" (Monroe qtd. in Sawyer-Lauçanno 213) and his poetry "will provoke imitation, but mastery is inimitable" (Moore qtd. in 448).



08). In another poem, this cycle is rosetree–dreamtree–truthtree–lovetree (CP 763), and in this cycle is the Tao, “the root of the root and the bud of the bud / and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows / higher than soul can hope or mind can hide” (766).

The eternal is not transcendent, immanent, or abstract, but concrete, cycles of concrescence, contingent and coincident. “What is deathless is the unceasing life-producing activity,” which is the Tao (Chen 173); “forever is now” and my and your response is to “dance you suddenly blossoming tree” (CP 767). In a time of stagnating metaphysics,<sup>129</sup> of capitalism, of fundamentalism, of ecocatastrophe and the Anthropocene, of overpopulation and overproduction, of escapism and extremism, of complexity and hyperobjects,

there is need to make the world sacred again. The divine is not away from the world, but is the very life pulse of the world. Time is not the moving image of eternity, but its very unfolding. Finite beings are not separate from the infinite ground, but its very fulfilment (Chen 42).

In a time of time and minutes, there is need for lilacs and love (CP 206). A tree is not sacred because, as mumbles the moth-eaten metaphysical mantra, “it participates in that power of being which is treehood, that power which makes every tree a tree and nothing else” (Wilhelmsen 104). It is sacred because it is an ephemeral frailty, a *hahaecceity* in the *c(ha)osis*, because it needs others’ love to live, because it loves others and helps them live. Its holiness is in its (w)hole existence: <sup>etho</sup>/<sub>theo</sub>logy.

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<sup>129</sup> My broad criticisms of metaphysics are partially a lament for its lapse, hence my reincorporations and reinvigorations of figures such as the Presocratics, Leibniz, Kierkegaard, Deleuze: these are transcriptions of metaphysics’s threnody into the eecological melody of (pata)physics; elsewhere it need not be, for as Derrida asks, what is metaphysics but “a white mythology that assembles and reflects Western culture?” (“White” 11). We need no white-mythologizing to assemble culture distinct from nature, but green-returning to the earth to *agence* nature and culture. Working with the Derridean nature-culture binary, Cummings sees culture growing and inextricable from nature, unable to cut its roots and shed its leaves. For Cummings, “the boundary between human culture and natural being [...] is not a hermetically sealed one. Rather, it is an active, permeable boundary which continues to open into greater contexts” (Terblanche *Poetry* 31).

Part of this making-sacred via making love is to foster and listen to a poetics of obligation, and this may occur playfully and productively through aesthetics. Hillis-Miller writes that “without storytelling there is no theory of ethics” (*Ethics* 3) because, following Kant’s categorical imperative, which says that “I should never *act* in any other way than in such a *manner* that I could also will that my *maxim* should be a universal *law*” (qtd. in 26, emphasis mine), I *pretend* that my particular maxim is universal, and this pretending is “an act of imagination, like writing a novel. When I enter in imagination into the miniature novel I have created for myself, then I shall be able to tell in a moment whether or not my action is moral” (28). This ethico-aesthetic t(r)opology is apt, but the transition from *act* → *manner* → *maxim* → *law* dilutes the particularity, the *hahaecceity* to whom we are obligated. Value is ejected from the physical to the metaphysical; the world is desecrated and hammered into dichotomies, where either my act is a perfect law or I do not act (and therefore I do not act). The categorical imperative ignores the exceptionality of our cases, giving too much power to a generalized Agent *per se*, forcing Others into shadows of the Self and actions into manifestations of a general law, and erecting a false means-end dichotomy that closes the flesh as a body, an clear end along a means, in spite of all the messiness and heteronomy of the world.<sup>130</sup> “If spring is exquisite, Cummings tells us, spring is messy, too. If love is the highest, the most beautiful, the most this, the most that, it is also messy,

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<sup>130</sup> Kant says, “act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only” (qtd. in Ricoeur 72). To mis/read Kant and Ricoeur, “never as a means only” implies that people must be treated as a (m)end rather than as only a means (objectification and reductionism), or as only an end (subjectification and subjectivism). Though “there must indeed be some kind of ethical reward and ethical punishment,” they “reside in the action itself” (Wittgenstein 6.422) because it is acted on a (m)end, because it is a means and its own end and vice versa.

and those who will have it only in a tidy form will have to do without it altogether” (Watson 36).

