

E.E. CUMMINGS: THE ECOLOGY OF HIS POETRY

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For Helene Winterbach (1926 - 1997)

I feel that a Man may be happy in This World. And I know that This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision. I see everything I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is far more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing which stands in the way. Some see Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & some scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, so he sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers.

William Blake (Letter to the Revd. Dr. Tusler, 23 August 1799)

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S.D.G.

ABSTRACT

E.E. Cummings' modernist poetry roots itself in nature. That it has not received overt ecosemiotic ("ecocritical") attention is surprising. This thesis reads Cummings' poetic oeuvre as found in his *Complete Poems* (1994) with a view to its ecological (whole, naturally interpenetrating) scope and dynamics.

It builds upon existing criticism of Cummings' natural view and nature poetry (Norman Friedman). Although it mainly adheres to a close reading of the poems themselves, it also makes use of secondary sources such as Cummings' prose, notes, painting, and letters, in support of the ecological argument. It also draws from a broad basis of sources including various strands of ecological discourse: especially "ecocriticism" (William Howarth) as well as cultural ecology, deep ecology, and -- on an interdisciplinary basis -- ecology proper (Michael Begon). The thesis incorporates texts on modernist orientalism (Eric Hayot) since it argues that Cummings' ecology and his unique version of Taoism radically inform one another. Because relatively few sources exist that relate modernist poetry to nature (Robert Langbaum) the thesis consults a variety of modernist criticisms (Jewel Spears Brooker) with a view to the relations between the modernist sign and its outside natural context.

Drawing upon sources further afield (Umberto Eco) the thesis offers a theoretical overview of the complication of natural context in the modern mindset as found in mainstream modernist discourse, structuralism (A.J. Greimas), and post-structuralism (Jacques Derrida). Amounting to a "semiotic fallacy", such a broad semiotic complication of sign-nature relations accentuates the importance of Cummings' poetry which remains at once modern and deeply connected to nature. Against this broad background, and in exploration of a zone of between-ness -- between opposites such as culture versus nature and East versus West -- Cummings' poetry is read hermeneutically to infer its various ecological dynamics. The main questions that the thesis examines are: What is the scope of Cummings' poetic ecology? What are its dynamics? How did critics respond to it? What reciprocal light does it shed on the poetic ecologies of the mainstream modernist poets T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound?

The thesis demonstrates that the extent of Cummings' poetic ecology is considerable: it involves his various poetic categories (such as lyricism, satire, and visual-verbal poems) from early to late in his career, as well as a gradual Taoist crisis in his development (more or less from the 1930s to the 1950s). A sequence of ecological dynamics from Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* are applied to Cummings' poetry, including humility (smallness and earthiness), flexibility (an osmotic semiosis), serendipity (or synchronicity), a singular ideogrammatic style (Nina Hellerstein), iconicity (Michael Webster), an open-ended cross-stitching of oppositional expectations, and "flow" or signs that open out contextualizing possibilities faster than the reader can close them down.

As the thesis further shows, these dynamics ultimately centre on Cummings' third dimension or voice beyond static and entrenched opposites of the relational and oppositional mind. The exploration concludes with a concise examination of additional instances of the third voice such as a yin tendency (restoration of femaleness), followed by an ecosemiotic analysis of two key ecological poems, the leaf poem ("l(a)") and the hummingbird poem ("i/ never"). The latter acts as an osmotic mandala that carries the modernist sign into active and complete earth, with the reader acting as the creative and collaborating intermediary.

The focus then shifts to the critical reception of this poetic ecology, and finds that influential critics (R.P. Blackmur) tended to misappropriate it as a form of non-intellectuality. For example, Cummings' ecological flexibility was perceived as childish sentimentality. The boundaries of Cummings' poetry were perceived not to be "hardened" or "objective" enough. These receptions were based on a particular mainstream modernist view of the intellect, informed by Eliot's objectified and ambivalent early stance. Due to this, critics tended to overlook or dismiss that central value of Cummings' poetry -- its ecology -- in favour of a more predominant and dualistic alienation from and even cynicism towards natural integrity. These in-depth revisitations reveal that Cummings' major minor status embodies an ecological achievement: his poetry managed to move between and beyond the overall dualistic mainstream modernist ecological dilemma that is marked by the major versus minor categorization.

Based on this thorough exploration of the elusive ecological dynamism of Cummings' poetry and its critical reception, the thesis turns its focus to Eliot's and Pound's poetry. The early, major works such as *The Waste Land* (1922) are read from the perspective of Cummings' poetic ecology, informed by the knowledge that a deep-seated double-ness towards ecology could be expected in these major works. An analysis of the mainstream modernist objectification of the sign with its concomitant and sealed-off alienation from its outside context and nature follows -- the focus is on selected texts such as "Prufrock", "Tradition and the Individual Talent", and the *Cantos*.

Eliot's and Pound's respective searches for and achievements of a third voice are subsequently examined, as found (for example) in the DA sequence of *The Waste Land*, "The Idea of a Christian Society", the *Four Quartets*, *Cathay*, and the "Pisan Cantos". Centring on this prevalent and underemphasized third voice, the thesis posits an ecological re-configuration of Cummings', Eliot's, and Pound's respective modernist projects. It demonstrates that Cummings' poetic ecology is central to the other two poets in terms of this voice. In provisional conclusion the thesis calls for a critical shift towards a more intense engagement with "smaller" modernist poetries such as Cummings', with a view to an increasing understanding of the ubiquitous, complex, and sometimes complicating "green" layer of the modernist poetic palimpsest.

Key words:

E.E. Cummings

Modernist poetry

Ecocriticism

Taoism

Third voice: T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound

OPSOMMING

E.E. Cummings se modernistiese digkuns is gewortel in die natuur. Dit is verbasend dat sy poësie nog nie gelees is vanuit 'n pertinente ekosemiotiese (of "ekokritiese") invalshoek nie. Hierdie proefskrif interpreteer Cummings se oeuvre soos bevat in sy *Complete Poems* (1994) met die oog op die ekologiese (heel, natuurgewortelde) reikwydte en dinamika daarvan.

Die proefskrif bou voort op bestaande kritiek van Cummings se natuurlike benadering en sy natuurdigkuns (Norman Friedman). Alhoewel die proefskrif grootliks hou by 'n "close reading" van die gedigte, word sekondêre bronne van Cummings se diskoers betrek, byvoorbeeld sy notas, prosa, skilderye en briewe, om sodoende die ondersoek na sy poëtiese ekologie verder te ondersteun. Die proefskrif betrek ook 'n breë basis van bronne wat 'n aantal variante van ekologiese diskoers insluit: veral "ekokritiek" (William Howarth) asook kulturele ekologie, radikale ekologie en -- op grond van 'n interdisiplinêre benadering -- natuurwetenskaplike ekologie (Michael Begon). Die modernistiese oriëntalisme (Eric Hayot) word ook betrek aangesien die proefskrif aanvoer dat Cummings se ekologie en sy unieke weergawe van die Taoïsme ten nouste by mekaar aansluit. Omdat daar betreklik min bronne bestaan wat die modernistiese digkuns in verband bring met die natuur (Robert Langbaum) soek die proefskrif 'n verskeidenheid modernistiese werke op (Jewel Spears Brooker) met die oog op die verbande tussen die modernistiese teken en die natuurlike eksterne konteks van die teken. Aan die hand van bronne van 'n minder ekologiese aard (Umberto Eco) word 'n teoretiese oorsig van die komplisering van natuurlike konteks in die moderne geestesgemoed aangebied. Daar word aangevoer dat hierdie komplisering begin met hoofstroom modernistiese diskoers en uitkring in die strukturalisme (A.J. Greimas) en post-strukturalisme (Jacques Derrida). Sodoende beklemtoon die proefskrif die belangrikheid van Cummings se digkuns wat tegelykertyd modern is en in die natuur gewortel bly.

Teen hierdie breë agtergrond, asook met die verkenning van 'n sone van intussen-heid -- tussen teenoorgesteldes soos kultuur versus natuur en die Ooste versus die Weste -- word Cummings se digkuns hermeneuties gelees om sodoende die verskeidenheid ekologiese dinamikas daarvan af te lei. Die sentrale vrae wat ondersoek word, lui: wat is die reikwydte van Cummings se ekologiese digkuns? Wat is die aard van die onderskeie dinamikas daarin? Hoe het kritici daarop gereageer? Watter wederkerende lig werp dit op die digterlike ekologieë van T.S. Eliot en Ezra Pound?

Die proefskrif toon aan dat die omvang van Cummings se digterlike ekologie aansienlik is: dit betrek sy onderskeie poëtiese kategorieë (byvoorbeeld liriek, satire, en visueel-verbale gedigte) van vroeg tot laat in sy loopbaan, asook 'n geleidelike taoïstiese krisis in sy ontwikkeling (ongeveer vanaf die 1930s tot die 1950s). 'n Reeks ekologiese dinamikas uit Laotse se *Tao Te Tsjien* word toegepas op Cummings se gedigte. Dit sluit die volgende in: nederigheid (kleinheid en aardsheid), buigbaarheid ('n osmotiese semiose), gelukkige toeval (of sinchronisiteit), 'n unieke ideogrammatiese styl (Nina Hellerstein), ikonisiteit (Michael Webster), 'n oop-eindige kruising van teenoorgestelde verwagtings, en "vloei" of tekens wat aanhou om kontekstuele moontlikhede vinniger oop te maak as wat die leser hulle kan toemaak.

Daar word aangetoon dat hierdie dinamikas uiteindelik sentreer rondom Cummings se derde dimensie of stem, anderkant statiese en gevestigde teenoorgesteldes van die relasionele en opposisionele verstand. Die verkenning sluit 'n bondige ondersoek na enkele verdere voorbeelde van dié derde stem in, byvoorbeeld die yin-neiging (herstel van vrou-heid), asook 'n nadere ekosemiotiese beskouing van twee sleutel-ekologiese gedigte, "l(a)" (die blaargedig) en "i/ never" (die kolibriegedig). Laasgenoemde tree op as 'n osmotiese mandala wat die modernistiese teken dra tot binne-in die aktiewe en volledige aarde, met die leser as kreatiewe en samewerkende tussenganger.

Die fokus word vervolgens verskuif na die kritiese ontvangs van hierdie digterlike ekologie, en daar word vasgestel dat invloedryke kritici (R.P. Blackmur) daartoe geneig was om dit te misplaas of verplaas, en dit te beskou as 'n vorm van anti-intellektualisme. Ekologiese buigbaarheid is byvoorbeeld beskou as kinderagtige sentimenteelheid. Die grense van Cummings se digkuns is beskou as gebrekkig ten opsigte van die nodige "hardheid" of "objektiwiteit". Hierdie ontvangste was gebaseer op 'n spesifieke hoofstroom modernistiese beskouing van die intellek, wat op sy beurt gebaseer was op Eliot se ambivalente en objektiverende vroeë benadering. As gevolg hiervan was kritici geneig om daardie kernwaarde van Cummings se digkuns -- die ekologie daarvan -- oor te sien of af te maak ten gunste van 'n meer oorheersende en dualistiese vervreemding van en selfs sinisme teenoor natuurlike integriteit. Hierdie diepte-ondersoeke na hierdie ontvangste maak dit duidelik dat Cummings se "major minor" status 'n ekologiese wins weerspieël: sy digkuns kon daarin slaag om tussendeur en anderkant die oorwegende dualistiese hoofstroom ekologiese dilemma wat deur die "major" versus "minor" kategorisering gemerk word, te beweeg.

Gegronde op hierdie deeglike verkenning van die ontwykende ekologiese dinamika van Cummings se digkuns en die kritiese ontvangs daarvan, word vervolgens gefokus op Eliot en Pound se poësie. Die vroeë, "major" werke soos *The Waste Land* (1922) word gelees vanuit die oogpunt van Cummings se digterlike ekologie, met die voorkennis dat 'n diepgestelde dubbelheid teenoor ekologie verwag kan word in hierdie werke. Hoofstroom modernistiese objektivering van die teken met die gepaardgaande en afgeslote vervreemding van die eksterne konteks word in besonderhede geanaliseer in uitgesoekte tekste soos "Prufrock", "Tradition and the Individual Talent", en die *Cantos*.

Eliot en Pound se onderskeie soektogte na en bereikings van 'n derde stem word vervolgens ondersoek, soos byvoorbeeld aangetref word in die DA reeks van *The Waste Land*, "The Idea of a Christian Society", die *Four Quartets*, *Cathay*, en die "Pisan Cantos". Met die oog op hierdie omvangryke en onderbeklemtoonde derde stem, stel die proefskrif voor dat 'n ekologiese herkonfigurasie van Cummings, Eliot, en Pound se onderskeie digkunste gemaak word. In terme van hierdie stem toon die proefskrif aan dat Cummings sentraal staan ten opsigte van die ander twee digters. Daar word tot die voorlopige slotsom gekom dat 'n kritiese verskuiwing nodig is in die rigting van die "kleiner" modernistiese digterprojekte soos dié van Cummings, met die oog op 'n duideliker begrip van die omvangryke, komplekse, en soms kompliserende "groen" laag van die modernistiese palimpses.

Sleuteltermen:

E.E. Cummings

Modernistische poësie

Ekokritiek

Taoïsme

Derde stem: T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound

NOTES ON THE TEXT

1. All references to E.E. Cummings' poetry are from the 1994 compilation entitled *E.E. Cummings: Collected Poems 1904 - 1962* (New York: Liveright) -- referred to as CP.

The thesis adopts an alternative reference procedure that deviates from the Harvard method in the case of this primary source, for the sake of indicating the historical context of the appearance of Cummings' volumes of poetry.

With a view to cross-referencing these volumes are indicated by means of individual abbreviations throughout the text (e.g. *Tulips* or *50 Poems*), followed in each instance by the abbreviation CP and the appropriate page number.

For example: "i thank You God for most this amazing" (*Xaipe* CP 663).

This refers to a sonnet published in *Xaipe* in 1950, and which appears in the 1994 edition of *Collected Poems* on p. 663. (Since Cummings rarely gave titles to his poems, first lines are used to refer to individual poems as is the standard practice in Cummings studies.)

Slight further deviations occur when the original volume title needs to be indicated in the text, outside the space for bibliographical references. In such instances only the abbreviation CP and the appropriate page number are retained. For example:

The sonnet "i thank You God for most this amazing" (CP 663) appeared in *Xaipe* published in 1950.

The table below provides the original full title that each volume abbreviation within the text refers to, as well as the first year of publication.

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Volume title</u>	<u>Year of publication</u>
<i>Tulips</i>	<i>Tulips & Chimneys</i>	1922
&	& [AND]	1925
<i>is 5</i>	<i>is 5</i>	1926
<i>ViVa</i>	<i>W [ViVa]</i>	1931
<i>No Thanks</i>	<i>No Thanks</i>	1935
<i>1938</i>	<i>Collected Poems (1938)</i>	1938

<i>50 Poems</i>	<i>50 Poems</i>	1940
<i>1 x 1</i>	<i>1 x 1 [One Times One]</i>	1944
<i>Xaipe</i>	<i>Xaipe</i>	1950
<i>95 Poems</i>	<i>95 Poems</i>	1958
<i>73 Poems</i>	<i>73 Poems</i>	1963
<i>Etcetera</i>	<i>Etcetera: the Unpublished Poems</i>	1983

2. References to Cummings' notes kept in the Houghton Library at Harvard University are indicated by their call numbers in accordance with the Houghton Library's filing system -- for instance: (bMS Am 1823.7 (64) folder 5).

By written permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

3. Since the presence or absence of full stops plays a significant role in Cummings' poetry, bibliographical references to poems cited in the text do not carry full stops -- in order to avoid any confusion as to how the poem is punctuated.

For example, the final stanzas of Cummings' poem "nine birds(rising)" include an exclamation mark in the penultimate line, after which the poem continues to conclude *without* a full stop or a similar mark of completion. Note that the bibliographical reference leaves no doubt as to whether the poem ends with a full stop or not:

tery(liftingly
caught upon falling)silent!

ly living the dying of glory

(*Xaipe* CP 627)

4. One of Cummings' grammatical innovations involves the omission of a blank space after a punctuation mark such as a semicolon, comma or parenthesis. This occurs both in his poetry and in his prose (and his letters in particular), although it occurs with less consistency in the prose. When citing Cummings, these omissions are retained. For example, a paragraph from a letter to Norman Friedman of June 1955 reads as follows:

stars. The lover merely thinks of them, in terms of possibility, as 'worlds'. His beloved(whose own eyes are to him 'more all stars than')actually feels them—to her they are 'flowers', since 'flowers' (she feels) 'only are quite what worlds merely might be'(if worlds weren't confined to the plane of soidisant reality) . . . i.e. worlds express reality(so-called);but flowers—being beautiful—transcend it

a study in contrasting psychologies:masculine(superficial)& feminine (profound)
(bMs Am 1892.1 (55) folder 1).

Note the following typical Cummingsian punctuation-deviations: the paragraph begins with no capital. No blank space follows upon most of the punctuation marks, e.g. "them,in terms of possibility,as". Unlike in his poetry, where Cummings is more careful and consistent, this paragraph contains one or two instances of the normal usage of punctuation which, in a Cummingsian context, come across as "deviations". For example, the blank space that does follow upon the first two full stops.

5. E.E. Cummings' initials and surname are written in the upper case throughout the text.

Norman Friedman expounds the reasons for this on the official E.E. Cummings website hosted at the following internet address:

<http://www.gvsu.edu/english/cummings/Index.htm>. (Click on "E.E.C.' not 'e.e.c.'")

A distinct trend towards keeping the poet's name in the upper case within criticism has by now substantially reduced the earlier see-saw tendency which entailed that some critics used the upper case while others reverted to the lower case.

6. Current critical texts show little consistency in applying the upper case or lower case to nouns that mark movements such as modernism, orientalism, and Romanticism. The thesis adopts the following: modernism, oriental, orientalism, sinology, etymology, ecology, entomology, ornithology, blue jay, lepidopterist, Christianity, Romanticism, Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Unitarianism, Confucianism, East, West, Western, American, Chinese, Cummingsian, Lepidoptera.
7. In those instances where it is undoubtable that the poetic speaker within a given poem is male, the text adheres to the pronoun "he" and its derivatives.

When it comes to a general employment of personal pronouns, the text employs the male and female cases in tandem, e.g. "he or she".

8. The thesis employs materials from some published articles by the author of this text (JET). These include materials from *Spring: the Journal of the E.E. Cummings Society*, the *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, and *Literator*.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Cummings and Ecology

Students of Cummings' work need little convincing that his poetry is nature-centered.

Michael Dylan Welch, "The Haiku Sensibilities of E.E. Cummings" (1995)

The world of nature in all its vibrancy and dynamism resists any final definition, as does the man who has discovered his place in the rhythmic cycle of nature. Within Cummings' vision, therefore, the rational approach to life is a denial of the mysteries and wonders of our world.

Pashpa N. Parekh, "Nature in the Poetry of E.E. Cummings" (1994)

... which simply indicates the speaker's awareness [in Cummings' poetry] that what men consider important, such as abstractions, is really unimportant, and what men consider to be unimportant, such as a leaf or a bird, is really of the utmost importance.

Norman Friedman, *(Re)Valuing Cummings* (1996)

1. Introduction: Cummings, nature, and modernism

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(95 Poems CP 673)

Some significant elements of the poetry of the American modernist E.E. Cummings (1894 -- 1962) are found in this much-discussed leaf poem. The lack of a title, ample blank space, the prominence of its visual aspect, its economy and implied dynamism, the modernist procedure of fragmentation and recombination, and the absence of an intellectualized voice, are all typical of Cummings' bulky oeuvre comprising more than eight hundred poems. These poems are collected in the revised and expanded volume *E.E. Cummings: Collected Poems (1904 – 1962)*, published in 1994 on the centenary of the poet's birth.

The initial interpretative resistance that the poem offers also strikes one. Decoded, its “message” could read as follows: *loneliness; a leaf falls*. This reconstructed “message” indicates that one of Cummings’ pivotal concerns is nature¹. In numerous poems, Cummings deploys his view of the poet as a “coward, clown, traitor, idiot, beast” who finds his or her self in nature’s sunbeams, mountains (*I X I* CP 562), seasons, twilight, snowflakes, mice, or one leaf.

Perhaps in a more hidden fashion, the use of blank space and the visual overtones of this poem indicate another important aspect of Cummings’ poetry: its oriental bent. In its downward, gravitational grouping, the implied portrayal of left-right balance, and its emphasis on letters-as-characters as well as the nothingness of blank space, this poem approaches the being-non-being attributes of the Chinese ideogram as discussed among others (and with reference to other poets) by Nina Hellerstein (1991). The poem is “oriented” in more than one sense: it “faces the East” with its orientalist characteristics, and places itself, so to speak, with a view to up, down, left, right, natural immersion, and being-and-nothing. Like fellow modernist poets such as Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, and others, Cummings was keenly interested in and made his own artistic sense of Chinese “writing” (Cummings, 1966:317). Moreover, Cummings gravitated in particular to Taoist natural sensibilities, such as an acute awareness of the way (Cohen, 1987:63), or the inherent changes of nature, for example when day moves into night or one season into another.

Obviously, some of the salient poems and essays of mainstream modernist poetic discourse -- the prominent, canonized discourse of Pound and T.S. Eliot such as the *Cantos*, *The Waste Land*, “The Teacher’s Mission”, and “Tradition and the Individual Talent” -- do not engage with natural unity as directly as Cummings does in the leaf poem (with its suggested organic “oneliness” of human self and natural

¹ The many connotations of the word “nature” lead to vagueness and imprecision. This term is employed in all its nuanced emptiness in this thesis in order to refer to the physical environment and/or wilderness, or, purely, the biological and physical context within which humans function on earth. Terms such as “environment” and “wilderness” are however also fraught either with imprecisions or frightening precisions of their own. For instance, the term “environment” evokes nature as a mute set of objects which surround us like a fence. This would imply that nature has only utilitarian and superficially decorative values and that interference with nature *should* be the order of the day: there seems to be a notion that nature has to be used and abused if we are to make sense of it. In its turn “wilderness” could underplay the orderliness of nature in contrast to the chaos and violence of our “civilized” cities. Nature is not only an “outside” given, but is intrinsically part of one’s very being.

other). In his recent reappraisal of Cummings' position in modernist poetry, *(Re)Valuing Cummings: Further Essays on the Poet, 1962 – 1993* published in 1996, Cummings' foremost critic, Norman Friedman, suggests that his poetry adds an important counterpoint² to some of the conspicuous elements of the modernist movement:

Where [Cummings] is likely to sing of the joys of spring, [the moderns] are prone to discuss its sorrows; where he praises the insights of childhood, they are prone to analyze its conflicts; where he treats of landscapes and seasons in terms of affirmative vision, they see them as symbols of humanity's alienation. They both share an interest in the wasteland of modern life, but where he sees it as an object of satire, they treat it as a tragic dilemma. They both are concerned with twentieth-century humankind's loss of sexuality and creativity, but where he simply asserts the values of these things, they are caught in coils of disgust and guilt. Cummings is one of the few poets of his generation, for example, who writes straightforward but serious love poetry (1996:4).

Friedman's comparison states a degree of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernist poetry, mainly in terms of nature. Cummings seems to be more affirmative and mainstream modernists more alienating when it comes to landscapes, seasons, and male-female relations. The poetic speaker in Cummings' poetry knows "what men consider important, such as abstractions, is really unimportant, and what men consider unimportant, such as a leaf or a bird, is really of the utmost importance" (Friedman, 1996:112).

Abstractions go along with rational distance, and although rational distance from nature has unmistakable values, it can also have negative consequences. One of these is a unique kind of boredom with nature, especially when rational remove from nature couples itself with short-sighted, materialistic greed. In his *A Sand County Almanac* of 1949, the cultural ecologist Aldo Leopold provides a straightforward formulation of this modern attitude towards nature:

Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land. Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it; to him it is the space between cities on which crops grow. Turn him loose for a day on the

² The term "counterpoint" is my own (JET) and suits the case here: in music, it refers to a melody played in conjunction with another, whereas in literature, it refers to a contrasting theme used to set off a main element (Thompson, 1995:306). Overall, Cummings' natural or ecological sensibility at once acts in conjunction with and in opposition to mainstream modernist poetry, as will be argued in this thesis. Also, the medieval Latin *contrapunctum* means a "pricked or marked opposite" (Thompson, 1995:306) – and Cummings' modernist poetic sense of nature does also prick the pretentiousness of the modern ego, especially in terms of perceived opposites and their structure and conception in the modern mind. This point will also be argued in this thesis.

land, and if the spot does not happen to be a golf links or a 'scenic' area, he is bored stiff. [...] In short, land is something he has 'outgrown' (1949:223).

Mainstream modernist discourse reflects a detachment from nature and a sense of alienation as described here by Leopold. On the one hand a work such as *The Waste Land* can be read as a critique of the lack of meaningful relations between modern human culture and the vitality of nature. On the other, it could also be read as a work that incorporates and entrenches a complication of sign-nature interrelations in a difficult, dislocational manner. "Abstractions", in the sense of objective, intellectual views of poetry and means of writing poetry, are ingrained within mainstream modernist discourse in a variety of manners, and a direct, affirmative relation to the land, birds, or seasons, does suffer as a consequence. A lament for the lack of modern interpenetration with and within nature, mainstream modernist discourse also embodies distance and isolation of the human sign from the land. In poetry, too, the issue arises whether our culture has "outgrown" nature.

As this thesis will show in some detail, mainstream modernist works such as *The Waste Land* appear to remain *ambivalent* about culture-sign-nature relations. As will also be shown, the two faces of this ambivalence or dilemma -- or its two extremities in terms of a natural sensibility -- are equally prevalent within mainstream modernist discourse. Such discourse can, therefore, be as pro-natural as it can be alienating. It can and does stress ancient naturalistic roots as found in the DA sequence of *The Waste Land* (Eliot, 1982:62; Edwards, 1984:113), and in essays such as Eliot's "The Idea of A Christian Society" published in 1939.

Mainstream modernist signs are extremely inclusive by virtue of their capacity to devour experience, and yet, at the same time, they are extremely exclusive and isolating. In the latter case, the mainstream modernist sign acts as if it is impenetrable, solipsistic, objectified/reified in extremity, and monumentally autonomous -- while it maintains maximum intellectual or objective distance between the sign and that which lies outside the sign and hence, nature. Formulated thus, the mainstream modernist dilemma surfaces as a semiotic-spatial problematic of the inclusivity and exclusivity of the sign, as well as a problematic of active orientation or placement within ongoing nature, and this thesis will pay attention to this problematic as part of its argument.

The struggle to interpret *The Waste Land* is at least partially due to the fact that it consists of semiotic object-fragments of which the conceptual boundaries refuse to give way to a sense of unified meaning or *gestalt*, or a sense of readerly orientation -- also in terms of landscapes. It should be re-emphasized that these semiotic object-fragments are at once extremely inclusive (of experience, reality, and nature) and extremely exclusive (autonomous). Add to this that these signs thwart the referential function -- that is, their awareness of their limitations and of their greater outside context -- and it becomes clear that and why it can be difficult, if not impossible, to trace the relations between the mainstream modernist sign and nature within a poem such as *The Waste Land*.

Mainstream modernist discourse further tends to sustain tension between opposites (such as culture versus nature, or sign versus reality, or intellect versus emotion) indefinitely, although it does so in a complicated manner. It sustains dualistic distance and hierarchy in various shades or tones, including tragedy, pity, irony. Consider, for example, the first lines of Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "We are the hollow men/ We are the stuffed men/ Leaning together/ Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!" (1982:77). These lines are cast across the opposition of emptiness ("hollow men") and fullness (headpieces *filled* with straw). But the aspect of fullness is also a kind of emptiness, in the sense that the headpieces are filled with something pointless, dry, and stuffy -- straw. The positive term of the opposition, fullness, is entirely ironic; not a significant fullness, or a sense of solidity and positivity, at all. Ultimately these lines retain the opposite itself in tense, indefinite and ironic suspension: the dilemma cannot be overcome.

These and other aspects of mainstream modernist poetry form part of its celebrated and so-called mature, tragic view of the dilemma of modern existence -- and also of its particular forms of sign-nature complication. A few lines down in "The Hollow Men", the reader encounters a "wind in dry grass" that is described as "quiet and meaningless" (Eliot, 1982:77), for instance. The wind itself is ambivalent according to this description: it is "quiet" and does therefore neither move, nor "say" or mean anything. It is, in short, a very strange wind since it cannot be located within one's experience of nature without ambivalence. In one sense, or, in terms of one

aspect of this uncanny³ ambivalence of the sign, mainstream modernist discourse establishes, on a sophisticated and complicated level, the very distance of alienation between human culture and the land that Leopold describes. It would be entirely unfair to state that mainstream modernist discourse reveals an attitude of boredom towards nature, but a sense of alienation from nature is reflected in the employment of complicated distances between the modernist poetic sign and the physical landscape and the ecosystem.

Whereas it can therefore be difficult to locate mainstream modernist texts with a view to their suggested sign-nature interrelations, Cummings' poetry incorporates a sense of natural immersion, and of someone who has found his active place within dynamic nature, while his poetry does also use devices found in mainstream modernist discourse such as fragmentation and recombination. Although this does not mean that Cummings is devoid of contradictions, dualisms, and tensions of his own, an important degree of difference arises when his poetry is compared to mainstream modernist discourse in terms of sign-nature interconnectivity. In fact, it is clear not only from Cummings' poetry, but also from his (nature) paintings, prose, notes, and letters, that he felt a unique and deep relation to nature from childhood onwards. The leaf poem published in 1958 -- with its sense of a visual and co-active entwining of natural other (falling leaf) and human individual (loneliness/one-ness) as well as its sense of active orientation within nature -- presents Cummings' natural sensibility as found towards the end of his career. And in non-lecture number two of his "i: six nonlectures" delivered in the Sanders Theatre at the Memorial Hall of Harvard University in 1952 and 1953 (published in 1953), Cummings said:

Only a butterfly's glide from my home began a *mythical domain of semiwilderness*; separating cerebral Cambridge [MA] and orchidaceous Somerville. Deep in this *magical realm of Between* stood a palace, containing Harvard University's far-famed Charles Eliot Norton: and lowly folk, who were neither professors nor professors' children, had nicknamed the district Norton's Woods. *Here, as a very little child, I first encountered that mystery who is Nature; here my enormous smallness entered Her illimitable being*; and here some actually infinite or impossibly alive -- someone who might almost (but not quite) have been myself -- *wonderingly wandered the mortally immortal complexities of Her beyond imagining imagination* (1953:32; my emphasis - JET).

³ Rainer Emig describes the "uncanny" nature of the mainstream modernist sign in Freudian terms. Such signs are simultaneously familiar, thus controllable, and alien, thus in control (Emig, 1995:141). Often, the mainstream modernist sign suggests more about a lack of natural integrity than it seems on the controlled surface of the poem, as in the example of Eliot's meaningless wind that does not move or make a sound.

The physical terrain described here is not a paradisaical semi-wilderness or “magical realm of Between” any longer, as a walk through it confirms. Such is the nature of the double-edged sword of progress which today cuts more swiftly and deeply. Nevertheless, this passage makes it clear that Cummings envisioned nature as a revered inclusive presence, a complex Who(m). For this poet, the condition of modern between-ness is a dynamic state between human culture and natural being, including a sense of entering the “illimitable being” of nature with one’s “enormous smallness”. And although Cummings is clearly aware of the *complexity* of nature here, he also remains aware of an elusive, magical simplicity of the process of one’s natural being. Indeed, child-likeness and innocence exemplify Cummings’ natural view, as found in one of his much-cited poems, “in Just/ -spring” (*Tulips* CP 27), which celebrates, in affirmative and earthy manner, children’s enjoyment of sensuous spring, moisture, and mud. As the modernist critic Murray Roston mentions, the “mudluscious” world which is created in this poem -- in which “eddieandbill come/ running from marbles and/ piracies and it’s/ spring// when the world is puddle-wonderful” (*Tulips* CP 27) -- seeks to “blend kindergarten thoughts with the sophistication of experimental Modernist typography in order to break through linguistic and metrical protocol and offer a refreshingly new perception of the world” (2000:181), and nature. Another of Cummings’ spring poems reads:

Spring is like a perhaps hand
 (which comes carefully
 out of Nowhere)arranging
 a window,into which people look(while
 people stare
 arranging and changing placing
 carefully there a strange
 thing and a known thing here)and

changing everything carefully

spring is like a perhaps
 Hand in a window
 (carefully to
 and fro moving New and
 Old things,while
 people stare carefully
 moving a perhaps
 fraction of flower here placing
 an inch of air there)and

without breaking anything.

(& CP 197)

In degree of contrast -- although also related to spring -- Eliot's *The Waste Land*, published in the same decade as Cummings' spring poem cited here, opens with the following lines:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
 Memory and desire, stirring
 Dull roots with spring rain.
 Winter kept us warm, covering
 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
 A little life with dried tubers.
 Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
 With a shower of rain; we stopped at the colonnade,
 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
 Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
 And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
 My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
 And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
 Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
 In the mountains, there you feel free.
 I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter. (Eliot, 1982:51)

A concise comparison of these texts reveals that both are modernist in definitive respects. For example, both texts employ methods to compress or contract utterance. Cummings' poem is stripped, even minimalist, with compact line-fragments that ultimately form a satisfying whole. The section from Eliot's poem is written in a deliberately non-sentimental, matter-of-fact, and at times even prosaic or novelistic mode. It tells the story of someone's life, but avoids epic form, and instead seems to focus deliberately on apparently trivial details such as drinking coffee, talking for an hour, and reading much of the night. These apparent trivialities are mentioned with a slightly unpoetic air which allows great economy, in the sense that the lifetime is sketched with a juxtaposition of almost meagre strokes or "events". Also, the reader (at least initially) finds it difficult to assemble these given fragments into a sense-making whole, due to the omission of vital clues -- one cannot be sure of how to situate the textual subject Marie, for example, despite the details that are provided.

In a number of ways, the passage rapidly creates distance, or a complex set of gaps, between the sign and a sense of readerly orientation. The very first line thwarts readerly expectations of a positive view of spring with its assertion that April is the cruellest month. It goes against the grain of expectations to view spring as a mean or

violent phenomenon. This includes the unexpectedly dramatic, ironic, and almost pointless interjection of human subjectivity into seasonal change -- can seasons be either cruel or kind, or *are* they, simply and only? A difficult gap, or an interference between the sign and natural reality is thus initiated. The speaker's adoption of Marie's voice and thought generates an additional aspect of this gap or distance between the poetic sign and the implied natural reality. Adopting another person's voice and thought in this manner came to be known within modernism as an adoption of the "mask". As has been noted, the poem sketches Marie's subjecthood with a couple of fragments, and it remains in some ways an inadequate fiction in the reader's imagination. This double procedure of adopting a mask, and a fragmented, difficult mask at that, further complicates the relation between the sign and the implied situation in this passage. It is difficult to *locate* Marie within a given implied (natural) space here, despite the fact that in "her" passage -- unlike later passages in the poem which take the difficulties of location further -- several clues are offered with regard to her origins and her movements within the seasons.

And the subsequent section of the poem pushes these (already precarious) sign-reality relations into further readerly ambiguity when the poem adopts a new, gloomy, austere, biblical voice with apocalyptic tone, in order to depict a landscape of searing drought and desolation. "Son of man", it asserts, "You cannot say, or guess, for you know only/ A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,/ And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/ And the dry stone no sound of water" (Eliot, 1982: 51). The landscape can only be known by means of a "heap of broken images": it is a distorted, fragmentary landscape without relief or water. Later in the poem, a "brown wind" blows that *cannot be heard* (Eliot, 1982:58). On one level, this evidently ties in with a loss of significance and spirituality: wind, often a symbol of spirit and the Holy Ghost, cannot be heard. It has merely become the brute fact of wind, without meaningful relation to human ear and culture. On another level, viz. that of natural placement and orientation which go hand in hand with the referential role of the sign, the notion of a *brown* wind that one can (yet) not sense (or hear), ruins one's experience of and interrelatedness with natural events. Still later in this poem, the water-dripping song of the hermit thrush takes non-referentiality to unprecedented lengths: not even the *sound* of water, never-mind its actuality, is possible in the modern landscape that this thrush occupies (Eliot, 1982:65) -- a thrush

that Eliot knew not only as a poet but also as an amateur ornithologist (Ackroyd, 1984:23). (Cummings, too, was an amateur ornithologist (see Ahearn, 1999:283-284).) Of course, a case could be made that the “drip drop” equivalences of the water dripping song of this thrush onomatopoeically imitate and indicate the hermit thrush sounds. Nonetheless, these sounds also appear to be arbitrary noises, not related to actual nature: the sound of water cannot be heard, even if the hermit thrush imitates them. Such is the complication of referentiality and an ensuing ecological ambivalence of mainstream modernist poetry.

Therefore: a complicated rational or semiotic distance, thick with irony and hints of tragedy, separates the poetic sign of *The Waste Land* from natural actuality. Staggered semiotic fragments or reified linguistic “objects” and various masks further mark the distance between sign and natural actuality in parts of the poem, as has been briefly demonstrated. A *modern* sensibility of harsh non-sentimentality and culture-nature complication thus permeates these lines -- although, paradoxically, the notion of spring as something/someone *cruel* is slightly melodramatic, and pathetic in John Ruskin’s sense (2000:485).

In Cummings’ poem cited here, “Spring is like a perhaps hand”, modernist line-fragments and utter economy also occur as we have seen, and one of the clear signs of its modernism and its urbanality is of course the central image of the *window* in which the changes of spring occur. (A poet of nature, and a poet of the farm, Cummings was also a poet of the city, and New York in particular, where he stayed at 4 Patchin Place for some decades.) And yet, as Friedman rightly suggests in general (1996:4), in this poem these modernist elements are used to create natural affirmation. The sign still reaches out towards and finds a sense of semiotic motion that is interpenetrative with natural change. A dynamic image is evoked in which the simultaneous power and fragility of the process of natural change within springtime are revitalized in a stripped, modernist fashion.

Consider that Cummings also personifies spring: it is like a perhaps *hand*. However: whereas Eliot’s personification (of a *cruel* spring) is clever in its avoidance of sentimental confirmation and the poetic cliché of the supposedly positive human qualities of spring, Cummings’ is bright with its subtle suggestion that personification is perhaps *not* suitable in order to describe the season. The poem suggests, after all, that *perhaps* spring is a hand -- and therefore that perhaps it is *not* a hand at all. This

procedure points to spring not as a the embodiment of human forms or thoughts, but as a given, a phenomenon, in its own right -- an "other" that (almost imperceptibly) refreshes the innermost self. It is not a foreign, alienating other as in Eliot's passage with its cruel spring. For the word "perhaps", repeated on three strategic occasions in Cummings' poem, *does* also allow personification. As in other poems to be analysed in this thesis, Cummings senses the sheer flexibility of a word such as "perhaps", and employs it with great precision and economy, to the full. And to the extent that spring *is* a hand according to this poem, it is gentle, cautious, full of care (careful), and embodies a motion that is difficult to follow yet impossible to ignore, a "perhaps" motion (or hand) that continues to move as one (carefully) watches. The poem also suggests a sensibility that one sometimes experiences in general: that nature's motions are not motions at all since they seem imperceptible and stable.

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This image presents change itself as at the very centre of natural events -- and change occurs from "Nowhere" as the poem states in line 3. Cummings readers know that he often puns on the unification of the words "now" and "here" into "nowhere" (95 *Poems* CP 676). And this procedure of a fortunate simultaneity, serendipity, or co-incidence of English words, is meant to signify that (Taoist/Zen/natural) nothing which is more than all, and which continues to change without getting trapped into any specific, demarcated place or moment with any finality. And yet this "nowhere" is most visible and tangible, so to speak, in the very here of here and the very now of now. Full (poetic) awareness of the present moment and place, brings recognition of the immeasurable now-here-nowhere (Friedman's term (1996:112)) of nature's movements. In one poem that expresses this, a nearly visceral sense of the now-here-ness of a snowflake twirling earthward, leads to a sense of the active "nowhere" from which nature emerges and to which it returns (95 *Poems* CP 676). In short: whereas Eliot uses modernist devices to suggest, lament, and cement the distance between the modern sign and nature, Cummings uses these to reaffirm and revitalize their interactive convergence.

Of course, one is on the verge of oversimplification with these arguments. And as so often happens to a reader who compares modernist poetries, the reading of one modernist poet seems to alter and inform the reading of another. Returning to Eliot's passage, does it not, after all, also contain elements of natural affirmation? Does the emphasis on the absence of positive relations between modern mind-set,

sign, and nature, not lead to a vivid revitalisation of natural imagery in this section from *The Waste Land*? Phrases that indicate how “dull roots” are stirred by rain, for instance, although not conventionally positive and appreciative of nature, do conjure a vivid earthy picture of the beginnings of organic growth. And a rare occasion of human freedom is found in this section of the poem, when Marie, in a moment of daring, forced abandonment, and surrender, goes down a steep mountain slope on a sled and discovers that “*In the mountains, there you feel free*” (Eliot, 1982:51; my emphasis – JET). Sign, human sensibility, and nature hence are joined in *The Waste Land*, too, although this sign remains ambivalent and uncanny within its alienating context. The line subsequent to the one which states Marie’s momentary freedom in nature, asserts an immediate return to matter-of-fact trivialities, as if Marie’s later, grown-up life has covered that moment of freedom under a blanket of “forgetful snow”. Ultimately, the passage stipulates that spring is painful to Marie precisely because it reminds her of the futility of existence and its *potentials* of vitality. While in Cummings’ poem, spring (magically) manages to change everything “without breaking anything”.

Eliot’s poem on the whole depicts a fallen state of human nature and human language (Edwards, 1984:108), and hence also the complication of a cross-fertilization of being within nature and human language. Cummings’ nature poetry finds new (modernist) ways of establishing interpenetration between dynamic language and dynamic nature. In Eliot’s poem signs seem to curve away from meaningful (referential) interaction with the land, back into themselves, where they return on the page as “mere shells of signifiers” (in the phrase of the Eliot scholars Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley (1990:206)), whereas Cummings’ poem presents the sign as a means to revitalize a sense of natural interpenetration.

It should be re-emphasized up front that these remarks are meant to suggest a *degree* of difference. Mainstream modernist discourse, among the many layers of its palimpsest, certainly also advocates a pro-ecological concern. For example, Eliot devotes substantial passages of his essay “The Idea of a Christian Society” (1939) to a direct treatment of green (or, ecological) issues. A wrong attitude to nature implies a wrong attitude to God according to Eliot in this essay, and the consequence is an inevitable societal doom (1980:290). It is time, he writes, for modern society to accept the natural conditions which allow us to live on this planet, to stop erosion, and

to desist from a preference of materialistic comfort at the cost of the natural enjoyment of future generations (Eliot, 1980:290). Eliot goes much further, and he prefigures deep ecological concerns when he asserts that Europe should emulate “savage” cultures, in which socio-artistic-religious complexes still allow a sustainable relation between culture and nature according to him (1980:291). Europe should therefore observe these “savage” complexes with “humility”, as Eliot further recommends (1980:291). In the more recent development of deep (or radical/rooted) ecology⁴, a notion of re-learning sustainability from other cultures comes into focus with the same intensity (see Bowers, 1993:181), and Eliot precedes these developments by at least three decades. In short, Eliot’s concern as found in “The Idea of a Christian Society” is not “merely” ecological but radically so (that is, to the root). Given his knowledge of the roots of words, Eliot was probably also aware that the word “humility” reaches back to soil, earth, *humus*. It is also clear, when Eliot advocates (in the same essay) a return to the natural awe which our Christian forefathers enjoyed according to him (1980:291), that he has the pagan-naturalistic roots of European society in mind. Viewed from the perspective of this essay, then, it becomes apparent that Eliot indeed entertained an enhanced sense of cultural rootedness within natural cycles, as observed by the current deep ecologist, Buddhist Beatnik, and “delayed” modernist poet⁵, Gary Snyder (1980:56).

Cummings’ poetic inscription of a sense of natural rootedness should consequently not be seen as an isolated project, but as a venture that belongs at the heart of one of the main concerns of the modernist poetic movement. It is within this broader modernist natural context that his particular natural sensibility offers a more directly affirmative, straightforward, and complex yet elusively simple counterpoint of a sense of mergence with and within dynamic nature, and a concomitant sense of ecological integration and integrity -- in contrast to the uncanny, but also aesthetically profound, ecological ambivalence of mainstream modernist discourse as found in *The Waste Land*.

Pound’s poetry also participates in Taoist natural sensibilities of immersion, flow, and ecological unity as Zhaoming Qian writes in his *Orientalism and*

⁴ Deep ecology stresses the *intrinsic* value of all creatures and elements on earth.

⁵ Snyder can be viewed as a “delayed” modernist poet since he continues the modernist legacy of Pound’s English-as-Chinese -- as Robert Kern reveals in a detailed comparison between Snyder and Pound (1996:208).

Modernism (The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams (1995:70). Pound's 1914-1915 translations of poems by the predominantly Taoist poet Li Po (circa eighth century A.D., Tang Dynasty) are examples (along with some poems within the "Pisan Cantos"), and this thesis will return to them. But as Qian further stipulates, Pound retained at least some sense of ambivalence towards Zen Buddhism, Taoism, and the notion of unity with and within nature, as found in the "China Cantos" (1995:71). In fact, it is tempting to think of the degree of difference between Cummings and Pound in terms of the differences between two schools of Chinese thought and literature: Taoism with its ecological penchant, and Confucianism with its societal emphasis.

From an ecological perspective, as explained in the sinologist Martin Palmer's article "Chinese Religion and Ecology" (1998), a distinction can be made between the roles of Taoism and Confucianism in Chinese culture. Put briefly, Taoism tends to underscore the spontaneity of nature's motion, and interactive human-nature ecological balance, whereas Confucianism highlights societal duties, punishments, and rewards (Palmer, 1998:22). According to Palmer, the "Taoists mock the attempts of humanity to control and channel the flow of nature. The hierarchies and structures of the Confucians make no sense to them and, worse, are seen as a perversion of the true Tao, the real way" (1998:23). Conversely, the "sage on the mountain, the man alone", a symbol of Taoist unity with nature, became "an abhorrent notion to many Confucians" (Palmer, 1998:23). In these respects, Taoism and Confucianism ended up in societal tension within China.

It could be said -- and here is the temptation -- that in general Cummings' poetry is more directly Taoist and ecological whereas Pound tends to remain ambivalent, and wavers, between Taoist harmony, spontaneity, and intuition on the one hand, and static Confucian harshness and symmetry on the other. Consider, for example, Pound's lines "the sage/ delighteth in water/ the humane man has amity with the hills" (1990a:543). This is Pound in humble and also Taoist/Confucian mode: a sense of unity between humans and nature permeates these lines. In contrast, the "China Cantos" are quite severe on Taoism. One emperor died because of "tonics and taoists" (Pound, 1990a:282), another went "down in a budh [Zen] mess" (Pound, 1990a:282), "taoists" (and also "taozers" as Pound sometimes refers to them in these Cantos) are equated with "assassins" and "taxes" (Pound, 1990a:283), there is a reference to the rot caused by "goddam buddhists" (Pound, 1990a:284), and so on.

And in an interview with Donald Hall, Pound clearly stated his Confucian preferences as he discussed his vision of a “Confucian universe” consisting of “interacting strains and tensions” (Hall, 1974:27)⁶. The absence of an interaction towards ecological wholeness -- that is, the presence of an interaction limited to the difficulties and tightness of “strains and tensions” -- is perhaps more telling than one thinks at first. For it soon becomes apparent in this interview that Pound’s Confucian universe is stringently objective and harsh. The interview turns to Pound’s methods of composing the Cantos, and he comments “if the stone isn’t hard enough to maintain the form, it has to go out” (Hall, 1974:28). In other words, textual objects to be included in the Cantos had to reveal a certain hardness and tightness, with exclusive conceptual boundaries of a kin with the very hardest of stones. Later in this interview Pound asserts “if the orders aren’t clear, they can’t be carried out”, and that this is paramount with “clear Confucius” (Hall, 1974:31) (or Confucianism, one assumes). Pound summarizes his arguments in this interview with a sentence: “I must find a verbal formula to combat the rise of brutality -- the principle of order versus the split atom” (Hall, 1974:33). This means that Pound sees the flux, dynamism, and diffusion of quantum thought in opposition to the harsh, objective order of a Confucian nature; also, and foremost, in poetic method. In a final twist, Pound ends the interview with suggested praise for “organic America” (Hall, 1974:35) -- Cummings’ poetry would be a good example of organic composition which does not consist of hardened stones arranged in hierarchically ordered structures.

In one of hundreds of letters between Cummings and Pound, collected in Barry Ahearn’s volume *Pound/Cummings*, Cummings (probably inadvertently) brought it to Pound’s attention that in Chinese literature flexibility overrides the issue of a stark choice between Lao Tzu and Confucius. Cummings was also attempting to indicate that Taoism is an experience and a way of life, not a form of organized philosophy, religion, or mysticism. In this letter of 28 November 1946, Cummings drew Pound’s attention to a set of translations of classical Chinese texts (with commentaries) by Lin Yutang, which states that even the most ardent anti-Taoists and defenders of Confucianism in China secretly enjoyed and admired Taoist literature, especially that of Chuang Tzu, the great Taoist poet-teacher of the fourth century B.C. (Ahearn, 1999:202; Yutang, 1948:66).

⁶ This interview was first published in 1962, and was conducted in February, 1960 (Surette, 1979:268).

Pound, who was evidently preoccupied with economical and other matters at that time, did not respond to Cummings' indications in his direct reply to this letter (Ahearn, 1999:204). But two weeks later he recommended Cheng Tien-Hsi's work on the paramount influence of Confucius in Chinese culture in a letter to Cummings (Ahearn, 1999:207). On careful consideration, it is clear that Cummings was right that one of the important values of literature is a certain flexibility which allows societal differences to be put aside, at least for a period of time, for the sake of greater complexity and deeper shades of powerful significance. To describe the degree of difference between Cummings' poetry and Pound's mainstream modernist discourse, one therefore has to look further than the differences between Cummings' Taoism and Pound's Confucianism -- although these attributes are at least indicative of some differences between Cummings in ecological mode and Pound in mainstream modernist mode. It is the difference between emphasis of intuition, spontaneity, and natural flow on the one hand, and (on the other) ambivalence about the relations between society, language, and nature. One of the potentially telling aspects of this degree of difference is the fact that Pound persistently sought for poetic "objects" with clear, even harsh (impenetrable) delineation. His preference (in the 1960s) for hard poetic stones have been mentioned, but as early as 1934 Pound's made it clear in his essay "The Teacher's Mission" that he viewed poets as hard objects within the structures of society. Here poets are compared to antennae (probably radio antennae and not insect antennae), voltmeters, steam gauges, and thermometers (1985:58). Poets themselves were rendered into mechanistic bodies with metallic outlines.

Whereas Cummings decided that to a Taoist artist objectification would be an interference with the necessary levels of intuition, emotive clarity, and naturalistic emergence. In one of the most provocative and intriguing books of criticism on Cummings' poetry -- Milton A. Cohen's illustrated *POETandPAINTER: the Aesthetics of E.E. Cummings's Early Work* (1987) -- one finds the following private note that Cummings jotted down in 1940 (a date of some Taoist importance in Cummings' career as the thesis will reveal):

what i now seek to master is expressing myself
 thru a person in the way(tao) i 'feel to do' (as
 Lachaise, bless him! would say) through nature
 so far,
 the presence of a person has resulted in an object.
 i.e. I get lost(immersed,buried) in Detail.

Result--compromise=confusion
but perhaps i'll win yet! esperons (Cohen, 1987:63).

Cohen's book does particular justice to the relations between Cummings' painting and poetry. However, in its turn the thesis cannot do justice to the depth of his uncovering of Cummings' aesthetics. One is tempted to indulge in the various aesthetics that Cohen uncovers (also based on a thorough study of Cummings' notes in the Houghton Library, Harvard University), and relate them individually to Cummings' poetic ecology; but that would entail a thesis of its own. Cohen does not pay particular attention to how these aesthetics are related to Cummings' natural sensibilities (1987:23, 34, 61).

Nevertheless, he indicates aesthetics that are crucial to an understanding of Cummings' ecology. These include Cohen's finding that dynamism is central to all Cummings' art (1987:57), his further inferral that Cummings' painting, writing, and notes are involved in a symbiosis of aesthetics (1987:19), his indication that Cummings preferred sensuous nature to abstractions (1987:38), as well as his discovery that Cummings viewed intoxication as a state in which the inherent dynamism of objects finally reveals itself (1987:156).

It becomes clear from Cohen's study that dynamism was more to Cummings' aesthetic taste and interest than fixity and closure. For instance, Cohen uncovers from Cummings' notes that the poet preferred the "speed" of the Futurists to the "cold and frozen grammar" of the Cubists (1987:46). As Cohen implies, Cummings had an ontology of simultaneity (1987:155). Cummings sought to create an art of simultaneity, unity, and dynamic wholeness -- certainly also with a view to similar "aesthetic" or whole movements of nature.

To return to the Tao note: it marks Cummings' artistic penchant for dynamism and the *natural* way (or Tao). Cummings wished to express himself through "a person in the way(tao)" and he "feel[s] to do [...] through nature". Up to that point in his painting career, he felt that "the presence of a person has resulted in an object", that he got "lost(immersed,buried) in Detail", and that the result was "compromise=confusion". In other words, Cummings felt that too much detail and too much objectification of one's person through art lead to a difficulty of compromise and confusion that prevent one from painting in accordance with the

Taoist, natural way. A more intuitive and directly emotional approach seemed to him to be closer to the achievement of such a Taoist art.

As Cohen further indicates (1987:19, 57) Cummings did not view his painting and poetry as completely separate disciplines, but instead sought an aesthetic middle ground between the two -- although his poetic career increasingly overshadowed his painting in the eyes of critics. Indeed, Cummings indicated in a playful "interview" that he would have preferred to stay in China where a painter is a poet (1966:317). One infers that his painterly Taoist aesthetic may be applied cautiously to his poetry. As the thesis will demonstrate in some detail, Cummings' wish to take a direction towards less artistic objectification and a more flexible, ecological art is not only embodied substantially in his poetry, but it also marks a decision that has cost the poet some damage in terms of the critical reception of his poetry.

Early modernist poetry such as Eliot's and Pound's frequently moved in an opposite direction: away from organicism towards increasing objectification and/or intellectualization; and important critics of Cummings' poetry and modernist poetry overall, followed suit. These include critics such as R.P. Blackmur who insisted (in 1931) that Cummings' poetry had to be more intellectual and objectified -- as the thesis will reveal in detail in Chapter Five. Michael Dylan Welch stipulates that the orientalist sensibility as found in haiku, Zen, and Taoism accents intuition whereas the West is inclined to accent rational intellectualization (1995:104) and objectifying distance. Overall, it could be said that Cummings inclined towards the former option, thus giving rise to one or two important misunderstandings between the poet and the critics.

The unique and contrapuntal emphasis on natural movement and growth in Cummings' aesthetic view as indicated by the Tao note is therefore important and compelling at a time of increasing awareness of ecology and orientalism. And the kind of contrast that may be useful in an analysis of the degree of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernist discourse as found in Pound's works (when it comes to ecology), thus comes into focus. Semiotic boundaries of Cummings' poetry may be of such a nature as to encourage intuitive mergence and an active readerly location in natural existence via flexible signs, while Pound's volume of *Cantos* appears to present a gargantuan semiotic atom or planet which devours as much experience and detail as possible into its objectified, contradictory, and somewhat

exclusive (“un-splittable”) outlines. This and related matters form part of the argument within this thesis.

All these considerations -- pertaining to an ecological degree of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernism (Eliot and Pound) -- intimate that the green layer of modernist poetry as a whole is more ubiquitous and informative than is frequently known. Of late the burgeoning field of “ecocriticism” (here referred to as ecosemiotics for reasons to be explained) has begun to analyze the “greenness” of the modernist poetries of Robert Frost (Elder, 1999:649) and Wallace Stevens (Harrison, 1999:661). Given Cummings’ emphasis on nature as an inclusive presence, it is strange that his poetry has not yet received similarly overt ecosemiotic attention. On the other hand, interspersed in the huge corpus of Cummings criticism, indications of his natural dimension abound: Friedman frequently writes, for instance, of Cummings’ organismic unfolding (1996:113), his Zen/Taoist leanings (1996:173), and the centrality of nature in (what he terms) Cummings’ “transcendental-organicist” poetic vision (1996:46).

Pashpa N. Parekh in his essay entitled “Nature in the Poetry of E.E. Cummings” (1994) views Cummings as a poet who has “discovered his place in the rhythmic cycle of nature” (1994:64). And some of the most informative readings of Cummings’ natural poetry occur in the work of critics who are mainly interested in other aspects of his poetry. Michael Webster who focuses on Cummings’ visual-verbal techniques writes about Cummings’ naturalism and ecology in articles such as “E.E. Cummings: the New Nature Poetry and the Old” (2000), and “Magic Iconism: Defamiliarization, Sympathetic Magic, and Visual Poetry (Guillaume Apollinaire and E.E. Cummings)” (2001). In his book published in 1995, entitled *Reading Visual Poetry After Futurism: Marinetti, Apollinaire, Schwitters, Cummings*, Webster notes that Cummings’ avant-garde, disruptive visual aspect “can coexist quite nicely with a ‘backward’ aesthetic that sees the work of art as an autonomous, complete, organic whole” (1995a:113). Notions such as these further underscore that nature plays a focal role in Cummings’ poetry -- so accentuating a lack of ecosemiotic attention to his work.

From a deconstructive perspective, Martin Heusser in his book *I Am My Writing: the Poetry of E.E. Cummings* writes extensively on nature in Cummings’ poetry, including a photographic analysis of Cummings’ poem on a wood thrush

(1997:258-259). Heusser seems to anticipate the recent surge of Jacques Derrida's preoccupation with nature as found (for example) in "The Animal That Therefore I Am" (2002). Besides his work on the early aesthetics of Cummings, Milton A. Cohen writes about wholeness in Cummings' poetry from a Freudian angle as found in his article "Cummings and Freud" (1983). From this angle, Cohen also describes relations between Cummings' aesthetics and nature. For instance, he remarks that Cummings' Freudian aesthetic sees animals as living mirrors and extensions of the human self (1983:594). That is, wholeness in Cummings involves human-nature interconnectivity. Michael Dylan Welch, who is also a haiku poet and scholar, offers a valuable article, "The Haiku Sensibilities of E.E. Cummings" published in *Spring: the Journal of the E.E. Cummings Society* in 1995, based on the notion that haiku, nature, and Cummings are inseparable. That the ecology of Cummings' poetry has not received particular ecosemiotic consideration is put in perspective by the existence of these critical responses to his work. Renewed examination of his poetic ecology, also from an ecosemiotic angle with its interdisciplinary concerns, could shed light not only on some of the profound and on occasion slightly hidden textures and dynamics of Cummings' poetry, but also on the critical treatment of his art.

Criticism reflects ambivalence towards nature as found in mainstream modernist poetry. Over the years, criticism did not always guarantee the acknowledgement of an open-ended and affirmative response to nature of the kind that Cummings' poetry seems to require. Prominent strands of mainstream modernist criticism such as New Criticism (despite its variations of "organicism", as found for instance in the criticism of F.O. Matthiessen), but also the later developments of structuralism and post-structuralism, would frequently tend at the very least to retain some form of ambivalence towards ecological concerns. And, at most, these fields of interest retained downright distrust towards -- as well as the attempted dismissal and even negation of -- ecological soundness as found in Cummings' poetry with its integrity of relations between human culture, poetic sign, and natural interactivity. In short, the modern mind-set as reflected in mainstream modernist discourse, structuralism, and post-structuralism could be said to *complicate* human-sign-nature relations -- the theme of the next Chapter of this thesis.

A surprising critical neglect of Eliot's green concern in "The Idea of a Christian Society", and, until recently, the general underemphasis of Pound's

orientalism could, for example, be ascribed partially to this ignorance or mistrust of ecology, along with a glaring absence of Cummings in recent more general works on modernist poetry. Cummings is often not even mentioned once in works of this nature, in which modernist poetry is reappraised from different angles⁷. This despite Cummings' major minor status as a modernist poet, his popularity, his unique sense of natural being, and above all the quality of his poetic art.

In its worst forms of criticism the fear of ecology -- a fear which can be explained by the notion that ecology touches upon a raw nerve of the collective modern mind -- finds expression in critical comments such as Clive James' warning that Cummings' ideas about spring and measurement would bring an end to civilization if they were put into practice (Rotella, 1984:9). James' verdict amounts to an overestimation of Cummings' so-called "kick-ass" anti-social edges, and an attendant underestimation of the actual ecological depth of his poetry. Cummings' ecological sanity and his powers of natural expression are deeply lyrical and "alive". His sense of being in place within nature is, in his best works, flexible and compelling to such an extent that it should be taken seriously and passionately -- but also reasonably. Chapter Five of this thesis gives detailed attention to the ways in which Cummings' ecology is overlooked or undermined in the criticisms of influential critics such as R.P. Blackmur, Edmund Wilson, F.O. Matthiessen, Edward Hood, and Helen Vendler -- thus spanning prominent individual samples within five decades of Cummings criticism.

Blackmur warns in a 1931 essay against Cummings' "sentimental denial of intelligence and the deliberate assertion that the unintelligible is the only object of significant experience" (1984a:107). But Zen and Taoism advocate a "no-mind",

⁷ A sampling of particular and important works that do not mention Cummings includes Robert Langbaum's seminal modernist-natural article "The New Nature Poetry" (1959). Langbaum mentions Marianne Moore and D.H. Lawrence, among others, but not Cummings -- yet Cummings offers unique and important modernist perspectives on nature, as Michael Webster argues in "E.E. Cummings: the New Nature Poetry and the Old" (2000). James Longenbach, in a recent article titled "Modern Poetry" (1999) in which the relations between modernism and Romanticism are revisited in terms of nature, also does not mention Cummings, whose poetry is, after all, interestingly balanced between Romanticism and modernism. Also, Gary Snyder who makes brief but enlightening remarks about modernism, orientalism, and ecology, does not mention Cummings.

In other recent books with a broad modernist scope, minor or major minor modernist poets such as Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Hilda Doolittle, Henriette Monroe, and many more, do feature -- but again one is struck by the total absence of Cummings. These books include Rainer Emig's *Modernism in Poetry: Motivations, Structures and Limits* (1995) and Daniel Albright's *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and the Science of Modernism* (1997).

ecological attitude which is a far cry from mere sentimental “anti-rationality”. Instead, this attitude suggests that one should look beyond everyday relationalities and desires of the rational mind, in order to rediscover ecological equilibrium. Taoist and haiku poetries, although contemplative and non-sentimental, accentuate intuition and not objectifying intellectualization (Welch, 1995:104) -- whereas mainstream modernist discourse frequently accentuates objectifying intellectualization. For instance, in Eliot’s frequently-discussed formulation of a modernist poetic device, the objective correlative (1980:48): although this formulation certainly suggests an intense level of fluidity and presupposition between the object(ive) intellect and subject(ive) emotion, it favours intellectual objectivity in a number of respects. Firstly, it is a formulation of the need to subjugate and control emotion. Secondly, it assumes that objectivity is always necessary and valid whereas emotion *as a phenomenon in itself, without the aid of intellect*, is suspect⁸. Thirdly and most importantly, it is an intellectual, objectifying formulation based on a hierarchy of objectivity and subjectivity in the first place.

Given this mainstream modernist accent on intellectual objectification, the sensibility of “no-mind” and intuition is crucial for an understanding and location of Cummings’ poetry within its modernist context and beyond. Cummings’ poetry places itself in nature as has been mentioned, and oriental sensibilities such as “no-mind” and the “now-here-nowhere” are central to this process, as will be demonstrated in this thesis. But in doing so, and in being contrapuntal to mainstream modernist discourse in this (ecological) respect, Cummings’ poetry has often been misappropriated, mis- or dislocated (also in the sense of mis- or dis-placed), by modernist critics such as Blackmur. It is likely that this occurred under the powerful sway of Eliot’s intellectualizing modernist stance as well as New Criticism (which was spearheaded in America by Blackmur).

In some degree of contrast, Cummings scholars such as Friedman, Webster, and Welch have been able to locate the poet with greater accuracy and appreciation, based on their awareness of the subtleties, strengths, and weaknesses of his ecological and oriental sensibility. In short, some critics (such as, once more, Blackmur, in

⁸ Some passages of the *Four Quartets*, Eliot’s more reconciliatory long poem, confirm the observation that Eliot viewed emotion itself with some suspicion. For example, Eliot writes of “the general mess of imprecision of feeling,/ Undisciplined squads of emotion” (1977:202) in this poem.

particular in his influential 1931 essay, discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis) have tended to overlook the ecological degree of difference between Cummings' poetry and mainstream modernist poetry, and have tended to ignore or castigate imperative positive values of his poetry that are related to ecology. To anticipate matters that are discussed in more depth within Chapter Five of the thesis: critics such as Blackmur tend to search for "hard", objectified semiotic boundaries in poetry, and may tend to decide that Cummings' equally clear, but more flexible and permeable semiotic boundaries, are "soft" in a negative, minor sense. Also, critics such as Blackmur were not in search of orientalist textures in modernist poetry, and these textures are central to the modernist sense of ecology.

Modernist ecology on the whole cannot be separated from orientalism. Along with a classical (Greek and/or Latin) dialectic that functions in mainstream modernist poetry -- in which there is a "tendency to move forward by spiralling back and refiguring the past" (Brooker, 1994:2) -- a generally underemphasized and quite ubiquitous oriental continuum is extant (Friedman, 1984:174; Qian, 1995:2). In reading Cummings, it is important to link his natural sensibility and orientalism, because these two aspects are combined into his sense of ecology. The leaf poem, as has been indicated, provides just one example of how Cummings' sense of nature approaches the Chinese ideogram; additional examples such as his hummingbird poem, "i/ never" (73 *Poems* CP 827) are examined in the body of this thesis.

A diversity of factors culminate in the relative lack of a rigorous exploration of Cummings' poetic ecology, with the exception of scholars devoted to his poetry in particular, as has been mentioned. These appear to include: 1) general underemphasis of modernist orientalism until recently, 2) neglect of Cummings' orientalism within the recent revival of modernist orientalist critiques and sinology, 3) an avoidance of ecology in progressive thought, since it probably touches on a raw nerve of collective destruction and guilt, 4) a general critical underemphasis of modernist ecological sensibilities for various reasons, possibly including the fact that mainstream modernist ecological sensibilities are complex if not over-complicated, 5) the absence of Cummings in those texts that do pay particular attention to modernism and nature (such as the works of Langbaum and Longenbach -- see footnote seven), 6) past critical ignorance of the degree of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernist discourse in terms of nature/ecology and intellect/emotion, 7) an

ambivalent complication of ecological issues within mainstream modernist discourse, also in its critical and New Critical modes, 8) a continuation of such complication in subsequent critical eras of structuralism and post-structuralism, 9) the pronounced absence of Cummings in recent inclusive reappraisals of modernist poetry from various angles, such as those of Emig and Albright (see footnote seven), and 10) the fact that ecosemiotics or “ecocriticism” has not yet embarked on criticism of Cummings’ poetry. Among numerous possible reasons for this overall neglect of Cummings’ poetic ecology, including perhaps mundane considerations such as the fact that Cummings, like any poet, wrote and published works that are excellent according to some while they are poor according to others, one should therefore include the possibility that his very ecology inhibited critical engagement with the poet at least to some extent.

Against this background, and given the relative underemphasis thereof, this thesis will examine the ecological degree of difference between Cummings’ poetry and mainstream modernist discourse. The aim of this focus on Cummings’ poetic ecology is to extend the critical illumination of his poetry with a view to its textual dynamics and sign-nature interaction, its location within modernism and beyond, and its past and present critical treatment -- locating Cummings in terms of his status and position within (modern) poetry has remained a central and ongoing concern⁹. It is also hoped that this procedure will lead to a partial clarification of modernist poetic ecology on the whole, as well as cultural ecological issues and ecosemiotics in general, for example with a view to the interrelations between modernist ecological sensibilities and modernist orientalism.

2. Context: ecology and orientalism

2.1. Ecology

Two key terms of this thesis are “ecology” and “orientalism”, and a key issue of this thesis will be the interrelations between these terms within Cummings’ poetry and modernist poetry at large. Beginning with the term “ecology”: ecology proper is

⁹ In the words of Guy Rotella, in the introduction to his compilation of Cummings criticism of 1984: Cummings “remains a lightning rod for energetic new approaches to literary study. Nonetheless, Cummings’ critical reputation (as opposed, of course, to his ‘popular’ one) remains in doubt. It will be a major task of future Cummings scholarship to work towards resolving that doubt, to evaluate and judge as well as to analyze and codify his work, to locate him as precisely as possible within modern, national, and other literary traditions as well as to consider him as an independent figure” (1984:18).

a natural scientific pursuit, and is described as follows by the ecologists Michael Begon *et al.* in a current, standard reference work for ecologists in the natural sciences: “Ecology is not a simple linear science: *everything affects everything else*” (1996:vii; my emphasis - JET).

The truths and difficulties of ecology are captured in this telescopic description with its paradoxically overwhelming implications. Ecology must take into account as many inherently dynamic variables as possible in its attempt to describe or model the interactions which make natural existence possible, while at the same time arriving at the simplest possible scientific descriptions and modelling of these interactions, and while (also at the same time) remaining wary of oversimplification (Begon *et al.*, 1996:vii).

One deduces that the best ecology occurs in an area between over-simplification and over-complexity (or complication): it keeps the innate complexity of natural interactions in mind without losing sight of simplicity. The act of drinking and incorporating water, for example, is astonishingly complex in its physiological, chemical, and other details. Yet it remains one of the simple facts of life, or of that which guarantees the continuation of life on earth. The difference between a necessary acknowledgement of complexity, and complication, can also be formulated in terms of the act of drinking water. Inherent complexity turns into added complication when water is polluted due to ignorance, neglect, or more deliberate actions, as occurs in the industrial world on a daily basis. In the simple and profound imperative of the deep ecological philosopher Arne Naess: “*Complexity, not complication*” (1995:5). “Organisms, ways of life, and interactions in the biosphere exhibit complexity of such an astoundingly high level as to color the general outlook of ecologists”, Naess continues (1995:6), and such “complexity makes thinking in terms of vast systems inevitable” (1995:6). But -- and here complication enters the equation -- such complexity “also makes for a keen, steady perception of the profound *human ignorance* of biospherical relationships and therefore the effect of disturbances” (Naess, 1995:6).

It is the fact of continuation -- or: an inherent and changing interrelatedness of forces, elements, and creatures on earth -- which makes this distinction between (innate) complexity and (added) complication important. Pollution of water (complication) is detrimental because it has a devastating impact on all those (and

that) which are interdependent upon it (complexity). Since the extent of the interrelated and dynamic interactions between entities and water are so vast and complex as to be unpredictable in all details, the threat of such complication (of which water pollution is a good example) is considerable.

Indeed, Begon *et al.*'s natural scientific description of a science (ecology) which is devoted to the study of the vast, delicate, and dynamic interrelatedness of things, is echoed in cultural ecology and ecosemiotics (that is, in brief, the study of relations between literature and nature). The cultural ecologist Barry Commoner's first law of ecology -- "*everything is connected to everything else*" -- is taken up in ecosemiotics (Glotfelty, 1996:xix; my emphasis - JET). Commoner's verb "connected" is perhaps more drastic than Begon *et al.*'s "affects", but the fundamental idea remains the same: humans are not alone or detached from everything that happens in the ecosystem -- indeed nothing or no-one is absolutely detached in this sense. Ecology, although it grew as an extension of the tradition of "exact" natural sciences, acknowledges the intrinsic and dynamic relatedness of everything and everything else. However, this means that ecological studies are essentially overwhelming: there is always the (humbling) knowledge in the back of one's mind that one has to take too many variables -- which are in the process of changing -- into account. Not unlike the "perhaps hand" of Cummings' spring as found in the poem cited in the introduction of this thesis, ecological motion is at once impossible to ignore and difficult to "capture" with any finality.

With ecology (whether from a cultural or natural perspective), one approaches the *inherent, interactive dynamism of existence*. Besides the fact that this has a number of philosophical implications in terms of time and space, inherent dynamism is also what Cummings' poetry is about to a large degree, as this thesis hopes to demonstrate. Such demonstration cannot be readily accomplished: it is in the nature of differentiating language in general, and the language of analysis in particular, to stall and fragment living phenomena, including "living" or intrinsically dynamic texts. As the mind analyses, and as the hand formulates the analysis, it is as if the dynamism of the text has moved on, or "elsewhere".

Of course, it remains necessary to give attention to the "living motions" of poetry. (Poetry is an intriguing field of study in the first (and last) place, precisely because it is "alive", or significant, or fulfilling in terms of a human semiotic

“hunger”.) Cummings’ poetry concerns dynamism or movement, and manages to suggest it by means of poetic devices which evoke a sense of natural motion. Particular movements, such as the leap of a grasshopper (Cummings, *No Thanks* CP 396) have perhaps not ever been handled with as much care and attention as in his poetry. The thesis will show in some detail that this poem takes great care to reveal the telling inability of language to capture the motions of the grasshopper with closure. Cummings also takes care to compose a sense of simultaneity or coincidence throughout his poetry: he is fond of exploiting linguistic coincidences, such as the serendipity of discovering and expressing (by means of fragmentation and recombination) words such as “one”, “one-ness”, and “i-ness” (selfhood) within the word “loneliness” -- as found in his leaf poem (cited at the outset of this Chapter). Furthermore, Cummings’ view and expression of dualistic opposites create a sense of dynamism through and beyond these opposites, into an awareness of their mergence, wholeness, or salubrious unification. We have in Cummings’ poetry a unique and satisfying balance between complexity and simplicity, fragmentation and recombination, opposites and unity. A standard opposite such as the one between the realm of culture and the realm of nature is motioned, so to say, into a movement of precise and clear mergence through Cummings’ employment of modernist devices and his “ungrammar”. In the leaf poem, Cummings uses fragmentation to rearrange language skilfully, and to persuade the reader into a new mode of recombination, so that a *gestalt* emerges in the mind’s eye of the flowing fall of the leaf (as described by Friedman, (1967:112)). In this (complex) readerly process, the interactive interconnectivity of human individuality and the floating leaf is the dynamic (and simple but not over-simplified) result. The aspects of the poem, whether semantic or formal, entice various aesthetic “movements”. And these “movements” are aimed at restoring and revitalising a sense of *natural* dynamism: the “movement” of experiencing poetry should correspond as intimately as possible with natural change such as a leaf falling, seasonal cycles, and “in-between” times of change such as spring, autumn, or twilight.

In a foreword to his 1926 volume entitled *is 5*, Cummings states with regard to his own work that he is exorbitantly interested in “that precision which creates movement” (CP 221). Perhaps no other prose statement by Cummings has attracted comparable attention from critics, precisely because it embodies an apt description of

one of the dominant impressions that his poetry makes on the reader: dynamism, and natural movement. In a note, Cummings expresses his view that words in a poem tend to influence one another like colours changing on a chameleon's skin in accordance with its environment, and that this *movement of signs creates an impetus or direction, a movement towards outside context*, and (therefore) nature (Cohen, 1987:186). Complex as it will be, the ecosemiotician must try to find ways to formulate or follow this ecological, or eco-contextual dynamism of Cummings' poetry, in which signs in a poem are involved in an outward and interactive motion towards nature, by means of their various semiotic interactions with one another. In other words: to the extent that all reading processes are also ecological events in the sense that cold artifacts on paper are assimilated, "brought to life", in the human mind, it should be said of Cummings' poetry that it enhances and charges this process towards semiotic interaction with the intrinsic dynamism of ecosystems, as found for example in the process of osmosis (that is, increasing saturation of fluids in a dynamic process of transfusion across an active permeable barrier such as a cell membrane). The thesis will attempt to describe these interactions and the intrinsic, ecological dynamics of Cummings' poetry, especially in Chapters Three and Four. For example, a close reading of the nature of semiotic boundaries within Cummings' poetry will reveal that a sense of semiotic osmosis is a valid description of sign-events in the reading of Cummings' poetry.

Certainly, there will be those who feel that this kind of analysis boils down to little more than a fanciful metaphor, in competition with other metaphors in the attempt to describe a poetry. But that is the point: just as creatures compete, co-operate, and interact in ecosystems, so do human linguistic metaphors and devices compete, co-operate, and interact in the cultural realm. And, as Cummings' poetry shows, these two systems -- ecology and culture -- are not separate, unrelated realms, but rather, are involved in an overarching set of significant interactions. Semiotic "hunger" and an osmosis of grammatical boundaries are important to human culture. It is a central cultural-ecological assumption of this thesis that human language is one force among many that allows humans to interact meaningfully with their natural environment, and that Cummings' poetry highlights this linguistic and experiential potential of one's cultural and natural existence.

Even so, one often senses that modern thinkers seriously doubt the truth of ecology. The ecosemiotician Dana Phillips recently expressed a thorough-going doubt over the notion that the realm of signs and the realm of nature can be similar (1999:582) in his article “Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology”. One has to agree with Phillips on a number of issues, including his suggestion that a return to realism should not be the result of ecosemiotic (or ecocritical) studies (1999:580). But when Phillips asserts that similarities between “literary form and the form of ecological communities” are “just a coincidence” (1999:582) (and no more), a necessary doubt sets in. Phillips evidently means “coincidence” in a negative sense and views it as something that deserves to be ignored or discarded since it holds no (causal/logical) truth. Yet the word itself -- “coincidence” -- contains ample suggestion of co-eventuality and co-existence, or a simultaneity of incidents. Cummings was strongly attracted to an aesthetic of simultaneity (Cohen, 1987:155).

In an open-ended and dynamic manner, and despite radical theoretical doubt as expressed by Phillips, this thesis still holds that essential interactions between human signs and nature should be explored, as in the case of Cummings’ poetry. And as the ecosemioticians Laurence Coupe and Jonathan Bate maintain in *The Green Studies Reader* of 2000, the post-structuralist spirit has led to an assumption that nature is little or no more than a *linguistic construct* (Coupe, 2000:3), and that there is (therefore) no nature (Bate, 2000:172). (To be fair, Phillips also seems to agree with this notion that semiosis should not view itself as so inclusive, that it becomes semiotically self-serving and negligent of nature (1999:578).) In short, relentless doubt about authentic sign-nature interrelations have become a tacit axiom, if not a pervasive semiotic “ideologeme” of our time.

Perhaps natural existence can be overlooked so readily because it appears to be exceedingly self-evident. After all, natural existence is as self-evident as the fact that all theoreticians, along with others, drink water and assimilate this liquid into the very fibres of their bodies, also for the purpose of further thought. In addition, it is as self-evident as the recognition that the entire universe and the ecosystem on earth as a whole -- with all the dramatic and delicate forces and changes that are involved -- remain (to put it awkwardly because of linguistic necessity) intact enough in order to continue their continuation. And this ever-unfolding completeness, or “green grace” in the phrase of the Christian ecosemiotician Jay McDaniel (1997:108), is that which

makes possible one's next concrete step, or one's next sip of tea, for that matter. Rephrased: being, or, as some rightly say, the gift of a lifetime -- this given-ness -- is a continuous, enormous compliment of complementarity, bearing in mind the sheer scale of what it takes to make experience intact enough to be actual. Such self-evident now-ness of being is often underestimated, and glossed over with abstract and other (often quite static) concerns, as Cummings is fond of reminding us in his poetry (*Xaipe* CP 620).

Once expressed, this self-evident ecological truth of interrelatedness, and of continuing-to-be-intact, may seem to be a mere truism. One surmises that many have turned away from this truth with a shrug of the shoulders and the question "so what?". But when a Lao Tzu in ancient China, or an Arne Naess in Norway, or a Cummings in America expresses this acknowledgement, of a self-evident dynamism and interpenetration of IS (one of Cummings' key words (*I X I* CP 557)), something of its overwhelming essence gets through, and it is no longer possible to shrug the shoulders so readily. It should be added that human integrity, or wholeness of mind and body, is directly equivalent to an ecological sensibility in which the interrelations between culture and nature, and the sign and the ecosystem, remain integrated. Even in terms of an essential human and cultural transcendence of nature which is often concomitant with a distortion of natural facts, such integrity remains imperative. Transcendence that truly excludes human-earth interrelations is inconceivable. And to the extent that such exclusive relations already abound in Western civilization, it has lead to terrible destruction.

Wholeness or "holism" is a central human concern with its associated senses of health, balance, harmony, homeostasis, osmosis, symbiosis, orientation, incorporation, and open-ended, dynamic, and growing stability and completeness. According to the deep ecologist and theoretical physicist Fritjof Capra, the term "holistic" has of late been replaced simply with the term "ecological" (1997:6). In this thesis, the terms "wholeness" and "ecology" are used as interchangeable terms in accordance with Capra's guideline. As has been stated, ecology carries within it the notion of *dynamism and continuation*. When it comes to ecology as wholeness, it is all too easy to think of it in terms of quiet arrival and finality. After all, completeness, harmony, and balance suggest a certain stasis and a sense of having achieved that which is necessary, or of having "arrived" with gross and quietistic finality. But it is

in the very nature of ecology (hence also wholeness) to remain in process. Naturally and culturally speaking, therefore, wholeness is never found in any static sense, but continues to be lost and regained in an ongoing process which also entails contradiction and conflict. However: this ongoing process of losing and finding a sense of completeness within the overall process of changes which one calls nature can itself be derailed. That which is frequently called the “ecological crisis” poses this much greater threat of annihilating the very *process* of losing and regaining ecology/ wholeness. If nature’s elusive yet essential continuation is itself broken or stalled, and if short-sighted materialistic gain coupled with rational distance is taken to even further lengths of brutal extremity, the opportunities of individual or cultural adaptation in order to lose and regain wholeness and a sense of human-nature integrity will be lost altogether. Rephrased: life will cease to be.

We again see that Cummings’ poetic ecology is not an isolated cultural or modernist event for the reason that culture, too, moves through a process of continuously-regained ecology. Ironically, because of the ecological crisis, pro-ecological activity has sharply increased in Western culture over the past decades. As has been indicated in this thesis, modernist poetry at large reveals overt, if often underrated, ecological discursive events such as Eliot’s “The Idea of a Christian Society”. And as this thesis will argue, Cummings’ poetry forms an integral, invaluable and contrapuntal part of modernist ecological awareness.

Besides ecology proper and ecosemiotics, both which have been discussed to some extent in the preceding paragraphs, a number of additional fields of cultural ecological concern are currently burgeoning. These include cultural criticism with an ecological slant, ecofeminism, and deep ecology. Cultural ecological criticism centres on the societal aspects of ecological thought and behaviour. It includes authors such as Aldo Leopold, Barry Commoner, Rachel Carson, and Fritjof Capra. In the educational field, the work of C.A. Bowers comes to mind as an additional example, although Bowers along with Capra could also be categorized as a deep ecologist. Eliot, who turned his attention from literary criticism to broader societal issues more or less after 1927 (the date of his official conversion to Christianity (Brooker, 1994:123)) can be said to be in cultural ecological critical mode in “The Idea of a Christian Society”. Nature writings of American transcendentalist authors such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson can of course also be included

under this rubric, along with English Romantic poetry which, on the whole, can also be viewed as a poetic critique of a rationalistic and contra-ecological era. As this thesis will make clear, Cummings' poetry belongs with these texts in the sense that it also functions as a critique of modern contra-ecological habits and attitudes. (In Chapter Three of this thesis, Cummings' satire will be analysed in terms of ecology.) A relation between Cummings' poetry and American transcendentalism (Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau) is documented (Cohen, 1987:79 ; Kennedy, 1980:42), and suggestions of his relation with Romanticism have been made from negative (Wilson, 1984:44; Blackmur, 1984a:109) and positive (Friedman, 1984:174-175; Webster, 1995a:113) angles.

Another form of cultural ecological criticism -- ecofeminism -- deals with issues such as the correlation between phallocentrism and anthropocentrism. Male domination of females and societal destruction of the ecosystem -- or what is perceived to be the female landscape in male-dominated societies -- are critiqued in this movement, in terms of metaphors such as "mother earth"; for instance in the work of Annette Kolodny. In view of the significance of ecofeminism within cultural ecology at large, this thesis pays particular attention to Cummings' treatment of females and female principles in his poetry. For, in this respect, too, Cummings is contrapuntal to mainstream modernist discourse. Whereas Pound was worried about the entrance of females into the modernist project (Emig, 1995:194), for example, Cummings reveres females more or less throughout his poetry, in masculine fashion.

Yet another development in the broader cultural ecological movement is deep ecology, which is a philosophical movement at its root and inception, with direct, practical outflow in terms of the continuation of the ecosystem. In the early nineteen seventies, at a time when cultural ecological texts such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Barry Commoner's *The Closing Circle* had turned into best-sellers, the legendary Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer Arne Naess published short, powerful philosophical articles in which he established deep ecology such as "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement" (1973). It is impossible to distinguish absolutely between Western concerns and Eastern influences in these articles and deep ecology on the whole. Naess' articles, for instance, at once derive from his respect for and influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition as found in the work of Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza and the wisdom of Zen Buddhism. Again, one is

under the impression that interrelatedness and a dynamism of influence occur in the cultural areas of ecology. All these developments, and those unfortunately not mentioned in this brief overview of ecology in culture, mean that Cummings' poetic ecology can be studied from a more comprehensive platform than in the past. A resurgence of Cummings' worth to the modernist movement and beyond should accompany the current budding interest in ecology and orientalism.

As employed in the thesis the term "ecology" marks -- in a dynamic, open-ended spirit -- one's significant connections to and within ecosystems and nature, and hence also one's sense of dynamic (changing and continuing) wholeness. At one extremity, such wholeness simply means that one remains physically and biologically intact within and because of one's interactive physical and biological surroundings. This seemingly brutal "given" or fact should not be underestimated in terms of its values. It can be a sobering thought to recognize that an entire universe, as well as the ecosystem, with a multitude of forces, elements, creatures, and events that are involved, must remain intact in order for one to continue existing, also on basic levels such as breathing, seeing, and eating. Cummings makes this point in a sonnet when he writes: "how should tasting touching hearing seeing/ breathing any--lifted from the no/ of all nothing--human merely being/ doubt unimaginable You?" (*Xaipe* CP 663).

At another extremity, wholeness therefore also marks the fact that the realm of one's culture/s, including religion and language, and the realm of natural existence, do not separate into two completely unrelated and non-integrated actualities. A poetic sense of unity with and within nature as mediated by Cummings' poetry forms part of this second aspect of dynamic wholeness, which is, of course, dependent upon and related to the first. Underpinning this is the potential that poetry revitalizes an ecological sensibility. That is, the possibility is entertained here that the sign could also be viewed as an ecological event, as that which mediates between the various dynamics of human culture and physical and biological nature -- including the notion of a transferral of significance or meaning-energy from one creature to another¹⁰. The ecosemiotician Robert Pogue Harrison makes the telling point that the *logos* is an ecological event:

¹⁰ The ecosemiotician William Rueckert compares this transferral to the transferral of energy via food stored in green plants (1996:111). Poems act as the energy sources of the semiotic community.

Orientalism (1978), manages by means of his capacity for “thick (dense) description” to shift the entire oriental discussion into the field of political concern. Said represents orientalism as a Western construct of ideas and activities which may have little to do with the brute reality of the East, and which is used to exploit the East by means of increasingly refined knowledge (1995:5). This includes Said’s notion that the West projects its otherness onto the East as found in his 1994 afterword to *Orientalism* (1995:332). To put it plainly, the West appears to see in its largely anticipated East that which may be dormant, dangerous, or desirable in itself. Lesser elements of Western culture are interjected into an invented, exotic “East”.

Is this orientalism? Is there anything that the West can say or do in terms of the East that would not be tinged by these political underpinnings and aims of exploitation? Should we be squeamish about the textual and somewhat imaginary nature of our knowledge of the East? More importantly: when Pound translates Chinese or when Cummings adopts Taoism in his poetry, are they indulging in the same “oriental” tactics in the Saidian sense?

Work done on modernist poetry by sinologists such as Qian, Kern, Hayot, and Yip, suggests an alternative but perhaps more difficult and ultimately more rewarding route of thought about the Orient. Qian (for instance) begins by pointing out that Said focuses on the so-called Middle East, but that he ignores the so-called Far East and China in particular (1995:1). Qian also points out that Pound and William Carlos Williams (the two modernist exponents on which he focuses) were attracted to the orient because of “the affinities (the Self in the Other) rather than the differences (the Otherness of the Other)” between themselves and Chinese poetry, and that they “did not seem to believe in Western cultural superiority” (1995:2). In fact, as Qian further mentions, Eliot went as far as to consider the superiority of China over what he perceived to be the crudeness of the West (1995:4-5).

Cathay, published in 1915, is a slim volume of translations of Chinese poetry (especially that of Li Po) made by Pound, based on Ernest Fenollosa’s notes, brought to him by Fenollosa’s widow in London. Hayot carefully considers the history of the volume’s reception which for prolonged periods of time was concerned with *Cathay* as *either* an English *or* a Chinese product (1999:524). He concludes that “it may make some sort of binary sense to think of *Cathay* as either English or Chinese [but] the most interesting scholars of Pound seem to wind up somewhere in a complicated

and confusing *middle ground*" (1999:524). He writes that one should not be fastidious about the literariness of orientalism as defined by Said, and that one should

deal with the problem of (mis)representation neither by solving it nor by ignoring it, living instead in the more complicated space that combines uncertainty and discomfort with an attempt to write something that's true (1999:530).

What does Hayot have in mind with "(mis)representation"? As Qian, Kern, and George Steiner suggest in their various ways, absence of exact Chinese knowledge for Pound at the time of his translations enabled him to translate with more economy -- since, as Steiner states (1975:359), Pound shared this absence of knowledge with his Western audience. Pound therefore had a kind of "shorthand" available in order to translate these poems effectively (Steiner, 1975:359). According to Qian (1995:72) and Wai-lim Yip (1969:164), this situation also enabled Pound to carry the essential, vivid spirit of the original Chinese poems across to his audience.

We have become used to the Frostian maxim that poetry is what is lost in translation, but in this unique case which points to the poetic genius of Pound, poetry is *found* in (mis)translation -- in the confusing but rewarding middle ground where the textual nature of one's Chinese understanding somehow leads to authentic and inspiring results. Pound acts as the near-perfect mediator because his lack of scholarly Chinese knowledge (admittedly combined with a level of precision), and the leeway that this accosted him in terms of creativity and the audience, allowed him to carry the original (ecological) "glow" of these poems over into English. Qian shows, for instance, how Pound on a number of occasions gets the exact translation wrong but retains the vitality of the Chinese original with greater effect than scholarly translators. One example will suffice and the curious reader is referred to Qian's book for further samples. Pound translates Li Po's "Taking Leave of a Friend" as follows:

Blue mountains to the north of the walls,
White river winding about them,
Here we must make separation
And go through a thousand miles of dead grass.

Mind like a floating wide cloud,
Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances
Who bow over their clasped hands at a distance.
Our horses neigh to each other
as we are departing.

(Qian, 1995:66)

Qian reveals how Pound, sometimes in parroting Li Po and sometimes in deviating considerably from Li Po's original and Fenollosa's correct renditions thereof, succeeds in mediating the Taoist spirit of the poem (1995:70). For example, Pound's rendition of the third line, "Here we must make separation", diverges from the original as translated more correctly by Fenollosa -- "At this place we have for once to separate" -- and Obata's "Here we part, friend, once forever" (Qian, 1995:68). Qian comments as follows:

Both Fenollosa and Obata have translated the meaning but missed the overtone. Pound alone, by using the English modal verb 'must', has brought out the sharpness and, in addition, conveyed the subtle implication in the original: the speaker has accompanied his friend outside the gate of the city still reluctant to part with him (1995:69).

One of the strengths of Taoist and Chinese poetry is its vivid suggestiveness, its clear implication of colours of meaning and natural identity without resorting to explanation or intellectual intervention, and it appears in view of Qian's remarks that Pound manages to get this across. These deliberations, treated all too briefly here, bring into focus the fact that the best kinds of orientalism are found in the confusing but true "middle ground" which Hayot suggests. Here the results of (mis)representation and (mis)translation as well as (mis)understanding could be more clear than the results of stringent correctness and distance.

This "middle ground" could be conceived of as a creative, dynamic, shifting and growing space where East and West intersperse one another meaningfully and where selfness and otherness intermingle significantly or with authentic textuality. Modernism on the whole in its undervalued oriental dimension occupied and explored this shifting space to a remarkable degree, thus succeeding in bringing to the West something of the deep qualities of Eastern art and poetry. In other words, in this active "middle ground" the East is not colonized but the West is radically influenced by the East, as Qian suggests throughout his book. The reciprocity of contacts and influences between East and West also moves in the other and perhaps less expected direction for once, when it comes to this poetic and critical middle ground.

Cummings' ecological-Taoist poems are studied in this thesis against this background, of groundbreaking work by modernist poets in terms of bringing the energy of oriental poetry across to the West, especially in terms of perceptions of nature. Groundbreaking work, moreover, which would imply a careful and enthusiastic filtering of Eastern materials by the poet, and which, in some cases, took

a lifetime in order to be moved forward. It is not a case of picking an oriental “quick-fix” for remediation of local (frequently ecological) ailments. One cannot at will “pick” oriental cultural goods from the shelf of an imagined multi-cultural “shopping mall”, as C.A. Bowers cautions (1993:140). The notion that coming to terms with oriental poetry or wisdom takes time and cannot be hastily accomplished, is underlined by orientalist such as Carl Jung (1975:58-60) and Martin Buber (1990:121-124).

For the purpose of this thesis orientalism can therefore be viewed as the serious (but not lame), poetic, creative, and critical participation in the art of the East which occurs and grows in Hayot’s “middle ground” and which renders Eastern art into something that is useful to its Western audience, while retaining the essential spirit of the original oriental works. Pound’s *Cathay* is one example of this kind of orientalist activity, a kind that is lasting in its effects, unlike the suggested periodicity of Pound’s Chinese translations as found in Eliot’s much-discussed assessment thereof (Qian, 1995:65; Kern 1996:3; Hayot, 1999:514-517), and unlike Said’s critical and political *judgement* of the predominantly textual inventiveness of orientalism. Certainly one of the astounding aspects of *Cathay* which Hayot mentions is the persistence of its impact (1999:518).