Hillis-Miller’s account of the role of aesthetics in ethics, “as the bridge between the law as such and any particular law applied” (*Ethics* 38) paves the way, over earth and through the forest, for an onoma(u)tonomic rule of I-over-others, of law, bodies, and seeing, which ignores exceptions and flesh, faults and feeling, as it summarizes and rationalizes. But the anomalos inherent in hahaeceity, in an individual who is nothing but, to co-opt Levinas, the “restlessness of the same disturbed by the other” (Levinas *Otherwise* 25), is continuous transgression of “the rule that divides identity from alterity” (Bök 40).<sup>131</sup> We are others, and Hillis-Miller’s Kantian ethics ignores this, dangerously assuming we can act as ourselves, because of ourselves, and heeding the imperative we create for ourselves in isolation from the calls of others, the obligations and imperatives they place in our flesh. Aesthetics, Cummings urges, conditions our persensitivity to brokenness, fragility, littleness, overwhelmingness, and serendipity, and nourishes processes of imagining and listening heteronomously, rather than forcing imagination to autonomously rectify itself with a so-called Law and without the world. Aesthetics broadens the leaves of the mind and deepens the roots of the senses together, neither of justice nor personal agency but of agencement and genius, from which all justices will sprout and fruit in the mo(ve)ments they are needed. My “ethical” act does not create a universal law set in stone<sup>132</sup> because I have succeeded

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<sup>131</sup> Levinas is referring to the *il y a* that is the irreducible Other, but this *il y a* parallels the *-it-* of “notqu / -it / ness” (cf. CP 820), the <sup>etho</sup>logical <sup>sub</sup>ject who is not-quite-flesh nor -figure, not-quite-self nor -other, nearly *both-and*. Illeity = *il-y-a-ity*.

<sup>132</sup> Ex. 24:12.

in autonomously forging a correct Manner; rather, aesthetically conditioned, responding always to the calls of others by which it is created, my “ethical” act stems from an adapting soil, from a humble, fertile, and beautiful love of, and with, the peculiar and the weak.

In conjunction and coalescence with this four-part petalody that Cummings finds in ecology and finds that ecology is are the three treasures of Taoism, which will help us to perceive and be the earth-as-sacred again:

The first is motherly love (tz’u),  
 The second is frugality (chien),  
 The third is daring not be at the world’s front (§67.2 Chen 208).

With a motherly, (pata)physical love that fuses *eros* and *agape*, passion and selflessness, which can “open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens” (CP 367), with frugality and utter humility or “full acceptance of being on earth which allows one to lose one’s ego in the unity of a relationship” (Terblanche “Iconicity” 185), with antinomial passive action (*wu wei*), clinamen-esque self-transformation (*tzu-hua*) and tranquility (*ch’ing ching*, graphically a clinamen), and syzygical self-equilibrium (*tzu-cheng*), the *i* blossoms into the *O*, we grow and bloom and open into our environment, creating places and worlds, laughing each other’s laughs, singing our inner silences, ecologically.

Cummings offers a toast to this *i-O* dance: “here’s to opening and upward, to leaf and to sap / and to your (in my arms flowering so new)” (CP 424). From these seven traits, we return to love, Tao, whole in our fragility, infinite migrations through the other, existing as the other, a reinventing two-(or-more-)scene. Love is the “rain awaited by leaves with all / their trees and by forests with all their mountains” (754); it is the possibility *and existence* of universality, plurality, and wholeness (*trees* and *mountains*) *within* the particular, the

singular, and the fragment (*leaves and forests*). Love is ornithopoeic, below and beyond all faith and reason (cf. 574), temporal—material *and* spiritual—and contingent, an antinomy of Big Bang and tiny fluctuation (cf. 530), a Higgs Boson through which all places, moving and blossoming, become (m)ends (cf. 443).

Cummings writes a (pata)physical, ornithopoeic phenomenology that is actually a phenology—*phen(omen)ology*: a first-person study of consciousness and existence that only and always blossoms into a study of earth’s seasonal and cyclical rhythms, in the biosphere, in the climate, and in each animal and plant. The  $i \rightarrow O$  transition within phenomenology, from humanism and anthropocentrism to posthumanism and ecocentrism, the study of *i* in and only as *O*, is phenological. Omens are exposed and call on us when we finally *realize* that we were always symbiotic and symbolic, circles among circles. The individual is indivisible from its eecology, the hahaeceity inextricable from its c(ha)osmosis, the flower inseparable from its soil, air, sun, rain, bees, and maybe eyes looking and noses smelling.