Although Hayot, Qian, Kern, and others consider orientalist modernism in an enlightening manner, Cummings is not mentioned once in these works, as has been mentioned earlier. This is partially due to the limit imposed on these works by the fact that studies of orientalism in modernism still have too many artists to choose from, and cannot, at this stage, consider all or even most of them. This could be related to the historical underemphasis of orientalism in modernist studies, as Qian writes: “I do not claim that the illustrations [of orientalism in modernist poetry that] I am providing are sufficient. Ideally, a comprehensive work on Orientalism and Modernism would cover at least two or three more prominent Modernist figures” (1995:5). As this thesis will demonstrate, Cummings should be one of these, given his standing as a modernist poet and the extent of the Taoist leaning in his ecological poetry.

3. Central questions and theses

3.1. Questions

Given this broad context, the argument to be developed in the thesis will respond to the following main questions:

3.1.1. To what *extent* is Cummings' poetry epitomized by an ecological sensibility? And *how* does Cummings manage to evoke an ecological sense in his poetry? That is, which key dynamics mark his poetic ecology, or which key dynamics does he employ to achieve a sense of ecology?

3.1.2. How do *critics* respond to these ecological qualities within Cummings' poetry? Have these qualities been neglected, or held in a positive or negative light? What light, if any, do these critical responses shed on Cummings' poetic status and the critical treatment of his poetry? Conversely: what light, if any, does Cummings' poetic ecology shed on the attitudes of critics towards his poetry?

3.1.3. What are the *ecological* dynamics of the discourse of *mainstream modernist poets* such as Eliot and Pound, and what light, if any, does Cummings' particular and modernist ecological sensibilities shed on the ecological sensibilities of these poets and their discourse -- and vice versa?

3.2. Theses and Chapter outline:

3.2.1. It will be argued that the ecological dynamics of Cummings' poetry could be described as imperatively prevalent and lasting in the poet's work and career, in terms of the various sub-genres of his work (including lyricism, sonnets, children's poetry, love poetry, visual-verbal poetry, and satire) as well as, to a lesser extent for reasons to be explained in Chapter Three of the thesis, the poet's development over time (from early to late volumes of poetry). This development does not, to the best of one's knowledge, involve a dramatic development from fairly weak youthful nature poetry to excellent mature nature poetry, but instead involves a sustained interest in expressing nature. It involves better works and less successful ones within each volume. As Friedman writes, Cummings' poetry is not typically modernist in terms of the "‘earning’ of affirmation" (1984:174). Mainstream modernist poets such as Eliot seem to be involved in necessary periods of struggle and darkness which grow

into a profound, tragic, mature sense in their salient works. Cummings' poetry, however, seems to involve a more gradual deepening of his sensibility with highs and lows along the way.

Chapter Three of this thesis focuses on ecological aspects in various genres and volumes of Cummings' oeuvre to demonstrate the extent of his poetic ecology. This Chapter touches upon and prepares the way for a more detailed analysis of some key dynamics of Cummings' ability to create a sense of ecology. Chapter Four systematizes and further explores these key dynamics which include a sense of (oriental/Taoist) smallness (in theme and form), a sense of earthiness, the creation of poetic or semiotic flexibility and fluidity, exploitation of the serendipitous potentials of language, and the creation of a dynamic third dimension of natural unification through poetic language. It will be argued that these ecological and Taoist dynamics are vital for an understanding of Cummings' poetry. Whether consciously or subconsciously employed by the poet, and whether overtly or covertly sensed by the reader, it is essential for the purposes of *criticism* that these dynamics are brought to the critical surface. Indeed, Chapter Five of this thesis will examine the notion that the critical dialogue about Cummings' poetry is enhanced by overt engagement with its overall ecological impact and its various dynamics.

3.2.2. As has been argued in the introduction of this Chapter, it is clear that Cummings' poetic ecology has not received the attention that it deserves outside the circle of critics who have devoted the larger part of their activities to his poetry, such as Friedman and Webster. These critics and others (such as Welch and Parekh) provide a useful and illuminating framework upon which a further study of Cummings' ecology and orientalism can be built.

A tendency to overlook the importance of Cummings in terms of modernist ecological deliberations can be traced to some of his influential early critics such as Blackmur and even the "organicist" critic F.O. Matthiessen (whose texts are revisited in Chapter Five of the thesis). Friedman, who believes that Cummings has a significant organicist and Zen modernist poetic vision, at one stage asks with intensity: "Why don't they see it?" (1996:68). That is, why do critics not take notice of and explore Cummings' particular organicist or ecological modernist dynamic? Why do they seem to think of his poetry as devoid of the necessary "complex and

many-sided world” (Friedman, 1996:68) that it does present, but which they do not seem to recognize?

Part of the reason for this is investigated in Chapter Five of this thesis. It could well be that one of Cummings’ stable, if not central, driving forces is a well-developed ability to mediate a sense of connectivity with nature through poetry. Whether this amounts to a fully-fledged and intellectualized modernist vision is debatable -- an issue which will be kept in mind as this thesis unfolds. Nonetheless, some of Cummings’ best poems, such as the leaf poem cited at the beginning of this Chapter, seem to emerge from the page spontaneously as much as they seem to take the reader into a sense of natural mergence. (Chapter Four pays closer attention to these aspects of the leaf poem.) One is inclined to say that Cummings’ modernist “complex central consciousness” (Quinones, 1985:91) is *ecological*. It does not mean that ecology is the be-all and end-all of Cummings’ poetry, since the poetry is too diverse, rich, and “alive” to be slotted into any one final category. A modernist “complex central consciousness” as described by the modernist scholar Ricardo Quinones is, in any event, distinguished by its capacity to assimilate and juxtapose disparate levels of modern experience (1985:91-92). But it does mean that at the heart of Cummings’ work resides a deep awareness of nature, an awareness which (at one extremity) relishes in natural affirmation, and (at the other) casts a satirical glance in the direction of the superficialities and stasis of the modern “man-made” (and not natural-born) world. In Friedman’s words, Cummings’ view “does divide the universe into the natural and artificial worlds, [but] it is the latter which is, in his eyes, simplistic, while it is the *organic* world which reconciles opposites and resolves paradoxes” (1996:68; my emphasis - JET).

It needs to be stated that a number of influential critics either ignored or reacted negatively to Cummings’ modern poetic ecology. Concise analyses of some of these criticisms (by Blackmur, Matthiessen, Vendler, and others) as found in Chapter Five reveal various reasons for these responses to the ecological dynamics of Cummings’ poetry. Based on these and similar “criticisms of the critics”, this thesis will argue in Chapter Five and elsewhere that part of the reason for some important negative critical receptions of Cummings’ poetry has been a misplacement of, if not the sheer dismissal of, its ecology. In Chapter Two, which provides an overview of theoretical considerations that underpin this thesis, some additional reasons for a

continued ignorance towards ecological semiosis in general will be highlighted. The complex deliberations of these Chapters (Two and Five) boil down to a consideration of the possibility that Cummings wrote an intensely ecological form of poetry at a time of an intense and prolonged complication of the relations between the sign and nature, in the humanities and in modern culture at large.

It can be imagined only too well that an era which denies significant relations between the actualities of the sign and the actualities of nature will tend to misplace a poetry which tends to affirm precisely such relations. In the process, a threat evolves that Cummings' poetry -- which takes these relations to great depth and height -- will be overlooked or rejected. Such critical neglect and rejection as found in the individual critics' writings are examined in Chapter Five, in exposition of a thesis that Cummings' ecology and his critical reception are strongly interrelated in terms of negative (as well as positive) critical responses to his work.

One gripping (albeit somewhat superficial) aspect of this analysis is Cummings' contradictory status as a major minor modernist poet. As recently as 1995, the debate about this status has been taken up again in Michael Webster's response to Richard Kennedy's 1992 article entitled "E.E. Cummings, a Major Minor Poet". (Both articles were published in *Spring: the Journal of the E.E. Cummings Society*.) These articles are considered in the main body of the thesis. Suffice it to say for the time being that dividing poetry into two categories set in hierarchy and tension -- major versus minor -- could be viewed as a symptom of a deeper dualism that underpins mainstream modernist discourse. Chapter Five will show -- based on the preceding descriptions of the dynamics of his poetic ecology (Chapters Three and Four) -- that the poet's intriguing major minor modernist status reflects the seemingly small but also crucial degree of difference between Cummings' discourse and mainstream modernist discourse. In one sense, critics are correct -- sometimes for the wrong reasons -- in their assessment of Cummings as both major and minor (and therefore also neither of these; that is, with an ecological poetic greatness over and above the issue of majorness versus minorness). This is so precisely because Cummings manages, in his poetry, to transcend standard and/or modernist dualities. In his treatment of the major minor issue Webster mentions that "[q]uite a bit of evidence suggests that Cummings was -- at the very least -- ambivalent about aspiring to major poet status" (1995b:77). Certainly, it is likely that some of the greater

aspects of Cummings' poetry centre on a singular capacity to communicate "smallness"; which may have been interpreted as "minorness" by some critics. After all, as has been indicated in this Chapter, Cummings clearly stated in his non-lectures that one enters illimitable nature by means of an "enormous *smallness*" (1953:32; my emphasis -- JET).

3.2.3. It is posited that mainstream modernist poets such as Pound and Eliot are deeply concerned and involved with what we currently term ecology, both in their poetic and critical discourse, but that these poetries waver and remain ambivalent about an ecology of the sign. Chapter Six looks at selected poems by Pound and Eliot on the basis of their ambivalent ecology, and Chapter Five pays attention to a similar ambivalence in modernist criticism of Cummings' poetry.

It is possible that, just as Cummings' poetry appears ambivalent through the lens of mainstream modernist oppositional hierarchies and their particular treatment within mainstream modernism, so does mainstream modernist discourse appear ambivalent through an ecological lens. Issues at stake in arguing this possibility include, briefly, the degree of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernist poets in terms of objectification, unification, delineation, dislocation, dualism, isolation/alienation, and organicism -- and in terms of the levels of connectivity between human, sign, and nature, as well as the referentiality or not of the sign. Current reappraisals of mainstream modernism (which, once more, do not consider Cummings) address the issue of whether salient mainstream modernist works such as *The Waste Land* ultimately form units or not, and whether more integrating if philosophical mainstream modernist views as presented for instance in the *Four Quartets* are ultimately false (because unifying), or not. This issue is debated on a complex basis in books such as Jewel Spears Brooker's and Joseph Bentley's *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation* (1990), Rainer Emig's *Modernism in Poetry: Structures, Motivations, and Limits* (1995), and Daniel Albright's *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism* (1997). It will be argued here, also with reference to these valuable scholarly works, that mainstream modernist sign-nature ambivalence reflects the uncertainty about the ultimate fragmented or whole nature of mainstream modernist works. Despite the unmistakable artistic greatness of mainstream modernist poetry, it also ends up in areas of semiotic ill-health, or un-wholeness. One of these, it will be argued here, is

ecological ambivalence that takes on various forms, including the possibility of objective distance that leads to ecological isolation and stasis.

The thesis posits that Cummings potentially manages to assail one of the major problematics of modernist poetry. A universalist or totalitarian tendency exists in mainstream modernist discourse as expounded by Emig (throughout his book). As such, mainstream modernist discourse indulges in “colonizing discourse”. That is, discourse which believes that it can devour anything and everything, and turn it into the monumental and hardened structures of modernist textuality (a tendency which resonates with structuralism and post-structuralism). In the process, mainstream modernist discourse begins to neglect the outside of language including (as I will argue) nature. It will furthermore be argued that Cummings avoids this problematic with greater and more ecologically sound success than the mainstream modernist poets, although reading Cummings makes one aware of moments in the salient mainstream modernist works where a more direct relation with and within nature could be indicated. Cummings also increases one’s awareness of an intense mainstream modernist expression of the *lack* of natural connectivity in the modern era. This renders mainstream modernist poetry ecologically haunting and aesthetic. In fact, it has to be made clear that the ecological nature of this thesis does not lead to a clumsy judgement that Cummings’ poetry is worth less or more than mainstream modernist poetry. To the contrary, this thesis will not be able to decide between the sheer poetic and aesthetic depth of Cummings’ or Eliot’s poetry on the whole.

Ultimately this thesis argues that an ecological practice of poetry and language, although engaged with matters also focused upon in mainstream modernism to a large extent (such as manipulating opposites, expressing the inexpressible, etcetera), leads to a quite singular view of difference and unification. Nature, in this kind of discourse (which can also be described as “contextualizing”), becomes a means of knowing one’s difference and selfhood, precisely because one’s sense of unification with and within that which lies, strictly speaking, “outside” the sign -- the ongoing otherness-and-selfness of nature -- determines one’s selfhood. On this basis the thesis will illustrate that Cummings’ poetry comes closer to the persistent implementation of an ecological and Taoist dynamism of non-sentimental unity with and within nature, when compared to mainstream modernist discourse. It is postulated in the final analysis that from an ecologically inclined viewpoint (including

the notion of one's essential (mis)understanding of Taoism), the seemingly minor degrees of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernist poetry on the basis of their "ecologies" grow in proportion and importance into some striking differences. The impact of a poetry informed, guided, and shaped by an outward purpose into interactive nature ultimately can have startling and different effects on the reader, such as a sense of mergence, integration, and a sense of "alive" natural integrity. And that these differences -- enlarged as they may be from the perhaps more limited (but in other senses, also more inclusive) ecological angle -- serve to inform the poetry of Cummings, Eliot, and Pound on a reciprocal basis. Along the lines suggested by Pound in his *ABC of Reading* of 1934, the thesis compares "biological slides" (or rather "living organisms") of modernist poetry (1987:22) on the basis of their ecological nature.

4. Method: the middle ground/route or "zone of between-ness"

The method adopted to study the questions posed above involves a more or less hermeneutic inferral of the poetic ecological dynamics, textures, and values of Cummings' poetry. Theoretical "apparatuses" or "lenses" are extrapolated from the critical response to Cummings as well as from theoretical approaches to literature and culture (such as ecosemiotics and orientalism), in order to aid this procedure. Secondary sources ascribed to Cummings such as his prose and notes will also be used to trace ecological fibres and dynamics of his consciousness and work. The thesis views the poems themselves as primary for purposes of interpretation and close reading, but a number of indispensable "preunderstandings" (to adopt Brooker and Bentley's terminology (1990:7)) of his era, outlook, and poetry can be reached by means of an awareness of Cummings' prose, notes, and paintings. That is, the ecological context of Cummings' perceptions can be highlighted with reference to the poet's own deliberations about his poetic project and his views of the artistic era in which he worked. These can on occasion be related to aspects of his poetry with illuminating effect.

A hermeneutic circle as described (among others) by David Couzens Hoy (1978:vii) -- that is, reading of the text which fluctuates and oscillates between its parts and its whole, and in which the part informs the whole and vice versa -- embodies the main methodological thrust of this thesis. Yet the hermeneutic circle adopted here is not entirely closed off and restricted to text and reader only. What is

envisaged as a methodology of cyclic, textual hermeneutics is contained in a more encompassing circle (in real terms), but perhaps also a more limited circle (in textual terms): a direct consideration of the relations between the subject, the sign, and nature. Such reading is in part informed by ecology as it is found in the natural sciences, as well as ecology as an experiential reality in day-to-day existence.

This procedure implies a rupture of the textually-closed circle of interpretation into a potentially greater circle of interpretation: one's physical and ecological being within the ecosystem and the universe. One's relation to the tree, or the leaf -- on a concrete biological as well as a mentally homeostatic (or more "dreamy" and unified) level -- does come into focus in this thesis, via Cummings' poetic *eco-logos*. Upon first consideration this greater ecological circle of interpretation would imply a more limited textual circle in some respects, but it also holds the potential of enlarging the basis of factors to be taken into consideration in the act of textual interpretation; and the enlargement, by means of extension, of the textual interpretation of Cummings' poetry and mainstream modernist poetry in ecological terms. In other words, one layer of the modernist palimpsest and the palimpsest of Cummings' poetic project within the modernist textual enterprise is considered here -- the "green" or ecological layer -- but not without considering as many variables and factors as possible, also textually. This situation of an overwhelming stream of variables and factors (textually as well as naturally) would be typical of the kind of experience that is methodologically encountered in ecological studies proper as well as, it seems, within ecosemiotics.

The advice of the ecologists proper, Begon *et al.* (as mentioned in the preceding sections of this Chapter) could in view of these deliberations be paraphrased and employed within this thesis, in methodological terms: take into account as many of the dynamic interrelations (textually as well as naturally) as possible, since any particular relation could be vital at any given time. Know from the outset that what is being produced scientifically or hermeneutically amounts to an approximation (not the final or positivist word) which should be as valid as possible. And try to find simple descriptions and make analyses of the phenomenon-in-its-dynamic-relations (that is, the ecology of the phenomenon) which are as simple as possible -- but simultaneously distrust oversimplification in view of the multitude of variables, factors, and interactions at hand. To this should be added that over-

complexity, or *complication*, must also be recognized and avoided. Examples of complication are when *no* relations between sign and nature are inferred, or when a view of nature as little more than a linguistic construct is entertained -- two views which paradoxically boil down to the same, namely semiotically legitimized ignorance of nature. In short: the thesis should attempt, as part of its methods, to steer between and through over-simplicity and complication, and focus instead on simplicity and complexity.

We have seen in the preceding sections of this Chapter that the sinologist and Poundian scholar Hayot refers to an active and sometimes difficult “middle ground” where the most interesting and valid appreciations of Pound’s *Cathay* occur. Hayot suggests that those critics who get stuck within an *either-English-or-Chinese* attitude towards *Cathay* limit the range of their criticism. Hayot’s suggestion is adopted and expanded as part of the method of this thesis, and this implies a persistent focus on the differences between, but also the potentially authentic linkages and interspersions between Eastern and modernist literature. In the case of Cummings, this ties in well with a study of sign-nature interrelations. It is therefore of importance to note that the ecosemiotician William Howarth, in his article “Imagined Territory: The Writing of Wetlands” (1999), compares the intersection of disciplines (as found in ecosemiotics) to wetlands, where elements such as soil and water mix beyond recognizable differentiation, and where clarification and growth occur (1999:520).

Howarth implies that the historical fear of actual wetlands as places of ominous “brooding” which should be turned into yet more monoculture (!) is perhaps reflected in the corridors of the humanities by the relative fear of the category of (natural, physical) *place* as a topical and vital literary concern (1999:512). Howarth argues soberly and seriously for the re-introduction of a natural context in textual studies, and comes across the notion of a middle ground/route in the process:

[An] emphasis on context argues for finding a middle ground, *between* two opposites, so that subject-object or mind-place becomes a synthesis of experience and imagination, a region lying amid apparent counterparts. Such a view directs the work of Nicholas Entrikin, whose ‘geography of modernity’ affirms Between-ness as the condition of place (1999:516--517).

Place is therefore a state of being between one’s semiotic mind, and the given of one’s concrete location. It is not difficult to agree with Howarth’s suggestion that, in times of uncertainty (such as modern ones), cultural and artistic growth occurs not

within the accepted and perhaps ignorant zones of the static continuation of a progressive life style, but in the zone of between-ness (or: the middle ground/route): in the complex place/s where imagination and reality meet, or where East and West, the sign and nature, or being-human and the ecosystem, do actually and significantly interpenetrate one another; and where awareness of this interpenetration is heightened.

Both the solitude of modernists in general and their sense of solidarity (and in some cases, wholeness) elucidate Howarth's remarks: in one respect the modernist project in its entirety is aimed at re-textualizing the reality of the day instead of artistically skimming its surface in an artificial manner. Modernism's break with its immediate artistic past is at least partially due to this imperative to occupy that sometimes more difficult and more rewarding zone of between-ness -- between art and everyday reality and, again, between East and West, the present and the past, Romanticism and postmodernism (with provisional hindsight), and in a case such as Cummings', the sign and nature -- which is one reason why Cummings is perhaps less *difficult* or why he takes less trouble to build the difficulties of alienation into his poetry in contrapuntal contrast to Eliot in his (Eliot's) salient mainstream modernist mode.

One recalls Eliot's dictum, stated in his 1921 reappraisal of the "metaphysical" poets of the seventeenth century, that modern poetry "must be *difficult*" (1980:65). The tension between difficulty and interpretative success is not as pronounced in many of Cummings' poems as it is in *The Waste Land*, for instance (although one hastens to add that Cummings is certainly complex, too) -- but the fact remains that both a Cummings and an Eliot are occupying in their various and interlinked ways the zone of between-ness, of trying to make sense and art of modern reality, its past, and its future, as well as its sometimes mundane social realities and its sometimes profound imaginative potentials.

In this thesis, literature, which often presents one with an intersection of phenomena and disciplines, is therefore studied by means of a method that breaches the purely textual cycle of hermeneutics in order to explore a state of between-ness in Cummings' modernist poetry. This state of between-ness, guided by Hayot's and Howarth's notions, mainly focuses on the poetic sign and nature, as well as the modern poetic sign and orientalism. Evident links between Cummings' poetic interest in nature and the East will therefore be examined. It is possible that the modernist

poets in general reached out to the East precisely because they could find there a re-establishment of an interactive and orienting link with nature. A link which was, moreover, at once non-sentimental and rooted within nature, as suggested by Gary Snyder (1995:91). Certainly, an attractive combination of non-sentimentality and natural rootedness in (say) Taoist poetry remains one of the key positive features of oriental poetry as we (mis)understand it.

One can learn much from modernist poetry in terms of the attempt to reoccupy and develop an active and significant middle zone of meaning, where experience would not threaten finally to split into two completely disparate and unrelated realms, one of the sign, and the other of nature. In Cummings' poetry one can learn more about a significant exploration of the sign-nature and East-West zone/s of between-ness, up to and including the point where opposites fuse into natural integrity or a third dimension. In the case of mainstream modernist discourse one can learn (in a more negative fashion) about the stretching of tensions to the virtual breaking point with a view to these relations.

Methodologically, this thesis occupies and further explores this zone of between-ness in the manners suggested by Hayot and Howarth: neither a squeamishness about the textual nature of one's Eastern and natural knowledge, nor the exclusion of the literary potential of dynamic nature and the poetry of the East -- but, instead, a persistence of trying to find valid descriptions and analyses *between* the opposites thus implied. The very nature of Cummings' poetry -- which evokes his "magical realm of Between", between mind and ecosystem, or culture and nature -- calls for this kind of analysis. This implies the expansion of a purely textual hermeneutic circle into the vast and commonsensical fact of one's natural existence, as well as the contraction of the textual circle in order to concentrate more purely upon the ecological aspect of Cummings' poetry.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Overview: The Modern Semiotic Complication of Natural Context

1. Introduction

The modern mindset tends to complicate referentiality and natural context. Supposedly endless semiotic continuums such as deconstructionist infinite semiosis or structuralist binarisms are envisaged as containing all of reality within hyper-reducing textuality. Too much is included and excluded at the same time. The sign is not taken as a mediating event between human culture and nature, but as a static and/or ghostly form on its own. This state of affairs provides a possible clue as to why Cummings' overtly mediating and naturally contextual employment of the sign leads to a struggle among some critics or, worse, is overlooked or rejected with a measure of critical disdain. At least since the advent of mainstream modernist discourse, semiotics has been looking in the direction of the total domination of experience by a powerful, universal, all-inclusive sign. Such a sign, uncanny and paradoxical to the core, is at once potent with its abilities to incorporate and control all kinds of experience, and yet is also weakened by its lack of meaningful mediating and/or referential connectivity and integrity.

Common sense has it that one of the general limits of the sign is referential: *the sign is different from and rooted in its outside*, an outside which includes nature. Critiques of the complication of this referential limit such as Raymond Tallis' *Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurian Literary Theory* (1988), Umberto Eco's *The Limits of Interpretation* (1990), and Rainer Emig's *Modernism in Poetry: Motivations, Structures and Limits* (1995) do not visibly consider that the referential function of the sign includes the crucial set of sign-nature relations. Drawing upon these and other critiques, this Chapter offers an examination (in the form of a brief theoretical overview) of the complication of this set of sign-nature relations and natural context in the modern mindset, as found in semiotic fields such as deconstruction, structuralism, and mainstream modernist discourse.

Possibly, the theoretical habit of (more or less) disregarding an interaction of the sign and nature has reached a taken-for-granted level in progressive societies (see Bowers, 1993:66). In other words, a lack of the recognition of sign-nature interrelations is not viewed as problematic. Or: the notion that nature is (on the one

hand) little or no more than a linguistic construct and (on the other) a utility of available objects is viewed as obvious, and is not taken to task. To circumvent this possibility, this Chapter includes a concise consideration of two essential developments of thought. The first is a rediscovery in the natural sciences that an exchange of signs is not limited to human nature. Instead, as it will be shown in this Chapter, it is becoming increasingly clear that most or all of nature involves some form of semiosis, or meaning-exchange. Strangely enough, fairy tale animals that speak may be closer to natural fact than has been assumed. This means, among other things, that human communication is not an isolated and totally unique natural event. It also means that communication forms an intrinsic part of survival and that, therefore, human language must also play at least some *ecological* role in human affairs. This Chapter further considers a second development of thought in relation to nature: Taoist poetics. It offers an alternative to various patterns of contra-ecological thought that often buttress broad modern semiotic movements such as structuralism and post-structuralism. These areas of interest (communication in nature, and Taoist poetics) will be concisely considered in this Chapter, then, to highlight modern contra-ecological thought patterns as found in (for example) structuralism.

An important question to be explored in this theoretical overview, and which will be taken further in subsequent Chapters of this thesis, is *where* Cummings and the mainstream modernists *fit* into an ecological perspective of the sign. Very broadly speaking, this Chapter sketches a configuration of positions with a view to this question. The Chapter attempts to demonstrate that modern criticism and theory (including structuralism and post-structuralism) tend to create a field of semiotic tensions in which contra-ecological aspects of semiosis are overtly or covertly entertained and perpetuated. It further demonstrates that mainstream modernist discourse has written itself into this field of tensions in a number of crucial respects; or, that this field of tensions begins with mainstream modernist discourse. Cummings' poetry as a whole *does* belong within modernist discourse¹¹, yet it acts at some distance from modern contra-ecological semiosis, and, in fact, finds itself inclining towards more truly ecological developments of thought such as Taoist poetics.

¹¹ A full and convincing discussion of Cummings' position within modernist poetry is found in Friedman's essay "E.E. Cummings and the Modernist Movement" (1962). This essay is reprinted in Guy Rotella's compilation of Cummings criticism, titled *Critical Essays on E.E. Cummings* (1984).

This configuration becomes visible when one considers opposites, for example. Given that human beings, by their very nature, are often attracted to thought patterns arranged by opposition (black versus white, dark versus light, nature versus culture, and so on), it may seem that opposites can be found everywhere, that their existence can be taken for granted, and that they are not an important indicator of differences, or degrees of difference such as the ones to be configured here. Indeed, the sheer prevalence of opposites in human thought -- from (say) classical dialectics up to structuralist binarisms and deconstructive third terms -- is not the most important issue here, but rather *the exact way in which opposites are perceived* in different eras, disciplines, cultures, or even at a given moment of existence, right down to the details of human relationships between a male and a female.

Once this imperative recognition is made, the proposed configuration begins to reveal itself. The exact view and employment of opposites to be found in structuralism and mainstream modernist discourse lead to various contra-ecological implications, whereas the exact view and employment of opposites in Cummings' poetry and Taoist poetics give rise to a revitalized sense of the ecological relationships that sustain culture, language, and nature. One of the main pairs of opposites that needs to be named in this respect, is language versus nature. Due to their treatment of opposites in general, structuralists, and in significant areas also mainstream modernists, end up with a dilemma of static hierarchical distance between the realm of language and the realm of nature, whereas Cummings invigorates a sense of their active connectivity.

As is already evident, anyone wishing to write about opposites, even in the more limited scope of a thesis such as this, has too much to choose from, and it is difficult to know where to start. However, since it represents one of the most systematic expressions of opposition and modern dislocation due to sign-nature complication, this examination begins with a reconsideration of the eminent French structuralist A.J. Greimas' much-discussed and much-employed semiotic square, introduced in English in 1968 (co-authored at that time by Francois Rastier) in the seminal structuralist article entitled "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints"¹².

¹² My references (JET) are to a 1987 publication of the same article within a compilation of Greimas' essays titled *On Meaning*.

2. The sentimentality of objective natural complication: the nature of structuralist binarisms

Often, a given term or category of mind instantly tends to evoke its opposite term or category. That is, a term *presupposes* its opposite term. Consider tall persons, for example. Would one be aware of a difference, tallness, in the absence of its opposite, smallness? If all people were of equal height, the opposite categories “short people” and “tall people” would be unnecessary. In other words, one opposite can be thought only in terms of the other. Colourlessness, for instance, can only be conceived because one is aware of colourfulness. And colourfulness can only be conceived because one is aware of the possibility of the absence of colour.

Greimas’ semiotic square is based on this presuppositional aspect of opposites. Of course, Greimas is not the first to become aware of it. *The Waste Land* alludes to Danté when it states: “Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison” (Eliot, 1982:67). Escape presupposes incarceration, and (within the presuppositional-oppositional constraints of the logical human mind) there is no way out of the dilemma. Lao Tzu’s notion is quite similar with a view to opposites: “If all on earth acknowledge the beautiful as beautiful/ then thereby is the ugly already posited” (1987:27; section 1). Both for Eliot and Lao Tzu, presupposition is viewed as an *entrapment* of the oppositional human mind, from which relief is needed – since no solution of the mind does *not* instantly evoke its negation. Greimas’ conception of the semiotic square uses this presuppositional aspect of opposites in human thought to represent one of the fundamental modes of modern human semiosis by means of the following square. For a number of reasons, I have chosen to look at the binarism (or pair of opposite terms, or seme) white versus black:

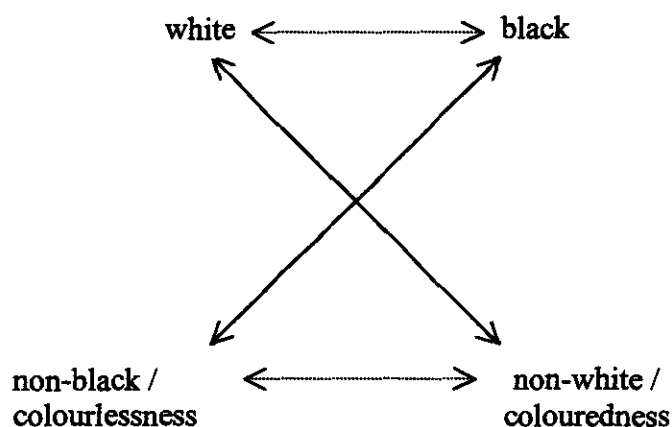


Figure 1: Greimas' semiotic square for the binary pair white versus black

In the more traditional and distinctly logical initial formulation of the square, white and black are neutralized on the axis of light: white is the presence of light whereas black is the absence of light (Schleifer, 1987:24). White is therefore positively marked (presence) and black negatively (absence). Each of these terms (white and black) presupposes its contradictory opposite: white presupposes all that is not white -- the absence of white or non-white -- and black presupposes all that is not black, the absence of black or non-black; this according to the logical structuralist view. And these negative (contradictory) terms absolutely neutralize the square: the positive axis (white versus black) which represents the presence of meaning is negated or *neutralized* by its absolutely negative axis (non-black versus non-white) which, in its turn, represents the (somewhat inconceivable yet total) absence of meaning (Greimas, 1987:49).

In the later, more semantic and even post-structuralist formulation of the square, it is accepted that white and black are both (semantically) experienced as *colours*: here the point is that although black is the absence of light or visibility, humans still experience it as a *colour* (Schleifer, 1987:24). But the contradictory relations remain in place according to this formulation: the colour white presupposes in a complex positive semantic fashion that which is contradictory to it, namely colourfulness. Whereas black presupposes in a complex negative fashion that which is contradictory to it, namely colourlessness (Schleifer, 1987:27). This means that on the semantic plane one contradictory *remains* positively marked and embodies the both-and option (both black and white, colourfulness), while the other contradictory

also remains *negatively* marked, and embodies the neither-nor option (neither black nor white, colourlessness) (Schleifer, 1987:27).

As both Fredric Jameson (1987:xvi) and Ronald Schleifer (1987:29) indicate in different contexts, the position of colourlessness within the square presents the unthinkable. One cannot conceive of the total absence of colour. The later formulation of the square thus implodes upon itself in this position (colourlessness). In other words, here the square moves beyond self-evident levels of meaning into a high degree of the absence of meaning. In this position the square escapes from itself, so to speak. This could be appreciated (as it has been the case among a number of post-structuralists such as Julia Kristeva) as a triumph for that absence-of-meaning which acts as the creative impetus, the desire, which guarantees and propels further meaningful utterances (Schleifer, 1987:29). It has to be added that the *hierarchy* between white and black is *maintained* in this second/post-structuralist formulation of the square: finding itself in a fundamental relation of positive complex relationality to all colours, or colourfulness as such, it appears that the term white is still presented as logically-semantically *more* colourful than black.

In his critique of the square, Jameson states that the square is indeed as comprehensive and universal as it purports to be, since it represents and summarizes the modern mindset in an extremely economical, exhaustively logical, and systematically reductive manner -- and yet, that the square is simultaneously (also for the reason of its "universal" intersubjectivity) ideally or symbolically situated to reveal some of the most telling shortcomings of the modern mindset (1987:xv). Extending this argument one should point out that some of these shortcomings occur in terms of ecological soundness. These ecological complications centre on the issues of sign-nature relations and a sense of natural context, as found in terms of the structuralist thought that is carried in the semiotic square.

The binarism (or seme) white versus black offers as good an example as any other of these ecological shortcomings. For, in both formulations of the square, whether traditional (strictly logical), or more semantic (somewhat post-structuralist as has been indicated), it has to be carefully considered that white appears to be simply more present and "more of a colour" than black. Although the entire operation of the square appears neutral in the most objective and intellectual sense, let it not go by unnoticed that white is either positively marked as the presence of light or that it is

as much as they know the relief of “blackish” phenomena such as the relieving coolness and protective shadow of nighttime, or a thunderstorm after a hot and dry day. They know the relief of both these forces equally, simply because natural processes sustain the equilibrium between them, no matter how dramatic or drastic the supersedence of one of these forces may become from time to time. In other words, the inclusive process of natural continuation -- or “green grace” (McDaniel 1997:108) -- means that neither the white process nor the black process indefinitely enjoys the upper hand in nature. Change and co-existence themselves imply green grace, whereas the persistent favouring of only one aspect (say white) is the truly unthinkable, the utterly static: the end of all ecological existence.

In terms of natural experience the square therefore offers a limited, reductive view even as far as colours are concerned. This biased view of the essential nature of colours is somewhat sentimental when compared to natural experience: the perceived male leg of every binarism (objectivity, intellection, white, dryness) as it is represented within the square and structuralism is persistently opposed to the lesser and perceived female leg (emotion, intuition, black, moisture). The perceived male leg moreover always has to enjoy the upper sleight of hand in the structuralist frame of reference. The sleight of hand in this unfair equation -- which drives the structuralist enterprise -- is the objectivity which persistently disguises bias in favour of the perceived male leg. In other words, and frequently despite appearances to the contrary, the intellect can also be used or abused in order to disguise things, and is not necessarily neutral. At the same time, natural experience itself is less sentimental, more inclusive, and more self-evident.

The numerous examples of this persistent objectified bias include Hawkes’ equation of *maleness* with *culture* and *verticality* on the one hand, and the equation of *femaleness* with *animals* (nature) and the *horizontal* on the other (1977:88). Although Greimas cautions that one should not think that nature is cast into the realms of non-signification in structuralism (1987:54), he also states that

human societies divide their semantic universes into two dimensions, culture and nature. The first [culture] is defined by the contents they [human societies] assume and with which they invest themselves, the second [nature] by those they reject (1987:53).

¹³ An electronic replica of this painting can be viewed at Ken Lopez’s online exhibition entitled “The Paintings of E.E. Cummings” (2002). The original painting is described as follows on this website: oil on canvasboard, 36” x 24” (no date) (2002).

Of course, all of this seems neutral and legitimate: one is dealing with an observation of the way in which societies organize themselves. And the *societies* assume culture and reject nature -- not neutral and observant structuralism. But this is precisely one of Jameson's excellent points about Greimas' theories: they tend to hide, in seemingly objective terms, their very projection of modern preconceptions onto reality. Underpinning Greimas' statement here is still the binarism of culture versus nature and an equation of the first leg of the binarism with what is acceptable and the second leg with what is not acceptable. The exact point at which mere observation turns into biased projection thus remains uncertain: at least to some extent, this neutral binarism hides and encodes a dualistic hierarchy in favour of a culture that rejects (and destroys) nature.

One wonders how structuralists would make sense of the Taoist poetic culture in which (as will be demonstrated) the very last contents that would be rejected could be *nature*. The mere existence of the Taoist poetic view dampens the universalist claims of structuralism. (The Taoist poetic view is treated separately in a section below for this reason among others.) One should remind oneself that the square presents itself as the *universal and entirely objective/neutral deep structure from which all meaning emanates*. According to Greimas, the square presents a formulation of the fundamental mode of existence of an individual or a society (1987:48). In fact, Greimas initially believed, in the 1960s, that entire social collectivities could be bent simply by altering the structuralist axioms upon which their thought and activities were based (Schleifer, 1987:19). Greimas later modified this totalitarian view in favour of a more post-structuralist approach as embodied in the second more semantic formulation of the square (in which, as has been indicated, the very same dualistic bias still lingers).

The modern view as embodied in the square therefore appears to place excessive trust in the powers of spatiality (abstract spaces or reductive "pictures" of meaning such as the square) -- as Jameson writes, all the structuralisms are deeply spatial (1987:xxii). It also puts great belief in objectification, delineation, symmetry, and distance, as well as opposition and extreme reduction. Within structuralist practice, entire societies or novels, with their living textures and contours of detail, are reduced to these opposites set into persistently hierarchical tension. Furthermore: there is a totalitarian tendency in the modern mindset as expressed in the square which

would lead one to believe that certain conceptions of the sign and meaning -- such as binary structuralist conceptions -- have the ability to include virtually any context, any reality, in its spatially conceived frameworks. Paradoxically, and despite structuralism's claims to the contrary, this leads to the neglect of what lies outside the binaristic metalanguage -- including living nature -- and hence also to a systematic impoverishment of the potential significance of the sign.

3. Total semiotics: infinite semiosis and natural context

Similar to deconstruction, the semiotic square is (moreover) carried in a continuum or vacuum of what various theoreticians refer to as *infinite semiosis* (see Jameson, 1987:xvi). By means of neutralization every binarism in the square (of which white versus black forms just one example) ends up in a renewed set of opposites on a higher (more neutral) plane. As I have indicated, black and white are neutralized by or into the term light which in its turn evokes its opposite, dark, and so on -- *ad infinitum* or *ad nauseam*, depending on one's viewpoint.

Unlike deconstruction, this infinite and potentially monotonous continuum of the endless repetition of a certain sign-pattern rests, in the case of structuralism, upon the concept of the binarism -- like the baking powder can within a baking powder can within a baking powder can (etcetera)¹⁴, binarism upon binarism grows into what is perceived by structuralists as a vast, virtually all-inclusive pattern. The ecologist will recognize that this vast pattern is actually reductive and narrow. These deliberations approach one of the central dilemmas of mainstream modernist discourse: vast inclusiveness which is nevertheless concomitant with massive reductionism.

In slight contrast to structuralism, the deconstructive notion of an infinite, all-inclusive, apparently endless sign-continuum rests upon (or moves along with) terms that thwart the binary conception in a strategic fashion -- deconstructive terms such as the supplement, the trace, parergon, and the gramma. Consider these sentences from Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (as published in Gayatri Spivak's English translation of 1976):

¹⁴ The baking powder can referred to contains a picture on its outside in which a similar baking powder can is reproduced, within which yet another is reproduced, and so on -- until the reproduced can turns too small to see or print.

Let us narrow the argument down further. In certain aspects, the [deconstructive] theme of supplementarity is certainly no more than one theme among others. It is in a chain, carried by it. Perhaps one could substitute something else for it. *But it happens that this theme describes the chain itself, the being-chain of a textual chain, the structure of substitution, the articulation of desire and language* (1976:163 -- Derrida's emphasis).

This passage (among other deconstructionist formulations) suggests that the sign is always already or endlessly supplemental in its essence. The sign is caught up within a continuum of infinite semiosis which somehow never returns to its limit of connectivity with what lies outside it, such as nature: the sign is differential and deferring to the "core". In Derrida's famous and perplexing maxim, "there is nothing outside the text" (1976:158). But as Raymond Tallis shows, there is a lot outside the text, perhaps even more than inside it -- certainly, this is common sense (1988:210). Although Tallis clearly states that deconstruction brings illuminating insights of a unique nature (1988:168), he also states for the sake of comic relief in dense semiotic times that, of course, the noun "dog" does not behave like the actual four-legged creature. It does not and cannot defecate on the pavement (1988:71). If all things were (mere) signs in the first place, this essential and commonsensical difference between signs and reality -- which is precisely that which also allows their interlevel linkage -- is obscured. Deconstruction causes a confusion of levels: "there is nothing outside the text" might make sense in a highly theoretical context, deep within a secluded spot of the house of semiosis -- but according to Tallis, rightly so, it cannot make common sense (1988:210). Umberto Eco, in his important book *The Limits of Interpretation*, makes a similar point about Derrida's deconstruction: that it uncovers profound truths while stumbling over obvious and vital limits of the sign (1990:36).

Post-structuralist complication of sign-reality-nature issues occurs in a couple of areas with persistent recurrence. It occurs in terms of scale and orientation, for example. Scale: is language in all its diversity truly "bigger" than nature in all its diversity? Or is language just another phenomenon among a myriad of natural phenomena? If the reality of nature is not "ground zero" have we not gone too far in the search for a semiotic "ground zero"? In other words: is it true, as deconstruction and structuralism suggest in their various ways, that the category "language" covers and continues to postpone (and paradoxically, totally diminishes) the entire living actuality of nature? To the ecosemiotician, this still seems to be a topsy-turvy representation of what is actually the case, despite the post-structuralist and

deconstructive attempt to escape from opposites. Of the various activities and phenomena within ecosystems, pure semiosis is only part. All linguistic activity, including deconstruction, supposes a vast ground of natural activity, even if this vast ground is certainly not a static “ground zero” of realism. When deconstructive texts are published, trees are chopped down -- to name but one example.

As far as orientation goes: one does not know, upon looking at the supplement-being-chain quotation (cited in the preceding paragraphs), whether one enters deconstruction at its centre (the *being*-chain of a textual chain), its periphery (the *supplement*), both of these, or neither of them. The *peripheral* supplement is *central* to meaning according to this “seminal” (or disseminating) deconstructionist pronouncement. Again one sees a tendency to over-textualize and neglect nature: the supplement is not allowed to return to its referential and/or orienting limit. Being indefinitely caught in its own supplementarity, the sign curves away infinitely from that commonsensical outside known also as nature -- and the sign appears to refer to other signs only or forever. Deconstruction thus suggests that the reader has no literal or literary ground from which to embark into and guide herself or himself within the ecosystem. The sign is all, but it is also too arbitrary to act as an orienting guide. Again, the ecosemiotician will sense that often, the truth is more different and familiar at once: textuality is part of what positions humans to direct themselves in ecological existence.

Eco criticizes Derrida’s usage of C.S. Peirce’s concept of infinite semiosis. In Peirce’s conception the sign has a direction towards its outside context, no matter how vaguely so in general (Eco, 1990:38). (One assumes that Eco will agree that the “outside context” of the sign also involves the ongoing given of nature.) According to Eco’s reading of Peirce, human language involves a *purpose* (1990:38). This purpose of human language is “connected with something which lies outside language” (Eco, 1990:38). It “has to do with referents, with the external world”, and it “links the idea of interpretation with the idea of interpreting according to a given meaning” (Eco, 1990:38).

Although semiosis is potentially infinite, it is not actually limitless, and one of its compelling limits involves nature, orientation, and a sense of proportion. But it appears that to delineate, to differentiate, to mark the sign with a metasign such as the supplement or the semiotic square leads in the broadly modern (structuralist and post-

structuralist) era to a complication of these (ancient) semiotic potentials of the sign. The modern metasign tends to be hyper-inclusive and hyper-exclusive at once: it is totalitarian or colonizing or over-textualizing, despite its many uses and its many uncoverings of strategic truths. Indeed, according to Eco, the notion of the endless drift of the sign threatens to spill over into a sort of semiotic cancer, the pointless proliferation of signs (1990:31); a similar point is made in Manfred Pfister's ecological critique of post-structuralism and post-modernism (1991:221).

However much the noun "cat" may appear to sit still in the moonlight and then glide effortlessly into a nearby tree within (say) a given poem, the noun and the actual furry creature remain essentially different from one another. There would have been no need for the noun "cat" in the first place, if this was not the case. Concurrently: however remote and arbitrary the noun "cat" is, it somehow allows a linkage to the actual furry creature. This difference from and linkage to reality are commonly referred to as the sign's referential function/s, and referentiality remains at once commonsensical and mysterious according to Tallis (1988:127).

At the hidden (and probably Freudian) core of deconstruction lies the idea that experience itself is an interpretation, that the senses themselves delay the presence of being. For instance: the Hubble space telescope literally takes pictures of the prehistoric history of the universe, since it took light from the far-out ends of the universe billions of years to travel to the telescope. As Carl Sagan states in *Pale Blue Dot*, the telescope is a time machine, since the immense distances to stars and galaxies mean that we see everything in space in the past (1995:14). Such a recognition implies that the naked eye is also a time machine, since we also see distant stars when we look up at the night sky. Similarly, when I touch a tuft of grass in the veldt, it takes a split second for the touching to travel into my brain -- and even a kiss is not an experience of presence but one of a split second ago (the kiss as supplement) -- according to this view. Without this kind of underpinning the deconstructionist argument that experience is essentially supplemental, would evidently be lost.

However, this technical recognition that experience is never present is *based on the purely spatial marking* of time by means of the clock, watch, almanac, split second, telescope, or the eye as a fleshy time-machine. One speaks of a stretch of time, the length of the hour, a very long day, etcetera -- without literally meaning that time is space. We do not know, philosophically, what the essence of time is, but it is

reasonable to assume that time itself is *not* a collection of symmetrically packaged spaces (such as the slices on the wall-clock, or the visual supplement of the semiotic square). It is important to remember that the distance from now into the past is not a concrete space; then one would take one's metaphors too literally. One cannot literally look back at a stretch of time in the manner that one can look ahead along a tarred road. Time is a different if somewhat unsolved phenomenon, no matter how strongly it may be related to space. In Vladimir Nabokov's opus *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, Van Veen views space (or spatial metaphors) as the imposter who/which thwarts his quest for a conception of the essence of time (Nabokov, 1971:424) -- and as Veen knows, part of this problematic is that one does not truly understand space, either (Nabokov, 1971:424).

The undeniable presence of existence is verbally complicated by this "infinite" -- and in many respects repetitive, vacuous, monotonous -- underpinning of the deconstructionist argument, through the differentiating and deferring *human marking of time*. Useful as they are, these markings of temporality cannot be contrived as if they *are* time. They represent and manage time as much as they confine and stifle experience. Just as the differentiating and deferring qualities of the sign are overstressed in the deconstructive spirit, so that sign-nature relations are complicated beyond good sense, so does the split second complicate the present-ness of experience in the same spirit.

Cummings satirizes such modern preoccupation with the marking of time. In one instance, his poetic speaker mocks the "loud exactitudes of imprecision" which modern and "contented fools of fact" use to measure and confine the flow of existence (*Xaipe* CP 659). The poem celebrates the bird-like precision of lovers who steer along with the timeless flow of change (and hence, paradoxically, essential-if-mysterious time itself), through "miracles of air" (*Xaipe* CP 659). When the lovers alight and sing, they are *stared* at, "very deafly", by a "colossal hoax of clocks and calendars" which represent a reduced, confined aspect of the "mystery of freedom" (*Xaipe* CP 659). (The lovers actively and naturally inhabit this freedom according to the speaker.) To Cummings, the difference between stifling *exactitude* (which tends to freeze experience or make it static) and flowing *precision* is crucial, since it is also the difference between believing (or reifying) the clock, and seeing with one's innermost eye. In fact, in the adjacent poem, Cummings' speaker refers to a sprawling,

“itmaking [objectifying] sickness of mind” (*Xaipe* CP 658) as one of the nihilisms of the modern condition.

In Eliot’s view, furthermore, our increasingly sophisticated semiotic levels of differentiation take us further and further away from immediate (or direct/transcendent/ Absolute) experience -- which the *jellyfish* still enjoys according to Eliot, as found in his Ph.D. study of F.H. Bradley’s philosophy (Albright, 1997:226)! (To the jellyfish, there is no difference between a thought, a “feeling”, touch, and eating, according to Eliot (Albright, 1997:226).) In some important respects, as has been pointed out in this Chapter, structuralism and post-structuralism embody a modern view devoid of mysterious and immediate sensitivities, and a perception of meaning and significance characterized (if not caricatured) by hyper-expansive spatiality, not unlike an enormous and flattening photograph which supposedly contains all experience, reproduced by means of reductive semio-spatial patterns (along an infinite continuum). Worse: a purely spatio-semiotic “ideologeme” seems to have emerged in which there are only semiotic differences and tensions -- no matter how uniformly represented (structuralism) or how diversely represented (post-structuralism). In human history, directness of experience and culture-nature connectivity have perhaps not ever been doubted with as much tacit or overt skepticism and sophistication.

4. Mainstream modernist complication of natural context

The complication of referentiality and natural context in mainstream modernist discourse centres on the relation between subject and object, with its implied relation between human observer and observed nature, as well as its various intricate relations between intellect (objectivity/distance) and emotion (subjectivity). On the one hand, mainstream modernist discourse is evidently more unifying in terms of subject and object than the preceding Cartesian era in which subject and object, opinion and fact, mind and matter (etcetera) were split and kept apart quite drastically (Brooker & Bentley 1990:26). As Eliot’s objective correlative or Pound’s image indicate, and as it is even more clearly stated in Eliot’s Ph.D. study (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:14), objective knowledge and subjective experience are related and fluid (interdependent) according to these modernists, and not separate and static. On the other hand, subject and object are retained within tense, oppositional and hierarchical relations in mainstream modernist discourse. As we have seen in Chapter One of this thesis,

Eliot's formulation of the objective correlative involves a hierarchy in which intellectual objectivity is at least slightly favoured above subjective emotion. Throughout his poetic career, Eliot retained a particular suspicion towards feelings, as is evident, once more, from the treatment of emotion in his (largely) reconciliatory *Four Quartets* (1977:202).

To be sure, the objective correlative does work. Images such as the slow yellow fog that curls into buildings in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1982:11), or the worlds revolving like ancient women and gathering fuel in vacant lots at the apocalyptic and melancholy conclusion of the "Preludes" (1982:24) -- to use two examples of the objective correlative that occurred before Eliot's publication of its formulation -- render emotional responses of considerable subtlety and depth. These exact tones of emotion are all the more evocative because they are defined to such a thin degree by their correlatives that it seems crude to name them with the available emotional terms. It is not here -- in terms of Eliot's employment of the device and even in terms of its possible application to, say, John Donne's conceit of the compass in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (1942:44) -- that complication occurs.

Complication occurs when mainstream modernist discourse, based on the perhaps surprising success of devices such as the objective correlative and objectifying poetry, begins to believe that *only* these forms of objectification and opposites set in hierarchical tension (*within* their more fluid presuppositionality) render artistic success -- on a universal, impersonal scale. Eliot states, for example, that the objective correlative is the *only* way of managing emotion in art (1980:48). Consider that this implies, again, that emotion has to be *managed* (by the intellect), which is not a philosophically innocent point. Ultimately, such success of these devices leads to the mainstream modernist notion that its devices could devour all kinds of experience. One is only a step or two away from what Rainer Emig terms the mainstream modernist myth of itself as an all-encompassing reality in its textual self (1995:154). At this point mainstream modernism neglects that which lies outside language (Emig 1995:130). It is believed that all of reality could be included in the purely textual and objectifying structures and textures of mainstream modernist textuality. The tendency to devour aspects of reality and experience through poetic

intellection and/or objectification -- a tendency which is one of the main reasons why Eliot reappraises the metaphysical poets (1980:64) -- becomes too successful.

Nevertheless, this purely textual *potential* to include most or all of reality in discourse can (again) be actualized only deep in the house of semiosis -- it can never be more than a potential and it can never be a commonsensical reality, simply because the sign always finds itself within a given real context (however distantly at times), if it is to make sense at all. We have not "outgrown" natural existence: this remains a simple but profound actuality. The mainstream modernists are quite aware that they approach the extreme limits of signification when they fragment, distance, and objectify reality into pure text, as Emig (1995:156) shows in various ways. In fact, this awareness of approaching the limit more often than not takes the form of various fears in mainstream modernism: fear that mainstream modernist texts threaten to become pointless, or fear of the real (concrete/natural) outside of language, where language reaches its limit or its death, and fear of the perceived female aspect of meaning (Emig 1995:194), among other fears.

Pure, all-encompassing text, the final word, and the mainstream modernist drive for textual totalitarianism or the ultimate colonizing discourse cannot and have not been accomplished, even if only for the fact that we still use words today. The drive to accomplish this, and the occasional belief that it had been accomplished, have led to a number of absurd, completely negative paradoxes in mainstream modernist discourse, summarized as follows by Emig. Mainstream modernist tendencies towards superhistoricism (being above history) and impersonality, seemingly succeed when developed to their utmost, when the poems are either *everything* -- or nothing, no thing, apparitions without subjective centre or historic position (1995:129), or natural context:

The first stance is a radical expansion of the potentials of the poetic material: everything is (in) language -- language is everything. The second one is a radical reduction: language is only language.

Both are paradoxical, and their paradoxes are easily uncovered. If everything is in language, then language itself is nothing, nothing, that is, which is separable from reality. But if language was not different from what it talks about, it would not communicate, not even signify. A sign is only a sign because it stands for something which it is not (Emig, 1995:130).

Thus mainstream modernist discourse threatens to turn into the very waste that it sets out to surpass in the first place (Emig 1995:182). The sign alienates itself from

its context, and the mechanism of building alienation into the artwork begins to threaten the artwork itself. One aspects of this textual overreaching is the complication of that commonsensical but potentially also profound co-existence between subject and object, sign and nature, etcetera -- all of which could guarantee the integrity of the very sign itself. One of the examples of this kind of complication is the personage of Tiresias who/which embodies the central, unifying element in *The Waste Land*, by Eliot's own assertion (1982:70).

Both Emig (1995:160) and Albright (1997:239) agree that Tiresias does not succeed as a unifying force in the poem. Tiresias should, for instance, embody the fertility of male-female union but her/his "dugs" (1982:60) suggest that s/he is a post-fertile personage -- that which has suffered all (1982:59) and which cannot reconcile opposites into a new vitality. We see that the mainstream modernist strategy of incorporating modern alienation into the artwork can be successful only partially: it cannot exorcise the alienating demon -- should this be one of the demons that Eliot had in mind when he wrote that the poet is an exorcist of the poetic demon (Sharpe, 1991:75). Moreover, this sense of isolation, alienation, and stasis, stretches itself across pairs of perceived opposites such as the inside of semiosis versus its outside, culture versus nature, male versus female, fragmentation versus unity, and objective distance versus subjective and personal context.

We therefore read works such as *The Waste Land* with what Brooker and Bentley call "binary vision" (1990:93): we do still see some unity -- say the melting of personages as perceived from the external, spiritual and in this sense unifying perspective of Tiresias -- or, to my mind, the unforgettable over-all musicality of Eliot's writing. But we also see the triumph and the threat of potentially absolute fragmentation and pure textuality (the text which refers only to itself), or the complicating self-reflexive sign which menaces finally to lose contact with the outside (the historical, subjective, societal and/or natural context of existence). It appears that one's vision remains forever poised between these alternatives in reading the poem, and that textual vision cannot be unified meaningfully in the final analysis -- one's reading is forced to remain non-integrated, binary, ambivalently poised between unity and utter disparity. Concomitantly, the poetic text continues to approach an unthinkable point of textual totality: if semiosis had a skin, it would have approached

the bursting point with its all-inclusivity, and the diminishing point in terms of its neglect of outside context, at once.

In these ways and more, the tendency to complicate the referentiality and natural context of the sign -- as found in one of its most systematic modes in structuralism and one of its most strategic forms in post-structuralism -- is already present in mainstream modernist discourse in its dislocational, difficult moods. Since post-structuralism is still evolving (despite the fact that its death has been declared on a number of occasions; declarations which tend to entrench the playfully apocalyptic post-structuralist disposition), it is not certain whether it will take this complication to a fuller degree or not. At this stage it seems that post-structuralism is moving towards increasing complication, favouring the nature of meaning in terms of an even more drastic doubt about the meaning of nature.

Emig reaches a parallel conclusion. He wants to see the fulfilment of the modernist promise of true heterogeneity in post-modernism, but warns in the conclusion of his book, in the words of Wittgenstein, that "a doubt which doubted everything would not be a doubt" (1995:245). The post-structuralist textual proliferation of (mere) signs may turn into a new, uncanny form of absolutism. Manfred Pfister suggests that post-structuralism and post-modernism could rediscover their Archimedic leverage by turning to nature (1991:224). These developments remain to be seen, and could be informed by the uniqueness of Cummings' position and poetry which (again) are simultaneously modernist and actively connected to nature. In other words, to the extent that the modern complication of sign-nature relations may persuade one to look for alternative, more ecologically sound and dynamic semiotic views and practices, Cummings' poetry certainly offers itself as a textual universe to be explored with renewed alertness.

5. Ecological alternatives: signs in nature, and Taoist poetics

5.1. Communicating nature: the ecological vitality of the sign

In a recent text entitled "The Animal That Therefore I Am: More To Follow"¹⁵ (2002), Derrida traces the history of the hierarchical separation between man and

¹⁵ This text is riddled with French puns and word-play. For example, the notion of "to follow" positively dances through Derrida's text with its various senses of "to read/understand", to "follow someone's trail or lead", to "follow one's self", to be behind or in front of someone, etcetera. These puns are spectacularly arranged and rearranged in the body of his essay.

animal in Western philosophy. Most or all philosophers, states Derrida, “from Aristotle to Lacan, and including Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, and Lévinas”, “say the same thing:

the animal is without language. Or more precisely [the animal] is unable to respond, to respond with a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from reaction, the animal is without the right and power to ‘respond’ and hence without many other things that would be the property of man (2002:400).

Derrida critiques this distinction between man-with-*logos* and the animal-without-*logos* in a complex fashion, including a replacement of the question “can animals respond?” with the question “can they suffer?” (2002:396), as well as the positing of a new ideal, of what the animal “would, would like to, or could be” (2002:401). This leads him to state, in typical and thickly ironic deconstructive mould, that it “is a question of words, therefore” (Derrida, 2002:401). There are moments in this text where Derrida comes (perhaps perilously) close to a very direct, referential treatment of animals, for instance when he describes the Echidna of Australia and New Guinea (2002:409). But the article on the whole still retains a perhaps slightly paler form of the deconstructive notion that there is nothing outside the text.

Nonetheless, Derrida does not directly consider the possibility that philosophers were simply mistaken in their belief that animals do not respond or communicate in the proper sense of the term. Much recent research within the natural sciences concern, directly or indirectly, this question, and the answers that have been found are perhaps surprising. It is becoming clear that most or all ecological being entails some form of semiosis, the exchange of signs. What was once conceived as a (or the) fundamental difference between humans and nature -- language -- is now emerging as a less ruthless difference, a difference not in absolute quality but in percentage or scale, a variation which could be more or less intense depending (for instance) on which animal one is considering among the numerous animals that do communicate including whales, dolphins, horses, ants, gorillas, and so on.

When a gorilla manages to communicate with a person by means of five hundred active and five hundred passive signs as in the case of Koko (Fischer, 2000:29), and if Koko moreover uses the sign to lie, then the distinct metaphysical chasm which has been envisaged between humans and the animal kingdom for the past centuries in terms of the philosophy of language, closes considerably. “Even

those [philosophers] who, from Descartes to Lacan, have conceded to the said animal some aptitude for signs and communication”, writes Derrida, “have always denied it the power to *respond* -- to *pretend*, to *lie*, to *cover its tracks* or *erase its own traces*” (2002:401).

Koko, however, begins to chew a red crayon and is asked by Francine Patterson, her human counterpart, “You’re not eating that crayon, are you?” (Fischer 2000:28). Koko signs in reply “Lip”, and applies the crayon first to her upper lip, then the lower one, suggesting that she is merely putting on lipstick as she has seen Patterson do (Fischer 2000:28) -- and also, that she is feeling guilty (as we would formulate it) and wants to do something about it by means of communication. In fact, Koko is using sign language to cover her tracks and deceive Patterson, thus employing one of the oldest tricks in the book of human language -- and also one of the surest signs of semiosis according to Eco (1976:7) among others.

It is difficult to assess precisely how close Koko comes to our human conceptions of language in this way, but it is easy to see that there is no more at stake than a scale of difference between animal and human in terms of communication in this instance -- and that we have overestimated our communicative uniqueness for a couple of centuries. Steven Roger Fischer in his *A History of Language* (2000) further states that gorillas like Koko, along with chimpanzees and other apes, obtain the linguistic level of human toddlers, despite severe physical restrictions such as the fact that the apes’ larynxes do not sag like humans’ do (in order to make articulate spoken language possible) (2000:29).

Koko’s IQ was measured in a test as ranging between 85 to 95, on par with average toddler intelligence -- and then there were some unfair anthropocentric aspects to the test which turned up in retrospect, such as the fact that a tree and not a house would be the natural shelter from rain to a gorilla (Fischer, 2000:29). A comparable point is made in terms of evolution in Jonathan Weiner’s helpful popular account of evolution entitled *The Beak of the Finch (A Story of Evolution in Our Time)* published in 1995: a fairly slight difference of scale between ourselves and the rest of the animal kingdom marks the sudden explosion which led to the situation that the planet is virtually too small to contain human success (1995:281-282).

In terms of the study of something as apparently far removed from humans as the insect kingdom, an explosion of a different kind is occurring: the increasingly sophisticated entomological knowledge of insect communication which includes the usage by insects of semiochemicals (this word, instantly familiar to the semiotician, is an entomological term designating the usage of chemicals among insects in order to evoke responses varying from alarm to attraction (Hölldobler & Wilson, 1990:227)). Here the difference of scale in comparison to human language is steep, but the fact remains that insects communicate by means of chemicals and gestures which could qualify as signs in the broadest sense. Consider the “tappings, stridulations, strokings, graspings, nudgings, antennations, tastings and puffings and streakings of chemicals among the ants” as described by the foremost myrmecologists of our time Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson (1990: 227), in their remarkable micro-universe of a book *The Ants* of 1990.

This is partly the reason why I suggest the term “ecosemiotics” instead of “ecocriticism” in this thesis: in order to denote the fact that in communicating, humans are not alone, and that the study of “ecocriticism” could develop into a more inclusive study of natural communication in general. Furthermore: one imagines that Cummings would have been intrigued and excited by these developments. Back on more familiar terrain, what these developments indicate is that the sign -- far from being a human appendix or quirk -- is a vital part of survival and of ecological being. Contrary to the popular conception, for instance, poetry (being the most charged form of language that we know) could be a vital part of ecological being. It is time to restate that poetry feeds one of humankind’s innermost needs: semiotic “hunger” -- in line with Cummings’ suggestion that we should “eat flowers [digest poems]/ and not be afraid” (*is 5 CP 262*)! To return once more to Derrida’s intriguing new essay “The Animal That Therefore I Am”: to Derrida it is clear that “thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from *poetry*” (2002:377; my emphasis -- JET). In this thesis we will have reason to return to Cummings’ and the modernist poets’ writing about various animals (such as the grasshopper, for example).

It would not be true to deduce from these arguments that the stretching of the referential functions of the sign would *necessarily* limit the sign’s ecological values with a view to human survival. Reckoning with the intrinsic complexity of referentiality is not solely bad, especially from an ecological perspective. Certainly,

in times of crisis and actual physical survival the sign could become more intensely referential: if a freak wave is coming from behind and I am standing on the rock and someone shouts on top of their voice -- "Wave! Wave!" -- it would be vital for me to make all the necessary referential links as quickly as possible and get out of the way. My next thought, however intricate, could be of no consequence if I do not establish the apposite referential conclusions in this situation, namely that an actual wave is approaching, that I am standing on the actual rock towards which the wave is approaching, and that there is little time. It could be fatal for me to assume that the one who warns me wants me to greet him or her, for instance -- to stretch the example.

Given all of this, human survival still supposes another layer of meaning; we know that merely surviving in the physical sense is not equal to a meaningful human lifetime. And in this sense stretching the relations and tensions between the sign and reality is essential to humans; we know for instance that art, as Pablo Picasso succinctly puts it in a famous expression, is the lie which helps us see the truth (Wilson, 1996:245). As William F. Lynch suggests in another context, humans will not be satisfied with less than the concrete reality *and* the dream (1975:15) -- and the dream involves at least some deformation of the referential relations between the sign and reality. In reconsidering the dislocation of referential relations within modern art and theory one has to be genuine. In Eco's words: "Let us be realistic: there is nothing more meaningful than a text which asserts that there is no meaning" (1990:7).

I am therefore steering this thesis between two poles for the sake of this kind of realism about the referential function of the sign: firstly, that semiosis is not Adamic, not a simple nomenclature of clumsy one-to-one correlatives between a stack of things and a list of names, as Ferdinand de Saussure reveals (1960:66), and as confirmed by Robert Kern (1996:8) in a modernist-orientalist context. Secondly, that the sign is not completely dislocational or non-referential -- not ever -- the sign always assumes and penetrates a real context however vaguely or indirectly in some instances, as Eco reveals (1990:4, 38). The natural world and possible worlds assume one another, and the interplay between them gives much of what one experiences as the joy of meaning.

In other words: we know full well that signs lie when they pretend that they are not related to their outside and natural contexts. And when this particular lie is

used to make us believe that all outside contexts have disappeared because they are merely semiotic at the “point of delivery” (to borrow Laurence Coupe’s phrase (2000:2)), a danger ensues of semiotically legitimized ignorance of nature. We have been cautious for long enough to restate that signs always already suppose nature -- and that signs merely vary in terms of the extent to which they may appear to distance themselves from their ancient ecological significance.

As we have seen, Arne Naess points out that the profound human ignorance of the complexity and interrelatedness of biospherical relationships -- and the resultant disturbance (or complication) of natural complexity (also in physical existence) -- is a hallmark of modern ecological unsoundness. I suggest that one of these disturbances is the human belief in the isolation of their particular forms of communication: the sophisticated ignorance of biospherical relationships in *semiotic* terms, disregarding the fact that the sign plays an active role in ecological being. This role involves an intrinsic linguistic complexity which cannot and need not be denied: *in many ways humans live deep within the house of language*. A relation between the sign and nature holds both the possibilities of a healthy transcendence of nature, and healthy identity with nature. But this relational complexity crosses over into complication when it is persistently suggested that the sign has neither (useful) limits in terms of referentiality, nor the capacity of interaction with the ecosystem. The recognition that language also actively relates humans to nature is found in one of its most advanced forms within Taoist poetics.

5.2. Taoist poetics

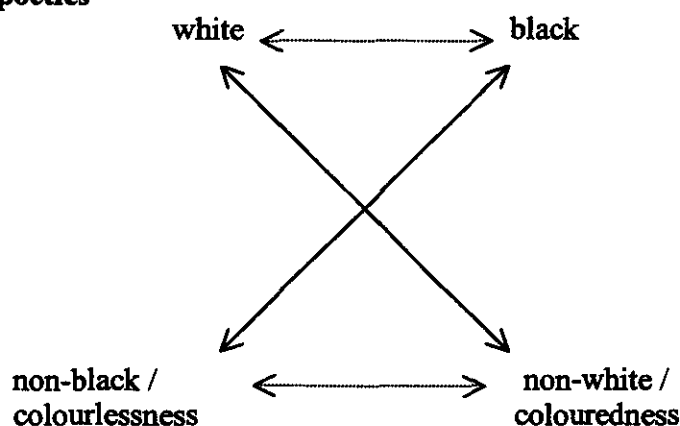


Figure 1: Greimas' semiotic square: white versus black

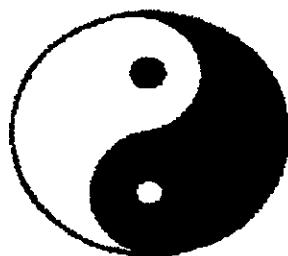


Figure 2: the Tai Chi

A visual comparison of these figures clarifies a couple of issues. The Tai Chi (figure 2), on which Taoism is also based along with much classical Chinese thought in general, maintains a heightened level of self-evidence and the self-explanatory¹⁶. In terms of the Chinese ideogram as compared to European reasoning, Pound makes a similar point, that the ideogram is based on a more self-evident thought process (1987:19). It is not difficult to see some of the principles that the Tai Chi symbol carries. In contrast, the semiotic square (figure 1) signals from the outset that considerable explanation will be needed in order to get to the gist of its meaning. (In the case of an “abstract” version of the square, and not a particular one such as figure 1 with its specific binary pair of black versus white, this would be even more true.)

The Tai Chi suggests, as if by itself, that it concerns opposites: this is apparent from the bigger black and white “tadpoles”. It makes evident that these opposites are presented with a view to motion, flow, or rhythm: the swelling and tapering of each tadpole and the cyclical form of the symbol suggest this. (In figure 2, the symbol suggests clockwise motion.) The symbol furthermore depicts that one opposite is contained within the other, when one notices the white “eye” or “seed” within the black “tadpole”, and the black “eye” or “seed” within the white “tadpole”. Moreover, it is probably apparent from the symbol’s visual form that a delicate, curved, and dynamic line divides and combines the black and white opposite forces. The symbol also suggests that neither of the two opposites enjoys some sort of privilege or preference: they are balanced in a motion in which one takes over from the other, (once more) as the seasons or day and night do in nature. Thus it can be viewed as a

¹⁶ I am indebted to Henri Laurie for pointing this out to me during an informal discussion in June 2000. He is a fellow scholar and participant in the current project on “South Africa: Space and Identity in the Local and Global Contexts”, and in particular the cluster “20th Century Metropolitan Literature” at the Potchefstroom University for CHE, South Africa. He is interested in the visual nature of things.

visual symbol of the natural way or the Tao, or the non-sentimental, non-esoteric appreciation of the role of opposite forces (which remain dynamically balanced) in natural change.

Although the Tai Chi is certainly also rational and reductive, it therefore does not place emphasis on the mechanistic and static -- but on the organic. Emphasis is on intuition and word-lessness, whereas the emphasis in the square -- as is evident even from its visual form -- is on intellectualization, symmetry, and a spatial and mechanistic approach. Most importantly, the Tai Chi suggests that the essence of natural existence is self-evident, and that too much abstraction and objectification can interfere with one's perception of this simplicity-within-complexity, of earthy being. In short, the Tai Chi puts opposites in motion with a view to natural continuation, whereas the square stalls the essence of meaning into a reified logical and spatial, textual mechanism.

The ecology of Taoism can be formulated broadly with a view to the Tai Chi. The black represents yin forces (night, winter, moisture, moon, earth, intuition, etcetera) and the white yang forces (day, summer, dryness, sun, heaven, analysis, etcetera) (Palmer, 1998:18-19). Although *yin* could be translated with *female*, and *yang* with *male*, one should be cautious in doing so. One's own socializations of maleness and femaleness may lead to misconceptions of a detrimental kind when it comes to an understanding of yin and yang (Capra 1982:20; Cooper 1985:14). One of these potential misconceptions lies in the Western notion that femaleness is passive (Capra 1982:20). Yin is not associated with passivity but with a different and equally essential form of action in the Chinese and Taoist views (Capra 1982:20). This kind of action is in harmony with nature's flow whereas yang action goes against the grain of nature's flow; total stasis is not conceived in the Chinese view (Capra, 1982:20). According to Capra neither of these forms of action are viewed as either bad or good in themselves by the Chinese, and one never manages to overpower the other (1982:19). Overbearing human emphasis on (say) yang actions such as aggression, competition, chopping down a tree, etcetera, may disturb the delicately poised balance between these two extreme and struggling forces, and it is only at this point that the Chinese and Taoist views are willing to judge between what is good and what not (Capra, 1982:22; Palmer 1998:19). To put it simply: thwarting the balance is not

good, and being in touch with the balance to the greatest possible degree is good. In terms of its unique postponement of judgement the Taoist view is entirely ecological.

The difficult male-female and culture-nature bias as found in the symbolic deed of the semiotic square is thus avoided: a verdict is delayed beyond the values of these forces considered separately to the balance (or not) between them. There is as much room for yin activity as for yang activity in nature. There is a time for chopping a tree and a time for active non-action (yin activity). Fritjof Capra's 1982 book *The Turning Point* argues at length that our progressive societies need to restore the yin sense, that the ill-health of our societies is related to our persistent over-stressing of yang forces such as competition, aggression, analysis, and the concomitant neglect of yin forces such as co-operation, acceptance, and intuition (1982:22).

In the Taoist view yin and yang (or earth and heaven) rub against each other (as visualized in figure 2), and this rubbing gives rise to all kinds of change (the living textures and creatures of natural existence); music and poetry are similar forms of change arising from and superseding opposites according to Taoist poetics (Liu, 1975:19), as expounded by James J.Y. Liu in his book *Chinese Theories of Literature* (1975). A condition between the perceived opposites of human culture and nature's being is most directly sought in Taoist poetics. A dynamic poetic configuration of words in the human mind in correspondence and interaction with the dynamic natural order is possible and is expressed in Taoist poetry¹⁷. An interesting Taoist means of achieving this is to use one word or concept within different contexts, so that the word or concept in question becomes a kind of semiotic mandala or hub, alive with all manner of subtle shades and colours (Liu, 1975:24). Consciously or subconsciously Cummings employs a similar procedure throughout his (undeniably American and Western) oeuvre: key signs such as (to name a few examples) "little", "is", "twilight", "bird", the "ing" syllable, and so on are arranged in various contexts with slight and more intense differences, so that these words begin to function, for the avid Cummings reader, as semiotic "open spaces" (Davis & Schleifer, 1989:70) or dynamic semiotic micro-centres of shades and colours of meanings and contexts.

¹⁷ Evolution and Taoism appear to move into each other's proximity with this notion. Taoists believe that language, humans, heaven, and earth came into being simultaneously. The patterns of language and the patterns of nature therefore could be in harmony – poetry re-establishes that original cosmic harmony (Liu, 1975:10). Broadly speaking, evolution also implies that language must have evolved from biological origins, and must therefore carry something of the original biological nature from which it emerged.

Some may feel that this gives rise to a sense of limited vocabulary in Cummings' poetry. Critics such as R.P. Blackmur have complained that the lack of intellectualization in Cummings' early poetry (up to 1931) rendered his poetry into a kind of "baby talk" (1984a:124), for example. It could, however, be argued with equal conviction that Cummings' repetition of key signs within altering contexts provides an economical way of enhancing the reader's sense of context. Towards the conclusion of this Chapter, a closer look at Cummings' own "theory" of signs is offered, and as will be shown, it is quite clear that to Cummings, the context-creating capacities of the sign were of the utmost value.

Indeed, economy is crucial in Taoist poetics, also for the reason that the Taoists hold that signs (and thought) soon tend to interfere with one's perception of natural change (Lao Tzu, 1987:27; section 1). Taoists also feel that too much allusion -- or the idea that every word must somehow refer to earlier writings as found in some periods of Chinese literature -- leads to the neglect of inspired moods and spontaneity: one falls *into* the trammel of words instead of catching the meaning-fish with it, and then leaving the trammel behind (Liu, 1975:39).

Extending this helpful Taoist metaphor one could say that a mechanism such as the semiotic square highlights the trammel itself. It visually and logically presents an abstract form of that with which one catches (and generates) meaning. It therefore also tends to absorb (colourful and varied) meaning into its structure, and solidify or reify the meaning into its spatial confines. In this sense, too, the square indeed presents a process of objectification. Although Taoist poetics do not neglect the differentiating qualities of language, its emphasis and direction are quite different to this. It tends to restrain an embezzlement with the employment of the spatial reductions of language to an absolute minimum in order to create a sense of dynamic unity beyond opposites such as humans (and signs) versus nature. This amounts to a very different treatment of intellect and opposites when compared to the treatment of opposites in mainstream modernism and structuralism. As has been demonstrated, the latter mindset tends to entrench, in various manners, the objectified dilemma of opposites set in indefinite, hierarchical (albeit at times fluid) tension. What Taoist poetics view as interference with sign-nature interaction and integrity is frequently championed (even when it is done with a sense of tragedy) in modern discourse. In

Taoist poetics, one has not yet arrived at the right dynamic when one has taken cognisance of opposites set in contradiction.

However, Taoism is not about a quiescent, monolithic, or monotonous and static unison of human culture and natural being, either. Martin Palmer writes, for example, that the Tai Chi (figure 2) is “a symbol of the cosmic struggle as yin tries to overcome yang and yang seeks to overcome yin” (1998:19). From this it would be all too easy to deduce that the Tai Chi, Chinese thought, and Taoism are preoccupied with dualism and even conflict, as in broadly modern, Western thought (and as found in (say) structuralism). Palmer continues, however: “It is important to stress that yin and yang carry with them no sense of good and evil. There is no dualism in Chinese thought. Yin and yang are not better than each other: they simply are” (1998:19). The classical examples of the relation between yin and yang include the alteration of the seasons: “at the very moment that yin triumphs -- the heart of cold, dark winter -- it also begins its inevitable decline and thus yang forces begin to arise, leading to spring and summer -- yang times” (Palmer, 1998:19).

Palmer’s notion that Taoism and orientalism in general do not involve a comfortable escape from the polar opposites that carry life or conflict runs throughout substantial orientalist texts; it is only the popular, laid-back, flower-child adoption of Zen and Taoism that led to the at least partially mistaken idea of a syrupy, passive harmony that is associated with Zen and Taoism. Instead, Taoism is non-sentimental in the sense that it incorporates full recognition of just how intense the struggle between opposite forces are, and in the sense that it accepts yin and yang as “natural forces or expressions of natural forces” (Palmer, 1998:19) -- that is, as a given of existence, in which “[h]umanity’s role is, however, strangely pivotal” (Palmer, 1998:19). In other words, humanity is at once weak enough and strong enough to influence nature’s powerful and also delicate (and ongoing) equilibrium between enormous and two-fold polarities -- and to influence it for good or bad.

Other examples of an orientalist acceptance of and entry into (and beyond) conflict and the struggle of opposites deserve to be mentioned. Arne Naess, whose deep ecological philosophy is partly based on Zen Buddhism makes it quite clear, for instance, that biospherical egalitarianism should be striven for *in principle* -- and he then states that he has added the “in principle” clause because “any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation, and suppression” (1995:4). Coming from

Naess with his abundant emphasis on interrelatedness, this is a mouthful. And it clearly implies that deep ecology is not of the “be-nice-to-squirrels” variety. One infers that human ignorance of nature is often even more blatant when nature is sentimentalized, for example when an African elephant cow weighing some six tonnes or more is kept in a paddock (in a zoo), and is called the rather unlikely name of “Cathy”. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke has composed a striking poem about a black panther caged in a zoo, entitled “Der Panther” (1981:138), and this poem amply expresses the pity of wilderness incarcerated and tamed.

Various notes and poetic lines indicate Cummings’ awareness that conflict, contradiction, and opposition are *included* into a view of natural integrity. One of his notes, written in response to R.H. Blyth’s volumes on orientalism (which appeared in the late 1940s and early 1950s), reads “[w]hen we are entirely alone with nature” -- and in Cummings, the word “alone” puns on the concept “all-one” -- “we feel an emotion that can be explained only by a contradiction” (bMs Am 1823.7(64) folder 5). Cummings’ poetry is riddled with paradox, oxymoron, and other disguises of contradiction, more often than not to point at a sensibility of being “all-one/alone” with nature. The note continues: “yet it is a single, elemental feeling. On the one hand it is a feeling of loneliness; on the other, it is one of fullness. It is like breathing in & breathing out at one & the same time” (bMs Am 1823.7(64) folder 5). In other words, the rational mind is confronted by an insoluble paradox or contradiction, and the paradox or contradiction itself indicates that a sensibility of unity and integrity beyond the entrapment of mind-relations is possible, also in terms of natural integrity or ecology. After all, as William Blake asserts in “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” (c. 1790), plate 3: “Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence” (2000:109). The potential of a dynamic unity of human culture and nature should not be confused with a flat, tedious, and oppressive uniformity -- about this Blake and Cummings felt equally strongly. Cummings alludes to Blake’s line “One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression” (2000:130) in a poem satirizing modern lust for numbers and conformity, entitled “everybody happy?” (73 *Poems* CP 791). Cummings passionately championed the cause of the individual against conformity throughout his career, as stated perhaps most intensely in his “i: six nonlectures” delivered at Harvard. For both Cummings and Blake, such concentrated emphasis of human individuality, and

the right *not* to be coerced into conventionality goes hand-in-hand with a profound respect for nature's integrity. Blake finds it striking that one tree does not ask another for permission to grow, and the lion does not ask the horse how to take its prey (2000:115). And according to Cummings' speaker in a sonnet, only when "serpents bargain for the right to squirm", "any wave signs on the dotted line/ or else an ocean is compelled to close", and "the oak begs permission of the birch/ to make an acorn" - only then will the speaker believe in "that incredible/ unanimal mankind" (*Xaipe* CP 620). Nature's sheer continuation is celebrated here as the prime relief from the monotony of a modern world with its various moralistic and bureaucratic restrictions and interferences, and also as one of the prime surges of energy that gives human existence significance while, concomitantly, it implies the shallowness of mere day-to-day coercion. And it is possibly always important that one's human imagination should be revitalized in this manner, of an exuberant poetic admiration for one of the "laws" of nature: straightforward, non-coerced, and non-sentimental contradiction that points to a greater integrity beyond mere dualisms of mind.

Yet, it also remains to be said that an intellectual preoccupation with opposite terms can interfere with this very innocence of nature, and the ongoing event of human-nature co-existence. Taoism -- far from quietistic as has been briefly demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs -- remains aware of *this* potential: of integrity, dynamic interaction, and also stable (ongoing and open-ended) unity between human reason and natural being, through and beyond (such) opposites and differences. Identity with and within nature is taken to great length in Taoism. Hence, once more, the fact that Cummings felt notable affinity with Taoism (a topic to be expounded in more detail in the next Chapters of this thesis). In fact, the paradox that Taoist poets use *differentiating* human signs to suggest human-nature *interaction and identity* did not go by unnoticed within Taoism. One prevalent Taoist saying reads "the myriad things and I are one" (Liu, 1975:62). Having stated this, Chuang Tzu goes on to say:

Since we are already one, how can I say a word about it? Yet since I have already called it 'one', how can I say I have not said a word? 'One' and 'word' make two; two and one make three. Going on from here, not even a skilled arithmetician could get to the end, let alone an ordinary man (Liu, 1975:62).

In other words, the final word has not yet been spoken or written, and Taoists were keenly aware of the differentiating nature of language at least since the 4th

century B.C. It is part of the very nature of language to continue differentiating (and deconstruction *does* make a valid point about language in general, despite stumbling over commonsensical admissions). Knowing this, Taoists nevertheless pressed on to seek, express, and mediate -- as spontaneously as possible -- a sense of interactive human-sign-nature unity. Herein lies much of their unique value, especially at a time when the modern world seems to have lost its capacity and taste for culture-nature integrity. To be sure, it is not an all-encompassing value, but it is vital, and will continue to attract the attention of Western poets and others who wish to make some sense of, and express with maximum effectiveness, one's interrelations with (one's very) nature. Of course, it always remains so that in the process of transliterating Taoism into Western culture, as in the case of Cummings, essential (mis)understandings will arise across nationalities and millennia, in accordance with Hayot's middle ground (1999:530). And it is also true, on top of this, that essential (mis)understandings and also transfigurations of nature will occur in human culture -- in accordance with an implication of Howarth's zone of modern (and probably ancient) culture-nature between-ness (1999:516). At least some form of between-ness, it now becomes clear, is also a condition of Taoist human poetics: they are fully aware of the differentiating impact of (their) language upon culture-nature integrity. And *knowing* this limitation of language, it can be said, is probably to be half-way towards overcoming it.

Assuming for the moment that Taoist poetics did and do (in transliteration) indeed manage to create a sense in the reader of active unity with the changes of nature, one should move on to a complex question: *how* did and do they manage this? For the purpose here, I wish to focus on the same question with reference to Cummings, as has been indicated in the first Chapter of the thesis. With the added starting point that, if the readerly experience of one reader counts, Cummings' poetry manages to create a sense of profound human-sign-nature commingling in the experience of this reader. But *how* is this done? And given, for the moment, Cummings' Taoist leaning, how is it done in Taoism (as we (mis)understand it)? Closer scrutiny of Taoist texts, including and especially Lao Tzu's original, reveals at least some outline of a careful process that may lead to such readerly experience. (I am careful to formulate this not to mystify the subject but out of respect for differences, nationalities, millenia.) One approach to begin an answer to this question

-- an answer which will be continued in subsequent Chapters when Cummings' poetry and its ecological vitality come under closer examination -- is to consider the Taoist view of opposites as exactly as possible, guided in particular by a concise reading of opposites as found in Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*.

Some of the main elements of this view, ones which I believe to be of direct relevance to Cummings (although certainly not the only ones) are humility ("smallness" and earthiness), flexibility, fluidity, serendipity (or simultaneity) and a revitalization of active unity between and beyond the opposites of human culture and natural being. Moreover, the sequence of these suggested elements is of some importance. Roughly, one could propose that in order to achieve the latter (a revitalized sense of dynamic integrity beyond those opposites), humility, flexibility, and fluidity are prerequisites on various levels, also in terms of one's view and employment of the nature of poetic language. If we take "humility" to be directly related to a sense of *smallness* (a sense of a place, position, and set of relationships within a much larger scheme of natural events) and *earthiness* (that is, a sense of staying close to earth or rooted in earth), for example, it becomes easier to see the relations between and the sequence of these elements. If such smallness and earthiness are not only attitudes, but also form part of the very way in which one employs language, then it theoretically becomes possible to write in the direction of greater unity between human culture and natural being: a rooted, humble (but not necessarily un-exciting and lame) form of writing ensues, close to the actualities of natural events and one's position within them. In addition, one needs to retain just the right levels of economy so that language will not interfere with natural perception, but suggest it maximally. As subsequent Chapters of this thesis will show, a fair case can be made that this is a large part of what happens, of the *how*, of the ecology of Cummings' poetry. The same goes for flexibility and fluidity: not only one's attitudes and themes, but also one's very employment of language, need to be flexible and fluid enough to allow a sensible and maximal fusion or mergence of one's cultural sensibilities and the actualities found in nature. The transcendence of mental opposites into a sense of vibrant and open-ended ecological soundness should be the "result" or "destination" of such procedures. Again, this point is to be illustrated in terms of Cummings' poetry in subsequent Chapters.

According to Lao Tzu, the way -- or natural change -- can barely be described because it seems so elusively small and hence unobtrusive, non-glaring, not obvious:

One looks for it and does not see it:
its name is "seed".

One listens for it and does not hear it:
its name is "subtle".

One reaches for it and does not feel it:
its name is "small".

These three cannot be separated,
therefore, intermingled, they form the One.

Its highest is not light,
its lowest is not dark.

Welling up without interruption,
one cannot name it.

This is called the formless form,
the objectless image.

(1987:32; section 14)

Lao Tzu takes care to mention that this elusive essence of natural being lies and continues to move beyond opposites such as light versus dark. Also, he continues to mention in this passage as elsewhere in his slim volume, that words can hardly capture and objectify this flow of the natural world. "Painfully giving it [natural flow/change] a name/ I call it 'great'", he writes in a later passage (1987:37; section 25). And: the "name that can be named/ is not the eternal name" (Lao Tzu, 1987:27; section 1). (At a time when, for example, the name of God is frequently used with contempt, it is beneficial to be reminded of awe beyond human language.) Recalling for the moment Cummings' much-cited description of his own poetic motives as a desire for "that precision which creates movement", it is of further interest to mention here that Lao Tzu, in this passage, describes what he has in mind with the adjective "great": "Great: that means 'always in motion'" (1987:27, section 25). Even if, across millennia and nationalities, Cummings' word "movement" may have a different meaning to what Lao Tzu may have meant with "motion", it is clear enough that an emphasis on intrinsic dynamism and continuation are important to both. And although Cummings' foreword from which his much-cited phrase is taken makes it clear that he has in mind a movement of art and a movement of/for the reader, his poetry itself makes it amply clear that he is equally interested in the movement/s of nature. As has been mentioned, and as will be further demonstrated in this thesis, Cummings expressed his interest in Taoism sufficiently for one also to assume, at least to some degree, a direct Taoist influence in his life and work.

Various passages of the *Tao Te Ching* show that economy and smallness (humility) do not only belong to the attitude of one in touch with the nature of nature, but that these attitudes have implications for language. "Use words sparingly,/ then all things will fall into place" (Lao Tzu, 1987:36, section 23) and: "When creation begins/ only then are there names/ Names too reach existence,/ and one knows where to halt./ If one knows where to halt/ one is in no danger" (Lao Tzu, 1987:41; section 32) -- to name two examples of comments on language in this text. Thinking of Cummings in terms of these utterances, one could on the surface of things immediately counter that Lao Tzu's slim volume and Cummings' bulky oeuvre do not match in terms of a "smallness" of language, or an economy of words. We will therefore have reason to explore, in subsequent Chapters, the many ways in which Cummings manages an intriguing word-economy of his own, also when compared to mainstream modernists. Suffice it to say for the moment that Cummings in his unique poetic way strives for a "smallness" of language (despite his productivity) underpinned by an avoidance of austere or high intellectual terminology (unless he is in playful or satirical mood), as well as a commitment to minimalistic poetry ("less is more"), the usage of ample blank space, a certain sensuality and earthiness (the so-called "common" word such as "spring" or "love"), and so on.

Lao Tzu's emphasis on earthiness, even if entirely different in terms of time and space than Cummings', is made quite clear in the *Tao Te Ching*: whosoever "wants to shine/ will not be enlightened" (1987:37; section 24) and the "Man of Calling", who "encompasses the One" (or unity), "does not want to shine,/ [and] therefore will he be enlightened" (1987:36; section 22). Taoism focuses in particular on that which does not strive for egotistic "shining". Instead, Lao Tzu focuses on that which is plain and simple (and even empty) such as clay pots (1987:31; section 11), the emptiness of a valley (1987:29, 32, 41; sections 6, 15, 32), and the simple and pure flow of water, which is considered in more detail within this section of this Chapter. One must "make one's earthiness common" according to Lao Tzu (1987:52; section 56). And: "Do not desire the glitter of the jewel/ but the roughness of the stone" (Lao Tzu, 1987:45; section 39). The penultimate passage of his volume sketches a scene of neighbourly and simple existence in which people die at great age, in active tranquility, and where their "dwellings" shall be small and "peaceful", and "their customs joyful" (Lao Tzu, 1987:64; section 80). William Carlos Williams'

poetry, in particular a poem such as "The Red Wheelbarrow", ties in well with this approach of an "own-backyard" poetry which is nevertheless refreshing and aesthetically powerful -- in his quite different way, Cummings also belongs where a minimalistic and even experimental modernism emphasizes the importance and immediacy of that which is supposedly (from the perspective of progressive societies) "common" or earthy.

Water, one of Lao Tzu's main themes, suggests the importance of purification, humility (since water flows anywhere and yet cleanses and remains itself), stillness, and (perhaps above all) flexibility and flow. Humility (smallness and earthiness) being a crucial prerequisite for a sense of natural unity according to him as we have seen, we now approach -- in a concise scrutiny of the theme of water, flexibility, fluidity -- the manner in which Lao Tzu manages to suggest that which lies beyond the opposites of mind, including the supposed opposition of human culture and natural being. A consideration of Lao Tzu's emphasis on flexibility (and water) follows.

"The strong do not die a natural death".
This I will make the departure point of my teaching.
[...]
The softest thing on earth
overtakes the hardest thing on earth.

(Lao Tzu, 1987:46-47, sections 42, 43)

In the whole world there is nothing softer
and weaker than water.
And yet nothing measures up to it
in the way it works upon that which is hard.
Nothing can change it.
Everyone on earth knows
that the weak conquers the strong
and the soft conquers the hard --
but no-one is capable of acting accordingly.

(Lao Tzu, 1987:63; section 78)

Here we see that Lao Tzu links the strength of flexibility with the cleansing powers of water. He also emphasizes the integrity of water: the fact that water -- although it has the tendency to flow anywhere that it is "lead" to -- will retain its purifying qualities and remain what it is including its suppleness, flow, or flexibility. Lao Tzu furthermore compares this fluidity to kindness and generosity:

The highest benevolence is like water.
The benevolence of water is
to benefit all beings without strife.
It dwells in places that man despises.

Therefore it stands close to DAO.

[...]

He who does not assert himself
thereby remains free of blame.

(1987:29-30, section 8)

Lao Tzu appears to be teaching a complex “lesson” through this aquatic image: excessive self-assertion will not win the day but rather humility, flexibility, and fluidity. Lao Tzu economically expounds the paradox that what appears to be strong (inflexible) can be quite breakable while that which may appear to be weak (flexible) like water is actually strong and lasting -- precisely because it remains integrally pure and supple.

Man, when he enters life,
is soft and weak.

When he dies
he is hard and strong.

Plants, when they enter life,
are soft and tender.

When they die
they are dry and stiff.

[...]

Therefore: when weapons are strong they are not victorious.

When trees are strong they are cut down.

The strong, the great, is below.

The soft, the weak, is above.

(Lao Tzu, 1987:62, section 76)

Consider Lao Tzu’s treatment of opposites in this passage. In deliberately paradoxical manner, he switches one’s usual oppositional expectations. Usually, one would be inclined to assume that strength lies in that which is rigid, sharp, unbreakable, whereas weakness resides in that which is pliable and soft. Playing upon this expectation, Lao Tzu makes his point in this passage by reversing or swapping the expectations, and by cross-stitching the pliable with the strong, and the rigid and “unbreakable” with the weak.

Friedman refers to Cummings’ device of “inverting images” (1967:46) in his *E.E. Cummings: the Art of His Poetry* (1967), and in his more recent *(Re)Valuing Cummings* (1996), he writes of Cummings’ “reverse polarities” (1996:57) which form part of the poet’s ability to transcend a dualism of mind. An unexpected cross-stitching of opposites as described here is part of a strategy in both Lao Tzu or Cummings -- whether Cummings employed it with conscious awareness of Lao Tzu in particular instances, or not. And such cross-stitching forms part of the potential to bring the reader to a recognition of that open-endedness and interaction with nature

which lies beyond rational-relational duality. In some poems Cummings advocates in his own way the superiority of a young, growing, flexible (or “green”) stance over an “old”, rigid, fixed one:

may my heart always be open to little
birds who are the secrets of living
whatever they sing is better than to know
and if men should not hear them men are old

may my mind stroll about hungry
and fearless and thirsty and supple
and even if it's sunday may i be wrong
for whenever men are right they are not young (1938 CP 481)

In this sonnet, of which I have quoted a part, flexibility and suppleness of mind are related to that which is desirable. Rigidity and moralistic correctness are related to that which stalls natural, spontaneous growth. One learns from nature the supple “lesson” that life itself, in its natural continuation, cannot be “taught a lesson”, and that inner growth occurs when one continues to pay attention to the “secrets of living”, “little/ birds”. A cross-stitching of opposites (strength and growth with suppleness and open-endedness, weakness and stalling with moralistic rigidity) occurs, and leads to a sense of flexible unity within natural being. As will be shown in subsequent Chapters, such playful cross-stitching can reach quite complex levels in Cummings’ poetry. Along with the oxymoron, paradox, contradiction, and more devices, this cross-stitching presents one of the ways in which Cummings, not unlike Lao Tzu, steers the reader towards a sense of interactive and ongoing natural unity.

Overall, Taoist poetics as well as Cummings’ poetry, sets out to create a sense of natural context within the mind of the reader. Suggestion is an important way in which this is achieved: too much detail is avoided and ample blank space in all senses of the word is left for the reader to fill in and to evoke natural continuation. Stated simply, blank space and maximal suggestion combine to evoke the recognition that nature continues to continue beyond rational constraints. (This aspect of Cummings’ poetry is considered in some detail in Chapters Three and Four.)

The sign employed thus is acutely aware, so to speak, of its limits -- also its referential limits (or its ties with nature) as we would be inclined to term them today. And often, Cummings creates effective means of communicating nature precisely by exploiting the referential limitations of the sign. Such signs mediate (or open up into)

nature. The deliberate inability of Cummings' famous grasshopper poem finally to capture the essence of the grasshopper's dynamic and conscious being via language offers a noteworthy example of this semiotic procedure or ecosemiotic, Taoist dynamic:

r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
 who
 a)s w(e loo)k
 upnowgath
 PPEGORHRASS
 eringint(o-
 aThe):l
 eA
 !p:
 S
 a
 (r
 rIvInG
 .gRrEaPsPhOs)
 to
 rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
 ,grasshopper;

(No Thanks CP 396)

Webster points out that the “S” and “a” are clearly meant by Cummings to fall outside the implied left and right hand boundaries of the body of the poem (2000:113). *Within* these margins the poem already stretches language to create a sense of the living grasshopper: its conscious eyes (the double o in “loo)k”), the whirring sounds (“rp”, “gr”, “ss”) and the p-o-pping motion of its jump, etcetera. The poem thus dynamically (by changing our linguistic expectations) portrays the fact that as we are conscious of nature's creatures, so are they conscious of us: they may jump when they notice us and we notice them.

But the “S” and “a” indicate that even these onomatopoeic and iconic gestures cannot confine the grasshopper to language. Something inexpressible still falls outside the barriers and limits of (stretched) language. The grasshopper and its leap are part of nature and this leap goes beyond language: the living reality of nature includes yet ultimately supersedes language in its vast and dynamic incorporation of everything and nothing. With this virtually Taoist paradox Cummings shows that language, by making its limitations explicit, does after all indicate the vastness and dynamics of nature. It is as if Cummings sets the grasshopper free through self-conscious language; and a language not self-conscious of its infinity, but its finitude.

The sign is the mediator and no more than the mediator which indicates this sense of natural being.

Incidentally, Cummings precedes Gary Snyder's nature poetry in this respect: Snyder also composes poems which suggest an incorporation of the word order into a larger order outside language (Kern, 1996:34). A comparison of Cummings' and Snyder's individual styles of approaching this cross-fluence of sign and natural dynamism falls outside the scope of the thesis. Suffice it to say that Cummings' poetic ecology forms part of a continuing modernist poetic legacy of which Pound is another important exponent.

6. Pound, Derrida and the East: a restoration of context?

A totalitarian drive in semiotics, with its concomitant effects of the complication and neglect of sign-nature relations in the modern mindset begins innocently in mainstream modernist discourse. It begins with the multiple need to create room for poetic utterance in progressive societies, to recreate a mythological ground that would give significance to human actions, and to provide a more scientific impetus for the writing and study of poetry in a world increasingly dominated by "hard" sciences and technology. The modernist artist is in this sense a fool, out of step with the beat of progress; the motif of the fool is prevalent in modernisms of all kinds. Creating room for poetic utterance also involves modernists stretching into the past in order to find resonance there and to reconfigure it for the sake of the present, such as Pound's and Eliot's classical propensities, and such as the pervasive oriental propensity in modernist discourse.

Furthermore, the attempt to create room for what Friedman terms an "authentic inner life" (1996:174) involves a number of meaningful transgressions in the modernist movement. Artistic traditions and taboos are transgressed along with grammatical and other rules in order to provide revitalized patterns of meaning -- among other transgressions. The initial resistance to modernism is a signal of this modernist tendency to transgress all kinds of barriers and traditions in the quest for meaning. We have seen that these transgressions are so successful that modernism ironically becomes involved in new forms of textual colonization or totalitarianism. Today mainstream modernism is very much part of the canon and it is perhaps convenient to forget the origins of the modernist struggle to make room for art.

The transgression of adopting orientalism makes more sense against this complex background of creating artistic room -- and overreaching the attempt into the realms of textual totalitarianism or the mainstream modernist problematic of ending up as its own never-ending utterance (Emig, 1995:167). For, in dislocating the sign and in striving for the maximum objectivity of the sign itself (thus creating great distance between the sign and its context/s), mainstream modernism moved away from the self-evident givenness of meaning to a complicating degree. And it is possible that the impetus for the adoption of orientalism in mainstream modernism stems from this severe degree of distance, dislocation, alienation, isolation, and stasis, when mainstream modernists such as Pound sensed these tendencies in their own work and society. There are a number of indications that the mainstream modernists therefore intensely longed for a return of the sign to natural connectivity: the *Four Quartets*, Eliot's anticipation of deep ecological thought in his essay "Towards a Christian Society", and more.

In a relatively underemphasized passage, Pound compares the Chinese ideogram to European thought in his 1934 publication the *ABC of Reading*, based on his readings of Fenollosa's oriental scholarly writings. I do not wish to get involved in the intricacies of whether or not Pound's or Fenollosa's views on the Chinese language were accurate, but wish to focus instead on the fact, suggested in these passages by Pound, that abstraction threatens to overwhelm that which is *self-evident* (also/still/even) in the modern world. In Europe, begins Pound

if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves from the simple things that he knows perfectly well, it recedes into an unknown region, that is a region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction (1987:19).

Pound illustrates his point with the example of the colour red: as one tries to find answers about what red is from the European, Pound argues, the answers tend to get distant and more "philosophical", away from the self-evident and increasingly into the realms of regressive abstraction. Pound shows that the definition of red is likely to move from a colour, to a vibration or refraction of light, to a mode of energy, to the modality of being or not-being, and so on, until both the questioner and the respondee get in beyond their depth (1987:19). In contrast, Pound continues to argue, one finds in China the method of science which is the method of poetry (1987:19). Pound then goes on to show that the Chinese ideogram is not a picture of a sound but a picture of a thing; *of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things*

(1987:21). Pound illustrates this with examples from classical Chinese. The Chinese ideogram for human is two simple strokes indicating two-leggedness. The ideogram for tree presents three roots, the implied soil level, a protruding stem, and a simple horizontal bar that indicates branches or a crown. And the ideogram for the concept "East" shows a combination of the ideogram for tree and sun: the sun is pictured behind the tree just above the soil level shining through the tree as when it rises in the morning (1987:21). Similarly, the ideogram for red is a combination of the ideograms (or abbreviated pictures) for rose, cherry, rust, and flamingo (1987:22). Based on these examples Pound observes:

That, you see, is very much the kind of thing a biologist does (in a very much more complicated way) when he gets together a few hundred thousand slides, and picks out what is necessary for his general statement. Something that fits the case, that applies in all of the cases.

The Chinese word or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS (1987:22).

Pound's point is that the best art critics are those who look and look again at paintings (1987:23), not those who fall into abstractions from the outset, hence tending to overlook the self-evident. But the subtleties of his argument should not be missed: Pound is suggesting that the ideogrammatic way of thinking is at once more simple (self-evident), biological, and scientific than the tendency to regress into evermore remote regions of abstraction. Admittedly, the dislocational levels of the sign which are maintained at times in Pound's own works such as the *Cantos* contradict some of the suggestions in this ideogrammatic passage; that is part of the overarching ambivalence or contradiction of the mainstream modernists. However, the ideogrammatic passages analysed here reveal that what Pound found in China was a greater sense of the convergence and natural rootedness of the sign, away from the threat of ever-increasing semiotic and objective distance between the sign and nature. One experiences nature and significance as given phenomena or larger dynamic systems into which one is born. And the sign system should not be removed from the natural system to the extent that this overall given-ness of experience becomes complicated to the extent of alienation or ignorance.

In view hereof the initial complication of sign-reality relations seems to occur when one thinks too much about the givenness of existence and meaning, perhaps in one's quite legitimate attempt to understand things -- but eventually because of the

error in thinking that objective semiosis can contain and therefore deny or exclude everything. Returning (against this background) to Greimas' structuralism and the semiotic square, it should be stressed that Greimas' entire project aims at making sense of the *givenness* of meaning: the feeling that meaning is there or here before one is able to say a word about it (Schleifer 1987:xviii-xix). But Greimas' attempt to capture this givenness of meaning invariably tends to drift off into abstraction upon abstraction, if not abstract tautology.

Regressive abstraction in fact turns into one of Greimas' self-admitted major obstacles -- and in a broad sense Greimas therefore confirms Pound's qualms about the nature of Western mental distance and abstraction. For instance, even in the relatively short space of "The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints", the proliferation of technical terms piled upon technical terms soon reaches bewildering proportions. A random sampling from the text includes the following technical terms: beginning with the fairly self-evident notion of the *seme* which consists of two contrary terms in presuppositional relations, the article soon moves on to add (among others) the following types of relations in its effort to pin down the very meaning of meaning: contradictories, relations of implication, hierarchical hyponymic relations, categorical relations, dimensions including schemata and deixes, leading to the formulation of constitutive relations, structural dimensions and semic structures, a typology of rules including permitted relations, unaccepted relations, prescriptions, interdictions, positive injunctions, negative injunctions, conjunctions, non-injunctions, non-interdictions, non-prescriptions, and, indeed, so on (Greimas, 1987:49-53).

At times Greimas is himself intensely frustrated by the inability of structuralism to stop its own proliferation of relational terminologies. He clearly signals that his attempts to "capture" the essential structures and relations of meaning has merely led to an indefinite augmentation of the formulation of further abstract relations (1990:3-4). As Emig shows, mainstream modernist discourse also ends up in a slide of proliferation in order to capture the essence of meaning -- ironically, once more, Pound's *Cantos* make a good example of this. But the modernists and Pound are also aware of the almost nightmarish proliferating slide of the modernist sign, into endless dislocational or colonizing drift (Emig, 1995:138). At some points the *Cantos* reflect upon their own failure in this respect, in a pitiful fashion (Pound, 1990a:816; Emig, 1995:138).

Given these self-reflections, Pound's admiration of what he perceives to be the convergent self-evidence of the ideogram can be placed with greater accuracy: reaching out to the East is not an exotic fashion in response to an external stimulus but a positive relief. Emig refers to the uncanny aspect of the mainstream modernist sign in Pound's case in particular: it is at once alien and familiar, under control and in control, etcetera (1995:141). It allows modernist success in capturing essences and yet causes a simultaneous and increasing glide into thin semiotic air; this gives rise to the sense among modernists -- if a complex metaphor may be allowed -- that the modernist poetic zeppelin had better be kept airborne since touching down on solid ground would mean its end. But in the orientalist strand of Pound's work one also finds greater levels of acceptance in terms of the relations between the sign and earth, to put it plainly.

On the one hand this brief analysis shows that Pound reaches out to the more natural, biological and even ecological aspects of (his perceptions of) the (Chinese) sign but that he yet remains captured within the more totalitarian, regressive aspect of the mainstream modernist sign on the other. This is a good formulation of the essential mainstream modernist ambivalence in terms of ecology and the ecology of the sign or ecosemiotics. But the historical significance of that aspect of this ambivalent stance which shows attraction to ecology, and the ecology of the ideogram, should not be overlooked. Perhaps to one's surprise, considering the general drift of Derrida's thought, deconstruction does not overlook the historical significance of Pound's exploration of the ideogram and Chinese poetry. Robert Kern (1996:7) indicates that *Of Grammatology* contains a strange twist in its discussion of Pound's translations of Fenollosa's notes.

Derrida portrays the general adoption of Chinese in the West as the European hallucination (for various reasons) (1976:80), but he pertinently exempts Pound and Fenollosa from this critique. Indeed Derrida exempts these translations from logocentrism, the main butt of his deconstructionist critique, altogether: he describes Chinese and Japanese writing as a "powerful movement of civilization *developing outside of all logocentrism*" (1976:90; my emphasis - JET). He further asserts that the attraction that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound's writing may thus be "given all its historical significance" (1976:92). One assumes that Derrida was aware of

Pound's statement that the Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound (Pound, 1987:21).

The implications of these statements in *Of Grammatology* are puzzling and illuminating. One of these implications is that Pound's Chinese concerns fall outside the grasp of the infinite deconstructive critique -- outside the endless proliferation of the supplement. One is tempted to think that Derrida paved the way for a more oriental understanding of the meaning of the sign, and that the oriental visuals on the cover of the 1976 edition of *Of Grammatology* are not incidental. Could it be that the strategic deconstructionist manoeuvre of a third term which hovers in the air above philosophical neutralization of opposites (Schleifer, 1987:172), and the deconstructionist perception of the impossibility of something new (Derrida, 1976:4) were meant to hold the place, so to speak, of a future oriental development? One cannot be certain of this: as far as one knows there is not much in deconstruction to (further) substantiate this thought. In the case of mainstream modernist poetry, and Pound especially, it seems clear (however) that the embracing of China is also an embracing of the biological, the convergent, the ecological: the self-evident natural context that is carried in the sign and which links it up meaningfully to its outside on a non-sentimental basis -- this according to Pound (1987:20). Yet, Pound continues to fluctuate between this possibility and a more clearly inorganic, objectively removed, infinitely prolific, hierarchical and symmetrical position of the fixed, dry, intellectualized, and distanced -- or *isolating* and *de-contextualizing* -- sign. Peter Ackroyd, in his biography of Eliot entitled *T.S. Eliot* (1984) summarizes this situation as follows in terms of the key terms wholeness (which I also take to mean natural integration), cynicism, and skepticism:

[B]oth Pound and Eliot -- and also near contemporaries, like Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More -- sought for a tradition or order of their own. But they had to create it for themselves, going to sources as remote as Platonism, Buddhism or medieval literature. Until they found some centre, some kind of coherence or wholeness, they would remain like the character in *The Education of Henry Adams* -- the passive, cynical or merely sceptical observer of an environment which seems meaningless and of other lives which seem absurd (1984:25).

7. Conclusion: the "untextuality" of Cummings' sense of natural context

That Cummings continued to write and grow into a poetry of natural context is therefore in part unique because of the more dislocational, complicating era in which he composed poetry. Whereas mainstream modernists tended to stress

intellectualization, the impersonal, the universal, the importance of the objectification of poetic structures and the modernist mask, and so on -- and hence tended to be ultimately entrapped in purely rational relations and contradictions -- Cummings decided that an objectifying artistic procedure gets in the way of clarity, and that a more directly emotional, intuitive and sensuous response to existence and nature is more in line with the way (or Tao). Whereas Pound and Eliot fluctuated and even wavered in terms of adopting a more ecological approach, Cummings sustained his growth in this approach.

All of this adds up to a renewed formulation of the degree of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernists when it comes to an ecological view of the nature of meaning and the meaning of nature. But since the more predominant view in modernist discourse in general became the more dislocational one -- for various reasons including a legitimate striving for literary studies as a valid scientific or objective pursuit in its own right (Bradford, 1996:521) -- one would expect a tendency among some dominant modernist critics to consider some aspects of Cummings' poetry as somewhat illegitimate, even untextual.

Foremost among these aspects could be Cummings' openly ecological leanings, his sense of the intuitive and suggestive sign which leads to active sign-nature unification, convergence, and natural context. Especially those critics who would tend to feel that a sense of organicism and flexibility is sentimental (since it might be related in their view to Romanticism) will be inclined to mistake some of Cummings' poetic aspects as sentimental. Chapter Five investigates this possibility with a view to particular critics. Such critics, it will be argued, do not consider (for a variety of reasons) the possibility of a poetry that does not seek to be "hard" in the objectified modernist sense, but precise and flexible in terms of sign-nature interaction, and the revitalization of a kind of sign that is convergent, roughly along the lines suggested by Pound in his ideogrammatic mode (as mentioned in this Chapter).

Besides Cummings' poetry, treated in the next two Chapters in terms of such convergence, does one find evidence in his notes that he shared something of Pound's view of the biological, convergent nature of the sign? Evidently one thinks here of Cummings' overt striving for a poetry which paints like Chinese poetry does (1966:317). But Cummings also wrote about his poetic vision of the (Western) sign

in particular. I conclude this Chapter with a look at one of Cummings' notes which indeed suggests his awareness of the sign as an ecological phenomenon. The note was dug up in the Houghton Library at Harvard by Milton A. Cohen. In it, Cummings asserts that a word has two kinds of meanings:

- 1) its own permanent individual meaning, e.g. dog, god, in common with all other words considered purely as elements of a Vocabulary.
- 2) its momentary or transient meanings, whenever modified by its fellow chameleons of a context: whenever it combines with another word or words to constitute a going-somewhere, an en-routeness, a self-directing entirety.

Still ideally in the case of

- 1) a word has a recognizable silhouette, it has edges.
- 2) a word is one or more or a number of ideas which thru mutual interpenetration (modifying more or less one another) create a direction, an impetus: of ideas which simultaneously abandon their individual silhouettes, edges... and fuse or melt into a movement (Cohen, 1987:186).

Cummings concludes this note by stating that *context is movement* (Cohen, 1987:186). If one now reconsiders his much-cited and self-admittedly simple comment on his own technique -- that he is exorbitantly fond of "that precision which creates movement" -- it becomes clear that to him composing poetry was about a movement of poet, signs, and reader towards a context, internally (among poetic signs) and externally (outwardly). In fact, given the centrality of nature to his poetry, it is fair to comment that an interlevel and active connectivity between the "inner" movement of signs and the outer movements of natural context is central to Cummings' poetic consciousness. To this should be added that the sensuous silhouettes or shapes of the very signs themselves formed, to Cummings' mind as far as one can see, a pronounced aspect of this context-creating process.

This view takes into account that the sign tends to be both autonomous (with edges) and integrative (fusing or melting into a contextualizing and ecological movement) all of which is reminiscent of Fritjof Capra's rendition of Arthur Koestler's concept of the holon. The holon is an entity such as a living cell which *continues to tend towards* both autonomy (self-preservation with clear boundaries) and towards integration (going beyond its boundaries into greater wholes) (Capra, 1982:27). In this manner the holon keeps functioning or growing: precisely because it does not absolutely lapse into either one of these states (Capra, 1982:27).

As the name “holon” implies, this active nature of such an entity (such as the living cell) is a *condition* of the wholeness of natural being (also its wholesomeness or homeostasis). In his *Quantum Poetics* (1997) Daniel Albright studies mainstream modernist poetic devices which more often than not are supposed to be meaningful “particles” and/or “waves” of meaning which are intended to take one back, through the text, to behind the text, into some sort of ur-meaning (1997:4). I suggest in extension of Albright’s study that one of Cummings’ essential and in some ways similar modernist devices neither amounts to the poetic “particle” nor the poetic “wave” as in the cases of Eliot, Pound, and Yeats but -- in moving from inorganics and quanta to organics -- the holonic sign. Albright uses the term “poememes” to describe these devices (such as Eliot’s objective correlative) and in Cummings’ case there is need to point out the possibility of a “holomeme” or “biomeme” or “ecomeme”. Of course this has a limited (or abundant) application in accordance with the life that the reader, in co-semiosis with the poetic speaker and the poet, is willing to imagine via a given mediating, modernist text.

In fact, Cummings’ (quite poetic and not truly intellectual) poetics is closer to Peirce’s linguistic theory than current fashionable theories which complicate sign-nature interrelations. As has been noted at the outset of this Chapter, Peirce emphasizes the outward *purpose* of the sign, as does Cummings in his way. Just one of the ways in which this poet describes his propensity for significant movement and milieu is the notion that signs merge in each other’s company like fellow-chameleons. That description suggests something of a slow movement and something of a camouflage of the sign, as well as colours and shades of meaning as words enter one another’s company. Consider, furthermore, that Cummings presents unity between self and nature as an *active* event or chain of events -- “only consider How” (*ViVa* CP 363) as he writes among other examples of his emphasis upon *process*. In Cummings’ ecology we are not dealing with a static correlation of names to things, and therefore not the Adamic sign.

The degree of difference which forms the main topic of this thesis could in view of this be further described as a difference in emphasis: in mainstream modernist poetry the emphasis is as much on distance, objectification (in its numerous senses of an objective view as well as the poetic sign as a “hardened” object), pure intellect, the impersonal, dislocation, difficulty, a tragic alienation from nature, and so on, as it is

on revitalizing a sense of wholeness. Within Cummings' poetry the emphasis is on connectivity, intuition, emotion, identification with nature. Both emphases include non-sentimentality in their various ways but Cummings' "objectivity" (or contemplative distance or non-sentimentality) is more fluid in a Taoist manner: it aims for a movement towards human-sign-nature interaction.

That Cummings saw solidity as a means towards fluidity and integration is made clear in his poetry. An example is a poem in *ViVa* (1931) which tells of "concentric geometries" that are "surely" (that is, appear solid/tangible) and which "sink through algebras of proud/ inwardlyness" followed by "a march outward in the freezing fire of Thickness", and which then (at the conclusion of this painterly poem) "gush silently in a state More/ fluid Than gas" (*ViVa* CP 313). In the same volume, Cummings critiques the fact that "earth's most terrific/ quadruped" -- the elephant -- when shot by humans for profit, "swoons into Billiardballs!" (*ViVa* CP 317). Cummings is therefore, on the one hand, less attracted to meaning in the shapes of billiardballs, or, one dares say, a universe squeezed into a ball (Eliot, 1982:14), or poetic signs that act as unbreakable stones (to which Pound was attracted) (Hall, 1974:28)), or poets that act as steam gauges (Pound, 1985:58), etcetera. On the other hand, his poetry gives voice to a non-complicated and complex affirmation of a sense of natural context created through interacting, sensuous signs that allow for an interlevel interconnectivity between the movement of the sign and the movement of nature.

Chapter 3

Scope: the Extent of Cummings' Poetic Ecology

The poet is not merely an observer of Nature, but is immersed in her, and from thence turns his gaze upon people, upon the age, and upon America. Heretofore, we have had Nature talked of and discussed; these poems approximate to a direct utterance of Nature herself.

John Burroughs, *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person* (1867)

Only the undivided man knows; for only in him in whom there is no division is there no separation from the world, and only he who is not separated from the world can know it. Not in the dialectic of subject and object, but only in the unity with the all is knowledge possible. Unity is knowledge. [...] This knowledge is not knowing but being.

Martin Buber, "The Teaching of the Tao" (1910)

1. Introduction – Cummings: development, categories, and ecology

This Chapter and the next are devoted to a hermeneutic, ecosemiotic reading of Cummings' poetic ecology. The next Chapter focuses mainly on the dynamics or "how" of this poetic ecology; this Chapter focuses mainly on the scope or extent of the ecological dynamics in his poetry. It is not meant as a quantitative exercise of counting poems and ecological effects. Various critics agree that nature is at the heart of Cummings' poetry as we have seen. Numerous poems relate themselves directly to the theme of nature (we will have occasion to "close read" some of them). They are equally devoted to the "how" (the manner of creating a poetic dynamism) of an ecological sensibility -- and not only the theme of nature.

Poets, as Derrida has recently pointed out, have more or less always given voice to nature and to animals especially (2002:377). Cummings does so in a particular way, or by means of processes of semiotic precision: for example, Cummings' employment of blank space, ungrammar, and typographics distinguishes his poetic involvement with nature from that of, say, Walt Whitman or William Wordsworth -- even though he shares concerns and characteristics with these poets. If poets are individualists, also of style, then Cummings is an exponent of this *par excellence*, because he takes the "cellular" nature of semiotics to some of its full integrating potentials. Semiotic units, whether words or phrases or spaces, in his case frequently behave like living cells which tend to integrate and form larger wholes. And this is an active process of a creative and deliberate (also persuasive) rearrangement of grammar and other inherited constraints, with the purpose of creating a sense of (open-ended and natural) unification and integrity.

In short: a consideration of the scope of Cummings' poetry has to include not only its relative extent in terms of the poet's oeuvre, but especially its depth, its dynamics, or its "how" (the main focus of the next Chapter). In the process of describing the scope of Cummings' poetic ecology in this Chapter, some attention will therefore already be paid to some of the dynamics that function in his poetry. This procedure is carried out to prepare the discussion in the next Chapter: that is, a discussion of Cummings' poetic, ecological dynamics/manner/way/"how".

For, one almost always has to keep in mind -- also when it comes to apparent quantities -- that Cummings does not merely write *about* nature: he *writes* nature. To Cummings, the poetic sign must be and is involved in a precision of movement that leads the reader to a sense of natural context (*is* 5 CP 221; Cohen, 1987:186; Webster, 1999:202). Cummings' *eco-logos* is meant to achieve a semiotic, visual, and auditory interaction with natural movement. And this has to be as direct and revitalizing as possible -- in the modern era, and by means of modernist and orientalist poetic dynamics. Two of the main "faces" or extremities of Cummings' oeuvre, lyricism and satire, are therefore the two halves of one heart: an advanced ecological poetic awareness and method of composition. The lyrical aspect affirms, celebrates and moves along with the movement/s of nature, whereas the satirical aspect pricks the pretences of an artificial, human-made modern "world" that has lost touch with nature on various levels, including love between male and female.

Two options offer themselves in an investigation of the scope of Cummings' poetic ecology: one historical, and the other categorical (or generic). One can trace the development of Cummings' poetic ecology through the various volumes published between the 1920s and the 1960s to show a gradual and/or radical deepening or development thereof along a historical trajectory of Cummings' development as a poet. To my mind, this option has a limited application in the case of Cummings, as opposed (for instance) to the case of Eliot. To some extent against my better judgement -- since categorization can be a stifling scholarly activity with results that appear more definitive than they are -- I shall opt mainly for the second route in this Chapter: a journey through Cummings' poetic ecology and its extent in terms of a selection of the various (and to his critics well-known) categories or sub-genres of his poetry such as lyricism, sonnets, love poems, erotic poems, visual-verbal poems, and so on. Evidently, it would make more sense to begin this exploration with the perhaps

simpler and more straightforward (*more*) lyrical works, and to work up to the perhaps more complex (*more*) visual-verbal works.

The reason for this is many-sided, and is fraught with various caveats of a misrepresentation of Cummings' poetry and ecology. Consider that Cummings does not have an intellectualized poetic "vision"¹⁸ equal to Eliot's or Pound's. This has unfortunately led to various unfounded misgivings about his poetic activity, such as the notion that Cummings did not work on his poetry. The complete opposite is the actual case: Cummings worked and reworked his poems (indicated, for example, by Webster (1999:199-210)). On the one hand we cannot point to a Ph.D. study in philosophy or a substantial body of serious criticism in the case of Cummings (in contrast to Eliot). On the other, we can and must make use of the facts that Cummings 1) worked and reworked virtually every word, letter, and space of his poetry and even his letters, often to create the maximum sense of spontaneity, 2) published "critical" prose in his poetic and frequently playful way (far removed from sober prose such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (Eliot) or "The Teacher's Mission" (Pound)) -- prose that nonetheless offers useful insights into his work and his "zeitgeist". And that Cummings 3) kept himself informed of and worked hard to incorporate various artistic and social developments of his day and age into his practice of art, as found in his bulky body of notes kept at the Houghton Library (Harvard University, Cambridge MA). Examples of the latter are his notes from R.H. Blyth's orientalist volumes which Cummings typed down soon after their appearance -- some of which are to be cited in the thesis.

In Milton A. Cohen's phrase, Cummings was a "closet intellectual" (1987:17) who, probably for aesthetic reasons kept his work on his aesthetics in the background, and preferred to pack these into his poetry without prior announcement or post-

¹⁸ I am differentiating between a poetic "vision", a poetic "view", and a "central complex modernist consciousness", since there seems to me to be a difference between the levels of public intellectualization of mainstream modernists such as Pound and Eliot, and that of Cummings. Pound's and Eliot's public intellectualization, as well as the trajectories of their development along tragic, "mature" phases occur to me as "visions" in the full sense. Milton A. Cohen has finally refuted the idea that Cummings was non-intellectual in his excellent book *POET and PAINTER*, but he also makes it clear that Cummings was a "closet intellectual" who kept his profuse analyses of his own aesthetics to himself (1987:17). And Cummings' published intellectual profile is more poetic and less intellectualized than those of Pound and Eliot. To mark these differences, I am using the terms "view", "central consciousness", "outlook", and so forth with reference to Cummings' poetic career. Of course, it could be argued with some conviction that Cummings' supposedly non-intellectual stance merely points to the depths of his orientalist view.

publication critical analysis in public. A consequence is that even the rational aspect of his work has its impact on the reader within the poetic and artistic textual space. Confirmation of this notion is the fact that Cummings used “critical” textual spaces such as the forewords to his poetry, his prose in general, and his notes in particular to continue writing in his cryptic poetic fashion. Even the “critical” space is turned into a more poetic and aesthetic space in this manner (an example is his foreword to his 1938 *Collected Poems* (CP 461)).

It is important to note again in this context that Cummings was quite aware that an orientalist approach to poetry meant the minimum intellectual interference and the maximum poetic and natural vividness of the text. Here one has another possible reason for the fact that Cummings was a “closet intellectual”, something which did not always stand him in good critical stead at a time when a public, intellectualized vision came to be seen as a major part of a good poet’s repertoire. An orientalist natural poetry is one that prefers not to *intellectualize*, although it strives to be a non-sentimental and thought-provoking poetry nonetheless.

To divide Cummings’ oeuvre into various categories poses the threat of viewing some categories as more profound or mature (say, the lyrical category), and others not: such as the visual-verbal category (see Webster, 1995a:113), or the “popular” category consisting of epigraphs, riddles, advertisement slogans, elegies, and so on. As Friedman showed first, despite his insistence on a poetic “vision” that supports Cummings’ work, the poet did not, like other “high” modernists, develop from a weaker, earlier poetry, via a “tragic” phase, into a more salient mature form of poetry (1984:174; 1996:14). From an ecological perspective at least, early poems such as “Spring is” (1925) (& CP 197) and “in Just-/ spring” (& CP 27) are as striking and subtle as much later nature poems including “l(a)” (1958) (95 *Poems* CP 673), “now air is air and thing is thing: no bliss” (1958) (95 *Poems* CP 675), or “i/ never” (1963) (73 *Poems* CP 824). I have deliberately referred to examples that belong to the lyrical as well as the (*more* extremely experimental) visual-verbal categories of his nature poetry -- both early and late -- to indicate that the adjectives “salient” and “major” (with all their implications) cannot be historically or developmentally imposed, directly or in any singular manner, to Cummings’ poetry.

Categories are preferred here above an historical development into mainstream modernist maturity as a means to describe the scope of Cummings’ poetic ecology,

because it could well be the lesser of critical evils in his case. It may be (so to speak) the more appropriate “tool” for an inferral of the scope and dynamics of Cummings’ poetic ecology. The fact is that literally early and literally late Cummings poems exhibit the same strengths, weaknesses, and techniques to varying degrees. Certainly some poems are more experimental and visual-verbal (“birds(“ (*No Thanks* CP 448) published in 1935) whereas others are only *less* experimental and more lyrical (“i thank You God for most this amazing” (*Xaipe* CP 663) published in 1950). As Webster rightly points out, Cummings experiments technically on more or less intense levels with typography, grammar, and the like throughout his oeuvre (1995a:113).

Dividing Cummings’ poetry into categories poses a greater threat: an undermining, however unintended, of the open-endedness of his poetry. For, it is my contention that the uncompromising *open-endedness* of Cummings’ poetry as a whole is perhaps unprecedented in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and that this forms a vital part of the ecological nature of his oeuvre. Virtually everywhere one looks in Cummings’ poetry, open-endedness is signalled. Blank space between poems and lines greets the reader throughout his oeuvre in various degrees, thus signalling an overall potential of a readerly integration of various (clusters of) poems or lines (or even syllables as in the case of the leaf poem (*95 Poems* CP 673)). The general lack of titles throughout his oeuvre intensifies this immediate open-endedness. Here is a signal that Cummings’ poems should not be read as autonomous units only, and certainly not as static and separate achievements or “monuments” of reified textuality¹⁹. Furthermore, poems and volumes often conclude with a precision of inconclusiveness, or an invitation to active open-endedness: an example is the conclusion of the sonnet “i thank You God for most this amazing” (*Xaipe* CP 663) which “concludes” by opening up, as will be shown in this Chapter. Other poems end with commas (*No Thanks* CP 451; *50 Poems* CP 531), in addition to the numerous poems that end without any punctuation (and within blank space). Titles and conclusions of volumes of poetry accentuate open-endedness further still: for example, a 1926 volume title is simply & [AND], and this volume “concludes” with the word “new” (& CP 218). Another

¹⁹ I hasten to add that my ecological reading will slant towards a more integrating approach to Cummings’ poetry, and that nothing prevents one from reading Cummings’ individual poems as autonomous units – the poet evidently intended them for such reading. I am stressing integrating reading because it seems that that has been underemphasized in view of Cummings’ copious indications (via blank space and the lack of titles, etcetera) that his poetry could also be read with a certain open-endedness.

example: the volume *Xaipe* (1950) ends with the word “begin” (CP 669). Aptly, the end poem in his last volume of poetry, *73 Poems* (1963), carries its last full stop four lines before its conclusion -- it ends, that is, in blank space. And these lines suggest that love (and the lovers in particular) is timeless, and that one’s lover looks through “both life and death”, leading to a sense of “merciful wonder” (read also: one-der) that “no world deny may or believe” (*73 Poems* CP 845) -- that is, beyond pale and stagnant opposites and a static “objective” (logical/oppositional) outlook.

Narrowing down the reading of Cummings’ signalling of open-endedness, one must also mention that end-sounds of his lines tend to be the more flexible vowels and voiced consonants of the English language, rather than the unvoiced and literally more closed and harsh unvoiced consonants. Even these end-sounds indicate non-closure and a dynamic continuation of voice -- as will be demonstrated in an examination of a couple of poems in this Chapter. To this should be added Cummings’ osmotic view and employment of semiotic boundaries of all kinds (varying from poetic traditions to grammatical constraints): semiotic barriers in Cummings’ poetry often act as permeable membranes rather than solid closures. As well as a recognition that his poetry is willing to incorporate apparent modern and prosaic trivia such as brand names, advertising slogans, popular songs, and so on²⁰. It is already apparent, then, that open-endedness is a crucial dynamic of his poetry. Such open-endedness invites the reader into a dialogue with the poet -- also in terms of a “novelization” and indeed an ecology of the poetic form²¹.

In some sense, Cummings’ poetry is therefore not about a (linear) *sequencing* of (autonomous) poems at all, but about an ecological readerly event: a significant, and paradoxically clear, “blurring” of the poetic voice, the readerly sensibility, and the

²⁰ The reader may visit Webster’s collection of links, notes, song-snippets, and pictures related to Cummings’ poetry on the official Cummings website, SPRING: <http://www.gvsu.edu/english/cummings/Index.htm>.

²¹ In an essay entitled “The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight”, the ecosemiotician Michael J. McDowell writes: “Bakhtin’s [dialogical] theories may be seen as the literary equivalent of ecology, the science of relationships” (1996:372). Bakhtin’s theory includes the notion of a “novelization” of other genres such as poetry. It involves “a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with the unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)” in Bakhtin’s words (McDowell, 1996:375). And as Zhaoming Qian notes the tendency of fusion in Chinese letters, includes the fusion of poetry and painting, spontaneity and “study” (contemplation), the patterns and workings of the universe and the patterns and workings of culture and mind as found in the Taoist

innermost movement of nature. Clusters of poems, or particular poems published decades from one another, and even particular key words and syllables, are in a sense secondary to their contextual dynamism within and beyond the oeuvre (into nature). The precision of this “blurring” is related to Cummings’ advanced sense of employing signs with clear silhouettes or sensuous edges, as his “theory” of language shows. This “theory”, as we have seen, accentuates a unification of opposites through language (Cummings, 1966:127), and an intratextual movement into extratextual context, as mediated through poetic signs with their individual silhouettes and chameleon-like capacities to merge (Cohen, 1987:186).

It is therefore, too, an essentially *religious* poetry despite its pretences of sheer experimentation. Starting with something as apparently formal as sequencing and arrangement, as well as clusters of poems and the overall impression of the open-endedness of an oeuvre, one soon ends up -- in the case of Cummings as in the case of other modernists and Eliot in particular -- in the realms of belief. Certainly, in reading Cummings, one is struck by the issue of the relations between poetry, belief, and nature. The term “religion”, as Jewel Spears Brooker reminds us in a different context, has an edifying etymology: it means a re-binding, a re-tying-up of disparate and broken things (1994:123, 136). It embodies an active form of wholeness and healing. At bottom, the value of Cummings’ poetry is that it mediates one aspect of wholeness very well indeed, namely an active whole(some)ness of the relations between humankind and nature in modern time²². Cummings’ poetry has a transporting “magic” (of between-ness): it has the potential to move its reader from one space to another, across boundaries such as the (perceived or semiotic) barriers between humankind and nature, male love and female love, the modern and the Romantic, majorness and minorness, and so on.

From the ecosemiotician’s viewpoint, this notion -- that the reader is moved from one space to another -- should be refined: Cummings’ poetry on the whole has the potential to transport the reader, via a careful (dis)arrangement of textual space

tradition especially (1995:145), and also the fusion of poetry and prose (1995:144). Possibly, an ecology of the “prosaic” open-endedness of Cummings’ poetic ecology deserves further study.

²² Whether Cummings’ poetry is not only naturally religious, but Christian, is a debatable and vital issue that falls outside the strict focus of this thesis. Rushworth M. Kidder argues that Cummings is a Christian poet (1979:161), but Friedman critiques in formidable fashion (1996:111) Kidder’s somewhat inventive analyses of some Cumming poems in order to demonstrate his theory. Cummings indeed transgresses and “blurs” boundaries with some significance, and it is not always clear whether his God or god was nature, or a deity such as the Christian God of Unitarianism, and possibly more.

and semiotic categories of all kinds, into an original sense of living natural place. This potential of maximum flexibility, fluidity, and invitation awaits the Cummings reader, and springs from the pages of any Cummings volume: at first glance, blank space (and not titles) meets him or her.

As in other modernist poetries, Cummings' asks of the reader to act as a co-collaborator (Brooker, 1994:71), indeed as the co-creator of the work, and in his case, this unlocks the potential of a revitalization of natural awareness -- a sense of one's very location, or orientation, and active participation, within dynamic nature. And as James Liu carefully explains, this is precisely the motivation and aim of Taoist poetry: a sense of significant flux between poet, reader, and the natural universe (1975:9). Chuang Tzu's statement -- that once the fish (of meaning) has been caught the trammel (language itself) should be left behind (Liu, 1975:40, 51) -- can be understood in this context: poetic language is the vital medium that re-mediate an awareness of vital nature, and then one does not linger any further with the signs that lead there (or here).

To the best of one's knowledge, only one Cummings critic has overtly and freely explored this religious natural potential of Cummings' poetry in our modern, secularized age. There are as many Cummingses, Friedman argues, as there are readers of the poet -- and to Friedman -- the critic who knew Cummings best on a personal basis, and Cummings' best scholar -- *his* Cummings is the "Zen Monk" (1996:173).

Cummings' poetry can act as a substitute for religion, if poetry can act as such at all. To my mind, poetry cannot occupy this space, and one modern individual's poetry can certainly not do so: Cummings' textual self is human, and so was his living self. Yet, poetry *can* -- since it touches upon the deeper nerves of human experience - - be a vital gateway between an artificial modern existence and the far greater significance of belief; and in Cummings' case, deep and "alive" natural orientation. That is, his poetry can be read as a striking modern mediation of "green grace" -- or the gift of (a natural) life. When teaching (Cummings' or Eliot's) poetry, one is not acting as a museum curator, but one is teaching something which "breathes", and this thesis is written in this spirit.

The open-ended wholeness (that is, the ecology) of Cummings' poetry should, furthermore, be read within a given and historically limited context. An entertainment of the notion that Cummings writes a form of natural wholeness does not imply that Cummings' poetry can be viewed as an a-historical phenomenon. Cummings does not reveal an intellectualized modernist "vision" that matures into salient poetry according to this thesis, yet he does reveal a modernist "central complex consciousness" (Quinones, 1985:91), also and especially of nature. There are historical reasons for this -- as will be indicated in the next section of this Chapter which discusses Cummings' relation to Taoism. Such a central complex consciousness has the ability sensitively to register and signify various disparate levels of modern existence and experience. And modern experience carries an impact of the fractured, disparate nature of an overwhelming influx of information and sensibilities. The modern poet must nevertheless combine these in some or the other fashion, as Eliot has eloquently pointed out (1980:38, 40, 64), in 1919 and 1921.

Ecology, as found in Cummings' poetry, hence amounts to all but an avoidance of modern realities, influences, and developments. And if categories are chosen here as a means of exploring the scope of Cummings' poetic ecology it is not done from an a-historical perspective, but with the acknowledgement that an historical approach of a salient, intellectualized, modernist vision as found in Eliot and Pound possibly has a lesser application to Cummings' consistently open-ended poetic approach.

2. Cummings and Taoism

From early to late in his career a somewhat hidden²³ texture of Taoism runs through Cummings' poetry. (This is particularly true when one considers that in the West, haiku, Taoist, and Zen sensibilities can be viewed as more or less interchangeable²⁴.) Taken together, a number of clues from Cummings' poetry, paintings, prose, letters, notes, and his biography point to a centrality of Taoism in his

²³ Taoism *should* be hidden, of course -- as Martin Buber explains, the true Taoist teacher does not know, but lives, and his or her solitude is one of "fullness" like the solitude of the sea -- and that, says Buber, is "the hidden life" (1990:41).

²⁴ Perhaps due to a different and more abrupt historical development in the West and in America as compared to developments in the East, Taoism, Zen, and haiku can be used to designate the broader orientalist layer of the modernist palimpsest, sometimes with more particular reference, and sometimes in general. Friedman, for example, uses Zen and Taoism in tandem (1996:77, 111).

poetry, and indeed to a gradual turning point in the poet's life and poetic career that is directly related to Taoism. This turning point was marked by *some* salient aspects, such as his journey through Russia in 1931.

For this reason I use the term "Taoism" as the interchangeable marker of Cummings' orientalism (that is, also his Zen and haiku aspect, and his overall ecological-oriental aspect). Tracing this Taoist centrality in Cummings' poetic enterprise can be difficult, given that Cummings preferred to build influences and his thoughts about his work into the poetry without sign-posting, as opposed to Pound who marks his oriental work with titles and analysis in critical prose, thus declaring its Chinese origins. Cummings rarely "went public" with these in official criticism or poetic sign-posting. When he did publish his orientalist and other thoughts about aesthetics, it was often done in a more playful and less intellectual fashion, as found for example in a compilation of his prose entitled *E.E. Cummings: A Miscellany* (1965).

A sketch of this Taoist centrality within Cummings' poetry may begin in April 1916, when Cummings published a "hokku" or haiku (*Uncollected CP* 875). Up to the very end of his career when he published a poem such as "l(a)" (*95 Poems CP* 673), Cummings maintained an ecological, Taoist interest and form of expression. In the 1930s, a couple of experiences (especially within Russia) led Cummings to reconsider his life and career, and here the poet evidently decided that Taoism was of great importance to his existence and poetry. Especially in the 1940s an overt concern for Taoism surfaced in Cummings' poetry, as well as in the other forms of his communication. This turning point towards a more direct and accentuated Taoist view should be sketched in some detail, since it informs the recognition that ecological-Taoist patterns and concerns, however hidden they may be on the surface thereof are invaluable interpretative pointers to an essence of Cummings' poetry. Before I turn to this procedure, a proviso should be added as to the extent of ecology and Taoism in Cummings' poetry on the whole.

There is no need, especially in the case of a poet so evidently signalling his preference for open-endedness and diversity, to claim the entire Cummings either for ecology, or for Taoism. To be sure, a sense of ecology or wholeness within his poetry needs to be explored to the greatest possible degree. But this should not lead to the idea that any one critic can embrace the complete Cummings, on whichever

theoretical or philosophical ground. Something in Cummings' poetry will elude the most astute critic, and his poetry will remain somewhat enigmatic as far as one can see. And there *is* an extent to which Cummings' poetry remains simply playful, or *fun* (to use David Chinitz's description (1996:81). And this playful aspect of his poetry does lead to striking poetic effects, even though it cannot be considered as "major" in any rigid sense. Important work on Cummings' poetry stems from a theoretical and aesthetic engagement with the array of his technical and visual-verbal devices and forms: for instance, Max Nänny's article "Iconic Features in E.E. Cummings' Poetry" (2001). Moreover, even if ecological and Taoist sensibilities and patterns are discernible in (for instance) Cummings' erotic poetry, there is also an element in these poems of the pure, spicy celebration of sex itself. And, *strictly* speaking, this celebration falls outside the range of an ecosemiotic or Taoist vision.

Indeed, the body of criticism of those critics who indulge in a positive appreciation of Cummings serves as a kind of combined "primitive indicator" of the high levels of interrelatedness, dynamism, and open-endedness (hence *also* the ecology) of Cummings' poetry. As has been noted in Chapter One, these critics, sometimes from different angles, tend to arrive at an ecological "centre" of Cummings' poetry, even if it is only in the process of moving on to other considerations. Some go straight to the heart of the natural matter, either from an orientalist viewpoint, or not: such as Friedman (Zen and organicism in Cummings), Welch (haiku and nature in Cummings), or Parekh (nature in Cummings). Others start from different angles and are attracted to nature in Cummings, thus providing important insights into his poetic ecology: Webster (whose main emphasis has so far remained the visual-verbal aspect of Cummings' poetry) and Heusser (who sets out with a deconstructive approach to the poet), to mention these intriguing and crucial exponents of Cummings criticism again within this ecological context. Other critics who may initially have reacted more negatively to Cummings, such as R.P. Blackmur or Edmund Wilson, do also provide a "sub-plot" of intriguing ecological insights into the poet's work, sometimes despite themselves -- but this is a theme for Chapter Five of the thesis in which these and similar criticisms of Cummings are revisited.

Whether praised or overlooked in criticism, then, the historical fact remains that Cummings paid overt attention to Taoism, and that a Taoist influence is found in his poetry. As has been stated, this can be inferred from his various forms of

communication, and from these (as will be argued here) it seems that this Taoist interest and its crisis spanned from (at least) the 1930s to (at least) the 1950s.

To begin with available biographical and bibliographical details: in 1933 Cummings published a quite poetic and intensely cryptic journal of his journey into Russia, entitled *Eimi*. As Richard S. Kennedy shows in his compelling biography of Cummings entitled *Dreams in the Mirror* (1980), this book marks an increased intensity of Cummings' beliefs in the individual and the miracle of existence, as well as an increased intensity of his hatred of worldly systems which suppress these sensibilities (1980:327-335). Kennedy highlights Cummings' discovery in Russia of the vital importance of a religious sensibility (1980:334). Cummings' visit to St. Basil's church after his visit to Lenin's tomb brought the poet to the recognition within himself (in his own words) of a "dark poet;a blindman", "darkly communicating with impossible light" (Kennedy, 1980:333). Cummings continued to compare this innermost, reconfirmed self to someone whose "voice is made of silence" and "when the voice pauses the silence is made of voice" (Kennedy, 1980:33).

However, Kennedy does not comment on this clear indication of the *Taoist* aspect of Cummings' discoveries in Russia -- the silence of voice and the voiceness of silence -- besides his notion that it embodies a religiosity in general (1980:334). Central to *Eimi* is a Taoist viewpoint, informed by Cummings' poetic and religious identification with a voiceness of silence and a silence of voice. It finds particular expression when Cummings mixes the experience of a departing train with a full citation from Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* towards the conclusion of *Eimi* -- which conclusion marks a rebirth and the escape from the Russian "unworld". Here Cummings cites section sixteen of the *Tao Te Ching* (1958:419). It implores one to create emptiness up to the highest, to see the heavenliness of earthy existence, and not to forget the eternal lest one fall into sin (Lao Tzu, 1987:33; section 16).

And the turning point clearly signified here continues to inform, form, and characterise Cummings' poetic career. Moving on to the 1940s (and 1950s), a relative wealth of direct indicators of Cummings' Taoist bent surface. In 1940 Cummings firmly wrote in a note that he wished to paint in the manner of the way or Tao (Cohen, 1987:63). In a letter to C.H. Ford of Easter Sunday, 1943, as cited by Webster, Cummings furthermore wrote:

[E]ach poem is a picture [...] 'I write' (whence our word 'graphic') but originally 'I make lines' --cf the Poet-Painter of China) and the paperspace around each poem is a where in which it heres or a surface in which it floats (Webster, 1999:202).

The note presents an essentially Taoist/Chinese/ideogrammatic aesthetic, of the roles of being and nothing on the visual basis of the printed character and blank space. Poems surface and float on the empty and liquid "canvas" of the page, not unlike the emergence of creatures such as trees within the vast, flowing space of nature. Indeed, Taoist paintings are known for their employment of blank space, and in transposing the medium of painting to the medium of poetry, Cummings showed in this note a refined own aesthetic of Chinese "writing-painting". Furthermore, the note stresses a sense of orientation or active natural location: the page is a *where* in which the poem *heres*. That is, the poem is an ecological medium that creates a sense of dynamic location with and within nature. The page is also a kind of "pool" that reflects one's (natural) being. Two years later, in May 1945, Cummings composed a fake "interview" (for an art exhibition) between an "artist" and an "interviewer", part of which reads:

'Well, let me see... oh yes, one more question: where will you live after this [Second World] war is over?'
 'In China, as usual.'
 'China?'
 'Of course.'
 'Whereabouts in China?'
 'Where a painter is a poet' (1966:317).

Cummings was also a painter of at least some renown. And it is important that he strove for and achieved an interartistic mergence or emergence of artistic impression and expression. He transgressed the inherited and somewhat entrenched modern, Western barrier between the disciplines of writing and painting. Again, it is clear that Cummings envisaged a third dimension or voice of greater and open-ended, ongoing unity beyond static opposites and categories: an area where artistic disciplines and media inform and feed upon one another. The playful "interview" reveals that Cummings sought and found an aesthetic related to China where art and nature co-habit intimately -- especially in Taoism.

As has been discussed in some detail in Chapter One of the thesis, Cummings continued to suggest Taoism as a way of life to Pound in a 1946 letter (Ahearn, 1999:202). In the same year, on January 31, Cummings wrote to Paul Nordorf, a musician who set some of Cummings' poetry to music -- to Cummings' delight

(Kennedy, 1980:384). In this letter, Cummings speculated on the Taoist symbol of perfection as sent to him by Nordorf (1972:170; letter 136). Cummings asked Nordorf whether this symbol presented a graphic combination of the female Venusian cross and the male Marsian spear (1972:170; letter 136) as used in biology then and today. In particular, Cummings wanted to know from Nordorf whether this graphic Taoist symbol represented a flower (1972:170; letter 136) -- and it looks like a strange little flower: .

Most poets are aware that the flower symbolises poetry, and so too in Cummings' case (*is* 5 CP 262). In fact, in 1925 Cummings compared the making of art to the crash of a delicately tossed "burlesk rose", an event which takes one into a third voice or dimension of experience, beyond the flat surface of rational and materialistic oppositional expectations (1966:128). In this context, Cummings highlights a Freudian notion:

Just as our fair land of dollars and no sense was not always blest with prohibition, even so language was not always blest with 'opposites'. Quite the contrary. A certain very wise man has pointed out (in connection with the meaning of dreams) that what 'weak' means and what 'strong' means were once upon a time meant *by one word* (1966:127).

This earlier Freudian aesthetic either anticipates, or is already built upon, Cummings' oriental leaning (the 1916 "hokku" suggests that the former is the case). It is no surprise that Cummings felt attracted to Taoism given his interest in a third voice of open-ended integrity. And Cummings was fully aware that this voice or dimension functions beyond the "two-dimensional" preoccupation with dualisms that characterise modern human thought (1966:126), as expressed in his playfully entitled 1925 essay "You Are Not Mad, Am I?".

Let us turn to the work itself, the poetry and painting. Parallel with the various notes and letters cited above, Cummings' art indicates an ongoing Taoist concern after his experience in Russia and the publication of *Eimi*. In 1944, Cummings painted with oil on cardboard, a painting entitled "the road (Tao)" (Lopez, 2002). This painting shows a blueish road disappearing into a pinkish sky blotted with green forms. Various other paintings of landscapes, often fluidly portrayed as if mountains, sky, and trees would "melt" into one (also in water colour), could be added here as further indications of Cummings' natural interest and (even if indirectly) his Taoist

sensibility. A good example is one of his paintings of Mount Chocorua²⁵ (which dominated Cummings' sky at Joy Farm).

Also in 1944, a volume of poetry entitled *l x l* [One Times One] mentions the father/s of Taoism, Lao Tzu, by name. It should be stressed that Cummings rarely mentions an influence directly in his poetry. This poem describes a character who would not pay attention to the essence of life, despite the fact that several great minds were available to him in order to show him the vitality of such an essence of life (*l x l* CP 553). The poem ultimately seems to imply that a close encounter with death, or perhaps death itself did finally manage to show the character that living instead of merely un-dying was crucial (*l x l* CP 553). Besides Plato and one or two other names, this poem states that "lao// tsze *certainly* told/ him" (*l x l* CP 553; my emphasis -- JET). Ample blank space between the two parts of Lao Tzu's name provides a plain indication that blank space also plays a Taoist role in Cummings' poetry.

In the same 1944 volume, a poem as seemingly unrelated to the Taoist theme as Cummings' elegy to the farm caretaker that he knew at Joy Farm, Sam Ward (Foerster, 1997:23), reveals ecological-Taoist patterns of a third, organic voice beyond static oppositional expectations. This poem reveals a Cummingsian line-by-line form which is at least reminiscent of a similar form of "English-as-Chinese" poetry or "ideogrammatic writing", as described by Robert Kern in terms of Pound and Gary Snyder (1996:226). Such writing increases the focus on the line-as-unit of composition and interpretation:

rain or hail
sam done
the best he kin
till they digged his hole

:sam was a man

stout as a bridge
rugged as a bear
slickern a weazel
how be you

(sun or snow)

²⁵ An electronic copy of this painting is accessible on the website devoted to the orientalist influence in American modernism, hosted by Yale University:
<http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/orient/mod11.htm>.

gone into what
like all them kings
you read about
and on him sings

a whippoorwill:

heart was big
as the world aint square
with room for the devil
and his angels too

yes,sir

what may be better
or what may be worse
and what may be clover
clover clover

(nobody'll know)

sam was a man
grinned his grin
done his chores
laid him down.

Sleep well

(1 x 1 CP 568)

Parts of the poem adopts Sam's rustic voice with a greeting such as "slickern a weazel/ how be you". (This has to be pronounced in true American fashion to be appreciated.) And in this elegy, the arrangement and manipulation of opposites are subtle and striking. The poem suggests a potentially long list of opposites. Some of these include softness versus hardness ("rain or hail"), life versus death ("till they digged his hole") (stanza 1), and "gone into what [death]" (stanza 4). Strength and subtlety/flexibility are opposed again in stanza 3 which compares Sam to a (rigid) bridge, a (more flexible, still solid) bear, and a (quite flexible) slick weazel. Stanza 4 opposes heat and cold ("sun or snow") -- note the preposition "or" here. Royalty versus rusticness, life versus death, and probably an artificial life versus a natural one are some of the opposites implied in stanzas 5 and 6. Stanza 7 takes opposites to some of their most entrenched extremities: a "round" or cyclic and earthy heart (Sam's) is opposed to squareness (which is not an option according to this stanza -- "the world aint square"). And this stanza further suggests that Sam, like any human, had an endless capacity for evil versus an endless capacity for good ("room for the devil/ and his angels too"), although it somewhat deliberately refuses to suggest that

Sam was an angel. Stanza 8 contains at least some irony with its short and unexpected “yes,sir” enveloped in blank space. (Unexpected: the other stanzas deliberately highlight *things* or *creatures* such as rain, hail, sun, snow, a hole, a bridge, a whippoorwill (an American nightjar), etcetera.)

It embodies a turning point in the poem: the term “sir” does double (or unifying) duty especially in such close vicinity with the word “yes”. The latter is one of Cummings’ key words which he also describes as a completely positive place or state of being, for instance in “i thank You God for most this amazing” (*Xaipe* CP 663). Viewed from this perspective, the “sir” in “rain or hail” possibly marks, simultaneously 1) the irony that such a man had to live as a mere servant, 2) the fact that Sam is saluted in this elegy, and 3) the contrast between Sam’s earthy (indeed humble and true-to-life) “royalty” or nobility as opposed to what the world deems to be royal.

Stanzas 9 and 10 dissolve the suggested opposites as listed above (note that they have “threatened” to dissolve all along -- rain versus hail are both examples of the weather, for example). These stanzas set out with a clear set of opposites: “what may be better/ *or* what may be worse” (my emphasis -- JET), but then the lines continue to suggest the (at first seeming to be obscure) “*and* what may be clover/ clover clover” (my emphasis -- JET). The switch from “or” to “and” is the subtle indicator of the significance of “clover”, here repeated to a *third* degree. Clover crowns usually consist of three leaves. And each leaf usually consists of two unified lobes. This suggests a third dimension beyond opposites, in these various manners -- should one consider the nature of the clover plant with the care that the elegy requires. It does not matter, and did not matter to Sam, what was better *or* worse (oppositional) -- instead, the elegy is meant to demonstrate that to Sam (and the poetic speaker), what matters and mattered, is or was the greenness of existence itself: a unity of human *and* earthy sensibilities (as is also suggested by the 4-into-1 line patterns of the stanzas). This clover to the third degree could well be the deepest salutary moment of this elegy.

The line “nobody’ll know” presents a paradox: a “nobody” (in the eyes of the world) really will or *does* know in the deepest sense, because he knows earth, and because artificial worlds such as royalty does not matter to him. This “nobody”

occurs in other poems in a positive sense²⁶, and could well be related to Cummings' Taoist sense of the now-here-nowhere. No-(particular)-thing, and no-(eminent)-body are at least *related* to Cummings' Taoist sensibilities of that nothing from which nature continues to emerge by itself, and, at most, these are central to Cummings' poetic outlook.

The elegy concludes in the final two stanzas (once opposites have been resolved) with a strong denouement, and the sense that death, to one such as Sam, is a form of blissful sleep, a final and continuing return to the earth that he knew well. Typical of Cummings' emphasis on dynamism and continuation, in this elegy as in other poems, is a line *sans* full stop, subsequent to a full stop. Sam has passed through the eye of the needle (full stop/death/burial) into a greater Sleep than this artificial world can offer; and (possibly) the sleep or "dying" that has been a natural part of (his) natural existence all along.

As we have seen, Taoist poetics accentuates a state of natural integrity that proceeds beyond rational-oppositional appearances of a human-made (and symmetrical, hierarchical, dualistic) world order, in which nature is merely the exploitable other. Cummings' third voice, at least influenced by Taoism, finds its own unique form of expression in the careful play and dissolution of opposites as found in an elegy such as "rain or hail". Again, it needs to be pointed out that this does not imply a quietistic harmony of arrival -- the poem's contradictions are crisp and clear, rustic and earthy, too. Of course, a reader who is sensitive to the ecological-Taoist undercurrent of Cummings' poetry will more readily be able to bring this aspect to the critical surface, even if most or all readers -- including those that do not pay attention to Taoism as such in Cummings' poetry -- will subliminally sense its impact.

²⁶ For example, in an elegy to a farmer, Uncle Sol, the speaker states that "nobody loses all the time" (*is* 5 CP 239). As the poem shows, it is precisely through losing that Uncle Sol "wins": after a lifetime of commercial farming failures, he is victorious when he eventually starts a "worm farm" (*is* 5 CP 239). Being-a-nobody is the ultimate reward in the most positive sense according to this poem. Spring, according to another poem, is something that "nobody may keep" (73 *Poems* CP 816) -- that is, only (positive) nobody *may keep* (positive) spring. The paradox is that the fool (nobody) who remains close to earth or in touch with the rhythm of existence truly is somebody precisely because an artificial world that does not consider him or her does not bother him or her: rather, he or she remains in touch with the substance, dynamism, and nothing of earthy being.

A short poem in a much later volume, *73 Poems* published posthumously in 1963, summarizes Cummings' ecological perspective in terms of a third voice or even a third era in Western civilization, with a view to (our original) nature:

wild(at our first)beasts uttered human words
 --our second coming made stones sing like birds
 but o the starhushed silence which is our third's (73 *Poems* CP 844)

As an autonomous poem, perhaps some will feel that this does not succeed. To the Cummings reader, here is another brief insertion which clarifies some complexities of his other more complex poems, and which yet offers an open-ended conclusiveness or satisfaction of its own. Not a contender for the "major poem" category, the blank space surrounding it as well as its arrangement of three lines, and even the significant role of the "o" in its third line, all provide such a reader with poetic fulfilment. Especially since seemingly "ordinary" signs on the surface of the poem actually evoke several contextual shades and colours to the more avid Cummings reader, who will have come across them in other poems or writings (for example, the "o", the word "coming", and the three-line arrangement itself).

And the poem manages to summarize, poetically, an animist history of Western civilization. The first line indicates Western pagan-animist history when trees and nature in general enjoyed (what we would today term) religious and personal stature -- and which continues in a paler form in fairy tales, when animals speak. The second line refers to the major turning point of Christ's incarnation: yet the link with the first era is not lost, since Christ's miracles made (natural) stones sing like (natural) birds. Nature was given voice once more, or: people in Western civilization could see with their innermost eye once more. By yoking together a metaphor of stones (that cry out God's name in the Bible) and birds singing, the speaker is trying to bring together the vertical and horizontal relations between God and nature -- a quite similar concern is central to Eliot's essay "The Idea of A Christian Society" (1980:290-291) (see Chapter One of the thesis).

Any notion of three or a third takes on extra significance in Cummings' poetry as has been demonstrated here -- for example, the "two" of "now" and "here" merging into the third (one) of "nowhere" -- and this third line is no exception. A Cummings reader can reach the point where a third line, or groups of lines that intimate the number three, acts as an "indice" of a kind that refers to third-ness or active and

unifying integrity beyond the “two-ness” of opposition. In this third line, Cummings envisages or announces a time in Western civilization during which yet another significant return to nature will be or has been made. It will be or is an era of “starhushed silence”, a cosmological era, probably also related to a recovery of the relations between humans and nature, and possibly also a rediscovery of natural poetics such as Taoism. However, the star is a symbol of Christ, especially in the Unitarian tradition in which Cummings grew up (Kennedy, 1980:357-358) -- and the link with Christianity is therefore also woven into the third line of this economical poem which ultimately states both an innocence of Western history and an innocence of sexuality.

In Cummings' oeuvre, the letter “o” plays the role of a graphic indicator of cyclic wholeness as well as an entrance or gateway into growing integrity. For example, the first lines of *73 Poems* read “O the sun comes up-up in the opening/ sky” (*73 Poems* CP 773). That is, the letter “o” suggests an arrival of the new, and an “opening” or entrance into a state of natural appreciation. Another poem, “maybe god” (*Xaipe* CP 652) ends with the lines: “and floating-// ly int// o” -- this stretched word and its isolated “o” clearly suggest an open-ended and cyclic entrance. In addition, the “o” in “wild(at our first)beasts uttered human words” could also graphically indicate the cyclical shape of stars themselves. In short, this poem celebrates a celestial and animist narrative that runs through Western civilization, in which heavenliness and earthiness inform one another, whether in the form of the Incarnation (as to Christians), or in the form of a cosmological awareness of one's place within nature, or on the basis of sensuality -- and all three at once.

One is tempted to move from this short poem to the subsequent and last poem in *73 Poems*, for in it the speaker states that “all [artificial or human-made] worlds have halfsight” (*73 Poems* CP 845). The poem goes on to cross-stitch opposites in Cummingsian fashion, linking life's eye with the sight of the spiritual, and death's eye with the sight of spirits that appear “in the guise of things” (*73 Poems* CP 845). And it concludes that only love's eye, especially between male and female lovers, is able to see the whole beyond these various opposites. According to the poem, the “axis of the universe” is the place where opposites dissolve, and this place is (occupied by) love (*73 Poems* CP 845). From here on, one could move to the focal motif of twilight in Cummings' poetry (Webster, 1999:199): twilight, where and when opposites such

as day and night dissolve into one another. An emergence-of-mergence underpins much of Cummings' poetic concern, and the attraction that Taoism held for him should be understood from the perspective of this recognition.

Another short poem of 1940 stipulates love as the "every only god// who spoke this earth so glad and big" (*50 Poems* CP 526), and yet another (of 1935) shows that love is the place through which all places move with brightness of peace (*No Thanks* CP 443). And a 1940 poem "hate blows a bubble of despair into" states that love "makes the little thickness of the coin" (*50 Poems* CP 531), i.e., love is that which *dynamically* continues to combine dual sides into slender and tangible substance. These poems are from two different volumes, slightly different historical times in Cummings' career, and although they have the gentle, mammoth theme of love in Cummings' poetry in common, each adds a dimension, a context, to the other - and these contexts reach out to, inform, and interact with one another. This is typical of Cummings' contextually precise flexibility and employment of an open, persuasive dynamism.

The open-endedness of Cummings' poetry has been demonstrated thus: starting with clearly Taoist influences in poems of the 1940s, one has now reached the very last of Cummings' officially published poems in 1963. Instead of lingering further with this last poem, it is perhaps necessary to write that in the same (last) volume, a clear and direct signal of Taoism is (still) found.

who are you, little i

(five or six years old)
peering from some high

window, at the gold

of a november sunset

(and feeling: that if day
has to become night

this is a beautiful way)

(*73 Poems* CP 824)

Not one of Cummings' most striking poems for the reason that it is perhaps just too easy and relaxed in form and theme, this poem nonetheless shows that Cummings' Taoist considerations continued up to the end of his poetic project.

Taoism, as has been indicated, stresses that the natural way (and in fact the essence of natural change itself) consists of opposites (such as day and night, winter and summer) that dissolve into one another in accordance with nature's rhythms. It also stresses a child-like perception (Lao Tzu, 1987:39; section 28), devoid of egotistical desires and complications, of this natural or "beautiful way". This poem clearly states these Taoist sensibilities in so many words, and Cummings was too aware of orientalism and Taoism in particular as has been demonstrated here, for this to be an accident.

The word "become" is another key word in Cummings' oeuvre (see, for example, his foreword to his 1938 *Collected Poems* (CP 461)), since it does unifying duty: it combines two sensibilities, that of growth (be-coming (into) something else, other, or more) as well as beauty (that which looks becoming). As this poem further states, the rational and grammatical barrier between i (subject/poetic voice) and you (other/child) is also meant to dissolve in the process of sharing the focal experience of sunset. Given that the poem was published post-humously, after a time when youth and age would have been on the poet's mind, it is also possible that the poem is meant to dissolve the barrier between age (i/poetic voice) and youth (you/child), in view of the ongoing way of nature. A way which continues to incorporate and supersede such opposites: as creatures grow old, new creatures are already growing. (Another poem employs a hyphen to suggest a unified "someone" referred to as little "you-i" who flies a kite (*I x I* CP 593).)

So far, this discussion of Taoism in Cummings has revealed a couple of vital interpretative clues in terms of his poetry. Firstly, a historical sequencing of his development as a poet, as well as (possibly) the linear sequencing of his poems themselves from volume to volume are less important than the open-endedness of his work. That is, Cummings creates a sense of *context* with such ease, agility, and precision that reading his poetry turns into a dizzying and satisfying experience of contexts evoked within contexts, and of semiotic parts and spaces that tend to melt into greater context as much as they retain their own flexible autonomy. One cannot read his lower case "i", for instance, without evoking its numerous contexts: of humility ("i" and "You" as found in "i thank You God for this most amazing" (*Xaipe* CP 663)), smallness (physically, graphically), maleness (the upright line and the dot jumping outward and upward from it), child-likeness (as we have seen here), and

location/rootedness/earthiness (and hence humility again, of someone who finds the self within the interactive vastness of natural existence). It further suggests simultaneity: a transgression of grammatical constraints occurs in one and the same motion that an increase in significance and various graphical effects are achieved, consciously or subliminally, so that the poem confronts the reader at once with the breaking of a known rule and the establishment of a new poetic notation. In Friedman's words when he discusses Cummings' (Zen/Taoist) notion of the very song of singing which is silence, the essence of singing, and of Cummings' technique (one may add), is that it "*opens out the implications faster than it closes them up*" (1996:55; my emphasis -- JET).

Secondly, whereas the "ordinary" Cummings reader will experience and enjoy this open-endedness and ecological-Taoist dynamic of his poetry, the critic is faced with some difficulty in handling its elusive simplicity, complexity, and dynamism. Cummings cannot be "captured" in (theoretical) language with finality. (Again: this does not imply that his poetry and poetics should *not* be and has not been explored to the fullest possible degree by scholars.) A poetry without titles, and with a deliberate-yet-unobtrusive non-autonomy -- and a poetry which is, moreover, focused on an absence of intellectualized intervention -- is not ready-made for the critic.

Thirdly, Cummings' poetry is probably lateral, a poetry of the relation between self, nature, and other (with some elements of a verticality towards God or a god), and yet, it is in this very lateral aspect that its depths occur and continue to move (one). A predominantly lateral (or self-nature)²⁷ poetry in terms of religion such as Cummings', nonetheless involves various (vertical, three-dimensional, diagonal, central) dimensions of the poetic adventure of ongoing human location and orientation within ongoing nature.

Fourthly and most importantly, Cummings' poetry on key occasions reveals an intense interrelatedness of Taoism, his ideogrammatic technique, an active sense of natural location/orientation, and ecology or wholeness. Since Taoism is written first in the form of Chinese ideograms, and since it aims at evoking a heightened awareness of dynamic natural location, such interrelatedness makes evident sense and

²⁷ One has in mind Martin Buber's distinction between the I-It emphasis of Taoism, in some contrast to the I-Thou emphasis in Judaism (1990:x).

should be expected on occasion in Cummings' oeuvre (examples to be discussed under the rubric of Cummings' ecological dynamics -- in Chapter Four -- include the leaf poem (95 *Poems* CP 673) and the hummingbird poem (73 *Poems* CP 827)).

Nina Hellerstein's sophisticated oriental analysis of the French writers Paul Claudel and Henri Michaux inadvertently has Cummings' ideogramatics written all over it. A brief analysis of this article, entitled "Calligraphy, Identity: Scriptural Exploration as Cultural Adventure" (published in 1991), will provide a closer formulation of the orienting ecological dynamic of (some of) Cummings' poems. Besides the leaf and hummingbird poems, most or all of Cummings' "skinny" vertical poems such as "blac" (50 *Poems* CP 487) could be related to his ideogrammatic dynamic.

"The rich visual resources of the Chinese writing system suggest a means to rediscover the original relationship between nature and man", begins Hellerstein (1991) -- that system has the capacity "to reawaken the physical life in language, and to return it to its elemental connection with magic and the absolute" (1991). If we may view Cummings' typewriter as a unique brush -- given his painterly orientations in typing -- we may see with Hellerstein that in Chinese calligraphy and in Cummings' poetry the "brush stroke represents the meeting point between the unique, subjective personality of the scriptor, and the universal laws of nature" (1991). Contrary to standard Western writing, poets influenced by Chinese calligraphy do not consider writing instruments "to be purely inert, mechanical auxiliaries" (Hellerstein, 1991). Rather, such a poet may be dependent "upon the organic, concrete qualities of his materials and their connections with nature" (Hellerstein, 1991). The poet "must arrive at a state of harmony with his materials" because "the human artist is himself an integral part of the natural world and his innermost sense cannot be separated from it" (Hellerstein, 1991). In other words, "human activity is simply another form of the creative energies of nature" -- even when the modernist poet such as Cummings expressed this on the rather mechanical typewriter (which yet opened up new possible ways of integrating a painterly sense of writing and natural being). "The Oriental calligrapher's goal is to understand and participate in the dynamic rhythm and energy of nature, in its abstract and fundamental laws", according to Hellerstein (1991). As we have seen, Cummings certainly approached a similar Chinese and Taoist aesthetic.

Such writing offers the opportunity to “pursue a meditation upon the nature of the reading and writing experience, both Oriental and Western” (Hellerstein, 1991) -- the notion of a middle ground comes to mind again. Hellerstein’s French exponents of such writing clearly intimate that “the movement of reading [should] be a descending one, recalling the downward vertical movement of reading Oriental characters” (1991). In Cummings’ “thin” poems such as the leaf poem, such descent is quite evident. “This vertical layout and its parallel use of blank space are intended to liberate the text from the mechanical linearity and the analytic syntax of Western writing” (Hellerstein, 1991). The “vertical axis is the ‘natural’ direction of thought”, and such natural direction evidently relates itself to “the movement of gravity and, even more, to the upright position of the human being” (Hellerstein, 1991) -- Cummings’ gravitational poems should also be read for their possible sense of human uprightness. Indeed, Hellerstein’s subsequent notion ties in well with Cummings’ leaf poem which gravitates towards the fragment “iness” (CP 827) that indicates selfhood: earthy gravity and human uprightness imply (human) balance, and a downward poem may be concomitant with a tendency to move “gradually towards the self” (1991). In the process of gravitational downward writing/typing and reading, the “right and left hands” and the right and left hand margins of a poem could be returned to their “traditional symbolism: the left position, the more ‘sinister’ one, is [...] reserved for the mysterious Other” (Hellerstein, 1991). In Cummings’ gravitational poems such as the leaf poem and “!blac” could imply a restoration of the balance between the left and right hand margins, contra the more entrenched poetic habit of writing towards the right hand margin where line breaks, end sounds, full stops, and so forth highlight it -- whereas the left hand margin is the space where little more than enjambment occurs. In short, such poems may restore the fact that the left hand margin has traditionally been somewhat under-accentuated. These poems could indeed be aimed at the implied left-right balance of an upright (balanced) human adventure on gravitational earth within the void.

“The use of both vertical and horizontal axes”, continues Hellerstein (1991), “has the effect of opening up the space of the page, of giving it symbolic dimensions, thus expanding the field of the text to englobe the cosmos itself”. In other words, “we discern the influence of Chinese and Japanese aesthetics, in which the empty space in a painting or surrounding a written text plays as active a role as the written or painted

elements" (Hellerstein, 1991). For "the Taoists, whose influence is fundamental in this area, it is a manifestation of the primordial, fertile Void, out of which all things are created" (Hellerstein, 1991). Blank space intimates the nowhere from which the now-here emanates and to which it returns in Cummings' view, as has been indicated. And this has textual implications as much as cosmological ones: "whiteness [blank space] serves to emphasize the brilliance and dynamism of the Chinese characters, which seem to burst out of the void into life" -- Cummings' poems can indeed make a similar direct and refreshing impression upon one. These procedures are not meant to double significance for the reader, but instead they should present him or her with a unity of "the dynamics of human psychic energy, the rhythms of scriptural gesture, and those of nature" (Hellerstein, 1991). Indeed, in many of Cummings' poems a Taoist and sometimes ideogrammatic unity of writing, reading, and nature is the dynamic result.

Overall, in reading Cummings from a Taoist and ecological perspective one should be on the lookout for indications of an active orientation within nature of a kind with Hellerstein's analysis of Western adaptations of Chinese "writing". Such active orientation will include the following "fundamental laws" of nature and human adventure: indications of the void or nowhere from which nature continues to emerge as much as poems emerge from a blank page, indications of gravity or downwardness, indications of balance or left-right restoration, and indications of uprightness.

That Cummings employs an ideogrammatic style of his own has been known -- if slightly under-emphasized -- for some time. Sister Mary David Babcock entitles her 1963 essay "Cummings' Typography: an Ideogrammatic Style". Her argument is that Cummings' poetry does for the American reader what "Chinese ideograms do for the reader of Chinese" (1963:123). She demonstrates this at the hand of various "ideogrammatic" interpretations of five or six poems. Her theoretical ground is Pound's and Fenollosa's prose about the nature of Chinese; and what the ideogram does, according to her, is to create "aliveness" (1963:115), to provide (visible) pictures of (intrinsic) things and meanings (1963:115, 119), and (importantly) to "venture into the realm of simultaneity" (1963:120), which includes, to my mind, a dynamic unity of (natural) experience.

Since the time of her argument visual-verbal analyses of Cummings' poetry have developed considerably. It is necessary to reconsider Babcock's valuable

ideogrammatic intuitions with a view to some of these developments. Using the theories of C.S. Peirce and Roman Jakobson, Max Nänny distinguishes two types of iconicity in Cummings' visual-verbal work: *imagic* iconicity which "consists in a sign that resembles its referent with respect to some of its characteristics" (2001:209), and *diagrammatic* iconicity which is "of a somewhat more abstract nature" and consists in a similarity of the *relationships* between the sign and the (temporal or other) *relationships* of its referent: for instance, *veni, vidi, vici* is diagrammatically iconic of a sequence of events (2001:210). An example of the former (imagic iconicity) is the much-cited poem "Buffalo Bill's" (*Tulips* CP 90) which looks like a horse's skull according to Nänny (2001:220).

Where would an ideogrammatic aspect in some of Cummings' poems fit, in terms of this useful distinction? Possibly, the function of Cummings' occasional ideogrammatic play of signs is active orientation along the lines of Hellerstein's orientalist human adventure. As has been indicated in this section, Cummings' own view of making poetic lines also suggests an orientation: both in terms of a pictorial sensuality of making those lines, and in terms of viewing the page as a "where" in which a poem "heres". This includes a restoration of the value of the (other-ly) left-hand margin of the poem, in poems such as Cummings' "l(a)" (*95 Poems* CP 673) and "i/ never" (*73 Poems* CP 827) -- these poems are treated in detail in Chapter Four of the thesis. Imagic and diagrammatic features may be combined in this process: for example, "i/ never" (as will be shown) combines an imagic aspect (the appearance of a hummingbird's head) with a diagrammatic one (relations between signs that are actively related to dynamic relations within nature).

Provisionally, Cummings' ideograms may be seen as one of his ecomemes, or as part of his *eco-logos*. Two of Nänny's categories of diagrammatic instances of iconicity in Cummings may be used to underscore this probability: *movement* (2001:224) and *change* (2001:227). These are viewed as intrinsic to nature within deep ecology, ecology, and Taoism. Taken rigorously, his ideograms would of course be examples of *diagrammatic* iconicity: a set of (poetic/typographical) relations are related to a set of (referential/natural) relations. Taken strongly, or to the full, however, this would moreover imply not a "somewhat more abstract" category of iconicity, but rather one that breaks through abstractions into the purest sense of (one's being on) earth. That is, the poem complexly indices relations of active and

physical *place*. Taoism is certainly aimed at the latter poetic event, as we have seen, and Taoism is “written” first in the Chinese ideogram.

Whether the West interprets (or can ever interpret) ideograms in the way that the Chinese do, is (again) not the point at stake here. Instead, an awareness of one’s (mis)understanding of the ideogram is necessary as Eric Hayot states (1999:530) (and such awareness is somewhat lacking in Babcock’s essay). But it has been demonstrated here that Cummings aimed for a Taoism of his own, and his ideogrammatic methods (where and when they do apply to his work) would complement an ecological reading of his poetry. A study of the extent and dynamics of his poetic ecology and Taoism must take note of this.

One of Cummings’ landscape paintings, not dated and entitled “waterfall” according to Ken Lopez (2002), emphasizes nature’s steepness (depth and height), and this is akin to Taoist landscape paintings²⁸: for example, Wang Wei’s work (see Qian, 1995:98) with their bullet-shaped, steep and deep mountains. A first glance at a reproduction of Cummings’ “waterfall” vertically reminds one of Taoist painting. But an important difference is that, whereas most Taoist pictures are in black and white, or in pale shades of colour, Cummings’ “waterfall” offers a myriad of colours that seem to fuse into one another. In general, it could be said that in Cummings’ poetry, Taoism also remains discernible under a surface of typographical and other forms of quite Western, and totally Cummingsian and colourful experimentation. Conversely, such experimentation more often than not evokes an ecological, and Taoist, response from the reader.

A sketch of Cummings’ Taoist tendency is incomplete without reference to his study (as found in his notes kept at the Houghton Library) of R.H. Blyth’s volumes on orientalism. These four volumes, collectively entitled *Haiku*, appeared between 1949 and 1952, and they had a substantial influence on a number of prominent American writers, including Cummings who studied volumes one and two. Cummings participated in a first burgeoning or burst of modern orientalism which centred on Pound and Fenollosa, early in his career (the 1910s), and he also had the

²⁸ At the Arthur M. Sackler art museum at Harvard University, Cambridge MA, an exhibition of landscape paintings from China, Korea, and Japan was held at the time of my visit (JET) in May 2001. Entitled “Streams and Mountains without End”, some of these paintings exhibited the same striking and vertical “steepness” of landscape, and one of the memorable paintings in this collection, by Lan Ying (17th century) had a waterfall as a central motif.

opportunity to participate in this second Blythian burst of the late 1940s and the 1950s -- an orientalist “explosion”, so to say, that continues via the Beat generation of the 1960s to this day in the work of authors such as Gary Snyder. Other authors influenced by Blyth include Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and J.D. Salinger (Yoshimura, 2001:2). As the Japanese haiku scholar and poet Ikuyo Yoshimura recently stated, with “the Zen Buddhism boom in the United States, Blyth’s books assumed something of the aura of holy books for haiku poets” (2001:1). At the least, Cummings was immersed in some of these volumes, and he meticulously typed notes on or from these volumes.

As Yoshimura points out, Blyth considered the Zen spirit and haiku to be the same essence or form of experience (2001:1). And as has been suggested in the thesis, Cummings’ poetry can also be read as an embodiment of finding an own, unique, and Western/American way of composing an ecological and Taoist/Zen/haiku interactivity with and within nature. It is clear, for instance, that Cummings identified with the Blythian idea that natural (what I term ecological) poetry is not *literary* (see Yoshimura, 2001:5). “Haiku take away as many words as possible between the thing itself and the reader”, reads one of these Cummings notes (bMs Am 1823.7 (64) folder 4). Cummings’ minimalism or economy -- the “smallness” of his poems or lines -- is therefore directly related to his Taoism. Or, another note, from Chuang Tzu’s thought (as Cummings indicates in the note): “The Great Way does not express itself;/ Perfect eloquence does not speak” (bMs Am 1823.7 (64) folder 4). That Cummings’ poetry does not aim to be “high” or eloquent literature with an unmistakable and clear, objectified voice, should (once more) be viewed from this Taoist perspective.

What can a poetry that does not “speak”, *do* -- in this oriental sense? And how can a poet in the modern West, where differentiation, intellectualization -- and self-referential language itself -- are foregrounded to such an extent (as expounded in Chapter Two of the thesis) manage (yet) to communicate something of that immediacy and directness of the here, now, and nowhere of natural experience? In all likelihood, such a poetry would have to be maximally suggestive, and it would have to rearrange, fragment and recombine if necessary, the constraints of conventional (Western) language. (This would include typographical and ideogrammatical

rearrangements.) Such a poetry would have to actively *mediate* between the modern reader and ancient and fresh and continuing nature.

Cummings' poetry is precisely such a poetry. Dazzled by his devices (such as his typography) as much as any other Cummings reader, and enjoying their mental challenges and puzzles, their humour, complexity and contradictions, it is true for this reader that these complexities overall are dynamic and may lead to a revitalizing, substantial, and yet also playful and comic²⁹ orientation within natural existence, experience, and context. Not a substitute for religion, but nonetheless a vital poetic experience of natural wholeness -- or ecology, including a Taoist element -- in the modern day and age, this is the most satisfying (and particular) satisfaction that I take from reading Cummings, and which is to be explored in the remainder of this and the next Chapter.

3. Ecology in selected categories of Cummings' poetry

3.1. Sonnets and lyricism

i thank You God for most this amazing
day;for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of love and of life and wings;and the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any--lifted from the no
of all nothing--human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

(*Xaipe* CP 663)

A seemingly ordinary motif is expressed here: affirmation of the extraordinariness of an ordinary day, the exaltation of the speaker's awareness of a new day and spiritual rebirth, in harmony with the title of this book of poems, *Xaipe*, meaning "rejoice!". This theme and that of rejoicing do not strike the reader as

²⁹ Comic: Cummings' poetry conveys a belief that ultimately, all will be well. Even hate will be absorbed and included, transformed, by and into love, for example (*50 Poems* CP 520). Of course, a view of this kind offers relief even in the worst moments of human experience. The possibility of a modern ecological comedy in Cummings' work and outlook could be examined in future research.

particularly modern or modernist. Some modernist critics, including Robert Graves, abruptly dismissed this sonnet as “intrinsically corny” (1972:174), probably for this reason. Although anyone is free to experience it as thematically trite and conventional, one should not be in too much of a modern hurry to dismiss it.

Its affirmative surface and its apparent indulgence in the “cliché” of ordinary joy are carried by a subtle poetic sub-texture of natural expression which could evoke an ecological response of considerable value. Expressing joy and affirmation as well as natural connectivity in modern times when the tragic, alienation, and textual dislocation and differentiation are the overwhelming norms can be a difficult new exercise which Cummings to my mind sees through well in this revitalized sonnet. Writing in the sonnet form is not entirely modernist either. Yet Cummings takes the trouble of modernising this form, establishing in this manner the new within the traditional and the traditional within the new³⁰.

This sonnet mixes the Shakesperian and Petrarchan sonnets into a new, individual form. The rhyme scheme is predominantly Shakespearian, which allows a “twist” in the final couplet, similar to the “twists” found in Shakespeare’s sonnets 30, 116, and 130. Yet the lines of Cummings’ sonnet are arranged in a hidden Petrarchan form: eight lines (octave, two quartets) are not parenthesized whereas six lines (sestet) are parenthesized. The Petrarchan volta -- implying some sort of shift, intensification, movement -- usually occurs between the octave and the sestet (Van Gorp, 1993:375). Cummings intensifies this shift: instead of the traditional volta one finds that the poet intersperses the sestet into the octave by means of parenthesis -- a hyperbolic or very energetic volta, so to say.

The six lines of the sestet are literally pushed into the eight lines of the octave in such a way that the Shakesperian final rhyming couplet is made formally possible. The sonnet therefore ends up with more structural potentials of poetic and readerly movement: both the Shakesperian “twist” and the intensified Petrarchan “volta”. The

³⁰ My analysis of this sonnet is based on academic seeds planted by Prof. A.G. Ulliyatt in an undergraduate course at the University of the Free State, South Africa in 1984 when he taught Cummings in his unforgettable way. Aspects of this section of the thesis can be found in greater detail in two articles by the author (JET), “Meaningful Transgression of Boundaries in E.E. Cummings’ Poetry: an Ecocritical Perspective”, *Journal of Contemporary Thought* 10 (1999), pp. 119-142, and “The Osmotic Mandala: on the Nature of Boundaries in E.E. Cummings’ Poetry”, *Spring: the Journal of the E.E. Cummings Society* 10 (Fall, 2001), pp. 9-22 -- as well as in a paper co-authored with A.M. de Lange, “A Close[r] Reading of E.E. Cummings’ ‘Anti-Rationality’”, *Literator* 21(1) (April, 2000), pp. 99-119.

implied Shakesperian twist invites the reader into a cycle of re-reading with more attentive, innermost ears and eyes. Should the reader follow this subtly indicated invitation, her or his ears and eyes may be opened to homophonous and visual coincidences within the poem such as the “sun” whose birthday it is: therefore implying the “Son” (of humankind).

In its turn the intensified volta points to an intensity of personification: there is no acute separation of the “descriptive” aspect of the sonnet (usually contained in the Petrarchan octave) and the “personalization” of this description (usually contained in the Petrarchan sestet). Rather, the “description” (of nature) is personalized from the outset within the octave, and then this personalization is ultimately intensified into the highly personal mystery of being within the sestet and its Shakesperian rhyming couplet. A movement occurs from “the leaping greenly spirits of trees” and “a blue true dream of sky” (already personalized description in the octave) to the innermost, mysterious “ears of my ears” and “eyes of my eyes” in the sestet/final couplet.

The lyrical aspects of the Petrarchan form are exploited to their utmost; Cummings seems to suggest the innermost, most fully expressed nature of the lyrical sonnet form itself. Also: the transgressive rearrangement of “correct” grammatical constraints amplify this organic effect of cyclical revitalization as the sonnet re-establishes the links between modern self and natural other. Examples include the following: “yes” is placed in such a way that it becomes a hybrid between its usual affirmative/exclamational category and an adjective describing natural existence. And “most” is creatively misplaced -- literally shifted into the middle of the line -- in such a way that it acquires a unifying meaning between two categories namely “i thank You most” (above all) and “this most amazing day” (of all days). Cummings shows how language allows its own dynamics of “organic” replacement and convergence. Similarly, the adjective “merely” is misplaced in order to unify the two notions of “simply being” (that is, pure biological existence: breathing, seeing, etcetera -- the earthiness of existence) and “being humble” (that is, an innermost spiritual attitude). The lower case “i” and the upper case “You” further present a graphic illustration of humility in its suggested upward line from below to above, lower case to upper case, and earth to heaven (and back again).

The lower case “i” which Cummings employs throughout his oeuvre suggests the importance of (an identity of) humility and smallness in coming to a full

realization of nature's vastness, and also the uprightness of being (considering the little vertical line) as well as the cyclical nature of being (considering the dot). As has been mentioned, it can be viewed as a "micro-ideogram" in its own right, to which the "micro-ideogram" of the "o" seems to form an interesting partner -- also in terms of readerly dancing. As Webster suggests, Cummings cultivated the role of smallness (1995b:77) of which the "i" serves as a graphic indication: this sonnet with its implied upward line between "i" and "You" confirms these possibilities.

Oxymorons fulfil their traditional role here (but in new arrangements) of pointing *beyond* language to the mystery of natural existence: "all nothing", the "unimaginable You" that can (yet) not be doubted, etcetera. Also the phrase "the gay/great happening illimitably earth" which suggests a number of oxymoronic effects: "earth" after all presupposes limits but the *process* of planet earth -- nature -- does not (it has not come to an end). The word "earth" acts like a full stop to this line: the adjectives (all implying no limitations) build up into and is then "stalled" in the word "earth". But this word has cyclical connotations for obvious reasons and also connotations of nature (soil, inhabitation, etcetera). Thus movement and stillness, change and definitive form, are combined in this richly oxymoronic phrase in line with what the poem on the whole wishes to get across.

Technically, the oxymoron joins "unjoinable" contradictions, thus bringing to the surface the inherent limits of (oppositional) language, amounting since ancient times to a "pointed foolishness" (Thompson, 1995:978): pointing, essentially, to the *outside* of language beyond the limits of the sign. Cummings (with his classical training at Harvard³¹) was attracted to and revitalized this somewhat extinct device in this sonnet and his poetry in general, along with paradoxes such as "i who have died am alive again today", and the sonnet form itself. So much for the idea among some that Cummings does not care for the traditional: so much does he care that he pays careful attention to renew it.

Within the macroforms as well as the microforms of this sonnet everything is aimed at motion, revitalization, and connectivity with nature. End sounds are predominantly "soft" or flexible (not unvoiced consonants), and the flexible "ing"

³¹ Cummings and Eliot acted together in a play at Harvard (Kennedy, 1980:86) and both attended this university in the early twentieth century.

sound or syllable with its connotations of process, movement, continuation, is stressed and counterpoised with its function of indicating abstract nominals and states of being. And this sonnet ends with an open-ended, dynamic "conclusiveness", with the very word "opened". It thus concludes with an authentic approximation, remaining open-ended in terms of sound as well as structure (the Shakesperian couplet with its suggestions of a "twist" of meaning which implies a re-reading of the poem and the mystery of nature). The sonnet ends somewhere between absolute finality and absolute non-conclusiveness.