His phen(omen)ology, as ornithopoeia is the ch(i)asmic process of figuring birds while birds figure us, is not only imagining the flower—which would merely be metaphysics—but is (pata)physically allowing the flower, “imagined,therefore real” (cf. 574), to imagine us and to change how we imagine.<sup>133</sup> The ability only to metaphysically imagine—to suggest an irreal plane of reference rather than really creating it—is moribund: in Cummings’s sole poem on suicide, the suicide, unable to see that there can be love in the world, unable to make real in imagining (a symbiotic *real:imagine*), thinks before his death,

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<sup>133</sup> Unfortunately, *imagine* is a videocentric word, but in Cummings it should suggest a synaesthetic persensitivity, an “imagining as I-marginal, Being-pushed-to-the-edge” (Darroch 12).

somewhere it is Spring and sometimes  
 people are in real:imagine  
 somewhere real flowers,but  
 I can't imagine real flowers for if I  
 could,they would somehow  
 not Be real (339).

When the Tao-love cycle is stepped past (transcended) or not perceived, devastation—personal, physical, climatological—results and ecology collapses to egology, philosophy and metaphysics alone;<sup>134</sup> the suicide dwells on the symplocity that he is (*somewhere, sometimes = I, I*) rather than the symplocity that he is woven with all things, imagined and real (*real:imagine*). Cummings's *i-O* phen(omen)ology warns of this. It encourages a way of ethico-aesthetically thinking with the whole self, of transforming *there-then-no* into *here-now-yes*—"laugh,and make each no thy yes" (651)—of reaction (onomatopoeia) and of creation (prosopopoeia), of striving for partial enfleshment from both ways at once, of passive-actively *fleeting* in an agencement (cf. 627), and of listening to the silence within all sound (cf. 712). Because of the prevalence of floral metaphors in both the *Tao Te Ching* and in Cummings's poetry, we explore one final poem that grows with flowers, and which will wishfully unite the (pata)physical and ornithopoeic, (a)symmetrical foci of the previous two chapters through "the peaceful theorems of flowers" (3).

Cummings writes extensively about flowers, more than about birds or even love.

Flower-related words appear 986 times in his poetry, and seventeen species are mentioned.<sup>135</sup> A veritable anthology (etymologically, a bouquet of flowers), the word "flower"

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<sup>134</sup> As Levinas writes, "philosophy is an egology" (*Totality* 47). Philosophy alone is egological; philosophy-aesthetics is eecological, or may be at least, as if.

<sup>135</sup> Roses (83), lilies (18), daisies (9), clovers (7), lilacs (5), violets (4), thistles, pansies, poppies, buttercups (2), and orchids, mayflowers, geraniums, dandelions, daffodils, crocuses, and amaranths (1). Flower-related words

itself appears 128 times, often in such creative interleavings as flower-faint, flowerish, flowerstricken, flowerterrible, mist-flower, and mouth-flower. The flower, a lover's smile, "so very new a flower, / a flower so frail, a flower so glad" (20), (in)complete as shattered love—"one flower is the spring; a falling leaf has the whole of autumn" (Cummings qtd. in Terblanche *Poetry* 172)—and fragile, ephemeral, miraculous and passionate, evanescent, inimitably beautiful, and passively active,<sup>136</sup> is an epithet in many of Cummings's (pata)physical conceits, an enmeshed, ornithopoeic dyscourse of interpersonal growth.

**95 POEMS #16 [1958]<sup>137</sup>**

The last poem is one of Cummings's later poems, from his second-last volume of poetry, my personal favorite,

*in time of daffodils(who know  
the goal of living is to grow)  
forgetting why,remember how*

*95 Poems*, which was published in 1958 after an eight-year silence, the longest poem-less pause in his career (*I x I* was published in 1950). Critics cite Cummings's age and ailments as reasons for this delay, and these frailties contribute to a volume of poetry that grapples with questions of mor(t)ality and Taoism most explicitly. Early in his career, in his first influentially Taoist period, he wrote that "these my days their sounds and flowers / Fall in

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include various nuts, fruits, trees, anatomical names (e.g. bough, bower, bud, petal, root, tendril), names of processes (e.g. bloom, grow, sprout, wilt), names of places (e.g. field, forest, garden), and names of related seasons or weather (e.g. april, rain, spring). Because of the ecological interconnectivity of Cummings's flora, it is difficult to decide which words should be included (e.g. related words like dirt, mud, and soil were excluded). In general, words which related to the theme of blossoming or petalody were included, as well as words that invoked ornithopoeia, (pata)physical love, and Taoism.