Should all of this be dismissed as "corny" simply because it is more affirmative and organic? Are the organic devices of this sonnet merely sentimental? Has modern linguistics, criticism and theory finally put behind us any notion of an "organic whole" in literature, along with any possibility of the authentic linkages between the sign and nature? What then of health, mental homeostasis, and similar possibilities and actualities? Are these truly "sentimental" concerns? After all, "corn" is originally something essential and nurturing. Only if these questions *have to* be answered positively can one reject Cummings' careful arrangements of the extraordinariness and inexpressibility of a perfectly ordinary day (the sun rising, the blue sky, trees). At the very least one is struck by the sheer impression that the "ordinary" day makes upon the poetic speaker and how Cummings manages to revitalize this impression in non-sentimentally modern, lively, and organic forms.

Conceptual, traditional and grammatical boundaries are thus employed as those that allow a transfusion and interspersion of categories and contents -- like the membranes of natural, physical growth. Neither the traditional sonnet forms nor grammar, typography, end sounds, conclusions, are treated as if they are absolutely autonomous or final. They are indeed not "objectified" to the rigid maximum or into a severely autonomous, sealed-off stasis -- in accordance with Cummings' emphasis on the non-objectifying manner in which he wanted to write a Taoist poetry. Instead the sonnet opens up towards and interacts with its outside: historically as well as naturally. It is modernist in its ability to telescope and contract much into its new and economical form, and it is non-sentimental in its revitalization of the recognition that mere breathing, touching, seeing, and so on, are central to the continuation of natural being. These modernist overtones take the shape of a carefully designed

suggestiveness, of that which moves outside of the sign, carrying the sign along with this movement into the (mobile) mystery of an (extra)ordinary day in nature.

Pound wrote that (modernist) poets act as the (radio) antennae, voltmeters, and steam gauges of the race (community/society) (1985:58) -- and I will return on occasion to his mechanistic/"inorganic" mainstream modernist imagery. How would this axiom be true of this sonnet by Cummings (whom Pound held in esteem as a fellow artist)? Here, the emphasis shifts from solidly outlined and somewhat static technological registers of the meaningful waves of existence, to more organic, alive, and dynamic ones such as (say) birds or frogs. After all, creatures such as these also register the waves of existence and the nature of relationships in the most acute fashion (more acutely than machines), and they do also give new shape to these waves in the form of songs and croaks, jumps or flights. Deep ecologists such as Gary Snyder and C.A. Bowers have reacted quite positively to Pound's notion of artists-as-societal-antennae. Pound's notion is taken by them to mean that poets -- with their refined and deep awareness of those essential relationships which make human survival in the most authentic sense possible -- tend to foreknow, intuitively, future developments (Bowers, 1993:121). As we see in this sonnet, Cummings gives contextual, vibrant voice to this notion, and in a more organic and ecological fashion than Pound's original antennae may have intuited (again: in its context, Pound's antennae are probably radio ones).

This sonnet shows Cummings' poetic tendencies of viewing textual boundaries as flexible and permeable in nature, like osmotic membranes. We see also a tendency in line with his idea that he is interested in "that precision which creates movement" to present the sign-in-motion, in-between tradition and novelty, semiosis and nature. We see furthermore that Cummings strives in various ways to unify and put into dynamism those boundaries which may have become conceptually static, such as the grammatical rules which pin down the categories of words and the distances between creatures. This tendency also goes for the grammatical minutiae of Cummings' poetry -- words such as "most" and "merely" are misplaced into positions where they acquire more convergent, saturated and combinatory meanings.

Cummings' poetry as found in this sonnet can be deeply lyrical -- one critic argues that Cummings' poetry, because it manages to be convincingly lyrical at its essentially non-lyrical time, should be regarded with great esteem for this reason

alone (Cowen, 1996:83). And we see that Cummings' poetry uses careful typographical and even purely graphical devices in order to signify states of being such as humility and balance. All or most of these aspects of his poetry can be found in slightly different forms throughout all or most of his poetic oeuvre. In addition to this particular sonnet, Cummings has revitalized the form in a number of poems to the extent that a separate anthology containing his sonnets only would be a substantial work. In other sonnets such as "you shall above all be glad and young" (1938 CP 484) flexibility and lyricism are also main elements along with the constant awareness of nature thus maintained and evoked. A number of Cummings' sonnets furthermore form part of the conversation with the poetic speaker's lover which continues throughout his poetry. The next section considers examples (not necessarily in sonnet form) of this dialogue.

3.2. Love poems and erotic poems

since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;

wholly to be a fool
while Spring is in the world

my blood approves,
and kisses are a better fate
than wisdom
lady i swear by all flowers. Don't cry
--the best gesture of my brain is less than
your eyelid's flutter which says

we are for each other:then
laugh,leaning back in my arms
for life's not a paragraph

And death i think is no parenthesis

(is 5 CP 291)

The implied situation of this poem is a female lover crying or wanting to cry. The handling of the female lover is remarkably easy. In this poem as in other love poems, there is no sense of male dominance or narrowness, or the kind of tensions exhibited towards females in Eliot's poetry (Docherty, 1995:124), or in Pound's Cantos XIV and XV. Cummings' poetry and this poem relate to the female lover who is more knowledgeable about emotion (Friedman, 1967:57) with reverence. Moreover, the poem is about the wholeness of love as experienced by the fool in love;

but there is no self-castigation, thick irony, or coils of guilt in this. It also becomes a way of stating that when it comes to love, rational delineation is worth less than straightforward emotion (Friedman, 1967:57). Firstly, this anticipates Cummings' later emphasis in the 1940 note in which he insists that feeling and intuition are closer to the natural (Taoist) way than objectification (Cohen, 1987:63)

-- "since feeling is first" was published in 1926. Secondly, it implies that sensuality surpasses thoughts and words, and wordiness especially. And even to the extent that life is textual, the poem suggests that death belongs within the main body of experience: it is not an accidental afterthought. It is not the abrupt and absurd accident that ends a progressive (artificial) "life" of upward linear progress.

Cummings turns the traditional tables by giving positive poetic value to the female, as well as to dying, darkness, and integration (in love and death); those qualities and phenomena which, in the modern progressive outlook, have taken on an appearance of disaster, the accidental, and even that which is sinister and avoidable. Soap operas, advertisements, and the mass media monotonously exalt "shine" -- the glitter of material progress and a competition in which the "male" aspect must dominate: this inevitably leads to a narrow view of "femaleness" which backlashes into a narrow, caricaturized view of "maleness". Cummings' sense of love is far removed from this. And it is closer to the deep ecological/Taoist notion that a complete life radically includes the female or yin aspect of being, as much as it involves the male or yang aspect of being. In the words of one of his poems, (male-female) "love is most mad and moonly" (*50 Poems* CP 530). And Cummings' poetry on the whole is not heliocentric. Certainly, there are a number of strong sun-phrases in it (CP 773, 830, 840), but they are outnumbered by moon-poems (for example the iconic cluster of them in *No Thanks* (CP 383-385)). Cummings' undoubtedly strong sense of maleness and heterosexuality is enhanced by his open-ended poetic awareness of luna.

The conversation with a female lover runs like a thread through Cummings' poetic texts: it may be submerged by other kinds of poems, but always only to re-emerge at some point in the oeuvre, often in clusters of dialogues with a female lover. A study of these clusters, and their various intra-cluster and inter-cluster relations would need another thesis of its own. In the first volumes various whores are mentioned, but even then, despite the youthful bravado of some of these poems (such

as “in making Marjorie god hurried” (& CP 211)), one finds the sudden inspiration of a composition that approaches, simultaneously, the utmost sensuality and a direct male interest in the sensuous female on the one hand, and the utmost reverence and gentleness towards the female on the other, for example:

i like my body when it is with your
body. It is so quite new a thing.
Muscles better and nerves more.
i like your body. i like what it does,
i like its hows. i like to feel the spine
of your body and its bones, and the trembling
-firm-smooth ness and which i will
again and again and again
kiss, i like kissing this and that of you,
i like, slowly stroking the, shocking fuzz
of your electric fur, and what-is-it comes
over parting flesh....And eyes big love-crumbs,

and possibly i like the thrill

of under me you so quite new

(& CP 218)

The flexibility (undecidedness) of commas and a word such as “possibly” is employed to the full. Commas are used to indicate breathlessness or a heart that skips a beat (“i like, slowly stroking the, shocking fuzz”) in addition to their usual Cummingsian role of providing pauses that nevertheless indicate a speedy conglomeration or coagulation of words (for example “of your electric fur, and what-is-it comes”). Parting and merging of male and female are held in careful balance throughout this love and/or erotic poem. That the poetic speaker does not need the female to be *under* him of necessity, is indicated by the word “possibly”. And in the last line, sounds pile up with dazzling agility: “of under me you so quite new” -- the poem “ends” not with the maximum stasis and closure, but with the maximum assonance and rhythm (iamb, spondee, unstressed syllable “so”, spondee). And that, of course, is paradoxically and indeed its “proper” conclusion, given its overall and direct approach to sensuous love.

In 1940 Cummings dedicated his *50 Poems* to his third wife, Marion Morehouse, with whom he enjoyed a lasting and affectionate relationship (Kennedy, 1996:16). This volume provides as good an example as any other of the way in which Cummings sequences and arranges a group of poems and love poems. A rudimentary reading of a cluster of poems in the volume follows to show how the conversation of

lovers can be woven into a Cummings volume of poems, with a view to underscoring the open-endedness of Cummings' poetry as well as the interrelatedness of his love and nature poems. The volume opens with a "skinny" poem that describes a falling leaf (CP 487), which can be read as a forerunner to the 1958 "l(a)" (95 *Poems* CP 673). Poem # 4³² of this volume introduces the motif of love: "nobody loved this/ he)with its" (CP 490), and # 5 continues the theme when the lovers are implied in the following lines:

. We're
 alive and shall be:cities may overflow(am
 was)assassinating whole grassblades,five
 ideas can swallow a man;three words im
 -prison a woman for all her now:but we've
 such freedom such intense digestion so
 much greenness only dying makes us grow (CP 491)

Closure is the nemesis of love according to these lines, whereas greenness (flexibility, youth) and the process-of-living-and-dying (love) provide continued growth. That is, this love poem states that ideas and signs should not incorporate (and hence incarcerate) one -- one should continue to grow in love. Incidentally, this recognition is suggested in quite ecological terms (of habitat destruction). Poem # 6 takes two "gentlemen poeds" satirically to the cleaners, and Cummings' word-play and sound-play here gives an edge to a caricaturization of homosexual "ppoyds" (CP 492). Poem # 7 contrasts the ocean (nature) and a street (the city): the sea is described as a "she" (CP 493), so the thread of female reverence continues. Poem # 9 resumes the love theme when a drunk is economically enacted, who hubbles/bubbles something about love (CP 495). Continuing a movement from the revered to the ridiculous, # 10 states love in the form of colloquialisms and an urban brutality (CP 496).

Satire and love poems continue to be mixed in poems # 12 - 37, interspersed with poems about children, dolls, a town, and nature. These include the well-known poetic narrative of anyone and noone who loved each other within "anyone lived in a

³² The notation "# 4" refers to the fourth poem in this volume. All the poems in Cummings' volumes carry such numbers, indicated in Arabic or Roman numerals. For the sake of economy I deviate from the procedure of indicating individual poems by means of their first lines in this discussion of a cluster or group of poems. All poems in this discussion, indicated via their volume numbers, are from the volume 50 *Poems*.

pretty how town" (# 29) (CP 515), as well as "my father moved through dooms of love" (# 34) (CP 520) with its incessant cross-stitching of opposites. It also includes another example of the notion that one truly human being cannot be incarcerated within an (artificial) "world" (# 36) (CP 523), a motif also explored in terms of love within # 5 as has been indicated. From poem # 38 onwards, a couple of poems comment poetically on the theme of love itself: "love is the every only god" (# 38) (CP 526), "love is more thicker than forget/ more thinner than recall" (# 42) (CP 530), and "hate blows a bubble of despair into" (# 43) which contains the line "love makes the little thickness of the coin" (CP 531). These poems and those between them explore the i-you relationship between lovers, along with poetic reminders of the nature of love. For example, poem # 39 opens with the lines:

denied night's face
have shadowless they?
i bring you peace
the moon of day

(CP 527)

According to Fenollosa as cited in Mary Babcock's essay on Cummings' ideogramatics, the classical Chinese ideogram for "brightness" combines a picture of the sun and a picture of the moon, so that "the cup is bright" would be "the cup suns-and-moons" (1963:119). Cummings' oeuvre associates brightness with peace (*No Thanks* CP 443), and this peace (as found in the lines above) is reached when male and female lovers are in love. In particular, it is found when an innocence of night-time is rediscovered, *contra* the "shine" of progressive "worlds". Lovers are "shadow-full", they know nighttime. Such consistent transgression of oppositional expectations, and celebration of a bright, open-ended/ongoing (e)mergence makes it clear how poems # 43 and # 44 in this volume follow upon each other, and how the love motif is related to Cummings' ecology. Poem # 43 reads:

hate blows a bubble of despair into
hugeness world system universe and bang
--fear buries tomorrow under woe
and up comes yesterday most green and young

pleasure and pain are merely surfaces
(one itself showing, itself hiding one)
life's only and true value neither is
love makes the little thickness of the coin

comes here a man would have from madame death
 nevertheless now and without winter spring?
 she'll spin that spirit her own fingers with
 and give him nothing(if he should not sing)

how much more than enough for both of us
 darling. And if i sing you are my voice, (CP 531)

The male poetic voice merges or identifies completely with the female voice at the conclusion of this sonnet. At first glance, the subsequent poem (# 44) may appear to be unrelated to # 43. Unlike the more lyrical # 43 with its more worded lines, here (# 44) the volume returns to a "thin" form as found at its outset. And this poem devotes itself to the motif of air. How should one connect the two poems, if at all? Poem # 44, "air," takes a gradual, downward fragmentation of words, syllables, punctuation marks, and blank space to suggest the appearance of one star in the (darkening) sky. But more: the last (broken) syllable of poem # 44 reveals an important omission. Whereas the first word of the poem is "air", this last syllable is "a.r", and the implication is that "i" becomes, turns into, identifies absolutely with, "air" (as well as the appearing star).

air,

be
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(a)

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 (live)
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 (is no littler
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an a:

fear no bigger
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 an a

hope)is

st
anding
st

a.r

(CP 532)

Returning to the more lyrical, less typographical poem # 43: as has been stated, it suggests a total identification of the poetic (male) song and the voice of the female lover, just as air and self become one in ("anding" or growing) open-endedness within poem # 44. Both poems therefore suggest a context beyond opposites such as male versus female, and self versus (natural) other. Consider that graphically, in # 44 the vertical line of the "i" has disappeared below the readerly horizon (and only the dot of the "i" has remained), thus suggesting an immersion of self into the other (star/nature). The speaker, "i", and the star, "a.r" one.

This concise reading of a sequence of poems in one volume (*50 Poems*) could be applied, while recognising the necessary and subtle differences of context, to most or all of Cummings' volumes, as well as his ongoing conversation with the lover. Directly or indirectly, and grounded in an array of manners to transcend opposites, the lovers' dialogue in Cummings is related to an interaction of sign and nature. Reverence for the female, as we now see, is not a narrow motif in Cummings. It is expanded into a restoration of the innocence of those supposedly "female" forces -- such as nighttime and the moon -- which, in the modern world with its dominance of supposedly "male" and frequently blinding, shiny conventions should be restored if equilibrium is to be sustained. Thus the love motif in Cummings also presents an ecological probability. Even within love/erotic poems that economically and comically dramatise a sequence of events, such reverence will come to the poetic surface.

may i feel said he
(i'll squeal said she
just once said he)
it's fun said she

(may i touch said he
how much said she
a lot said he)
why not said she

(let's go said he
 not too far said she
 what's too far said he
 where you are said she)

may i stay said he
 (which way said she
 like this said he
 if you kiss said she)

may i move said he
 is it love said she)
 if you're willing said he
 but you're killing said she)

but it's life said he
 but your wife said she
 now said he)
 ow said she)

(tiptop said he
 don't stop said she
 oh no said he)
 go slow said she)

(cccome?said he
 ummm said she)
 you're divine!said he
 (you are Mine said she)

(*No Thanks* CP 399)

The poem, found in *No Thanks* (1935) with its quite private, minute circulation, enacts a multi-layered (and perhaps Bostonian) "moment of crisis" in frank, comic-dramatic terms. It balances the urge to go ahead and the cautions which arise from the possible consequences of doing so. It also delicately balances the comic as well as the serious implications of this unfolding drama. It is poised somewhere between predicament and the loss of control. The double twist that occurs in the final lines also strikes one. Initially the male counterpart is quite willing to go ahead whereas the female counterpart is quite cautious -- although these roles swap a little at just the right moments in order for the drama to complete itself (for instance when the female says "if you kiss"). The climax implies that the ultimate "victor" of the implied "competition" is the female: as the poem pinnacles, the male acknowledges the divinity of the female and the female states that the male is Hers with an upper case "Mine" which acquires extra significance. In Stephen Scotti's musical based on Cummings' poetry and performed at the 12th annual conference of the American Literature Association at Cambridge (MA) in May 2001, the power with

which the female singer projected the long note “Mine” in the musical rendition of this poem, underscored the effect which is being described here.³³ The male is immersed into the female as the drama concludes. It is not often mentioned in discussions of this poem that the speaker is implying the supremacy of the female principle of integration, immersion, and, by extension, fluidity, unity, etcetera. To my mind this is an important indication of Cummings’ viewpoint on the nature of the opposites of the maleness and femaleness of existence. The reverence that we find throughout Cummings’ poetry towards the female lover (reverence equalled in a different poetic form by the South African Buddhist poet Breyten Breytenbach) finds full expression even here in Cummings’ comical, erotic mode.

This indicates the complex and instructive issue of how Cummings treats “femaleness” or in Taoist/Chinese terms the *yin* aspect of natural being. In numerous other erotic poems such as the striking “my girl’s tall with hard long eyes” (*Tulips* CP 133) (published in 1922) one finds the celebration of sensuality along with the intimation of the positive (sexual) values of downwardness, darkness, dying, reintegration -- what is normally considered to be the lesser “female” forces of existence in glistening, progressive, male-dominated societies. Generally speaking, these societies equate value monistically and sometimes misogynistically with qualities such as upwardness, shine, “living”, separation, dislocation, differentiation, opposition, reduction, competition, and so on. One sees that the Freudian link between sex and death that became prevalent in modern times in Cummings’ case takes the form of an ecological event: the possibility of a restoration of language to a state beyond opposites, as is also specifically indicated by Cummings in Freudian terms as we have seen (1966:127).

Cummings’ approach to sexuality is quite expressly heterosexual:

Girlboys may nothing more than boygirls need:
i can entirely her only love

whose any mystery makes every man’s
flesh put space on;and his mind take off time (1938 CP 484)

To Cummings the rational, progressive view of unisexuality (or uniformity) is negative because it is monotonous -- the sonnet goes on to describe this condition as a

³³ I attended a performance of this musical (which had travelled successfully to South America) at the Hyatt Regency, Cambridge (MA), in the United States, on 26 May 2001.

“foetal/ grave called progress, and negation’s dead undoom” -- Cummings uses “doom” positively in his foreword to this volume (1938 CP 461). That is, Cummings does not anticipate either some form of a narrow Western “femininity”, or a form of political correctness. Paradoxically, his admiration and celebration of the female and femaleness makes his poetic speaker *more* male, also in terms of heterosexuality. Another poem (written in slang and published in 1926) states that the speaker needn’t be so “spry” about questions “arty” since “a pretty woman who naked is/ is worth a million statues” (*is* 5 CP 245). We find in Cummings a more inclusive, spontaneous, and earthy erotic sensibility of the overall competition between and ongoing equilibrium of the “male” and “female” forces of natural being -- best expressed as yin and yang as found in the Taoist view. Part of this process is a subtle readjustment of the balance between perceived “male” and “female” forces in modern existence.

Consider again that a narrow view of the femaleness of existence -- a view such as the predominant modern one in progressive societies -- leads in a kind of backlash to a narrow conception of maleness: femaleness is viewed as the passive, the dark (etcetera) in a negative or subjugating sense, and the range of what is female as well as the hierarchical disposition imposed upon femaleness imply an impoverishment of male-female relations on both sides. This view separates maleness severely and/or persistently from perceived female things such as intuition, emotion, and integration among other things. Maleness then turns into a lonely disposition of being lost in the arid, the intellectual, the competitive, and so on. While these notions may have become commonplace in our time, the point not to be overlooked is how the narrow conception of femaleness also leads not only to the “dominance” of (narrow) maleness over (narrow) femaleness but the concomitant impoverishment *also of maleness*. Eliot’s waste land could very well be a lament for this barrenness on a mythical male-female plane, as Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley suggest (1990:106-107). Cummings’ embodiment of male-female relations is potentially so wholesome precisely because the poet carefully avoids some of the pitfalls of dominance and a confined view, and stays with the sense of the greatest possible fullness of both the female and the male aspects of (ecological) existence and experience. And again, this sensibility can be found in Cummings’ earlier and later poetry. If the later poems are perhaps more mature in sensibility here and there, it is not a maturing of a kind with Eliot’s development from tragic fragmentation to grown-

up reconciliation, via a mature, searing, intellectualized vision. Instead, even in upbeat and totally sensuous more youthful poems, Cummings' tone of a female inclusivity and a transcendence of (male-female) opposites is already quite apparent. An example is another 1926 poem that compares making love and driving a car, in adoption of a somewhat brutal and unmistakably naïve male speaker's voice:

she being Brand

-new;and you
know consequently a
little stiff i was
careful of her and(having

thoroughly oiled the universal
joint tested my gas felt of
her radiator made sure her springs were O.

K.)i went right to it flooded-the-carburetor cranked her

up,slipped the
clutch(and then somehow got into reverse she
kicked what
the hell)next
minute i was back in neutral tried and

again slo-wly;bare,ly nudg. ing(my

le-ver Right-
oh and her gears being in
A 1 shape passed
from low through
second-into-high like
greasedlightning)just as we turned the corner of Divinity

avenue i touched the accelerator and give

her the juice,good

(it
was the first ride and believe i we was
happy to see how nice she acted right up to
the last minute coming back down by the Public
Gardens i slammed on

the
internalexpanding
&
externalcontracting
brakes Bothatonce and

brought allof her tremB
 -ling
 to a:dead.

stand-
 ;Still)

(is 5 CP 246)

We have seen that Cummings employs the full stop to indicate continuation, as in the elegy to Sam Ward, “rain or hail” (1 x 1 CP 568). The poem continues after the full stop to suggest continuation or change itself. In this poem, as it is also the case in numerous poems and in “rain or hail”, a new way is found to suggest unity beyond oppositional expectations. The climax of the poem with its unmistakable *double entendre* suggests a series of events and experiences that go beyond the opposites of contraction versus expansion, and motion versus immobility. A high degree of simultaneity between opposites is strikingly composed here. Also, the climax suggests a movement beyond the contradiction of love (and sex) versus death.

Should one be forced to decide, it is evident that even in this almost outlandishly successful poem (since it does not seem easy to pull off a comparison between sex and an automobile while retaining reverence, male-female integration, and a sense of gentleness despite the hungry, brutal innocence of a beginner) -- it is evident that even in this case, an ecological and Taoist element lingers. Ecological: this poem renders male-female interactivity and integration on the most intense biological and poetic levels. And Taoist: the transcendence of opposites into a third voice is suggested even here, and the sheer spontaneity of the poem’s effect could also be related to an emphasis of spontaneity and the flow-of-(natural)-events in Taoism. Compounds such as “Bothatonce” and “allof her” point to the organic and orgasmic unity of the experience, and there is the suggestion of integrating silence and death in these concluding lines.

Of course, Lao Tzu’s own volume is devoid of any sexual references. It simply does not address the topic. And it is true to say, even on this thematic plane, that “she being Brand” is more American than Taoist -- should one be forced to decide upon it. As Lewis H. Miller (Jr.) shows in his thorough and intriguing analysis of the motor car imagery of the poem -- complete with illuminating copies of instruction manuals and car advertisements from the time, maps of Boston streets, etcetera -- this poem is ultimately about the mixture of the experiences of driving a car

for the first time ever and making love for the first time ever. One is tempted to describe it as an extended mechanistic “conceit”. Miller states in his essay entitled “Sex on Wheels: a Reading of ‘she being Brand/ -new’” published in 1997 in *Spring: the Journal of the E.E. Cummings Society*, that Cummings’ resonant sexual punning

provides as graphic and clinically incisive a description of simultaneous orgasm as one will find in any sexual manual; and we might conclude that at this heightened moment in [the conclusion of] the poem, tenor and vehicle rub artfully against one another to generate an ambivalent perspective on the speaker and his abilities: as a lovmaker he appears to have fully satisfied himself and his partner: as a driver he has come to a herky-jerky, jolting, mechanism-straining dead standstill (1997: 63-64).

Miller’s description of the poem, focused on the mechanistic elements thereof, is inherently valuable. Certainly, an ecosemiotic reader who is also aware of Cummings’ oriental interest may add to this description that an ecological dynamic is retained even in this poem with its boyish elements. Overall, it has been demonstrated here that Cummings’ love poems and erotic poems are also aimed at a restoration of the innocence and power of females and femaleness, in the process of rediscovering an innocence of unity in modern times. According to Lao Tzu, one who lives his maleness and guards his femaleness sees (nature) again as a child (1987:39; section 28).

3.3. Children’s poems

From his “children’s poems” -- which are for grown-ups, too, like Eliot’s cat poems in his *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* -- it is clear that Cummings took care to maintain a child-like outlook. These poems can either be child-like in *tone*, or they can focus on the *theme* of children and their perceptions of life -- or both -- as in the following poem with its deliberately simple form of rhyming couplets, published in 1958, literally at the mature end of Cummings’ poetic career:

maggie and milly and molly and may
went down to the beach(to play one day)

and maggie discovered a shell that sang
so sweetly she couldn’t remember her troubles,and

milly befriended a stranded star
whose rays five languid fingers were;

and molly was chased by a horrible thing
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles:and

may came home with a smooth round stone
as small as a world and as large as alone.

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
it's always ourselves that we find in the sea

(95 Poems CP 682)

In the words of Audri L. Wood, in her investigation of poetry teaching in American schools, Cummings is not “for adults only” (1997:105). A simple, child-like flow of this poem carries some profound ecological patterns and values (which are likely to be perceived at least intuitively by children). Four little girls and their playful experiences on the beach are effortlessly portrayed, varying from the sweet singing of a shell to the fright which a sea crab causes (innocently, playfully expressed). It presents a natural awe that children sense with their whole bodies (and which is therefore not “sublime” in the traditional, elaborate sense). Every child possibly has a similar memory of being truly and more often than not unnecessarily frightened by the sheer “otherness” of some natural phenomenon such as a crab. As nerves harden in growing up we frequently lose this sense of the sheer otherness of nature’s creatures and elements, but the eclipse of this sensibility is rarely complete and, in Cummings’ case, this sense is all but eclipsed.

On two occasions the couplets are interrupted (and rearranged) with the word “and” (stanzas 2 and 4). The second instance in which “and” is inserted is clearly marked with a colon. From this aptly indicated point onwards the more profound ecological implications begin to resonate in the playful flow of the poem. The stone is neither small nor large: it is (in) a state beyond these opposites, of being “alone”. Cummings’ readers know that as in the case of the co-incidence of the words “now” and “here” into the word “nowhere”, the poet also exploits the co-incidences of the words “all-one” and “one” -- that is, completeness or wholeness -- within the word “alone”. An additional example is the suggestion that any *two* lovers (since they are in love) are perfectly *alone* (50 Poems CP 591), that is, all-one.

The stone is therefore something on its own (alone) which is undivided (all-one or simply “one”). In a synecdochic, ecological way, it contains its relations to the whole of nature within itself: in the same non-dualistic way that now and here in their absolute now-ness and here-ness shifting-ly continue to contain more than everything -- the nowhere -- “within” their essence. A Taoist/Zen sense of unity thus shimmers

through the surfaces of the poem. The final rhyming couplet makes sense in this context: that whatever we lose including the relational, oppositional separation of rational human categories such as “you” and “me”, it is our very selves (beyond these rational categories and distances), our innermost natural being, that we find not any longer *at* the sea (as implied in the first stanza when the girls go *to* the beach), but *in* the sea. This camouflaged preposition of the final stanza marks the levels of interconnectivity and interfusion implied by the poem, and configures the discovered creatures and elements from the sea into a new light: of ecological being. Being, with wholeness and wholesomeness, and a child-like perception which still radically (in the root) allows itself to participate fully in the natural existence of which it forms an absolute and active part.

To this one may add that the oriental view in general frequently uses water and the ocean as symbols of spiritual clarity and unity; as suggested by Cummings’ rendition of the word ocean as an “O// cean” which is “everywhere/ nothing” -- in his post-humously published 1963 poem “what is/ a/ voyage” (73 *Poems* CP 840). A child-like and Taoist ecology is suggested here. “[L]osing” (the relationalities of) one’s mind (as a child does) is concomitant with finding the whole, or a continuing and open-ended interactivity with and within nature: physically and emotionally. Consider that the end-sounds of lines are (again) physically/audibly flexible, voiced consonants, and that the first and final couplets of the poem have vowels as end-sounds. These sounds underscore an open-endedness of the continuing voice, also on a physical, biological level.

Also consider that besides the two singular “objects” mentioned (shell and stone), two creatures are mentioned: a (quite active) crab and a (languid/possibly dead) sea star. Both of these are natural mandalas (and hence suggest intactness, or completeness): creatures with “rays” that lead to a centre. There are four little girls, and there are four oceanic “things/creatures” in the poem. This could be related to the eight “rays” of the active crab-mandala (that moves *side-ways*, again underscoring the lateral, the open, contra a *vertical* and final “algebra”). And the five “rays” of the sea star could, of course, be related to Cummings’ poetic arithmetic which maintains that two times two is five -- as indicated by a volume entitled *is 5* (1926). This “is 5 logic” could be explained as follows: the answer always remains *one more* than the rule. Or: the answer remains a question -- open-endedness itself. Whatever we think

of a stone, it remains all-one (itself), alone. It remains itself to the extent that it is beyond the rational, or “because”. Children know this, and therefore know themselves. These more profound sensibilities are treated with comfort and agility, and indeed with a level of “mature child-likeness” in this ultimately simple and horizontal poem.

The following child-like poem as found in Cummings’ historically first volume *Tulips & Chimneys* (1922) is better known and more complex (Kennedy, 1980:25):

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it’s
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing
from hop-skotch and jump-rope and

it’s
spring
and
the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

(*Tulips* CP 27)

A recent deconstructive reading of this poem, Iain Landles’ “An Analysis of Two Poems by E.E. Cummings” (2001), takes its contradictions to an extreme: Landles goes as far as to read homosexuality and urine into it (2001:35-36), although he feels that deconstruction can also read its more child-like elements for their innocence (2001:35). Landles further argues that only deconstruction can stroke and

unravel these complicated textures more comprehensively (2001:31, 35), unlike the earlier more one-sidedly “innocent” readings of it. Certainly, Landles’ reading of the symbolic balloonman is illuminating (2001:33, 35-37): it stresses and exhausts the potential of a less innocent, suggested tone of a “far and wee” presence that prefigures a more foreboding grown-up realm.

Umberto Eco’s critique of Derrida’s employment of Peirce’s “infinite semiosis”, (mentioned in Chapter Two), thus comes into renewed focus. Derrida states in *Of Grammatology* that without the instruments of criticism, “critical production will risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything. But this indispensable guard-rail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened* a reading” (1976:158). Eco then argues, in terms of Peirce and Derrida’s employment of the Peircian term “infinite semiosis”: let “us for a while protect the reading of Peirce, rather than open it too much” (1990:37).

An ecosemiotician may also feel that “in Just-” should be “protected” in this sense from a post-structuralist reading to some extent -- but then in the name of ecological open-endedness. That is: the centre of this poem, which dominates the poem, reveals an innocence and child-like experience of the natural realm, a mud-lucious and puddle-wonderful world. And the frame of the poem, its intimation of something more foreboding, is quite thin when compared to the child-like centre. There is no dramatic oscillation of ergon and parergon in this poem, of the paranoid kind to be found in the Madame Sosostris passage in Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:78).

Murray Roston suggests that “in Just-” restores a loss of innocence that ensued an initial modernist preoccupation with Freudian analysis (2000:182), and further suggests that “in Just-” with its child-like spirit is akin to Paul Klee’s modernist painting “Dance, Monster, to My Soft Song” (2000:179, 181). The painting shows a girl child manipulating a monster by means of a piano-like structure, and by means of *playing* (see Roston, 2000, plate 20). Like “in Just-”, the overriding tone of Klee’s painting is a rediscovery of child-like form in ignorant command of a Freudian “monster” of child-corruption. As we grow up, “soil” and “dirty” turn into guilt-ridden and derogatory words, and children’s freedom from this is central to “in Just-”.

And this ties in well with a grown-up voice in “o sweet spontaneous/ earth” in the same volume of poems: a voice that insists on the dynamic and open-ended pureness of an earth that refuses to be confined to philosophers’, believers’, and scientists’ prudent pinching and poking (*Tulips* CP 58). Earth cannot be confined into a theorem: it continues to be. Again, a Taoist sensibility is anticipated: at the root of Taoism, as has been shown in this and other Chapters, is the notion that nature simply *is* (and continues to be), over and above human perceptions of various contradictions and complications, including the complicated aspects of advanced, differentiating, theoretical languages. One could, therefore, equally well read “in Just-” as an attempted and complex *unification* of the opposites young versus old, for even the lame old balloonman is interpreted as through the eyes and ears of a child: “far and wee”.

Ecology is a heightened and deepened awareness of one’s interrelatedness with and within nature and ecosystems, and the dynamics of Cummings’ poetry are more often than not aimed at revitalising this, also from the child’s perspective. That is, a perspective in which difference and distance are less important than active participation. Such a perspective should remain part of a grown-up ecological outlook, to paraphrase a sense at the centre of Cummings’ poetry.

And Cummings’ child-like view -- a view also central to Taoism (Lao Tzu, 1987:39; section 28) -- is related, perhaps on a slightly more “serious” level, to the motif of the (modernist) fool in his poetry. Cummings’ poetry deliberately, and ultimately spontaneously, maintains the child-like view or the fool’s view, unlike the supposedly “mature” view of the acceptance of alienation in the modern world. And this view leaves room for affirmative natural creativity as found in the children’s poems analysed here. It is the view further (and still) embodied in a 1958 poem such as the following:

out of the lie of no
rises a truth of yes
(only herself and who
illimitably is)

making fools understand
(like wintry me)that not
all matterings of mind
equal one violet

(95 Poems CP 736)

The truth of yes is the affirmation of nature's being. One notices again in this short poem, that such affirmation includes a *re-affirmation* of the sheer natural "*her-ness*" of being. An oppositional "arithmetic" of this poem runs as follows: out of the (negative) lie of (negative) no rises the positive (since a minus times a minus is a plus): the (positive) truth of (positive) yes. Two negatives into a positive and the additional positives give the overall positive in this semiotic "multiplication" which Cummings frequently employs. Themes of the restoration of unity and balance therefore correspond to and resonate in Cummings' unique "algebraic" patterns; indeed Cummings' poetry has been referred to as an "algebra of the heart" (see Friedman, 1996:78). Cummings' algebra is ecological like Arne Naess' deep ecological philosophy in which he states the following "algebraic" or philosophical formulation:

An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things (1995:3).

Cummings' "algebra" also carries this essential interrelatedness of natural being: his poetry mediates the overwhelming sense of nature's IS or being into which one violet flows or rises -- the "yes" of nature's being. In other words, Cummings' poetry (A) would not be the same without natural existence (B)²⁷. Reading the first stanza of "out of the lie of no" in view of the second, a suggestion of the truth "rising" would furthermore be essentially organic -- like a violet emerging as if from nowhere into the now-here. It is the kind of truth perceived readily either by the child or the (ecological) fool: the fool who as the poem suggests *understands*, that is, "stands under" or is humble enough to surpass "wintry" (deathlike?) rationalisms or "matterings of mind". Also: a fool rooted in (the rhythms of the) earth. "Matterings" which can be explained as either "concerns" (worrisome issues), or "objectifications" (making thought-patterns into "matter"), or the tendency to turn (mother) nature into

²⁷ And this axiom can be further related to Cummings' treatment of various opposite conditions or phenomena. For instance, the following A's and B's would not be the same without each other: female (A) and male (B), the inside of language (A) and its outside (B), peace (A) and dynamism (B), brightness (A) and emotion and intuition (B), subject (A) and object (B), self (A) and natural other (B), and so forth. Cummings takes great care, throughout his poetry to signal that 1) these A-B relations together present the set of (permeable) boundaries where true significance is possible -- i.e., Cummings' poetry gravitates towards these boundaries. And 2) these A-B relations are arranged in various dynamic ways within his poetry, in order to show their mutual and ecological interdependence and interpenetration. However, such formal formulations of Cummings' poetry can achieve little more than to point the way to the actual "magic" of his poetry: they cannot exhaust or fully describe his poetic ecology.

mere matter -- in short, reification and a revenge of objects. Cummings' poetry satirizes a wordly system that under-estimates and stifles the importance of one (mere) violet. It is a scathing, ego-pricking, and very important aspect of Cummings' poetic ecology.

3.4. Satire

when serpents bargain for the right to squirm
and the sun strikes to gain a living wage--
when thorns regard their roses with alarm
and rainbows are insured against old age

when every thrush may sing no new moon in
if all screech-owls have not okayed his voice
--and any wave signs on the dotted line
or else an ocean is compelled to close

when the oak begs permission of the birch
to make an acorn--valleys accuse their
mountains of having altitude--and march
denounces april as a saboteur
then we'll believe in that incredible
unanimal mankind(and not until)

(*Xaipe* CP 620)

That "incredible/ unanimal mankind" is more often than not the intended recipient of Cummings' satire. If Cummings' poetry has a solid, steely core, then it is his satire of a contra-ecological, artificial modern world. In this particular sonnet the speaker states in one breath his admiration for nature which simply continues to be, and his bright non-admiration for the disproportionate importance that humans attach to activities such as signing on the dotted line, striking, hating one another for various "attitudes" or "altitudes", etcetera. A human tendency, that is, to be blinded to the continuation of nature because we are trapped in our own devices, schemes, and rational-oppositional and competitive conceptions. Taoism, as Martin Palmer writes, mocks humanity's attempts to control and stifle nature's flow (1998:23), and hence to end up in self-fabricated spatial confines -- also what we today term semiotic spatial confines (Lao Tzu, 1987:27; section 1). Cummings is giving voice to nature's vast humility or its intrinsic and silent continuation, and in this sonnet he pricks the pretentious ego of modern humans "living" in ignorance of (their) nature and authentic, growing self-hood (individuality).

A "preunderstanding" (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:7) sheds light on Cummings' sometimes stinging poetic critique of this progressive world that creates enormous

conformity by means of ever-increasing differentiation, reification (objectification), and *numbers* -- that which makes *numb* according to one of his poems (73 *Poems* CP 791). Cummings took to task some modern contra-ecological thoughts and habits, in some instances long before they grew into even more ecologically-devastating proportions. (As Michael Begon *et al.* write, modern habits are currently destroying biodiversity at a rate that previously occurred only in the Quaternary ice-ages in the history of earth (1996:viii).)

And probably, various critics' negative responses to Cummings are at least indirectly related to the persistence of his critique of these issues: the stifling measurements of business and "science", and "freedom" as a kind of slavery -- in short, a numb conventionality of masses of people, with its negative impact on nature's wholeness and proper (ecological) uniqueness. In any event, an ecological "preunderstanding" can be inferred from one of Cummings' letters, in response to Ruth Shackford, the Cummings' contact person at Joy Farm -- parts of which have recently been published by Friedman who states: "writing on November 20, 1957, about the launching of Sputnik, October 4th that year, and remembering his visit to the Soviet Union in 1931" (1997:18), Cummings writes:

[S]peaking of the Russian 'satellite'--some years ago I went to Russia;& saw for myself(thanks to a special passport-visa,as well as some extraordinary luck)what no American tourist so much as suspects. Soviet Russia is one enormous prison,a huge slave-state in which any 'citizen' may at any moment be murdered by the Secret Police--& if somebody protests,his wife or children or parents or sweetheart or whoever he loves most may disappear & never be heard of again. You can imagine what I think of American 'intellectuals' who want the USA to become just like Russia as soon as possible! (Friedman, 1997:18).

Cummings explains in the letter that his fear is this: just as Russians must conform through coercion, so will Americans conform because "it's the easiest thing to do" -- being one's self when everyone else is busy being everyone else is hard according to Cummings in this letter (Friedman, 1997:19). That ecology does not mean *monotony* (but living *relationships*) to Cummings is made clear in the subsequent paragraph of the letter:

[A]s for the so-called world of the future:am too busy living in the present to fall for any such nonsense. Air--unless I'm very much mistaken--is to breathe;& the more machines(particularly planes & rockets & spaceships)are invented,the less breathable the air is. Everybody except an idiot(or a 'scientist')should be able to see where that leads (Friedman, 1997:18).

The poet envisages an air cluttered with various flying objects, and although due to habitat destruction, industries and automobiles more than rockets, it is not far-fetched to say that he prognosticates the greenhouse effect. Inventing more and more machines would not be *inspirational*. Understood from this perspective, of an ecological concern, much of Cummings' (even biting) satire comes into its own as a reasonable phenomenon, even if it may not necessarily be *rationalistic*. In fact, from an ecological perspective it seems that Cummings' satire and poetic critique can be so intense because contra-ecological modern societies *rationalise* their destruction of nature. It uses "reason/s" to remain blind to, excuse itself from, or intensify an increasing scale of ecological ignorance and (hence) destruction. Some of Cummings' poems clearly indicate that only a very arrogant outlook can believe that it will teach nature some kind of *lesson* in the final analysis ("o sweet spontaneous" (*Tulips* CP 58); "if everything happens that can't be done" (*I x I* CP 594); "should this fool die" (*Etcetera* CP 1053)). Today, these concerns have grown in proportion and they provide added validity to Cummings' poetic ecology, also in its satirical mode.

pity this busy monster,manunkind,

not. Progress is a comfortable disease:
your victim(death and life safely beyond)

plays with the bigness of his littleness
--electrons deify one razorblade
into a mountainrange;lenses extend

unwish through curving wherewhen till unwish
returns on its unself.

A world of made
is not a world of born--pity poor flesh

and trees,poor stars and stones,but never this
fine specimen of hypermagical

ultraomnipotence. We doctors know

a hopeless case if--listen:there's a hell
of a good universe next door;let's go

(*I x I* CP 554)

Underneath its emphatic surface and telling full stops, a careful and ecological play of opposites continues here in Cummings' poetry. An artificial, man-made world does not compare to the living, born realm of nature. Progress is indeed a

contradiction: it is a rash sustenance of comforts that are nonetheless not so comfortable after all (a comfortable “dis-ease”); simultaneously, it is a disease, and the poem is an ecological prognosis. Humans are therefore un-kind: not child-like (the German word for child is “das Kind”), not related to nature as children are related to their kin. Human nature has turned into a “busy monster” who deifies (and reifies) razorblades to the extent that they obliterate actual mountains. In the final couplet, somewhat deliberately, the poetic voice dissolves opposites: the universe next door is a “*hell/ of a good*” one. This universe continues beyond those opposites (such as rich versus poor, culture versus nature, artificiality versus life and death) that plague the un-world of modern progress according to this and other Cummings satires. Humans get trapped, through lenses among other things, within the curving “*wherewhen*” of their obsession with controllable, measurable, and predictable (confined) spaces (see also “(of Ever-Ever Land i speak” (1938 CP 466); “the season ‘tis, my lovely lambs” (*is* 5 CP 265); and “POEM, OR BEAUTY HURTS MR. VINAL” (*is* 5 CP 228)).

And such focus on the profitable “*wherewhen*” leads to an ignorance towards the (Taoist/Zen) “*now-here-nowhere*” and its positive no-ones, nobodies, and nothing/s as intimated by Cummings throughout his oeuvre. It leads, in short, to ignorance of one’s natural place. The open-endedness of the final couplet (down to the details of a nasal voiced consonant and a vowel in end positions) – again *after* a full stop and without a full stop of its own – elegantly completes this satire, with its ecological and Taoist upliftment of a monotonous preoccupation with closure, reification, dualisms, and scrutinizing and selling razorblades. At bottom, this satire expresses modern humans’ un-relatedness to nature, and therefore their un-kind-ness to themselves: modern humans are not relatives of themselves and nature (and this is frequently clear also from their view of semiosis). This satire contrasts the “cutting edge” of a deified razorblade to a more open-ended pity of ecological interrelatedness and flexibility. Also, it anticipates the post-modern accent on hyperreality and infinite semiosis with its mocking of that “fine specimen of hypermagical/ ultraomnipotence” – that busy monster, manunkind. And its emphasis on pity for nature, obliterated by this busy monster, is unmistakably ecological.

It could be argued that some of Cummings’ satires can be related to ecology with difficulty. Yet, seemingly “remote” satires that do not, on their surface, relate themselves to Cummings’ poetic ecology do reveal an ecological critique upon careful

study of their dynamics. For example, a poem that seems to castigate businessmen as its sole objective, suggests ironically that a “goodly co [company]” had “paid to make man free” (*1 X 1* CP 552). The body of the poem presents a precarious ceremony of self-congratulation in some business parlour, upon this liberating feat. The ceremony concludes:

then up rose mr lipshits pres
 (who always nothing says)
 and he kisséd the general menedjerr
 and they smokéd a robert burns cigerr
 to the god of things like they err

(*1 X 1* CP 552)

Besides other aspects such as the elaborate accents in “kisséd” and “smokéd” and the self-burning cigar -- with a hint of “narrow” maleness -- the final line of the poem is intriguing for it presents an apt description of one of the main problematics of modern life. Concurrently, it pricks the ego-pretentiousness associated with this problematic. This problematic is the fact that we continue to objectify and/or reify things -- experience sold in “cans” which Cummings also satirizes (*1938* CP 466; *1 x 1* CP 549), or the rational tendency to make “it” and “which” of experience (*Xaipe* CP 658), including the marking and “packaging” of time (*Xaipe* CP 659). As these processes of reification (read also: objectification) continue, we are more and more overwhelmed by objects, and we turn increasingly into objectified caricatures of ourselves. Rainer Emig (in considering mainstream modernist poetry) refers to this as the “revenge of the objects” in Baudrillard’s terminology (1995:186). The converse and related paradox is also true according to Cummings: as we depersonalize nature into a monotony of objects, it becomes more personal as if by itself: “but though mankind persuades/ itself that every weed’s/ a rose, roses(you feel/ certain)will only smile” (*73 Poems* CP 744). The poem that follows on “pity this busy monster, manunkind” (analysed in the preceding paragraphs) states that “this mountain slept// while his pines lifted their green lives and smiled” (*1 X 1* CP 553). Note, too, how Cummings puns on “leaves” with the word “lives” here, by means of a careful contextualization of the word in terms of one’s syntactical expectations.

By deliberately mis-spelling and rhyming the word “err” (are) in the poem under discussion, Cummings shows a number of things with great simultaneity: for instance the error of the managers’ position when they themselves slide into the

“things” that they glorify and sell (which happen to be laxatives). Also the furtiveness and deep-seated uncertainty (under the veneer of glamour) of this position (since “err” reminds of the novelistic interspersions “...er” which indicates uncertainty in a clumsy way). Also, it effectively and economically satirizes the suave smoothness of their discourse which would hastily replace “are” with “err”, and the error of self-diminishment in the most negative sense.

No Thanks (eventually) published in 1935, contains a poem with a telling omission: a missing “o”. At first glance, this satire is unrelated to ecological issues. The single event satirised here is the president of the United States who throws a baseball to inaugurate the baseball season:

o pr
gress verily thou art m
mentous superc
lossal hyperpr
digious etc i kn
w & if you d

n't why g
to yonder s
called newsreel s
called theatre & with your
wn eyes beh

ld The

(The president The
president of The president
of the The)president of

the(united The president of the
united states The president of the united
states of The President Of The)United States

Of America unde negant redire quemquam supp
sedly thr
w
i
n
g
a
b
aseball

(*No Thanks* CP 392)

The echoing sounds across loudspeakers in the stadium (as presented in stanzas 3 and 4) are a satirical highlight of Cummings' oeuvre²⁸. Visually, the reader is initially as confused by the arrangements of words in these stanzas as the announcement would have been overwhelming in its delayed echoes through the stadium speakers. The poetic speaker views the event on a newsreel. As Webster writes, the "newsreel lacks aliveness and spontaneity, as does the empty pomp of the ceremony of throwing out the first ball of the season" (1995a:135). The speaker is twice or thrice removed from the "event": he or she hears it as announced through loud speakers in a stadium (first remove) and listens to and watches it on a newsreel (second remove). In addition, the "o" -- iconic of the baseball according to Webster (1995a:135) -- is present (first line) and actually absent (remainder of the poem) (Webster, 1995a:135).

In reading this poem, much depends on one's view of either its autonomy, or its intratextual interrelatedness with the (entire) rest of Cummings' oeuvre. A reading of this poem as an autonomous poetic event that satirizes the president's throw, pure and simple, is not only valid but necessary. As has been mentioned in this thesis, Cummings' awareness and control of the "silhouettes" or sensuous edges of individual poetic signs and individual poems as wholes deserve a reading of their own. However, as has also been argued here, Cummings' signs -- including individual poems -- reach out to one another across somewhat static and entrenched semiotic and poetic expectations (such as the expectation of autonomous poems). They tend to move (one) into an enhanced sense of (ecological) context, as Cummings clearly wished to achieve (Cohen, 1987:186).

What exactly could a more ecologically conscious reading add to extant analyses of this visual-verbal satire? Firstly, let the pun on the concept of a beginning "season" not go by unnoticed. (Although the word "season" is not mentioned, the "aseball" which is homophonous with an "ace-ball" or first ball of the "season", is implied.) In Cummings' poetry we see an ecological emphasis on the change of seasons as well as other in-between natural states such as twilight. In this satire, the cyclical nature of seasonal change turns into something unreal, or un-dreamy, or a "reel" that signals a confusing announcement and a frivolous, "seasonal" event.

²⁸ Richard D. Cureton mentions first that these stanzas represent an echoing effect (see Webster, 1995a:135).

Secondly, we have seen that Cummings satirizes a progress that ignores and destroys nature in the name of reified ultraomnipotence, quite intensely. The missing “o” in the word “progress” is therefore significant in this satire, if one allows to oneself to read it in terms of Cummings’ whole satire and nature poetry. Thirdly, the *announcement* of an implied “united state” is all but united as rendered in the poem: it is, rather, a (visual) cacophony. It is a searing reminder of an artificial and harsh, “newsreel” start to the “season”. And the clumsy inanity of the “event” is underscored by the notion of an “a b c” in the final stanza. The last three lines contain the “a” and “b”, and suggests the “c” with its “ace-ball” (“first ball” of the “season”).

From an ecological perspective, then, this poem satirizes not only the superficiality of the baseball event, but also, ultimately, the missing moon and indeed the missing cyclical femaleness of nature’s presence as intimated by an “o” in numerous Cummings poems (some of which I have mentioned). The “o” in the top left hand corner visually invites the reader into an escape from artificiality, and an *in-scape* into nature, the “hell/ of a good universe next door” (*I x I* CP 554) with its (ecological and Taoist) flow, and with the compelling o-sound invitations: “let’s go” (*I x I* CP 554), or “All lose, whole find” (*I x I* CP 556) -- life and nature are not (only or merely) about winning or losing (see “death(having lost)put on his universe” (*No Thanks* CP 451)) -- or dualisms of the competitive mind.

A critical difficulty of where and how to *close* or *stop* a given reading of Cummings’ poetic ecology should not prevent one from exploring its sheer ecological (pliable, whole, or alive) extent and dynamism. Even in this baseball-poem (which, one dares say, leaves the baseball-lover free to admire the game since it satirizes the “false” throw), ecological eyes (and “I’s” or selves) are tellingly missing. The president becomes a symbol of the lack of a “wing” (final stanza) and its replacement with a false arm. Eyes, as we have seen in other Cummings poems such as “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” (*No Thanks* CP 396) are also (typgraphical and audible) oos in Cummings’ poetry. The lack of a significant relationship between humans and nature, ultimately is central to Cummings’ satire even at its outer extremities as in the baseball poem. Indeed, some poems may have satirical *edges* while they are nonetheless quite lyrical in their affirmation of nature. An example is a 1922 poem which lyrically establishes nature’s presence and concomitantly *satirizes* those who

wish to “explain” nature, presenting them as failed lovers who pinch, prod, and poke nature without success:

O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked

thee
,has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy

beauty .how
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and

buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods
(but)
true

to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover

thou answerest

them only with

spring)

(*Tulips* CP 58)

As Cummings writes in a quite later poem of 1958, his voice is concomitant with a man whose “heart” is true to his “earth” (*95 Poems* 676) (note the anagram which arranges a unity of heart and earth), and to whom anyone’s artificial world is therefore of lesser consequence. Consider that “O sweet spontaneous” also starts with an “O” at the top left hand, like the baseball satire. It is a Romantic “O”, to be sure -- purely exclamational in this sense -- but it is also a small typography of earth and earthy cycles. (As far as could be determined, Cummings almost always uses “o” and not “oh”.) Again, it may also be read as an “entrance” into the poem, and into the born

(not made) world. Given these and other contexts, the omission of the “o” and its replacement with a hardened, man-made ball in the baseball satire, also suggests (to the Cummings reader) a modern ignorance towards a number of things: innermost eyes, taking nature personally, the moon, a sense of entrance into born nature, and the cycle/s of earth.

3.5. Visual-verbal poems

The extent of Cummings’ visual-verbal aesthetics is remarkable: a poem such as “o pr” (*No Thanks* CP 392), analysed in the preceding section, indicates this.

Martin Heusser summarizes the initial unease and reluctance of critics faced with the copious scale of Cummings’ typographical poetry, as follows:

A major reason for this uneasiness that has, for many years, haunted critics dealing with Cummings’ typography is the extraordinary diversity of his visual strategies. [Richard D.] Cureton correctly observes that ‘one might claim that Cummings made more intensive and extensive use of visual form than any other poet in literary history’ (‘Visual Form’ 245). Cummings’ poetry contains the whole gamut of possibilities; he has written shape poems, pattern poems, acrostics and ‘concrete’ poems, exploits all conceivable forms of iconicity, visual as well as syntactical, and he uses typography as a guide for reading his poems (1997:241).

One way of accommodating Cummings’ typographical aspect is to consider Cummings’ accent on a Taoist/Chinese influence, an influence that undoubtedly gives prominence to the visual as a vehicle of natural intuition. Heusser (1997:279) discusses the probability that Cummings’ visual element and visual elements in literature at large aim at the greater evocation of *simultaneity* -- and Mary Babcock reaches a parallel conclusion in her essay on Cummings’ ideogrammatic style (1963:120).

From a consciously Taoist viewpoint simultaneity can also be transcribed as *co-incidence*. That is, an ongoing and interactive *co-eventuality* of incidences or events that continues to make biological life on earth possible. Also, the notion that “coincidence” is not a *mere* accident purely because it falls outside strictly logical patterns of cause-and-effect. These co-incidences vary from incorporation (eating) to comprehension (organization into one’s mind and self), including co-operative biological processes such as symbiosis and osmosis. In orientalism, it also involves significant and non-superstitious (a-logical) “accidents” or co-incidents such as one’s presence where the moon reflects on rippling water, combined with a sense of upliftment. Poetically, this further involves a quest for expressing the impression that

nature makes on one, of a pure simultaneity of co-events and flow -- also, of (say) breathing, seeing, sensing the wind stirring in grass, and much more, at a given instant -- and into which one is radically included according to the Taoist view.

!blac
k
agains
t

(whi)

te sky
?t
rees whic
h fr

om droppe

d
,
le
af

a:;go

e
s wh
IrII
n

.g

(50 Poems CP 487)

From an ecological viewpoint a couple of points could be added to Webster's analysis of this poem (1995a:130). A readerly recombination of the scrambled syntax of this poem could read: black trees against a white sky, from which leaves dropped/a leaf is dropping and goes whirling. Webster mentions that the syntactical spacing of the poem isolates the possibility of the concept "a:;go", intimating that most of the leaves had already fallen from the trees (1995a:130). We have the opposites white versus black, and they are cross-stitched by means of punctuation: black receives the exclamation mark and white the question mark. (Perhaps one would usually assume that white takes the exclamation mark of purity, innocence, daylight, and so on.) Hidden in the first four lines, and created through fragmentation and Cummings' separation of "agains" and its "t", is the verbal notion that black *agains*, that is, recurs and/or continues. Then the exclamation mark would mark a restoration of the

continuing, active incorruptibility of black and its associated shades of meaning, in nature. Such innocence or a continuation of non-sentimental and dynamic nature, is transferred to white, because the spacing of this word is such that it gives rise to a question, [w ^i] (“whi”), followed two lines down by its question mark, and confirmed with its rhyming sound within the word “sky” (one line down). And questions are marked as positive events throughout Cummings’ oeuvre as far as could be determined. They open up space, whereas commands, and reasons (or rationalisations) tend to indicate a negativity of closure according to Cummings’ viewpoint. (Indeed, the role of the question in Cummings’ poetry begs a closer study.) For example:

when god decided to invent
everything he took one
breath bigger than a circustent
and everything began

when man determined to destroy
himself he picked the was
of shall and finding only why
smashed it into because

(1 x 1 CP 566)

A spontaneity and essence of creation and breathing are expressed in the first stanza: God decided to in-vent, or breathe out, everything. Humans, in their turn, continue to defeat themselves by smashing the open-ended “why” of continuing existence into a static closure of “because”, or rationalization. This reading is confirmed by another poem in the same volume:

so isn’t small one littlest why
it into if shall climb all the
blue heaven green earth neither sea
here’s more than enough room for three of me

and only while your sweet eyes close
have disappeared a million whys;
but opening if are those eyes
every because is murdered twice

(1 x 1 CP 588)

A more fragile rearrangement of syntax in this poem (as compared to, for example, “!blac”) again confirms Cummings’ respect for the female lover. A 1926 poem sensually mentions “all the whys/ which lurk/ between your naked shoulderblades” (*is* 5 CP 282). We have come full circle as is bound to happen in reading Cummings’ categories of poetry: the above is a love poem. Read with its

(somewhat hidden in terms of sequencing) circustent counterpart of the same volume, this poem makes clear that to Cummings' poetic speaker, a threedimensional open-endedness of love and why is preferable to the twodimensional closure of reason/s and because. Other poems, for further instances, speak of "dying/ 's miraculous/ why?" (*Xaipe* CP 604), "blue the triangular why" (of a celebrated kite) (*Xaipe* CP 668), "each why// of star(afloat/ on not quite less than all/ of time)/ gives you [my love] his flame/ so is your heart/ alert" (*I x I* CP 575). If one reads these various "whys" in their individual poems as separate, autonomous events, one should not preclude their role in creating and suggesting context. As this brief detour through Cummings' "whys" reveals, a word such as "why" gathers in context: it suggests an open-endedness towards the female lover and nature. It further suggests the creation of significant room, rather than spatial confinement. (Teachers know well that questions have this dialogical capacity to open up learning/growing space.)

The suggested "why" in the "!'blac" poem therefore carries a predominantly positive sense of the need for questions to open the necessary space into nature's mysteries and wonders. In the process, opposites are dissolved: black, as we have seen, carries the exclamation, and white (therefore) the positive "why". Taken out of their perhaps traditional contexts²⁹, the opposites of black versus white are dissolved into an ecological sense of a third voice, or active location beyond rational dualisms. The ripple effect of these "reverse polarities" can be felt throughout much of Cummings' poetry: for instance, in the poem "so isn't small one littlest why" cited in the preceding paragraphs, the word "murdered" acquires a surprising positivity of love, as found in another love poem, too, "whose are these(wraith a clinging with a wraith)", which states that the lovers cannot be killed (again) by the ocean's waves since they have already been "murdered" (as separate egos) by their love (*Xaipe* CP 639).

The question mark in the "!'blac" poem further possibly indicates the shape of a tree, thus acting as a micro-ideogram. The full stop at the bottom of the question mark would represent the point at which the tree comes from the soil, the straight shaft of the symbol (before it begins to curve) would indicate the stem, and the curve would indicate the crown. This would further explain Cummings' placement of the

question mark right next to the word “tree”. Stark opposites of a white sky and black trees open up into a question. A fragmented juncture “which from dropped” joins the sky and trees on the one hand and the falling leaf on the other. The gravity of the fall as in the later poem “l(a)” (95 *Poems* CP 673) is indicated by the long, downward shape of the poem -- a point stressed in terms of “l(a)” by Heusser (1997:272). In this way the singularity of the event and its possible one-ness as found in “l(a)” (Friedman, 1967:172; Webster, 1995a:138) could be indicated visually. The conclusion of the “!blac” poem further indicates that the leaf is whirling. In its whirling motion the leaf may suggest the still point from which everything emanates, as found also in Taoism (Lao Tzu, 1987:32, 37; sections 14, 25).

This is another expression of Cummings’ third dimension beyond opposites: the gyre intimates unity and stillness from which (natural) growth emanates. And in the “centre” of its gyrating fall Cummings places three one-shaped figures: two capitalized “I’s” and one letter “l”. A unifying, third-dimensional co-incidence of two selves or two I’s are hinted at in the word “whirling”: fragmenting the word hence accents that two “I’s” form one letter “l” or figure “1” as the speaker is taken into the (also visually central) twirling motion of the leaf. The whirling continues, but the placement of the full stop is once again significant: it occurs *before* the final “g” of the word “whirling”, and the “conclusion” of the poem. This could indicate two possibilities. Firstly, as in other Cummings poems, that the natural motion continues beyond the grammatically correct “conclusion”. And that motion itself escapes any final linguistic description, as in the grasshopper poem (*No Thanks* CP 396) (see Chapter Two). Secondly, it is possible upon careful visual examination that this full stop should indicate the “soil” level (thinking of the question mark as a tree) and that the “g” with its downwardly-hanging second little eye would then indicate that the movement will ultimately end up below the soil level. Here a complete re-integration with soil will occur. A natural cycle would be completed; this reading ties in well with the over-all figure one shape of this poem as well as “l(a)”. Further credibility is leant to this possibility by Webster’s thought that the “g” stands for “ground” (1995a:157)).

²⁹ Black and question mark as markers of doom in a standard, negative sense, and white and exclamation mark as standard markers of positivity and vision.

In provisional summary: Cummings' ecological sensibility is not an isolated given in his poetry, but stretches from his lyricism and sonnets, his erotic poems and children's poems, to his satires and his visual-verbal forms. In addition it has been demonstrated that his ecological sensibility spans Cummings' career from the outset (*Tulips & Chimneys* published in 1922), throughout, into the later end of his oeuvre (*73 Poems* published posthumously in 1963). One may therefore reasonably reiterate that the ecological sensibility lies very close to if not at the very centre of Cummings' particular modernist commitment.

This would suggest among other things that Cummings is a distinctly *ecological* modernist fool³⁰. His poetry is ecologically committed, aimed at confronting and possibly altering or enhancing the modern reader's natural sensibilities. Cummings' speaker strikes one as constantly aware of the possibility of fusion with the natural other into greater selfhood -- which amounts to growth, another of Cummings' key (or often repeated) words (1938 CP 461). Some of the more or less predominantly ecological motifs and devices -- or dynamics -- of Cummings' poetry invite further attention and organization.

³⁰ The modernist fool or artist can be defined provisionally as follows: he or she is out of step with the beat of progress, and continues to look for experience and expression of an authentic inner life. In Cummings' case, this motif is further related to someone that continues to look for an authentic ecology or wholeness of modern semiosis and natural actuality.

Chapter 4

“How”: Selected Dynamics of Cummings’ Poetic Ecology

Visible, invisible,
a fluctuating charm
an amber-tintured
amethyst
inhabits it, your arm
approaches and it opens
and it closes; you had
meant
to catch it and it quivers;
you abandon your intent.

Marianne Moore, “A Jelly-Fish”
O To Be a Dragon (1959)

We have come to realize that there are no static structures in nature. There is stability, but this stability is one of dynamic balance, and the further we penetrate into matter the more we need to understand its dynamic nature to understand its patterns.

Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (1982)

1. Introduction

Iconicity and other visual-verbal dynamics are not the only ways through which Cummings creates interactivity between the sign and nature. The preceding Chapter mentions additional dynamics such as an economy of (ecological) suggestiveness, the overall (and fluid) open-endedness of Cummings’ methods of composition, and a cross-stitching of opposites. These steer the reader to make a creative, poetic jump (even if it is gradually or stably done in some instances), across the supposed divide between semiosis and the biosphere, culture and nature, or the sign and ecology. Richard D. Cureton, Cummings’ most comprehensive syntactical analyst, refers to these events as “interlevel” ones (1980:250).

This thesis clearly cannot exhaust the array of “interlevel” dynamics in Cummings’ poetic ecology. We have seen in the preceding Chapter that the scope of Cummings’ poetic ecology is considerable, spanning across the historical publication of his volumes and the development of his career, as well as the various sub-genres of his oeuvre. Also that it involves macro-dynamics such as the careful and abundant employment of blank space, to micro-dynamics such as a particular, contextualized placement of given signs within individual poems. All kinds of holomemes in Cummings’ *eco-logos* deserve study. These include individual poems, as well as micro-ideograms such as Cummings’ “i”, and an osmotic manoeuvring of inherited semiotic boundaries. The latter involves, in its turn, a transgressive and significant

rearrangement of correct grammar and poetic traditions (for example, the sonnet form) -- and more.

These dynamics further indicate the vital degree of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernists when it comes to a poetic ecology. Whereas mainstream modernist poetry is inclined to stress and employ "hardened" (objectified) semiotic boundaries and (hence) a sense of alienating *fragmentation*, Cummings' poems accent flexibility, fluidity, and "interlevel", ecological *recombination*. (Both kinds of modernism, Cummings' and mainstream modernism, employ the device of fragmentation and recombination -- but sometimes with different accents and often, different ecosemiotic results.)

Slightly hidden (Taoist) dynamics such as (also ideogrammatic) simultaneity and the subtle and effective suggestion of the co-existence and co-incidence of human culture and natural continuation are vital to Cummings' inherently dynamic poetry. We have seen that Cummings' upliftment of oppositional expectations corresponds to that of Taoism. Furthermore, Cummings' particular occupation of William Howarth's zone of between-ness includes Western natural scientific leanings (his ornithology, the tendency to thwart inherited constraints into more osmotic forms, and so on), mixed with an oriental natural sensibility. And the latter (again) foregrounds a middle ground or route, between the perceived opposites of East and West (Hayot, 1999:530). The reader "ends up", in reading Cummings carefully, in a third dimension, in conjunction with Cummings' third voice. Here s/he may experience, via Cummings' mediating powers, a rediscovery of that simultaneity, or serendipity, or co-incidence, which carries much of what we call natural experience. Here (or there), all is nothing and nothing is all, as Qian formulates it (1995:155): there is no confinement, just a con-fluence of semiotic and natural events. And in this threedimensional now-here, silence sings.

all which isn't singing is mere talking
and all talking's talking to oneself
(whether that oneself be sought or seeking
master or disciple sheep or wolf)

Gush to it as deity or devil
--toss in sobs and reasons threats and smiles
name it cruel fair or blessed evil--
it is you(né i)nobody else

drive dumb mankind dizzy with haranguing
 --you are deafened every mother's son--
 all is merely talk which isn't singing
 and all talk's to oneself alone

but the very song of (as mountains
 feel and lovers) singing is silence

(73 Poems CP 804)

Anyone who is (still) fortunate to reach a place that is quiet within nature -- or a space of quietness with one's beloved as the speaker tells us -- will know that an audible silence is indeed one of the delights of ecological experience. Also concretely, one may experience here a silence that is so silent that it is audible, and one may indeed feel that mountains "feel". A dreamy condition and a concrete condition may commingle within nature. And this sonnet states this recognition with just the right mixture of emphasis and release.

Instead of signs that create the maximum objective differentiation and distant spatiality, Cummings' signs revitalize a full-empty (or complete) intuition of one's enduring natural locality. The now and here dissolve into nowhere -- or, the now and here emerge from nowhere -- and complete individuality (loneliness) merges with complete natural interpenetration (one-ness). In another of his children's poems, Cummings also makes the alone, all-one silence of a sculpture from stone sing (50 Poems CP 525).

What will follow, then, is one possible exploration of Cummings' whole/ ecological "how". Or: one route of Cummings' poetic ecology is (critically) *followed* here, guided by Taoist poetics as found in Lao Tzu's original text especially. This is to be carried out in continuation of a hermeneutic, ecosemiotic reading of Cummings' poetry. As we have seen in Chapter Two of the thesis, Lao Tzu stipulates one or two "strategies" (for lack of a term) that enhance one's awareness of natural integration. A humility of attitude and language, or a smallness and earthiness of existence and words, allows one to come close to (what we today term) an ecological sensibility. (Shine, length, opposites held in indefinite and hierarchical tension, and an intellectualized sign that believes it can cover and devour all (natural) experience shall have a lesser capacity to evoke dynamic natural integrity, especially in an era where these things perhaps dominate experience too much.) Concomitantly, a flexibility and fluidity of attitude and language underscore an ecological potential in which semiosis and natural events merge significantly. These and similar "strategies" lead

on occasion to a serendipitous revitalisation of human-nature equilibrium in the most dynamic, intuitive/suggestive, and open-ended sense. Signs are composed in such a manner as to co-incide with nature's significant co-incidences. Again, Cummings' (poetic sense of) now-here-nowhere, or (e)mergence as well as his advanced sense of all-one loneliness and individuality bring this level of ecological serendipity into the English language. In his way, he manages to compose an ecological-Taoist poetry in English, in the modernist era; hence incorporating, dissolving, and transcending the barriers between modern culture and continuing nature. Informed by (his) Taoism -- aware, that is, of his particular modern zone of between-ness, between a unique American English and Taoism -- some key dynamics that bring about this kind of upliftment or transcendence (*into* the ecosystem) are examined here. The discussion culminates in a relatively full ecological exploration of two vital ecological poems in his oeuvre: the leaf poem "l(a)" (95 *Poems* CP 673), and the hummingbird poem "i/ never" (73 *Poems* CP 827).

2. Some key dynamics of Cummings' poetic ecology

2.1. Humility (smallness and earthiness)

2.1.1. Smallness

One of the surest signs of Cummings' striving for ecological unobtrusiveness and persuasion is his emphasis upon smallness as a natural theme and a poetic technique. Evidence for this striving ranges from his statement "I am a small eye poet" (1972:109, letter 82) in a 1925 letter to his mother, to Webster's acute observation that virtually all the animals in Cummings' poetry are small ones, ranging from mice, grasshoppers, and birds to chipmunks and crabs and (at the large end) a baby elephant (2000:111). Furthermore, Cummings' fort  in composing poetry lies not with the ever-prevalent Western insistence that a great poet should write long poems -- long poems that Richard Kennedy insists upon, for example, in his attempt to judge Cummings as either major or minor (1992:38). Some of Cummings' greatest works are quite economical and even "small". An example is the leaf poem "l(a)", consisting of 23 characters and containing a universe in it according to some of Cummings' critics (Welch, 1995:117). As Cummings suggests in a later poem, one may come across a certain bird (singing at twilight) "whose universe a single leaf may be" (73 *Poems* CP 821).

In his article on Cummings' haiku sensibilities, Michael Dylan Welch indeed lists "smallness" as one of its key qualities (1995:98). The sinologist Zhaoming Qian writes that Pound was struck by the absence of long poems in Chinese (1995:25). A Taoist sense of proportion leans in the direction of fewer and not more thoughts and words. Probably, this ties in well with the general modernist dictum of "less is more" -- Cummings' minimalism speaks for itself. In a passage from his non-lecture number two (as quoted in the preceding Chapters), Cummings states that (as a child) his "*enormous smallness* entered Her [nature's] illimitable being" (1953:32; my emphasis -- JET). A final set of indications of Cummings' preference for the little: "little" is one of his key words (along with words such as "spring", "love", "death", and many more) as found in a considerable number of poems. These include "o by the by" (*1 x 1* CP 593), "who are you little you-i" (*73 Poems* CP 824), "may my heart always be open to little/ birds" (*1938* CP 481), "little tree/ little christmas tree" (*Tulips* CP 29), "so little he is" (*1938* CP 471), "i am a little church(no great cathedral)" (*95 Poems* CP 749) -- and many more. In fact, Katharine Winters McBride's *A Concordance to the Complete Poems of E.E. Cummings*, lists 202 entries of the word "little" in Cummings' oeuvre (1989:939), excluding its derivatives (such as "littleness").

Lao Tzu writes that a "tree trunk the size of a fathom/ grows from a blade as thin as a hair./ A tower nine stories high/ is built from a small heap of earth" (1987:56, section 64). And this paradox: "if the man of calling never does anything great/ then he can complete his great deeds" (Lao Tzu, 1987:56, section 63), and "Do the great thing while it is still small!" (Lao Tzu, 1987:55, section 63). In addition: "the man of calling avoids/ what is too intense, too much, too big" (Lao Tzu, 1987:40, section 29). "DAO [Tao] is the eternal unutterable simplicity./ Even though it is small/ the world dares not make it its serf" (Lao Tzu, 1987:41, section 32). As has been noted in previous Chapters, the essence of natural change is so small according to Lao Tzu that it is bafflingly elusive³¹ (1987:32; section 14).

Cummings' striving for smallness in theme and composition can be better understood in this Taoist light. One can read his poetry as a Western expression of

³¹ Incidentally, in terms of purely Western scientific conceptions, one of the baffling aspects of DNA is that from its smallness (its simplicity and literal smallness) arises the sheer diversity of creatures that we share life with: this baffling aspect of "autopoiesis" (or "self-creation"/ "self-organization") is compared by one DNA analyst to the spontaneous emergence of a city from the head of a carrot (Berlinski, 2001).

the Taoist impression of smallness, non-interference, and not attempting to leave the greatest mark, but instead attempting to persuade one into natural being via (elusively small) poetic mediation. Then the spontaneous “smallness” of Cummings’ poetry comes into its proper place. And it possibly becomes less difficult to *locate* the poet as either major or minor in terms of modernist dualistic hierarchies and symmetries (so to anticipate arguments of the next Chapter of the thesis).

little man
(in a hurry
full of an
important worry)
halt stop forget relax

wait

(little child
who have tried
who have failed
who have cried)
lie bravely down

sleep

big rain
big snow
big sun
big moon
(enter

us)

(*No Thanks* CP 393)

Awareness of one’s littleness (instead of striving for and worrying about something “important”) is the potential gateway into renewed connectivity with the vastness of one’s natural being. But this assumes the necessary inactivity or (to speak in “Sino-English”), a passivity of the active kind – or that Taoist non-action which allows everything to fall into place (see Lao Tzu, 1987:48; section 48). The little man and the little child should empty their minds of worries and failures, in order to return to the natural mode: indicated by blank space (emptiness) and the “alone”/all-one verbs “wait”, “sleep”, and “(enter”.

In the first stanza the parenthesis (which always plays a significant role in Cummings’ poetry) perhaps indicates how the little man is filled up with worries and hurrying. In the second stanza the parenthesis perhaps indicates the mood of simple, straightforward (non-sentimental) empathy and protection: they include all the words

about the child in their smooth round shapes -- which on other occasions intimate other natural phenomena such as the sliver of a moon (*50 Poems* CP 571). In the case of the final phrase, "enter us", the parenthesis acts as visual indicators of the process of entering. As the signs enter the parenthesis, so should rain, snow, sun, and moon enter us. And just as "us" is the collective noun, so should nature and humans be (increasingly) unified for humans to continue discovering their actual selves. The worries and failures included in the other sets of parenthesis are now replaced with the natural vastness of the elements -- replaced indeed by the notion of reciprocal *entrance* itself. The parenthesis seems to indicate a process of interfusion and saturation (beyond human worries and failures), therefore indicating an osmotic sensibility, as found, too, in the sonnet "i thank You God for most this amazing" (*Xaipe* CP 663) with its interfusing "octave" and "sestet" marked by parenthesis.

Cummings' transgression of boundaries which seemed so wild and extravagant to some critics reveals its reasonable side in this ecological way: after all, osmosis implies a significant and healthy trans-fusion through permeable barriers/membranes. The ample space between "enter" and "us" stresses this sense of entrance and a more peaceful natural saturation beyond normal worries, hurryings, and failures that clog the mind. The blankness of the page itself is so structured that entrance is suggested. The idea that smallness, economy, active passivity, non-interference of anxieties towards greatness, etcetera, will all serve to reconnect one with (the movements and greatness of) nature, is ecological and Taoist. So, too, is Cummings' strikingly stripped and temperate rendering of one's smallness *within* the big elements. The poet finds a minimalistic, modern way of expressing this impression. However, this point is not esoteric (in an occult "Taoist" sense). The point is that connectivity of the highest kind occurs in terms of the earthy concreteness of existence, or the innermost quality of perfectly available, self-evident, and ongoing concrete and natural phenomena such as sunlight and snow. Taoism is sensuous/earthy in this respect, and so is Cummings' poetry.

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(1938 CP 471)

Cummings was fond of burlesque theatre with its supersedence of opposites (1966:128). He was also fond, as this poem makes clear, of the comedian Jimmy Savo. Cummings made an “exuberant” oil portrait of the dancing Savo (Ordeman, 1997:53-54). The diagonal shapes of this 1938 poem remind one of two poems published three years earlier in *No Thanks*. One is “o pr” (CP 392) with the president throwing a (b)aseball from his false diagonal “wing” (arm). This occurs, as we have seen, at the start of a newsreel “season” (a close reading of the poem has been made in the preceding Chapter). The other is “birds(“ (CP 448) (still to be close read in this Chapter) with its diagonal and disappearing arrangement of letters. An additional

immediate graphical similarity between “so little he is” and “birds(“ is an inversion of parenthesis which seems to suggest an outward direction towards (natural) context. Such inverted parenthesis point outwardly (and, of course, they bulge inwardly, towards the text). Furthermore, the “o” sign/sound plays crucial roles in “o pr” and in “so little he is”: the Savo poem recovers the missing “o” in the “so” of the baseball satire.

John T. Ordeman mentions (1997:53) that the Savo poem suggests various relations between Savo and a (little) bird which, in its turn, should be related to Cummings’ overall awareness of the relationships between the poet, (little) birds, song, and silence. Various simultaneities are created in the process. Words are fragmented in such a way as to ensure the maximum serendipity as the reader recombines them. Open-endedness -- contexts that open up faster than signs can close them down -- could well be the overriding impression that lingers upon a careful reading of the poem.

Reading the poem from top to bottom, one may start with the first three lines: “so little he is/ so./ Little”. One may now read, because of the odd full stop and capital, firstly: so he is so -- he is as he is, he is himself³². And (simultaneously/secondly): he is so little, his self is little (humble). The former suggests the pure being of Savo as he performs: one cannot say how “so” he is, he is just/ purely so. The latter suggests poetic empathy and identification with Savo’s smallness and humility (also in the sense of: earthiness, sensuousness). Such simultaneity is continued by the necessity of a readerly jump to recombine fragments in lines 4 to 6. Savo’s Little-ness is (pure) be-ing, and (concomitantly, and with a syntactical jump), Savo’s Little-ness be-comes expert-ly expand(ing) (stanza 3) -- or grOwing (into) -- a wing. Moving on (in a clumsy theoretical fashion compared to Cummings’ poetic agility) to stanza 4, the same suggestion of pure being is continued. Line 13 (first line of stanza 4) merges the (merging and) expert wing with the be-(w)ing of a poet: “Is poet iS”. Capitals in that line contain the word poet within an overriding IS, or (pure and simple) being. As movement is to context according to Cummings (Cohen, 1987:186), so is poet to being, and bird to poet, and Savo to both bird and poet according to the poetic speaker. The remainder of this stanza re-

establishes the sense of pure being by splitting-and-reuniting the word “so;ul”, so that it renders yet another “so”. One infers that “so” points to essence (“soul”/being/being).

Savo’s soul is the poet’s soul which corresponds with a childlost and foundclown spirit of unity -- beyond opposites such as lost and found. (The “o” sound works hard to suggest voiced continuation.) Stanzas 4 and 5 are “broken” with blank space, and the blank space is paradoxically bridged with yet another simultaneity of reading, again suggested by means of fragmented signs. The lines “)foundclown a// -live a/ ,bird” render the following simultaneous readings: the childlost foundclown is alive, the childlost foundclown is a bird, one has to live (like) a bird, (to) -live (is to be) a bird.

What exactly does the comma do prior to the word “bird”? Overall, the poem highlights punctuation, and this should be a pertinent question. One way of reading this comma is to note that it is preceded by a semicolon in the word “so;ul” of the preceding stanza. In the sign “,bird” the semicolon loses its upper “full stop” -- the mergence of poet, the performer Savo, and a bird or birds, is therefore one step more complete (that is, minus one closure of a full stop). Such a reading is confirmed by this: that the “concluding” set of punctuation marks indicate a progression from greater finality/closure to greater open-endedness/flexibility. The sequence of these punctuation marks is as follows: *full stop* (end of sentence/closure), *colon* (hesitation, but with expectations aroused of something to follow or to be explained), *semicolon* (combining two separate thoughts into one), and *comma* (a mere pause in a continuous sentence). The comma, apparently like Savo’s bird-like performance and the poet’s bird-like voice, is a faint, more open-ended trace that satisfyingly disappears into the nowhere of blank space, thus suggesting the simultaneous “magic” of Savo’s performance, the poetic voice, and the life/aliveness/being of a (little) bird. The flowing overall curvature of the final stanza could indicate a disappearing wing.

The softness of a bird is contrasted with a (crashing?) exclamation mark: in a prose piece on burlesque, Cummings’ “burlesk rose” shatters opposites because it is delicately tossed and lands on the stage floor with an earth-shattering crash

³² The Afrikaans Buddhist poet Breyten Breytenbach entitles one of his volumes of poetry, *Soos die so* (1990). I.e., “as the so”, “just like the so”, “just like the just like”, or “just as/ so it is”; not in the sense of despair, but in the sense of serendipity and being.

(1966:128). The “!O” (stanza 5) with its reverse exclamation mark (emphasizing the left hand margin as does the first inverse parenthesis), probably signals (serendipitous) exclamation, completeness (perfection), and entrance into nowhere or exit from mere and static “things”. The poem as a whole could be read as an *entrance* of precise and artistic (minute) serendipities.

“Contained” in a triangle of ampersands, the next lines of stanza 6 (at first glance, perhaps strangely) isolate the signs “j” [dʒ] and “i” [ɪ] in various (minimalistic/little) combinations. These minuscule arrangements are not without a purpose of context, as is the norm in Cummings’ poetic ecology. At least two possibilities suggest themselves to the (contextual) Cummings reader. Three ands (ampersands) suggest a third voice of unity once more, given that “and” suggests continuation, as opposed to “or” which suggests discontinuation, opposition, or a hierarchy of choices. It is probably a unity of burlesque performer and poetic voice, as the rest of the poem indicates. The “j” presents Jimmy Savo, and the “i” the poetic speaker (as we know). Placing “ji” together in the middle of three ands, therefore makes sense. The poet is “dancing” on the page with (little) letters just as Savo is so little, and just as he performs on the stage with a precision of bird-like “magic”.

The compound “jim,jimm/ ;jimmy” contains the faintest traces -- since the poem is already “on its way” out into the now-here of blank space -- of the following: jim is being just as i am ([dʒim] and [ɪm] fused into one sign). A similar trace that can be inferred homophonically reads jim-and-me, [dʒim-mi]. Consider that these compounds continue to suggest a two-into-one configuration of signs that resonates with the “ji” amidst three ampersands. Further serendipities of Savo’s surname are similarly suggested in the final stanza. In fact, the notion that the performer is a bird continues from the last line of the penultimate stanza to the first line of the last stanza: “;jimmy// s:” -- this is homophonous with “jimmy’s”, or jimmy is. The colon explains that Jimmy (Savo) is a bird, an “A/ V”, reminiscent of the word “aves”, which ties in with a notion that Savo takes flight as he performs, or that he grOw(s) a wing, or that he enters/ exits through a cyclic and perfect “O” or nothing, as suggested in preceding stanzas and the poem on the whole. Capitalization of the A and V highlights the graphical aspect: one points upward and the other downward, possibly suggesting that Savo outperforms these opposites with his childlost, foundclown, and

“alive” bird-so(ul). The final letter of his surname and the poem, “o”, is laden with various contexts created within this poem, and as found in other Cummings poems that we have analysed. It probably marks an exit from the stage and an entrance to the outside world, the world outside words and gestures, since it is followed immediately by an outward-pointing (and inward-bulging) parenthesis. Conversely, it could also mark the entrance of an outside natural world into the world (or theatre) of art, with Savo as the pivot in this process of out-fluence and in-fluence.

There is a likelihood that in more ways than one, this Savo poem also embodies a counterpart to the baseball satire (analysed in Chapter Three). Both poems refer to a closed space -- the Savo poem a burlesque theatre, and the baseball satire a movie theatre. However, the Savo poems celebrates movement and an open-ended upliftment of outside (and bird-like, poetic) context, whereas the baseball satire pricks the pretences of a false opening to a “season”, and the constricting closure of modern progress and hollow, announced “celebration”.

Stanza 3 of the Savo poem contains a seemingly loose question mark. Possibly, it could be an icon of the shape of a growing wing, with its curvatures. Also, given that the reader is here drawn into a virtual feast of semiotic serendipities (of discovering words played into words, and contexts emanating from contexts), this question mark could also indicate that Savo is a loser, and that losing is important. I.e., “what *weak* means and what *strong* means, were once upon a time meant *by one word*” (as Cummings comments in his essay on burlesque (1966:127)). The question mark is to the left of the “n” in the word “wing” -- thus suggesting that a serendipitous reading of the word “win”, a potential which the reader who is (by then) trained to discover such serendipities is to be questioned in the context of this Savo poem. Savo’s flexibility, and the serendipitous, merging qualities of the poem itself are “weaknesses” that are nonetheless so “strong” because they embody a third, continuing, and direct (non-artificial) artistic voice. (In other words, Savo understands the art of winning by losing.) And this voice, the ecosemiotician must add, hardly ever strays from an active unity between art and nature -- not even in the Savo-bird poem. As we now see, littleness itself is an important prerequisite of a (semiotic) strategy that wishes to communicate (the greatness of) nature and natural art.

In his recently translated “The Animal That Therefore I Am” (2002), Derrida cautiously suggests the notion of *l’animot*: that which is half word and half animal in particular (in contravention of French grammar³³) (2002:409). Cummings precedes Derrida by some decades with a poetry that is half culture, half nature, and half comedian, half bird. To Cummings the avenue between culture and nature is inherently a little one, a small one -- and not one to be travelled by a semiotician (in the broadest sense) who believes that her or his (view of the) sign can cover or even colour (and diminish) all of nature (to mere signs). Cummings suggests a timeless, vast nature, through an exploration of even minuscule semiotic limits. His poetry may be *l’animot*, but it remains distinctly small and humble (rooted in earth), and does not end up in the monotonous, repetitive, discrete continuums of “infinite semiosis”.

2.1.2. Earthiness

Although the Taoist attitude advocates “non-attachment” to one’s materialistic desires and hopes for greatness (Lao Tzu, 1987:56; section 64), it also advocates the most intimate possible connectivity to earth and soil, and indeed the concrete ground of one’s being. “No-mind” means an appreciation of the continuous flow of nature’s way, and it means to be (so to speak) “in sync” with the concrete and changing “hanging together” of nature. Finding one’s way back into timelessness (one of Cummings’ motifs (95 *Poems* CP 683, 768)) does not entail some esoteric escape into vague and “infinite” spiritualism and/or theory. To the contrary, it entails delving deeper into the essence of nature’s solidity and time, including the material aspect of biological being -- Friedman therefore rightly applies the maxim that to Cummings the way *down* is the way up (1996:59). I take this also to mean that to Cummings, as in Taoism, increasing closeness to one’s earthiness brings an increasing humility of insight and wisdom. Overall, Taoism presents a paradoxical and relieving sense of the heavenliness of the earth and the earthiness of heaven; something to which Cummings appears to comply in his own fashion. In short, the earthy way is the heavenly way. Heaven and earth should meet for transcendence to occur.

In the words of the Taoist scholar J.C. Cooper, Taoism entails that “[m]an should bring the spiritual down to earth and raise the earth into the spiritual”

³³ It is clear, however, that Derrida favours an interpretation of his own *l’animot* as more word than animal, and more a question of human cultural atrocity, than a limit that also allows poetic, open-ended relief (2002:392).

(1985:10). This is the basis of true intelligence according to Taoism, and is related to the Taoist sense of spontaneity, as opposed to the austere moral strictures of Confucianism. It further ties in well with an ecological comical aspect which one frequently finds in Cummings' poetry: that all will be well, and is therefore already well. Cooper also mentions Taoism's "resolving third" (1985:18) -- of which we have seen substantial evidence in Cummings' outlook and poetry. This includes spontaneous and deep acceptance of sensuousness, and indeed of concrete existence, here and now. Acceptance of one's concrete existence is often assumed, but can be difficult to achieve -- since one gets ill for instance -- as the South African Taoist and Augustinian philosopher, Martin Versfeld, observes (1990:12).

As one comes to accept and relish one's natural (also earthy) essence, in being radically part of nature, one spontaneously grows into greater interrelated selfhood or nothingness (or: ecology and not egotism). This paradox is central to Taoism and Zen, and to the Christian incarnation: that God loves one to the degree of becoming flesh; God's way is also down in order to go up. Satan seems unable to touch flesh and to *become* (fully part of) time, and remains within the infinitely thin heights of abstract spiritualism. That Taoism and Zen can be abused (especially in the West, one assumes) to remain and hide within precisely such lofty and grey heights of "pure spirituality" should not be denied. Non-attachment is far removed, as far as one can see, from aloof detachment. And non-attachment is a quite lofty ideal, to a large extent. Moreover, love that does not concretely love is perhaps not love at all: the road to hell is paved with good intentions, as the saying goes. One among several poems that stresses Cummings' humble and radical *participation* in concrete time, reads

faithfully tinying at twilight voice
of deathless earth's innumerable doom:
againing(yes by microscopic yes)
acceptance of irrevocable time

particular pure truth of patience heard
above the everywhering fact of fear;
and under any silence of each bird
who dares to not forsake a failing year

--now,before quite your whisper's whisper is
 subtracted from my hope's own hope,receive
 (undaunted guest of dark most downwardness
 and marvellously self diminutive

whose universe a single leaf may be)
 the more than thanks of always merest me (73 Poems CP 821)

This sonnet actively and gently meditates on the speaker's *under*-standing (line 7) of a diminutive bird's song. Published post-humously, it aptly considers the irrevocable passing of time for a poet and a bird. Living creatures are the undaunted guests of "dark most downwardness" (death and reintegration with earth) -- and they continue to sing, and their singing already suggests silence. Of course, in this implied situation, which begins in twilight (when day dissolves into night) (line 1), the descending darkness is also that of nighttime.

They positively *dare* (simply by living and singing) not to forsake a failing year and the immensity of doom. Earth continues, and such continuation involves an "innumerable doom" and indeed, innumerable deaths. In this sonnet doom is a fraction less positively portrayed than is usual in Cummings (for instance in his foreword to the 1938 collected poems (CP 461) and in the poem "a wind has blown the rain away and blown" (CP 153), pointed out to me by Michael Webster. Still, the poetic speaker relates his acceptance of and gratitude for a lifetime and birdsong to a co-existent bird. It is no less than a letter of acceptance to a bird; something unique in the history of letters. And the bird's entire life (universe), like that of the poetic speaker, will drop down to earth like a single leaf. Therefore the bird's song -- which is "againing" (continuing) acceptance of irrevocable time, yes by microscopic yes -- is marvellously self-diminutive. Or, it is a music that increases (gains) as the bird decreases (diminishes). Hence the poet's "song" or sonnet which increases with *more than* thanks as the poetic speaker decreases (always *merest* me). If nothing else, this sonnet relates a striking poetic humility, and a comprehensive embrace of audial, visual, and biological earthy being. Of course, there is also a mysterious, dreamy quality to such existence -- of which twilight and the word "marvellous" are indicative in this sonnet. And this sonnet is preceded in this volume (73 Poems) by another small bird poem that reads:

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

are
silent
now

.in silvery

notqu
-it-
eness

dre(is)ams

a
the
o

f moon

(CP 820)

Martin Heusser includes a photograph of the spotted patterns on the American wood thrush's breast, and speculates on the relations between these spots and the interspersed punctuation marks within the word "thrushes", on the basis of iconicity and referentiality (1997:258-259). These spots will have cryptic or camouflaging advantages to such birds, especially in dappled foliage (Heusser, 1997:258) as the rest of this poem clearly indicates -- all Cummings needs to suggest trees and foliage is the phrase "in silvery" (*silva* is Latin for tree; and *luna* and *silva* and thrushes are silently one here). The "silvery" leaves are not quiet (stanza 4), that is, they are probably stirring in a breeze. Cummings uses a camouflaged "quiet": the actual word is "quite", hence suggesting a not-quiet state or a mergence of dreaminess, silver moonlight, and a stirring breeze in branches.

The cryptic "t,h;r:u;s,h;e:s", furthermore contains a couple of "camouflaged" suggestions of concepts merging into one another, or embodied in the "language" of the thrushes: "hush", "she", and "he" come to mind. If a breeze is stirring, the trees of stanza 4 may suggest a silence which sings, or that stillness which continues to move. Another reading of stanza 4 confirms this possibility: not-quit, that is, continuation or change or life itself. Or: it suggests a (positive) it-ness and now-here-ness of natural being. Stanza 5 intimates a state between the opposites of reality and dream: "dre(is)ams". It suggests, concurrently, the dream state, also the "is" of nature (with her thrushes, silvas, and luna), as well as the "am" or being of the poetic speaker. Yoking these (usually separately represented) three states of being (subject, nature's

objects, and the dream) together -- and literally sliding the words across one another -- resonates with the 1-3-1-3-1-3-1 (or: 3-into-1) line pattern of the seven stanzas.

And here, the “o” takes on yet another contextual dimension besides those that have been mentioned in the thesis. The thrushes, branches, and leaves, bathed in lunar brightness, combined *are* and *dream* a reciprocally being-and-dreamy/dreaming moon: “a/ the/ o// f moon”. It is *a* (one) moon, and it is *the* (most singular and particular) moon, and the double “o” of “moon” find their unity in the third “o”, isolated in the penultimate stanza where it does double/unifying semiotic and natural duty. One can read here “the o of a moon” (with its graphical and slightly Romantic connotations), as well as “a *the* of moon” (with its faint suggestion, too, of a “thee”). In other words, one can read the “o” as part of the penultimate stanza and a graphical and gentle exclamation of completeness, and one can read it as the cue to a link with the final stanza, as part of the word “of” -- or both. With almost absolute word economy, Cummings contextualizes an almost total ecology and serendipity of co-events in this poem. Semiotic procedures here interpenetrate the nature of ecological relations within nature itself. Delving into the apparently simple concreteness of a thrush-branch-and-moon moment, Cummings returns to the modern reader with a dynamic and refreshing complexity of earthy being, through a simultaneity of (also quite concrete) ecosemiotic events on the blankness of the page. The “aliveness” of Cummings’ word economy could be compared to a readerly dance, or a breeze stirring through trees (also of the human mind).

The “f” in the stanza “f moon” may seem to dangle in thin semiotic air, but it could indicate a full moon, as intimated by the graphic “o”. Thus the poem exhausts readerly serendipities to suggest earthy completeness, and whole, silent, ongoing participation in being-in-earth. A simultaneity of semiotic events, as described here, evokes a simultaneity of natural events.

Lao Tzu writes that the natural way includes the joy of eating food, hearing the “cocks crow and dogs bark” in one’s neighbour’s yard (1987:64, section 80); it is “not to desire the glitter of the jewel/ but the raw roughness of the stone” (1987:45, section 39); it is in short to “make one’s earthiness common” (1987:52, section 56). In the hurried and frequently alienating modern world, with its myriad of abstract desires and events, its percentages, power struggles, and infinite semioses, Cummings’ voice acts as a reminder. One should not underestimate the original, even biological,

“magic” of the gift of life itself: of being here, now. On a more complex level, comparing his dynamics to those of the mainstream modernists, Cummings furthermore makes his earthiness common in Taoist vein, by *not* avoiding at all costs the supposed clichés of common (and short) words such as “earth”, “love”, and “spring” (as well as supposedly traditional poetic forms such as the sonnet). Instead, he employs the novelties of modernist poetic sensibilities and devices to revitalize an earthiness that is common to every individual (whether she or he would wish to admit it, or deny it, with the gift of a lifetime).

Earthy sensuousness is also apparent in Cummings’ love and erotic poetry which have been discussed in some detail in the preceding Chapter. His recognition of the concrete sensuousness of existence surfaces clearly in most of these poems.

death(having lost)put on his universe
and yawned:it looks like rain
(they’ve played for timelessness
with chips of when)
that’s yours;i guess
you’ll have to loan me pain
to take the hearse,
see you again.

Love(having found)wound up such pretty toys
as themselves could not know:
the earth tinily whirls;
while daisies grow
(and boys and girls
have whispered thus and so)
and girls with boys
to bed will go,

(No Thanks CP 451)

Struggle between death and love recalls the usual opposites, such as death *losing* and love *winning* -- however, such a reading is neatly, laterally uplifted by love having *found* (and one’s realization that death *lost* not in terms of winning or losing, but in terms of letting go, not having “found”). A whirling earth (tiny) and the mandalas of daisies growing (perhaps “bigly”) intimate cyclical wholeness beyond opposites. The poem dissolves these opposites in terms of boys and girls who go to bed: simply by going to bed as the concluding comma of the poem suggests (in dynamic contrast to the full stop after “again”), life continues beyond a stasis of opposites. A sensual, earthy way carries continuation in the cosmic struggle between

forces such as death, love, pleasure, and pain³⁴. This poem clearly proposes that the timelessness of existence as suggested in the first stanza is carried forward by sensuous contact between male and female, even (or especially) ignorantly so.

In other words, the “nowhere” of the unifying third and Taoist position is found in the nowness of now and the hereness of here -- indeed, it is found and significantly lost in the absolute and spontaneous essence of sensuality. Cummings’ poetic speaker is free to say that

this man’s heart

is true to his
earth;so
anyone’s world
does

-n’t interest him(by the

look
feel taste smell
& sound
of a silence who can

guess

ex-
actly
what life
will do)loves

nothing

as much as
how(first
the arri
-v-

in

³⁴ Another poem states that “true wars are never won” (*l x l* CP 570): one may infer that it is in “losing” (letting go) that one finds one’s innermost self. One may further infer that the battle (also between sexes) should continue and continues. And: a fully-fledged (true) *war* of opposites cannot lead to unity (one-ness, homophonously implied), but only to a twodimensional, dichotomous stasis of “victory”.

-g)a snowflake twi-
sts
,on
its way to now

-here

(95 *Poems* CP 676)

The poem contrasts the stable unpredictability of nature with the (hinted-at) uninteresting and predictable “world” of human constructs— and the arrival of a snowflake embodies the natural way. Note that the isolated “v” indicates a downward arrow suggesting the direction of the snowflake’s fall -- earthward. The poem exploits the co-incidence that the preposition “in” sits within the word “arriving”: “outside” becomes “inside”, earth becomes heart. It transcends a static delineation that would view the flake as a “thing”: the speaker’s love of the arriving now-here-ness (earthiness/sensuousness) of the flake equals his love of “nothing” -- no (delineated) thing or object (stanza 7). A celebration of sensuous, earthy being and nothing is again found in this poem. Consider, too, the 4-into-1 line pattern as found in other poems with similar sensibilities (“rain or hail” (1 x 1 CP 568); or “t,h;r;u;s,h;e;s” (73 *Poems* CP 820) with its 3-into-1 pattern). The four-lettered anagram of heart and earth evidently affirms the notion of a (natural) unity beyond the polarity of human subject and natural object. As the snowflake appears into now and here, it disappears (melts) into nowhere.

The sensuousness and earthiness of Cummings’ view of life and his employment of signs mark a difference between Cummings and a more Emersonian, Platonic, abstract Ideal (of which concreteness is then merely the lesser reflection) (Cohen, 1987:79). In Taoist vein, Cummings uses signs that invite the reader to realize again the (e)mergence of heaven and earth -- and this is perhaps the most intense *ecological* recognition that humans can experience.

2.2. Flexibility and fluidity

A certain flexibility is part of any (poet’s) language: the human mind has the capacity to interpret and make a sense-making whole of a sequence of words in a sentence, for example. Much of Cummings’ poetry seems to be aimed at enhancing this flexible semiotic process, en route to a “going-somewhere” (and a going nowhere), of nature. Cummings continues to alter the nature of English in favour of the meaning of nature. He treats semiotic barriers as flexible, permeable entities (that

allow readerly transfusion), so that nature's change or flow comes to mind. Also, so that signs are involved in a creation of contexts within contexts, ultimately to "find" themselves in the now-here-nowhere context of nature. The fact is that individual, autonomous signs must also be flexible enough to form part of greater wholes to function at all.

Some critics hail Cummings as a "synesthetic genius" (Forrest, 1993:8). There is perhaps no need to stress that "survival of the fittest" may equally well mean survival of the most adaptive, the most flexible (Capra, 1997:238). Monumental "strong-headedness" is not the only virtue: *integrity* and a capacity for *integration* are closely related. Absolute autonomy (which implies no integrative capacities) is not entirely natural should it be conceivable. This could be what Cummings has in mind when he accentuates the Freudian notion that "weak" (flexible) and "strong" (autonomous) were once upon a time meant *by one word* (1966:127).

For a considerable time, as Cleveland Hickman Jr. *et al.* mention in their book *Integrated Principles of Zoology* (1997), it was thought in the natural sciences that the cell membrane is sealed off. That it was designed to keep the cell contents intact, and to give them the maximum, closed protection (Hickman *et al.*, 1997:50). It was only later discovered that the membrane does not merely protect the cell contents, but that it plays an astonishingly complex and active role in the integrating, homeostatic processes of the living organism (Hickman *et al.*, 1997:50). It is permeable, and invites, allows, and actively participates in transfusion (Hickman *et al.*, 1997:50). It therefore guarantees the whole integrity of the organism.

Cummings' poetry seems to point to a similar discovery in cultural terms: growth is not dependent only on the greatest possible autonomy and sealed-off, entirely objectified, delineated conceptual barriers. Rather, growth occurs because these boundaries are permeable and allow fluidity. The integrity of an organism depends on this integrating capacity of its membranes, and this fluidity of its substances. What would a "*cultural* destination" of a flexibility and fluidity of the sign, be? Could it be mental homeostasis? A wholesomeness and ecology of the mind? Indeed, Cummings seems to be suggesting something of this nature, given the centrality of his view of aesthetic and cultural growth:

one(Floatingly)arrive

(silent)one by(alive)
from(into disappear

and perfectly)nowhere
vivid anonymous
mythical guest of Is

unslowly more who(and
here who there who)descend
-ing(mercifully)touch
deathful earth's any which

Weavingly now one by
wonder(on twilight)they
come until(over dull

all nouns)begins a whole
verbal adventure to

illimitably Grow

(1 x 1 CP 557)

The line pattern, 1-2-3-4-3-2-1, is significant again: it embodies a swelling out from and a return to singleness/unity. The poem does not merely describe but verbally acts out the appearance of stars as darkness increases at twilight³⁵, as well as their disappearance behind or “within” the earth’s “deathful” horizon. The resistance that the poem offers in terms of immediate interpretation gradually lessens up to the last stanza, which neatly clinches and dissolves the preceding interpretative tensions. This process-nature of stars appearing and disappearing is related in this poem to the appearance of nouns who are overtaken (or submerged into) an active verbal adventure of growth. The noun is a synecdoche that designates the objective and the static, whereas the verb indicates movement and expansiveness.

³⁵ Cummings’ own interpretation of this poem emphatically asserts that it describes falling snow (bMs Am 1892.1 55, folder 1). However, in the same letter of June 25 1955 to Norman Friedman, Cummings wrote: “Thus;ten or tenthousand individuals may(&,insofar as each can be called an individual,must elucidate or interpret a particular poem in ten or tenthousand ways--the particular poem remaining meanwhile herself-&-nobodyelse. Like a particular humanbeing,& unlike mostpeople,a particular poem IS immeasurably alive” (bMs Am 1892.1 55, folder 1). Of course, Cummings’ reading of the poem makes it clearer that “weavingly” is a description of falling snow flakes who meet their “end” or integrity as they touch deathful earth. In the reading of stars appearing, “weavingly” could imply a growing texture of various constellations as the increasing darkness seems to “weave” them from nowhere. Those constellations and individual stars meet their “death” as they touch or are swallowed by the earth’s horizon. In short, whether stars or snowflakes, the poem provides an “alive” sense of natural phenomena that move into dynamic clarity and unity -- and nouns cannot “capture” the dynamism of the process.

Phrases such as “one by/ wonder” create simultaneity: we expect another “one” and we find it clothed in a different word “wonder”. A serendipity of unity is signified: of amazement, and the miraculous aspect of stars appearing and disappearing. On the preceding page of this volume, this poem finds a companion: “one’s not half two. It’s two are halves of one” (*I x I* CP 557). It suggests not a linear but an integrating “algebra” -- not counting in 1-2-3-4-5... fashion only (which creates an ever-extending line in which one will always remain half two), but calculating in terms of division and multiplication which allows a fusion of twos into ones. It further suggests to lovers that when they lose all opposites, all excluding barriers, they will find the whole -- “deep in dark least ourselves remembering/ love only rides his year.// All lose, whole find” (*I x I* CP 557).

The “destination” of the flexibility and the fluidity of poetry is in a certain sense no destination, no coarse arrival, at all. It is rather the sustenance of open-endedness into an ever-increasing saturation of natural balance, and in one sense at least the “destination” is the nothingness, the silent singing, of nature’s now-here-nowhere -- for which lovers are especially destined according to Cummings. Not only are (conceptual) boundaries thus flexible and osmotic but their flexibility should lead to flow, to absolute integration, in which the boundaries themselves dissolve -- reminiscent of William Howarth’s assertion that social maturity includes the sense of a loss of boundaries, and a radical identification with and within nature (1999:519).

i go to this window

just as day dissolves
when it is twilight (and
looking up in fear

i see the new moon
thinner than a hair)

making me feel
how myself has been coarse and dull
compared with you, silently who are
and cling
to my mind always

But now she sharpens and becomes crisper
 until i smile with knowing
 --and all about
 herself
 the sprouting largest final air

plunges
 inward with hurled
 downward thousands of enormous dreams (is 5 CP 302)

The “dreams” refer to stars (see “the moon is hiding in” (*Tulips* CP 105)). However ideal these dreams could be, the poem “i go to this window” (above) intimates the actual entrance of a vast outside nature into the innermost self of the speaker. The speaker loses his fears, coarseness, dullness (non-love) as nature’s miracles radically enter him. The *process* is the focus of this poem: “only consider How” (*ViVa* CP 363) as another poem states. And the process of nature, as much as the process of Cummings’ ecosemiotic dynamics, uplifts a flat perception of cemented opposites such as culture and nature. It creates a semiotic dissolution into natural actuality. The boundaries of the self and the outer boundary of nature allow an innermost transfusion of natural sensibilities and actualities. In some poems, such dissolution reaches an extreme paradox: nature becomes more personal as persons disappear into it:

un
 der fog
 ’s
 touch

slo

ings
 fin
 gering
 s

wli

whichs
 turn
 in
 to whos

est

people
be
come
un

(1938 CP 463)

The poem is so arranged that a merging of one condition into another and its reverse merging are signified. On the left hand margin we find the word “slowliest”, spread out to indicate visually the gradual nature of the double process. One process is a (personal) fog with its “touchings” and “fingerings” that turn things (whichs) into personal significance (whos). One imagines trees that take on the form of ghostly or human forms as the fog increases. The other (concomitant) process is that people disappear (in the increasing fog): they “become unpeople”, or, returning to the top “un” of this cyclical poem, they are covered “un/ der” fog’s touchings and fingerings. The literal flow of fog, and its moisture, thus dissolve all kinds of boundaries between subject and object. The double “un” at the beginning and end of the poem respectively tie the poem into a fluid cycle that emerges from nothingness (blank space) and re-merges into it. The word “become”, fragmented into two meaningful syllables (“be” and “come”), again indicates the attractive active or fluid verbal nature of the process (of dissolution) itself.

Indeed, Cummings seems to be absorbed by processes that dissolve solidity, as when ice turns to water, then to vapour, and then into “nowhere”. Early poems already indicate Cummings’ preference for a condition “more fluid than gas” (*ViVa* CP 313), rather than a condition in which humans prefer solidity and make an elephant “swoon into billiardballs!” (*ViVa* CP 317) -- a phrase with more than a hint of an unfavourable and satirical view upon such an “event”. In one sonnet, Cummings dares in quite uncharacteristic fashion, and again with a mixture of tongue-in-cheek frustration and lyrical admiration of nature, to tell the world how to rule itself:

sonnet entitled how to run the world)

A always don’t there B being no such thing
for C can’t casts no shadow D drink and

E eat of her voice in whose silence the music of spring
lives F feel opens but shuts understand
G gladly forget little having less

with every least each most remembering
H highest fly only the flag that’s furred

(sestet entitled grass is flesh or swim
 who can and bathe who must or any dream
 means more than sleep as more than know means guess)

I item i immaculately owe
 dying one life and will my rest to these

children building this rainman out of snow (No Thanks CP 390)

Overall, the riddly and fragmented ABC that the speaker suggests here defeats the ease of the suggestion in the first line that anyone knows how to tell others to run the world. The lack of titles in Cummings' poetry at large prepares one for the irony of a sonnet quite formally entitled in its first line; and therefore not entitled, after all. The second stanza could (nonetheless/therefore) be interpreted to say that one shouldn't run the world. And one should not do it in a particular way. The first line probably states: (always) don't run the world, since there is no (artificial) world to run. The second line states that the restrictions of such an un-world do not mean much: can't (restriction) casts no shadow. As we have seen in another poem, "denied night's face" (50 *Poems* CP 527), Cummings refers to non-lovers as the "shadowless they" who deny "night's face" -- it is almost always important to know that Cummings persistently, through context, creates a positive where one might (logically) expect a negative. "Shadow" and "doom" are just two examples of such (unexpected) positives. The second line of stanza 2 probably again states the positivity of "shadow", and the lack of such positivity among those of us who insist on "can't" and "don't" (closure/objectification).

Given this fake "austere" introduction, stanza 3 challenges one to incorporate that which lies beyond opposites and closure: the process of spring, with its singing silence. Incidentally, this line also effortlessly suggests a state beyond any set of dichotomies between the realms of sound (voice, music), nothing (silence), and tangible incorporation (eating). The fruit of nature, spring with its music of silence, should be enjoyed. That is why the F of this riddle reads: "feel opens but shuts understand". To my mind, it should be read as follows: to feel is that which opens one up into the silent singing of nature, whereas to "but" (or: to give a reason) shuts one down to it. Understanding is to "know" or (more appropriately) intuitively guess this, and to stay close to humus, over and above interfering abstractions.

The G instruction presents some problems against the background of the motif and dynamic of littleness in Cummings' poetry, as described in the preceding sections of the thesis. To "gladly forget little having less" could be related to an increasing humility, that is, a decreasing "bigness". Since one always has less (one is decreasing to earth), one can gladly forget little: and to forget little is not to make a great, worrisome issue of it, which remains the (little) point and ties in well with Cummings' overall "smallness" of composition. Another possible reading of this line is simply that "little" is actually great. This reading ties in with the next stanza (the completion of the octave): one should remember with "every least", "each most". That is (paradoxically, Taoistically), as one decreases, one will increase. I wish to stress that this line on the whole suggests the very motion of motion, as do so many lines (even considered individually) in Cummings' poetry. The composition of the line itself persuades the reader to see opposites move into motion: increase is decrease. Cummings' flexibility and fluidity are "categories" of his dynamism. Such (e)motional and open-ended and also crisp cross-stitching of opposites continues in the last line of the octave (with its 1-2-3-2 line arrangement): what is low (the furled flag) should be flown highly -- a Taoist point, adapted to modern nationhood. There is, of course, a (fluid) nothing between opposites that are cross-stitched in this fashion. An entrenchment of separate and static opposites dissolves into nothing: opposites do not really matter as much as they seem to do. The reader's logical oppositional expectations (high is separate from and hierarchically above low), now "flows" into an (empty, resonant) space beyond them. And this space is the now-here of radical, flowing location or orientation. Who can fail to sense, "behind" this line, an earthy flag flowing in the heavenly wind?

As in other more or less Petrarchan (but actually Cummingsian) sonnets, of which one or two have been close read thus far in the thesis, this octave prepares the way for an intensification of significance in the sestet. In this case, flow itself increases in intensity. A space of significance has been "opened" into a flexibility of opposites and expression by the octave, and in the sestet things really flow into one another. The ABC procedure is left behind, and the line pattern (which ended on a cliff-hanging 2 in the octave), now becomes 3-2-1, again signalling a return to a third-ness of unity beyond opposites. The "arithmetic" of a third voice seems to take over from the tediousness of an ABC of how (not) to run the world, and instead, of

how to be (no-one, a decreasing-increasing someone) on or in (unity with) earth. The static, objective *differences* between processes and phenomena like a sestet, grass, flesh, and swimming, find themselves in a truly fluid context in the first line of the sestet: "sestet entitled grass is flesh or swim".

An inversion of the biblical "all flesh is grass" occurs in the streamlined chaos of this line. It ties in with the notion that a diminution (dying grass) means an increase (turning into flesh again), reminiscent of the resurrection. With an economy of dynamism and fluidity, this line suggests much in addition: that grass is flesh, that is, grass is as one's very (biological, fleshy) being. It also suggests that language is grass: "sestet entitled grass", and, that structures such as sestets will and should perish, in opening up to nature, or in being re-integrated with nature. Re-integration (the process of dying, and ultimately, one's death) of course also presupposes a level of flexibility and fluidity: one has to have an inherent (natural) capacity to "dissolve", in order to be able to continue dying. And the word "swim" in the end position of this line stresses that one has to be immersed or that sestets should enable one to be immersed in water -- or the flowing, silent music of spring, for that matter -- in order to understand or even, to go under.

Ensuing lines of this stanza return to the themes of "can't" and "but" introduced in the octave, but now with the positive verbs "can" and "bathe". Simultaneities of meaning continue to (flexibly) open up faster than they can be closed down by the reader. Lines 1 to 2 of this stanza allow the following serendipities: firstly, "swim/ who can and bathe who must" can be read, via enjambment, as a single compound thought. Which may be paraphrased as follows: she or he who can (still) swim or be immersed, and who still has a craving for (simply "must") bathe in the flow of earth's being and spring will be as grass that is as flesh -- will be resurrected (beyond an artificially run world). Secondly, just as "can't" casts no shadow, so does "can" turn one into a who (with a shadow), and just as "but" closes down understanding, so does "bathe" open up immersion (swimming into, so to say).

The "or" of line 2 of this first stanza of the sestet should then be read simply as an economical indicator of "rephrased". Rephrased, then, the serendipities of the "can" that makes one into a who with a meaningful shadow, or the she or he who can still be immersed into understanding amounts to "any dream/ [that] means more than

sleep [just] as more than know means [to] guess". In other words, there is always more than the sleep of knowing can tell us (reminiscent of Blake's view on a Newtonian monotony of rationalism), and therefore *guessing* is (truly) understanding (or standing under, on soil), because it is the more open-ended approach to the flowing dynamism of earthy life. The riddly quality of this sonnet is thus brought to its full (or empty) implications. As Cummings writes in a foreword to his 1938 *Collected Poems*, "Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question" (CP 462) -- without a full stop, to indicate again that possibilities will open faster than they can be closed down.

The sonnet concludes with a seemingly matter-of-fact item that clearly states the speaker's (and Cummings' well-composed) sense of flexibility and fluidity. Living is a process, a form of dying, always open-endedly aimed at re-integration with earth. Earth is not mentioned as such, neither is the word "bequeathed" -- both are subtly implied by this conclusion. The speaker (immaculately, perfectly balanced perhaps) owes the process of dying his one life, and will bequeath the rest of it to children building a snowman that will melt into earth, so confirming the speaker's status as a "rain man", a fluid subject. To dream and guess, to play imaginatively like a child, are all forms of a state of fluidity in which categories (instructions, demarcations, dualisms, and ABC) of mind dissolve. In theme and form, this poem is a humble triumph of ongoing open-endedness (also known as flexibility and flow) over (and in-cluding) a stagnation of shutting down. One very important implication of all this is that Cummings does not view (the ABC of) language as a set of static structures, but as a flexible and fluid medium that can immerse one into the flow of dying-living and imaginative, sensuous playing. The sonnet as a whole further underscores that this is one of Cummings' (rare) "laws". It is, of course, a lawless law to a large extent, but not without an order (or stability) of balanced, riddly, and child-like (sensuous) fluidity. And the first parenthesis of the sonnet, isolated and incomplete, but "facing" or pointing (literally with its points, not its bulge) to the left already indicates that 1) here is an inverse law that makes more sense. And 2) laws themselves actually belong outside the sonnet -- this parenthesis seems to stop the first line in its tracks, so to speak, and to push it back out of the poem, given its isolation and direction. In short, a first parenthesis that would have indicated closure in submission to the laws of grammar is tellingly absent.

In a letter to Carol Poulin dated 8 July 1961, a year before his death, Cummings gave his own concise explication of this poem. Much of what he wrote then corresponds well with the interpretation given in the preceding paragraphs of the thesis. For example, Cummings highlighted the semi-parenthesis of the first line (1972:270; letter 261). His own interpretation of instruction A reads: "the way to run the world is always not to(try to)run it" (1972:271), which ties in well with my interpretation. Cummings' explanation of "instruction" E confirms my reading that the sonnet implies earth: "eat of her -- the earth's -- voice in whose silence is the music of spring" (1972:271). To an interpretation of "instruction" G, Cummings added a temporal element: "never be guilty of selfpity;if you once had a little but now have less,forget the earlier time gladly;& when you have least,remember gladly the time when you had most" (1972:271). His reading of the flag image stresses that one should treat one's true or highest self as something sacred (1972:271), whereas mine accents that when the flag is furled it is low, and that such "lowness" can actually be height. My reading does tie in with the earthy aspect of the sonnet. Cummings further relates the "swimming" of the sestet, to "self-expression" (1972:271). His interpretation of the sonnet's conclusion emphasises flexibility and fluidity, although Cummings explains it slightly differently:

I owe death one life,the mortal part of me,& bequeath all the(immortal)rest of myself to these children;whom I see building,out of snow,the figure of a man who'll melt away in the rain(becoming a rain man) (1972:271).

To grow and to become go along with humility (returning to earth, snow, rain, and play) and fluidity (melting). The "invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common", according to Ralph Waldo Emerson (1995:54). Cummings consistently and in his unique way adheres to a similar principle of earthiness. As Emerson continues to write, to the poet nature is "not fixed but fluid" (1995:55). One of Cummings's poems suggests that "though wish and world go down,one poem yet shall swim" (*ViVa* CP 373). The poem is presented as a fish that moves (and finds itself) within water: poetry is an immersion. Similarly Cummings' poetry embodies an affirmation of twilight not as the abode for the poet's rejected and forlorn sensibilities as Webster indicates (1999:199), but the celebration of the wonder of that time of day when our stark and perhaps somewhat static sense of opposites is "becoming bright" and "little melted" (*is* 5 CP 283). Twilight is a "focal"

motif in Cummings, as Friedman writes (1967:95), and one of the important reasons for this is that flexibility and fluidity are notable dynamics of his poetic ecology.

2.3. Serendipity (co-incidence)

Perhaps it is unnecessary to state that life, even on the most biological levels, simply teems with co-eventuality, or a certain simultaneity of events. Ecology is also a study of co-existence (perhaps exemplified best in concepts and processes such as symbiosis). One breathes, sees, thinks, eats at the same time that leaves outside move in the wind, under a blue sky through which fantastically shaped clouds are drifting, and so on. Simultaneously, numerous cellular processes were occurring without one's necessarily being aware of them, in order for one to notice the (limited) co-events that one is able to notice³⁶. And a star must have been exploding in the universe somewhere, at the same time. Existence is a continuing and unlimited series of co-events: events that continue to continue, so to write, and events that continue to co-incide (also in the sense of remaining intact) as they continue. However, the very sentences I just employed demonstrate the difficulty of signifying such simultaneity: for instead of an immediacy of co-events, the sentences drift off into an increasingly clumsy, static, and linear list of "things" (and not events). These sentences have a limited capacity to suggest simultaneity, despite themselves.

Whatever the extent of our misunderstanding of Chinese and the ideogram, there can be little doubt that in the West, sinology and orientalist (Chinese) poetry have led to an enhanced sense of how to actively signify simultaneity. In the Western tradition, a welcome freedom from superstition may have damaged a sense of simultaneity: logical chains of cause-and-effect as a norm tends to undermine a sense of serendipity: that is, a meaningful and uplifting sense of co-incidences. "Coincidence" as it is used in general and in theory in the West today more often than not carries a connotation of something illegitimate, avoidable, and merely accidental. The ecosemiotician Dana Phillips uses this word in precisely such a subjugating manner when he questions the possibility of poetic linkages between semiosis and natural events (1999:582). One is faced here with a loss of a sense of the dynamic

³⁶ There is now fair evidence that mitochondria -- organelles responsible for cellular respiration within one's cells -- were once separate organisms that became part of cells through prolonged symbiosis (Capra, 1997:226). This points to an ecology of evolution: that evolution or "survival of the fittest" is at least as much about co-operation and flexibility as it may be about competition (Capra, 1997:238). Dynamic co-existence is intrinsic to survival and being.

interconnectivity of a natural existence. If a causal chain is not visible between events -- such as the snooker ball striking another with a certain velocity and at a certain angle, thus giving rise to the predictable path of the ball that is struck, hopefully into the pocket -- the flow of interrelated events are deemed to fall outside true significance: they are deemed to be essentially false.

C.G. Jung indicates that "coincidence" is not viewed in China as a mere accident, but as a natural principle (1975:56). This is evident for instance from the truly ancient *I Ching* (or "Book of Changes") which employs coincidence as a means to come "in sync" (so to speak) with nature -- hence Jung's term of "synchronicity" to designate this natural principle.

Whether in a consciously orientalist manner or not, Cummings exploits the seemingly fortunate coincidences of words within words in order to suggest the unifying, ongoing co-events of nature. He carefully and abundantly exploits semiotic serendipities, often with a view maximally to open up the text and the reader into the sheer co-eventuality (literally: events occurring in temporal synchronicity with one another) of natural and artistic events. Some main examples that run like threads through his oeuvre include the co-incidence of the words (as has been mentioned) "now" and "here" in the word "nowhere", the experience of one-ness in words such as "alone" and "loneliness", and even the fragmentation of the word "twilight", so that its first syllable "twi" suggests two-ness, and its next suggests (in words as in nature) an elucidating unification into one sign: "light" (*ViVa* CP 350, 351). On occasion Cummings creates multiple co-incidences as we have also seen (for instance in the Jimmy Savo poem). Consider an additional (economical) example in which the main motif and method seem to be serendipitous:

Beautiful

is the
unmea
ning
of(sil

ently)fal

ling(e
ver
yw
here)s

Now

(95 Poems CP 713)

Much of the visual fragmentation in this poem aims purely at slowing down the reading, thus creating a sub-sonic “audibility” and a visual indication of the slowness of the falling snowflakes. Indeed, a quick “scan” of the visual form of the poem reveals a meandering, weaving pattern of parenthesis which possibly indicates the flowing and floating fall of a snowflake. Nonetheless, the stanza “ently)fal” -- although it emphasizes the “fal” sound which may perhaps intimate some sort of primitive Germanic sense of gravity -- does not pictorially convey anything which instantly reminds one of either snowflakes or gravity. But this “thin” suggestiveness which the poem carries throughout culminates into a satisfying set of co-incidences in the final two stanzas. Visually, the fragmented emphasis on “v” and “w” could indicate -- as in another snowflake poem “this man’s heart” (95 Poems CP 676) -- the downwardness of the fall of the snowflakes.

And by means of careful and minimalistic fragmentation as well as a precise placement of the final parenthesis the final two lines bear all of the following implications at once, or co-incidentally: 1) silently falling everywhere (a lot of snowflakes/snowflakes everywhere/the snowflakes are everywhere-ing themselves), 2) here is *snow*, 3) here is *now*, and, in reverse, 4) here is *everywhere*, as well as 6) “here” and “now” and “snow” are/is *nowhere* (in view of one’s knowledge of Cummings’ motifs). The final “w” may now acquire the meaning of the unification of downwardness and upwardness as its visual shape implies: it points upward and downward simultaneously, and it combines a double “v” or two arrows into one. Such a reading leads to the possibility that the “w” (with its visual condition somewhere between a double “v” and one sign) and the single “v” together may again intimate a third, unified location beyond polarities. As the poem on the whole suggests, the “w” and “v” could -- on the micro-scale -- confirm that nature’s gravity gives rise to human upliftment into the fulness of nature’s serendipity or simultaneity. Cummings entitles one of his volumes *W [ViVa]* (1931), thus indeed combining to “V’s” into a single, third unit meaning “long live!”.

Serendipity is one of the crucial ecological dynamics in Cummings’ poetry. Poems such as the one above, and numerous others (as has been indicated in various close readings in these Chapters) create the maximum serendipity through various

means, including a “breaking open” of words (again, faster than the reader can close them (logically) down). Cummings has found ways to arrange Western language, and to transgress Western logic, in a manner that opens the sign up into a sense of nature’s sheer co-eventuality. In Cummings’ poetry a “coincidence” is rarely a mere falsehood: instead, it evokes a recognition of incidents occurring meaningfully together; just as an ecological and biological existence continues to do throughout one’s lifetime. “Green grace” is serendipitous: one has been born into nature with an allocation or gift of time to get to know and appreciate it, and all along one’s very existence continues on a vast, complex, and delicate basis of the continuing interweaving of a multitude of co-events or co-incidents. Serendipity is also one way of moving beyond static and hierarchical opposites into a third dimension or voice. The sequence of this study of Cummings’ ecological dynamics is meant to suggest that the various dynamics of Cummings’ poetic ecology probably culminate in the creation, also for the reader, of an awareness of this third dimension or voice.

2.4. Dynamic threedimensionality: Cummings’ third voice

birds(
 here,inven
 ting air
 U
)sing

tw
 iligH(
 t’s
 v
 va
 vas
 vast

ness.Be)look
 now
 (come
 soul;
 &:and

who
 s)e
 voi

c
 es
 (
 are
 ar
 a

(No Thanks CP 448)

In view of the importance of the (ecological) third dimension in Cummings' poetry -- which has been considered throughout this thesis, also in close reading -- one or two points about this poem could be added to Webster's compelling visual and ecological analysis of it (1995a:122; 1999:209). In this poem, parenthesis possibly indicates birds against a twilight setting (Webster, 1999:210)⁴⁴ (the vastness of which is indicated by blank space). There is also the audial suggestions of the birds' voices and the implied co-incidence that you (the birds) *sing* twilight's vastness ("U)/ sing"), while they simultaneously (and literally) use the air to fly. The phrase "inventing air" also carries a similar serendipity: birds seem to "create" the very air to the speaker's eyes, just as they literally breathe in -- in-vent -- the air to fly in it.

Their song is presented by the many a's and their concomitant vowel and diphthong sounds, for example [æ] in "and" as well as [a:] in "are" and "vast". There are typical bird-sound repetitions such as [æ] - [æ] ("&:and"). To describe another of these repetitions involves a slight phonetic or phonological detour. Interestingly, the short [a] sound which is in some respects slightly more open than sounds such as [ʌ] (for instance in "cup") and [ʊ] (for instance in "wash") has not been retained in modern English⁴⁵, in contrast to other modern Indo-European languages such as Afrikaans with its current [a] sound (in various words such as "kat"). Cummings' repetition of sounds in a sequence from this poem such as "va/ vas/ vast" may very well indicate -- on the level of sound -- a "return" to the vowel [a], so that the vowel sounds in that sequence could read [a] - [a] - [a:], reminiscent of the rhythmic sounds of various bigger birds. That sequence of sounds would then be echoed by either the sound pattern [a:] - [a] - [a], or [a:] - [a] - [ei] in the final three lines, "are/ ar/ a".

⁴⁴ Webster believes that these shapes indicate swallows (1999:210). Cummings' direct interest in swallows is clear from his letters (1972:272; letter 262). Visually, a distribution of parenthesis on blank space certainly does readily indice swallows. However, I find Webster's interpretation of the "music" of this poem, which indicates swallow sounds according to him (1999:210), a trifle unlikely. These sounds perhaps point away from swallows, to some other (probably American) bird, perhaps geese or ducks. Swallows, as far as one knows, make softer and/ or sharper, chirpy sounds, not the louder and more croaking [a:] sounds of bigger birds and water birds.

⁴⁵ Indeed, the adaptation of this sound, probably into the modern English [æ], has remained something of a phonological puzzle (Lass, 1976:105). It should be remembered that all the English candidates for the adaptation of this sound are slightly less open than the original [a], as implied by Roger Lass (1976:107). This is the reason why I read the sounds in Cummings' poem as a return to [a] along with a similar sound-reading later in this thesis when it comes to Eliot's DA syllable in *The Waste Land* -- these poems may indicate a return in the direction of linguistic origins and slightly less rounded, more open (primitive) sounds. See also Chapter Six, 4., for a reading of Eliot's DA syllable against this linguistic background.

Given this analysis, verb and sound description would flow into one within the final three lines of the poem: the verb “are” and the primitive, repetitive, open sounds of the birds’ voices. To describe these sounds as onomatopoeic in a conventional sense does not yet do justice to the serendipity, musicality, and ecology of this poetic moment.

The following dynamic patterns of a “third” float in this poem, inviting the reader into a natural unity of speaker, birds, and twilight: as the word “vast” visually increases from one to three letters (v, va, vas), so do the voices subsequently decrease from three letters to one (are, ar, a). The letter “a” thus acquires the role of indicating unity: “a” is usually used to indicate one (of something) in English, and the 1-2-3, 3-2-1 letter pattern of the second and last stanzas, of which “a” is the culmination, underscores this unifying moment. Moreover, the one “a” (with its meaning of “one”) that gives over to blank space could also suggest that a last bird remains visible and then disappears: from 1 to 0, then.

Given that “o” (and not “oh”) often also plays the role of exclamation in Cummings, as we have seen, it could also be that this final “a” holds something of an “ah”, an exclamation of wonderment as well as a mergence of poetic voice and bird voice, as the birds and their sounds disappear from sight into nowhere. In the consecutive poem of this volume, such a reading of “birds(“ is confirmed. In that poem, the “two-ness” of “i” and “you” is suggestively unified into nothingness by means of the concluding signs “(an-/ onymo/ -Us” (*No Thanks* CP 449): that is, we (the lovers) are one beyond names. Consider, also, that the “birds(“ poem uses inverse parenthesis throughout to suggest Cummings’ intriguing inverse “law” that one enters into nature as nature enters into one. Also, that the diagonal arrangements of this poem and its emphasis on ampersands and the word “soul” (stanza 4) relate it to the bird-like Jimmy Savo poem (1938 CP 471) analysed in preceding paragraphs. To my mind, however, the sounds and distribution of fragments in this “birds(“ poem, suggest a bigger, slower, and perhaps more heavy variety of bird.

Cummings employs humble (small and earthy/sensuous), flexible and fluid, and serendipitous dynamics of a unifying co-incidence to create the unifying third (beyond opposites such as subject and object, self and other) -- on occasion into minute detail.

D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y

leaves
(sEe)
locked

in

gOLd
after-
gLow

are

t
ReMbLiN
g

,,....,

(73 *Poems* CP 838)

The hidden, suggestive patterns of a third, unifying dimension within this short poem are virtually limitless; I will consider some. Like the study of micro-moths within lepidopterology⁴⁶ in which the most astounding wing patterns of some of these truly minute creatures come to light only under the microscope, a three-dimensional dynamic goes down to infinitesimal details within this poem. On a more macroscopic level one finds the line pattern of 1-3-1-3-1-3-1 as discussed in terms of other Cummings poems by Friedman (1967:105). From an ecological and aesthetic viewpoint this patterning is “incidental” but also *co*-incidental, not entirely arbitrary: they suggest a flow of thirds moving into increasing natural one-ness, carried among other things by the fact that the poem begins and ends with a one-line stanza “inside” ample blank space.

But what to make of the many upper case letters which do not form a discernible acrostic word or phrase (unlike in one mouse poem, “Me up at does” (73 *Poems* CP 784) for example), upon careful examination, and except for faint possibilities such as “ANY”? And what of the set of punctuation marks in the final line? On an arbitrary interlevel basis they could point to a kind of iconic “rustling” of leaves, in view of the poem as a whole. But does their particular arrangement make any microscopic sense?

⁴⁶ The study of Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths).

The upper case letters form numerous patterns of thirds. Three letters in the first line each consist of three lines: A, N, Y. I literally mean that each of the letters is “built up” of three visual lines in different configurations: “A” consists of two diagonal bars leaning against one another with a tinier third crossbar which seem to combine them. “N” consists of one upward, one diagonally downward, and one upward line again. “Y” consists of an upward line splitting upward into two additional lines; or (conversely) it consists of two downward diagonal lines merging into one (line). “D” is the exception in this instance, consisting of only one upright bar and a semi-circular shape, which unite into one figure, the “D”.

An “E” is capitalized in the middle of the middle line of the second (three-line) stanza. Its three horizontal bars are self-evident and they appear to combine to the left into one (fourth) upright bar. One possible “interpretation” of its shape is that it combines three things into one; but this is not the only possible interpretation. If we take its verb “sEe” into account we again find three letters and the middle one is capitalized, perhaps suggesting that one should see into or look at the middle (between differences).

Stanza 4 highlights the circularity of the “O” and the two-leggedness (so to speak) of the “L”.

gOLd
after-
gLOW

The two upper case “O’s” seem on a purely visual basis to be involved in some sort of interplay with the two “g’s” on the left. Moreover, the “OL” sequence (line 1 of the stanza) is reversed in line 3 (“LO”). Visually speaking this reversal could read as follows: 1-to-2 (“O” to “L”) in the first line and 2-to-1 (“L” to “O”) in the third. The final “O” therefore again seems to indice completeness, unity, and entrance into nature/exit from pure semiosis as in a number of other Cummings poems that have been examined. Viewed from the perspective of this microscopic “arithmetic” of emphasized visual letters, the two “g’s” carry two relatively circular shapes combined by a little line. They, too, could be part of 2-into-1 patterns of a suggested third dimension. Capitals of the third last line form the following similar patterns: 3-4-2-3, or 3-3-2-3 (“R”, “M”, “L”, “N”). The first line of this stanza consists of one “t” -- which, if we carry on our reading, amounts to a two, whereas the

third line consists of a single “g” which amounts to a three as we have seen. If one could deduce anything from this visual play of letters and numbers it could be that ultimately twos continue to be included and unified into a third: one (“O”) gives over to two (“L”) and two (“L”) is unified again into one (“O”), three figure threes occur in the first line, and so on.

Punctuation in the final stanza confirms this possibility of the play of twos and a unifying third (in which three turns out to be dominant). Besides somehow and arbitrarily -- at a glance -- looking like the trembling of leaves, it is carefully arranged. There are seven punctuation marks just as there are seven stanzas. We have a comma, semicolon, colon, full stop, colon, semicolon, comma -- in that order: this indicates a progression from open-endedness (comma) to increasing “finality” (colon, full stop) and back to the more “flexible” comma again. Visually these punctuation marks present in terms of the number of marks that they visually consist of, a 1-2-2-1-2-2-1 pattern. The ones amount to three and the twos to four (thus giving seven). The ones are so arranged that they seem to include the twos. Two-one, two-one (etcetera) conform to the idea of opposites (dualisms) being unified into the transcendent third position. The full stop or one in the middle now becomes all but a full stop: it is a pivot of suggested and dynamic unity.

This playful arrangement of threes, twos and ones accompanies and reinforces (on minute scale) that movement itself -- “trembling” -- is central to one’s experience of leaves rustling in a twilight afterglow. Stanzas 3 and 5 each consists of one word -- the word “in” (two letters) and the word “are” (three letters). Thus a preposition and a plural verb are emphasized. Literally, the preposition has two letters and the verb three. The sound of this verb carries a hint of a relieving affirmation, “aaah”. Moving from two to three is again suggested, and if we take these stanzas together, they may suggest that to be “in” this sunset “in” which leaves “are”, then that is to be (relieved).

This poem further suggests that within the golden afterglow of sunset one finds the leaves “locked”: silhouetted, one assumes. But even in their ultimate delineation as silhouettes they are trembling with movement. By making “in” and “are” typographically independent one senses that as the golden afterglow is “in” the leaves and the trembling, so are the leaves and the trembling “in” the golden afterglow: separate dualities (such as leaves silhouetted against a sunset sky) dissolve into an interpenetrating sense of threedimensionality beyond opposites. The dynamic

“trembling” seems to enhance this sense of serendipity: intense co-existence or co-incidence is implied and underscored by the arrangement of punctuation marks and the emphasized letters with their 2-1-3 play.

Obviously other readings of the poem are possible, whether in terms of a third unifying dimension or otherwise (more arbitrary). Notions could and should be added: the two capitalized O's perhaps intimate sight (as in other Cummings poems, mentioned in the preceding Chapters). This would then be related to the dreaming “sEe” of the poem (stanza 2), and the fact that it could be suggested that twilight (the golden afterglow) intensifies into the mere silhouettes of the trembling leaves when the poem gives over to punctuation marks only. The leaves are “locked” in twilight *and* they tremble: this indicates the possibility that it is being observant of and entering into the middle zone, the zone of twilight and between-ness, that is nature’s way; the pivotal full stop in the final stanza and the capitalized E, in the middle of the word “sEe”, would confirm this reading. But there is enough room in this poem to suggest other possible readings such as deconstructive dissemination: after all some of the letters seemingly just float around outside any three-dimensional patterning such as the “r” of the word “are”. Furthermore, the poem also relies on the oppositional tension between stasis (“locked”) and movement (“trembling”), although this contradiction seems to be resolved in terms of the many two-into-one suggestions of a three-dimensional dynamic. Such disseminating and contradictory patterns, however, must also leave room for a more ecological reading: of static two-dimensionality giving over to dynamic three-dimensionality, right down to the microscopic levels of this poem.

Cummings’ focal motif of twilight perhaps tilts the scale in the direction of the latter more ecological reading (without presuming to negate the other possibilities). For twilight is not merely a theme in Cummings’ poetry. Between-ness -- between human, sign, and nature, as well as subject and object, human self and natural other, maleness and femaleness, etcetera -- is a dynamically interactive *condition* of Cummings’ poetry. It is the condition of his poetry that points clearly to Cummings’ refined and potent ecological sensibility. And the dreamy motif and striking reality of twilight resolves the standard opposites of day versus night. It is no wonder that Cummings with his innermost responsiveness to the transcendent third dimension or voice was attracted to this state of natural being to such an extent. As we have seen in

some examples of his poetry analysed here, Cummings finds remarkable new ways of conveying the importance but also the crispness and almost impossible beauty of this state of twilight in-between-ness, with its ongoing humility and fluidity of ecological open-endedness, mediated through a minimalism of modernist signs.

In virtually every poem, a stability of two-ness into the third of one-ness accompanies Cummings' poetic sensibility. His voice *is* a precision of thirdness, and his "space" or place is an active third dimension of an (e)mergence of poetry and nature. This stability of wholeness is utterly dynamic (hence ecological). Overall, Cummings discovers and rediscovers (and creates, for the reader) a variation of slightly or quite different contexts in which this ecological stability is continued. One may therefore perhaps be excused for jumping from the micro-analyses of the third-voice or threedimensional poems above, to a quite different, and more straightforward poem. Here the poet, towards the end of his poetic career, finds a peace of thirdness with his very self (mediated, of course, through a poetic speaker -- when one writes of "Cummings", one has his textual self in mind):

a total stranger one black day
knocked living the hell out of me--

who found forgiveness hard because
my(as it happened)self he was

--but now that fiend and i are such
immortal friends the other's each

(95 Poems CP 730)

Some features in this short self-analysis will strike the avid Cummings reader as slightly estranging. A poem ending on two unvoiced consonants, and with the level of finality offered here, is not common in his oeuvre. The word "black" is not often used in a negative context, either. Yet even in this poem, with its clear contradictions and its conflict, duality is dissolved or solved. As in other poems, Cummings uses the word "hell" in an unexpected position. On the one hand, to "knock the living hell out of" someone is no more than a colloquialism, and Cummings takes care to make this poem seem as casual as possible ("my(as it happened)self he was", for further instance). On the other, that a fiend knocks *hell* out of one, means that hell and not heaven was resident in one, in the first place. A duality of one's self is of course familiar in a greater or lesser degree to most of us. And in this poem, Cummings cross-stitches this duality to show that even this

boundary, between “i” and “self”, allows transfusion into greater unity. It is therefore not only one’s ability to *register* opposites, but actually *how* one enters a state through and beyond them, that matters. At this, Cummings is a masterful poet with an astonishingly effective set of poetic dynamics that lead to such a transcendence of static and hierarchical opposites.

2.5. A yin dynamic in Cummings’ poetry

One or two additional aspects of Cummings’ three-dimensional ecological dimension or voice deserve attention. It has been mentioned as the argument here has been unfolding that Cummings’ poetic speaker reveres females and femaleness. For further instance, in a letter to Friedman of June 1955, Cummings “summarized” his poem “swim so now million many worlds in each” (*Xaipe* CP 602) as follows:

stars. The lover merely thinks of them, in terms of possibility, as ‘worlds’. His beloved (whose own eyes are to him ‘more all stars than’) actually feels them—to her they are ‘flowers’, since ‘flowers’ (she feels) ‘only are quite what worlds merely might be’ (if worlds weren’t confined to the plane of soidisant reality) . . . i.e. worlds express reality (so-called); but flowers—being beautiful—transcend it
a study in contrasting psychologies: *masculine (superficial) & feminine (profound)* (bMs Am 1892.1 (55) folder 1; my emphasis - JET).

Cummings’ inclination to view the feminine as more profound speaks for itself in this passage. He also reveals a fairly consistent tendency -- in his poetry -- to restore the positive value of the supposed “female” leg of the gender duality. Since it is self-evidently less complicated by Western socializations of maleness and femaleness, one should refer to this as Cummings’ particular, poetic forms of restoring a *yin* sensibility. As we have seen, Cummings indicates the positive value of forces such as integration, death, darkness, moisture, the moon, the female lover, and so on. In the Taoist view these forces or elements belong at the yin side of the yinyang “equation”.

I single out this aspect of Cummings’ overall sense of three-dimensionality because it could prepare the argument within the next Chapter, namely the existence of a critical tendency to misplace or undervalue some of the sheer ecological dynamics of Cummings’ poetry. For within our Western view -- and I will try to avoid over-generalization within this argument -- the tendency (even philosophically) is to undervalue and even swamp the importance of the yin side of existence. A detailed, succinct and convincing analysis hereof, cutting across dimensions of society such as economics, medicine, and physics is offered in Fritjof Capra’s *The Turning*

Point (1982). Those living in progressive societies should be able to gather instant evidence of the dominance of a narrowly perceived “male” and “female” aspect of existence, in any event.

Lao Tzu equates his natural sensibility on a number of occasions to darkness, the mother, water, the emptiness of a valley, and so forth. He also laments on one occasion his apparent foolishness among men of the world. Men of the world are “bright, alas, so shining-bright” (1987:35, section 20) whereas Lao Tzu appears to himself as having “the heart of a fool: so confused, so dark” (1987:35, section 20). As Cummings said after his visit to Russia, he perceived in himself a “dark poet; a blindman”, “darkly communicating with impossible light” (Kennedy, 1980:333). Lao Tzu further states that being “in touch” with one’s personal sense of the yin dynamic of natural existence is imperative in order to maintain a clarity of natural vision:

Whosoever knows his maleness
and guards his femaleness:
he is the gorge of the world.
If he is the gorge of the world
eternal Life does not leave him
and he becomes again as a child. (1987:39, section 28)

Lao Tzu goes further within this section by equating “maleness” to “purity” and “honour” on the one hand and “femaleness” to “weakness” (flexibility) and “shame” (unobtrusiveness) (1987:39, section 28) on the other. Child-likeness is equated to “satisfaction”, “simplicity”, the “gorge” (or a fluid source) as well as the “valley” (with its inobtrusive sculpting, so to speak, of land and air, being and emptiness) (Lao Tzu, 1987:39, section 28). Evidently in times when the progressive, competitive, “yang” factor becomes too intense for ecological comfort, a restoration of yin is required to retain the balance -- as Capra suggests in terms of his Taoist, deep ecological perspective (1982:30).

The Taoist view holds that just as the “somethingness” of the yang force -- say, the delineation and solidity of a rock -- is balanced within natural continuation by the “emptiness” or “absence” of the yin force (say an open night sky), so should analysis be balanced by intuitive integration, the “dry” intellect by “moist” emotion, and so on. The reciprocity and indeed the interpenetration of these forces ensure the continuation of existence and ecology (see Chapter Two). Should the balance be upset by means of the persistent bias towards one force (such as yang “shine” and

“progress” to the detriment of ecological wholeness), then the Taoist poet, teacher, and painter will tend to seek the balance by reconfirming yin. This should therefore not turn into a new bias: rather the greater overall dynamic balance between yin and yang should be sought in accordance with and sustenance of an unassuming, crystal clear, child-like view.

It is possible that all or most artists are “in touch” with the yin side of existence in general -- but the scope of analysis to “prove” this hunch can not be accommodated in this thesis. Cummings reveals a discernible tactic of the restoration of yin in yang-overdriven, contra-ecological societies. There is the overall sense in his work, mentioned in the thesis, of a *positivity* of forces that are often (negatively) viewed in the standard progressive conception -- such as doom, fate, integration, the night, downwardness, dying, and so on. Examples range from early poems to later ones. Early: in the 1922 volume *Tulips & Chimneys*, lovers are turning “fatally” into their (innermost) selves (CP 283), and this gives positive value to the notion of “fate”. In a 1926 poem, the female lover should send life out of the poetic speaker and the night “absolutely into” him (*is* 5 CP 303). The night is quite refreshingly restored to an entirely positive position in this manner. In another poem from the twenties, the speaker states that “this is the passing of all shining things” and that the soul should “lead us/ into the/ serious/ steep// darkness” (*Tulips* CP 49). An entire 1931 sonnet is devoted to the positivity of the ocean, moonlight, darkness, twilight, and reintegration -- all of which are presented as moving “beyond either”, that is, moving beyond the splitting of dualistic separation (*ViVa* CP 380). Other early poems indicate that humankind “achieves amazing doom” (*ViVa* CP 352): doom is therefore positively viewed, restored as an essential element of a meaningful life. A whole garden of roses bows to the mother figure (*ViVa* CP 353): direct homage is paid to the female aspect of existence; the “black bod/ ies” of trees hide green leaves (*ViVa* CP 355): black is held in positive light for once. Night is equated with a Nobody who comes slowly over the town to one’s relief (*ViVa* CP 356) and one entire poem can be read as an indication that understanding comes only with the positive reassessment of the yin side of existence:

when rain whom fear
 not children but men
 speaks(among leaves Easily
 through voices womenlike telling

of death love earth dark)

and thousand
 thrusts squirms stars
 Trees,swift each with its

Own motion deeply to wickedly

comprehend the innocently Doomed
 brief all which somewhere is

fragrantly,

arrive
 (when
 Rain comes;
 predicating forever,assuming
 the laughter of afterwards--
 i spirally understand

What

touching means
 or What does a hand
 with your hair
 in my imagination

(*ViVa* CP 357)

This poem concludes with the male speaker “spirally” (finally) understanding that just as rain and its “womenlike telling” of death, love, earth, dark predicate “forever”, so does touching a girl’s hair in one’s imagination. (This continues in a “nearby” poem with the directly positive reverence of doom and the “bright land” of sleep (*ViVa* CP 359).) In the Unitarian tradition, the word “what” means “death” or “dying”: the doom of integration or returning to soil is (perhaps weirdly) honoured. A yin darkness is positively viewed and handled.

Other poems indicate the “dear beautiful eternal night” (*New Poems* 1938 CP 464), or a positive sense of reintegration and dying: “only dying makes us grow”, as the speaker tells his lover (*50 Poems* CP 491). A love-liness of doom is expressed in the well-known Cummingsian line “my father moved through dooms of love” (*50 Poems* CP 520). Moving on, one finds love equated to a who, doom to beauty, and fate to growth (*50 Poems* CP 538): note that the positive is placed where we would be

inclined, in view of the modern lifestyle and its underpinnings, to expect the negative. When we therefore read of little flowers rising from the “tremendous darkness” into air (*1 X 1* CP 559), we are inclined to notice that “tremendous” is here meant in a fully positive sense. The line does not seem to carry the perhaps more standard interpretation of a little flower struggling against the big, bad, black sky, or form within the dark, sinister earth.

Cummings does not attempt to restore an ecological innocence (simple being) of darkness only, but also of moisture and flow. One poem suggests that (only) noone could be softer than the rain (*Xaipe* CP 653). Little fish “climb through the mind of the sea” (*Xaipe* CP 658) -- intelligence and upwardness are thus associated with fluidity and the ocean -- and not with fixity/solidity and the sky. Another indication of how Cummings restores the yin sense, as has been mentioned in the thesis, is the more luna-centric and less heliocentric nature of his oeuvre. Furthermore, yang aridity and fixity of the land are included into and superseded by a heightened sense of the flexibilities and indeed the motion/s of nature. A poem states that ten thousand saharan centuries “are smaller than a rose’s moment” (*95 Poems* CP 683), and this is equated with the notion that real/true time is “neither reasoned nor unreasoned” (*50 Poems* CP 683) -- it moves on beyond opposites of mind. These things indicate Cummings’ awareness that the fixity and aridity of deserts and wastelands could be due to an overemphasis of qualities such as the “dry” intellect. And that restoration will occur in terms of flexibility, natural suppleness, fluidity -- yin elements. As will be demonstrated in Chapter Six of the thesis, Cummings thus finds himself in contrapuntal contrast to a mainstream modernist fixation upon desertified landscapes of quite severe aridity.

Later in his poetic career, in a poem published in 1958, Cummings asserted that the “nowhere” of earth’s night is “prodigious” and “proud”, and that a mother who has given birth has a silent smile “whose only secret all creation sings” (*95 Poems* CP 714) -- again we have the specific restoration of the female or yin principle in this poem. Descriptions such as proud and prodigious would not be so directly associated with the nowhere of earth’s night in standard oppositional conceptions of the distribution and configuration of “male-female” qualities. Indeed, even spring which is traditionally a yang force even in China is viewed as female in some of Cummings’ poems (*95 Poems* CP 718). The earth (clearly on the yin side of the

“equation”) is a person, furthermore, “who can never do wrong” and the poetic speaker urges us to do and be in the same way (95 *Poems* CP 769). This return to earthiness is of course undoubtedly related to the restoration of ecological balance via the restoration of the yin-sense as found in Taoism.

A sense of positive “nothingness” is introduced in another poem by “the great dim deep sound of rain” (73 *Poems* CP 816). Dimness, deepness, and rain all belong in the yin aspect of natural existence. In this poem the speaker goes as far as to state that he feels that “sunlight is only loaned:whereas/ night is given(night and death and the rain// are given;and given is how beautifully snow)” (73 *Poems* CP 816). Restoration of the yin aspect of existence and experience in contrast to the emphasis on sun, shine, man, and competition in progressive societies, is quite clear from these lines. This poem furthermore ends with the notion that spring is that which “nobody may keep”: since we have seen that Cummings tends to suggest the positive where we may allocate the negative, “nobody” could be meant positively here as that (kind of non-)person who can actually keep spring. Cummings further writes of the beautiful way as day turns into night (73 *Poems* CP 824): part of the Taoist perception is the non-negative view of yin phenomena such as night and, importantly, the restoration of the *active* yin sense of “non-doing”. Being at-one with, or being at-oned to, the inherent changes of nature as day moves into night involve the kind of non-doing that allows everything to fall into place by itself, according to Lao Tzu (1987:48; section 48), and (in its way) according to this poem by Cummings. As has been stated in the thesis, it appears that the Chinese do not consider absolute stasis to be possible, and therefore supposed “female passivity”, better expressed as yin non-doing, is as vital and dynamic in their view as the yang action of interfering with nature.

In all of this, as the Hasidic teacher and sinologist Martin Buber⁴⁷ stated early in the previous century, lies a vital lesson for Western progressive societies. We are, according to Buber, ready and ripe for the insight that progress cannot indefinitely destroy (interfere with) the natural way -- we are therefore ready to learn from Taoism (1990:124). However, Buber equally stresses that we will have to learn this in our own terms, from the perspectives of our own history (1990:124). Cummings offers a

⁴⁷ Buber is linked to modernist history: he attended occultish “Quest” meetings with poets such as Pound and Yeats early in the twentieth century (Surette, 1994:233).

rich, effective, and economical poetic set of dynamics from which this lesson is more than accessible, and in a non-pedantic manner.

As far as could be determined, classical Chinese does not equate the opposites of yin and yang with the left or right hand. In reading Western interpretations of Western orientalism such as that of Nina Hellerstein, it seems evident, however, that such orientalism 1) takes away the abundant emphasis on the right hand that has become a tradition in Western poetry, and 2) restores the rather neglected left hand margin of Western poetry. One could argue about this for a considerable time, but one should not split hairs in order to avoid a couple of issues in this respect. In Western poetry, the right hand margin carries the weight of end-sounds, rhyme, full stops, and semiotic “events” which tend to clinch the flow of the poem in various degrees. It is as if the poem is written and read towards a heavy or solid right hand margin. The left hand margin carries only the “weight” (but actually the fluidity) of a far more meagre set of possible poetic events, such as enjambment. Overall, it could be said that Western poetry traditionally moves towards, and is directed towards, the right hand margin. The left hand margin occupies the position of the mysterious, the Other, in Chinese culture according to Hellerstein (1991) as has been explained, and orientalist poets therefore tend to write also in *this* (left-hand) direction. Or, they write with a greater sense of balance between left and right. Part of Cummings’ restoration of yin (darkness/the mystery) could also be indicated in his tendency to restore the left hand margin of poetry with a view to a less narrow, more inclusive (and ultimately also more joyously male) balance of yin and yang, left hand margin and right hand margin, open-endedness and pointedness, as well as mystery, magic, or other, and delineation, distance, or the objectifying intellect.

2.6. Cummings’ “is 5” eco-logic

A further aspect or “sub-dynamic” of Cummings’ third voice may be called an “is 5” logic -- or, given the findings of this Chapter, an “is 5” *eco-logic*. Brief attention is paid to this, since it ties in not only with the third voice, but also with the motif of the modernist fool and Cummings’ sensibilities of solitude, solidarity, and wholeness. It holds a potential of relating Cummings’ ecology to earlier and broader modern ecological developments, since an “is 5” logic applies to Fyodor

Dostoyevsky's "underground man" -- a phrase that seems rich with ecological and earthy implications as well as implications for art, society, solidarity, and solitude⁴⁸.

In Cummings' case, this "is 5" eco-logic takes a particular form. A concise introductory look at it may be offered here in order to demonstrate the capacity of his poetry for further ecological research, and to underline that the thesis can offer no more than a necessarily complex and detailed *approximation* of the overall dynamics of Cummings' poetic ecology. In a sonnet, Cummings states his "is 5" principle:

one's not half two. It's two are halves of one:
which halves reintegrating, shall occur
not death and any quantity; but than
all numerable mosts the actual more

minds ignorant of stern miraculous
this every truth--beware of heartless them
(given the scalpel, they dissect a kiss;
or, sold the reason, they undream a dream)

one is the song which fiends and angels sing:
all murdering lies by mortals told make two.
Let liars wilt, repaying the life they're loaned;
we (by a gift called dying born) must grow
deep in dark least ourselves remembering
love only rides his year.

All lose, whole find

(1 x 1 CP 556)

The "is 5" logic is an ecology of "the actual more" (line 4) which continues to be more than "all *numerable* mosts" -- or, which remains immeasurable in every sense of the word. Dissection and dichotomy stifle the "deep in dark" born-and-dying organicism of existence, thus delimiting, stifling, and destroying the "is 5", organic eco-logic. In other words, as we have also seen in various other poems by Cummings, nature in its integrity always remains one more than any demarcated location or moment or thought: it continues to include and supersede the rational mind. An "underground", "is 5" eco-logic means natural maturation (or growth): one loses all preconceptions in order to continue finding the whole -- love continues to move

⁴⁸ Even if mainstream modernist poetry, for example, radiates a strong sense of (also societal) alienation, it is still poignantly balanced on the closeness of the words *solitary* and *solidary*. Albert Camus' short story "The Artist At Work" (1957) about a joyous and slightly foolish painter ends with a painting displaying just one word on its canvas, and it is impossible to distinguish whether it reads "solidary" or "solitary" (1958:115). Cummings' particular solitude and poetic societal commitment (solidarity) centres on his notion of an interpenetration with one's natural surroundings that simultaneously activates an innermost sense of complete individuality or "I-one-ness", as the leaf poem also reveals.

beyond opposite preconceptions or expectations of the rational mind and therefore is able to ride the mare of time. It remains more than any “correct” and hence stifling answer that incarcerates being within spatial confines. In form, this sonnet enacts this recognition by reverting to a traditional sonnet manoeuvre: it continues beyond the normal fourteen lines into an additional half-line that indicates a dimension of unity beyond opposites *contained and continued* in that additional, “is 5” *one* (line) which supersedes the relational constraints of a delimited or fabricated modern “world”.

bRight s??? big
(soft)

soft near calm
(Bright)
calm st?? holy

(soft briGht deep)
yeS near sta? Calm star big yEs
alone
(wHo

Yes
near deep whO big alone soft near
deep calm deep
????Ht ?????T)
Who(holy alone)holy(alone holy)alone

(No Thanks CP 455)

This poem invites the reader into a contemplation, even a modernist meditation, upon a star. The star is not used as a symbol (although it carries traces of Cummings’ Unitarian form of Christianity (Kennedy, 1980: 357-358)) so much as its existence is textually presented. A number of formal patterns are used to show that the being of the star falls outside logic and outside language -- again, a paradox of outlining the limits of the sign so that the inclusive and larger context of nature is evoked through language -- surfaces here as in the grasshopper poem and other Cummings poems.

The upper case shifts within the word “bright” as the poem unfolds, so that each instance of the word is highlighted in tandem with the active and increasing brightness of the star. This shifting upper case “electrifies” the brightness of the star in its context of unfolding poetry. Furthermore, the question mark -- which often marks open-endedness itself in Cummings’ poetry, as has been indicated -- first decreases to one question mark (“sta?”, line 8) and then “takes over” the word “bright” to increase again to a maximum open-endedness in the penultimate line with

its nine question marks that move from an arithmetic of four (“????Ht”) to *five* (“?????T”).

Thus the adjective bright -- or the quality of brightness -- takes over from the delineated object or noun, “star”, into a maximum brightness and a maximum unity with the on-looking speaker, until the calmness, depth, and soft nearness of the star matches that of the speaker’s mood -- and vice versa. Indeed, the upper case “O” in “whO” (line 12) again acts as a visual and exclamational as well as cyclical and still entrance through which subject (speaker) and object (star) are unified. And the flexible result -- as the final line suggests with its chameleons of words that intersperse one another’s contexts into a sense of slow movement and continuation -- is a deeply personal awareness that the star is whole, all-one, alone (itself), and holy (pure).

Moreover, the two sets of parenthesis in this line act as transfusible barriers that allow a condition beyond the opposites of observer and observed: the parenthesized phrase “(holy alone)” is bridged with another non-parenthesized repetition of the word “holy” so that the next parenthesized phrase reads “(alone holy)”, thus incantating a simultaneity of meanings and various shimmering serendipities, as Cummings is bound to express. Since this final line begins with a “Who” (referring to the star as much as to the speaker), one cannot but sense these shimmering serendipities in what follows, also with a view to parenthesis: the sounds/signs holy, wholly, alone and all-one dissolve. One description of all of this could read: the star is wholly all-one (first parenthesized phrase) and because it is therefore pure or holy, it is also purely single, or other, or “self” (utterly alone or itself, second parenthesized phrase). By reversing the directions of words in these parenthesized phrases, the poem shows that wholeness is found in all directions and that its essence is a tranquility of movement and dissolution.

This brief reading ties in well with the motif of the modernist fool, for at least two reasons. Firstly, it intimates a poetic speaker absolutely in touch with nature’s dynamism. Such intense focus on and interpenetration with one star is not entirely modern in the materialistic or intellectual sense of the word. Secondly, an “is 5” logic -- according to which the incorrect answer that surpasses the rule is the actual answer -- is embedded in the poem. That *additional* one, or the one that is more than and floats loose from the correct and logical answer (four) is achieved in the penultimate

lines when the question marks reach that figure (five), whereas the final line then goes on to “describe” (also, de-write) that incorrect and profound, foolish answer. The overall form of the poem confirms this reading: starting out with one line in the first stanza, it reaches a figure of five lines in the final and fifth stanza. In almost every respect, the poem reveals that the foolish answer is the right answer because it admits that there is more to living nature than the “correct” mind can delineate.

As such, this poem evidently resonates with Cummings’ 1926 volume entitled *is 5*, and that resonance indicates possibilities for future research in terms of Cummings’ sequencing and growth, as well as in terms of the open-ended nature of poem-groups within his oeuvre. My reading of the poem further confirms, perhaps purely incidentally, various comments on the nature of the modernist or modern fool; these comments pertain directly or indirectly to modern ecology. Such a fool, adhering to an “is 5” logic as in Cummings’ case would be out of step with the rigorous measurements or “mechanical/ itmaking sickness” (Cummings, *Xaipe* CP 658) of modern progressive society. The modernist scholar Ricardo Quinones’ description of the modern fool involves his notion that such a fool is related to Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s motif of the “underground man”, which seems to be a modern person of humility, hidden-ness, understatement, and understanding as well as one who is involved in a life of sacrifice for the greater good -- such as the solidarity of the character Alyosha in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Quinones writes that the underground person “wishes to affirm that twice two is five” (1985:93) -- which happens to be precisely one of Cummings’ eco-logical dynamics as we now see.

C.A. Bowers also gravitates to Dostoyevsky’s “underground man” with a view to modern ecological concerns. Bowers adds that in the modern world with its coercion of measurements, such a person falls out of step with the often shallow and rigid beat of progressive society (1993:47). That is, the underground person with his or her “is 5” eco-logic is committedly in search of the authentic inner life for which modern progress, as Friedman suggests (1996:174), sometimes offers marginal if not incarcerating room. In Cummings’ case, one has to add that he is not only satirically out of step with the harsh and frequently bewildering *beat* of progressive societies, but that he is also most particularly *in rhythm* with the greater pulse of natural continuation. The grammatical, orientalist, and other *transgressions* of such a fool now strike us, in Cummings’ poetry, as osmotic events of a *re-entry* into natural

being. To my mind, this is one of the crucial overall values of Cummings' life and poetry. It presents us with one of the great achievements of Cummings' modern commitment (to nature), and hence a deep solidarity that goes beyond us-versus-them issues, just as Cummings' poetry goes beyond the divide between popular and intellectual appreciation.

Without reference to Taoism, this brief sketch of the kind of modernist fool that Cummings' poetry presents will be incomplete. Lao Tzu, like Cummings -- again, across millennia and nationalities, hence in terms of an illuminating (mis)understanding of the active middle ground that this thesis has adopted -- experienced himself as a fool, a dark person for whom the shining brightness of "successful men" was not obtainable. Some passages from section 20 of his *Tao Te Ching* reads:

O loneliness, how long will you last?
 All men are so shining-bright
 [...]
 I have the heart of a fool: so confused, so dark.
 Men of the world are shining, alas, so shining-bright
 [...]
 I alone am different from all men:
 But I consider it worthy
 to seek nourishment from the Mother. (Lao Tzu, 1987:34)

Such were that ecological fool's perceptions of himself as a fool: note that his perceptions remain consistent with a non-expectational emphasis of darkness and yin, closeness to earth, and an ecology of being. Consider, also, that it emphasizes that the ecological fool cannot belong within a sphere of shining (or blinding) brightness, but that he or she prefers to stick to common earth. Cummings' own sense of lonely and earthy foolishness is abundant in his poetry. (A brief list of poems related to this motif include CP 291, 305, 440, 562, 736, 845.)

Cummings' "is 5" eco-logic is, of course, also related to the overall third dimension of his poetic ecology (with its Taoist undercurrent). If the answer remains one more than a concluding or closing option (the correct "four", in this instance), then it follows that further space for dynamism, contemplation, continuation (and so forth) is opened up. And that space is, furthermore, a place of unification (an always-additional "one-ness") of sign and (natural, active) being.

“Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question” (CP 462), as Cummings wrote at the “conclusion” of his foreword to his complete poems of 1938. That phrase positively brims with inherent dynamism, and the gentle urge to continue continuation itself, so to speak -- and this is what Cummings’ precision and minimalism are about as much as his extravagant and more extroverted experimental devices. The question opens up a *more* beautiful answer which opens up further *more* beautiful questions -- and so on. (The overall impression of the direction of that phrase seems to be as much to the left -- from “question” to “answer” -- as to the right, from “answer” to “question”.) Dynamic open-endedness is the very essence of Cummings’ poetic ecology. As Milton A. Cohen concludes in his book on the early aesthetics: “Ultimately, Cummings opted for more, not less, flexibility in his poetic techniques” (1987:235). Once more, Friedman’s vital insight springs to mind: Cummings’ poetry “opens out the implications faster than it closes them up” (1996:55). And Cummings’ loneliness co-habits with his modern commitment or solidarity towards an increasing awareness of ecology or wholeness, to some extent in contrapuntal contrast to paramount forces of contra-ecology in modern semiosis and existence.

3. Conclusion: two key ecological poems – “l(a” and “i/ never”

3.1. “l(a” (the leaf poem)⁴⁹

l(a

le

af

fa

ll

s)

one

l

iness

(95 Poems CP 673)

This poem presents a sense of gravity, and a sensuous portrayal of a falling leaf, as has been mentioned by numerous critics. Indeed, a considerable number of

⁴⁹ The reading provided here is extracted from a talk given by the author at the Cummings panel discussions of the 12th Annual Meeting of the American Literature Association in Cambridge MA, during May 2001. A revised and expanded version of this talk is due for publication in *Spring: the Journal of the E.E. Cummings Society* 11, October/ Fall 2002.

eminent critics have responded to the poem over time, including Edward M. Hood (1959) and Helen Vendler (1973). But the Chinese ideogrammatic potentials of the poem -- again: gravity, left-right balance, being (print) and nothing (blank space) as well as the suggested adventure of human uprightness within nature's (grave and) singing silence -- have not been given the attention that they deserve. The figure one downward-*and-upward* shape of the poem, its signification of a restoration of *left-right balance* and its (somewhat ideogrammatic and Taoist) sense of being (printed characters) and non-being (blank space) are unmistakable. To a large extent, this poem is a Cummingsian "ideogram", typed on a typewriter with a view to natural immersion and individuation.

Following Friedman (1967:171-172) in his *E.E. Cummings: the Art of his Poetry* (1967), various critics mention the implications of unity and wholeness in the poem, as well as its flowing sense of the fall of a single leaf, still best described by Friedman (1967:172). Since the poem's emphasis is equally strongly on solitude (loneliness), what kind of wholeness could be portrayed here? The human speaker is not *merely* alone in this poem: his existence is radically tied up with the falling of one leaf. It is my suggestion that the double loneliness or two existences of this poem -- that of the human and that of the leaf -- together form the "oneliness" or wholeness that the poem depicts through striking ecological dynamics (or "holomemes"), including some of those that have been discussed and organized in this Chapter.

That the loneliness applies equally to the leaf becomes clear when one considers Basho's "haiku" (seventeenth century A.D.), presented as follows by Michael Dylan Welch:

Won't you come and see
loneliness? Just one leaf
from the *kiri* tree.

(1995:95)

"When we are entirely alone with nature", according to Cummings in one of his notes from R.H. Blythe's volumes on haiku, we experience "on the one hand [...] a feeling of loneliness; on the other, [...] one of fullness"(bMS Am 1823.7 (64) folder 5). Cummings continued this note: "'Loneliness' is also a state of *interpenetration with all other things*" (bMS Am 1823.7 (64) folder 5; my emphasis). These notes date to the early 1950s, and the leaf poem was published in 1958. It is quite possible,

therefore, that the leaf poem suggests not merely a sad, isolated lonesomeness of a forlorn speaker. On the contrary, it appears to present a state of absolute and dynamic interpenetration between (cultural) self and (natural) leaf. “Loneliness” would then not be a state of saddened separation, but instead it would be taken over by its other possible meanings as suggested in the leaf poem: 1) complete individuation (when one is entirely one’s self), and 2) complete wholeness (when one is concomitantly one with a lonely/single leaf).

“One flower is the spring; a falling leaf has the whole of autumn, of every autumn, of the eternal, the timeless autumn of each and all things” (bMS Am 1823.7 (64) folder 4), as an additional note from the same collection reads. It is therefore doubtful that the fragments and shape of the leaf poem “ultimately emphasize, sadness” (Dilworth, 1996), or that they pyrotechnically hide a mere “romantic sentimentality” at their (disappointing and too subjective) core, as Edward M. Hood stated (1984:92) in a 1959 review.

A reading of its ecological dynamics points to a different interpretation and evaluation of this poem. The dynamic of humility is virtually startling in this poem with its 23 letters arranged to suggest a universe (also of natural knowledge and experience). Smallness is a central dynamic of the poem, and so too is its direction towards earth (and her moving leaf): we find a careful arrangement of characters into the most minute details, and the overall figure 1 shape with its gravity and the almost visceral fall of the leaf. Fragments are arranged to create the maximum potentials of readerly *recombination* -- which entails, too, a readerly sense of natural (e)mergence, and not only a post-structuralist dissemination of decayed semiotic fragments caught up in a maximum of contradiction and tension between self and natural other.

The dynamics of flexibility and fluidity are also quite prevalent in this poem: the flow of the leaf, and a mergence of reader, speaker, and leaf. Dynamics of serendipity abound in this poem: some of these include the maximum exploitation of various words contained within the word “loneliness”. Many of these have been mentioned by critics of the poem, although they have not, for the most part, mentioned equally strongly that these serendipities lead to an overall sense of self-other, subject-object, and culture-nature (e)mergence. (With the term “(e)mergence”, as it now becomes clear, one is attempting to suggest a simultaneity of readerly, poetic, and natural mergence-and-emergence. As the poem emerges from the page in

readerly recombination of fragments, so does a sense of mergence with and within nature take dynamic shape, for example.) Serendipitously, then, one reads the following signs within the sign “loneliness”: “one-ness” or “one-liness” (integrating, merging unity beyond entrenched opposites), and “i-ness” (or self-hood, individuation, the innermost self: indeed, the poem gravitates into selfhood, the humble or *humus*-selfhood of a lower case “i”).

Through these and other dynamics (the latter includes the “ideogrammatic” style of writing of this poem), Cummings’ composition of a dynamic third dimension and the continuation of his third voice come into their own. This is the ultimate dynamic of this poem. And it can happen that upon reading and re-reading it, one experiences, through the poem, a threedimensionality. Of course, the cold artefact of a printed poem is quite twodimensional. But readerly engagement with the leaf poem can lead to an imaginative sense that one sees through the printed characters, *into* the blankness of the page, and through this blankness, *into* the human adventure of active uprightness and left-right balance within the active gravity and nowhere of a natural existence.

And the leaf poem is possibly threedimensional not only in this ideogrammatic and beyond-oppositional sense. Cross-stitching -- which, as we have seen, is one of the telling ways in which Cummings manages to suggest the third dimension beyond dualisms of the modern mind -- reaches a high degree of intensity in this poem. Such cross-stitching occurs (at least) on two levels in the poem, at once: with a view to the poem’s arrangement of a fragmented word and a parenthesized phrase, as well as on the more minute, “inner” level of a particular visual arrangement of syllabic fragments. For the sake of manageability, I shall look at these (utterly entwined) levels separately.

The word “loneliness” is literally interspersed with the phrase “a leaf falls”, and this is no accident, although it is maximally co-incidental or synchronistic (and hence serendipitous). We need to see that the word (“loneliness”) represents a slightly more human dimension (of subject, self, and feelings), and that the phrase (“a leaf falls”) represents a slightly more natural dimension (of object, other, and fall). That one is literally interspersed into the other, then suggests an entwinement of subject and object, as well as self and other. This cross-stitching is carried on throughout the poem, into minuscule detail. For example, each parenthesis invites the

crossing over, or cross-fluence (so to speak), of word into phrase and phrase into word (stanzas 1 and 4). Hence, it invites a fluidity of subject into object (and vice versa), as well as self into other (and vice versa), thus dynamically portraying the threedimensional dynamic of cultural-natural “one-ness” and individuation. As will be demonstrated in relation to the hummingbird poem in the next section, such parenthesis present an osmosis of semiosis and nature: they are ecosemiotic in the fullest sense.

Turning to the even more minute and “inner” arrangement of syllabic fragments in a continued reading of the cross-stitching of those two dimensions in this poem, reconsider lines 2 to 4:

le
af
fa

Firstly, the arrangement here is consonant-vowel (line 2), vowel-consonant (line 3), and consonant-vowel again (line 4). Secondly, the “fa” syllable (line 4) presents the reverse image of the “af” syllable (line 3). In these two ways, a cross-stitching is most particularly suggested. If we were to make a pattern of it, by (say) allocating a figure 1 to consonants, and a figure 0 to vowels, it looks as follows:

10
01
10

The zeros form a curving line of entwinement with the curving line of ones (of course, any other two digits would have provided the same pattern). If we now return to the first level of cross-stitching (of entwining word and phrase), and allocate a 1 to subject/self/feelings, and a zero to object/other/falling leaf, the overall cross-stitching pattern of the poem can be represented:

1(0

10
01
10

00 (or: 01, 10, 11)

0)
111 (or, just 1 since the word states “one”)
1

11111 (or, just 1 since the concept here is “being i” or “one self”)⁵⁰

An entwining double helix dynamic emerges, of two strings bulging away from and then into one another, via cross-stitching. This is reminiscent of the structure of the “key to life” or the “language of life”, DNA. Finally published in 1953 by James Watson and Francis Crick, the timing of this (minute and yet massive) explosion of information points to Cummings’ knowledge of it prior to the publication of the leaf poem; especially given his interest in science (Friedman, 1996:127) and ecology (Friedman, 1997:18).

A couple of intriguing correspondences between the (dynamic) structure of the leaf poem and that of DNA, suggest themselves. Both are related to the interlevel junctures between language and nature. And both are three-dimensional and dynamic in character. Also, both are involved with a seemingly self-emergent quality. That DNA is a kind of “language” or a form of the storage and distribution of vital information has long been acknowledged and studied, also from the outset of the discovery (Coppedge, 1976:125; Olby, 1974:420). It encodes and decodes the various “instructions” that induce the diversity of living forms we witness around us, including our physical human shapes. Just as characters seem to combine in a double-helix structure (of word and phrase, subject and object, etcetera) in the leaf poem, so does DNA appear to be a double helix string of two sets of code. And it is not a static code: some experts on DNA have been delighted to see that this molecule positively “dances” as it fragments and recombines (Klug, 1983:1215). The leaf poem, too, involves a dance into stillness in its process of fragmenting and entwining two linguistic and ontological strands of code/meaning. DNA has also brought scientists before baffling recognitions such as the spontaneous emergence, seeming self-creation, or “autopoiesis” which accompanies life: with DNA things seem to create themselves from nothing (Berlinski, 2001).

Since -- so to say -- a universe seems to fall with the fall of this poem, as Michael Dylan Welch writes (1995:117) on the basis of its haiku qualities, a reading of the leaf poem tends to go on indefinitely, thus underlining its minimalistic effectiveness to mediate nature. I wish to conclude this reading, for the time being,

⁵⁰ The five figures of the bottom fragment of the poem possibly tie in with Cummings’ dynamic of an “is 5” eco-logic as discussed in the preceding section of the Chapter.

with a look at two additional aspects. One is its intimations of gyration, and the other its suggested audial aspect. Entwinement of the double helix kind evidently suggests the flow of one string into another, and hence gyration.

Friedman notes the “fluttering alternations” of the floating fall of the leaf, as suggested by the vowel-and-consonant pattern of the first four lines (1967:172). Such motion could also embrace a slow twirling of the leaf on its own axis. The cross-stitching of the syllables “le/ af/ fa” implies this: what used to face in one direction, faces (an eternity or a syllable later) in the reverse direction. This creates a suggestion of a leaf that turns from tip to (perhaps) stem in one direction, then in the opposite direction, and then back in the original direction again. The “twirling” structure of DNA could be related to a “twirling” leaf. One implication of this reading -- but not necessarily in terms of this reading only -- is that the two “lls” of syllable 5 (line 5/stanza 3) is pivotal. Friedman mentions that it creates a telling pause in the poem before the fall of the leaf is continued (1967:172). Here, one of the figures 1 (say, subject/human self/poetic speaker) swaps direction and position with the other figure 1 (say, the other, or the object of the leaf). Such an inversion would tie in well with the over-all “one-ness” of culture and nature that the poem stresses with its figure 1 (ideogrammatic) shape, its revelation of five figures 1 (letters 1) by means of fragmentation, and the fact that the only immediately discernible English word on the surface of the poem is “one” (line 2 of the penultimate stanza). Consider, moreover, that this word contains the only cyclical graphic amidst the numerous upright/downward figures 1 (and figure “i”). Given, as has been demonstrated in detail in this thesis, that the dance of the “o” (and the “i”) is vital to many Cummings poems, this singular “o” could be quite important to a reading of this poem. As part of the word “one”, it acts as a kind of first “attractor point” into the (meaning of) the poem, out of its dissemination, and into its potential wholeness. That means that it acts (as in other Cummings poems) as yet another form of “entrance” and/or “exit”. It marks an “emergent property” when and where significant chaos becomes significant order, a quality of the dynamic, threedimensional (e)mergence of this poem. And this is at least slightly reminiscent, once more, of the “autopoiesis” of life in connection with DNA. If the leaf and the poem “twirl”, as I am suggesting, it could again indicate the Taoist notion of that stillness from which all dancing (being) emanates, or

that silence from which all music comes. (As we shall see, in his quite different way Eliot was also interested in this kind of gyration.)

Is there music in this poem? Cummings employs typography to create pauses -- and in this poem to create an almost audible sense of the flowing fall of a leaf. A subliminal audial quality of suggested (fragmented) sounds occurs in the poem (Turco, 1994:73). And because they are so minimal, especially in contrast to the visual aspect, these sounds gain in significance. They evidently tie in with natural events such as leaves rustling and wind stirring. It seems to me that the poem could also be read as a musical scale of a child-like kind: as in the do-re-me scale. Since the poem as a whole escapes from all kinds of dualities (including up versus down and sound versus (visible) silence, etcetera), it is possible to read or "sing" this poem as a top-down scale as much as a down-up scale. Some of the fragments approach the qualities of a musical scale: reading upward (in tandem with the poem as an oriental adventure of uprightness in the void of nature), the scale "fa/ af/ le/ l(a)" comes to mind (lines 4 to 1). Of course, "la" is an almost universal children's note, most often associated with a spontaneous expression of belonging, discovery, and joy. This could very well be one of the "end notes" of the leaf poem.

3.2. “i/ never” (the hummingbird poem)

The attractiveness that smallness held for Cummings (in form and in life) also led to his composition of a couple of hummingbird poems. In one of these, close read (like the other) by Webster (2001:108), the mating dance of two hummingbirds is actively portrayed (95 *Poems* CP 747). In the other, read below in extension of Webster’s reading, the discovery of the (minute) universe of a hummingbird’s nest with its (even more minute) eggs makes an amazing impression on the poetic speaker.

i
never
guessed any
thing(even a
universe)might be
so not quite believab
ly smallest as perfect this
(almost invisible where of a there of a)here of a
rubythroat’s home with its still
ness which really’s herself
(and to think that she’s
warming three worlds)
who’s ama
zingly
Eye

(73 *Poems* CP 827)

Webster views this poem as a “magic icon”, as described in his “Magic Iconism: Defamiliarization, Sympathetic Magic, and Visual Poetry (Guillaume Apollinaire and E.E. Cummings)” (2001). The poem’s shape evokes that of a hummingbird’s head (Webster, 2001:107). Two “eyes”, one at the top and one at the bottom corner of the poem provide the necessary visual pun for one to recognise this (Webster, 2001:107) -- and the extended right hand line forms a “beak”, as illustrated in figure 1 below.

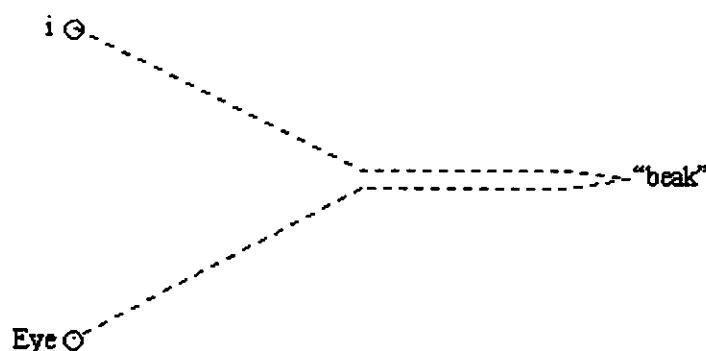


Figure 1: hummingbird magic icon, “i/ never” (CP 827)

Webster aptly also observes some of the ornithological aspects of the poem, in view of Cummings' interest in ornithology. It is difficult to imagine just how small the rubythroat hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) and its nest are: the complex nest, for example, has a diameter of no more than three to four centimetres (Webster, 2001:107). The eggs are of a size between peas and jelly beans (Webster, 2001:107). The speaker is entering the complex and immeasurable "boundaries" of nature by focusing on something elusively small.

From an ecological perspective, the nature of this poem's boundaries is potentially informative⁵¹. This could be true of the overall visual shape/s of the poem down to the level of parenthesis. Beginning with the former: as one reads the poem the word-signs increase to the right, reaching the pointed right hand maximum of the "hummingbird's beak". From there on the word-signs decrease to the left, as depicted in figure 2 below.

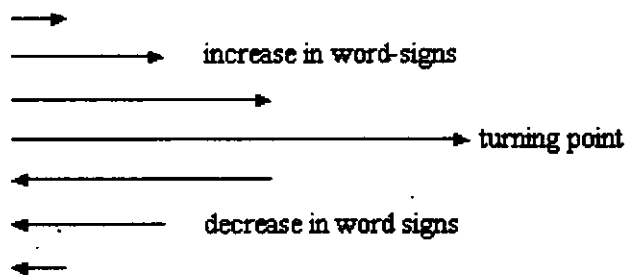


Figure 2: increase/ decrease of word-signs, "i/ never" (CP 827)

The extended middle line which ultimately forms the "tip" of the "beak" -- viewed from the point of view of iconicity -- therefore seems to also form some sort of readerly turning point. Here the movement to the right, the increase of word-signs and the concomitant decrease of blank space reach their maximum. And from here onwards occurs a movement to the left, as well as a decrease of word-signs and the increase of blank space. Furthermore, the overall shape of the poem suggests a "closing down" (a specificity/tapering/pointedness) towards the right and an "opening up" or funnel-like effect towards the left. And the three points of the roughly triangular shape of the poem all point to blank space. (See figure 3 below.)

⁵¹ Further analysis of this poem occurs in one or two publications by the author (JET): "Meaningful Transgression of Boundaries in E.E. Cummings' Poetry: an Ecocritical Perspective", *Journal of Contemporary Thought* 10 (1999) pp. 119-142, and "The Osmotic Mandala: on the Nature of Boundaries in E.E. Cummings' Poetry", *Spring: the Journal of the E.E. Cummings Society* 10 (Fall, 2001) pp. 9-22.

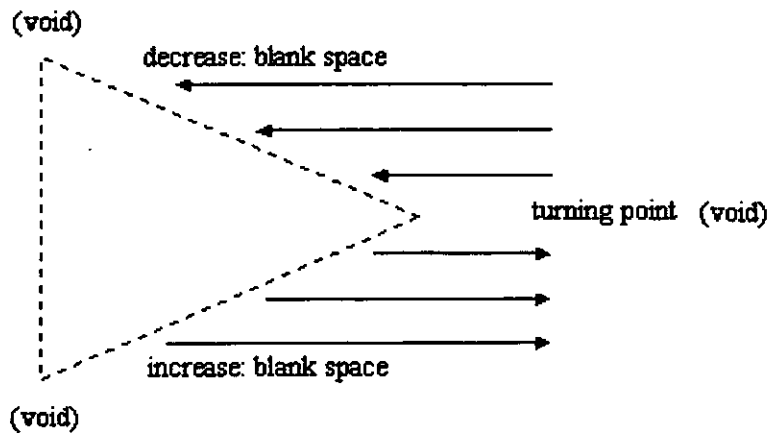


Figure 3: increase/ decrease of blank space, "i/ never" (CP 827)

This emphasis on blank space could be related to an emphasis on the void as Rai Peterson notes in terms of Cummings' blank space in general (1995:46). It is evidently also reminiscent of the similar emphasis found in Chinese "writing" and painting -- emphasis of which Cummings was quite aware, as we have seen. Does this poem fit into Mary Babcock's notion of Cummings' ideogrammatic style? Such a reading of this poem is imperative, and Nina Hellerstein's economical, helpful orientalist analyses may be applied in this instance. The hummingbird poem is a unique variant of an oriental sense of the adventure of human uprightness *within* the active now-here of nature. The poem takes the conventional readerly movement towards the right hand margin to what I have termed a *turning point* (the "tip" of the hummingbird's "beak"). This pointedness to the right is then equalled by the funnel-like opening to the left overall, as well as the movement to the left as the poem steers towards its bottom and blank space from the turning point onwards. Figure 4 presents the left-right balance and gravity (a readerly movement to the bottom point) as indicated by the visual shape of the poem.

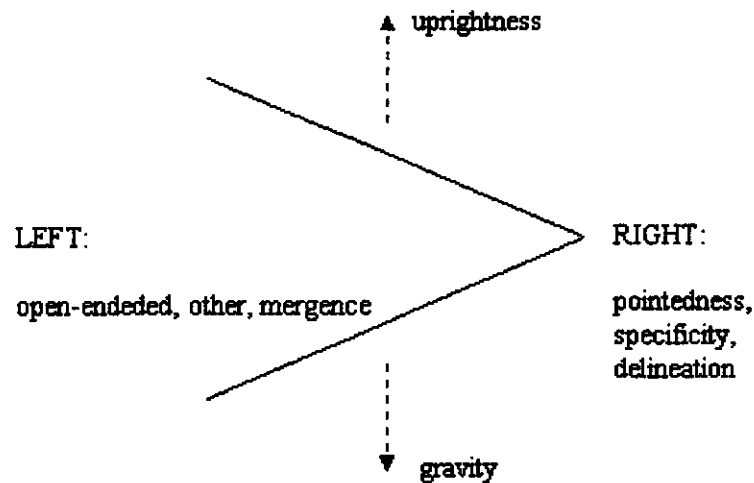


Figure 4: adventure of human uprightness, left-right balance, “i/ never” (CP 827)

As Hellerstein (1991) further notes, such a movement to the left should be considered as a movement towards the mysterious other-liness of human natural existence. In this instance the other could be no other than nature as embodied in the hummingbird’s perfectly layered and sculptured, minute nest. By means of visual subtleties which approach the subtleties and strengths of rhyme and sound within good poetry -- that is, not with a blandly handed-over and imitative “concrete” image (for the sake of the image) -- Cummings presents the natural adventure of being human. And there is more to this poem. Conceptual boundaries tend to dissolve in/through it.