<sup>136</sup> These metaphorical resonances are Biblical, a tribute to Cummings's Unitarianism: *fragile* from "man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down" (Job 14:2); *ephemeral* from "his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth" (Psa. 103:15) and from "the grass withereth, the flower fadeth" (Isa. 40:8); *miraculous and passionate* from "as a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters" (Song of Sol. 2:2); *evanescent* from "glorious beauty is a fading flower" (Isa. 28:4); and *inimitably beautiful and passively active* from "consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and I say to you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matt. 6:28–29).

<sup>137</sup> CP 688. See Appendix.

a pride of petaled hours” (CP 12). Late in his career, in his second deeply Taoist period, an end that is a (return to the) beginning, he writes that he is “blossoming beyond to breathe” (811).

*in time of daffodils(who know  
the goal of living is to grow)  
forgetting why,remember how*

This poem is five three-line verses in iambic tetrameter (four measures). Each verse has a single rhyme, though the rhymes are primarily visual (slant rhymes), and secondarily sonic (-ow, -m, -s/z, -nd, -e). Each haiku-like verse could be read as a distinct phrase or melody, a simple yet evocative impression, even an imperative—recognizing daffodils’ “knowledge” here in the poem encourages us to listen to them now in life.

The first line—*in time of daffodils(who know*—situates the poem in early spring, when daffodils are blooming. *In time of daffodils*—not “in *the* time” or “in *a* time”—suggests that this early spring blooming is time itself, as is the late autumn wilting, that the daffodils are creatively, actively involved in the cycle of spacetime. The ch(i)asm of *of* entwines *i-O*, entangles <sup>sub</sup>ject, grafts lover into beloved, weaves flower and world. As Cummings’s bird creates space as it “chirps in a tree,somewhere nowhere” (281), these daffodils create time, their time, a time: “time is not something to be endured: it is activated, orientated” (Guattari 18).<sup>138</sup> Earlier, Cummings writes, “now the intimate flower dreams” (CP 75), which not only means that now the flower is dreaming, but that this flower is dreaming the present, now, time itself, when “i watch the roses of the day grow deep” (45). The eternal is the evanescha-tological return: “sahas have their centuries;ten thousand / of which are smaller than a

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<sup>138</sup> Humans too, as things with mass, create spacetime—a “figment of space” (Cummings *Eimi* 35). This is at once subjective creation (e.g. waiting a day for my beloved to arrive feels like a year) and objective creation (e.g. the forces and mass of my flesh produces and is produced by time). “Co-create” or “contribute to creating” are better phrases than “create,” but I use “create” to re-focus and over-emphasize the activity of time, which is wholly neglected in traditional Western passive experiences of time.



rose's moment" (683). Not only do these early flowers signal spring, but they are spring, their growth is an (a)symmetrical fractal of the world's growth—"time is a tree(this life one leaf)" (511)—and of a person's growth, for the daffodils are a *who*, *daffodils(who*.

*in time of daffodils(who know  
the goal of living is to grow)  
forgetting why,remember how*

As persons are *whos*, daffodils are *whos*: "Thy fingers make early flowers of / all things" (14). Flowers are as people, a *hahaecceity*, an ephemeron—"a flower(whom / i meet anywhere)" (368); "you and i are blossoming" (777). Cummings writes that his lover's "petaled flesh doth entertain / the adroit blood's mysterious skein" (20)—*entertain* is used in its specific denotative sense of "hold between" or "intertwine." The lovers' flesh is petals, evanescent and eternal, and holds the mysterious entanglement (*skein*) that is lively blood, Tao, which can *only be* in this intertwining, as the birds *are* in the intertwining with twilight, with the spacetime created in and by their eecological agencement (cf. 627).

The daffodils and lovers, entangled, are whos who know *the goal of living is to grow*, that "the aim of life is life's continuation" (de Gourmont 26). The end of the present-participle (*living*) is an infinitive, an infinite, end (*to grow*): *Il n'y a pas de fin*. There are barely means, either; there are only (m)ends. The end is the means (to grow is living) and the means is the end (living is to grow). These (m)ends are of a persensitive that will help repair and heal the earth. This parenthesis is inserted in the middle of a verse which otherwise reads *in time of daffodils forgetting why,remember how*. *Why*, which can never be answered, an infinite regress, *why*, the illimitable, indeterminate, and *indefinable*, "precisely unbig as i'm a why" (CP 735), is better forgotten in favor of what can be done, in favor of *how*. Earlier, Cummings writes "only consider How" (363). *How* is pragmatic, "ethical" and

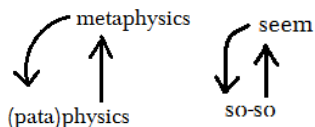
political, and in the process of striving aesthetically for an unattainable *why*, we can make our minds and hearts fecund and nourished, ready to act and be in love, in ecology. In this participle (forgetting) is the broken infinitive (to remember): the (in)finity of participation and participality.