Consider the homophonic swapping and mergence of self “i” and natural seeing “Eye” -- which together form the pun of the hummingbird’s eyes on the sides of its head. The increasing readerly movement towards the bottom left point of the poem corresponds with a warming of “worlds”: the eggs, the mother, and the nest become “ama/ zingly/ Eye” -- or self, or innermost awareness. The seeing “Eye” sees the essence of (one’s) nature. This reminds one of Emerson’s statement that when one actually sees nature, “all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all” (1995:6). It further reminds of Blake’s lines: “How do you know but ev’ry Bird that cuts the airy way/ Is an immense world of delight, clos’d by your senses five?” (1953:124): when the innermost senses awaken or open up, one sees a “magic” of natural being. And as the innermost Eye opens the boundaries between self and other dissolve into pure nothingness or absolute identity. Two dissolves into one: the third dimension. Human self and natural other become two

aspects of existence, not two separate realities. And these aspects dissolve into an intuitive sense of dynamic natural unity.

The middle line of the poem (the “pointed beak”) hence comes into focus. Here, the aha-erlebnis of the naturalist discovery of the hummingbird’s nest is portrayed. Since hummingbird nests are so diminutive and well hidden, they are difficult to find (Webster, 2001:107). Discovering it would be a coveted naturalist observation. Indeed, naturalists will relate to Cummings’ description of this discovery. As one walks in the veld, one may sense that something important is lingering on the fringes of one’s observational field. One does not yet know exactly what it is or where it is; just that there is something hovering in the vague and general field of vision (Cummings’ “almost invisible where” in the middle line). Often, immediately following upon such vague awareness, the object seems to crystallize clearly into the field of vision as a discovered, delineated phenomenon -- as if by itself. Cummings’ “there”, with its implications of “found it”, or “there it is in outline”, establishes this as the middle line moves on. Many naturalist observers would end here, at the “objective” observation, and move on in further exploration of similar observations.

But in Cummings’ middle line the vague “where” and delineated “there” of the “observation” are continued *through the final parenthesis* within the line, into “here”. The outside, the delineated and objective observation, now moves into the inside, the human subject. This is how full saturation between natural otherness and human selfhood is indicated in the middle line. The final parenthesis in this line -- which also looks like the lens of an eye -- therefore acts as an osmotic (conceptual) boundary. It allows and actively invites a transfusion of separated semiotic “substances” into a greater level of saturation. A saturation, that is, of object into subject, other into self, nature and human, as well as outside and inside. (See figure 5.)

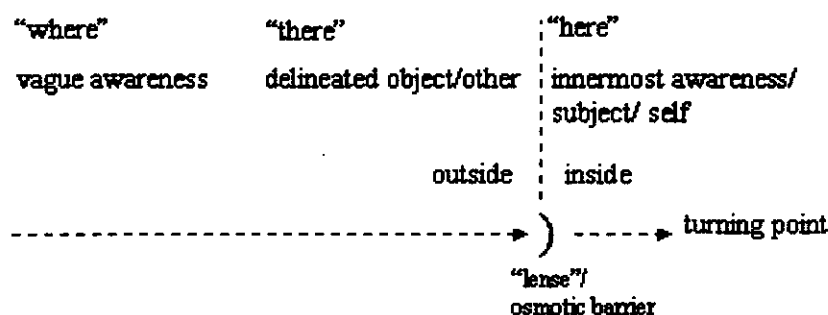


Figure 5: central line, osmotic barrier (parenthesis), "i/ never" (CP 827)

For these reasons, it is more than appropriate that the turning point of the poem in terms of the left and the right as well as word-sign and blank-space increases and decreases should occur at the end of this pointed line. The line en-acts a semiotic osmosis in which subject and object are indeed involved in a turning point. The poem with its transparent i-Eye (which implies the co-incidence of human observer and natural observed), its osmotic parenthesis, its homophonic swapping of self and observation, its swelling and tapering into nothingness, etcetera, therefore becomes one huge osmotic mandala: the Eye. These are the levels to which Cummings is able to carry the suggestion of human-sign-nature (e)mergence, and an (e)mergence of the visual-verbal and the ecosemiotic.

This osmotic mandala again employs the various dynamics mentioned in this Chapter. Humility: an active smallness and earthiness of theme and form. The theme is small, indeed: a hummingbird's nest and eggs. And the method of composition is small: 49 words, to be precise. These are economically arranged down to the minimalistic details of the important role of one parenthesis, as we have seen. Such economy again allows a maximal sense of being included along with or into the dynamic and complex vastness of nature beyond all kinds of opposites: the smallness of the nest is as the immeasurability of the universe, and the poem opens (one) up into this. And again, "common" words and earthy interests are foregrounded (and shaped) so as to indicate the heavenliness of (ecological) being and participation. The "strangest" word in the poem is "ama/ zingly", reminiscent of the rhythmic adjective "greenly" in the sonnet "i thank You God for most this amazing" (*Xaipe* CP 663). (Note that "ama/ zingly" is fragmented to indicate its serendipitous "am" -- i.e., being, as well as its "magical" switching of self and observation, somehow indicated with

the fragment “zingly”.) Flexibility, fluidity, and serendipity are hallmarks of the theme and dynamics of this osmotic poem. It leads to a different (hummingbird) contextualization of the third dimension or third voice. Cummings, with his interest in ornithology, was likely to know that hummingbirds almost invariably lay only two eggs. Webster speculates on the riddle of the third universe in this poem: it could be the mother bird who needs warming, too (2001:107). Or it could be the nest itself that is being warmed. In extension of this, since opposites are most particularly transcended in this poem, the third universe could well be related to Cummings’ third dimension or voice. The (triangular) poem does, after all, resonate with dynamics of dualisms that are overcome into a third, unifying cultural and natural state. Besides the (entrenched) opposites of subject versus object, self versus other, and sign versus its outside, a long list of opposites being in the very process of transcendence could be added with a view to this poem. These include the opposites or dualistic categories of painting or writing, left or right, down or up, being or nothing, stability or dynamism, sound or silence, smallness or vastness, gravity or upliftment, and so on. In the “final” or open-ended analysis, this is what the “i” and “Eye” see when they/it discovers the universe of a hummingbird’s nest.

How exactly would critics react to such poetry? Perhaps some would feel that it is mere trickery, especially in visual-verbal terms. Nonetheless, the subtlety and conviction of visual dynamics in connectivity with the ecological realm in this poem could also be said to reach the subtlety and conviction of “good sound” devices such as rhyme and assonance (which are, after all, also forms of poetic “trickery”). That is, the visual dynamics of this poem are at once “hidden” enough and clear enough to be convincing. Creative readerly jumps are needed to “see” what the poem is about: nothing is handed over on a (visual) plate. One has to see the pun of the eyes, for example, to see the iconicity of the poem.

The astute visual-verbal critic Martin Heusser reads this visual pun quite differently, and overlooks (at least to some extent) its iconic and ecological dynamics. In deconstructive spirit Heusser classifies this poem along with a number of other examples of Cummings’ visual-verbal work under the rubric of what he deems to be that “*ill-defined referent*” (1997:251). This would mean that the hummingbird poem has a shape without an outward direction towards nature: an arbitrary, self-reflexive,

and self-contradictory shape. In Heusser's words, this poem belongs under the rubric of signs with "unmotivated" visual effects (1997:251). In "these examples", he writes

we have an eye-catching, dominant visual element for which it is impossible to find a referent elsewhere in the poem. Nowhere do we find a plausible ('motivated') relationship between what the poem says (i.e. its 'topic', 'theme', 'content', or 'message') and its shape or the (near -) symmetry which constitutes it (1997:252).

If push came to shove, an ecosemiotic reader would have to differ from this reading (while, also, allowing the point at least to some extent -- signs are arbitrary, too, and so are some of the other poem shapes that Heusser mentions, as far as one can see). To an ecosemiotic reader the hummingbird poem offers a satisfying example of a holomeme (a sign of wholeness), or the *eco-logos*. In Derrida's more recent and cautious terms, such a sign could also be referred to as *l'animot*: half sign, half animal (2002:409). Overall, at least three "species" of sign should be added to this in Cummings' case: signs that are half sign/half bird as well as half sign/half plant and those that are half sign/half earth. These signs continue to find themselves in that difficult and rewarding zone of between-ness where sign-nature interaction takes place. These poems or signs open up dynamically *into* a context of natural movement. Some critics have (perhaps inadvertently) tended to overlook, neglect, or ignore the extent and dynamics of the ecology of Cummings' poetry. As will be argued in the next Chapter, this has had an unnecessarily negative impact on its critical reception.

Chapter 5

The Critical Treatment of Cummings' Ecological Poetry

There was a church behind them, of course. The church clock struck ten.
Did the strokes reach the furze bush, or did the thorn tree hear them?

Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (1922)

1. Introduction: the "s-o variable" and Cummings criticism

Notions of the part and the whole as well as the exact nature of the relation between subject and object are privileged in modernist discourse. This is clear not only from the preceding Chapters of this thesis in which Cummings' sensibility of natural wholeness with its implied merging of opposites such as human subject and natural "object" were explored, or Eliot's formulation of the objective correlative, but also from other important aspects of Eliot's prose such as his consistent emphasis on the poetic whole (1980:40, 64). As Brooker and Bentley state, the nature of modernist discourse was also driven by a renewed conception of the subject(ive) and the object(ive) in which the relation between these two halves, realms, or poles of experience became more fluid (1990:31): modernists were acutely aware that objective reality is changed in the process of subjective perception, and that objective reality is (therefore) not completely separate and static but more idiosyncratic and unreliable.

Just one simple, illustrative example of this sense of the fluid interdependence of subjective perception and objective reality occurs in Virginia Woolf's early modernist experiment in fiction, the novel *Jacob's Room* published in 1922 (that seminal year for modernist literature): "'Oh-h-h-h' groaned Jacob, as the boat rocked, and the trees rocked, and the white dresses and the white flannel trousers drew out long and wavering up the bank" (1992:29).

This is a fairly straightforward textual example of the modernist recognition that objective reality alters in accordance with subjective awareness: when the subject in the boat is rocked the perceived objective reality -- in this instance, trees and people dressed in white -- also rock, appear to rock, or are drawn out in shape. More complex instances of this reciprocity of the subjective and the objective and the ensuing fluidity or indefiniteness occur in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922).

This fluidity of subject-object relations also touches upon and resonates within additional pairs of relations such as self versus other, the sign versus its outside, versus male versus female, East versus West, human versus nature, major versus minor, taste versus corn, rational versus irrational, intellect versus emotion, and so on. These oppositional relations are central to and treated in various ways within all kinds of modernisms.

Mainstream modernist fluidity of some of these oppositions still entertains a set of more static, hierarchical, and alienating relations between them. For example, the complicated fluidity of subject-object and male-female relations in Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is not matched by a similar fluidity in terms of major versus minor poetry as found in Eliot's essays "Religion and Literature" (1935) (1980:109) and "What is A Classic?" (1944) (1980:129).

A thread that binds these opposites together is of course their duality: one should remind oneself that all these opposites together mark a preoccupation with two-ness, or dualism, in mainstream modernist discourse. And the treatment of one pair of opposites (major versus minor, for example) is reflected, however subtly on occasion, in the treatment of another (say, subject versus object). Put plainly, based on a reading of Eliot's poetry and prose, major poetry is simply more objective and strives to be impersonal and universal. It hence remains in supposed control of the subjective (emotion), the provincial, and inner conviction. In fact, Eliot equates such conviction with (minor) propaganda (1980:110).

The mainstream modernist poem is composed through objective correlatives and in a seemingly objective, intellectual (controlled/distanced/ironical) tone for the most part, in order to render refined subjective insights and/or responses from its reader. Simultaneously, Prufrock faces a dilemma: he threatens to turn into an object himself, merely a second-rate actor in his own life, controlled by objects (such as cigarette butts) as much as he seems to be in control of them.

At most, this entire set of two-fold relations turns into new forms of a totalitarian textual hierarchy in mainstream modernist discourse. In a complicated manner, mainstream modernist discourse maintains that if poetry is not objective and impersonal enough, it is minor. At least, that is one way of reading Eliot's prose. As a consequence of this drive towards an all-inclusive impersonality and objectivity of

the sign, the poetic subject dangles uncomfortably between being all, or being virtually nothing, as in *The Waste Land*'s second section entitled "A Game of Chess" (which already indicates a set of complicated relations between the opposites of white and black).

'What is that noise?'

The wind under the door.

'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'

Nothing again nothing.

'Do

You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remem-
ber

Nothing?'

I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'

But

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag--

It's so elegant

So intelligent

(Eliot, 1982:55)

On various levels, this passage from *The Waste Land* is indicative of what the poem does in terms of the s-o variable. To start with, this is a supposed dialogue between a male and a female lover -- or a self and an other caught in various twofold relations. The female's words take inverted commas, and the male's words or thoughts, not. It is not a dialogue: the communicative role of language fails. Instead, one has two monologues drifting away from and towards one another in various degrees of disparity, vanity, and non-transcendence. It is as if one is *inside* the mind of the speaker, and that meaningful relations to an outside, or a sense-making context, are impossible.

The typography here, in terms of the spacing and isolation of words and a fragmentation of phrases in accentuated blank space, looks startlingly familiar -- and strange -- to the Cummings reader. The wind is doing nothing, it is just wind. It has no "magic" or significance of (a human or other-ly) context. How different this is from Cummings' now-here-nowhere, and his conversation with a female lover. Eliot's "nothing" carries only a (logical) absence of significance, contained in the abysmally solipsistic closure of a male brain. Later in the poem, the speaker states with despair that he or she can (at least) "connect nothing with nothing" (1982:62).

This particular *kind* of nothing of disparity, despair, and logical absence can instantly turn into its opposite: either objects with concrete substance, and/or allusion, signs as nothing more than signs, or signs as their own “objects”. The female questions (perhaps even confronts or interrogates) the male in this passage, with that potential of *nothing* in his head. In response, the male thinks of Madame Sosostris’ Tarot card prediction, and of eyes that turn into (the dead objects of) pearls, as well as (the purely textual object of) Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poetry (see Eliot, 1980:90, 96). Such eyes, although they may carry at least a hint of spiritual transcendence (tears/suffering hardening into jewels) are of course blind and dead. They can see nothing, in the most brutal sense of a total absence of life and visibility. These pearls or eyes seem to float with great intensity in a vacuum of absence (nothing) -- that is part of the startling objectifying effects that mainstream modernist objectification can have. And then the male speaker’s thoughts, and the poem, take an unexpected, yet quite mundane turn towards the Shakespeherian Rag -- either a piece of cloth, or a “ditty” of the jazz era playing in the background on a gramophone. Again, one is struck by the subtle difference of Eliot’s ironical “Os” here, compared to Cummings’ “os” which are indicative of entrance, upliftment, and transcendence with and within nature. The elegance and intelligence of Eliot’s “Rag” (which reminds of the word “text”, or *textus*) are meant in the most searing, ironical manner indicated by the “modern” mispronunciation of a Shakespeherian rag with its airs of the “*pohetic*”.

Upon reading such passages one is left with an impression of a dramatic void or absence (of context) filled with a disparate and yet classically precise arrangement of objects and personas that flash or float in and out of it with enhanced delineation. Let this provisionally suffice as one description of the deliberate, objectified non-integrity of the s-o variable in mainstream modernist discourse. The poetic textual object (the poems themselves, or their parts) either turns into an all-inclusive reality of its own or into mere words, the empty objects or shells of signifiers that return upon themselves -- more or less at once. *The Waste Land* is written in this spirit, and has to be read in this spirit -- possibly with the paramount exception of its conclusion as the thesis will argue. It contains an objectified ambivalence to its core. It forces the reader to admit that one can (merely) connect absence with absence.

As Michael Edwards writes, nothing in this poem comes to one single, or, one may add, in an integrated manner: language itself is fallen in this poem, and it is

anxious about its own fallen state (1984:108). To some extent, its profoundest meaning is that it can only suggest the pointlessness of modern language. It confronts one with the textual object as an object, and reveals little direction towards an active and highly significant natural context as found in Cummings' poetry. Mainstream modernist discourse persistently complicates an unfolding or active integrity of the relations and dynamics between subject and object, self and other, and the sign and its (natural, societal, and historical) contexts. Its signs reveal little of an active and integrated context of (say) male and female love. It therefore desires and laments a lack of fullness, fruitfulness, and a meaningful integration of life's opposites.

Nonetheless, it is by arranging such signs into a whole of musical fragments (if nothing else), that these signs create a striking absence of meaning. Not unlike Greimas' semiotic square, such signs are based on the logical/modern absence of significance (which can also be expressed as the absence of a set of integrated, open-ended, and active interrelations between subject and object, male and female, and self and other). And they aspire for the same positivism -- inclusiveness on an impersonal scale -- or a total form of semiosis.

Fluidity therefore does not automatically mean a greater integrity of the modernist sign. It does not necessarily overcome the drastic Cartesian split between subject and object, as well as subjectivity and objectivity. To the contrary, it can also mean that the relations between subject and object, self and other, and the sign and its outside will be stretched to the utmost, to the point of almost total disparity and alienation. Thinking of nature here, such signs can be used to create an almost intolerable tension between the human subject and self, versus the natural object or other.

Texts such as *The Waste Land* and Woolf's *Jacob's Room* thus pose a very important modern question: do we still (actively and significantly) know *where* we are? Do we still know, in modern time, our ecological *place*? Or has the state of modern between-ness -- between cultural subject and natural other -- reached a point of severe crisis, and of such distance as cannot be meaningfully overcome? From this negative angle, then, mainstream modernist poetry certainly touches upon or even embody an ecological crisis. And: if we do not know where we are, should it lead to a closing down of ourselves and significance, away from where we are in nature? Or: if we have already reached that point in modern culture, what should we do about it?

Cummings' poetic "answer" to such laden questions, as we have seen in preceding Chapters, is quite different in tone and result than those of a salient mainstream modernist poem such as *The Waste Land*. Cummings opens up the modern sign to discover an active and meaningful nature, sometimes also in a comic and even light, playful manner. Eliot's answer closes down upon itself, it "steels", delineates, or objectifies itself, into an ironical pity of the absence of meaning and the impossibility of transcendence. Difficult it is to decide which has the greater artistic effect, as I have maintained. And, on the technical surface of an Eliot passage as cited above, and a Cummings poem as analyzed in the thesis (say, "in Just-/ spring" (& CP 27)), there is little difference in terms of typography. But this little difference is a telling one: for Cummings' poetry remains flexible so as to go up into a greater ecological context, whereas Eliot's poetry retains tensions, constraints, and almost impenetrable poetic objects (fragmentarily, and sometimes "meltingly" arranged) that can be related to an absence of such a context with much difficulty.

It is therefore also difficult to assess whether mainstream modernist texts such as *The Waste Land* form units, or not. Does the fluidity of relations between subject and object lead to an integrated and contextualized whole, or not? So much is included, arranged in various sets of tensions, and yet so much is excluded, too, in the case of these signs. Recent criticisms of these texts and *The Waste Land* above all, do indeed focus on the issue of their unity or their utter fragmentation, from the perspective of the reader and the act of interpretation. Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley, Rainer Emig, and Daniel Albright are some of the critics that engage with this complex and intriguing issue. Emig and Albright argue in parallel (from their various angles) that a work such as *The Waste Land* and its central figure Tiresias do not ultimately succeed in creating wholeness, integrity, or unity. This is so, according to them, because the relations between subject and object (Albright, 1997:240), as well as those between the sign and what lies outside the sign (Emig, 1995:130) are complicated beyond wholeness and/or a transcendence of binary and opposing realms. Brooker and Bentley write that *The Waste Land* is at once fragmentary and self-reflexive in one of its main aspects, and unifying or integrating in another, so that it requires a "binary reading" (1990:93), with one eye constantly on (total) disparity and arbitrariness, and the other constantly on a significant whole underpinned by an awareness of lasting, eternal love.

Based on these considerations one could argue that the issue of the potential wholeness (or not) of modernist texts centres on an “s-o variable”. That is, a set of tensions, constraints, levels of fluidity, and static, “impersonal” hierarchies between the perceived opposites of subject versus object, self versus other (including male versus female), and the sign versus its outside -- as well as related opposites, for example intellect versus emotion, which are related to object(ivity) and subject(ivity). Brooker and Bentley’s valid point that modernism in general tends to emphasize the fluidity of subject-object relations when compared to the preceding Cartesian era (1990:18-19) could then be paraphrased as follows: modernist art involves the potential fluidity and the potential fixity of this s-o variable. It furthermore involves the potential of a relatively complete disparity of this variable, in which subject, self, or sign, threatens to dislocate itself from its integral relations with object, other, or what lies (and moves) outside the sign.

Jacob’s Room contains a telling passage that (apparently for no reason) mentions, perhaps to one’s surprise, that bushes and a thorn tree near a church cannot hear the church bell tolling (Woolf, 1992:115). One (important) reading of this seemingly minor passage in this novel, is that human culture and natural other are in separate realms, deaf to one another. One infers that modern signs just have to stress that any meaningful relations between belief, nature, subject and object, self and other, the sign and its outside -- in short, any integrity of the s-o variable -- have become obsolete, or ironical to their very core. There is always only this distance, this absence, between these realms. In one sense at least, Jacques Derrida is therefore quite modernist: one of his main arguments is that language can always be used ironically, with a telling and little, vast, or even infinite difference of postponement between the sign and its outside.

Formulating the issue in this manner makes it possible to recognize and state that the s-o variable shifts in degrees along a kind of modernist “algorithm” or scale, also on the basis of its ultimate fluidity or fixity in modernist poetry. In 1917, Eliot wrote that the “contrast between fixity and flux, this unperceived evasion of monotony, [...] is the very life of verse” (1980: 33). (Eliot had in mind that the apparent freedom of so-called free verse reciprocates a more intense need for form (fixity), in paradoxical contrast to what many may have suspected.) Within “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) and “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921), Eliot

stressed the vitality of the poetic whole -- whether in terms of the poem as a whole, the poetic community as a whole, or the poet's ability to fabricate wholes from disparate experience (1980: 40, 64). At the same time, Eliot emphasized the need for difficulty and dislocation, in view of the fragmentary nature of modern experience (1980:64-65). In difficult times such as modern ones, Eliot perceived and advocated a need for the poet to isolate, remove, or distance the poetic artwork from its various contexts -- whether personal, societal, historical, or (perhaps inadvertently) natural; the terms Eliot use are that the poet should "dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning" (1980:65). This act of dislocation is related to the notion that the poem should be autonomous (with delineated boundaries), objective in the sense of being an object in its own right on an impersonal (read also: intellectual/distanced) basis, withdrawn to a great extent from its many complex modern "environments" -- while including as much of its context as possible, within itself, and (hence) within its objectified, dense (or tight), and clearly delineated textual boundaries. If necessary, it seems that these boundaries must be "hard", even impenetrable, so that the poetic object can withstand bad modern weather if need be -- Eliot's formulation of F.H. Bradley's definition of the individual comes to mind. This individual is contained in absolutely impenetrable or "immediate" boundaries (Eliot, 1982:73), and I will return to Eliot's Bradleian concept of the individual.

One sign in such a new work of modernist art has to alter, however slightly, the whole of European poetry, past and present (Eliot, 1980:38). Such a sign is made, one supposes, under tremendous pressure by an individual and depersonalized modern poet, who is aware of its various reverberations down the poetic ages. Suggestions that such a sign is further objectified through this tremendous pressure, like a ball (or a layer of coal) increasing in density, can be found in Eliot's prose when he compares the writing process with a chemical transformation (under pressure) within a chamber -- here Eliot states: it is the "intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts" (1980:41). Such pressure involves a "depersonalization" of the poet, and it is "in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science" (Eliot, 1980:40) -- that is, too, a maximum of poetic or semiotic objectivity.

What I tentatively term the "s-o variable" (for the sake of economy) therefore marks two important tendencies in modernist discourse: the first is towards

dissolution, integration, unity, reconciliation -- in short, a new integrity of the whole, mediated through (new forms of) poetry. The second is towards dislocation, and fragmentation, as well as an indefinite sustenance of tension for the sake of objectification, also in the sense of a conceptual separation, "hardening" or distancing of the poetic utterance from an alienating and alienated social, natural, and historical context. As mainstream modernist poetry makes clear, the sustenance of such distance in poetry (between subject and object, self and other, and the sign and its outside) is not easy: to the contrary, it goes along with a dramatic complication of significance.

Most or perhaps even all modernists reveal both these tendencies in various degrees. As we have seen, Cummings' own "theory" of signs includes an awareness of their "edges" or "silhouettes" (which suggests at least some fixity or autonomy of the poetic form), as well as of their integrating, chameleon-like capacities to create a dynamic and "magic" context of meaning. Given the overall greater fluidity of the s-o variable when compared to the era preceding modernism and twentieth century science, modernist artists were free to create either the ultimate sense of fragmentation and dislocation, or the ultimate sensibility of renewed unity and integration -- or to maintain the tension between *these* potential polarities to its utmost. They took the freedom, for instance, to fragment and recombine poetic language in such a way that a sense of unity could be evoked, back into a kind of "ur-meaning" in which opposites dissolve intuitively. Or, they were equally free simply to maintain the maximum tautness between the potential for unity and the potential for complete disparity. Both potentials seem to characterize Cummings' and mainstream modernist poetry. From an ecological perspective, however, Cummings' poetry seems more flexible and contextual, and mainstream modernist discourse more fixed and alienating.

As far as complete disparity is concerned, modernism encounters one of the intrinsic limits of signification as Emig shows (1995:130): that the sign is only a sign because it stands for something which it is not, and therefore (one should add) that it always assumes some context besides its own (again, whether natural, societal, or historical). In other words, significance and meaning presuppose at least some level of co-existence and integrity between opposites such as subject and object, self and other, as well as the sign and its outside. The notion of an s-o variable contains this intrinsic and vital limit which at the same time opens the sign up towards its outside,

and allows the sign to play a mediating or ecological role, among other considerations. When the sign is viewed as too exclusive in terms of the occupation of its own domain as it happens within mainstream modernist poetry according to Emig (1995:129), this commonsensical contextual limit is transgressed in a negative sense. Besides the exciting textual effects achieved in this manner, this transgression also leads to a number of complicating paradoxes such as the fact that the sign appears to be merely a sign without a contextual impact: an increase in meaning also leads to a diminishing of one of the roots of meaning.

Such a limit or freedom makes Cummings' unique evocation of the ecological sensibility possible and vital. Seen in terms of the s-o variable, Cummings on numerous occasions moves the other modernist tendency -- towards a sense of wholeness -- to its extremity. This tendency is shared by Eliot to some degree as we have seen in this thesis, but it is a tendency that Cummings gradually (and on occasion with creative bursts) allowed to expand and grow to its greatest possible maximum throughout his career, given the reasonable limits that Cummings as a poet and a human being shared with his fellow modernists. The preceding two Chapters of this thesis provide ample evidence hereof, from a generic, historical, and dynamically ecosemiotic viewpoint. In Chapter Six of the thesis, further comparisons between Cummings' poetry and mainstream modernist poetry occur with a view to further demonstrating this degree of difference. Here, I am concerned with how critics were able to fit Cummings into this ecological scheme of modernist poetry, or not.

This degree of difference between Cummings and Eliot in his salient mode is embodied, for instance (and broadly speaking), in the result that Cummings satirizes the contra-ecology of modern society and affirms the dynamic co-existence of human, sign and nature in his more lyrical works -- as we have seen in Chapters Three and Four. Whereas Eliot's salient and canonized enactment of the s-o variable results in the relatively tragic entrenchment of alienation and dislocation as well as the more or less indefinite tension or stretching of (fluid) opposites (whether this tension involves the colours of irony, ambivalence, maturity, or other possibilities in individual instances) versus a fixed view. As we have seen in the osmotic mandala of Cummings' hummingbird poem, opposites are meant to dissolve in it, to the extent of identity between human self and hummingbird other, observant subject (poetic speaker) and observed object (hummingbird's nest), as well as (most certainly) a

dissolution of the sign and the ecosystem that lies (strictly speaking) outside it. And as we have seen in the passage from "A Game of Chess" cited in the preceding paragraphs, Eliot maintains a classicist restraint of form -- concomitant with the necessary levels of objective and ironical distance -- between male self and female other (or vice versa), and the sign and its context-less-ness or its absent context. It further employs a precision of objectivity to control the subjective readerly response. And, its personas are involved in a complex disparity between themselves as subjects and the objects that "surround" them, or themselves as objects determined by their "surrounding" objects (such as the wind under the door).

More particularly, this degree of difference in terms of the modernist employment and perception of the s-o variable means that Cummings composes poetry with a view to the greatest possible sense of contextual saturation in many instances, *including* and *transcending* his employment of the objectivity or sensuality of the sign and opposites. Whereas Eliot (again, in his salient works) composes with a view to the maximum sense of difficulty and dislocation, that is, of poetic fragments propping up the disparities of modern existence with a view to at least some sense of structural tension.

And this procedure entrenches, however ironically or ambivalently so, the modern sense of contextual alienation: the sense that history, society, and nature leave one in a peculiarly modern state of isolation. Of course, this very entrenchment can be read as a sense of commitment on Eliot's side: a refusal to omit modern sensibilities from modern art as well as the refusal to write poetry which would glibly, "lyrically", skim the felt realities of modern experience. At the same time this procedure means that the demon of (also, ecological) alienation is established within the poetry.

The fact that Cummings avoids this particular problematic because of his affirmative view and employment of the relations between human signs and nature's dynamism, is therefore quite important in terms of modernism as a whole. Yet, despite the fact that Cummings and Eliot also share a number of modernist interests with a view to this s-o variable, the ecology of Cummings' poetic project -- also in terms of this variable -- has been overlooked within criticism. It is my contention that this occurred, in crucial instances, for the reason that the (intellectualized) ambivalence and isolation that Eliot built into his poetry became the norm in

mainstream modernist criticism. As recently as 1996, Friedman described Cummings' unifying, affirming and accepting vision, and posed a necessary question -- even if one may feel that Cummings does not have an intellectualized, fully-fledged mainstream modernist vision, but rather an ecological view or "central complex consciousness":

This view, which achieves a vision of timelessness though time, is not a simplistic division of the universe into black and white: although it does divide the universe into the natural and artificial worlds, it is the latter which is, in [Cummings'] eyes, simplistic, while it is the organic world which reconciles opposites and resolves paradoxes -- and this is, in effect, the complex and many-sided world which critics say is lacking in his work.

Why don't they see it? (1996:68).

Among other considerations, Friedman's argument in response to his question is that critics need to expand their awareness of modernist visions (and Cummings' vision) to include more possibilities such as a Taoist view. In response to his question, Friedman continues to assert this Taoist vision as a valid one, while relating it to Cummings' poetry, and while identifying some of Cummings' shortcomings and successes in this regard. For instance, Friedman writes with a view to modernist criticism on the whole that the split within it

occurs when one branch of modernism, primarily the New Criticism, as I've been suggesting, wants to transcend the limits of intellection by complicating it with opposites set in tension, while the other branch wants to transcend intellection altogether in order to achieve a truly whole, pure, and nondualistic vision -- an achievement more profound and more noble than the tragic vision itself (1996:95).

What Friedman seems to be arguing is a more extensive inclusion in the modernist canon of a poet such as Cummings, whose poetry gives greater expression to a sense of Taoist (or ecological) unity and lesser expression to a sense of opposites remaining ironically, tragically or "maturely" bound in hierarchical tension. Based on this argument, this Chapter of the thesis explores a possibility that Cummings' tendency to radically follow the more integrating, ecological modernist slant into its uniquely Cummingsian extremity or fullness -- or full-emptiness to be more exact -- could have pushed him away from the set of expectations which were dominant among influential modernist critics over a considerable period of time. This exploration of these responses include a concise overview of the critical treatment of Cummings' ecological poetry in terms of the s-o variable. It could be that some critics; including ones whose impact on Cummings have been substantial, expected

modernist art works to reveal the necessary tension, hierarchy, and distance between opposite poetic as well as experiential forces such as the object(ive) and the subject(ive), while Cummings handled these opposite forces on the basis of his notion of a third dimension or ecological voice. That is, the possibility of the maximum active integrity and hence unity between sign, nature, and human being. The preceding couple of Chapters give ample evidence that (and ample description of how) Cummings handled opposites into the third dimension. Rephrased: this involves the potential of the maximum poetic employment of an ecological, context-creating dynamism. It is from the perspective of this possible misunderstanding between Cummings and influential critics that I briefly turn to individual examples of these critical treatments of Cummings' poetry, covering in as much detail as possible important examples thereof over a number of decades.

2. Some influential critical responses to Cummings' ecological poetry

2.1. Edmund Wilson (1924)

A number of judgements which were destined to be repeated in the overall critical response to Cummings emerge in the well-known American modernist critic Wilson's brief 1924 review of Cummings' poetry -- Wilson's remarks (of course) concerned only Cummings' early work published up to 1924. Wilson asserts the following in terms of Cummings' style -- it is of the "eternal adolescent", as "halfbaked as boyhood" (1984:44), it marks the fact that Cummings is not his own best critic and reveals "little application of the intellect"; we can hear the poet in the background "chuckling with the delight of a schoolboy" (1984:44). Wilson writes that Cummings' style also reveals, however, a high degree of attractive spontaneity like "perspiration" and like the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's work; Cummings' lyricism "dissolves on the mind like the flakes of a lyric dew" (!) (1984:44).

Wilson mentions that Cummings' punctuation has "a life of its own" (1984:45) but judges that the poems are ugly, even hideous, because of this (1984:45) -- thus introducing a number of critical responses which, early on, divided themselves over rejection or appreciation of what was perceived as Cummings' "avant-garde" emphasis on the visual instead of the audial (see also Webster, 1995a:113). The "shattered fragmentation" of his poetry further leaves the reader with a jigsaw puzzle,

according to Wilson (1984:45). Wilson prescribes to the ailing boy-poet that he should stick to the conventional limits of punctuation (1984:45), thus underlining that Cummings' poetry involves at least some intellectual engagement, after all. If the critic plays a mediating role between poet and public and if it is acceptable that critics are in a way subordnary to poets -- in the sense that critics such as Wilson himself did not produce substantial poetry -- it has to be admitted in hindsight that Wilson takes the role of the critic very far in prescribing to the poet in this manner.

Wilson also feels that Cummings' emotions and affirmations -- "the adoration of young love and delight in the coming of spring" -- are "conventional and simple to the extreme" (1984:46), and that they "verge on the banal" (1984:46), although Wilson feels that Cummings is preferable to Wallace Stevens in this respect because Cummings is, at least, "not impervious to life" (1984:46). Wilson concludes his castigation of the perceived adolescence of Cummings with a couple of fatherly sentences of goodwill, mentioning Cummings' ability for "charming expression" and concluding with the sentence that "Mr. Cummings deserves well of the public" (1984:46), if not from critics.

One of the central issues of Cummings criticism anticipated by Wilson's review is the related critical conceptions that Cummings' poetry lacks intellect (objectivity), is too emotional, sentimental, or Romantic (subjective), and that Cummings' poetry is therefore conventional, banal, or childish. Again and again we see in modernist criticism of Cummings' work, a notion that his "experimentation" (in terms of typography, fragmentation, blank space, punctuation, syntax, grammar, etcetera) leads to a merely spectacular surface hiding a trite, conventional or adolescent sentiment. There is the sense among these critics that Cummings is merely playing and that he has no authentic poetic substance at the centre, underneath the surfaces of his poetry. The possibility is not considered, for instance, that an essentially playful and affirmative poetry could also be spontaneous, intuitive and ecologically affirmative in terms of its view. Or, that a unique and active natural, Taoist "nowhere" moves inside and beyond the framework of his technical manipulations.

What does one learn in retrospect from critical texts such as Wilson's? Although aspects of Wilson's review could be viewed as archaic if not slightly paternalistic, let it not go by unnoticed that this kind of criticism still reveals a great

level of critical care and commitment -- the ideal that besides mediating or interpreting, the critic also acts as a watchdog, a guide, and a pruner of poetry for the sake of the increasing evolvment and streamlining of an individual's poetry and the direction of poetry on the whole; a level of critical engagement and solidarity which in today's multi-various and "professional" (and, let it be said, sometimes incestuous) poetics, is sorely lacking (in contrast to the modernist era) according to some observers (Gioia, 1991).

Nevertheless: it is evident from Wilson's review that he perceives a lack of maturity and intellect in Cummings' poetry. And it is illuminating to see how Wilson, like critics to follow, *creates* a sense of ambivalence where he seems to perceive a lack of ambivalence, underscoring the sheer importance of ambivalence itself to this kind of modernist discourse. A dialectical set of striking tensions or contradictions in Wilson's review includes his appreciation of Cummings' lyrical capabilities and even Cummings' abilities of achieving a sense of poetic "dissolvance" in the reader's mind (although Wilson expresses this in a mixed metaphor as we have seen) on the one hand, his depreciation of Cummings' "romantic sentimentality" on the other, as well as his depreciation of modernist devices such as fragmentation. Could "dissolving" poetry be too fragmentary and too lyrical -- all at the same time? Could a poetry be too experimental and yet too trite and conventional at the same time? And could exceedingly puzzling or riddly poetry not be cerebral or intellectual? It seems, among other things, that only a very serious, even sombre form of intellect strikes critics such as Wilson as adequately intellectual.

Wilson *appears* not to notice that fragmentation can persuade the reader to recombine in a devoted manner which yet gives rise to a spontaneous readerly experience, and that this process of recombination could be precisely that which leads to a sense of overcoming opposites and tensions into an enhanced sense of what Wilson terms "dissolvance", what Cummings terms his third dimension or voice, and what the ecological reader could term a sense of natural unity. In other words, although Wilson's review was published almost a decade after the appearance of Pound's *Cathay*, what Wilson does not take into account is the ecological and oriental dimension of Cummings' project, the possibility of an interactive, non-sentimental integrity of sign and nature. As we have seen in preceding Chapters this dynamism is

already apparent in Cummings' poetry and notes from early on and matures well (although not always in spectacular or sign-posted bursts) as his career progresses.

Where Cummings composes child-like appreciation of the miracle of nature (spontaneously, with awe, with open-ended immediacy, and so on) Wilson sees either the danger of a return to Romantic sentimentality, or the existence in Cummings' poetry of an adolescent "kick-ass" or "tough-guy" attitude -- or both. Where Cummings foregrounds authentic intuition and emotion (while not neglecting the cerebral aspect) Wilson sees a lack of the intellect altogether -- and in this instance a look at the reason for Wilson's verdict is informative.

Wilson projects a very particular modernist conception of what "intellect" means onto (Cummings') poetry: opposites set in tension (ambivalence) and the maximum objectivity in the sense of a dislocation and delineation of the sign. Blackmur's analysis of Cummings' language (discussed in the subsequent section) makes these prerequisites even more evident. Concurrently, Wilson does not take the oriental or ecological modernist view into account. Against this background, one needs to confirm the sense of Friedman's observation that modernist criticism should be more inclusive in looking at a modernist such as Cummings:

Over the years I have come to realize that the New Criticism was only a local variation of the larger movement of modernism, which is indeed characterized [...] by its attempts to achieve a holistic vision by means of the devices of fragmentation and recombination. The particular interpretation put upon those devices by the New Criticism happened to have stressed the clash of opposites, the 'earning' of affirmation, the use of mythic substructures, the sophisticated and self-critical speaker, and 'maturity' of vision, but this interpretation is far from an adequate account of the whole of modernism (1984:174).

In terms of the s-o variable, Wilson is on the lookout for New Critical ideals in which the objectifying dislocation of the sign from its outside is maximal, including the subjugation of emotion regulated by a foregrounded "objective" intellect, and a focus upon the modern self struggling with the societal or natural other. But one of the most profound aspects of Cummings' poetry in general is that he employs the modernist fluidity of the s-o variable to achieve the maximum dynamic *location* of the sign within its outside, including a foregrounding of an intuitive (Taoist) response to experience, and a refocusing of the modern self in terms of the natural other -- indeed in terms of the prevailing modern *self-ness* of nature.

2.2. R.P. Blackmur (1931)

R.P. Blackmur is considered to be a spearhead of New Criticism in America (Friedman, 1996:73). Although he disclosed in a later review (1941) that he had admired Cummings' poetry for twenty one years (1984b:70), this critic's early, more substantial and influential essay on Cummings entitled "Notes on E.E. Cummings's Language" (1931) was quite devastating in terms of some of its criticisms, probably reflecting Blackmur's attempt to steer the poet into a more overtly New Critical direction. Indeed, Blackmur admired Eliot's poetic stance (Webster, 1995a:116) of an intellectualized poetry.

Although Blackmur does not mention it explicitly in this essay, the objective correlative forms a helpful background to his criticism of Cummings. From a writerly perspective, the objective correlative as formulated by Eliot embodies a set of objects, events, or a situation (rendered within the text) which act as the objectified textual formula that controls, evokes, or exemplifies a particular emotion in the impersonal mind of the poetic subject (or poet) (1980:48). From a readerly perspective, the objective correlative should presumably evoke the same exact shade or tone of emotion. The objective correlative suggests writerly and readerly correspondence -- a textual formula "outside" of the poet and the reader, a kind of common ground of objective intersubjectivity. As Eliot writes in a different context, the "poem's existence is somewhere between the writer and the reader" (1980:80). The objective correlative provides an intersubjective device that will objectify and control emotional contents and responses in this mid-zone between poet and reader.

As Eliot clearly advocates, the poetic object created by means of the correlative is completely apart from the poet's personality and private life (1980:43-44). In this way, Eliot feels, art approaches "the condition of science" (1980:40), or a precision and exactness of (objective) textual delineation and a refined, measured (subjective) emotional response. A paradox here is that the subjective becomes objective (emotion is objectified, and the poetic person becomes impersonal), while the objective (more precisely, the objectified poetic text) becomes more subjective (emotionally precise, or more impacting in terms of emotion). Here we have the fluidity of the s-o variable in mainstream modernist discourse. Such fluidity, however, implies that the s-o variable (also) needs to be "stalled" into objectivity. In other words, intellectual distance (and objectivity in that sense) is what guarantees the

impersonal success of this procedure: the objective is favoured “objectively”, above or in control of the subjective.

This condition of good modernist poetry entails, of course, the maximum stripping of the poet’s emotional and subjective interference so that one is left with a poetic object that will be, so to say, the hard, clear, intellectual, and dense or objectified precipitation of experience and expression -- in line with Eliot’s comparison of the poet’s person to a (quite inorganic) catalyst within a chemical transformation (1980:40). The poet’s mind remains impartial and the poetry is formed like gases mixing and producing sulphuric acid (Eliot, 1980:40). There is, overall, a “hardening” of mind and poetry which goes along with the objectivity of both the poet’s mind and the ultimate poetic object rendered by the poet’s mind. Objectification, in this view, is concomitant with a hardening or solidification (and even acidification!) of conceptual boundaries; the poet’s mind or the poetic object is comparable to a solid atom or a snooker ball, as found, too, in F.H. Bradley’s conception of the individual which Eliot cites in his notes on *The Waste Land* (1982:73). As the argument unfolds in this and the next Chapter of the thesis, I shall return on occasion to this intriguing formulation with its clear indications of a “hardening” of individual boundaries.

It seems to be this sense of objectified -- or distanced and hardened -- boundaries that Blackmur finds lacking in Cummings. Blackmur begins with the mild and understandable suggestion that “the poem must have a meaning apart from its private life” in order to be understood at all (1984a:109). One must agree with Blackmur about this axiom -- the poem has to be unprivate enough in order not to be totally obscure. (Even if obscure works can also be striking.) The thesis does not question the validity of a necessary distance (also of respect) between self and other, as well as the poet’s private life and the (separate) life of his poem. One cannot see Cummings with his acute awareness of privacy and individuality (1953:23-24) questioning this axiom, either.

But Blackmur goes further and states that Cummings *is* obscure because no such separate meaning is found in his poetry (1984a:109, 110). At this stage of Blackmur’s argument one may begin to sense that his judgement is not entirely fair. The truth is that Blackmur does not merely seek a poetic event separate enough from the private life of the poet so as to be understood in general. Rather, he seems to be

looking for a form of poetic separation in a very particular sense, informed by the objective correlative as far as one can see. For instance, Blackmur expects modern poetry and Cummings' poetry to reveal a high degree of "hardness in the emotion" (1984a:108). He insists that the reader needs the mental or spiritual equivalent of the "solid, concrete, definite" in order to understand any given work (1984a:113). Blackmur hence seems to require a maximum poetic difficulty and resistance, in order to find satisfactory critical penetration or interpretation.

Indeed, one of Blackmur's main qualms concerning Cummings' poetry in his 1931 essay is that the poet is "soft" -- too lyrical (1984a:107), too non-intellectual (undefined) (1984a:107), too mystical (1984a:111), too Romantic (1984a:109) and, of course, too childish (1984a:108, 124). Consider that all of these have potential connotations of "softness" or flexibility, and not enough mature "hardness". Maturity goes along with a "hardening" and distancing of conceptual boundaries according to Blackmur. And because Cummings does not take this "hard" route, Blackmur finds him lacking in modern poetic sensibility.

Of course, it would be difficult to define exactly what a "hard" emotion is, as opposed to a "soft" one. And perhaps it would be even more difficult to cite examples of these supposed differences. But hair-splitting of this nature is unnecessary -- difficult as it may be to define, one understands what Blackmur has in mind: Cummings' poetry does not offer the kind of fragmentation, distancing or dislocation and the concomitant autonomy or "hardening" of conceptual and emotional boundaries that Eliot's salient prose advocated, and that Eliot employed in poems such as *The Waste Land*. Does this really make Cummings' poetry sentimental and obscure? Is it not possible that Cummings' forms of non-sentimentality simply work in a different way -- not the cold piece of platinum bringing gases together to form sulphuric acid or concentrated poetic objects with hardened boundaries, but rather an ecologically flexible and open-ended *logos*?

Cummings, as has been demonstrated in the thesis, creates a sense of movement, a direction outward to interactive context and natural interaction, as well as a semiotic osmosis -- with great, if light, precision. Blackmur did not look for this latter possibility in his 1931 essay. Perhaps preoccupied with the fairly new triumphs of Eliot's powerful objective and even inorganic (chemical) views of poetry, Blackmur searched for intense levels of an objectification of the poetic sign. In a

double movement similar to his criticism of Cummings -- double in the sense that what is criticized is also appreciated -- Blackmur, in a different context, also finds Thomas Hardy lacking in emotional discipline (1957:1). And although Cummings' signs do have edges, they are so arranged (and again) with so much precision that another form of clarity arises in his best works -- a clarity of ecologically dynamic interrelatedness and (e)mergence. This clarity would be similar to the clarity and purity (and flexibility) of water (as Peter DeVries suggests in relation to the poet (1984:73)), in contrast to the sharper, even biting clarity of poetic precipitates such as sulphuric acid or other distanced and inorganic, exact, or dry poetic "objects".

Blackmur's 1931 essay had a significant and extensive impact on subsequent Cummings criticism. Blackmur's judgement can be found, barely disguised if at all, in later appraisals of the poet such as those of Carl Bode and Edward M. Hood (whose appraisal is treated in a subsequent section of this Chapter). In 1941 Blackmur revised his opinion of Cummings' poetry in a shorter review, expressing his appreciation of Cummings' ability to "enliven the relations of words to one another" (1984b:70), praising the poet for his "sense of synergy" (1984b:70), and asserting that much of Cummings' vision falls outside strict (and hence, one should add, subject-object or causal) logic (1984b:70). In other words, Blackmur came to see that Cummings was not about hard emotions captured in solidified textual structures, but about dissolution and an enhanced perception of the *context* of (relations between) signs. "Synergy" implies a dynamic and simultaneous co-existence, or an ecology of the sign, and Blackmur, to my mind, comes much closer to an essence of Cummings' poetry in this somewhat overlooked, later review.

The reason that Blackmur provides for the changes in this later review is that "Mr. Cummings' practice has improved with his increasing interest, as it seems, in persuading his readers of the accuracy of the relationships which his words divulge" (1984b:71). In other words, Blackmur is conceding that Cummings has a unique and different precision of his own, that was only becoming clear with his publications between 1931 and 1941, and *50 Poems* (1940), on which the review focused, in particular. A deeper set of reasons seem to underpin Blackmur's article, and these are related to his discovery and formulation of an intrinsic dynamism in Cummings' methods of composition. To be sure, Blackmur still criticizes Cummings' poetry for its supposed lack of sound, and the dominance that the visual enjoys in his poetry.

Blackmur describes this as the “sin against the Holy Ghost” (1984b:71). He still feels, too, that Cummings has a “limited vocabulary” (1984b:71), but in contrast to his first essay on Cummings, he reduces this criticism, and he begins to see some of the important ecological dynamics of the poet’s work, without, of course, referring to them in ecological terminology. It is worth citing some of these new insights that Blackmur enjoyed at some length, since they are valuable early insights into what I term Cummings’ poetic ecology.

Mr. Cummings’ poems depend entirely upon what they create in process, only incidentally upon what their preliminary materials or intentions may have been. Thus, above all, there is a prevalent quality of uncertainty, of uncompleted possibility, both in the items and in the fusion of the items which make up the poems; but there is also the persistent elementary eloquence of intention – of things struggling, as one says crying, to be together, and to make something of their togetherness, which they could never exhibit separately or in mere series. The words, the meanings in the words, and also the nebula of meaning and sound and pun around words, are all put into an enlivening relation to each other. There is, to employ a word which appealed to Hart Crane in similar contexts, a sense of synergy in all the successful poems of Mr. Cummings: synergy is the condition of working together with an emphasis on the notion of energy and the working, and energy in the positive sense, so that one might say here that Mr. Cummings’ words were energetic (1984b:70).

With its emphasis on “process”, “fusion”, “togetherness”, “aliveness”, “synergy” and “energy”, Blackmur, in his New Critical manner, is providing here a relevant and careful exposition of what I term Cummings’ inherent and ecological dynamism. Blackmur continues to state that it is difficult to describe (or follow) such “energy” within the available critical space, dominated by logic:

The poems are, therefore, eminently beyond paraphrase, not because they have no logical content – for they do, usually very simple – but because so much of the activity is apart from that of logical relationships, is indeed in associations free of, though not alien to, logical associations. In short, they create their objects (1984b:70).

The critic looking for a logical distance between subject and object that is built into the poem itself will have a limited capacity to describe what happens in Cummings’ poems, according to Blackmur here. Also, he is suggesting that Cummings’ poems include and supersede such distance with its “activity” or dynamism. Whether these poems turn into (static) objects or not (as Blackmur indicates) is perhaps debatable, since that notion may close an open-ended poetry too soon -- but consider, nonetheless, that Blackmur says here that the poems seem to *create themselves* (as objects). As we have seen with a poem such as “l(a)” (95 *Poems*

CP 673) an element of autopoiesis, or seemingly, self-creation, indeed fits into a reading of Cummings' poetry.

Perhaps despite his New Critical self, then, Blackmur offers additional insights into the inner dynamics of Cummings' (ecological) poetry. He notes that Cummings' "everyday vernacular" (words such as "Who and Why and How and No and Yes and Am"), are "capable of infinite diversity of shading" (1984b:72). These act as "directional nubs" according to Blackmur (1984b:72). A "nub" is a centre, a gist, and Blackmur's "directional nubs" are similar in drift to what I term Cummings' advanced sense of creating contexts, words that repeat themselves in slightly or much different contexts, so that an overall sense of open-ended context (or growing into the whole) is continuously created. And the direction of these "nubs" is more often than not outward, towards and into nature. Individual key words, or individual poems such as the hummingbird poem analysed in the preceding Chapter, indeed act as osmotic mandalas.

Overall, Blackmur's fatherly and passionate declamations and affirmations of Cummings' abilities reveal that an appreciation of Cummings' poetry goes along with an awareness of the poet's well-developed ability to create a sense of synthesis and contextuality -- the maximum flexibility and fluidity of the s-o variable -- whereas a negative view arises when the critic is looking for those forms of objectification and mature ambivalence which characterize (what we today term) mainstream modernist discourse. So "weak" and "strong" is this contextualizing, ecological force in Cummings' poetry, that New Critics such as Blackmur were drawn into it, sometimes despite a central ambivalence induced by their critical frameworks, and sometimes with elucidating critical formulations of Cummings' poetic ecology.

2.3. F.O. Matthiessen (1944)

In the nineteen forties a number of critics found Cummings lacking in social engagement and growth (personal poetic development) (Friedman, 1996:67). Perhaps surprisingly (in view of his interest in *organic* poetry), Matthiessen is one of these critics. In his 1944 review of Cummings' poetry, Matthiessen judged that Cummings reveals a lack of continuity, change, and the proper rendering of the "organic principle" -- Cummings is "as incapable of the organic principle as Emerson was, and

for surprisingly similar reasons" (1984:77). Matthiessen also rightly notes that Cummings is concerned with an organic view and growth (1984:77).

This critic feels that Cummings' persistently "gay" affirmation of nature becomes expected and monotonous and that the poet remains a "romantic anarchist" (1984:77). We have seen that Blackmur finds Cummings' poetry not adequately "hardened", probably in view of the fact that Cummings does not write poetry with a view to the objective correlative. In the case of Matthiessen's essay a similar feeling prevails, although expressed slightly differently, in terms of nouns and verbs. That Matthiessen shares Blackmur's New Critical ideals is clear from the admiration that he expresses for Blackmur's 1931 assessment of Cummings' poetry (1984:77) and the fact that he agrees with Eliot (1980:48) that "the evocation of emotion by means of complete, concrete objectification is the *only* right way of expressing emotion in art" (1947:65; my emphasis - JET), within his *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* (1935).

Matthiessen is uncomfortable with what he terms Cummings' preference for the verb over the noun (1984:77) -- he does not see or does not prefer Cummings' emphasis of movement over fixed delineation, in other words. However, one cannot agree with Matthiessen's inferral that Cummings "is *against* nouns" (1984:77, my emphasis - JET). As has already been argued, it would be closer to the truth to say that Cummings is aware of the inherent delineation of language (including the nominal "edges" of grammar), but that he arranges these into a context which evokes a sense of motion into the "outside" of language, and (reciprocally) a sense that the "outside" of language (nature) enters or flows into the domains of semiosis.

A sense of the interfusion of language and nature includes -- to quote Blackmur's words from his later reappraisal again -- Cummings' synergistic ability to "enliven the relations of words to one another" (1984b:70). It does not imply that Cummings is a noun-basher of sorts. Cummings enriches the grammatical position of the noun at least as much as he revitalizes other grammatical categories with his unique and dynamic rearrangements. (Just one example is how he turns the exclamation "no" into a noun marking a place or a condition of being in the line "lifted from the no of all nothing" (73 *Poems* CP 663).)

It is true (as Matthiessen notes (1984:77)) that the poetic speaker in one of Cummings' poems affirms the prospect of the adventure of verbs taking over from the

dullness of nouns (*I x I* CP 557), but this cannot be taken as a direct indication that Cummings had something against nouns themselves. Rather, it means that nouns begin to fade as delineation and stasis go over or grow into a sense of movement and context, carrying the nouns along. In fact this poem dynamically enacts natural change as twilight intensifies and stars appear to “floatingly” “grow” in the sky only to descend and disappear within the rising horizon. Cummings views change as *intrinsic* to (natural and textual) experience, like the Taoists; critics such as Matthiessen do not consider this organic option.

Matthiessen loses sight of the “big picture” of Cummings’ actual poetic aims with his assertion that Cummings is somehow *anti*-nominal. It takes a high level of precision -- and indeed a precise awareness of the syntactical role of the noun as well as the plastic qualities of language in general (Olsen, 1996:158) -- to evoke a sense of movement and context, and Cummings was aware of this as his brief description of his technique shows: “Like the burlesk comedian, I am abnormally fond of that *precision which creates movement*” (1938 CP 221; my emphasis - JET).

Motion and precision (and hence the necessary levels of demarcation or re-demarcation, also those created by the noun and Cummings’ frequently unique placement of the noun) are therefore irrevocably reciprocal in Cummings’ view. One should recall, furthermore, that the noun also acts as an “open space” according to the reception-aesthetist Wolfgang Iser (Davis & Schleifer, 1989:70). And a case could be made that Cummings anticipated this awareness of signs as open spaces (which the reader fills in with particulars), as a means of ensuring that the maximum *contextual* precision is rendered within the poem, so that the reader is taken along with the movement of open spaces and signs in general. Finally, Cummings’ unique variation on the sustained modernist tension between fixity and flexibility frequently stresses flexibility en-route to a sense of active, continuing-to-be-dynamic natural interactivity, as we have seen.

Against this background, it is of interest that Matthiessen prefers Thoreau to Emerson, because Thoreau employs the exact detail according to Matthiessen (2001:289), whereas Emerson remains too intellectual and idealistic (2001:287) -- and therefore vague, as stated in Matthiessen’s book *The American Renaissance* (1941), three years prior to his treatment of Cummings analysed here. Matthiessen believes that Cummings, like Emerson, is too idealistic and refuses to grow out of a

sense of “inspired moments” (1984:77). As has been noted, Cummings’ sensuous and intuitive approach to nature is also different from Emerson’s abstract Platonic idealism (see also Webster, 1995a:114). Cummings moves more or less directly into sensuous nature, and does not consider nature to be a lesser replica of a mental or spiritual Ideal.

Matthiessen appreciates Emerson for his child-like love of the “gypsy attraction” in nature (2001:288), and he equally appreciates Cummings’ poetry for its “remarkable playful joy that eludes any analysis” (1984:78). Matthiessen’s sense that Cummings eludes *analysis* is akin to Blackmur’s sense that *logic* forms only a sub-aspect of Cummings’ poetry, and Wilson’s sense that it is the *dissolving* and *spontaneous* qualities of Cummings (and not his intellectual ones) which carry the day. It appears that these critics sense that there is a quality within Cummings’ poetry which falls outside or goes beyond the intellect, but that they find it difficult to formulate or locate this quality. As I have been arguing, an improved prominence and understanding of ecology and Taoism in more recent critical developments cover some distance towards such formulation and location of this essence of Cummings’ poetry.

The fact is that Cummings’ poetry is not solely aimed at creating the kind of precision related to objectification, delineation, and an abundance of detail -- this would lead, according to the Taoist view as much as to Cummings’, to a sense of spatial confinement and stasis (Lao Tzu, 1987:27; section 1). In fact, Cummings satirizes the “itmaking” (objectifying) propensity of modern times on one or two occasions in his oeuvre.

(nothing whichful about

thick big this
friendly
himself of
a boulder)nothing

mean in tenderly

whoms
of sizeless a
silence by noises
called people called

sunlight

(elsewhere the mechanical
itmaking
sickness of mind sprawls)
here

a livingly free mysterious

dreamsoul floatstands
oak by birch by maple
pine
by hemlock spruce by

tamarack(

nothing pampered puny
impatient
and nothing
ignoble

)everywhere wonder

(*Xaipe* CP 658)

The “mechanical/ itmaking/ sickness of mind” is the sprawling wasteland of modern existence that has lost touch with a personal response to nature’s dynamism. Sunlight flows like silent noises, and one should take this personally, according to the speaker here. Different kinds of trees “multiply” (indicated by the preposition “by”) into “wonder” or one-ness. To Cummings, such levels of s-o fluidity and unity are preferable to a barren, dry wasteland of objectification.

Adjacent to the hummingbird poem (read from an ecological perspective as an osmotic mandala in Chapter Four), one finds perhaps its companion, which reads:

timeless

ly this
(merely and whose
not

numerable leaves are

fall
i
ng)he

StandS

lift
ing against the
shrieking

sky such one

ness as
con
founds

all itcreating winds

(73 Poems CP 826)

The tree “described” in this poem is timeless and immeasurable. When the human sign connects with the existence of the tree on a personalized basis, such timelessness is the “result”. The poem makes it obvious that such connectivity occurs beyond an objectification of a kin with modern “itcreating winds”. In particular, words are spaced in such a way as to suggest a paradox: the “numerable” and visible leaves of the tree (line 5) are the gateway to the tree’s immortality and immeasurability. The poem thus creates a small, and telling difference between concrete sensuality and mere objectivity. When the tree turns into an object, one has lost touch with the essence of its being, and one’s own being. Between-ness entails steering through the extremes of (mere) dreaming and timelessness, and (mere) objective observation and rationality. Poetry is that space where this sense of active orientation between the concrete sensuality and the eternal dream of being within nature continues to commingle significantly.

And although Cummings’ lyrical natural view -- in contrast to his satire of the “objective” preoccupation -- relies on intuition, the evocation of an intuitive centre within a poem through which the reader is potentially taken into a renewed sense of natural wholeness is not a haphazard affair, as has already been demonstrated in this thesis. Creating and evoking a sense of serendipity, co-incidence, the third dimension beyond opposites, etcetera, cannot be achieved by imprecision, even though it may foreground intuition, spontaneity, motion, mediation, and context at least slightly more than the poetic “object”, intellectual demarcation and incisiveness, delineation, solidity, and the isolation of the text.

The difficulty that Cummings manages -- without necessarily making this difficulty into a severe complication for the (inaugurated) reader of his work -- is the capacity to render poetry which is at once non-sentimental and rooted within nature. It is this aspect of Cummings’ project that critics such as Blackmur (in his earlier essay) and Matthiessen overlook when they insist that the best poetry *has to be* objective, delineating, mature in the ambivalent sense, distanced from an intuitive and

spontaneous centre, and so on. A modernist fluidity of the s-o variable allows for a different kind of precision -- that of the maximal non-sentimental (also, precise) flow of poet, reader, and sign into the affirmation of ecology (or wholeness). Cummings' poetry on the whole bears witness to this aspect of the overall modernist enterprise.

2.4. Edward M. Hood (1959)

Hood's review was published a year after the publication of Cummings' penultimate volume of poetry, *95 Poems*, and focuses on this volume. Perhaps one would expect that critics would have come to terms by that time with the nature and potential of Cummings' unique and striking version of the more naturally rooted, orientalist strand within the modernist movement. However, when Hood begins his analysis with the assertion that Cummings' poetry presents the critic with "unqualified emotion" which is "merely asserted, not embodied" (1984:92), one already knows that "embodied" here means something roughly equivalent to terms such as "objectified" or "intellectualized", along the lines of New Criticism, the objective correlative, and so forth. This is confirmed a few lines on by Hood's sentence: "Any emotional and intellectual vitality [in this volume] is not objectified, but is prior to the poem" (1984:92).

Hood's lens is especially directed at the leaf poem, "l(a)" (*95 Poems* CP 673), about which he holds the following critical reservations: it is a poem of "romantic sentimentality" containing (or disguising in modernist fashion) "only Cummings' private feelings about the leaf" (1984:92). The "emotional and intellectual vitality" of the poem is "not objectified" and thus "forces the reader" to "feel charitable sympathy for a stranger's cry of distress" (1984:92) (this "stranger" being the poet or poetic speaker).

The "nervous glitter" on the surface of the poem "hides" its "emptiness" and "conventionality"; Hood indeed compares the poem, on this basis, to a "Cole Porter lyric" (1984:92) which would equate the poem to a sort of lyrical much ado about nothing. Cummings also does not avoid the cliché but conceals it according to Hood (1984:95): one finds a "vacuum of thought and feeling within" the poem (1984:95). Hood further feels that the mood of autumn which the poem alludes to, is the mood of adolescent Romanticism (1984:94). Like Porter and Gatsby, Hood concludes,

Cummings is just one more exponent of the “ag[e]ing but incorrigible Child of the Twenties” (1984:95).

As in the cases of Wilson, Blackmur (in 1931), and Matthiessen, the pattern recurs: Cummings’ emotion is too raw or non-objectified, rendering childish poetry of Romantic sentimentality, or mere surface antics without any objective substance, or excited surface glitterings covering up inner emptiness. The glitter of party cutlery and jazz instruments which compensate for an inner, materialistic emptiness and non-commitment come to Hood’s mind in reading “l(a”, along with what he feels to be the “stranger’s cry of distress”.

To anyone who has read this poem either *without* the knowledge that it could, somehow, be related to what Hood terms the “Child of the Twenties”, or *with* the knowledge that “l(a” presents (in its unique way) an ecological sensibility, Hood’s assessment of the poem seems not only implausible but positively outlandish. To be sure, Cummings employs jazz qualities in his poetry, especially in audial terms -- the relatively free improvisation of sounds which (as in jazz) actually rests on a highly developed sense of sound and its structures.

But to my mind it would be difficult to prove in terms of the textuality itself of the more visual “l(a”, that it somehow presents a *cry* of sorts, not to mention a *cry of distress*. If there is something melancholy about “l(a”, it is finely tuned in terms of an intuitive shade of sadness -- there is nothing desperate about the poem. My analysis of this poem holds that all kinds of opposites are suspended within it, including the opposite pair of downward sadness and upward joy.

If any of the recombinatory “DNA” dynamics (that is, on the basis of an entwinement of human self and natural other) -- or the ecological and Taoist sensibilities of this poem -- get across to the reader, however subliminally so, one feels that a different appreciation of the poem is bound to ensue, based on a different readerly experience along the lines of spontaneous emergence and immersion into a sense of nature’s dynamic “hanging together” or “co-incidence”.

Because he does not or cannot take an ecological aspect into account, Hood does not approach some vital aspects of the poem, however legitimate his own value judgements may seem in view of the reading schema that he adopts. The aspects he does not consider include the notion, dynamically suggested by the very structure of

"l(a)", that the moment of human loneliness co-incides with the (lonely) moment of the falling leaf, and that this double loneliness or two "ones" actively point to a deep, gyrating, non-sentimental unity that goes beyond the standard barriers of human self and natural other, or subject and object. To put it plainly: simultaneity itself (of the event of human loneliness and the simultaneous event of the falling leaf) means that the way of humans and the way of nature are not separate at all but significantly interpenetrating. And this significant interpenetration -- here presented in a quite non-sentimental fashion by Cummings with devices such as fragmentation, recombination, suggested gyration, etcetera -- ultimately does not mean sadness but wholeness (even in sadness, and ultimately beyond either sadness, or joy). As I shall argue in the next and final Chapter, this sense of synchronicity occurs frequently in modernist orientalist texts and poems in general. It is not necessarily a return to sentimental emptiness.

And this suggestion of simultaneity is technically difficult to achieve, although its ultimate effect on the reader may not be difficult (dislocational) in Eliot's sense. Difficult to achieve because Western language with its greater (but not all-encompassing) sense of linearity, distance, and dislocation (from the outset) has to be creatively and effectively rearranged -- not into a mere picture, but certainly in visual ways -- in order to suggest simultaneity. At this (and indeed in the sense of spontaneity) Cummings excels in a poem such as "l(a)". Hood does not seem to recognize this possibility.

Another possibility overlooked or not considered by Hood is that "emptiness" carries a different sense in orientalist poetry at large, and also in much of Cummings' poetry, as well as within "l(a)". It mediates that "nowhere" which continues to be more than any specific (and objectified) square metre or split second (i.e., objectified space or time). The flower continues to open, and even when we do recognize this with an exact delineation of thought and experience, the flower still continues to open. This is one way to describe the elusive natural force which poets such as Li Po, Chuang Tzu, and Cummings try to suggest. Furthermore, "emptiness" in the ecological, Taoist sense points to "no-mind" -- striving for a more direct "perception" and mediation of all that goes beyond the relations of the everyday mind with its categories and hierarchies -- that which Eliot, in his doctoral thesis, would term (one of the variants of) immediate experience.

On the one hand, one cannot blame a critic such as Hood for not recognizing these aspects of Cummings' poetry, given the particular modernist critical framework within which he functioned. On the other hand, these aspects are clearly signalled by some of the immediate surfaces of a poem such as "l(a)", some of which have been mentioned in a different context within this thesis, such as its downward-upward visual arrangement and its emphasis on blank space. At best, Hood's criticism reveals a passion for certain aspects of modernism and New Criticism. At worst, his review misappropriates Cummings' poetry for something that the poetry does not pretend to be (namely a set of "objective correlatives"), thus revealing a tendency among modernist critics to project a certain view of poetry onto poetry, regardless of the actual aims of the poet and the actual dynamics of the poetry.

In terms of the s-o variable, critics such as Hood, Blackmur, and Wilson appear to expect the maximum distance and autonomy of the sign with a view to the opposites of subject and object, self and other, and the sign and its outside. It seems that these critics do not want the presentation of the "mere" oneliness of human and leaf as presented by Cummings. Instead they look for the necessary distance between poet and leaf (or subject and object, or self and other), the necessary ironical, detailed, or other forms of ambivalence in terms of the relations between human and leaf, as well as the necessary "hardness" of the barriers and the necessary irony of the distance between human and leaf. They look for tension and hierarchy, not dissolution and atonement; similarly, they seem to look for austerity of intellect and emotion (in that order). They do not seem to recognize or appreciate Cummings' skill in employing modernist techniques and sensibilities (such as fragmentation, recombination, a sense of singularity and solitude) in order to signify the ecology of being.

2.5. Helen Vendler (1973)

Unlike Hood, Vendler experiences "l(a)" as one of Cummings' "exquisite fragile triumphs" (1984:101) in her 1973 review of Cummings' complete poetry, eleven years after the poet had passed away. (At that time, some six decades of intense critical engagement with Cummings' poetry had passed.) But she goes on to write that she wished there were more examples of these triumphs in Cummings' oeuvre. Vendler is, in fact, self-admittedly concerned with the "mystery of [E.E. C]ummings' great aborted talent" (1984:99). She motivates this by stating that

something is wrong with the relations of parts and wholes in Cummings: the poet has “stunning parts”, but no sense of the whole according to her (1984:100)! She believes that “dismemberment” interests Cummings more than “reintegration” (1984:100), and cites the grasshopper poem (discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis) as her example of this lust for disfiguration and lack of coherence (1984:100).

This is of course hard to fathom for those attracted by Cummings’ mastery of a sense of wholeness. (Also, it is hard to fathom for those attracted to the levels of dismemberment that are maintained in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.) To the ecosemiotic reader, Cummings’ advanced sense of the whole in terms of sign-nature relations is a felt and satisfying force of his work. It could be that the mother-tongue English speaker initially experiences more of the sense of fragmentation in Cummings’ poetry, but even so the sense of recombination and entwinement between human self and natural other (or self) that his poetry mediates has struck numerous first-language speakers such as Friedman.

Upon reading and re-reading Vendler’s intriguing essay, one realizes that besides this complaint, her main trouble with Cummings’ poetry is that it is “anti-rational” -- as we have seen also in the cases of Wilson, Blackmur, and Hood. According to Vendler, stated in her slightly forceful and hence also relieving (straightforward/challenging/engaging) manner, Cummings’ mind is “abysmally short on ideas” (1984:101) and reveals a “murderous devaluation of the intellect” (1984:103).

Like other critics, Vendler does not take the trouble of researching the fact that Cummings not only revised his poetry substantially but kept numerous sharply observant notes on intellectual and other developments of his time, as I have indicated. This lack of research gives rise to the possibility that the readerly experience of spontaneity in Cummings’ poetry gets confused with a critical hunch that Cummings wrote entirely spontaneously. Surely there is a subtle and vital difference between aiming with great care for the maximum readerly sense of spontaneity on the one hand, and simply going ahead and writing down whatever comes to mind from the well of emotions, on the other. It is this difference which ultimately renders Cummings a truly modernist poet and not a fully-fledged late Romantic -- if it can be taken for granted that Romantics did not rework their poetry.

As it is often the case, moreover, one has to conceive of the intellect in a given manner in order to perceive its apparent absence in Cummings; Vendler is no exception as far as this recognition is concerned. In fact, she offers one of the clearest expositions of just what shape the modern intellect (absent in Cummings) takes or should take: and it is a contra-ecological shape in a number of crucial respects. She notes that “ambivalence was not a possibility with him” (Vendler, 1984:101) and that in Cummings’ poetry affirmation is taken too far and “pain is scantied” (Vendler, 1984:101). We find the critic “hissing ‘bah, humbug’ to the spirit of mercy, blossoming, love, life, and april which has dared to disturb our cynical universe” (Vendler, 1984:102). The absence of intellect in Cummings is further marked by Cummings’ “dogged sentimentality” (Vendler, 1984:103).

The intellect which Vendler sketches is one in which ambivalence (and, one assumes, the necessary tensions between opposites) and a mature view that includes pain and excludes (mere) affirmation combine in a suitably intellectual-poetic fashion, thus avoiding the sentimental. The intellect must respond cynically, in alienation, with irony, with a thick sense of the tragic, to a difficult or indifferent universe. This is a narrow view of the intellect, of course, and would exclude numerous artists with a more affirmative capacity from the realms of bright art. Nevertheless the absence of this kind of intellect in Cummings and the affirmation of (for instance) the cycle of the seasons “awaken angry logical resistance” in the reader according to Vendler (1984:102). (Ponder that logic and anger are thus combined into a somewhat strange and ambivalent tension.)

The implication that there is little or no logic in Cummings’ poetry can be refuted on the basis of logic, as found in J.E. Terblanche and A.M. de Lange’s article “A Close[r] Reading of E.E. Cummings’ ‘Anti-Rationality’” in which these authors apply systematic logic to Cummings’ poetry with success. Yet this is not the entire point, since Cummings rarely simply foregrounds the logic of opposites within his poetry, but instead aims to surpass this oppositional logic (of presence and absence, marked and unmarked, positive and negative, etcetera) (Terblanche & De Lange, 2000:111-113). His signs persistently tend to coagulate into a sense of the ecological vitality of experience and reading.

And Vendler (perhaps unconsciously, and despite her admiration for the leaf poem) ignores this admittedly spontaneous and ecological poetic alternative. In

numerous poems -- for instance, "Spring is like a perhaps/ hand" (& CP 197) -- Cummings does not merely affirm natural being; instead, he finds a way to render the fragility and intensity of spring in an entirely nuanced yet powerfully direct manner, employing his own originality of expression along with modernist devices. He renders, that is, an *eco*-logical view of human participation and rootedness in the (active) ground of nature's stable continuation. Poetic and modernist expression of such affirmation cannot simply be taken for granted in modern times. On the contrary: expressing this to the satisfaction of modern scrutiny with its "angry logical resistance" to affirmation has become more challenging.

In one or two instances Vendler makes it uncomfortably clear that she finds the ecological aspect of Cummings' poetry unsatisfactory. Vendler critically attacks one of Cummings' nature poems which reads

"o purple finch
 please tell me why
this summer world(and you and i
who love so much to live)
 must die"

"if i
 should tell you anything"
(that eagerly sweet carolling
self answers me)
 "i could not sing"

(73 Poems CP 836)

The finch's *song* is its complete "telling". By being itself, the finch tells everything it can about itself and about existence. The finch is a self: not an "object out there" that could teach or should be taught a (modern) lesson. Part of this paradoxical "telling" by the finch, is that the self of the poetic speaker is similarly natural. There is no logical answer to the process of living, dying, and singing -- there is just IS, and song. Thus the poem suggests that should the bird (humanly) "tell" its secret to the speaker, it would be a grotesque interference with the ecological self-realization of both the speaker and the bird. We may agree with Vendler that this is not the most successful of Cummings' ecological poems since it appears slightly lame and somewhat too easy, but a poem such as this should spur one on to recognize that Cummings' poetry *is* ecological and that he has written remarkable ecological poems. Any poet can be "hammered" on an individual weaker poem, but in this case it seems that the broader issue of Cummings' affirmative ecological view is at stake.

Vendler expects that Cummings, after Thomas Hardy, should turn from the “blessed hope” of birdsong to his “own sombre and unconvinced mind” (1984:101) -- even though Cummings does have, after all, “the right to be an optimist” as Vendler also states (1984:101). Still, Vendler insists that Cummings is simply *too* affirmative when he writes that the purple finch will not “tell” what the meaning of life is (but instead simply live or sing it). It is as if critics such as Vendler have delved so deeply into the house of pure, decontextual or distantly ironical and sceptic semiosis, that poetry which establishes meaningful links with nature -- in which the inability of language to finally capture nature is exploited in order to establish these links -- simply does not appear to exist for them as a valid possibility.

At one stage Vendler goes as far as to write that by “simply juggling syntax” one could “write a Cummings poem oneself” (1984:103). This is reminiscent of the Afrikaans poet D.J. Opperman’s poetic suggestion that by simply shuffling the words “tree”, “dream”, and “stream” in different random orders, one can write a volume of Chinese poems (“Hoe Om ‘n Bundel Sjinese Poësie te Skryf” (Opperman, 1987:271)) -- and it has to be added that Opperman is a good poet, whereas Vendler never delivered those juggled Cummings poems. Hopefully this thesis demonstrates that, on the contrary, the evocation of natural context takes more than a random shifting of words -- however spontaneous the results may appear. It involves among other things a different view and employment of the s-o variable in which subject and object, self and other, as well as the sign and its outside should merge maximally and clearly.

Vendler, like the other critics studied in these sections, remains ambivalent about Cummings’ poetry -- they may appreciate the poet for not being impervious to life, or for spontaneous masterpieces, or for indefinable joy, etcetera, but at the same time they react quite negatively to Cummings’ perceived anti-rationality and sentimentality, and a supposed lack of the necessary semiotic objectification. Overall, their view intimates that ecological flexibility and inclusivity are minor and sentimental concerns in the modern era. It can be difficult to see how these critics could expect from a poet to be joyful, dynamic, open-ended (and so on -- qualities that they praise in Cummings), and to be tragic, closed, and “objective”, too.

What this concise look into critics from the past also reveals, then, is that at least part of their ambivalence about Cummings arises because critics underrate, ignore, or reject his ecological sensibility. Wilson senses the importance of

“dissolvance” in Cummings but still insists on greater intellect, Blackmur rejects the flexibility of Cummings’ poetry as sentimental “softness” although he later appreciates Cummings’ abilities of synthesis and synergy, both Matthiessen and Vendler admire various aspects of his poetry but find the poet too affirmative in terms of nature, and so forth. It seems that the ecological reading of Cummings’ poetry could shed further light on the ambivalence of these and other critics towards the poet.

3. Modern/ist critical ambivalence and Cummings’ ecological sensibility

Various reasons could be cited for the ambivalence of critics (such as those studied within the preceding sections) towards Cummings’ poetry. These include the simple fact that Cummings, like any other poet, wrote poems which seem great to some and not successful to others, thus leading to the overarching sense of ambivalence in the reaction to them. It also includes the fact that Cummings’ own (quite limited) defensiveness and dualism (the “us versus them” aspect of his work) may have provoked ambivalence from some critics as it is true in the case of Vendler (1984:102), for instance.

But these are not the main reasons that critics such as those discussed above provide for their somewhat ambivalent reactions to the negative and positive aspects of Cummings’ poetry. Rather, as we have seen, their reasons centre on the issues of intellect, sentiment, objectivity; including the notion that Cummings’ poetry itself is not adequately ambivalent. The fact is that Cummings’ affirmations and his sense of human-sign-nature interrelatedness (that is, his ecological and Taoist view) seem to critics such as Wilson, Blackmur, and Hood to belong within the category of either belatedly Romantic and/or minor (sentimental, corny) poetry. In retrospect, however, and to some extent against the grain of its heterogeneity, mainstream modernist critical discourse made too much of an issue of “objectivity”, thus excluding other reasonable strands within modernism at large.

The body of the more overtly positive and the less ambivalent reception of Cummings’ poetry focuses with less distance on Cummings’ ecological potentials. Here one finds less insistence on a poetic “objectivity”. The existence of this body of critical appreciation leads to the question whether some of the more disapproving and ambivalent critics have not, indeed, misappropriated the poet’s actual aims and achievements at least to some degree.

Besides Friedman, Welch, and Webster, whose admiration of Cummings' ecology has been indicated in the thesis, a number of other critics confirm that Cummings' sense of active natural unity is highly developed, as well as critically attractive and valuable. These critical confirmations of Cummings' ecological abilities may further underscore the extent to which modernist critics such as Wilson and Vendler have possibly misappropriated the deeper values of Cummings' oeuvre.

For instance: John Peale Bishop in his 1922 review claimed that Cummings knows that written art is not "intelligent without emotion" (1984b: 31) and asserted that one of Cummings' outstanding features is that the "sensuous and emotional are fused in his mind" (1984b: 32). Bishop appreciated Cummings' foregrounding of emotion and intuition, and he knew that such qualities lead to a heightened sense of fusion. A New Critical emphasis of "objectivity" was not a generally shared critical prerequisite even in the nineteen twenties. Also in 1922, John Dos Passos compared a reading of Cummings' poetic novel, *The Enormous Room* (1921), to an enjoyment of good food (1984:33). And Slater Brown stated in 1924 that Cummings' words "function not as units in a logical structure, but as units functioning in a vital and organic structure of time" (1984:38). Here we have some early critical prototypes of an ecological reading of Cummings' writing and poetry. Some critics, moreover, link a unique sense of natural awareness in Cummings' poetry to Taoism: according to John Peale Bishop (in a 1938 essay), Cummings has developed into the Tao (1984a:135). The thesis demonstrates, however, that it was only later that critics again focused on Cummings' orientalism: Friedman, Mary David Babcock, Welch, and Webster come to mind.

As I have mentioned, Blackmur overturned his initial (and more impacting) assessment of Cummings in 1941, when he appreciated the poet for his "synergy" and suggested that Cummings' poems

are, therefore, eminently beyond paraphrase, not because they have no logical content -- they do -- but because so much of the activity is apart from that of logical relationships, is included in associations free of, though not alien to, logical relations (1984b:70).

Intrinsic to Blackmur's statement in this instance is the vital recognition that logic itself -- or the objective and intellectual composition of poetry in accordance with opposites set in logical tension and hierarchy -- is not the be-all and end-all of

artistic validity, and that Cummings seems to have the unique ability to include and yet surpass the patterns of logic in his poetry.

This gives rise to an important question: does art have to be intellectual in a narrow, "objective" sense, in order to be successful? How valid is this position -- adopted by some of the most important critics within the twentieth century as we have seen also in terms of Cummings -- historically and to this day? After all, did not Eliot himself, perhaps the most exemplary and successful intellectualizing poet that we know, indicate on numerous occasions that the ultimate origin or destination of poetry is *not* intellectual? One thinks (again) of the importance that Eliot attaches to immediate (non-rational) experience, to the fact that poetry begins with "a savage beating a drum in the jungle" (1980:95), in addition to the fact that Eliot writes that it is a test for genuine poetry that it can communicate over and above that which could be understood or explained about it (1980:206).

The procedure of intellectualizing or objectifying the poetic utterance -- as proposed by Eliot's formulation of the objective correlative -- is after all a technique, a means to an end, and not the only valid technique and certainly not the only valid *destination* of poetry. This remains true despite the sometimes absolutist *expression* of the need for an intellectualized technique within Eliot's early essays. New Criticism may have made it seem that this was the *only* poetic way, in response to Eliot's strong influence on criticism. But surely poetry is more than a unique variant of intellectual discourse -- poetry is an art form, more open-ended yet more conclusive than science, common sense, and facts. A young Cummings wrote to his father in 1917 that art is the greatest science of all (Cohen, 1987:17).

Some critics go to the extreme opposite of the New Critical position: one example is Peter De Vries who feels (in a 1944 review) that Cummings's poetry does not respond well to analysis and dissection, and should be simply "digested" (1984:72-73). De Vries underestimates the role of the cerebral in Cummings' poetry - for it takes time (and also intellectual effort) to come to terms with Cummings -- and yet De Vries is right that the dominant effect of Cummings' poetry is spontaneous and healthy, no matter the exact length of time and effort it may have taken the reader or the poet to produce these effects.

By the 1950s the early, more devastating assessments by critics such as Wilson and Blackmur began to give way to a more down-to-earth, thoughtful consideration of Cummings' poetry. John Logan, for example, wrote in 1955 that Cummings' experimentation is aimed at unity with the reader -- and that this aim does not succeed only when either the poem or the reader fails to bring it about (1984:86-89). This implies a shift away from the critical dissatisfaction with Cummings' supposed lack of intellect and vision in general, to the more ordinary recognition that Cummings and the reader are fallible, like all human poets and readers.

In the same year, Robert E. Maurer noted that Cummings was "not popular with the New Critics because he was too personal and non-intellectual; he did not think or write in their groove" (1984:138). Again one finds a more ordinary reason for some critics' dissatisfaction here: the reason being, as Webster later indicates, that critics "come to texts with norms and expectations, and come away either delighted or disappointed according to whether the text fulfils those norms and expectations" (1995b:78). Some of the New Critics came to Cummings' poetry with a particular set of norms and expectations, especially with a view to the role of the intellect. And they were disappointed -- they did not find what they were looking for. Instead of continuing to "castigate" Cummings for his supposed lack of (this particular form of) intellect, this might boil down to a misunderstanding in the dialogue between the poet and his critical audience.

In the 1960s some critics again stated outright that integration is one of Cummings' strong points. Horace Gregory, for instance (1964): Cummings' "achievement is unique in our time: a lyrical integration of satire, religious feeling and art" (1984:97). Or L.S. Dembo (in 1966): Cummings' work is based on "sympathetic union" between "mind and object" (1984:177). (In the dominant modes of New Criticism, this kind of union is not tolerated in a similarly straightforward fashion.) Still, right up to the nineteen seventies, influential critics such as Vendler stuck to the judgement that Cummings lacks intellect and that his poetry is therefore not successful. On the other hand: in the words of William Heyen, in the same year as the appearance of Vendler's review:

We cannot in any logical way argue with the transcendental assumptions that make Cummings's world what it is and his poems what they are. All we can do is to make a Cummings poem our own, to appreciate its crafts and mysteries as best we can and come to love it, or we can reject it (1984: 242).

Heyen oversimplifies the issue with too much of a “take it or leave it” stance. Nonetheless, it is quite incidental that his reading of the role of logic in Cummings’ poetry leads to a critical result much different from Vendler’s assessment. To Vendler, who insists on certain forms and foregroundings of intellect and logic, Cummings ultimately fails abysmally. A more nuanced analysis of what Cummings’ poetry is about finds expression in terms of the meaningful juxtaposition of Cummings’ poetry and orientalism -- Michael Dylan Welch writes, for instance: “Haiku’s objectivity is non-intellectual because the strictly objective poem, in Zen fashion, is devoid of intellectual intrusion. These are values for which Cummings demonstrates an impassioned sympathy” (1995:104).

Welch implies that objectivity, or non-sentimentality, does not take one particular form only. It is not only the foregrounding of Western “scientific” forms of intellect such as logic which may render objective or contemplative results -- rather, keeping intellectual commentary or intellectualized forms of expression to the minimum within poetry could be more non-sentimental (from an orientalist perspective), since intellection and abstraction may interfere with the clean-cut immediacy of the readerly experience.

Eliot was initially criticized for the perceived over-abundance of intellect and “cleverness” of his poetry (Sharpe, 1991:65). Perhaps astonishingly soon, this complaint switched to an entrenchment of his intellectual poetic voice in criticism. Edmund Wilson’s 1924 criticism of Cummings and Blackmur’s 1931 essay are related to this development, as has been indicated. Such insistence on these forms of intellectualization lasted for a considerable time: in 1973 Vendler re-stated Cummings’ lack of intellect and his sentimentality. Cummings’ supposed non-intellectual poetic voice has not met the same critical success as Eliot’s intellectualized voice. An overall hesitation still seems to lie at the core of Cummings’ critical reception. This is all the more ironic in an era characterized by fairly rapid changes of opinion and expectations. It has taken critics surprisingly long to get used to Cummings. This is even more ironic, perhaps, in view of the important notion that Cummings’ poetry is intrinsically dynamic, and continues to open out contexts faster than they are closed down. Also, since time itself seems to move faster with the freight of a greater diversity of contents in the modern era, one would have expected that critics would have made up their collective mind about Cummings’

poetry and status to a greater and more stable degree. Eliot writes with a view to modern experience

In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions that a minute will reverse. (1982:13)

And this may seem to summarize the modern indecision surrounding Cummings' poetry, but it does not, and the reasons for this are perhaps vague at first glance, but they are important. Cummings' poetry *curves* -- -- in line with his "theory" of language which views signs as chameleons that create a context. His poetry creates an organic whole, an ecology of the sign. There is something distinctly cyclical about the impression that his poetry makes on one, despite the various angularities of his technique. I mean that although Cummings fragments and spaces signs on a typewriter as much as any other modernist poet, his poetry still opens itself up into the cycles of the seasons, and nature. Mainstream modernist poetry does not curve in a similar manner: when it moves, it *switches*, seemingly in an instant, from one extreme to another. It remains, so to say, angular. Consider this passage from Eliot's *The Waste Land* once more:

‘What is that noise now ? What is the wind doing?’
Nothing again nothing.
‘Do
You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remem-
ber
Nothing?

I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
‘Are you alive, or not ? Is there nothing in your head ?’
But
O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag-- (1982:55)

This passage switches from absence (nothing) to objects (pearls/eyes) with a breathtaking speed. The motion is repeated even more rapidly, just once: back to nothing again, then an isolated "But" which seems to act as an objectified interruption or incision, and then the commodity of a Shakespeherian Rag. Such rapidity of switching, such breaking apart of the reader's expectation of an intact s-o variable, leads to a dis-memberment that is a central motif and technique of the poem. There is little or nothing similar in Cummings, besides the technique of fragmentation and recombination. Absences do not flash into objects with such isolated rapidity. If Cummings is also rapid, it is towards integration, a transcendence of the various

opposites of the s-o variable, into a greater, ecological dynamic of (their) integrity. And such integrity holds a curvature or connects with a cycle of active natural orientation and stability.

The degree of difference between Cummings and mainstream modernist discourse thus comes into renewed focus. Contextualization as in Cummings' poetry goes along with a cyclical motion in which signs combine to form a greater context. Objectification and "colonisation" as in mainstream modernist poetry creates sharp, distinct angles as various poetic objects flash into and out of a vacuous context of the absence of true significance. This formulation sheds light on the quite ubiquitous critical hesitation towards Cummings' poetry. We have not been able to *follow* Cummings' poetry with the same level of "objective" accuracy that we could follow or describe important aspects of Eliot's discourse. At the elusive centre of Cummings' poetry lies a "magic" of natural context, in an era physically and semiotically characterised by a moving away from nature, or a destruction of nature. Cummings stays true to a modernist middle ground, and zone of between-ness, without "giving away" his central position within these middle-zones of meaning, between the East and the West, and modern culture and ongoing nature. Once the "magic" of a Cummings poem has "happened", it is difficult to point to the signs themselves and explain how this occurred. It is easier -- if this formulation may be allowed -- to feel uplifted into an ecological integrity in reading his work, than to explain how this came about by pointing to his signs in a critical manner. Reading Cummings makes one admire nature anew, and (in the most positive sense) forget the words that led to the upliftment. It is, indeed, a humble poetry that one is examining here along with his critics. Its (sometimes astonishing) effects remain grounded and apparently "common" to such an extent, that they often defy intellectual inquiry. Also in terms of the major versus minor modernist dichotomy, Cummings' poetry has managed to sail between and beyond duality. The persistence of this issue, and the persistence of critical hesitation towards Cummings, can therefore also be registered - - as such -- as a paradoxical and positive indication of Cummings' ecological capability.

Modernist discourse on the whole struggled in the early stages of its (rapid) evolution to gain the necessary intellectual status. Poetry and criticism had to be respectable fields for intellectual enquiry and this gave rise to the need for

establishing poetry and criticism as “objective” pursuits. This went along with the genuine and successful pursuit of a more direct, immediate and modern way of writing poetry and practising criticism -- and in his unique and in a certain sense “non-intellectual” way Cummings is an important part of these poetic developments.

But these developments also gave rise to an absolutism upon the remarkable success of the enterprise, coinciding more or less with Eliot’s dominance in modernist poetic discourse, marked by the year 1922. As has been indicated, Emig refers to this absolutism -- akin to positivism -- as modernist “totalitarianism”. The intellectual position and the intellectualizing or objectifying mode of poetic expression -- including its classicist and other underpinnings -- turns exclusive. This goes along with a hardening of conceptual boundaries and the prerequisite that modern poetry, too, should embody the hardening of boundaries as we have seen. Such poetry strives to be impersonal, supra-historical, and above nature, by means of “angular” or “exact” forms of expression.

In the process, Cummings’ poetry, which continues to seek a refreshing and indeed quite modernist search for natural integration, spontaneity, intuition, etcetera, is castigated by these critics (as we have also seen). And these initial, mainly New Critical responses to Cummings’ poetic project had such an impact that their ripple effect continued, obviously with varying degrees of intensity, up to the nineteen nineties when Friedman was still challenging the (modernist) lack of inclusivity and the lack of the critical perception of Cummings’ (ecological) achievement.

From an ecological perspective, this ambivalent history of the reception of Cummings’ poetry marks or masks a considerable poetic feat. A predominantly positive reception of Cummings over the years -- mixed as it has been with some serious critical reservations towards his poetry -- shows that Cummings manages no less than a *uniquely personal, creative and modernist revitalization* of an ideal which may seem to have been suppressed along with the Romantics and the transcendentalists, namely a greater sense of immediate and refreshing unity with nature, (even) beyond the intellectual prerequisite, and definitively beyond the sense of dislocation and alienation which marks Eliot’s salient works.

In other words, critics who devastate Cummings’ poetry because they do not take his ecology into account -- probably for historical reasons such as the need to

establish poetry as an intellectual domain on the one hand, as well as the extreme (and sometimes deliberate) ignorance towards a sense of ecology on the other -- move too quickly from the assessment that he lacks the necessary (and, as I have argued within this Chapter, very particular) intellectual vision, to the assessment that his poetry is (Romantically) sentimental. A different "emptiness" or "nothingness" is veiled within, or mediated by, Cummings' poetic devices: it is the now, here, nowhere of ecology and Taoism. Among influential critics (as has been demonstrated here), this other, more ecological and oriental dimension of modernist discourse (which is equally important in Eliot and Pound upon careful consideration) has been scanted.

One has to admit that if Cummings' view is ecological and in that sense indeed Romantic, he gives unique and refreshing modernist expression to these continuing ideals; ideals which continue, that is, to this day and which now seem to be increasingly important as we face our future on this planet. Responding to this ecological sensibility which permeates Cummings' poetry leads to a more reasonable approach to (and appreciation of) this poet's work.