*in time of daffodils(who know the goal of living is to grow) forgetting why,remember how*

The lilacs too create time. And the lilacs were created in time, by others, by lilacs, birds, pebbles, smiles,

*in time of lilacs who proclaim the aim of waking is to dream, remember so(forgetting seem)*

griefs, and trees, an *O* created by an *i*, wherein the *i* has always been—“i am going to utter a tree,Nobody / shall stop me” (114)—and an *i* created by an *O*. Daffodils bloom in early spring, and lilacs soon follow in late spring or early summer. The lilacs proclaim *the aim of waking is to dream*—again, a (m)end, and Taoist though also a (pata)physical proclamation. Waking, the finite means, is the infinite end of “to dream”—and *finite* and *infinite* could be interchanged, as could *means* and *end*. “Whatever this and that petal confutes. . . / to exist being a peculiar form of sleep” (262): to dream, to create the *as if*, “roses which really are dreams / of roses” (748), to act as if the *as if* is actually real, as if laughter and dreams are most serious and most wakeful, is the aim of the aimless, the (m)end of endless and meaningless aesthetics. This second verse ends with an exhortation (a)symmetrical to the first’s: *remember so(forgetting seem)*. As Cummings’s life wilts, he surveys his art from a (pata)physical and Taoist place, and encourages his reader to cast off artifice (*seem*) to return to fullness from fullness (*so* → *seem* → *so/so*): to dream is to remember *so*, to create the *as if* is to sow *seem* to grow *so*. A *seem* is the way (Tao) to *so* as metaphysics is on (and



often *in*) the way to (pata)physics, as aesthetics is the way, the Taoist *wu wei*, to “ethics”—see diagram.

Roses, who bloom later in summer, after lilacs and daffodils, do not know or proclaim, but *amaze our now and here with paradise*. Our particular instant and our peculiar instance, our poronymic *now and here*, our present that “splits up into an inexhaustible multiplicity of possibles that suspend the instant” (Levinas *Totality* 238), is entangled in an eecology of relations, a labyrinthine ecosystem of flora and fauna, a divine rhizome of roses and humans and millions more. Roses give paradise, they amaze with it, they *are* paradise. Paradise is the Tao, living-growing, waking-dreaming, Uexküllian growth melodies and harmonies, and earth eternal in time, (in)finite—“if we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present” (Wittgenstein 6.431), “an inexhaustible multiplicity of possibles that suspend the instant” (Levinas *Totality* 238), a galaxy of rose-times, dream-times, truth-times, love-times, human-times.

*in time of roses(who amaze  
our now and here with paradise)  
forgetting if,remember yes*

The eecological is paradise, the only paradise, amazing and mysterious. Roses amaze because roses, as daffodils and lilacs, creating spacetime, now and here, are forgetting *why* and *seem* and *if* and remembering *how* and *so* and *yes*. (A)symmetrically, *why* = *seem* = *if*, and *how* = *so* = *yes*. These (in)equations seem contrary to Cummings’s prior poetry, but they are a continuation of it; his poetry is not static like a picture of a bird, but kinetic like a bird rising in twilight, and it dawns gradually on its reader, moving through humble heights and proud depths (cf. CP 574). *If* is being forgotten, the *as if* has been realized, created, and spoken, the two-scene is a real scenario, and now *yes* must be said and done to it—we are “sing[ing] an if // of day to yes” (815). We are not inert like theologies, monads, and mononomatony, like abstract conceptions, but lively like <sup>etho</sup>/<sub>theo</sub>logies,

nomadologies, ornithopoeia, and concrete actualizations,  
 monadologies, dehiscing seeds, blossoming petals, and promiscuous pol-

*in time of roses(who amaze  
 our now and here with paradise)  
 forgetting if,remember yes*

len; and we, remembering this Tao through Cummings's aesthetics of striving, are obliged to participate, passively acting the "earth's own clumsily striving" (749).

This harmony with nature, predicated on disharmony, taking what we need and leaving the rest, allowing

*in time of all sweet things beyond  
 whatever mind may comprehend  
 remember seek(forgetting find)*

plough and sword and hammer to rust while minds deepen, hearts broaden, ears listen, and green thumbs and hands welcome others, is petalody. It is growing as flowers, with flowers, and into flowers: "From each brave eye shall sprout a tree" (19). We blossom as flowers, beautifully fragrant and deliciously vibrant, and we die so new flowers may grow; we assist their growth by our own growth and decay, liminology and porology. This harmony with nature is of flowers, which are and symbolize *all sweet things beyond/whatever mind may comprehend*. They are the t(r)opology of a wor(l)d-garden, not Eden but "whose universe a single leaf may be" (821). Time is created by the earth and its objects, its denizens, and not an abstract construct of man's making. Time, of all sweet things, is beyond comprehension not because it is infinite, but because it is (in)finite, because it is in and of the finite, immediate and instantaneous. Infinity connotes the vastness of the universe, but more anthropocentrically of our minds—and this is readily, willfully comprehensible. But

gigantic timescales are truly humiliating in the sense that they force us to realize how close to Earth we are. Infinity is far easier to cope with. Infinity brings to mind our cognitive powers, which is why for Kant the mathematical sublime is the realization that infinity is an uncountably vast magnitude beyond magnitude (Morton 60).

Vast finitudes are truly beyond comprehension: they horrify, terrify, and petrify the mind—three words Morton

*in time of all sweet things beyond  
whatever mind may comprehend  
remember seek(forgetting find)*

uses to describe what happens to humans faced with vastness and multiplicity and complexity. They cannot be thought or known, only to be acted in, acted under imperatives and directives and poetics of obligations—*find* is forgotten and *seek* is remembered. Seeking is before and after finding, as *yes*, *so*, *dream*, and *how* are before and after *if*, *seem*, *wake*, and *why*. To *seek* is to strive to *find*, and what one does again after *finding*: “If a poet is anybody,” Cummings intimates in his foreword to *Is 5* (1926), “he is somebody to whom things made matter very little—somebody who is obsessed by Making” (CP 221).

Seeking continues though life is a mystery which cannot be found and is only founded in its par-

*and in a mystery to be  
(when time from time shall set us free)  
forgetting me,remember me*

ticipality (*to be*). The last verse of the poem has a visual-auditory harmony: each of its tetrameter lines rhymes on the [i] phoneme and the /e/ morpheme, where the previous four verses rhymed slantedly, partially, or sometimes sonically and sometimes visually. The last verse also has a Taoist, tautological harmony which mirrors the resolution of *keeping-giving-love* and *if-yes-love* in a repetition of *love* (cf. 574). In this unknowable mystery of *to be*, Cummings asks us in forgetting him to remember him, lovingly (cf. 530)—as in the other four verses, to shed superficiality, civilization, and construction through aesthetic striving, for coincidence, existence, fullness, and the earth.

The *me* also represents every person, every *me*, whose “i” is a subjective construct of the object, the *me*, whose sharp [i] sound intimates littleness and humility. Little children often begin speaking by identifying themselves not as *i* but as *me*—not as a subject but as

an object. It is (almost) to this childlike beginning we must return—from me to i to *me*, from objects to sub-

*and in a mystery to be  
(when time from time shall set us free)  
forgetting me, remember me*

ject to <sup>sub</sup>ject. To remember a person, a *me*, is to forget their constructions and deceptions, anthropocentrisms and egocentrisms, and be with them (&) and create a place of love, a world of yes with them despite inevitable death, whose “clever enormous voice [...] hides in the fragility of poppies” (55), *when time from time shall set us free*.<sup>139</sup>

Earlier, Cummings writes, “so / much greenness only dying makes us grow” (491). He writes “greenness *only dying*” (emphasis mine)—not more than dying, not death as an end-in-itself, or death as an end-time, not ecological devastation or environmental destruction, but ephemeral dying, part of living. He opines that if “roses complain / their beauties are in vain,” then he “shall imagine life is not worth dying” (744): life is therefore *worth dying*; and a life worth dying is not of a world beyond repair, hope, or (m)ending.

## RETURNING indefinite thoughts

*Returning is the movement of Tao.*

*Weak is the functioning of Tao. (§40.1 Chen 152)*

We, as everything, are a petalody, and the petals grow and wilt. Cummings reminds us, phen(omen)ologically, that we are not beyond the earth, but within it, part of it, (in)finite