It further reveals that a fashionable and somewhat limited "grid" or lens was used by a number of important critics when they expressed their discomfort with aspects of Cummings' poetry. This "grid" as I deliberately wish to call it, since a "grid" consists of blocks created by a spatial duality of the vertical and the horizontal, consists for the most part of the expectation or norm that genuine poetry should be hallmarked by the necessary ambivalence, alienation, distance and opposites set in perpetual and frequently hierarchical tension. It is therefore natural to assume that one of the telling dimensions of the critical response to Cummings would be the dualism of the major minor issue, to which I turn in conclusion to this Chapter.

4. Conclusion: the major minor issue and Cummings' ecological poetic achievement

Modern thought in general reveals an instantaneous tendency to reduce and hierarchically divide the world of experience into sets of opposites. Among these the categories of major versus minor poetry within mainstream modernism is just one example. The brutal hierarchy which has been established and maintained between the perceived opposites of the human cultural force and the natural force -- a hierarchy in which nature is for the most part perceived to be subservient to humans -- is one of the main reasons behind the destruction of ecosystems within progressive

societies, as Eliot also knows (1980:290). Perhaps one's first instinct is that this ecologically-devastating hierarchy has little to do with the major minor issue. But then one would have to overlook the original point: that the modern mind, as I have stated, tends to reduce the world into sets of opposites and furthermore tends to divide these sets of opposites into hierarchical patterns such as culture versus and above nature, as well as a major, inorganic intellect that acts as a controlling factor or the means to create a supposed organic whole.

A doubt lies at the root of mainstream modernist ambivalence towards natural context: should poems be organic wholes, or should they remain aloof, difficult, "objective"? As we have seen (Chapter Two) in the case of structuralism, the supremacy of intellect and culture versus and above emotion and nature has been entrenched in modern thought patterns. Even if no historical relation can be found between mainstream modernist discourse and A.J. Greimas' structuralist practice, both embody this important aloofness towards nature, or a telling shortcoming of the modern "zeitgeist". In short, the major minor issue as viewed against the larger background of a dualistic tradition in general appears to take on direct ecological relevance.

Returning to poetry from this perspective, one needs to ask again if poetry can be only of a major or a minor shape, and whether poetry which is neither major nor minor in the modernist sense can nevertheless be great or good. This question is of singular relevance to Cummings as the recent brief and intriguing polemic about this issue in relation to his poetry shows. I am referring to Richard Kennedy's 1992 essay entitled "E.E. Cummings, a Major Minor Poet" and Webster's response entitled "Cummings, Kennedy, and the Major/Minor Issue" published in 1995.

In order to set the necessary background for a more detailed discussion of Cummings and the major minor issue on the basis of ecology, a further concise look at the issues involved within the major minor categorization is necessary. We have seen in the preceding sections of this Chapter that modernist critics such as Blackmur and Hood seem to view major poetry as that which signals a given conception of the intellect. Moreover, such poetry has to signal a prevalence of intellectualization or objectification itself, within art. These critics find Cummings lacking in these sensibilities. Major poetry needs to be intellectual, objective, "hard", distanced and also mature in the tragic and/or difficult sense like Eliot's salient works -- and these

dimensions are not equally apparent in Cummings' poetry. From here, the critics quickly move on to decide that Cummings' poetry is not intellectual enough, and that it is therefore too sentimental, and minor.

Of course, Eliot's own conception of major poetry is quite different: (incidentally) Eliot begins by relegating the issue of the length of the poem to one side (in a double manoeuvre which nevertheless retains the issue of length in a qualified sense), and subsequently the poet states that major poetry (as opposed to minor poetry) is that in which a knowledge of the whole or a large part of the poet's work makes one enjoy more and understand better any one of his or her poems (1957:49). Majorness "implies a significant unity in [the poet's] whole work" according to Eliot (1957:50). Eliot continues to safeguard his definition by stating that it is impossible to put this increased understanding "altogether into words" (1957:50). Eliot knows that poetic greatness is elusive.

If reading the parts in terms of a convincing and overarching sense of the whole is the prerequisite for major poetry, one cannot see how Cummings would fail to meet the requirement; although one should persistently keep in mind that it is likely that Cummings did not aspire to "major" poetry as Webster notes (1995b:77). As this thesis has demonstrated, Cummings' poetry is characterized by an advanced sense of the roles of the part and the whole, especially on the basis of ecological experience. Of course, further deliberations about what makes major poetry could be added. Kennedy adds to the list of requirements the length of poems, the representativeness of the poet in terms of a given poetic movement, the absence of "bad" published poems, and originality (1992:38-40). But precisely because the arguments about majorness and minorness tend to become intricate, it is easy to overlook one crucial aspect of the entire issue. This aspect is the fact that the "game" -- reminiscent of what Eliot terms a mug's game (Webster, 1995b:81) -- of majorness and minorness rests upon an intellectual divisioning, underpinned by a sense of duality: the opposite pairs, however cloudy the veils of arguments around them may be, of *major versus minor* poetry.

And however intricate the arguments may yet turn out to be, mainstream modernist discourse privileges certain forms of intellectualization which seem narrow to us now, faced as we are with an ecological crisis on an even larger and increasing scale. That this discourse championed these forms of intellect cannot be "wrong" in

itself -- unless it would turn too exclusive, dividing, and reductionist, as in the cases of some of the important critical treatments of Cummings' poetry (say, Hood's and Vendler's). An emphasis upon intellectualization itself within Eliot's writings and within mainstream modernist criticism at large is unmistakable: we are struck by Eliot's apparently drastic insistence upon the impersonality of the process of making and reading poetry, the absence of commonsensical subjects in his earlier mainstream works (such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", *The Waste Land*, and "Gerontion" especially). We are also struck, as found in the criticisms of Cummings cited above, at the readiness and zeal of American mainstream modernist critics to view emotion as mere sentiment the moment that they perceive the absence of the necessary and perceived intellectualization in poetry.

Additional examples could be cited, but it is plain to see that mainstream modernist criticism tends to put faith in a certain conception of the intellect while tending to be at least slightly suspicious of emotion in general. A differentiation between the object(ive) and the subject(ive), as found in such criticism, is an intellectual procedure in the first place. This intellectual procedure lies at the base of mainstream modernism and informs the evaluation of poetry and hence the issue of majorness versus minorness as perceived by the modernists -- as it is apparent from Blackmur's initial response to Cummings, once more.

There can be little doubt that this intellectualization holds an advancement in poetry, and indeed the advancement of emotional qualities within poetry. This is evident from Eliot's works which have occupied scholars in various degrees for nearly a century. To this day, reading Eliot's poetry involves emotional subtleties of great freshness and impact, as those who teach Eliot will testify. These qualities of mainstream modernist discourse are not under attack here. However, it need not be denied that mainstream modernism develops a hierarchical and dualistic distance between the object(ive) and the subject(ive) and that this could show problematical results, especially in those perhaps rare but crucial instances where modernist discourse turns totalitarian.

One needs to refer to Rainer Emig's work again in this respect. According to him, modernist discourse in its totalitarian mode tends to become ephemeral, dangerously aloof and homogenizing in its impact, ignorant towards and/or fearful of the perceived femaleness of experience, too universally intellectual, and so on, as I

have indicated at various stages of the argument within this thesis. Considering the critical treatment of Cummings' poetry in mainstream modernist discourse, one could add one or two reservations to Emig's list.

The modernist ideal and actuality of a fluidity of subject-object relations and of what I have termed the s-o variable is thwarted by the dualistic issue of majorness versus minorness and its related sets of dualities such as the precedence of the objective/intellectual over the subjective/personal/emotional, as well as the (modernist) sign/structure over its context. Perhaps ironically, Eliot states that a "single verse is not poetry unless it is a one-verse poem; and even the finest line draws its life from its context" (1980:90). I certainly do not wish to suggest that Eliot did not have an organic whole of poetry in mind, always. But in his case, his awareness of the whole was also almost always accompanied and sometimes complicated by a need for distance, classical symmetries, logic, and a mature or hardened intellect. Again: mainstream modernist ambivalence means that nothing in it comes to one single. It comes to one double. On the one hand, this leads to a potential of flow and unity that Cummings achieves more fully to my mind. On the other, it leads to a potential of poetic objects or fragments that remain fragmentary to the core, and this aspect is heightened in the more totalitarian, major modes of the major versus minor duality.

A powerful and suggestive flow of subject and object, self and other, and the sign and its outside freezes into a dualistic structural conception of hierarchies and distances. The objective (in the intellectual sense as well as in the sense of the poem as a "hard object" or set of "hard objects") gains the upper hand in the totalitarian modernist mode whereas emotion and the subjective are subjugated to lesser (female) realms -- Pound's Canto XIV (to which I shall turn in some detail within the subsequent Chapter of the thesis) offers a good example.

Similarly, the Western poetic self is seen as more progressive and lasting whereas the definite influence of orientalism upon modernism is underemphasized (as we have seen). And the distance between the modernist sign and its natural, historical, and societal outside or context is stretched to the breaking point. Poetry thus at once gains impact and loses substance (as expounded by Emig, and as cited in preceding Chapters). In other words, mainstream modernist discourse (especially in its totalitarian mode) remains indefinitely ambivalent about the integrity of the

relations between subject and object, self and other, the sign and its outside, maleness and femaleness, intellect and emotion, etcetera. On the one hand, the greater flow and integrity of these relations are emphasized -- on the other, uncomfortable hierarchies and distances are maintained with a sleight of the "objective" hand.

Returning to Woolf for a moment: as we have seen, *Jacob's Room* (1922) clearly indicates that subjective perception reciprocally influences an objective reality, for instance when the trees (appear to) rock as the subject in the boat rocks. Yet the narrator also stresses that it is quite uncertain whether wholeness, the integrity of self and other, and self and nature, can still be perceived in the modern era. For example, a church bell tolls but the thorn tree does not "perceive" the tolling (Woolf, 1992:115). This may not seem startling since it seems commonsensical -- so commonsensical indeed that one is inclined to wonder why Woolf stresses this sense of disjunction or ignorance between church bells (human culture) and thorn trees (natural other) to such a degree. It becomes clearer what Woolf has in mind as soon as we realize that one of the important themes in *Jacob's Room* and modernism overall is the issue of the tension between the potential wholeness of being and its actual disparity. Even seemingly insignificant fictional facts such as Jacob's reading of *The Globe* -- a newspaper title which suggests wholeness and yet carries the disparate and sometimes desperate news of the day in a seemingly inconsequential manner -- fit into the mould of this tension.

Immediately preceding the description of the tolling bell of which the thorn tree is somehow ignorant, one finds this telling passage:

Then Jinny Carslake, after her affair with Lefanu the American painter, frequented Indian philosophers, and now you find her in pensions in Italy cherishing a little jeweller's box containing ordinary pebbles picked off the road. But if you look at them steadily, she says, multiplicity becomes unity, which is somehow the secret of life, though it does not prevent her from following the macaroni as it goes round the table, and sometimes, on spring nights, she makes the strangest confidences to shy young Englishmen (Woolf, 1992:114).

Permeating this passage is an English and Western sense of the need to respect and maintain distance from others and from objects such as pebbles and even a bowl of macaroni. If such distance has to be ironical in the modern age, it is still preferable to a projected "oriental" foolishness, immorality, and sensuality. And yet, the passage registers a fascination with the possibility of greater unity. If one looks at ordinary stones "steadily", multiplicity becomes unity. A sense of loss in the face of modern

disparity and disjunction is expressed here, and this is the background to the “inability” of church bells to reach the thorn tree (as portrayed in the subsequent paragraph of this novel).

The modern mind is preoccupied with ecological ambivalence -- the loss of integrity between cultural subject and natural object, or self and other, or the sign and its outside. And this loss can be blamed, as in this passage, on “fake” orientalism, or a suggested lack of logic and irony. Jinny Carslake is portrayed as a fake, with serious suggestions of the immoralities that brood under the veneer of her “orientalist” innocence. And of course, shy young Englishmen are attracted to the immorality, not the innocence. The Indian philosophers are fake, too, at least by implication. Overall, this passage at once criticizes the possibility of natural unity and integrity -- which is “*somehow* the secret of life” -- and it registers the (pitiful) loss of such integrity in modern culture. It is the expression of an ecological dilemma.

This dilemma is again underpinned by pairs of opposites, and the need at least to *suggest* a *decision* in terms of their persistence. On the surface of this passage these opposites are self (English) and other (oriental). But overriding this almost incidental pair of opposites are other much more telling pairs such as unity versus distance and respect, corruption versus morality and integrity, the ordinary (a number of pebbles picked off the road) versus the mysterious (their apparent unity), the intellectual versus the sensual, and so on. Since the church bell cannot reach the thorn tree, a further dualistic concern is suggested: a sense of community, belonging, and wholeness versus a sense of utter and merely rational dislocation, and of being a mere cynical observer of existences that border on absurdity.

Modernist dualities such as the major/minor issue ultimately reflect this modernist sensibility which frequently includes the subtle undermining of the orientalist drive towards greater natural integrity. Major poetry remains intellectual in that logical and distanced sense which is viewed as Western and modern. Again, this in itself cannot be viewed as incorrect: everyone needs the sense that they remain true to themselves. It is only when it turns too exclusive that complication occurs as I have suggested throughout this thesis. A case in point would be the relative historical neglect of Pound’s oriental translations which nevertheless include one of his greatest poems, “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”. (This poem is examined in the next

Chapter.) Another case in point, as I have argued, is the misunderstanding of the ecology of Cummings' poetry, including its Taoist sensibility.

As *Jacob's Room* reveals, modernism is quite cautious about the possibility of unity with and within nature. Cummings' quite straightforward affirmation of this ecological prospect has been viewed with a similar critical distrust. Cummings dares to use modernist devices such as fragmentation in order to re-establish and reconfirm the integrity and unity and above all the wholeness and wholesomeness of human-sign-nature co-existence in the radical (that is, rooted) sense. Critics such as Hood and Vendler can hardly "believe" (in) this -- to them, it is Cummings' "sin". Although he uses different examples, Cummings still perceives that the thorn tree participates fully in existence and in human experience.

If majorness implies the serious application of the prerequisite for the necessary distance and objective perception over emotional and spontaneous participation in nature, as well as the need to build the difficulty and complication of modern separation and disjunction between male and female, culture and nature, and the sign and its outside directly into the work of art, then Cummings does not qualify. This poet knows that aspiring for subtlety and "littleness" could be the (Taoist) avenue towards a greater sense of ecological humility, impact and integrity for poet and reader alike. Cummings for the most part does not err in the typically totalitarian or "major" modernist way. As Webster further writes in terms of Cummings and the major minor issue:

I'm not sure I want to read poetry in this way, because putting a poet's work into boxes labelled 'major' and 'minor' may unnecessarily limit the ways in which we can approach it. For example, to call a body of work 'major' already implies that you value high seriousness over playfulness, content over formal experiment, instruction over delight, and timeless permanence over historicism. Privileging a body of work as 'major' may tend to turn it into a monument of received wisdom rather than a living expression that engages the reader. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that I am against monuments of received wisdom; I'm saying that there is more than one way to read a poem. In sum, to play the major/minor game is to risk becoming trapped in what Cummings called 'impotent nongames of wrongright and rightwrong' (1995b:81).

"Becoming trapped" is indeed the essence of the major minor problematic: and one of its confining aspects, perhaps the most important and devastating one, is that one tends to become entrapped in hierarchically dualistic structures of the mind. It is against this background that one clearly sees the importance of Cummings' own emphasis of a third position beyond dualities, Eliot's insistence on the importance of

immediate experience over, below and above/behind relational-rational experience, Emig's exposition of the dangers of the totalitarian neglect of what falls outside mainstream modernist textual structures, and Friedman's re-valuation of the importance of Cummings' sense of wholeness and of Cummings' own (limited) failures in terms of duality.

Like Saul Bellow's *Ravelstein*, Cummings has his unique ways of persuading the reader back (and forward) into the originality of experience, or the nowness of now. Admittedly Bellow's *Ravelstein* is far removed from Cummings' poetry. Yet one senses in reading Cummings and in experiencing his poetic view of nature precisely what the novel *Ravelstein* says about the character Ravelstein:

Since we are so often called upon for judgments, we naturally coarsen them by constant use of abuse. Then of course you see nothing original, nothing new; you are, in the end, no longer moved by any face, or any person. Now this is where Ravelstein had come in. He turned your face again toward the original. He forced you to reopen what you had closed (2001:180).

To my mind, part of Cummings' ability to take one into an original sense of natural being, and to avoid the pitfall of modernist totalitarianism, is that this poet (somehow) managed to transcend the entire major minor issue. This is true, to start with, on the historical surface of Cummings' modernist career: the issue of whether he was a major or a minor poet had not been decided as late as 1995, after nearly a century of overall critical engagement with his work. Perhaps it is time simply to admit that this issue is undecidable in his case. Such recognition will leave the way open to engage with Cummings' particular and striking methods of handling the s-o variable. Cummings does not lose sight -- as mainstream modernist discourse in its more absolute modes does -- of the fact that the sign is radically related to its outside, that the subjective could be just as authentic a mode of expression as the objective, that nature still continues to supersede and include human existence, that maleness need not always dominate femaleness, and so on. His revitalization of the quite non-mainstream-modernist sonnet form, his reworking of Taoist sensibilities, his keen satirical sense of his immediate history, etcetera, all embody his commitment to make the historical and traditional relevant and fresh to the modern audience. Overall, one finds in Cummings the satisfaction of natural integrity expressed in authentic modern form.

Sometimes for the wrong reasons and sometimes for the right ones, critics were and are therefore “correct” in not being able to place Cummings with great precision in terms of majorness and minorness. Cummings at his best transcends dualistic hierarchies in all kinds of manners, including the major minor dualistic hierarchy. Viewed on the basis of ecology, it is appropriate that Cummings should be viewed as both major and minor, and neither of these. His poetry includes and transcends dualities, whereas major modernist poetry continues to waver in terms of the s-o variable, and an ecological dilemma or ambivalence. Cummings excels at precisely the meaningful and -- to use an oxymoron -- clear blurring of categories and divisions such as subject-object, self-other, and sign-outside.

One admires critics such as Blackmur, Hood, and Vendler for the level of passion in their response to Cummings but frequently, where they look for intellectualized ambivalence, tension and hierarchy or “hardness”, they find, castigate and/or overlook Cummings’ osmotic flexibility and an organic poetry which is natural right down to its very dynamics. Cummings presents one with an active and firm view of experiencing and living nature. But whereas he stops short of viewing nature’s trees or birds or stars as mere “objects”, and whereas he gives these creatures of nature their full subjective value as meaningful others and equal selves within themselves -- that is, as subjects in their own right, like trees realizing themselves by growing and bearing leaves -- a number of vital criticisms of Cummings stop short of acknowledging that this poet manages to steer the modern and modernist artistic sensibility beyond the “necessary” ambivalence, dualism and autonomy (“hard” boundaries), in a refreshing and singular modernist fashion, into the ecological sense of lasting and continuing natural unity, wholeness, integrity and interaction. As I will attempt to demonstrate in the next Chapter of this thesis, the other modernists, especially mainstream ones such as Eliot and Pound, do not stray as far away from this ideal as their more totalitarian modes (including the major minor issue) may lead one to believe.

In 1942 Pound adamantly insisted that Cummings was “the brightest person in America” (Kostelanetz, 1999:1); at the same time (as we have seen) a number of critics insistently lamented a lack of intellect in Cummings’ poetry. This contradiction in response to Cummings affirms on the one hand the fairly mundane fact that Cummings’ intellectualization is of the “closet” variety, but no less

fundamental and sharp. On the other hand this ties in well with the point I am trying to make within this section of this thesis: that Cummings tends to transgress opposites such as majorness and minorness, intellection and non-intellection, etcetera -- into a sense of their meaningful and quite clear "blurring" or fusion into active unity.

Cummings manages an unequalled and lasting feat of modernist expression, even when viewed (as best as one could) from "within" the domains of high modernism itself, including its prerequisites and prejudices. From an ecological perspective in which the wholeness and integrity of human-nature relations are not merely the ideals, but vital steps in social maturation as well as a commonsensical part of daily existence, Cummings' status as both major and minor and yet neither of these should be viewed as a remarkable poetic and ecological achievement.

Chapter 6

The Ambivalent Ecology of Selected Poems by Eliot and Pound

1. Introduction

The preceding Chapters of this thesis underscore the importance of reading Eliot's and Pound's poetry from an ecosemiotic perspective. In Chapters Three and Four we have seen that the scope and dynamics of Cummings' poetic ecology run deep. The first two Chapters have suggested that in this respect, Cummings' poetry is contrapuntal to mainstream modernist poetry. And in Chapter Five I have demonstrated that the critical reception of Cummings' poetry was compromised to some extent because critics were on the lookout not for poetic ecology, but an intellectualized ambivalence within poetry that would also entail an ambivalent ecology. Here, I pointed out that Eliot's intellectualized influence played a central role with regard to the manner in which these critics looked at Cummings' poetry in general and his poetic ecology in particular.

I have also maintained throughout that a poet such as Eliot contemplated and composed a distinct poetic ecology of his own, something that became increasingly evident towards the mature end of his career (after 1927). In other words, mainstream modernist poetry such as Eliot's surfaces as doubly ecological. On the one hand, it helped instill a contra-ecological critical position also among prominent critics such as R.P. Blackmur, and this ties in with the absence of organicism and ecology in Eliot's poetry. On the other, Eliot's later poetry involves a clear poetic ecology that seems to indicate that Cummings' more steady poetic ecology that was maintained more or less throughout his poetic career could not have been as "wrong" -- even from a modernist poetic and critical perspective -- as those initial criticisms of Cummings' poetry held it to be.

Some central questions posed in Chapter One of the thesis have been answered to an extent that makes the further exploration of mainstream modernist ecology more relevant and possible. An examination of the first set of questions -- as to the scope and the particular dynamics of Cummings' poetic ecology -- has revealed that Cummings' poetry is substantially ecological, and that various dynamics within it involve a readerly sense of ecology or of being-placed within nature via the modernist sign. The middle ground or zone of between-ness reaches one of its full implications in Cummings' poetry: the s-o variable (between subject and object, self and natural

other, and the sign and its outside) “fuses” in his poetry with an ecological effect of mergence and interlevel interactivity between the dynamism of the sign and the dynamism of nature.

The second set of central questions formulated in Chapter One -- considering the critical treatment of the ecological dimension of Cummings’ career -- has clearly indicated that critics were unable or less willing to respond to such a poetry without ambivalence, in particular in the earlier and often more salient moments of modernist criticism, as has been demonstrated with a view to Blackmur, Edmund Wilson, and even much later Cummings critics such as Edward Hood and Helen Vendler. Such criticism overlooked the possibility of Cummings’ poetic ecology in favour of a more static and constrained view of the fluidity of the s-o variable. Suggestions that Eliot’s and Pound’s poetry retains the same tensions on the one hand while it also involves a more fluid, ecological alternative are to be examined in this Chapter.

Because it is strikingly ecological, Cummings’ poetry therefore increases an awareness of the ecological ambivalence both within modernist criticism and modernist poetry. This ambivalence remains to be demonstrated and delineated as found in the poetries of Eliot and Pound. Focus on the *ecological* dynamics of these poetries is necessary, and one should be able to achieve this focus more clearly from the perspective that Cummings’ poetic ecology brings about. Moreover, the further exploration of Eliot’s and Pound’s ecologies to be examined here should put Cummings’ ecological poetry in greater approximate perspective.

Since mainstream modernist poetic ecology is a complex and complicated topic indeed, this Chapter will initially focus on less complicated examples thereof and work up to more complicated examples. Reference will also be made to some ecological implications of Eliot’s and Pound’s critical prose in support of this description of their poetic ecologies. So far, we have caught glimpses of the nature of the ambivalence of their poetic ecologies, especially within mainstream modernist criticism of Cummings’ poetic ecology (Chapter Five), and to some extent within mainstream modernist poetry and prose. I have stressed that mainstream modernist discourse emphasizes an objectification of the poetic sign, at some remove from the outside, natural context of the sign. Also, that it simultaneously stresses the importance of a living (organic) whole of poetry, of which Cummings’ poetry is a unique and illuminating modernist example.

Broadly speaking, this mainstream modernist ambivalence stretches itself across two poles: alienation and ecological complication on the one hand, and affirmation and organic wholeness on the other. As such, this ambivalence or dilemma may serve to inform a broader (textual, interpretative, or hermeneutic) critical ambivalence that has occupied readings of salient mainstream modernist works such as *The Waste Land* over the past decades: whether such a poem ultimately forms a whole, a unified poem, or whether it remains a collection of disparate fragments arranged in all kinds of undecided and oppositional tensions on the page. This broader context will be kept in mind as the description here unfolds.

A good starting point, although not directly related to nature at first glance, is the refrain of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1917) which reads:

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo. (Eliot, 1982:11, 12)

Michael Edwards, in an entertaining and elucidating Eliotian “conversation” with this refrain, based on his reading of the poem in its entirety, writes:

- Q. Where do the women come and go, talking of Michelangelo?
- A. In ‘the room.’
- Q. Where is the room?
- A. In the poem.
- Q. Yes; but why are those two lines in the poem?
- A. Why indeed? The language is numb. There are neat iambs, there is rhythm, there is rhyme, but the verse floats self-absorbed, beamed from nowhere, without referents. The syntax is complete, and empty. For all its formal rightness, the writing alienates. It is a foreign language.
- Q. Why do the women talk of *Michelangelo*?
- A. They could be talking of anyone, or anything. The line signals that it is gratuitous. ‘Michelangelo’ fills the next language space.
- Q. Again, why Michelangelo?
- A. Perhaps because the women reduce art-works to objects of cultivated conversation. Perhaps in the interest of mock-heroic. Perhaps because of his sexy nudes. Also because of his gorgeous name, full and varied in the mouth, profuse syllables.
- Q. Why do they *talk* of Michelangelo?
- A. Because the poem is partly about language, its inevitability, its inadequacy.
- Q. Is there any significance in the combination of a rich word and a drained sentence?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Are you as certain of all this as you sound?
- A. No (1984:99-100).

This intriguing “cross-examination” of this refrain amplifies the broader ambivalence that I have referred to, within which an ecological ambivalence may be identified and formulated. The refrain is an almost too perfect piece of poetry: it is rhythmic, it rhymes, it is glib in its awareness of itself as a nice piece of poetry. It is

also unforgettable for this reason, and its poetic music plays an important role in the imprint that it makes on memory. In colloquial terms, one would have said that it is “catchy” with the same intensity that some modern popular songs may be described as “catchy”. And the focus that these lines draw upon themselves ties in with the fact that they are almost entirely self-reflexive, and almost entirely devoid of referents or other contextualizing anchors within the poem. Which women? Why do they talk? Which room? Why do they talk of a famous Italian artist of the past? Shimmerings of answers to these anchoring questions can be found, but not in an open-ended contextual sense. The refrain seems to dangle in a void or a non-referential un-context, even a vacuum, as a textual object that is little or no more than a textual object. It does not open up into a context to the reader’s satisfaction. Or: from an interpretative angle its conclusivity amounts to an extreme textual closure that allows little finality as well as little contextual interpenetration. Here, the s-o variable ends up in an undecided oscillation between its pairs of opposites, since it remains caught between indefinite self-reflexive fixity on the one hand, and a dislocated and difficult remove from outside context on the other -- at once. Ultimately, in the case of this refrain the s-o variable freezes into a purely textual or objectified semiotic stasis: the sign is only a sign -- it has turned into its own object. The reader is trapped inside the trammel of words or the textual framework of the refrain traps the reader, and there is little sense of having “caught” a “fish” of meaning with a view to an existence outside semiosis.

In short, we see again what it means when we refer to a “textual fragment” within Eliot’s early poetry. Here, signs close in on themselves, and seal themselves off from a given outside context such as *place*. Edwards’ question -- *where* do the women come and go? -- is pertinent, and we experience the significance of this refrain in direct proportion to its daring suggestion that it has no meaning and particularly, that it has no outside purpose or direction. Consider that what is missing in this refrain is a sense of its implied situation or location: we read of a room and have little inkling of *where* the room is to be positioned in our ecological mind’s eye.

Thus the purely poetic textual space that the refrain “occupies” overrides any sense of (outside/natural) place or orientation. Rephrased: besides the purely textual or objective spatiality of language, thought, and the interpreting intellect that the refrain does “occupy”, it cannot be located. It is becoming clearer, therefore, what

Eliot meant when he suggested that the modernist poet should *dislocate* language into his or her meaning (1980:65). Such dis-location has spatial implications as well as ecological implications of the loss of a sense of active place with and within nature, including more cultural concrete spaces such as a room, as well as the loss of interlevel connectivity between the modernist sign system and the ecosystem.

Much the same sense of ambivalent dislocation occurs when one reads the “water-dripping song” of the hermit thrush in *The Waste Land*. At first glance, nothing could be more ecological, and more suggestive of an interlevel interpenetration between the sign and nature than this natural passage within this salient mainstream modernist poem. After all, the signs of this passage are onomatopoeic: they imitate the sounds of the hermit thrush’s song (Eliot, 1982:65). But an interference occurs: read within the context of the poem as a whole, with its various other bird songs, its bird legend from ancient poetry, and its searing absence of water in general, it soon becomes clear that even these onomatopoeic signs also reflect intensely on themselves as mere arbitrary semiotic constructs. Still, such signs are of course *not* deconstructive in one or two important respects. For they have an additional “referent”: an intense awareness of the absence of transcendent meaning, or a confirmation of their own (also ecological) ambivalence. I shall return to this example in greater detail later in this Chapter.

Suffice it to say in the interim that the kind of spatial or dislocational ambivalence that is already prevalent in the “Prufrock” refrain is also prevalent in more ecological or natural passages of mainstream modernist poems. And that the extreme and objectified self-reflexivity of these signs interfere with their outward, interlevel purpose towards nature.

Now consider again how economically Cummings manages to convey an ecology of being with equal modernist intensity:

Me up at does
 out of the floor
 quietly Stare
 a poisoned mouse
 still who alive

is asking What
have i done that

You wouldn't have

(73 Poems CP 784)

Formally, this poem consists of one or two unsettling modernist and Cummingsian procedures of “estrangement”. It dis-arranges and recombines syntax with deliberately “small” lines or fragments of text. And these fragments seem to “float” in blank space in a somewhat peculiar manner, especially to an uninitiated Cummings or modernist reader. For example, an additional blank line follows upon line 4 (“a poisoned mouse”) and this seems to break the poem into two further fragments, each consisting of four lines. On top of these modernist procedures of fragmentation, various words appear to be randomly marked with upper case letters, such as “Stare” (line 3) and “What” (line 6). A reader may well sense the kind of fragmentary dislocation that he experiences when reading the Prufrock refrain analysed above.

Decoded, the rearranged syntax of the poem could read: a poisoned mouse, lying and dying on the floor, still alive, quietly stares up at me asking why humans (or “i”) disliked it so much as to kill it, and what it has done that “i” have not also done in the course of a lifetime. Essentially, the poem (and the mouse) therefore asks what the difference between humans and mice are, and whether these differences justify the killing of one by a (supposedly superior or distant) other. The superior human gaze is brought to the floor: in the moments of dying, the reciprocal stare of the mouse challenges, equalizes, includes and supersedes that superior human gaze.

Through the various modernist procedures of fragmentation that I have indicated, moreover, such identity is not only *told* but *showed*. Besides the pausing and rhythmic four-syllable effects that the “small” line fragments convey, they tie in well with the “smallness” of the mouse’s stare and “language”, thus already indicating a sympathy of language and natural event (dying mouse). The ample blank space within which these “small” fragments float further amplifies the intensity of the dying experience. The now-here-nowhere, also when it comes to a dying mouse, is not a space or place of quiet sentimentality, but a profoundly empty place of integration between mouse and nature (returning to dust) as well as human onlooker and nature (dying mouse). The additional blank line that separates the poem into two four-lined

groupings seems to stretch the intensity of the situation a little further: the mouse has been poisoned (first four-line grouping) but it is still alive (second four-line grouping).

And the upper case letters emphasize the following words that together make a meaningful string within the larger context of this (small) poem: Me Stare What You. Since the poem as a whole suggests that the mouse is also a living self (with an equal stare of its own, towards the human), it is possible to think of the mouse as (another) "Me", or another "i" or "self" instead of the more standard and traditional notion that mice (although they certainly can look at one just as one looks at them) are objects or others "out there". The upper case phrase embedded in this context could therefore be interpreted as follows: in this (seemingly trivial) moment the mouse sees the poetic speaker or the human being *for what it is*. Subject and object are cross-stitched as Cummings is prone to do with opposites, so that a position beyond the opposites comes into direct view: to the (subjective) speaker, the mouse is an observed object, just as to the (self of the) mouse, the speaker is an observed presence. Through and beyond this, lies the shock of the discovery of natural identity in dying, and in recognizing one another.

Since "what" stood for the afterlife (and hence also dying) in Cummings' Unitarian milieu (Kennedy, 1980:402), one could argue further that the upper case phrase implies that the dying of the mouse is concomitant with a dying of the poetic speaker: the kind of dying that is brought about by a view that sees the mouse as a mere object or nuisance to be taken out of the way. The mouse's stare therefore poses one or two important questions on the basis of the increasing ecological identity that the poem embodies in every thematical and formal respect: Do you (human onlooker/reader) realize what it means to stare at a mouse-(such as my)-self, especially since this mouse self can also look back at you, and perceive your interference or your lingering presence in the very same (shared) ecological place in which "i" (mouse) happen to be dying? Do you realize what my death means in terms of yours? And so on.

The first line emphasizes the upwardness and also the inverted or unexpected ecological direction of this stare: "Me up at does". The upper case letters further visually portray this upward line from floor to Human, from (small) mouse to (tall) Human, and vice versa. But in the carefully suggested reciprocity of the stare, of the onlooker and the looked-upon, as well as the implications that this reciprocity has for

(also human) natural identity, this upward line is reversed, and the mouse (in dying) is momentarily more profound than the human onlooker and the reader.

This poem, just like other examples (some of which we have explored), therefore draws its reader into ever deeper considerations of natural identity: it opens up into nature, as Cummings poems are likely to do. It does not merely (and quite economically) sketch an implied, if somewhat isolated situation: of a dying mouse on a floor, and an absent yet present onlooker who may or may not have been responsible for the killing of the mouse. It also creates a remarkable open-ended and intuitive centre through which the reader is persuaded to ponder the nature of natural identity itself. With a few brief lines, Cummings manages deeply to re-orient or actively locate one within (one's) nature, including a deeper, profoundly ecological "location" of an enhanced natural awareness, or a sense of active place-ment (or being-placed inside nature). As much as this poem attracts attention to its arbitrariness, indeed to the arbitrariness of syntactical and typographical arrangements on a page, so much does it manipulate these to place the reader within a *deepened* and not lessened sensation of ecological location. To the modern urban reader, this poem can be positively uncomfortable with its economical ecological intensity.

To return to the "Prufrock" refrain: it suggests an uncomfortable presence-yet-absence of place with a more pronounced emphasis on the absence of location or outside context, and the objectified presence of text. Cummings' "Me up at does" shows a small if telling difference when compared to this refrain: it also suggests an uncomfortable presence-yet-absence of place, but with emphasis on the presence of place and the interrelatedness of humans and animals, and less emphasis on the signs as objects, since they (merely) act to take one into the sense of place. Once one does sense the ecological placing or identity that the signs lead to, any further meddling with the signs as signs may begin to seem no more than an added complication or interference.

The remainder of this Chapter examines various selected examples from Eliot's and Pound's poetry (and some prose) with a view to the further exploration of the ecological dilemma or ambivalence that appears to underpin mainstream modernist discourse. With a thorough ecosemiotic reading of Cummings' modernist poetic ecology, one has a good starting point from which to embark on this exploration, and it seems, too, that there is no turning back: one of the values of

Cummings' poetry, not to be overlooked here amidst such varied and complex considerations, is simply that it makes one more aware of the ecological potentials and difficulties of modernist discourse at large, and mainstream modernist poetry in particular.

One of the problems of such an endeavour is that there is too much to choose from the bulk or depth of Eliot's and Pound's poetry -- also in terms of the historical development of Eliot's poetry and discourse towards an ever-increasing reconciliation and (also ecological) acceptance, and Pound's fairly consistent wavering between a pronounced ecological-biological and orientalist poetry on the one hand, and a pronounced objectified, salient, and somewhat contra-ecological poetry on the other. One can never simply say that (say) Eliot's poetry is contra-ecological, and yet one can hardly say that it is affirmative of ecology (as in Cummings' case) either. On the one hand, Eliot's earlier poetry up to and including *The Waste Land* evokes a startling absence of (also ecological) transcendence. In this sense, it either pronounces an intense search for ecology, or an intense awareness that something has gone wrong in modern ecology. And in this narrow, limited, or indirect manner, Eliot's poetry often remains quite ecological even when it does not seem to do so: for it intensely evokes the *absence* of an organic whole within which the poetic sign and the modern human should belong.

On the other hand, even when one recognizes intense ecological moments in this poetry, one cannot escape from a certain unease, namely that the intense ecology nonetheless negates ecology (or wholeness, or interlevel integrity between the sign and nature). Overall, then, one is almost always forced to explore a very indecisive zone of between-ness in reading Eliot's mainstream poems ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "Gerontion", *The Waste Land*, "The Hollow Men", and the early essays up to more or less 1921) for his ecology. Indecidability may seem to be the overriding impression here. This uncomfortable and difficult double-ness of course reflects the "epistemic trauma" (Vargish & Mook, 1999:14) of that time, and is to be understood from this historical, epistemological, and ontological perspective. Such understanding nevertheless does not ultimately relieve the ambivalence, and the sense that mainstream modernist poetry may have done as much ecosemiotic damage as it may have embodied an ecosemiotic advancement. To complicate matters even further, a mainstream modernist poet such as Eliot was overtly aware of this very

ambivalence, complication, or difficulty which forces one to follow his own (sometimes ambivalent) comments on his own ambivalence in an attempt to stay with the ambivalence itself. In short, straightforward, totally unobscure statements about mainstream modernist ecology will be more or less out of the question in what follows. The indecidability with a view to ecosemiosis that resides in the very “foundations” of mainstream modernist ecology means that it is almost always hard to know where to start or finish an ecosemiotic reading of the poetry, and indeed, that one’s reading ultimately remains undecided, or “binary” in Brooker’s and Bentley’s helpful terminology (1990:93). Not even an approximation of ecological dynamics, of a kin with such an approximation of Cummings’ poetic ecology in this thesis, is possible in mainstream modernist poetry. Rather, it is possible in a positive sense with a view to only one leg or dimension of the overall dilemma or duality, namely those instances where acceptance and variations on Cummings’ third voice occur in Eliot’s and Pound’s poetry. An attentive ecological reading of these poetries therefore goes along with a renewed experience of an epistemic and ecological crisis, even decades after the poetry was published.

For the sake of managability, Eliot and Pound will be separated in this exploration, which separation occurs for practical textual reasons, and not to imply a vast gulf between the poets when it comes to an ecological reading of their work. The exploration begins with a selection of poems (and some prose) by Eliot. This poet’s historical development allows one to trace a general movement from a more complicated ecological poetry to a more accepting, complex, and also simple ecological acceptance, concomitant with his conversion and baptism into the Anglican church in 1927, and with his 1939 essay “The Idea of A Christian Society” which implies that a good relationship with God goes hand in hand with a good relationship with nature (Eliot, 1980:290). The exploration continues with a concise look into Pound’s ecology, based on the preceding exploration of Eliot’s ecology. In Pound’s case, a neat historical development cannot be traced with equal comfort: instead, Pound was able to publish in the same year (1934) an ecologically removed and even static and mechanistic view of poetry as in “The Teacher’s Mission” with its imagery from physics (Pound, 1985:58), as well as a radical critique of all Western abstraction and science in favour of a more self-evident, biological approach of a kin with (his view of) the Chinese ideogram (Pound, 1987:20), as found in his *ABC of Reading*.

Furthermore, the historical composition of Pound's more intensely ecological Chinese poems and his (only) less intensely ecological and salient, bulky *Cantos* do not allow a tidy reading of an historical line of ecological development. The *Cantos* took decades to compose, from the 1910s to the 1960s: in fact, Pound started them at just about the time that he had published *Cathay* (Surette, 1979:24). More Taoist and ecological as well as less Taoist and rather contra-ecological moments can be examined in them. For these reasons, Pound's ecology will be read in a less tidy historical context along a more wavering mid-zone between undecided extremities of contra-ecology and ecology.

2. Eliot's ecology: selected poems (and some prose writings)

2.1. Prufrock's entomology (1917)

To the best of one's knowledge, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" has not been read from the perspective of ecosemiotics, and this is one reason why its (quite brief and incisive) entomology has gone by unnoticed. Entomology, put plainly, is the study of insect life on earth. Consider the following passage:

For I have known them all already, known them all--
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume? (Eliot, 1982:13)

A close ecosemiotic reading of this passage soon reveals an undertone of "science" and entomology in particular. The accent of the word "formulated" (lines 2 and 3) is vaguely reminiscent, like an odour, of laboratory words and substances such as "Formalin" (formaldehyde) and formulae. The creature on the pin is directly indicative of the collection and scientific study of insects (also associated with formaline). The image on the whole offers a strange mixture of the subject or poetic speaker, Prufrock, and "objects" of study such as insects. Prufrock identifies with an insect to be studied, incarcerated, and killed for the sake of even closer scientific scrutiny. The image arranges itself (with some poetic licence) so as to suggest that human eyes that study one are similar to killing insects for the sake of studying them or "fixing" them in a (formulated/paralysing) phrase. The objective correlative of this entomological passage is a removed, ironical, or objective and scientific gaze.

Prufrock's suggested and suggestive identification with insects viewed in this manner depicts the hopelessness of his position, somewhere between his being a subject in the universe or a mere object that remains secondary to his own existence. He is no Prince Hamlet, or John the Baptist, or Lazarus come from the dead (Eliot, 1982:14-15): instead, he is a subject or an object that has incorporated various other objects (cigarettes, coffee, and so on), and ultimately will be incorporated into an objective fix of isolated and steady eyes that "formulate" one like an insect on the wall. As in a gross scientific "crucifixion", Prufrock is pinned alive: he sprawls and wriggles on a pin against a wall, like a moth that is indeed sprawled or spread out for study. Possibly, the Edwardian undertone of collecting insects such as butterflies and moths ties in with the overall early twentieth-century Bostonian atmosphere of the poem in these lines.

Prufrock's *own objective view* (as also suggested in adjacent stanzas) -- of an awareness of severed objects such as eyes that float in his mind without faces or bodies, or coffee spoons and voices without any context, or arms with bracelets, hair, perfume, and a dress but again without (the context of) a body or a face -- ironically rebounds to turn him into an object. The "objective gaze" in its scientific and subjective multiplicity and intensity ultimately boils down to an incarceration which pins, corrodes, and destroys the living context of natural being. One can no longer "presume" one's freedom (line 7), and there is no escape from one's own involvement in the incorporation of objects (spitting out the butt-ends of one's days and ways, line 6).

Prufrock, the object of (also his own) entomological study and the "objective gaze" of the modern world in general can therefore not force a moment to its crisis, or its turning point, at which opposites would dissolve and one could escape from the terror of one's stifling and static analytical mind (despite all appearances of the abrupt movements of such a mind: for, "In a minute there is time/ for decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" (Eliot, 1982:13), and there will be "time yet for a hundred indecisions,/ And for a hundred visions and revisions" (Eliot, 1982:12)). That is, seemingly kinetic but ultimately petrifying objective or intellectual distance cannot be overcome. These remarks apply to Prufrock's vision of the universe as well as his inability to be incorporated by his other, a female (or an ur-universe).

A most intriguing universe emerges from Prufrock's groping and slightly clumsy and foolish -- but persistently ironical and self-ironical -- modern mind. On the one hand, this universe is terribly subjective, and interrelated to the point of no control. On the other, it is just another object along with the various objects that seem to crouch in Prufrock's vicinity in order to stage their various revenges.

On the one hand, this universe is so delicately and vastly interconnected in all aspects, and Prufrock is so aware of his subjective relations within this perception -- indeed, a totally subjective universe, or a subject-as-universe -- that he dares not take a bite from a peach. "Do I dare to eat a peach?" (Eliot, 1982:16) is equivalent to "Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?" (Eliot, 1982:12) -- or vice versa. One bite from the fruit will ripple throughout and disturb the entire universe -- such levels of interrelatedness are intense and could have dire consequences. From the subjective angle, then, one's actions of survival in the universe are indefinitely violent, and horribly sensitive: in a very real sense, one is totally incapacitated to act. In fact, this universe is so interrelated and personal that totally disparate things may seem to be radically related. For example, a seemingly unrelated other "I" that (merely) shifts a pillow and (rather prosaically) asserts that that is not what she meant at all (Eliot, 1982:14) utterly disrupts Prufrock's desire to roll the universe into an (unlikely) ball or object, to roll it towards an overwhelming question (at which we can finally only guess). The disparity of these events, highlighted by the use of pronouns in the poem -- the events of Prufrock's wish and the lady's action and words -- paradoxically can only be of terrible consequence in such an interconnected, intensely personal/subjective and self-conscious universe. For, every action in such a universe, no matter how unrelated it may seem on the surface of things, actually affects every other aspect of it: the universe itself is half intelligent, half matter. An ecological point, indeed, but without any affirmative qualities, and certainly to the detriment of Prufrock's relationship with females. Prufrock's universe is reminiscent in this sense of the highly subjective and interconnected, but also apocalyptic, depleted universe at the conclusion of the "Preludes" with its notion of "some infinitely gentle/ Infinitely suffering thing" (Eliot, 1982:24) and its worlds (planets and stars and realms) that revolve like "ancient women/ Gathering fuel in vacant lots" (Eliot, 1982:24). Again, the universe consists of personal phenomena, realms, or worlds (such as personalized and even simply *personal*/intelligent planets or atoms, one assumes).

On the other hand, this very same universe is solipsistically objective, also in the sense of being cold, unfeeling, and indifferent to an individual fate. Prufrock's desire to "have squeezed the universe into a ball" (Eliot, 1982:14) springs to mind. And this non-descriptive, dull ball -- we learn no more about it from the poem besides the fact that it is a *ball* -- should then be rolled towards the (non-divulged) overwhelming question by a Lazarus-Prufrock come from the dead. The metaphor itself deserves attention. It is an impossible or absolute metaphor, bordering on a mixed metaphor: Prufrock squeezes an unlikely universe into an unlikely ball that has to be rolled towards an unknown question. An ability to construct an image of rational relations in thin mental air and of turning the universe itself into a mere, non-descript and totally controllable object (ball) in the process, therefore equals Prufrock's inability to force the moment to its crisis.

The word "ball" is a semiotic object of significant pointlessness within this metaphor or series of mental gymnastics. Besides the opposites of vast versus small -- universe into ball -- it also suggests the opposites of significant versus dull, and ecstatic versus mediocre. Prufrock's monological outcry to *do* something profound -- to come back from the dead like Lazarus and confront us all with a devastating question that would finally shatter modern mental complacency (Eliot, 1982:14) -- unfortunately solidifies itself into the anti-climax of this universal, mundane word-object: a ball.

And the reader who follows the trajectory of this ball within its vacuous context cannot help but to return to the word itself. (That it alludes to another ball, the ball of love as found in Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" probably confirms the point.) And the word itself -- isolated into non-referentiality -- strikes one as somewhat plain, arbitrary, and brutally short within its supposedly overwhelming context. That it alludes to another poem (Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress") merely confirms its referential or purely textual isolation. Prufrock's ecstatic desire to control the universe and to have the strength to force the moment to its crisis is thus objectified into blunt stasis, also on a purely semiotic plane. Here is the ultimate objective revenge: the poem also stifles into semiotic objectification or even reification at this point in the reading.

Prufrock considers but cannot convince himself to "have bitten off the matter with a smile" (Eliot, 1982:14). And the word "matter", so prosaically slipped into this

phrase, is laden with various connotations: of the ur-womb or a mother universe (Brooker 1994:133), or the ashes and dust of which this universe consists from a purely objective perspective, or a delicate problematic and an indication of something that has gone awry. Prufrock refrains from biting into this problem, this difficult matter. And there is a suggestion, as in most of the poem, of sexual implications and complications here: for if Prufrock should advance or force the moment to its crisis, it seems possible that *he* would be bitten off like a piece of matter. Of course, on a more mundane level, this phrase -- "To have bitten off the matter with a smile" (Eliot, 1982:14) -- merely indicates Prufrock's exceeding and slightly obtuse politeness under the circumstances of his own extreme anxiety in a difficult universe full of subjective and objective tensions and constraints. He is indeed sprawling and wriggling on the pin of a paradoxically subjective and objective universe that is contained within his mentality to the extent that it contains him.

At its conclusion, the poem suggests that the dream, the fantasy, the ocean, and the mermaids cannot find a meaningful connection with Prufrock's modern cultural reality: human voices are the nemesis of this dream, and the result is drowning (with its faint relation to some form of integration, after all). From an outside readerly perspective (that is, not from the inside interpretative perspective of Prufrock's views on things), the poem itself also comes to a sudden, abrupt death. The final line is entirely compact, almost matter-of-fact, and paradoxically conclusive: "Til human voices wake us, and we drown" (Eliot, 1982:16). There is no sense at the end of this poem as in many of Cummings' poems that the poem itself opens up, as it concludes, into an outside-and-inside, transcendent or "magical" ecological context, of which we have seen several examples in preceding Chapters. The poem simply ends with a sudden event of a suggested opening up into society (the human voices), and the death of the poetic subject (drowning). Provided that it carries a faint suggestion of integrating with a dreamy and fantastic ocean after all, such dreamy and concrete possibilities are overridden by the incisive break or interruption that the line signals. In the final analysis, this line carries the same purely textual self-awareness of the refrain, the impossible ball-word, or other similar semiotic events in the poem. Despite its paradoxical and momentary, death-like "opening up" into some societal or cultural context, it embodies a conclusive textual or semiotic reading event, with a telling full stop that indeed acts like the "sardonic

bullet" (!) which Eliot's fellow modernist poet, William Carlos Williams, ascribed to Eliot's poetry in general (in Ruiz, 2000:78).

For the sake of an additional illustration of Cummings' contrapuntal ecology we may briefly consider the poem "nine birds(rising" (*Xaipe* CP 627) because its conclusion corresponds to some extent and on a purely formal basis with the conclusion of "Prufrock". The penultimate line of this poem surprises us with an interruption in the shape of an exclamation mark in the middle of a word. It is an authoritative command of a Cummingsian modernist kind that instructs the reader and/ or the poetic speaker to be quiet within nature's silence:

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

(*Xaipe* CP 627)

The same formal procedures as in Eliot's modernist poetry are used to a much different ecological effect in this and other Cummings poems. Signs are fragmented, but the fragmentation is carried through in such a manner that it finds an advanced and unifying balance with natural continuation and integrity. For example, seemingly discarded fragments of words such as "ing" (line 4) and "ly" (line 16) function in the left hand margin to establish a rhythmic fluctuation and flow of non-accented and accented syllables; and line 16 indeed concludes with a return to traditional prosody. This line has a set rhythm of symmetrically arranged non-accents and accents, including anapaestic feet and a concluding trochee, thus suggesting the rhythm of the flying birds, even the ascent and descent of their wings, against the (disappearing)

twilight sky. That the line should begin and end on non-accented syllables ties in with a sense of flexibility and dissolution. The birds are “living the dying of glory”: such is their one-ness with the twilight scenery, that it seems that *their* movements create the fading light of dawn, as much as that fading light makes their movements clear. Again, we may end up beyond oppositional and objectively distant expectations with a view to our experience of nature. The birds and the speaker are living-and-dying as twilight fades into darkness, and this is a profound aspect of their unity.

The poem fragments the word “twilight” to suggest the maximum potential of a third dimension beyond opposites (and fragmentation): broken open as it is in this poem, one sees that its first syllable “twi-“ (line 6) suggests a two-ness, and one also sees, as one makes a downward journey through blank space, that this suggested “two-ness” of the twilight condition ends in a one-ness: the singular syllable “light” (line 7), or the elucidation that goes along with the realization that twilight turns opposites into one. The various words containing [ʌ i] sounds indicated by the letter “i” further underscore this rhythmic and increasing unity beyond the various opposites that language normally carries between self and other, subject and object, and the sign and its outside. A maximal flow and unity of the s-o variable is evoked through a minimum of language and modernist fragmentation directing the reader with their fragments on the open side, inviting a recombinatory reading event that will lead to a sense of exciting, also tranquil, modern natural integrity. The poem prepares all of this early on when it fragments the word “climbing” (with its [ʌ i] sound) by means of a colon and a line break, so that its audial and visual correspondence with an isolated “i” -- which finds itself within the word “into” as the reader discovers upon continuing the reading -- becomes clear. The self, the subject of the poem, thus climbs or rises with the nine birds into a twilight condition beyond stark opposites of the mind and relational, rational (and potentially objective) constraints such as day versus night and self versus nature.

The (already dynamic) opposites “liftingly” and “falling” are dissolved after the exclamational instruction in the penultimate line: the final line evokes a rhythmic silence of utter unity between opposites such as self (and reader) versus birds and twilight sky as has been demonstrated. Again, Cummings’ poetry evokes an opening up into nature. Cummings’ exclamation mark or instruction, an authoritative

modernist abruptness, can hardly end there with the same abruptness that Eliot's "Prufrock" maintains with its "sardonic bullet" or a final full stop. Instead, a flowing ecological "final" line of poetry in Cummings' poem dissolves all such grammatical pretences of conclusivity. This goes along, moreover, with the 1-2-3-4-3-2-1 line pattern of the poem (on a stanzaic basis). With this formal arrangement, the poem indicates an emanation from blank space, an increase of words, details or events (up to the four-lined stanza), and then a return and a decrease back into one-ness and the now-here-nowhere of blank space.

Cummings' poetry presents a telling ecological counterpoint to a mainstream modernist poem such as "Prufrock". Instead of a delineation and an abrupt, classicist and objectifying halt, we have in Cummings' poetry the osmotic potential of a fusion into a context that permeates and includes the poem: the context, that is, of dynamic nature. In Cummings' own "scientific" and poetic formulation, to him "P[oetry] is that temperature at which opposites fuse" (bMs Am 1892.7 (90) folder 42 sheet 434)⁵². Here, at the point of poetry or the point of IS, opposites melt into a third dimension of unity and integrity -- also between, through, and beyond male and female as in some of the Cummings poems that have been studied in preceding Chapters, and self and universe.

Opening into a context outside the sign means a double death to mainstream modernist poems such as "Prufrock". Prufrock hears human voices (in a sense for the first time) at the end of the poem: he finally escapes from his own universal mind into a vaguely suggested outside social context, and he abruptly drowns at the same instant -- and then the poem also drowns or "dies" with a sudden halt. Cummings' entire nine-birds poem, as many of his poems, builds up into an active fading into nature's dynamic context. We remain aware of the otherness of those birds and we remain equally aware of the self-ness of that otherness. Even after the abrupt and interesting insertion of an exclamation mark in the penultimate line of this poem, it returns in the final line to rhythm, silence, and flow into natural now-here. And this is quite different from an objectifying halt such as the conclusion of "Prufrock".

This recognition confirms the objectifying nature of "Prufrock": the persona's name, "Prufrock", contains all kinds of punning potentials, and two of these are the

⁵² This is from Cummings' "California notes", and was written in red ink and underlined by the poet.

phrases (jammed into a name), “prudent rock” and/or “rock solid proof”⁵³. Assuming for the moment that the solidity of a rock represents the solidity of distant and objectifying maleness, in contrast to and in need of fluid femaleness, it could be argued that Prufrock’s prudence is related to his intellectualization, to that dry and ironic rational distance and those relational perceptions which he has to retain in order to continue his secondary existence. Irony and objectivity (intellect) themselves seem to be embodied in the notion of an isolated male rockiness, or a “prudent rock” in search of rocky solidity and elusive proof of the profundity of his threatened existence. This reading should be related to the arid, rocky landscapes and the searing absence of water in later poems such as *The Waste Land* and “The Hollow Men”. Similar landscapes are found in Pound’s *Cantos*, as I shall demonstrate.

We see in this brief analysis that “Prufrock” focuses on issues that are familiar to the Cummings reader: the interrelatedness of the universe, the relationships between male and female, the agile ability of the modern sign to include much in its condensed lines, and so on. But the effect of “Prufrock” is different to Cummings’ poetry, especially on the basis of ecology. “Prufrock” remains undecided, caught in various objective and hierarchical tensions between somewhat fluid opposites, on most if not all levels of the poem. Within the possible world that the poem creates, the persona Prufrock faces a stifling and insurmountable dilemma of opposites such as male and female, and subject(ive) versus object(ive). Without, from the readerly perspective that looks upon and interprets the possible world of the poem from at least some distance, the poem refuses to melt into integrity and confronts one, for example, with the word “ball” as a purely textual or semiotic object. Hence, this poem’s integrity resides in the persistence of its objectifying interference with readerly procedures, and the way in which it draws attention to itself as a collection of poetic fragments or textual objects (such as its refrain and its abrupt conclusion). In the process, the poem sustains an absence of transcendence -- also the transcendence of opposites -- with great effect. And in case one felt that such absence was not implied at all, Prufrock’s sensitive awareness of a maximally interrelated and half-personal universe merely serves to underline it. In short, despite all appearances of his mental kinetics Prufrock remains trapped in his male intellect, just as the poem is trapped in

⁵³ The actual origin of Prufrock’s strange name is more mundane: as Hugh Kenner stipulates, Eliot derived it from an advertisement of a furniture removal business named after one Prufrock (1965:3).

modern objectified and (therefore) non-transcendent language. The transcendent possibility of an interlevel unity between the sign system, thought, and nature remains elusive and is present only in its absence. Instead of these procedures and results, Cummings' poems focus on the same issues and use some of the same devices in a different manner to evoke precisely such interlevel and ecological transcendence. It is devoid of an incarcerating "objective gaze" that ultimately returns to the subject in the form of a cruel, objectifying entomology.

2.2. The poet as platinum, the poem as sulphuric acid (1919)

From an ecosemiotic viewpoint, Robert Langbaum's 1959 essay on nature in modernist poetry entitled "The New Nature Poetry" is seminal. It embodies a rare instance of a sober and convincing overview of what happened to nature in modernist poetry, and I shall return to it on one or two additional occasions. It has to be mentioned from the outset that Langbaum does not analyze specific examples of Eliot's or Pound's poetry, and that he does not mention Cummings. He focuses on modernists such as Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and D.H. Lawrence. And with these examples at hand he makes telling points about what is termed here "modernist ecology".

One of these is that modernist nature poetry moves away from what John Ruskin in 1856 termed the "pathetic fallacy" (2000:483). This fallacy is succinctly defined by Langbaum as the projection of subjective human qualities onto nature (1970:104). One of Ruskin's examples of such human, poetic interference with a clearer view of nature itself, is from Charles Kingsley's poetry: "They rowed her in across the rolling foam - / The *cruel, crawling* foam" (2000:485; my emphasis - JET). Ruskin states that such lines "produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the 'Pathetic Fallacy'" (2000:485). Instead of bringing nature closer to us with greater clarity, the addition of the human adjectives "cruel" and "crawling" interferes with natural perception. What is needed, is more distance from nature so that it could come into its own as an other -- and modernist nature poetry provides this according to Langbaum (1970:104).

We have seen that modernist poetry does not break entirely with the pathetic fallacy: for example, Cummings writes of spring as a *hand*, and Eliot writes of a *cruel* April (see Chapter One). To be sure, in their individual ways both poets also move

away from the pathetic fallacy in order to provide clearer expression of nature's sheer otherness. A better *example* of what Langbaum has in mind is found in Marianne Moore's poem about a jellyfish -- from her volume *O To Be A Dragon* with its orientalist and Chinese considerations of the powerful heavenliness of (even humble) earthy creatures such as the silk worm (1994:177) -- which reads:

The Jelly-Fish

Visible, invisible,
 a fluctuating charm
 an amber-tinctured amethyst
 inhabits it, your arm
 approaches and it opens
 and it closes; you had meant
 to catch it and it quivers;
 you abandon your intent.

(Moore, 1994:180)

A mixture of nursery rhyme qualities and an adult modernist style, this poem with its subtle typography that indicates the fluctuating movement of the jellyfish, relies on and suggests a vital modernist natural paradox. It is not through embracing or capturing nature's other-ly creatures that one may grasp the essence of their (charming, also "magical") existence, but through letting go and maintaining just the right (also intellectual or contemplative) distance from them, that their essence surfaces. A similar procedure of letting the grasshopper go through language is found in Cummings' grasshopper poem, as has been indicated (Chapter Two). And some of Wallace Stevens' poems, such as his study of two pears that are themselves (1955:196) and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (1950) can be read as poetic manifestos of a modernist ecological phenomenology. Stevens asserts that the poet should ignore the hymns that fall from the wind and rather pay attention to the hotel nearby (1955:471). Such poems act as proposals of (what Stevens also terms) a modernist "new knowledge of reality" (1955:534), in line with Langbaum's observation that distance from nature, instead of subjective projection onto it, allows greater clarity and closeness to nature.

This modernist development may be contrasted with Romantic subjective projection onto nature as found (for example) in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" (1819). That wind is addressed as a person (apostrophe) -- the speaker pleads with the wind to make him or her its lyre (Shelley, 1984:49) -- and is described with the aid of human qualities such as its supposed impetuous temperament (pathetic

fallacy) (Shelley, 1984:49). Langbaum (therefore) rightly registers that in modernist poetry, Romanticism is at once extended and countered by a paradox:

[According to Ruskin], poetry of the first order retains the 'plain and leafy fact' of the primrose, 'whatever and how many soever the associations and passions may be that crowd around it.' Nor only does Ruskin anticipate Eliot's attack on the 'dissociation of sensibility' from thought, but he sets forth the program of the best twentieth-century nature poetry, which defines itself by opposing, or seeming to oppose, the pathetic fallacy (one cannot perhaps get around it), and thus extending the range of nineteenth-century projectiveness. For to feel in nature an unalterably alien, even an unfeeling, existence is to carry empathy several steps farther than did the nineteenth-century poets who felt in nature a life different from but compatible with ours (1970:104).

Paradoxically, then, distance from nature's others brings one closer to their otherness, and hence closer to natural actuality (see also Webster, 2000:109). Given that Langbaum does not consider examples from the mainstream modernist poetry of Eliot and Pound, one is inclined to wonder whether the same could be said of their poetic ecologies. Do these poems, and Eliot's early discourse, maintain the same delicate balance between (intellectual) distance while also displaying a renewed appreciation of an organic community in which nature's others are to be credited with an equal existence of their own? The mainstream modernist ecological ambivalence would suggest that the answer will be a mixture of no and yes. And so it is: for in one of its ecological dimensions, Eliot's earlier (and often more salient) discourse indeed envisages a strong connectivity between poetry and an organic whole. But in another equally important dimension of this discourse, Eliot moves away sharply from an organic imperative into an inorganic, remote, and isolated modern imperative. An illustrative example is found in his well-known and much-discussed early essay entitled "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919).

From an ecosemiotic perspective it becomes clear that this essay stretches itself across two extremities or polarities: one quite organic and ecological, and the other quite *inorganic* and to some extent, contra-ecological. A brief close reading of passages from the essay will demonstrate this, as well as a concurrent recognition that possibly, mainstream modernist discourse stretched the distance between observer and observed nature just too far on occasion, so that a disjunction instead of a wholeness was achieved, and so that modernist signs tended to collapse into themselves as their own objects, or their own "outside reality" or nature. That is, whereas the other-ly "magic" of the jellyfish shimmers through in Moore's poem because she advocates and sustains just the right measure of contemplative distance from it, an extreme

stretching of this very distance between objective sign and nature could also lead to renewed interference and difficulty as the sign seems to lose contact with the outside, natural world. An “objective fallacy” thus comes into view.

In this essay Eliot expounds his “Impersonal theory” of poetry (1980:40). He draws a careful distinction between two sets of relations: one is the relations between a new *poem* and poetry on the whole, and the other is the relation between the new *poet* and his or her poem (1980:40). *Poetry* should be viewed by the new or individual poet as “a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written” (Eliot, 1980:40). Such a statement carries the values of an organic community -- of “living” and hence organic poems, or poems that tend to integrate themselves with a greater, “living” whole in which the past and the present inform one another. The “other authors” form a distinct part of this organic whole, according to Eliot (1980:40), so that one may speak of Eliot’s acute awareness for the need of an organic community (of poetry). In this sense, Eliot still envisages something of an organic completeness into which one may enter via poetry.

As mainstream modernist discourse is bound to do, the essay then swiftly switches to an inorganic analogy: this motion is itself typical of mainstream modernist objectification, since it puts a sharp, oppositional, logical turn on the page. The relation of the poet to his poem is compared with an inorganic chemical transformation inside a closed chamber. Some implications of this analogy or extended conceit are quite thought-provoking and even slightly disturbing. Perhaps Eliot, under the sway of an inorganic “scientism” that was prevalent among modernist poets⁵⁴, was a little deliberate in thus “modernizing” the ancient notion of an organic whole of poetry and community. Perhaps he felt -- to speculate for an instant -- that a rather “woolly” conception of an organic community had to be balanced with a much

⁵⁴ Additional references to the poet-as-scientist are scattered throughout modernist writings, including Cummings’ notion in a letter to his father that art is the greatest science of all (Cohen, 1987:17), William Carlos Williams’ analogy of Marianne Moore’s mode of composition with scientific methods that belong in the laboratory (in Homberger, 1976:158), Pound’s insistence that poets should be found in the laboratory and not in the churchyard (in Albright, 1997:8), and more. These references mark the scientific drive that underpinned the composition of modernist poetry: an attempt, and commitment, to come to terms with reality with greater clarity, through poetry. Contracted methods of composition in modernist poetry are examples of how this drive found its way into the very textures of modernism. For in-depth treatment of modernist poetic notions of essential semiotic “particles” and “waves” (or poememes), see Daniel Albright’s *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism* (1997). For a study of the shared principles between modernist letters (and fiction in particular) and scientific developments at that time, see Thomas Vargish & Delo Mook, *Inside Modernism: Relativity Theory, Cubism, and Narrative* (1999).

sharper inorganic image, so that a greater scientific "exactness" or even positivity could be achieved. Eliot's assertion of his "Impersonal theory" (of the impersonal -- and perhaps also universal or positivist -- poet), that it is through "depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science" (1980:40), confirms this speculation to some extent.

An ecological perspective may find this exactness and positivity a little disconcerting. Eliot's analogy, summarized, is that the poet or his mind is equal to a "bit of finely filiated platinum" (1980:40). Note that this suggests a purity and density of mind, still remotely reminiscent of "wholeness" or fusion. It also has a slightly alchemical implication. At the same time, it reduces the living mind and personality of the poet quite steeply: to a small, delineated, metallic object.

The transformation continues, in an increasingly inorganic, "exact", and objectified or even reified direction, at some distance from the notion of an organic whole. Emotions and feelings are equated to two gases inside the closed chamber in which the experiment unfolds: oxygen and sulphur dioxide (one life-giving and the other toxic). Through the presence of the poet's mind -- the bit of platinum which acts as a catalyst -- the gases combine to form sulphuric acid: the product or poem. Sulphuric acid is a corrosive, biting liquid often used in the industrial world. A more inorganic and modern comparison between chemistry and poetry could hardly be imagined. The entire image indeed carries a sense of complete closure and isolation, and of an inorganic chemical transformation devoid of a personal dimension or an organic conception.

"[N]umberless feelings, phrases, images" float in the poet's mind, and these are the "particles which can unite to form a new compound", or a new poetic precipitate such as sulphuric acid. And to extend the "scientific" analogy, Eliot adds that it is "the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts" (Eliot, 1980:41). Poetic "particles" such as feelings, should be as dense as possible. This advocates an objectification of poetry: in the isolation of a closed chamber, the poet's mind as a metallic object catalyses dense poetic particles to combine into an inorganic, corrosive, and industrial chemical compound.

Ecology tends to focus on organic realms, and an organic view of culture is closer to ecology than an isolated inorganic view. As will be shown in a subsequent

section, Eliot's inorganic view with its resultant objective and impersonal isolation and its incisive and stalling, even biting precision, finds its way into his immediate view of the individual on another important occasion, when he cites from F.H. Bradley's philosophy in his notes on *The Waste Land*. Furthermore, the early essays such as "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) continue to distribute themselves across the imperative of an organic wholeness and the imperative for isolation, dislocation, and difficulty in poetry (1980:65).

The "emotion of art is impersonal" as Eliot (1980:44) states towards the conclusion of "Tradition and the Individual Talent". My brief close reading of his inorganic imagery shows that Eliot had in mind an exactness and remoteness within the framework of an inorganic, poetic "science" that would carry poetry into a universal, impersonal, and positivist dimension. This view is central to Eliot's mainstream modernist outlook. Via the objective (or "impersonal" or "intellectual") correlative, it finds its way into the core of Eliot's salient/early poetic practice up to (more or less) 1922: emotion, as in the somewhat elaborate inorganic analogy just analysed, should be controlled by poetic "objects", presumably within the impersonal mind of the poet. Prufrock's attempts to control an interrelated universe by means of objectivity is a feature of Eliot's early poetry in general.

In *The Waste Land* such poetic objects or fragments of language are arranged with the same indefinite tension between organic, "living" wholeness, and signs that collapse into "inorganic" textual objects that corrode or bite into cultural organicism. If poetry had traditionally been involved in a sense of human-nature community, giving voice to nature's others in various manners along with a sense of active belonging in the natural realm, then Eliot's inorganic analogy takes the distance between an objectified sign and an organic potential very far. In Moore's "A Jelly-Fish" (cited earlier) a more mature recognition that leads to a greater understanding of the creature's moving essence overcomes the ambivalent tension between a child-like appreciation of the "magic" or charm of the jellyfish and the immature wish to capture or grab this in order to comprehend or grasp its essence. This more mature recognition involves an acknowledgement of the limits of the sign: it cannot be employed to "grasp" or devour the essence of the jellyfish. It involves a maintenance of such distance that it views the creature as free to continue its motions with a full acceptance of its otherly essence. The issue arises -- also with a view to modernist

writing -- whether this kind of distance could not be stretched into oblivion, and into a new stasis as well as a too comprehensive "devouring" of natural essence. Such inclusivity combined with such distance will remain exclusive of nature to an extreme degree -- and Eliot's early poetry and prose at least approach and at most entrench this condition of hyper-inclusive and distant exclusivity.

It should not be overlooked that the science of ecology also entails a level of precision, culturally prefigured in poetry by Cummings. A humility of admitting that it is not final or positivist further qualifies this field of study. The view is, rather, that ecology can achieve valid, useful, and precise approximations of the living ecosystem. Objectivity that leads to closure and an extreme form of autonomy is alien to an ecological awareness of the flexibility and dynamism of nature's stable and integrating boundaries. To the ecosemiotician, Eliot's inorganic analogy seems at odds with his awareness of poetry as a living whole. Sulphur dioxide is involved in the phenomenon of "acid rain" which can have negative consequences for aquatic life, even far away from the industrial sources of the gas (Begon *et al.*, 1996:81). On the literary plane, perhaps Eliot's inorganic analogies may have had similar corrosive effects in terms of an ecology of the sign: as we have seen, New Critics had a substantial negative impact on Cummings' poetry, based on their misapprehension of his lack of ambivalence and his more straightforward and affirmative rediscovery of ecology.

In any event, Eliot's poems (for the most part) cannot be interpreted to the extent of their achievement of a satisfying organic whole: instead, objectivity and an "inorganic" method of impersonal composition interfere, and at best one can make a "binary" interpretation of Eliot's salient works, with one eye constantly on wholeness and the other constantly on a complete disparity of poetic object-fragments set in various degrees of tension. Part of this intrinsic ecological ambivalence in these works, however, remains that in its emphasis on the absence, difficulty, or impossibility of an organic whole, it ultimately makes a compelling and vital ecological point in modern time.

Important prose works such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" perpetuate the ecological ambivalence of mainstream modernist poetry. In his completely modernist manner, Cummings is more traditional in organic terms than this analogy would suggest: his modernism co-habits excellently with ecological

wholes. Perhaps this provides an additional reason for early modernist critical ambivalence about his poetry: Cummings' poetry was not organically ambivalent enough. Today, in a world facing an ecological crisis that has resulted from enormous ignorance towards and exploitative interference with the biosphere -- as Eliot (1980:290) and Cummings (Friedman, 1997:18) foresaw -- it should be said that Cummings' refreshing organic stability and ecological dynamics have become even more worthy of attention. And the ecological ambivalence of mainstream modernist discourse, as we begin to see here in some detail, reciprocally informs the uniqueness and foresight of Cummings' poetic ecology.

2.3. Song of the hermit thrush (1922)

Incidentally, both Cummings and Eliot were amateur ornithologists as I have indicated, and Pound showed at least some interest in the study of birds as his letters to Cummings about the behaviour and character of the American blue jay testify (Ahearn, 1999:282-287). Eliot, with his clear inclinations towards separation and closure as we have furthermore seen in the preceding sections, perhaps tellingly chose the *hermit thrush* for inclusion in *The Waste Land*. Moreover, this bird and its song appear towards the climactic conclusion of the poem within the section entitled "What the Thunder Said".

His notes to the poem cite from Frank M. Chapman's award-winning 1906 *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*, and Eliot notes that he heard the bird in Quebec Province (Canada) (1982:72). This species is "most at home in secluded woodland and thickety retreats" (Eliot, 1982:72) according to this Chapman citation. Furthermore, as if to stress the shyness and wariness of this bird, its "notes are not remarkable for variety or volume, but in purity and sweetness of tone and exquisite modulation they are unequalled" (Eliot, 1982:73). Eliot adds his own observation: "its 'water-dripping song' is justly celebrated" (1982:73). In short, it is clear that Eliot paid attention to this bird in the natural realm, and that he identified with it as a reclusive and understated maker of perfect or unequalled songs.

When we now turn to the bird's appearance in the poem, we need to be cautious. The same levels of fairly warm identification with the bird that the notes indicate are not necessarily to be found in the more impersonal realms of the poem itself. For a start, one has to consider the textual context of the "water-dripping song"

(henceforth: water-dripping song without inverted commas) in the poem: all kinds of bird sounds spice the poem on the whole, along with a bird legend from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and along with a blistering landscape of severe drought. The incantation of the water-dripping song starts in the previous stanza and runs right up to the onomatopoeic song itself, the line reading "Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop":

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains
 Which are mountains of rock without water
 If there were water we should stop and drink
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
 If there were only water amongst the rock
 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
 There is not even silence in the mountains
 But dry sterile thunder without rain
 There is not even solitude in the mountains
 But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
 From doors of mudcracked houses
If there were water

And no rock
 If there were rock
 And also water
 And water
 A spring
 A pool among the rock
 If there were the sound of water only
 Not the cicada
 And dry grass singing
 But sound of water over a rock
 Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
 But there is no water

(Eliot, 1982:64-65)

From here, the poem moves on to the Emmaus passage and the possibility of a third that walks always beside one. I mention this out of context, because it is difficult to link the water-dripping song with what follows it, and the consequence as in the most part of the poem is a loss of a sense of stable interpretative sequence. This Emmaus passage that follows could be read in sequence as an intensification of a hallucinatory mirage that is already suggested by the absence of the sound of water and indeed the unlikelihood of the water-dripping song within its context of a barren landscape (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:178). It could also be read as a lament for -- or a precursor towards -- a third, unifying dimension or voice.

The stanzas cited above portray the extent to which the landscape has turned to a waste land. From an intense desire for water itself, the passage progressively lapses into increasing desperation: "If there were the *sound* of water only" -- that is, if only language or bird song could at least intimate the *possibility* of water. And then the hermit thrush sings its water-dripping song, but in the mixed and impossible (or only linguistically possible) context of a desert with pine trees. In terms of the poem as a whole, it is hence of little use to think of this landscape as a given or implied place. The poem strikes deeper, into a kind of barren soul-scape or mind-scape. This is made clear by the absence of referential clues about the landscape, a shifting focus on and deliberately unlikely or purely semiotic mixture of various landscapes, and the absence of a sequence that would have increasingly built a stable or consistent picture of the nature of this landscape within the mind's eye. In fact, one of the few equivalent aspects of these various landscapes or mind-scapes (as they fade from and return to the passages of the text) is their persistent barrenness in many cases. The need for water is a spiritual need here: it is the need for the transcendence of opposites such as aridity and moisture, through a significant integrity (or "organic whole") of those opposites. At bottom, it is therefore also an ecological need, haunted in these passages and in the water-dripping song by its intense absence.

Besides the overall and barren "landscape" in which the hermit thrush is therefore "situated", its sounds form part of a motif of bird sounds at various intervals throughout the poem. For instance, a cock crows "Co co rico co co rico" on the roof-tree of a chapel (1982:66), and more obscure bird sounds such as "Twit twit twit/Jug jug jug jug jug" as well as "Tereu" (reminiscent of some sadder bird sounds) occur (1982:59). The "jug jug" sound and the "Tereu" sound are involved in a small complex or mixture of allusion, past legend, and even a faint reminder of school punishment in which the bird sounds "jug jug" seem to be reminiscent of the word "tug" ("to dirty ears" (Eliot, 1982:54)). Moreover, the "jug" sound is related to a nightingale that "[f]illed the desert with inviolable voice" (1982:54) -- further underlining the notion of a mind-scape rather than an actual landscape. We do not expect to hear a nightingale in a desert, but in shrub or woodland.

"A Game of Chess" (second section of *The Waste Land*) sets out with a description of Cleopatra in her richly decorated barge on the river Nile, then melts into an affluent and vain modern woman, presumably in a flat somewhere, and these

molten images melt further into an image of Philomela in the legend from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though the window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced ; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, the world pursues,
'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls

(Eliot, 1982:54)

The Ovid legend is a bird story: moving through increasing cycles of revenge and violence, King Tereus, Queen Procne, and her sister Philomela are eventually transformed into birds: an eagle, a swallow, and a nightingale (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:136). The sound "Tereu" melts into the name of the king, Tereus. The "jug jug" (nightingale) sounds fuse into the legend of Philomela. Increasingly, the reader is forced to recognize that these bird sounds -- at first glance quite onomatopoeic and therefore related to nature on an interlevel basis -- are no more than textual objects or a convention of arbitrary and self-reflexive signs. There is nothing *in* the words "Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop" (especially in its visual form) that would directly suggest natural presences or the presence of the hermit thrush. When spoken out loud (according to convention, of course) such proximity with actual nature becomes more likely. As pure "onomatopoeic contrivances to stimulate pure noise" or "pure significance" in the words of Brooker and Bentley (1990:136), these signs can fulfil their onomatopoeic role and briefly establish an interlevel relationship between themselves and natural actualities such as the water-dripping song of the hermit thrush.

However, as soon as they are meant to represent something that birds have *said*, the divide between arbitrary human language and natural creatures is re-installed (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:189). And this divide, it has to be added, is further increased by the various "unreal" contexts that the bird sounds "occupy". Again, it seems that the tendency to objectify signs into pure text overrides more referential and orienting capacities of the sign, even in these passages which may have seemed to be of a more direct interlevel poetic and ecological nature. Or: an ecological ambivalence in *The Waste Land* includes the bird sounds: on the one hand, these sounds evoke an interlevel connectivity between the sign and nature, even if only

momentarily. On still another level, they equally portray the arbitrariness and self-reflexive closure of human language. They float as semiotic objects in a relative void of context, or the absence of transcendence (also ecological transcendence), or, possibly, an absence of transcendence that remains suggestive of transcendence.

The suggestive ambivalence *within* the (im)possible world that the poem creates, also takes its toll on the reader who is situated *outside* of it. Such a reader now has to face the consequences of a modern language that she or he shares with the poet, and from which there is no satisfying escape into a non-linguistic natural actuality. The contemplative, objective, or intellectual distance between the poetic sign and the ecosystem is stretched to the point where it snaps, and signs collide into themselves as their own referents or objects. The effect is almost entirely other-ly: human language turns into an alien, other-ly medium that cannot mediate the integrity of relationships that make life on earth possible, such as a relationship between the hermit thrush and human nature. Indeed, such signs are as difficult and dis-locating in their effect as Eliot wished signs to be (1980:65).

It might be admirable to be confronted with an entrapment of one's own language and thought to this extent, since it stimulates the potentials of a renewed discovery of the need for transcendence and a unity beyond opposite realms. But then it would be equally admirable to see how such potentials may function in modern time, and Cummings' poetry offers this alternative to mainstream modernist discourse. Thrushes are still "selves" that belong in a natural community with ourselves in Cummings' poetry, not mere signs (as we have seen), and modern human language as well as modernist poetry may still open themselves up with a revitalizing directness into the otherness (and selfness) of natural continuation. The ambivalence at the core of mainstream modernist poetry, a modern ambivalence about nature that has continued if not increased substantially to this day, should not exclude a more directly ecological poetry such as Cummings' from the realms of "inorganic" modern criticism.

Chapter Four of the thesis offers a discussion of Cummings' hummingbird poem, the poem "birds(" in which these creatures invent air as much as air invents them, and a poem about the American wood thrush. The advanced iconic and osmotic elements of Cummings' form of modernist poetry, in contrapuntal contrast to the objectified isolation (one dimension) of Eliot's early works, invigorates a sense of

natural identity even in the modernist era. A wholeness of the osmotic mandala or magic icon “i/ never” (the hummingbird poem) now seems to be a more whole and also (to some extent at least) more wholesome result than an exclusive and collapsed human objectivity. Reciprocally, the telling and persistently ambivalent absence of such wholeness in Eliot’s bird passages examined here informs Cummings’ telling presence of wholeness: the two poetries indeed complement one another in this respect, and to read one without the other would be an impoverishment. The major minor categorization always posed this threat, of reading an impoverished, more objectified, positivist, and somewhat totalitarian modernism without the awareness of its profound ecological possibilities as embodied most positively and approximately (read also: with open-endedness) in the case of Cummings. In short, Cummings is as invaluable to modernist ecology as Eliot may be.

2.4. The male mind-scape (1922, 1925)

“The Hollow Men” (1925) is such an interesting poem because it offers an intermediary form between Eliot’s earlier, more intensely fragmented works such as *The Waste Land*, and his later more reconciliatory works such as “Ash-Wednesday”, “Journey of the Magi”, and the *Four Quartets*. In terms of its motifs and levels of despair, “The Hollow Men” is an extension of *The Waste Land*. And in terms of its more rhythmic, incantating, and cyclical repetition of prosodic and syntactical equivalences, it anticipates the later poems.

This poem is informative for an additional reason: it continues the male mind-scapes that are found in *The Waste Land*, and it makes some of the aspects of these mind-scapes (represented as landscapes) clearer, particularly in terms of the maleness of these mind-scapes. From an ecological viewpoint, maleness and femaleness are of incisive importance in human and natural existence, for evident reasons such as procreation and spiritual fulfilment. In what follows, I shall stick to this rudimentary observation in reading “The Hollow Men” and *The Waste Land* on the basis of their barren landscapes or male mind-scapes. I do not wish to pretend that this reading is conclusive: it merely highlights an interesting possibility from a particular angle informed by ecological considerations of the male and female opposites in existence and experience. Consider, for instance, the following extract:

This is the dead land
 This is the cactus land
 Here the stone images
 Are raised, here they receive
 The supplication of a dead man's hand
 Under the twinkle of a fading star.

It is like this
 In death's other kingdom
 Waking alone
 At the hour when we are
 Trembling with tenderness
 Lips that would kiss
 Form prayers to broken stone.

(Eliot, 1982:78-79)

The "dead man" that supplicates the stone images could be interpreted as one of the "hollow men" of this poem. These men, and that man, are the "stuffed men/ Leaning together/ Headpiece filled with straw" (Eliot, 1982:77). They know no (spiritual or transcendent) fulfilment: they do not experience love. Their voices are hollow with the absence of love: they "whisper together" and their voices are "quiet and meaningless/ As wind in dry grass/ Or rat's feet over broken glass/ In our dry cellar" (Eliot, 1982:77). In particular, these men and that man cannot transcend opposites into a third dimension of active stillness and peace: their empty heads are filled with an opaque pointlessness and drought: straw. Their drought and aridity are intellectual in the full sense of the word. The "dry cellar" could therefore also be read as the male mind in modern time, parallel with the decayed houses of culture and the dry house-brain of "Gerontion" (Eliot, 1982:33; Brooker, 1994:89).

The stone images, the broken stone, and the arid, rocky waste land could be read with some justification as a male intellectual landscape, or a male mind-scape. The telling absence of moisture or water in these mind-scapes could therefore also be read as the missing element of a female awareness, also in terms of earth and ecology. And in "The Hollow Men", this mind-scape can certainly also be read on the level of sensuality, as intense male sexual frustration. What has gone wrong in this landscape, this waste land, this male mind-scape? "The Hollow Men" seems to provide a slightly more clear answer to this question:

*Here we go round the prickly pear
 Prickly pear prickly pear
 Here we go round the prickly pear
 At five o' clock in the morning.*

(Eliot, 1982:79)

This image borders on male (arid, dry, prickly) mental madness. It mixes a nursery rhyme quality with an intense and mature lack of moisture and thorny difficulty. In the darkness of an early morning, child-likeness and maturity mix in a frightening manner. Going “round” implies wholeness, a dance towards a centre. At the centre of this particular dance is something that would not allow an entrance into the centre: a prickly pear. Although juicy inside, it defends its moisture with a tough and thorny outside. And five o’clock in the morning is a strange time for such a dance. Again, we are confronted with an image that draws attention to itself as a semiotic object, and then traps attention within itself as no more than a semiotic object, or as that which disallows a referential exit that would transcend the opposites of objectified/reified language and natural actuality.

However, not only sensuality and sexuality have gone awry in the male mind-scape. The issue is much more intricate and comprehensive. A certain absence, shadow, or “evil” interferes with transcendent connectivity or love:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow

Life is very long

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is the
Life is
For Thine is the

*This is the way the world ends
 This is the way the world ends
 This is the way the world ends
 Not with a bang but a whimper.*

(Eliot, 1982:80)

The capitalized "Shadow" can be read as various phenomena: the evil of a Kingdom, the logical absence of transcendence, a female aspect of existence, and so on. Ultimately, it returns to itself as an obscure, dense, objectified sign. And that is what has gone wrong: men are trapped in their language and thought. The aridity of the male-mindscape and its terrific isolation and depression are due to a reified or objectified intellect and language. Fluidity is as impossible as transcendence and significant ecology. Deeds are severed from their potency, and the world ends in anti-climax. Emotion and response are held apart, just as opposites remain in tension within the male mind-scape.

A certain "red rock" in *The Waste Land* confirms that the landscape is barren due to male intellectual distance from transcendent potentials and potencies. In short, men are in trouble in the modern era. Their narrow, modern view of an objective reality out there backlashes and turns them into narrow, modern objects that remain secondary to the potentials of their own existence:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief.
 And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
 There is shadow under this red rock,
 (Come under the shadow of this red rock),
 And I will show you something different from either
 Your shadow at morning striding behind you
 Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
 I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

(Eliot, 1982:52)

A "heap of broken images" is a semiotic objectification of some substance as well as some impossibility. It implies, perhaps, that (semiotic) images are "things" that can break. It further implies, as we have seen throughout Eliot's discourse, that signs can be viewed and employed as textual "objects" or "particles" (1980:41). Nothing can grow from such broken poetic object-fragments -- and this image of broken images is, of course, itself an example of such object-fragments. Metaphors are taken too literally in the modern era: they are viewed as their own semiotic

objects. The mind-scape depicted above is desperate to reject such a literal (also non-transcendent/objective) view of language while it continues to make use of this rejected semiotic “material” to drive its message to the reader. This ecological ambivalence permeates the modern male mind-scape dominated by intellectualism and objectivity, and causes a disruption that cancels the potential of transcendent meaning from the outset. Or: the beginning or “root” of mainstream modernist poetry is opaque, not transparent, not osmotic, and it hence causes readerly alienation from the outset. The consequence is doom in a negative sense and not the adventurous more “female” or yin doom that Cummings employs (discussed in Chapter Four). As the passage examined here reveals, the consequences as well as the starting point are - for we are indeed dealing with an opaque chicken-and-egg situation -- that in the objective, intellectual, or modern view, dust is merely dust, and the “dead tree gives no shelter”.

Since biblical allusions are contained in this mind-scape passage (Ezekiel 2: 1 - 3; Ezekiel 37: 3 - 4; Ecclesiastes 12) it is not improbable that the “dead tree” could also refer to a non-transcendent cross, or a cross that has turned into a mere modern object or commodity⁵⁵. The “red rock” has undeniable Freudian or sexual connotations; it is phallic. And its shadow, perhaps indicative of a more “female” potential, deceives one. (A shadow in such an abundantly heliocentric mind-scape increases in significance, since it offers at least some potential relief from the scorching sun that insistently “beats” on the heap of broken images.) It deceives one, since it is the place where the speaker shows the reader or an implied “you”, the deceit of his or her own shadow. It is the place where we recognize that in modern existence, death (the shadow, the integration) has no significance: it amounts to “fear in a handful of dust”, one of the most important and negatively potent images of the poem.

⁵⁵ As a counterpart, “three trees on a low sky” (Eliot, 1982:97) are symbolical of the crucifixion in Eliot’s later “Journey of the Magi” (1927). And those trees unify living nature and transcendent belief. Indeed, as much as “Journey of the Magi” marks a return to narrative sequence (stanza 1 in particular), symbolism (stanza 2 in particular), and religious paradoxes such as cultural and actual death leading to spiritual rebirth (stanza 3 especially), it also marks a return, throughout the poem, to concreteness, referentiality, and natural context. In this respect, the symbolical old white horse that gallops into a meadow (Eliot, 1982:97) (stanza 2) should prove to be an interesting counterpoint to the earlier, lonely cab horse that steams and stamps before the lighting of the lamps (Eliot, 1982:22) in the “Preludes” (1917). The latter horse could mark a turn away from symbolism toward modernist disjunction and difficulty.

A hand should (of course) return to dust, from which it has been created in the first place. And such return should be a spiritual rebirth, in Christianity as much as in pagan European religion (two interwoven motifs in the mythical ground of *The Waste Land*). A living hand that holds dust, with the dust of flesh and the dust of matter so close to one another, should be symbolical of such transcendence, and indeed also of an ecology of being that unites humans and nature beyond the opposite conceptions of the human mind. But since the dust has turned into no more than (objective) dust in a landscape and mind-scape dominated by a male conception of fragmented objects, holding it in life is fearful. It now serves as a warning of the dire consequences of modern objectivity and the lack of spirituality: death will be meaningless, as Eliot further profoundly indicates in the short fourth section of the poem, "Death by Water".

Eliot alludes to Andrew Marvell with the lines in "The Fire Sermon" (section III of the poem): "But at my back in a cold blast I hear/ The rattle of bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear" (Eliot, 1982:58). The original passage referred to, reads:

But at my back I alwaies hear
Time's winged Chariot hurrying near:
And yonder all before us lie
Desarts of vast eternity. (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:132)

In modern objective and impersonal time, time's chariot has caught up with humans, since the poem portrays the reality that we are already *within* those distant and stifling "desarts" or waste lands of an objective view dominated by a narrow maleness on every level of experience and existence. We see, then, that Eliot's ambivalence regarding an objectified and contra-whole or contra-ecological era, runs deep. Opposites can be overturned at any moment, but they cannot be transcended. On the one hand, this gives rise to significant new poetic potentials and actualities; on the other, it continues to go along with an absence of wholeness. The faceless women of *The Waste Land*, represented in terms of the objects that surround them, and represented most closely and disturbingly in terms of their hair, tie in well with the male mind-scape and its lack of transcendence. Automated "love" ("The Fire Sermon" (Eliot, 1982:60) -- women that turn into objects equally with men, or a woman that takes out tins and puts a record on the gramophone as she "smooths her hair with automatic hand" (Eliot, 1982:60) before and after automated, objectified

“love” -- all of this reveal that objective distance has rendered transcendence impossible, even on the most biological level.

It is for this reason among others that Cummings' celebration of sexuality and male-female transcendence into organic wholeness is rejuvenating and marks a return from the grave coils of Freudian guilt to child-like, complete innocence and natural appreciation. Less ecologically ambivalent than Eliot with his mainstream ecological dilemma of a sign that has to evoke and penetrate nature while remaining a distanced and difficult objective sign-as-sign, Cummings' poetry has uplifting and different (ecological) results for the reader.

2.5. Im-mediate experience, a jellyfish and a pair of ragged claws (1917 - 1922)

Eliot's doctoral thesis presents one with a more biological view “signified” by a jellyfish: a primitive creature of complete immersion. Other oceanic creatures and polyps are quite prevalent in the discourse of (especially the younger) Eliot (Albright, 1997:227). In human culture, our ever-increasing levels of more refined semiotic differentiation, although an advance in certain respects, also has the implication that we are carried further and further away from direct, immediate, or transcendent experience. Every added slice of semiotic difference with its powerful refinement of our abilities to formulate varied and complex insights and feelings, also adds another little bit of distance between ourselves and direct experience. To the jellyfish, however, with its total immersion in its surroundings (without such levels of semiotic differentiation), such directness of experience continues. This seems to be one of the points that Eliot stressed in his doctoral thesis. In Daniel Albright's words,

there is a strong undercurrent in Eliot's philosophy that suggests that my human cerebration, busy and minute and cogent as it may be, is derivative, second-hand, artificial: the jellyfish's touch is crude, but it is authentic. The jellyfish knows a world less detailed than mine, but more real (1997:226).

One could say that the jellyfish embodies that transcendence of experience beyond opposites such as self and other: what is other and what is self, or what is environment and what is being, are unified in the “experience” or existence of the jellyfish. It experiences no oppositional differentiation between its being and its aquatic “surroundings”. Its environment and its in-vironment are one: the creature is primordially whole.