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<sup>139</sup> Cummings’s Unitarianism, disavowed early, remains influential throughout his life, and so this line—though it is not mass extinction, apocalypse, or rapture that relieves us from time, but time itself in a Taoist cycle—suggests an afterlife. Cummings’s afterlife is precarious, potentially beautiful. As (pata)physics is a passing-through metaphysics and a return to physics—a forgetting-remembering having shed laws for idiosyncrasy—his afterlife is an (after)life, an end that is a return, evanescent. It is afterlife in life, heaven in earth. In an early poem, Cummings writes, “suppose / life is an old man carrying flowers on his head” (CP 189), and that death is a young man wishing to buy the flowers for a slender girl called “afterwards,” who “likes flowers” (189). An entwining of *yin* and *yang*; this living (after)life is a young girl, where dying life is an old man—traditionally, *yin* is death and femininity, *yang* life and masculinity. “Afterwards” exists in the same now-here as Life and Death do: they are all people, and Life is dying as Death is living (cf. Heraclitus).

and (im)permanent, beneath and below vastness and powers. He coaxes us to live in harmony with the world, to blossom and allow as many others to blossom as we can, to take only what we need and leave the rest, to (m)end the world, not end it or treat it as a means, to repair damages and hurts and hates, to heal devastations and live brokenly and joyously and full of laughter, an immortal hilarity that is “the rose of joy” (Emerson “Love” 191), a nihilarity, a laughter of nothingness and because of nothing, the no-thing whom I, a sym- plicity and a hahaecceity, are and whom you am.

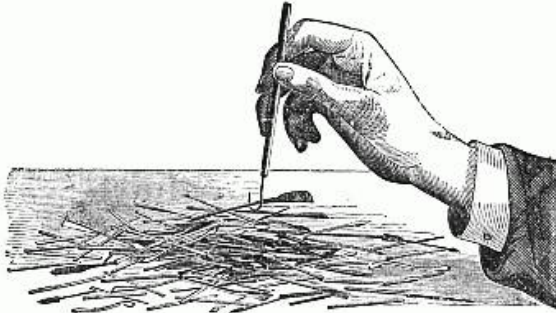
In the *Tao Te Ching*, there are five words for different varieties of return, different evaneschatologies: *fan*, to return to the world; *kuei*, to recover, repeat, or return; *fu*, to return to the ground or source; *chou*, to move round and round; and *huan*, to come back or retribute. All ends are beginnings and means—(m)ends—and all cycles are of the earth, the ground, the flowers’ soil. To fully conclude this thesis on E. E. Cummings’s eecology, a Taoist and Cummings-esque return to many beginnings is required: “for love beginning means return” (CP 526), “and up comes yesterday most green and young” (531). Primarily and phen(omen)ologically—that is, studying the *i* that is of and only is (in) the *O*—Cum- mings’s calligrams poetically plead with us to treat the world as sacred again, to see the divinity in the unpredictable, the celestial in the corporeal, the holiness of change and Tao, to see god in the smallest things and only there, in hahaecceities and idiosyncrepsies, a god “who holds Himself as the little white rose of a child” (748) in a world that “is probably made / of roses & hello” (108)—where “time is a rose / which opens” (1027), when “Rain comes; / predicating forever, assuming / the laughter of afterwards” (357)—and to “be unto love as rain is unto colour; create / me gradually” (373). This is “ethics,” or actually, a poetics

of obligation tended by Cummings's aesthetics, by alive, creative art, by word- and world-opening figures, by synaesthetically feeling in and around grammar, law, and name.

In our e-motive, *eros-agape* love, we (pata)physically fecundate with all things—which may be grimy and pristine sex, various dirty and sublime symbioses, or tiny and quasi-universal interactions. And in these orgasms (ergosums), these “dumb blossoms of new mingling” (123), these “gnashing petals of sex” (206), we are denuded—“the prettiest wrath / of blossoms dishevelling” (147)—and returned to our animality, and *ergo* we are, a *sum* of creations and reactions, and we eecologically agence, an illimitable tangle of lovers, an ephemeral flock of birds and block of words, an evanescent grove of flowers. We *are* and help others *to be*; we help the world *to be, to come*, to become and to blossom in laughter and partial enfleshment: “And if i sing you are my voice” (531), a voice “singing each new leaf out of each tree” (521)—and as we have perceived, leaves and trees are lives and spacetimes. Eecology is “the green whereless truth / of an eternal now,” which “welcomes each was / of whom among not numerable ams” (558); it is the “swim blossoms of person” (586); it is “Life's life and strikes my your our blossoming sphere” (582), where our “hearts are mountains, roots are trees” (560). Eecology is the wholeness of the (w)hole and the broken. It is Tao-love, of the  $\text{A}$ nomalos individual, of the four-part cycle of the earth, of the fourth way beneath the third and dichotomous ways. We must both create with it and react with it in its particularity and peculiarity, spontaneously and sensitively and moment by mo(ve)ment; “paraphrase [...] is a total impossibility,” as Cummings's poetry itself (Shapiro 139). Upon eecology both our aesthetics and “ethics” depend, and vice versa—our very lives, our only loves, the earth. “What does it all come down to?” Cummings asks.



“Love? Love”—“the reason that i laugh and breathe” (CP 296). We must return to the earth in love, again and again, as best we can, in order to live. Having worked our way chronologically through Cummings’s *oeuvre* and the writings of his critics, syncretically and onerously through theory and philosophy, and gleefully through myriad neologisms, in lieu of summarizing the (pata)physical creation with and reaction to hahaeccities, the Taoist flesh-



A heap of jackstraws (a.k.a. pick-up sticks), Cummings’s metaphor for consciousness, which is a fractal of ecology, an interobjective agencement of fleeting tensions, relations, laughters, and agencies. Image from Shorey [1877].

figures of ornithopoeic birds and our understandings of birds and all lives and all things, and the blossoming-processes that all ephemera are, I will end as I began, without end (.), with a provocative, partially summative quotation from Cummings’s early play *Him*:

These solidities and silences which we call ‘things’ are not separate units of experience, but are poises, self-organizing collections. There are no entities, no isolations, no abstractions; but there are departures, voyages, arrivals, contagions. I have seen an instant of consciousness as a heap of jackstraws. This heap is not inert; it is a kinesis fatally composed of countless mutually dependent stresses, a product-and-quotient of innumerable perfectly interrelated tensions. Tensions (by which any portion flowing through every other portion becomes whole) are the technique and essence of Being: they copulate in laughter, in your least premeditated gesture are born myriads which die only to be incredibly reborn, they are eaten and drunk, we breathe and excrete them under different names. I do not stroke edges and I do not feel music but only metaphors. Metaphors are what comfort and astonish us, which are the projected brightness of ourselves—a million metaphors times or divided by a million metaphors will constitute a moment or a coatsleeve—here is what we call smells and flavors, the difference between this face and another, god, never, tomorrow, love, yesterday, death or whatever yourself and myself agree to entitle that minute indestructible doll which only the artist possibly may endow with a carefully passionate gesture (I.iv, 28–29)

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APPENDIX  
whole poems

*No Thanks #58* [1935]

love is a place  
& through this place of  
love move  
(with brightness of peace)  
all places

yes is a world  
& in this world of  
yes live  
(skilfully curled)  
all worlds

*50 Poems #42* [1940]

love is more thicker than forget  
more thinner than recall  
more seldom than a wave is wet  
more frequent than to fail

it is most mad and moonly  
and less it shall unbecome  
than all the sea which only  
is deeper than the sea

love is less always than to win  
less never than alive  
less bigger than the least begin  
less littler than forgive

it is most sane and sunly  
and more it cannot die  
than all the sky which only  
is higher than the sky

*1 x 1 #34 [1944]*

nothing false and possible is love  
 (who's imagined,therefore limitless)  
 love's to giving as to keeping's give;  
 as yes is to if,love is to yes

must's a schoolroom in the month of may:  
 life's the deathboard where all now turns when  
 (love's a universe beyond obey  
 or command,reality or un-)

proudly depths above why's first because  
 (faith's last doubt and humbly heights below)  
 kneeling,we—true lovers—pray that us  
 will ourselves continue to outgrow

all whose mosts if you have known and i've  
 only we our least begin to guess

*XAIPE #29 [1950]*

nine birds(rising

through a gold moment)climb:  
 ing i

-nto  
 wintry  
 twi-

light  
 (all together a  
 manying  
 one

-ness)nine  
 souls  
 only alive with a single mys-

tery(liftingly  
 caught upon falling)silent!

ly living the dying of glory

*95 Poems #40 [1958]*

silence

.is

a

looking

bird:the

turn

ing;edge,of

life

(inquiry before snow

*73 Poems #48 [1963]*

t,h;r;u;s,h;e:s

are

silent

now

.in silverly

notqu

-it-

eness

dre(is)ams

a

the

o

f moon

*95 Poems #16 [1958]*

in time of daffodils(who know  
the goal of living is to grow)  
forgetting why,remember how

in time of lilacs who proclaim  
the aim of waking is to dream,  
remember so(forgetting seem)

in time of roses(who amaze  
our now and here with paradise)  
forgetting if,remember yes

in time of all sweet things beyond  
whatever mind may comprehend,  
remember seek(forgetting find)

and in a mystery to be  
(when time from time shall set us free)  
forgetting me,remember me

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Western Gold Medal  
Genetics Major  
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