To return for a moment to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917): in it another oceanic creature appears. The lines "I should have been a pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (Eliot, 1982:14) come to mind. Against the background of Eliot's primordially complete jellyfish of his doctoral thesis, this image takes on extra significance. Indeed we have an image of only half a creature: its centre, its body, is missing -- just as the faces of the various women in *The Waste Land* are also missing. This oceanic creature has solidified into two claws that should (somehow) continue to scuttle across the ocean's floor. It is an image of incisive and decisive isolation, and of the impossibility of a life that has been severed from its centre and yet desires to continue its living immersion in existence. When human voices wake us from this aquatic dream, as the conclusion of the poem states, we drown (Eliot, 1982:16). Signs are concomitant with the end of (direct) experience, and yet also (perhaps) the avenue to a final direct experience, of dying. Eliot continues this motif of drowning, of returning to the primordial in death, in various forms through the "Death by Water" section in *The Waste Land* to the post-conversion poems "Journey of the Magi" and the *Four Quartets* in which one's end is one's beginning: a cycle of death and spiritual rebirth.

However, the scuttling-claws image of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" evokes an indelible broken-ness of being, cut off from a whole centre in a double or inherently contradictory fashion. A double-ness of experience that cannot be transcended, and that can be conveyed only by means of "hardened" and severed objects -- also semiotic objects, once more -- such as this image of a ragged *pair* of claws prevail in Eliot's mainstream modernist ecology. When Eliot found the peace that passeth all understanding -- including a transcendence of logical, objective opposites -- he found it in Christianity. The salient poems suggest such transcendence but do not find it with the exception of perhaps one or two telling instances. And the scuttling-claws image remains an almost total metaphor -- it cannot be related to commonsensical ecological existence: it maintains a complicated degree of self-reflexive language that is difficult to bring in line with the integrity of physical being.

The word "immediate" underlies this ecological ambivalence or problematic. This word is worthy of reconsideration, in particular in the highly specific and complex philosophical context of Eliot's thought. The word is central to the philosophy of F.H. Bradley, which philosophy Eliot discusses in a thesis entitled

Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley. Bradley, as Jewel Spears Brooker writes, was an absolute idealist (1994:83). His philosophy questioned the “objectivity” of objective reality, left room for transcendence or the Absolute, and was written in a stripped, classicist form. Eliot was attracted to all these aspects, as his discourse and poetry testify.

Bradley further differentiated among three important forms of experience: immediate experience, rational or relational experience, and transcendent experience (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:39). These forms of experience together form an important ground of Eliot’s discourse, as Brooker (1994) as well as Brooker and Bentley (1990) demonstrate in detail. For the present purpose it is perhaps enough to point out that the second, relational kind of experience is that of the human mind, thought, and language. It consists of the myriad of relations that make up our grown-up perceptions of a world regulated by reason, the rise of objects, and a fragmentation of experience (Brooker and Bentley, 1990:39). The first kind of experience, with which we are familiar as children before we develop a mind of our own -- and which is submerged but not obliterated as rational experience takes over -- is immediate, and direct or whole. Besides our immediate experience as infants, we may experience glimpses of it in later life, and Eliot’s leap into faith also involves a leap into a condition in which immediate and relational experience unite into transcendent experience. On a purely formal basis -- and perhaps also in more religious terms -- consider that again a condition of unity splits into a dualism of separation to return to a more profound condition of unity, along a trajectory of three stages and states of being, much as in Cummings’ third voice.

Possibly, lines in *The Waste Land* such as the following refer to this kind of Absolute awareness: “my eyes failed, I was neither/ living nor dead, and I knew nothing,/ Looking into the heart of light, the silence” (Eliot, 1982:52). From this perspective, the later and central lines to the poem, “I can connect/ nothing with nothing” (Eliot, 1982:62) may not only mark a severe emptiness or sheer (logical) *absence* of significance, but also an ability to transcend the opposites of mind. These central lines therefore indicate a rock-bottom ambivalence that continues to hover between a significant absence and a greater completeness.

Indeed, Eliot’s discourse is spiced on telling occasions with the notion that unified, integrating experience borders on the frightening and that its impact on one’s

existence should not be underestimated. An example is his summarizing comment at the conclusion of the first Chapter of his thesis: if “anyone assert that immediate experience, at either the beginning or end of our journey, is annihilation and utter night, I cordially agree” (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:42). Transcendence goes along with horror and not only relief, then, and as we shall see at the conclusion of this Chapter in which the DA sequence of *The Waste Land* is read from an ecological viewpoint, it is important to keep this in mind.

The citation from Bradley in the notes to *The Waste Land* -- a citation which is not readily to be interpreted and placed -- refers to Bradley’s concept of immediate experience, as Brooker and Bentley helpfully point out (1990:193). To understand how the limits of thought and language are treated in this central mainstream modernist poem, it is important to understand this citation. Since it refers to immediate, direct, or whole experience of the Absolute, it points to a surpassing of the rational relational limit of our everyday modern mind with its relations. From within the latter kind of (relational) experience which dominates our day-to-day living, life looks anarchistic and borders on total disorder: things appear to be fragmented, disjointed, and disproportionate -- in short, unsettling and incomplete. This is the nightmare of history that modernists such as Eliot and James Joyce wanted to awaken from. The need to transcend this kind of experience is therefore tellingly underscored by the rational relational limit of thought and language: we remain aware of the limit. One is trapped within this limit and no matter how much one mills around along the various and ultimately fragmented and dualistic trajectories of its various relations (for instance between subject and object), existence remains unsettling and incomplete.

In grown-up, rational existence, immediate experience serves in its absent presence as a kind of conscience, subliminally suggesting that transcendence and wholeness is (still) possible. It prods one, so to speak, to make a leap into faith, or the irrational. Of course, relations of logical opposition form a bedrock of rational relational experience. One is trapped within the opposites of one’s relational thought. Here is the significance of the lines alluding to Dante at the concluding section of *The Waste Land*, “What the Thunder Said”: “*Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison*” (Eliot, 1982:67; my emphasis - JET). Within dominant rational relational experience there can be no escape from the dualities of mind: any (relational) *solution* always

already presupposes its *negation*. Such are the limitations of an encompassing and devastating logic from which escape does not come readily. In fact, such transcendence can only come through the peace that *passeth all understanding*, or “shantih” (Eliot, 1982:67; 1982:74), as the final line of *The Waste Land* indicates to the third degree: that is, the word “shantih” is repeated thrice. On these grounds a scrutiny of the Bradley citation on the nature of immediate experience (in the notes to the poem) is more than justified:

‘My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts and feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others that surround it. . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul’ (Eliot, 1982:74).

An important implication here is that immediate experience is indeed *immediate* or im-mediate: that which is *not* mediated (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:199), or that which is incommunicable in the final analysis, and which therefore adds an obstruction to a sense of community or wholeness. As soon as it is mediated, it falls into the general domain of language with its rational relations and its oppositional dualistic limits that entrap the directness of the experience. Also, as we see here, immediate experience is terribly private: ultimately, one cannot convey or communicate the transcendence of one’s innermost and totally unique being, or one’s soul. A quite severe contradiction therefore underpins the notion of immediate experience. The jellyfish which simply exists (without language or rational relations) does experience with utmost directness. By implication its very existence is transcendent. Humans, trapped within their culture, language, or thought can still make a leap of faith into immediate experience in a moment’s surrender, but this cannot be mediated through our advanced and self-reflexive but painfully non-transcendent modern language. The bottom contradiction here is that that which is meant to be totally open since it is completely whole and interpenetrates the realities of experience absolutely is also closed off. Pound’s un-splittable atom comes to mind again, but this time it takes on the gargantuan proportions of *all* experience. And despite the notion that immediate, transcendent experience includes all, it also excludes all upon a close reading of Bradley’s citation: “my experience falls within my own circle, a circle *closed on the outside*”, and every sphere (or individual soul) is “opaque to the others that surround it”. One cannot see into another soul, and communication itself disallows the mediation of direct experience from one soul to

another. Souls, here conceived with classicist precision, thus remind of the impenetrable solidity of gigantic snooker balls. Eventually, and more than paradoxically, Eliot and Bradley envisage immediate experience as that which leads to complete closure and stasis, even if it remains a closure and stasis of a cyclical or spherical nature. An implication is that if one were to transcend the limits of the rational mind into the transcendence of being-part of the all, it would go along with a condition of complete impenetrability and non-communication.

The ecological reader may find it disturbing that the barriers that divide existences could be conceived with this intense level of firm closure. To him or her, the directness of ecological being seems to be based on a far greater and more prevalent flexibility of boundaries and the concomitant dynamism and wholeness of natural being. These boundaries, like membranes, are the active zones that allow one to be one's very self and to remain intact as an autonomous being or individual, precisely because they equally allow one to actively participate in one's active surroundings. And this kind of (also innermost) being with its more co-operative and integrating actualities may not have been as atavistic and primordial -- and in this sense alien, serious, and unobtainable -- as the mainstream modernists appear to have believed. To some degree of contrast, this kind of being is actually what happens in biological existence every day. If we now add that such biological existence, this simple and complex "green grace" or gift of physical existence, goes hand in hand with a dream-like and a recurrent child-like and poetic awareness of one's natural place, one sees that the issue of transcendence is perhaps (and in this more limited sense) not so entirely austere and sealed off as Eliot's and Bradley's classicist conceptions hold them to be. A comic dynamism of continuing, open-ended nature continues to include and supersede such private and static individual tragedy.

Mainstream modernist philosophy therefore already maintains a deconstructionist perception that our sensuous senses delay any directness of experience. We are trapped in language, thought, and the six senses with infinite solipsism and irony, sealed off from outside realms and others by a semiotic and sensuously "interpretative" staggering of differentiation and deferral. Between us and the jellyfish lies an infinite and complicated waste land or mind-scape of semiotic differences, postponement, and absence. Bradley emphasizes in the citation that our senses are as much included in our opaque selves as are thought and feeling. Feeling,

senses, and thought collaborate to provide us only with a distorted and extremely limited, highly individualistic perception of existence and experience; and there is no escape from this, even in immediate experience. Christians may be inclined to say that even our senses (along with language and thought) are those of a fallen condition contaminated by and permeated by the evil of not experiencing and participating in spiritual reality. This may be true, but it should not lead to the notion that our senses seal us off from one another, and from nature. The senses are openings in the full sense of the word. They continue to open us up to the world outside, and they bring the outside world inside, also by virtue of their marvellous biological substance -- as in the case of Cummings' osmotic parenthesis or "lens" in the middle line of his hummingbird poem (see Chapter Four). These sensory perceptions are not merely a distortion of natural reality, but radically participate in it.

A view that entertains a closing of one's innermost self to the outside world, or to what the senses bring inside one, is a cultural prerogative that one can exercise and maintain only with great difficulty and complicating ecological consequences. Transcendence of whatever nature, should *include* and not deny biological existence. Bradley's Absolute should evidently include such existence, since it is meant to include all experience. Yet, as the citation in Eliot's notes reveals, it is trapped in a contradiction of total closure. A more open-ended transcendence as found in Cummings' poetic ecology makes more direct and immediate -- and less im-mediate -- ecosemiotic sense. In his case, the sign is a mediating ecological event, quite different from the more closing and static logical *logos* that Eliot in his Bradleian moods seems to have critiqued, employed, and cemented.

If one remains deliberately ignorant of nature within an opaque philosophical fortress, and if one consciously or ignorantly destroys nature with the "excuse" of total im-mediacy, something has gone wrong -- also in terms of spirituality and culture. Eliot was perhaps never more right than when he stated that a wrong relation to nature indicates a wrong relation to God, and that the consequence is an inevitable and negative societal doom (1980:290). After all, as Eliot's mainstream poems reveal on the basis of their mind-scapes, a deeper, more disturbing objectifying philosophy underpins the superficial progressive materialism of modern society. It views the boundaries between human individuals and other individuals of the ecosystem as impenetrable. Hence the landscape turns into a set of (semiotically deterministic)

objects, or a heap of broken images. Dust is no more than dust in this view. And the active actuality of the landscape or the ecosystem threatens finally to turn totally inaccessible, and devoid of (inter)active meaning.

2.6. Eliot's later, cyclical third voice (1927 - 1942)

After a readerly confrontation with one's own interpretative procedures and one's own struggling and oppositional mind in the mainstream poems, Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1935 - 1942) comes as wholesome relief. And to the Cummings reader, they come as poetry of uncanny familiarity and difference. However, it is not possible to do justice to an ecological reading of this remarkable collection of poems within the confines of this section. The *Quartets* fulfils a radical turn in Eliot's view and methods of composition, and it is closer to Cummings' oeuvre than the mainstream modernist poems. It consists of tranquil and careful expositions of the transcendence of opposites (Cummings' third voice), acceptance, and a return to humility (also in its most earthy sense). For instance, the Christian conclusion to a passage in "East Coker" (1940) reads:

Do not let me hear
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless. (Eliot, 1977:199)

These lines also embody an opening up into the nowness and directness of *humus* and earthy being, as stated with its emphasis on the timelessness of humility, and as other parts of the poem will confirm. (Incidentally, this passage is reminiscent of Cummings' preference of humble and youthful flexibility rather than rigid, "old" correctness.) The levels of acceptance in the *Quartets* -- acceptance of darkness, stars, animals, male and female love, rustiness and common life, locality or "home", and more -- are carried in a cyclical pattern of the transcendence of opposites into a third dimension. Opposites that are transcended include feeling versus thought⁵⁶, as well as culture versus nature. Various opposites that have occupied the early poems with such tension are finally resolved in acceptance: male versus female, the sign versus nature, and so on. And this pattern -- with the exception of emotion on some

⁵⁶ Brooker and Bentley (1990:39) mention that Eliot often referred to immediate experience as feeling, relational experience as thought, and transcendent experience as the unification of the two.

occasions -- positively permeates the *Quartets*. A passage from "Burnt Norton" (1935) reads:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance

(Eliot, 1977:191)

Some affinity between this passage and Cummings' poetry deserves mention. The passage involves the creation of a space beyond opposites reminiscent of Cummings' third voice. For instance, the still point from which all movement emanates can be "found" neither by moving from it nor by moving towards it (line 4): to get beyond opposites means freedom from demarcation and rational relations such as "away from" and "towards". And the passage argues that were it not for the still point there would be no dance -- thus intimating a condition beyond the opposites of motion versus immobility (lines 1, 5, and 6). In order to underscore this motion beyond opposites, the passage concludes by indicating that there is *only* the dance, only movement. Now, a stillness which is at once a total motion cannot be understood by the rational logic of the relational mind, and hence these procedures "foolishly" point to that which exists over and above semiotic categories of the intellect, from which the categories of mind emerge in the first place. The "still point" from which this continuing everything emanates is therefore elusive or intrinsic to all movements, and one has to move beyond objective categories to sense it. The line "There would be no dance, and there is only the dance" marks the sharp contradictory procedure adopted to point beyond opposites to an emptiness that is nonetheless full of positive significance (and more so than in the early poems with their searing, *more* logical absences). Of course, the notion of a gyre, a still point from which all movement proceeds can be found in various mythologies -- and it is also found in the idea system of Taoism as we have seen with a view to Cummings' poetry.

Eliot's "Burnt Norton" continues to stipulate that one reaches this still point when one finally supersedes everyday dualisms of mind and achieves freedom from desire and action -- here is another maturity at the end of the modernist tunnel, in

some contrast to the tragic, alienating maturity of the early poems. Enlightenment or acceptance is described as follows in this section of the *Quartets*: “inner freedom from the practical desire, / The release from action and suffering, release from the inner/ And outer compulsion, yet surrounded/ By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving [at once]” (Eliot, 1977:191). All of this sounds quite Zen Buddhist and Taoist. Other passages in the poem include additional references to Zen, such as the “lotos rose” (Eliot, 1977:192) with its accepting combination of East (lotos) and West (rose). “Burnt Norton” further relates this third voice of stillness to oriental sensibilities in particular:

The stillness, as a Chinese jar is still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence,
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
 And the end and the beginning were always there
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now. (Eliot, 1977:194)

The violin’s sound or song is simultaneous with its stillness: in his way, Eliot is here suggesting the “singing silence” that Cummings’ readers are familiar with, as we have seen in preceding Chapters. Opposites such as song and silence merge into the still point as much as they already, in the present moment, carry within them the silence of the still point that they emerge from in the first place. Indeed, it is an ecological still point, too, as Eliot’s “co-existence” above indicates and as expressed in the rest of the *Quartets* with its various passages centring on rustic life, animals, soil, and so on. Furthermore, Cummings’ accent on the nowness of now here finds its Eliotian equivalent in the line “And all is always now” (1977:194). And the following passage⁵⁷ from Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* seems to be at least reminiscent of the Eliot passages just cited, with its expression of a “position” beyond opposites, and a stillness from which all motion, and the now-dance of life, continue to emanate:

Create emptiness up to the highest!
 Guard stillness up to the most complete.
 Then all things may rise together.
 I see how they return.
 Things in all their multitude:
 each one returns to its root.
 Return to the root means stillness.

⁵⁷ Cummings cites this passage, section 16 of the text, at the conclusion of his *Eimi* – see Chapter Three of the thesis.

Stillness means return to fate.
 Return to fate means eternity.
 Cognition of eternity means clarity.
 If one does not recognize the eternal
 one falls into confusion and sin. (Lao Tzu, 1987:33; section 16)

A return to roots provides, in every sense of the phrase, an apt description of the *Quartets* as a whole. A return to the “still” root or gyre has been demonstrated. And this ties in with a return to rustic locality (as opposed to the impersonal universality of some earlier poems), an acceptance of the positivity of being and dying, and various other features of the *Quartets*. Moreover, Eliot balances this return to roots with a return to and acceptance of Christianity, as expressed for example in the following passage from “The Dry Salvages” (third poem of the *Quartets*, 1941):

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
 Here the impossible union
 Of spheres of existence is actual,
 Here the past and future
 Are conquered, and reconciled,
 Where action were otherwise movement
 Of that which is only moved
 And has in it no source of movement—
 Driven by daemonic, chthonic
 Powers. And right action is freedom
 From the past and future also.
 For most of us, this is the aim
 Never here to be realized;
 Who are only undefeated
 Because we have gone on trying;
 We, content at last
 If our temporal reversion nourish
 (Not too far from the yew-tree)
 The life of significant soil. (Eliot, 1982:213)

The passage relates Christ’s incarnation to a rediscovery of the significance of earthy being, and earthy reintegration in death -- the lack of which *The Waste Land* lamented and entrenched. Note that the still point is still suggested, in what seems to be a warning against demonic and chthonic (earthy/underworld) powers. The “life of significant soil” is of course an ecological thought, and a thought of humility (earth). Such humility is marked by the fact of continuation: the modesty to continue trying, despite failure. And for most of us the aim is never realized: besides wondering for whom it was realized (as the line seems to suggest), continuation itself is again confirmed as the way of humility, of which Christ’s Incarnation is the little understood and supreme historical event. As the poem later states or cites, the “way

up is the way down" (Eliot, 1977:210) -- and the concreteness of Christ's intervention in human and earthy affairs is envisaged also as of ecological significance in this poem, in line with Eliot's overall ecological concern throughout his poetic and critical career. The "fear in a handful of dust" of the waste land has been transcended.

In "Little Gidding" (the final poem in the sequence, 1942) exploration is the motif, and it formulates a full circle as follows:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And to know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always--
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of flames are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

(Eliot, 1977:222-223)

Under the simplistic, even humble or "common" surface of some of these deliberately understated phrases (with the exception of the final line which happens to be the final line of the poem as a whole) resides various examples of word-play, or of returning words to their original (also non-intellectual) meanings. In other words, dormant metaphors which we no longer experience as such although we use them are revitalized. Moreover, they are subtly revitalized into an earthy sub-stratum of "significant soil": we have in some of these lines the very roots of English words. The impossibly possible "unknown, remembered gate" evidently refers to Christ as the gate into eternity, but the word "remembered" plays a double and unifying role: like the word "religion", it implies a re-binding, a re-tying into wholeness and into a sense of belonging as a member of a larger body. Eliot's earlier *dismemberment* of poetic fragments, is here rejoined. And the lines "[w]hen the last of earth left to discover/ Is that which was the beginning" return the word "discover" to an original

meaning of uncovering the soil to be buried: this earthy death is a spiritual beginning and an affirmation of integrity and union. It embodies an earthy cycle of birth and death. Again, an ecological and transcendent condition of “complete simplicity” or unity is indicated. Note that the stillness is again present, this time compared to the interval between two waves.

As is evident from the lines cited above, the poem enjoys a Christian climax: a mixture of the Holy Ghost, England, love, comic relief that all shall be well (and is therefore already more well than one may have thought), Christ’s crown, and the unity of a male spiritual flame and a female and/ or Buddhist (lotos) rose. (The rose is of course also a much endowed symbol of poetry, love, and England: and if a flower has ever looked like a still burst of flame, a red rose comes to mind.)

But these are merely the metaphorical messages, the notions that are carried by the *poetry*. And the poetry itself is earthy and sensuous to some degree: its imagery contains a rich distribution of the elements and earth especially, as has been indicated on the basis of the roots of words such as “discover” and “remember”. The imagery also includes earthy aspects such as vegetation, fire, and overall it amounts to an evocation of sensuous and silently passionate mind-pictures such as the combining of flame tongues and rose petals. And the “always” or the still point -- eternity -- is found by following a bird (at one stage a thrush, at another a kingfisher) that has led the speaker and the reader from the beginning of the poem, and has quietly urged us back into the quick (essence) of “here, now, always” as indicated again in this passage. Cummings’ ecological and transcendent now-here-nowhere -- although stated slightly more secularly, with less clearly Christian overtones, and in a less philosophical and abstract manner -- resonates well with the still motion and quiet singing of Eliot’s final lengthy song.

By way of an additional example, when Eliot finally describes a unity of males and females as well as loam and sensibility, he reverts to the past in order also to describe a union of past and future within the modern present. And the effect of this is again a sense of slight remove from the events, especially when compared to Cummings’ more direct presentation of male and female love (as studied in Chapters Three and Four). A passage from “East Coker” reads:

The association of man and woman
 In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie--
 A dignified and commodious sacrament.
 Two and two, necessarye coniunction,
 Holding eche other by the hand or the arm
 Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire
 Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,
 Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
 Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
 Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
 Mirth of those long since under earth
 Nourishing the corn. Keeping time,
 Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
 As in their living in the living seasons
 The time of seasons and the constellations
 The time of milking and the time of harvest
 The time of coupling of man and woman
 And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
 Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

Dawn points, and another day
 Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind
 Wrinkles and slides. I am here
 Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning. (Eliot, 1977:197)

To be in one's beginning is to be at peace within one's locality, and this relationship between self and locality acts as an entrance into immeasurability -- that is the implication of the concluding lines of this section: one is here, there, and elsewhere simultaneously, because one is centred in one's beginning. One can therefore also accept one's end. Tied in circles of love, the beginning and the end are one. A rare acceptance of male and female "coniunction" -- expressed in deliberately older form to point to origins -- is here expressed fully and unambiguously in Eliot's poetry. "Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth" further intimate a unity of humans and earth. And clumsiness (not sophistication), as well as the striking and sensuous phrase "Dung and death", and the speaker fully accepts these as a part of natural existence and poetic language. There is little distinction between the coupling of humans and that of beasts: because there is a pervading sense of dancing and living "in the living seasons" -- no longer are a unity with and acceptance of seasonal cycles viewed as clichés to be ironically treated as in mainstream modernist discourse, although mainstream modernist discourse certainly also shows an awareness of natural cycles.

Living nature is part of living human nature. The emphatic and earthy phrase “[d]ung and death” sounds and seems primitive, and, as a phrase, not to the taste of sophisticated modern ambivalence and irony. Here, however, it finds itself in a context of complete acceptance of earthy being itself -- of one’s beginning. And a humble embrace of the merging of human feet and soil, as well as the wind and the ocean: consider that the dawn wind and the ocean are one to such an extent, that the ocean’s wrinkles and the wind’s wrinkles cannot be separated; indeed, a zone of between-ness, between elements. Such is the nature of the humble, truly perceiving eye that may look with awareness and tranquility into the third dimension beyond opposites or differences.

These lines seem to be the poetic equivalent of Eliot’s “green” statements in prose (published in 1939). “It may be observed”, Eliot wrote in an about-turn when viewed against the background of his inorganic imagery in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), “that the natural life and supernatural life have a conformity to each other which neither has with the mechanistic life” (1980:290). Eliot writes that “our notion of what is natural [has] become distorted” in modern, progressive time (1980:290), and continues:

We are being made aware that the organization of society on the principle of private profit, as well as public destruction, is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism, and to the exhaustion of natural resources, and that a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly. I need only mention, as an instance now very much before the public eye, the results of ‘soil-erosion’ - the exploitation of the earth, on a vast scale for two generations, for commercial profit: immediate benefits leading to dearth and desert (1980:290).

With a formulation such as this, Eliot’s poetry as a whole comes into its own. The absence of wholeness and integrity in *The Waste Land* (a poem of “dearth and desert”, indeed), as well as its presence in the *Four Quartets*. Of course, one may feel slightly let down by the later prose and poetry -- as some critics certainly have felt (Emig, 1995:239-241). The exciting fields of tensions and interpretative struggles of the early discourse are missing, and one may therefore experience the later discourse as a lapse into comfort and reasonability in which merely a dry, slightly philosophical and patronizing husk of Eliot’s compelling and harsh early voice has remained.

However, from his earliest philosophical, critical and poetic writings, it should now be clear that Eliot, despite all major appearances to the contrary, had an intense

ecological dimension in mind all along, whether expressed in difficulty or contradictory complication as in the early works, or in peace and with deliberate and paradoxical simplicity as in the later works. In the *Quartets*, Eliot returns to locality in every sense: to a real, concrete London with its “gloomy hills” and to Hampstead and Putney (Eliot, 1977:193). Instead of unreal cities and an impersonal approach to directness, presence is suggested on the basis of a significantly concrete locality: the speaker identifies with the present, “Now [...] in England”, and because of this “the timeless moment/ Is England and nowhere” (1977:215). Perhaps incidentally, these lines indicate the very now-here-nowhere that Cummings’ poetic ecology brings to his readers throughout the larger part of his oeuvre.

Tiresias, the figure of supposed union in *The Waste Land*, is actually a post-fertile hermaphrodite, an “old man” with its “wrinkled dugs” (Eliot, 1982:60), in some contrast to the loam feet of rustic lovers full of mirth in the *Quartets* (Eliot, 1977:213). Furthermore, this return to locality and “significant soil” (Eliot, 1977:213) also involves a turn away from modern progress, indicated by the lines “while the world moves/ In appetency, on its metalled ways/ Of time past and time future” (Eliot, 1977:193). In other words, progress ends up in a solidity of stasis that always misses the present, still, eternal moment -- much as Cummings’ satires also indicated throughout his poetic career. Eliot’s ultimate critique of modern society is that it has seriously misconstrued matter, because of a general absence of spirit⁵⁸.

Perhaps surprisingly in view of Eliot’s intense intellectualization throughout his career, this return to significant soil, locality, and the present, eternal moment, further goes along with a specific emphasis on ignorance and the relieving loss of too much thought, or thought controlled by excessive desire for the wrong objects: “Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:/ So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing” (Eliot, 1977:200) -- that is, so the dualism will dissolve. In “East Coker”, a very deliberate series of paradoxes appear, slightly reminiscent of

⁵⁸ In an earlier and often neglected poem, “The Hippopotamus” (1920), Eliot stresses -- through a comical cross-stitching of opposites -- that in Laodicea, or the current church and society, the flesh and blood matter of the hippopotamus has been undermined. This poem asserts that what seems below (the hippopotamus) is actually above, and what seems above (the modern church trapped in materialistic, miasmic mists) will therefore remain below while the ‘potomus ascends to heaven (Eliot, 1982:40). In the seemingly utopian dystopia of Laodicea matter is misconstrued as materialism and not spirit.

Taoism and Cummings' avoidance of intellectual interference and pro-activity towards an earthy or common form of illuminating ignorance:

In order to arrive there,
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not. (Eliot, 1977:201)

In other words, it is through apparently negative growth or diminishment -- closer to significant soil and away from desires and materialistic success -- that one may return to one's very self, instead of remaining trapped within a projected, secondary self that has turned into a slave of one's own rationalizations and ecstasies. These paradoxes toe a very fine line indeed: between the paradox of that which seems, to one's rational mind, to be quite one's self but which remains removed from one's actual, spiritual, unified self on the one hand and, on the other, the paradox of being one's actual self precisely by not *knowing* that self. Paradoxically, then, ignorance is more than bliss: it is the way into actual knowledge or wisdom. And again, a quite similar instruction is found in Taoism, and in Cummings' "alive" poetic enactment of the instruction. For example, a central assumption of the *Tao Te Ching* is that through non-doing, nothing remains undone, or everything falls into place as if by itself. Moreover, this involves the notion that learning or sheer intellect cannot bring about the necessary wisdom, just as Eliot's passage cited above makes a similar point indeed when it states that the way into earthy wisdom is the way of ignorance:

Whosoever practices learning increases daily.
Whosoever practices DAO [Tao] decreases daily.
He decreases and decreases
until at last he arrives at non-action.
In non-action nothing remains undone. (Lao Tzu, 1987:48; section 48)

These passages inscribe yin non-doing -- or *active* non-action -- as well as a "negative progress" or increasing diminishment towards common soil and significant existence not contaminated and complicated by overbearing desires for worldly success. In today's terms and as stated in the *Quartets*, the "metalled ways" of

progressive preoccupations will thus dissolve. Cummings' 1955 letter to Friedman comes into renewed focus: here the poet critiques "abstractions raised to the power of the concrete" and refers to a mentality of this kind as a "stainless steel mind" (bMs Am 1892.1 (55) folder 1). Paradoxically, child-like innocence is more direct and true. Reducing the interference of mind and desire leads to a renewed view of the miraculous and paradoxical essence. As has been demonstrated with fair abundance, Cummings' poetry creates a quite similar awareness.

And yet, Eliot's poetic voice remains different from Cummings', even if the *Quartets* undoubtedly shares the principle of a cyclical, unifying third voice with Cummings' poetic ecology. One possible way of describing this essential degree of difference that remains even when Eliot's ecology and Cummings' ecology approach a closeness as we now see, is to state that Eliot's cycles of paradoxes that intimate the third voice as in the passages examined here, retains a slight aloofness, and comes across as a series of instructions: phrases such as "In order to"... "You must" dominate the cyclical textuality of the cycles, and in a sense break the cyclical patterns themselves with the insertion of an authentic "voice of reason" -- perhaps inadvertently.

In Cummings' case, as has been shown in this thesis, similar paradoxes and the sense of a third dimension beyond opposites such as culture versus nature, simply seem to *happen* to one in reading. There is a greater and preferable effect -- within the ecological limits of this reading, of course -- of Cummings' poems that take one *into* the third dimension and natural unity with greater directness. Although the *Quartets* certainly involve similar cyclical effects of wholeness and an entrance into the still, dancing point via poetic signs, those signs strain under a tension evoked by their instructiveness instead of a more actual persuasiveness. Rephrased: whereas the *Quartets* may leave one with a feeling that they are written *about* transcendence on an equal basis as their more direct *showing* of transcendent cycles, Cummings' poetry overall involves a more direct approach, method, and readerly result.

Therefore: it would be an oversimplification to view the *Quartets* as no more than a successful return to peace and acceptance. Where the *Quartets* requires us to read about the notion that "All is always now" (Eliot, 1977:194), Cummings' poems create a more direct now-ness through a unique arrangement of poetic signs. Whereas the *Quartets* speaks of a place "[b]etween two worlds [that] become much like each

other" (Eliot, 1977:218), Cummings' hummingbird poem and leaf poem create a more direct sense that one is carried into that between-state, in which the world of signs and the world of nature commingle on a purer basis. In other words, the *Quartets*, viewed from a Cummingsian ecosemiotic perspective, still seems at a slight remove from the cycles that they at once advocate, describe, and inscribe.

We have seen that critics responded with ambivalence to modernist poetry and that an ambivalence resides within Eliot's early poetry with a view to ecology. Critics responded ambivalently to Cummings' poetic ecology as we have also seen, and critics also continue to respond with some ambivalence to Eliot's reconciliatory works such as the *Quartets*. Some critics and Eliot himself regard them as a success on par with *The Waste Land*, but others feel equally strongly that they present a false homogeneity of unity and conformity (Emig, 1995:239-241).

These various ambivalences centre on the various ecologies of modernist poetry. Cummings was initially more or less castigated for his more direct ecological approach. Eliot has been criticized for his return to a false and certainly also ecological acceptance. As has been demonstrated here in addition, Eliot remained intensely ambivalent about ecological soundness in his early works, while later works returned to wholeness but not without some hesitation when compared to Cummings' poetic ecology.

And: within the modernist movement on the whole, these various and intricate ambivalences were certainly also reflected. For example: William Carlos Williams had a view of a modernist "own-backyard" poetry that would revitalize an earthy and direct modern experience -- it seems that a quiet war had been fought within modernism which reflects the said ambivalence. Williams reverted to war imagery when he described the impact of Eliot's early poetry on this more localized modernist ideal. For example, he stated that Eliot's poetry struck him like a "sardonic bullet" (in Ruiz, 2000:78). Williams also wrote: "Critically Eliot turned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art from itself -- rooted in the locality which should give it fruit" (in Ruiz, 2000:78). Williams asserted that *The Waste Land* "wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it" (in Longenbach, 1999:123).

This “war” was perhaps resolved by Eliot’s accent of admittedly English locality in the *Quartets*. Yet, one is still forced to consider and reconsider whether even this level of acceptance finally got rid of the earlier, more intense ambivalence, given the slightly more *telling* mode of Eliot’s ecology in a work such as the *Quartets*, especially when compared to Cummings’ poetic ecology which in its entirety is at least of a slightly more direct mode. Nonetheless, from an ecological perspective Eliot’s modernism would be as incomplete without the *Quartets* as modernist poetry on the whole would be incomplete without Cummings’ capacity to write between and through opposites into a modern return to nature. As the *Quartets* is to *The Waste Land* in reciprocity, so is Cummings’ poetry to modernist poetry in ecology.

3. A brief overview of Pound’s poetic ecology

Although not in terms of an historical development equally clear as that of Eliot, Pound’s modernist ecological ambivalence takes a parallel shape, with the exception of his deeper and more ecological orientalist involvement -- to which Eliot responded with some hesitation of a virtually Saidian character (Hayot, 1999:515-516). Mainstream modernist or major Pound also adheres to a more objectified, inorganic, and “scientific” view of poetry and poets. I have already mentioned the example of his equation of poets to voltmeters, steam gauges, and (radio) antennae (1985:58), parallel to Eliot’s equation of the poet’s mind and personality to a bit of catalysing metal in an industrial chemical transformation. Of course, Pound’s images from physics suggest that poets are acutely sensitive to their surroundings and can register slight changes with great precision of a scientific nature. But let it not go by unnoticed that these images also reduce living, “organic” poets to metallic and narrow laboratory instruments, again suggesting -- just as Eliot’s earlier inorganic imagery suggested -- a closure, a hardening of outline, and a somewhat alienated reductionism and mechanization of poetry.

Pound’s celebrated image (soon supplanted by a more Taoist vortex (Qian, 1995:71-72)) finds itself in tandem with Eliot’s objective correlative as an objectifying poetic device of some positivist absolutism. Pound defines the image more succinctly than Eliot formulates the objective correlative: it is “that which presents an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time” (1985:4). Depending on what Pound means with the words and phrases “that”, “a complex”, and “intellectual”, this formulation could be interpreted either in a more ecological

clearly delineating or objectifying poetic eye with an intense awareness of barrenness and desertification. The phrase "hard steel" is descriptive of precisely such an eye, and its relation to the landscape. Nature solidifies under the scrutiny of this inflexible and isolating poetic gaze -- as found, too, in *The Waste Land*. There is the same telling absence of natural flexibility and the same result of objectified poetic fragments that can be related to or integrated with one another only with great ambivalence or difficulty: the reader remains estranged from the poetic mind-scape (Pound, 1990a:68), and an expectation that a poetic landscape may present or interpenetrates with an actual natural landscape, is dashed. We read about an isolated, naked, howling William Blake running within the setting of this desolate mind-scape, as well as various other authors such as the "old Admiral", "Brother Percy", "Lord Byron", "Ernie Hemingway", one "Captain Baker", and so on (Pound, 1990a:70-72). On one level, this Canto makes it clear that male authors in modern time experience some difficulty. And on another, it is clear that the male poetic gaze leads to a barrenness of objectification, of almost blindingly-heliocentric or desertified outlines - but little flexibility or moisture, and only starkly oppositional moisture when it is found.

As in *The Waste Land*, this particular Canto includes a swift series of switches towards an opposite and hence remains *objective* also in that sense: femaleness, fluidity, and some form of tranquility. The first sign of such fluidity -- and a purgatorial hope of salvation according to Pound's "plan" of this Canto within its series of Cantos -- is a group of "blue lakes of acid" in which the criminal lies (1990a:68). Here the poetic speaker or subject cleanses himself of the hell of the previous Cantos: "And I bathed myself with the acid to free myself/ of the hell ticks, / Scales, fallen louse eggs" (1990a:69). Objectification leads to some fluidity and acidity, and a cleansing from gross organisms such as lice. Next is the "lake of bodies", "aqua morta", a lake of "limbs fluid, and mingled, like fish heaped in a bin,/ and here an arm upward, clutching a fragment of marble,/ And here embryos, in flux,/ new inflow, submerging" (1990a:69). Somehow, this pool of fluid human flesh is meant to depict the lost face of a generation, so that one is still halfway between the hellish desert of a post-war time, and a more fluid and tranquil (and female) potential of integrity and flow. The speaker descends a "stair of grey stone" (meant by Pound

as an entrance into *purgatorio* (Surette, 1979:42)) to find, presumably still along the way, the opposite of the dearth male desert:

The plain, distance, and in fount-pools
 the nymphs of that water
 rising, spreading their garlands,
 weaving their water reeds with the boughs,
 In the quiet,
 and now one man rose from this fountain
 and went off into the plain.

(Pound, 1990a:70)

This glimpse of pure aquatic bliss and a moment of tranquility stands in stark (read also: objectified or delineated) contrast with the textual desert that has preceded it. The powerful simplicity of each line, and its condensed modern (also intellectual) nature, retains an ambivalence: the potential of either reading it as “ideograms” of a kind (as Pound intended (Surette, 1979:24)) that are meant to juxtapose clear objects, or as intellectualized poetic objects that remain fragmentary and fail to create a sense-making and dynamic ecological context.

In fact, Pound goes further into this ambivalence in a number of Cantos than Eliot has done in (say) *The Waste Land*. Pound does something that Eliot does not: he exploits “nature” imagery to establish hellish, disgusting, or purely derogatory images of modern culture. Although *The Waste Land* describes an upsetting and ambivalent absence of ecological significance, Eliot does not resort to such tactics. Either Eliot was more sensitive to ecology in general, or the poetic points that he made about modern culture were not equally passionate. In any event, an ecological reading of mainstream modernist poetry should note passages in which *natural* imagery turns unnatural with fury. Pound’s Canto XIV is meant to portray the hellish and non-Confucian disorder of the modern world. It is a poetic tirade against certain economists of that time, the “obstructors of distribution” (as the final line of this Canto indicates). They are described as “bigots” and “black-beetles, burrowing into the sh-t,/ The soil of decrepitude, the ooze full of morsels,/ lost contours, erosions” (Pound, 1990a:62). And this is merely the beginning: “Above the hell-rot/ the great arse-hole,/ broken with piles,/ hanging stalactites,/ greasy as sky over Westminster,/ the invisible, many English,/ the place lacking in interest,/ last squalor, utter decrepitude” (Pound, 1990a:62). And it continues: “The slough of unamiable liars,/ bog of stupidities,/ malevolent stupidities, and stupidities,/ the soil living pus, full of

vermin,/ dead maggots begetting live maggots" (Pound, 1990a:63). Finally, the "obstructors of [economic and epistemological] distribution", are compared with "liquid animals" and someone "waving a condom full of black-beetles" (Pound, 1990a:63).

The speaker's disgust is involved in an ecological ambivalence that may evoke a readerly disgust. The persistence of slinging natural imagery at unnatural economists threatens to turn into mere readerly disappointment with poetic licence: one may feel that nature and the reader suffer more from Pound's "biology" than the intended economist victims. The reader is confronted by an over-abundant clarity of short, angry lines filled with phrases that carry a bewildering array of fragments that deride the body and the ecosystem. It takes a mature mind, indeed, to see finally that words such as "soil" and "dirt" should be part of derogatory language. One does not grow up with a sense that earth is disgusting, and we have come far from Cummings' innocent and mudluscious world. We have entered an economic hell via the backdoor of an ecological hell. Black beetles that burrow into dung may have been misconstrued here as something that would fill English readers with dread: scarabs that actually do this in actual nature, somehow strike one as less immoral than the exploitation of nature imagery in this Canto. Unfortunately, Pound takes ecological ambivalence too far on occasions such as this.

If this is one example of an extreme in Pound's ecology, one hastens to add that the poet also takes another extreme far: namely the ecological-oriental dimension of modernist poetry. We may say that Pound is as ambivalent as Eliot when it comes to ecology, but that he is ultimately more extreme and less controlled than Eliot, so that his poetic ecological ambivalence paradoxically emerges as more salient. To be sure, a sense of dualistic opposition itself -- concurrent, as has been indicated, with an intellectualized or objectifying poetry with its stress on a dilemma of the clash of polarities -- also underpins Pound's poetry. Canto VII offers this example, selected for its additional ecological relevance from numerous possibilities of a similar stark and intellectual/objective and side-by-side, square fixation of opposites:

And all that day
Nicea moved before me
And the cold grey air troubled her not
For all her naked beauty, bit not the tropic skin,
And the long slender feet lit on the curb's marge
And her moving height went before me,

We alone having being.
 And all that day, another day:
 Thin husks I had known as men,
 Dry casques of departed locusts
 Speaking a shell of speech . . .
 Propped between chairs and table . . .
 Words like locust-shells, moved by no inner being;
 A dryness calling for death.

(Pound, 1990a:26)

This passage divides neatly between those not afraid of female beauty (the poet or poetic speaker), and those that are afraid (men that are the dry “casques of departed locusts”). Formally, the first seven lines are in a group separate and opposite to the next seven lines. Those not afraid, are fully alive (first grouping) -- and those who fear are dry, stiff, and dead (second grouping). Another pair of opposites thus comes into focus: the sensuous flow of the female form versus the drought of a maleness severed from femaleness. Prosody and imagery underscore this opposition: the passage of female beauty “softens” with phrases such as “long slender feet” and the end-sounds of the word “marge” (edge). The word “being” sounds flexible in contrast with the word “death”, along with “harsher” phrases such as “Dry casques”, “Thin husks”, and “a shell of speech” -- a hissing, staccato, indeed “dry” quality of sound sets the second grouping in prosodic contrast to the first, in line with its theme of arid male emptiness.

It is therefore ironic that the *Cantos* overall cannot overcome their ecological ambivalence to achieve the expression of an earthy paradise -- which Pound envisaged them to be from the outset and towards their completion. An overriding, objectifying force to write an epic that would summarize and contain the entire Europe, past and present, perhaps contradicts and shatters the female flow of the *Cantos* into a sense of wholeness or paradisaical bliss. The *Cantos* in their entirety, besides some passages of remarkable fluidity and acceptance, may leave one with a more predominant impression that they will turn into the very locust-shells which they critique as a condition of men who have removed themselves from female (read also: lyrical) beauty. Nicea’s “long slender feet”, so to speak, may have been incarcerated and fragmented by that male, intellectual, objectifying gaze that cast them into a vision “lit on the curb’s marge”. Moved too little by a more flexible and dynamic flow of (ecological) contents and direction, the *Cantos* would appear to solidify or

stall into the negation of their own direction, hence failing even remotely to express a *paradiso terrestre*.

As Rainer Emig therefore rightfully notes, Pound comments with some poetic pity on the possible failure of his *Cantos* (1995:138). And it is in such pitiful utterances which collapse the entire inclusivity of mainstream modernist poems such as the *Cantos* -- such poetic "confessions", so to say -- that they die, and come to a strange life. Now included in official publications of the *Cantos*, I am referring to one or two poetic notes and incomplete fragments of *Cantos*, written by Pound in the 1960s. These have the effect of suddenly creating a purely subjective and poetic *context* for the *Cantos* overall that the reader may hold on to:

That her acts
Olga's acts
of beauty
be remembered.

Her name was Courage
& it was written Olga

These lines are for the
ultimate CANTO

whatever I may write
in the interim.

[24 August 1966]

(Pound, 1990a:818)

This economical "Canto" reminds one of Cummings' poetry in some respects - and Pound enjoyed a prolonged, pyrotechnical correspondence with Cummings as has been indicated. Scanning those letters, one is struck by the sheer density of word-play and a general shattering of traditional methods of writing letters. Pound seems to have enjoyed the freedom that Cummings' poetic method of composing letters allowed, so that a Cummingsian Pound emerges from them. It needs to be established to what extent Cummings also may have influenced typographical experimentation as in the "Canto" above.

In any event, this "Canto" states an acceptance of the "interim", or the in-between nature of modernist poetry. Indeed, it envisages the entire bulk of the *Cantos*

as an interim manoeuvre that stretched the tension between absolute poetic objectification and pointlessness indefinitely, and it signals a return to subjective context, parallel with the same development in Eliot's poetry (as we have seen). Simultaneously, it poignantly states an acceptance of the female. It further toys with typography such as the curving bulge to the right and then an overall direction to the left hand margin of the page. Read with a view to some form of iconicity, the poem has a female shape. In other words, instead of a straight, linear, objective or "square" drive towards the right hand margin, it bulges and *curves* to the right. And its direction to the left possibly underscores a direction to the "other" (more neglected) zone of femaleness and nature. Against this background, the word "*remembered*" is important (line 4), just as it is in Eliot's *Quartets*: it could indicate, on various levels including acceptance of subjectivity, femaleness, and in-between-ness, a rejoining or a re-binding of poetry into a larger context outside pure or self-reflexive semiosis. Not unlike Eliot's return to locality in the *Quartets*, this "Canto" *locates* the *Cantos*. Pound's poetic notes to Cantos CXVII et seq. further includes this "Canto":

M'amour, m'amour
 what do I love and
 where are you?

That I lost my center
 fighting the world.
 The dreams clash
 and are shattered--
 and that I tried to make a paradiso
 terrestre.

I have tried to write Paradise

Do not move
 Let the wind speak
 that is paradise.

Let the Gods forgive what I
 have made
 Let those I love try to forgive
 what I have made.

(Pound, 1990a:816)

These lines suggest a derailing of text within the *Cantos*. One loses one's centre to fight the world with poetry and criticism -- Pound's main occupations. In the process, dreams are shattered into fragments. An earthy paradise has remained elusive, and yet it has been there all along, in the wind that speaks. Part of this recognition of derailing and this return to self and centre in general, has been the shedding of objectified, self-reflexive semiotic fragments set in various arrangements of (often oppositional) tension, as I have indicated here from the perspective of ecology, or an integrity of human culture and nature. Inevitably, some of Pound's earlier fragments come into focus with these added poetic moments in which Pound (thinly disguised as a poetic speaker) finds relief in the death of the *Cantos*. If the words of men without the female beauty turn into no more than dry locust-shells containing no being, then at one end of Pound's ambivalent mainstream modernist ecology, his words continue to return as a male "dryness calling for death" (achieved at last in the added *Cantos* cited here). And an objectification or reification of the sheer solidity and weight of text, occasionally crops up in the earlier *Cantos*, such as Canto V which begins: "Great bulk, huge mass, thesaurus" (Pound, 1990a:17). This line could also indicate the future *Cantos*, this gargantuan and encyclopedic atom or planet which only splits into flux and flow on occasion.

However, the orientalist dimension of Pound's poetry involves a greater sense of sign-nature fluidity and unity. This development in Pound's poetry overall (of which the 1915 *Cathay* remains the supreme achievement) also flowered on occasion in the *Cantos*. Consider Canto LXXXIII in the "Pisan Cantos". As Leon Surette explains in his *A Light from Eleusis* (1979:187), its somewhat incoherent jumble of fragments in the first stanzas actually embodies a sense that paradise is found in perfectly ordinary and seemingly incidental concrete phenomena. And a tone of rest and earthy acceptance indeed follows: "in the drenched tent there is quiet/ sere eyes are at rest" (Pound, 1990a:543). As seems to be the norm in mainstream modernist poetic texts, peace comes with moisture and rain. The next lines read: "the rain beat as with colour of feldspar/ blue as the flying fish off Zoagli", followed two lines down

by a citation from Confucius' Analects, "the sage/ delighteth in water/ the humane man has amity with the hills" (Pound, 1990a:543).

And once more, such acceptance goes along with a cross-stitching and a saturation of opposites, and these lead to an active and tranquil position of unity (the familiar third voice of Cummings' poetic ecology). "When every hollow is full/ it moves forward" (Pound, 1990a:544): intrinsic dynamism is rediscovered when opposites complete one another. The poem then abruptly switches to the theme of incarceration (the opposite of the theme of flow and found freedom). It refers to a caged panther (probably Rainer Maria Rilke's "Der Panther" (1981:139)), and it continues to state:

Nor can who has passed a month in the death cells
believe in capital punishment
No man who has passed a month in the death cells
believes in cages for beasts

(Pound, 1990a:544)

The ecological theme is sustained through this sombre switch to an opposite condition, and it continues to indicate a need for open-endedness and uncoerced, even wild freedom. The Canto moves on to make acute observations of the activities of a wasp, and in the process a cross-stitching of (also sensual) opposites occurs distinctly. Indeed, the passage as a whole melts one image into the next with ease and agility, consistently underpinned by a stable, accepting tone of earthy realities and a position beyond opposites:

and Brother Wasp is building a very neat house
of four rooms, one shaped like a squat indian bottle
La vespa, *la vespa*, mud, swallow system
so that dreaming of Bracelonde and of Perugia
and the great fountain in Piazza
or of old Bulagaio's cat that with a well timed leap
could turn the lever-shaped door handle
It comes over me that Mr. Walls must be a ten-strike
with the signorinas
and in the warmth after chill sunrise
an infant, green as new grass,
has stuck its head or tip
out of Madame La Vespa's bottle

mint springs up again
 in spite of Jones' rodents
 as had the clover by the gorilla cage
 with a four-leaf

When the mind swings by a grass-blade
 an ant's forefoot shall save you
 the clover leaf smells and tastes as its flower

(Pound, 1990a:546-547)

"Brother Wasp" becomes "Madame La Vespa" at the end of the first stanza of this passage: opposites dissolve. Pound in cross-stitching mode is playful, almost frivolous, with a sense of relief. The wasp -- with its connotations of stinging sexuality and caring for its kin -- is both male and female, and the speaker's position is that gender for once does not matter. The little "squat indian bottle" is a little art work of perfection that anyone who has watched certain wasp species, will be familiar with. It is a mud pot or clay pot, of course, and since it reminds the speaker of the East and of ink, it follows that a reader may read Lao Tzu's emphasis on the clay pot as a symbol of peaceful and earthy emptiness (1987:31; section 11) along with this passage. The speaker is also reminded of swallows' clay homes, on his or her way to Italy and the great fountain. Fountains are almost universal symbols of new life, also in ecological terms such as procreation. The speaker is then reminded of the (quite "cultural") skills of a cat. And in this context, Mr. Walls surfaces as a spirit in his own right, beyond mere moralisms, since he was quite a lover. There is "warmth", after "chill sunrise" -- reading deeply into this phrase, one or two potential connotations spring to mind in the context. It could suggest, for instance, a warmth beyond a heliocentric, male-dominated and hence "cold" or objectified intellectual sun. The clover with its four-leaf would confirm this possibility (tying in with the four rooms of the wasp's nest): various mythologies focus on the number four as a female number. The caged gorilla should be linked with the caged panther and man in the earlier passages of this Canto, and should therefore be read as a possible indication that it is male acceptance of female nature that leads to transcendence from the cage. The clover leaf subsequently sustains its (sharp, acidic) taste and smell as it turns into its flower: a suggestion is carried of eating poetry. When Pound becomes sensuous, one is able to enjoy a rich, pungent, and sharp kind of sensuality that is nonetheless achieved by what seems to be the greatest of ease, flow, and agility.

Such natural flow, as Cummings' poetry depicts, is akin to the Tao, the "beautiful way" when day turns into night (73 *Poems* CP 824). It finds poetic resonance in Pound's more openly orientalist poetry. And with this, one has reached the other (and much more peaceful) extreme of mainstream modernist ecological ambivalence: a return, after the derailing of the sign into a relative objective shattering into fragments, to that middle of the middle ground where opposites inform and feed upon one another, and dissolve. Cummings' notion and poetic employment of an ecological third voice is imperative to modernist poetry on the whole, and Pound's oriental translations offer a field of modernist ecological research on par with Cummings' poetry. An example is Pound's much-acclaimed (Qian, 1995:76; Kern, 1996:197) creative translation or significant (mis)understanding (Hayot, 1999:24, 530) of the following Taoist poem by Li Tai Po (circa eighth century A.D.):

The River Merchant's Wife: a Letter

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.
At fifteen I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever, and forever.
Why should I climb the look out?
At sixteen you departed,
You went into far Ku-to-Yen, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.
You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!

The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden,
They hurt me. I grow older.

If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
 Please let me know beforehand,
 And I will come out to meet you,
 As far as Cho-fu-Sa. (Pound, 1990b:134)

The poem is proportioned so well because it is directed by an outward purpose towards nature⁶¹. It stands as a reticent landmark of the orientalist ecological capacities of mainstream modernist poets. It is deliberately devoid of metaphors and personification (with one or two extra-compelling exceptions such as the short, sharp, and stinging butterfly image), as well as intellectualized intrusion by the poetic voice, in line with modernist orientalism at its best in general, as found, according to Michael Dylan Welch (1995:104), in Cummings' poetry. It tells a fairly simple story of a girl and a boy growing up in their village, their getting married, and the husband then leaving the young girl behind to go down the river for mercenary purposes as it happened in China at that time (Qian, 1995:82). The young girl moves through a trajectory towards the (non-sentimental) acceptance that the cycles of the human realm may be interrupted, but will also continue like the cycles of nature.

A Taoist sense of natural rootedness and interpenetration permeates the poem. The poem leaves ample open interpretative space so that an intuitive centre is created through which the reader will sense an interactivity of human developments, the poetic sign, and natural continuation. And although Cummings' poetry may be said to be more dynamic with its typographical and other forms of experimentation, it shares the same effect of a dynamism of humility or earthiness with "The River Merchant's Wife".

Since the human realm and the natural realm are thus connected in natural integrity within "The River Merchant's Wife", the decline of the relationship promises the stable and changing promise of a later return to ascent: just as yin autumn and winter are sure to turn into yang spring and summer. The somewhat naïve optimism of the speaker towards the conclusion of the poem is both innocent

⁶¹ Indeed, such interpenetration possibly reaches into the actual evolutionary and ecological behaviour of butterflies. A more extensive interdisciplinary reading of the central oriental and ecological butterfly image of this poem, on the basis of the colouration and behaviour of Lepidoptera (the insect Order containing butterflies and moths) in the ecosystem and in China, is found in J.E. and R.F. Terblanche's article entitled "Ezra Pound's Orientalism, Natural Rootedness, and Lepidoptera" published in *Literator* 23(3), November 2002, pp. 1 - 22.

and just: it is in humble accordance with the cycles of earth, and the downs and ups of a dance of (natural) being. And at the centre of that dance, as Cummings' and Eliot's poetry shows in various manners, one finds the transcendence of opposites, including opposites such as down and up: the deeper the speaker penetrates the existence of natural cycles and developments in this poem, the deeper she penetrates the cyclical movement of her own nature: she ends up in a condition beyond a stark dualism of loss and healing.

4. Conclusion: a critical ambivalence about mainstream modernist poetry, viewed from the perspective of ecosemiotics – the DA sequence

From the more limited -- also more inclusive -- perspective of ecosemiotics, criticism of mainstream modernist poetry can be divided into two groupings: one ecologically aware, and the other approaching the "semiotic fallacy" or a tendency to view nature as no more than a linguistic construct. The first grouping tends to underestimate the complication of ecology within mainstream modernist discourse, while it champions its ecological values. The second tends to underestimate and ultimately dispose of the ecology of mainstream modernist discourse, while it champions its pure textuality. To tie this discussion of this critical or theoretical ambivalence surrounding mainstream modernist discourse down to an example, reflect on the climactic DA sequence towards the conclusion of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, within the section entitled "What the Thunder Said":

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
 Waited for rain, while the black clouds
 Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
 The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
 Then spoke the thunder
 DA
Datta: what have we given?
 My friend, blood shaking my heart
 The awful daring of a moment's surrender
 Which an age of prudence can never retract
 By this, and this only, we have existed
 Which is not to be found in our obituaries
 Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
 Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
 In our empty rooms
 DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
 Turn in the door and turn once only
 We think of the key, each in his prison
 Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
 Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours

Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus
 DA
Damyata: The boat responded
 Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
 The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
 Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
 To controlling hands

I sat upon the shore
 Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
 Shall I at least set my lands in order?
 London bridge is falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon--O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie
 These fragments I have shored against my ruins
 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
 Shantih shantih shantih

(Eliot, 1982:66-67)

Here, at its conclusion, the speaker finds himself/herself/itself precariously dangling on the very edge of madness, and on the edge between total disaster and disorder on the one hand, and salvation and the peace that passeth all understanding (shantih) on the other. The poem needs a very careful close reading of every aspect of this passage (as with much else in it): simplistic interpretations are not at hand -- the entire poem and this concluding passage signals this recognition clearly enough. A seemingly minor aspect, such as the omission of punctuation and a full stop in the final line of this passage and the entire poem, "Shantih shantih shantih", are important interpretative clues.

The Cummings reader has enjoyed that poet's ability to create contextual movement (often also based on orientalist sensibilities) through the omission of a full stop as has been indicated in the thesis on a number of occasions. She or he will be inclined to notice a telling development along the same lines here at the very end of *The Waste Land*. The peace that passeth all understanding -- that which finally transcends the entrapment of human language and thought (so clearly indicated by the line from Dante "Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison" in the passage above) -- is a movement into (outside) context, and freedom from the oppositional mind. Dynamism is implied by the omission of punctuation: the utterance continues beyond a full stop. It implies an event beyond language -- mediated through a heightened modernist awareness of the limitations and constraints of correct language. This

could be indicated by a more significant entry into blank space or nowhere, after the telling omission of a “correct” and conclusive full stop. That the word “shantih” is repeated *three* times would then be all but accidental: it would intimate a coincidence, or a third possibility through, beyond, and outside dualism. In short, the poem indeed “fuses” here in a way familiar to the Cummings reader.

In other words, at its very conclusion the poem finally becomes involved in the “awful daring of a moment’s surrender” *beyond* semiosis. Up to and including the penultimate line, “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.”, one is free still to view the signs on the page as no more than signs that return upon themselves as highlighted textual objects -- although this is certainly not the only possible reading of such a line. But in the final “shantih” line, it is difficult to doubt further a conclusion that the poem wished to get beyond itself as a collection of textual fragments, into a transcendent context of integrity between the semiotic inside, and an ecological and spiritual outside. The question to be answered is: to what extent does this final line, this escape and in-scape, ripple in reverse across the poem overall, and the DA sequence in particular? Shall we read the DA sequence as indicative of a significant return to our linguistic (Sanskrit) root (and the *Upanishads*), and hence indicative of an integrity with and within nature, or not? Taking this reverse reading one important step further: shall we consider Tiresias (the central and unifying personage of the poem according to Eliot’s notes (1982:70)) -- and hence his collaborators, Madame Sosostris and the Sybil of Cumae -- seriously as entities of integrity and unity, or shall we take them as the supreme indicators of a severe and oppositional disjunction in epistemological and ontological (as well as ecological) terms?

These crucial questions pave the way for a brief discussion of the overall critical ambivalence in response to this (the most) salient poem of mainstream modernist discourse, and how this critical ambivalence might be related to ecological considerations. Beginning with the more overt ecological readers of Eliot’s poetry: Robert Pogue Harrison, in his book *Forests: the Shadow of Civilization*, sees modernist poetry at its best as a “kind of spiritual ecology” (1993:149), and *The Waste Land* in particular as a harbinger of the greenhouse effect (1993:149). We need a less ironic name for the “greenhouse effect” according to Harrison, and he suggests the “fever effect” since forests are on fire and earth’s temperature is increasing -- according to Harrison, this term will mark the ecological legacy of the twentieth

century: *desertification* (1993:148). And with almost prophetic foresight -- since poets have a kind of sixth sense that make them more abundantly and richly aware of those relationships that are vital for survival, and hence future developments -- *The Waste Land* can now be understood, in ecological retrospect, as "in some ways" a forecast of the "spiritual effects of a changing climate and habitat" (Harrison, 1993:149).

Gerontion's "[t]houghts of a dry brain in a dry season" (Eliot, 1982:33) (which were initially to be included in *The Waste Land*), and the various desertified waste lands of the poem, prompt Harrison to suggest that the "fever effect", or "desertification of habitat" in physical and spiritual terms, is the "true 'objective correlative'" of *The Waste Land* (1993:149). If this is so, and if this poem comes to one in such a singular overarching ecological manner, then it should follow that the DA sequence marks a radical return to natural and cultural roots, in which culture and nature commingle and inform one another. And such a reading, as I shall demonstrate, is warranted -- but it may be only one dimension of a greater ecological dilemma within the poem.

Perhaps the most unlikely and eloquent spokesperson for mainstream modernist ecology with specific reference to Eliot and Pound remains Gary Snyder, the Beat poet who nonetheless continues a legacy of Eliot's and Pound's cultural views of nature and orientalism. I have already referred to various comments on mainstream modernist oriental and natural sensibilities by Snyder in preceding Chapters of the thesis. One or two of his further comments on Eliot's poetry read: "What's really fun about Eliot is his intelligence and his highly selective and charming use of Occidental symbols which point you in a certain direction" (Snyder, 1980:56) and "[Eliot] had the sense of roots" (Snyder, 1980:57). Snyder implies that Eliot's precision is directed towards an ecological modernist sub-stratum, where signs act as revitalizing roots bringing about a cyclical interaction between nature and culture, and vice versa. In other words, Snyder's deliberately casual and compelling remarks about mainstream modernists such as Eliot reveal an awareness that modernist poetry is active within a zone of between-ness on an ecological basis.

This notion becomes clearer when one pays some attention to Snyder's general comments on the nature of poetry and its interrelations with and within nature. In a climax situation in the ecosystem, Snyder writes, a high percentage of the energy that

is distributed in the biospherical web is found not from the annual production of biomass, but from “recycling dead biomass, the stuff on the forest floor, the trees that have fallen, the bodies of dead animals. Recycled” (1980:173). Therefore, (also modernist) art is an “assimilator of unfelt experience, perception, sensation, and memory for the whole society. When all that compost of feeling and thinking comes back to us then, it comes not as a flower, but -- to complete the metaphor -- as a mushroom” (Snyder, 1980:174). Poets are thus the essential links between ancient, foregone cycles of culture, new cycles of culture, and natural cycles. As John Elder comments in his 1985 book *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*, the imperative “principle affirmed” by Eliot’s and Snyder’s poetic views is that “culture must be understood in terms of a dynamic continuity” (2000:229) that includes both culture and nature. The dialectic between past and present poetry, quite prevalent in Eliot’s discourse as we have seen, now comes into its own as an ecological awareness that culture, like nature, is impoverished if the cycle between past energy pathways and present ones break down. That is, in fact, the precise point at which the poet enters in order to continue the cycle.

Against this background, one sees that a decayed fragment such as the DA syllable -- that is, an ancient and somewhat forgotten piece of text paradoxically near to the root of our modern culture -- evidently revitalizes a unity of the modern cultural cycle (always threatening to turn into mere monoculture) and the ancient natural cycle marked by this syllable (see Elder, 2000:229, 231). Michael Edwards -- in his *Towards a Christian Poetics* (1984) -- sees *The Waste Land* overall as a poem in which the fallen nature of language is foregrounded, whereas the DA sequence “reaches back to a pre-lapsarian condition, before the dispersal of languages” (1984:113): here the poem offers Sanskrit as a metaphor of a “primitive, wise and single speech” (1984:113).

To confirm such a reading of this syllable, one should add that Eliot takes care to bring it into his poem in such a manner that it evokes an onomatopoeic and iconic directness. This directness can be made apparent best by contrasting Eliot’s rendition of the DA sequence with a more standard translation from the DA section in the *Upanishads* which Eliot could read in the original thanks to a thorough education at Harvard in the early twentieth century. One example of a more standard translation of this section is Max Müller’s. Consider how it offers a fairly oppressive didactic space

in which “Sir” (the thunder god Prajapati) teaches a little moralistic lesson with lame pedantries -- especially when compared to Eliot’s rendition -- such as “[Sir] told them the syllable Da”:

The threefold descendants of Pragapati, gods, men, and Asuras (evil spirits), dwelt as Brahmakarins (students) with their father Pragapati. Having finished their studentship the gods said: ‘Tell us (something), Sir.’ He told them the syllable Da. Then he said: ‘Did you understand?’ They said: ‘We did understand. You told us ‘Damyata’, Be subdued.’ ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘you have understood’ (Müller, 1969:189).

Müller’s rendition of the DA story is written in a rather patronising tone. Demons and pupils really seem to follow the tedious and predictable unfolding of a “little lesson” with slavish schoolishness. In contrast, Eliot’s rendition of the same procedure or sequence positively jumps from the page in response to a jolt of (also textual) lightning. The syllable DA is supremely onomatopoeic: its physical pronunciation, [da⁶²], economically presents the sheer eventuality of the sound of thunder. In thunder storms pressure builds up in the air and is then suddenly released with a loud clap of thunder: in pronouncing DA the tongue forces air pressure to build up by blocking it in the sound [d] and this pressure is abruptly released with a short, open sound and the maximum release of air and voice in the sound [a]. Hence, physical speech economically penetrates actual weather events in this case. And the ample blank space that follows on each DA within the poem, iconically presents the whiteness of a lightning flash, as well as a silence that follows the clap of thunder. Furthermore, each of the “interpretations” of the DA syllable or thunder clap echoes the onomatopoeic qualities of that syllable, in a manner at least slightly reminiscent of various rumbling echoes in the clouds that may follow upon a loud clap of thunder. That is, [d] and [a] sounds are at once included, broken, and “softened” in these “interpretations” -- or, actually, semiotic echoes that echo the echoes of thunder: “datta” [data], “dayadhvam” [dajadvam], and “damyata” [damjata]. The DA sequence in *The Waste Land* becomes poetry precisely because it embodies not mere telling, but a showing of natural, incantating, and exciting directness on these

⁶² The [a] sound has been adapted and does not occur in modern English (Lass, 1976:105), unlike other modern Indo-European languages in which it is still used, such as Afrikaans. It should be remembered that all the English candidates for the adaptation of this sound are slightly less open than the original [a], as implied by Roger Lass (1976:107). This is the reason why I read the “A” of the syllable “DA” as the more original [a] and not later possible variants such as [æ], [ʌ], or [ʊ]. For a similar reading of this sound within Cummings’ “birds” see Chapter Four, 2.5.

onomatopoeic and iconic grounds. It seems, then, that the DA sequence indeed wishes to revitalize a modern cultural and an ancient natural cycle.

Confirmation that Eliot could have intended the DA sequence to be a return to nature may be found in two additional autobiographical phenomena. Eliot loved sailing and found peace at the ocean (Ackroyd, 1984:22): the speaker finally finds himself or herself at the edge of the ocean in the final stanza following immediately upon the DA sequence, and this could very well be an indication of a positive development. (That is, in support of the purely textual indications of such a development.) Furthermore, more or less at the time of the writing and publication of *The Waste Land*, Eliot seriously considered turning into a practicing Buddhist believer (Ackroyd, 1984:27), so that one cannot use his later Christianity to turn the oriental aspects of this poem into mere exotic contrivances, even from an autobiographical perspective. Above all one has to keep in mind that when Eliot finally found his religious peace of Christian belief, it did not lead to a break away from ecology on his part. Far from it: this event intensified his insistence on and awareness of nature and the interrelatedness of culture and the ecosystem as "The Idea of A Christian Society" which has been mentioned a number of times, pertinently reveals.

All of which raises a concern: what happens to this ecological directness in the DA sequence when viewed as mere (somewhat deconstructive) "empty shells of signifiers" that return to and close in upon themselves, hence acting as little more than purely textual objects that have little or no direct, interlevel connection with and within nature? And which reading is legitimate: the ecological one, or the "deconstructive" one?

A central occupation of critics in response to the poem, as well as a central issue of the ecological ambivalence of mainstream modernist discourse, thus comes into renewed and provisionally conclusive focus. Daniel Albright, for instance, finds a disjunction *within* the possible world of the poem:

Health, intelligence, mutability of self, salvation, all depend on a vision in which subject and object are intimate, co-extensive -- a vision in which Experience appeals to its latent Immediacy. But Tiresias dwells in a fully dissociated world in which feelings (himself) and things (the gramophone, the typist) have lost all relation. [...] This is exactly the predicament of *The Waste Land*: it is a domain of metaphysical error, in that its mental world has been cut off from its physical world. [...] [T]he residents of the waste land are too lazy, too incompetent in feeling and thinking, to do the difficult work of integrating their world (1997:240).

Put plainly, the world inside *The Waste Land* does not reconcile feeling, thought, and physical being. The result is a world of disjunction in which health (and wholeness) as well as salvation are not possible. Subject and object, as well as self (for instance male) and other (for instance female) remain non-integrated, and hence little integrity is to be expected *within* the world of the poem, among its various personas. Albright's remark stops short of a formulation of the other important aspect here, namely the overall relation between the signs of the poem and their outside context. Accent on the disjunction of the poem on *this* level is found in Rainer Emig's critique of mainstream modernism. He agrees that Tiresias fails as a symbol of potential union beyond opposites such as male and female (Emig, 1995:160), but his critique (as we have seen) goes further to explore the difficult relations between the poem, viewed from an outside readerly perspective, and an outside context of history, society, and by implication, nature.

What we see is that Brooker and Bentley are correct to stress the difference between internal interpretation (by various personas *within* the poem) and external interpretation *of* the poem (that of the reader who engages with the text at least to some extent from an outside perspective) (1990:9-10). Albright's remark fits the first, and Emig's extends into the latter. From their external perspective as readers, Brooker and Bentley go on to reach one or two intriguing conclusions with a view to the DA sequence in *The Waste Land*. They acknowledge various occurrences in this passage that may indicate an increased interlevel linkage between the sign and nature: onomatopoeia, a foregrounding of serious internal interpretation for the first time in the poem (unlike Madame Sosostris' internal interpretation which is ironically viewed, for example), and so on (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:189). From the external perspective, however, the reader is still free to experience the sequence as a series of signs that do not mean anything:

The first and most important point about the thunder is that it does not say anything at all, and further, that it does not mean anything. It is like the birds who 'say' twit, jug, and tereu, and the cock who 'said' co co rico. When such words reveal the presence of birds, cock, or thunder, they have those meanings, but when they are offered as quotations of what the birds, cock, and thunder said, they reveal that nothing whatsoever has been said. The lines 'Then spoke the thunder/DA' dramatize vividly the moment before meaning, a moment of pure insignificance. As soon as the word '*Datta*' is supplied, however, the ideal unity of a nonsignifier collapses into the dualism of meaning (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:189).

It should be added that another kind of significance is possible here -- neither pure onomatopoeic “insignificance”, nor pure significance of a discursive, deconstructive kind. An interlevel connection may be sustained here between the sign and nature so that an ecological transcendence of the s-o variable and its various opposite realms is achieved. A recycling of decayed fragments of culture to continue the deep reciprocity between human culture and nature occurs. And perhaps inadvertently, Brooker’s and Bentley’s reading supposes an ecological disjunction: a sign that always lapses into more signs and an indefinite (“deconstructive”) postponement of ecological transcendence. A deconstructive reading of *The Waste Land* is one of their main considerations (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:6). The quite ecologically-minded Eliot (that abounds in this thesis) could be undermined by a deconstructive “semiotic fallacy” in this instance.

As has been stated from the outset of the thesis, modernist poetic ecology centres on a zone of between-ness, or the various tensions between, commingling of, and the potential transcendence of various opposites and the supposed split between language and nature in particular. When Brooker and Bentley read the final stanza of the poem, they focus on the word-play and emphasis brought upon the word “shore” as both a noun and a verb (1990:202). This word has implications for the entire poem according to their reading (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:202):

The wordplay here has the effect of placing the process of setting things in order (‘shoring’) on a precarious margin (a ‘shore’). ‘Shore’ and ‘shored against’ join forces to place this final stanza squarely on a dividing line where no closure through choice of one side or the other can become a valid end of the reading process.

This would be typical of the ambivalence that a reader may experience in reading this poem, also in terms of its ecology. Yet, its ecology seems to point in the direction of another reading here: that a shore, where land and water (finally) meet, may be the beginning of the end of the ambivalence. And ambivalence, as I have argued in the thesis, involves a dilemma, an insurmountable double-ness of experience. On an ecological basis, such a dilemma involves the threat of two realms that will break apart with dire consequences on all levels of existence and experience: that of language, and that of nature. Three or four additional aspects of this final stanza now begin to fall into place, in every sense of the word. The “arid plain” (the waste land) is now behind the speaker. And much depends on whether we shall also read this word doubly: in terms of space and time. For if it is also meant as indicative

of time, as it seems to do in its abundantly double context, it implies that the speaker and the poem has moved on: closer to water, the opposite of the dry, male, objectified and fragmented mind-scape. The proximity to water could indeed be read, from an ecological perspective, as a move closer to possible reconciliation and a significant transcendence of difficult and dislocated opposites: it is the right place for one to shore one's fragments against the ruins -- just as a shore is indicative of that between-ness which is the condition or prerequisite of modern transcendence and ecological maturation. Moreover, the speaker is "fishing": he has a line *in* the water. What he discovers there, furthermore, are two important things: a complete chaos of subconscious fragments of text, including the notion of purgation and salvation, and of "swallowing" in more than one sense (read against the background of the poem in its entirety). Swallow, as in the transcendence of Queen Procne from violence, but also the verb "swallow" -- of incorporation and to be incorporated, or acceptance of identity, or individuation. The other important thing that the angler discovers in the water is a series of opposites that underpin the subconscious chaos of these fragments. Brooker and Bentley provide a detailed analysis of these opposites (1990:204). And there is, in this transformation of a subconscious and aquatic awareness, rather horrible suggestions, too, of mutilation and murder, over and above the various indications of a transcendence through art, especially with reference to the fragments alluding to Hieronymo (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:205). "So much", they write

for redemption through art. All solutions, all affirmations generate their formal opposites. The poem ends on the margin between secular hope and secular damnation, between order and madness. On that margin, that shored-up shore, 'Datta. Dayadvham. Datta' return as the mere shells of signifiers. They are stripped of their glosses, their ambitions toward being guides, like poetry, to life. The appropriate end is the repeated benediction, 'Shantih shantih shantih.' It is only because peace is out of the question on this precarious margin that it must be stated. Understanding has brought us to a margin between minimal affirmation and maximal calamity, so the only peace thinkable is that which passes (transcends, in the Bradleian sense) understanding (Brooker & Bentley, 1990:206).

This interpretation, however, misses one or two small but vital issues. The first is the omission of a full stop in the final line, which does not go along with any sense of being emphatic, or of something that "must" be stated. The second is the fact that the word "shantih" is repeated three times. Combined, the lack of a full stop (so that the poem ends in open-endedness, also for the reader) and the thrice repeated word seem to indicate the orientalist and modernist notion of a third voice of dissolution -- and thirdness itself is indicated as an important desire in the Emmaus

passage that precedes the DA sequence, in which the speaker wants to know: "Who is the third who walks always beside you?/ When I count, there are only you and I together/ But when I look ahead up the white road/ There is always another one walking beside you" (Eliot, 1982:65). As a mixture of hallucination, the legend of Scott's end in the North Pole, and the Emmaus passage in the Bible, this passage could very well also prepare the third voice at the conclusion of the DA sequence.

This notion is intensified by a recognition that the shantih-line follows upon passages in which various fragments were retained in virtually awful tensions of polar opposition to the point of madness. The fact of between-ness, of sitting on the shore, on the borderline between an arid plain and the ocean, confirms such a more ecological reading of this conclusion. Perhaps Brooker and Bentley wished to diminish the orientalist dimension of the poem more than Eliot's position at that time would allow for, and perhaps that is the reason why they persistently insist that the oriental fragments (such as DA and its "echoes") return on the page as empty shells of signifiers that have no possible direct bearing on the very nature of the poem, besides a deconstructive element. To the Cummings reader, however, who is abundantly aware of the oriental and typographical potentials of a third voice that finally breaks deeper into the zone of between-ness, beyond a merely rational (and almost insane) persistence of oppositional thought, the ecological transcendence towards the conclusion of *The Waste Land* seems positively to restore the searing absence of natural integrity that the entire poem has lamented.

In other words, this kind of reading is highlighted by Cummings whose poetic ecology has implications for modernist ecology at large. Norman Friedman is right when he argues that Cummings' orientalism should encourage further exploration of modernist orientalism on the whole (1984:174; 1996:4). In his poetry and in his non-intellectualized poetic prose Cummings was quite aware of a central ambivalence in modern time and in modernist poetry, and he continued to point the way to its dissolution with his emphasis on an ecological, Taoist third voice. In *The Waste Land* we see how the middle ground, the zone of between-ness, can shake one as it moves through extremities of absence and tension. Ultimately, however, the poem delicately and convincingly points to this third dimension beyond those opposites. What is written at the conclusion of this salient poem is found in Cummings' economical renditions of a similar modernist ecology:

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Of course, as has been indicated in the thesis, this poem has been and could still be experienced as a disappointment from an ecologically ambivalent modern/modernist critical perspective. We have seen that critics felt that this poem offers only a pyrotechnical surface that hides a return to subjective sentimentality. If one recombines this poem in that way, it would often be from a starting point that modernist poetry and discourse has to be ambivalent, and has to amount to an objective control of emotions. As such, this poem would then hide a trite individual subjectivity under its busy and glittering surface antics. Then, indeed, it could be read as bumper sticker message and a Hallmark card (Turco, 1994:72-73), or a Cole Porter lyric (Hood, 1984:92). However, when such objectifying interference with the poem has become obsolete to one reading in this (post-structuralist) day and age for whatever reason, the poem may lead in another, ecological direction, a direction probably intended originally. We then recombine its fragments to see how they form an (e)merging, threedimensional whole of culture and nature, in which nature is the larger order into which the poem goes *down and up*, beyond mere sentimental subjectivities such as either sadness or gladness, and beyond a view of signs-as-mere-signs or nature-as-mere-signs. It is then a truly humble poem that balances an inbetween-ness of the s-o variable with a return to natural open-endedness and rootedness, with great effect. Neither a major nor a minor poem, it then remains a poem of smallness, humility, fluidity, and flow into a third dimension or voice. And as we now begin to see, this voice occurs throughout modernist discourse, although mainstream modernist discourse and its critical reception overshadowed this recognition due to its greater ambivalence and lesser sense of unity. And because Cummings, as in this leaf poem, emphasizes one-ness more than salient mainstream modernist works which accent dislocation more, the one-ness of mainstream

modernist discourse may now seem to have been underemphasized partly by mainstream modernist discourse itself, and partly due to a critical reception that continued to fail to realize that such one-ness is the ultimate condition of even the most salient, major, and ambivalent modernist poems. For this reason, Cummings' poetry remains an invaluable and revealing part of the modernist poetic movement. From an ecological point of view, then, one has to assert that the current configuration of modernist poetry is entirely incomplete without Cummings' unique modernist and ecological poetic voice. It is clear that these findings call for an ecological re-configuration of the poetic discourse of Cummings, Eliot and Pound.

Conclusion

An Ecological Re-configuration: Cummings, Eliot, Pound

An ecological re-configuration of the poets studied in this thesis begins with the recognition that Cummings, Eliot, and Pound were all drawn towards the notion of a third voice. Moreover, in all three cases the third voice is related to issues and questions of ecology: ecology in the broad sense of an active completeness, wholeness, and integrity of the poetic sign, as well as the related notion of ecology in the more particular sense of those relationships that sustain a quality of human biological survival.

The first set of main questions of the thesis -- as to the scope of Cummings' poetic ecology and its dynamics or "how" -- has revealed, firstly, that the extent of his poetic ecology is considerable since it can be found in some depth within all or most of the familiar categories of his poetry. It has further revealed that a gradual historical crisis which centres on Taoist poetics underpinned Cummings' further development as a poet of nature, more or less between the 1930s and 1950s. Secondly, upon inferring -- by means of an ecosemiotic method based on modern "between-ness" as the condition of ecological experience -- the manner in which Cummings manages to elicit an ecology from his reader, his poetry has revealed a striking and illuminating array of ecological dynamics.

It can now be asserted that these dynamics centre on the third voice in various respects. For instance, the analyses in Chapters Three and Four show that his osmotic tendency, yin tendency, ideogramatics, "is 5" eco-logic, humility, flexibility, serendipity, and so forth are all involved in the process of sustaining an ecological voice, beyond a stasis and contra-ecology of various dualistic frameworks within the modern mindset. These dynamics upset one's oppositional expectations, one's entrenched habits of dualistic thought and "correct" grammar, arithmetic, typography, etcetera, only to revitalize the ultimate recombinatory potential of rediscovering a fresh, integrated third voice into nature. In a sense, and certainly from an ecological perspective, Cummings' poetry seems *more* reasonable and correct precisely because it re-arranges or builds upon existing semiotic habits of the modern West so as to create its unique ecological soundness. Indeed, as Cummings was aware, his individuality or loneliness and his solidarity or wholeness are irrevocably tied together. And this is not true only in those rare instances -- not treated in detail here

since they have been treated well by Friedman who knew Cummings personally -- when the poet indulges in various irresolvable dualities of his own, usually in defense against society. As has been demonstrated by means of a thorough hermeneutic and close reading of a substantial diversity of Cummings' poetry, the ecological third voice is his more predominant, successful, and aesthetically attractive mode of composition.

The reader who will take the trouble will find key modernist ecological texts such as the hummingbird osmotic mandala in Cummings' oeuvre. His painterly and writerly sensibilities here combine with reading and ecology to present the third voice to great effect. This poem, like many of the others studied in the thesis, presents an elusive "smallness" of expression at its centre, and that centre allows a dazzling recombination of the various typographical, grammatical, and other experiments and dynamics that Cummings employs. Moreover, this recombinatory event may lead to a heightened sense of active natural location and orientation, so that it must be concluded that Cummings manages an interactivity on all kinds of levels between the modern sign and the ecosystem.

If modernist poetry on the whole could be viewed as a break with the Cartesian past of static dualism, and a venture into the more fluid ontology and epistemology of the s-o variable (see Chapter Five), then Cummings has succeeded in motioning this fluidity into great heights and depths of poetic ecology. This success has to be counted as a lasting and increasingly valid element of Cummings' oeuvre, and needs to be further explored in future research.

Of course, there has always been and will always be another alternative: namely to explore the fluidity of the s-o variable in order to uncover a deep uncertainty or epistemic trauma at the heart of modern experience and existence. The mainstream modernist poets Eliot and Pound are masters at this. And from this more mature, ironic, and alienating angle, Cummings seems to be removed from the mainstream poetic enterprise. However, as the thesis has demonstrated in detail -- initially based on its ecosemiotic approach to his poetry and then taken further based on the scope and dynamics of the ecology of Cummings' poetry -- this is not the whole modernist truth.

A more complex modernist poetic configuration is necessary from an ecologically informed viewpoint, just as it is necessary for critics to bring the various oriental and ecological dynamics of modernist poetry to the critical surface if we wish to read the poetry more inclusively, fairly, and clearly. A second set of main questions in the thesis focused on the critical reception of Cummings' poetry and the relations between that reception and his poetic ecology. Chapter Five of the thesis has responded to this question in some detail, within the framework of a theoretical overview of the complication of natural context in Chapter Two. In-depth revisitations of familiar names in the range of Cummings critics (see Chapter Five) point out that the intellectual approach to Cummings' particular ecological dynamics has tended to be at least ambivalent -- and centrally ambivalent at that -- and at most dismissive.

These revisitations, from Edmund Wilson to Helen Vendler, have further shown that ambivalence itself, or an ecosemiotc dilemma of unity versus fragmentation, accompanied crucial responses to Cummings' poetry. One has to deduce that Cummings' poetic ecology itself -- his awareness of nature and his methods of not only writing about but *writing* nature -- has had damaging critical consequences for the poet in a number of important critical areas. Flexibility was mistaken for weakness and sentimentality, for example. A lack of ambivalence towards nature was interpreted as a lack of intellect altogether, whereas Cummings' poetry seems to maintain just the right levels of ecological simplicity and complexity to steer between the outer modernist extremities of various ecological complications, including an impersonal totalitarianism of objectified or reified signs that are weakened by their lack of outside context.

It was only when critics such as R.P. Blackmur sensed (in 1941 as opposed to 1931) that a different dynamic functions at the heart of Cummings' poetry -- namely an ecological dynamic -- that they began to approximate the essence of his work with more clarity and with greater appreciation or *less* ambivalence. We have seen that some critics, such as Wilson in 1924, went so far as to *create* or project ambivalence with a view to Cummings' poetry in the struggle to come to terms with Cummings' actually simpler and more complex methods of exploiting an ecology of the sign. And we have seen that critics such as Helen Vendler entertained a very specific view of the poetic intellect, and of what it ought to be -- and that this view either ignored or

attacked an ecological poetic potential. Vendler's attack on Cummings' admittedly rather weak ecological poem "o purple finch" (73 *Poems* CP 836) disguises the real issue: namely that Cummings does not reveal the required levels of natural cynicism that Vendler expected from good or even well-behaved modern poetry.

A third set of main questions involves a comparison of "living organisms" or "biological slides" of the poetic ecologies of Cummings, Eliot, and Pound in line with Pound's suggested method of studying art. By the nature of its focus on Cummings' poetic ecology, the thesis evidently could not do absolute justice to the poetries of the mainstream exponents. However, a modernist poetic ecology will do well to start with Cummings' poetry in any event -- for in his oeuvre we indeed arrive at a rich and magnificent field of modern ecological poetic activity. In looking back at the argument presented in the thesis as a whole it has to be clear that the relative neglect of Cummings' poetry in general and of his poetic ecology in particular (for example in seminal essays such as Robert Langbaum's) is difficult to grasp. In short, to study Eliot's and Pound's ecologies on the basis of that of Cummings may be good critical practice.

Informed by a thorough ecosemiotic reading of Cummings' poetry, the thesis has uncovered intriguing and imperative interpretative potentials with a view to Eliot's and Pound's respective modernist poetic enterprises. It has shown that nature-culture between-ness (and hence the s-o variable), as well as an East-West middle ground, are indeed as central to modernist poetry on the whole as Eric Hayot suggests and as William Howarth suggests inadvertently. From a Cummingsian ecological perspective informed by Hayot's and Howarth's suggestions the thesis has made a number of central modernist poetic concerns apparent.

Foremost among these is a critical awareness of the exact treatment of opposites in modernist poetry, *including* the vital opposite of the realm of semiosis versus the realm of nature. The degree of difference between Cummings and the mainstream modernists in their major mode could be described on the basis of this awareness. We have seen in Chapters Five and Six especially that Eliot and Pound take ecological ambivalence, or a natural semiotic dilemma, quite far and certainly further than Cummings does.

Generally speaking, given the various poetic inferences and analyses of the thesis in its entirety, Eliot and Pound indulged in a stretching of s-o tensions to the utmost, including once again the vital set of sign-nature relations. On the other hand, they found their own routes into a third voice of greater natural acceptance as we have also seen. And it now begins to appear that the former has been over-emphasized whereas the latter has been underemphasized. Among various reasons for this state of affairs, the thesis has indicated carefully that the rise of two related fallacies -- namely a modernist "objective fallacy" and a post-structuralist "semiotic fallacy" -- may have led to a distortion of the actual validity not only of Cummings' ecological third voice, but also those of Eliot and Pound.

To put these fallacies in perspective once and for all, it is necessary to cite Laurence Coupe's formulation of the "semiotic fallacy" at some length:

Since the mid-1970s [within] various schools -- formalist, psycho-analytic, new historicist, deconstructionist, even Marxist -- the common assumption has been that what we call 'nature' exists primarily as a term within a cultural discourse, apart from which it has no being or meaning. That is to say, it is a sign within a signifying system, and the question of reference must always be placed in emphatic parentheses. To declare that there is 'no such thing as nature' has become almost obligatory within literary cultural studies. The great fear has been to be discovered committing what might be called 'the referential fallacy'. On the one hand, the scepticism of theory has proved salutary: too often previous critics assumed that their preferred works of literature told the 'truth' about the world. On the other hand, it has encouraged a heavy-handed culturalism, whereby suspicion of 'truth' has entailed the denial of non-textual existence. It is a mistake easily made, perhaps, once one has recognised the crucial role language plays in human sense-making. But it should still be pointed out that, in failing to move beyond the linguistic turn, theory has been stuck in Ching-yuan's second stage of enlightenment [during which stage nature is experienced as a complete other to human culture simply because of the recognition that it exists only inside one's mind -- the third stage involves a return to the knowledge that one is part of nature and that mountains are themselves again]. In seeking to avoid naïvety, [theory] has committed what might be called 'the semiotic fallacy'. In other words, it has assumed that because mountains and waters are human at the point of delivery, they exist only as signified within human culture. Thus they have no intrinsic merit, no value and no rights. One function of green studies [such as ecocriticism or ecosemiotics] must be to resist this disastrous error (2000:2).

In modernist poetry, Cummings' oeuvre offers an "alive" testimony to such resistance on the lyrical, satirical, and visual-verbal levels. There has been considerable pressure on modernist poetry from a post-structuralist perspective to be read as no more than signs, or in terms of the "semiotic fallacy". The thesis hopes to have demonstrated that Cummings' poems are more than themselves, or more than mere signs: that the osmotic hummingbird poem, for instance, is more than an ill-

defined referent, and that a child-like poem such as “in Just-/ Spring” maintains a non-self-contradictory centre of earthy playfulness. Similarly, the thesis has provisionally concluded with a view to the most salient modernist poem, Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, that its conclusion can be read rather well from the perspective of Cummings’ third voice: on the levels of iconicity and onomatopoeia as much as on the levels of orientalism and an interlevel connection between the sign and the ecosystem.

Nonetheless, the thesis has also argued that the “semiotic fallacy” is partially adumbrated by a mainstream modernist “objective fallacy”. The latter is related to the former in a particular sense as we have seen: signs are placed with such distance and difficulty from their outside and natural context, that they collapse into themselves, seal off into a sliding proliferation of their own perpetuation -- of which Pound’s *Cantos* remain perhaps the most striking example. They paradoxically turn into their own objects. In other words, they offer themselves as little or no more than text, like the refrain in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (see Chapter Six).

Driven by the need to be precise, exact, and “scientific” to the extent of positivism and totalitarianism, these signs turn solipsistic, impenetrable, and hyper-inclusive as well as hyper-exclusive (toward their outside context) at once. The result is the celebrated and searing male mind-scape that pervades *The Waste Land*, “The Hollow Men”, and to some extent Pound’s *Cantos*. An infertility of the sign is reciprocally reflected in an infertility of the landscape. The hierarchical “grid” of critical poetic objectivity, consisting of metaphorical steel, a heap of broken images in the beating sun, sulphuric acid, and voltmeters puts up a seemingly insurmountable screen between human observer and observed nature.

In the smaller, less spectacular variants of modernist poetry such as Marianne Moore’s or William Carlos Williams’ poetry and indeed in the major minor, small poetry of Cummings a modernist ecology comes into its own without similar difficulty. Here, distance between the sign and nature often leads to a renewed perspective on and closeness to natural being, as Robert Langbaum indicates (1970:104). The thesis may also be read as an attempt to stimulate a further exploration of smaller modernist projects. Now that the more spectacular varieties of modernist poetry have been studied abundantly, it seems to that these smaller types call for increasing critical devotion, also with a view to re-informing the former kinds.

A concise analogy may be in order: the study of Lepidoptera set out (in the nineteenth century) with almost exclusive attention to the bigger, more conspicuous butterflies such as birdwings and swallowtails. Over the past decades, however, smaller types such as blues, coppers, and hairtails have been examined -- and this shift has brought about a substantial increase of knowledge on the intricate behaviours and life histories of butterflies in general. In some ways, these smaller butterflies which seemed duller and less interesting at first, have proven to be more intriguing than their more spectacular relatives. Perhaps a similar situation has arisen in modernist poetic discourse, although one hastens to add that in literature, unlike the case with Lepidoptera, one is far more free to compare the spectacular and smaller variants directly. In other words, a continued comparison such as this one between the spectacular modernisms of Eliot and Pound and the smaller modernism of Cummings, seem to be called for -- since it is also true that we have not even begun to exhaust the major modernist poems.

To return to Langbaum: a broad historical perspective on sign-nature relations within modernist discourse does well to keep John Ruskin's seminal formulation of the pathetic fallacy in mind. Ruskin's fallacy offers an early prototype of Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility" (Langbaum, 1970:104). Put plainly, both Ruskin and Eliot longed for a return to a more thoughtful and less personally coloured poetry with a view to natural phenomena. As this thesis asserts, however, mainstream modernist poetry ends up in renewed difficulties of sign-nature relations. And one way of describing these is to assert that mainstream modernism gave rise to an objective fallacy -- the other extremity, equally interfering with a view to natural location and perception -- and that Cummings avoided this with a most particular and singular form of Taoism, as the thesis has pointed out in some detail.

Interestingly, Ruskin's initial essay on the pathetic fallacy also seems to prefigure the possibility of a future objective fallacy. Ruskin introduces his "Of the Pathetic Fallacy" (1856) as follows:

German dulness, and English affectation, have of late much multiplied among us the use of two of the most objectionable words that were ever coined by the troublesomeness of metaphysicians, -- namely, 'Objective' and 'Subjective'.

No words can be more exquisitely, and in all points, useless; and I merely speak of them that I may, once and for ever, get them out of my way, and out of my reader's (2000:483-484).

His introduction does not seem to ask for an *objective* poetry, either. Ruskin spends most of the remainder of his essay on the pathetic fallacy, that subjective poetic weakness which interferes with natural perception -- I have cited one or two examples in preceding Chapters. But here and there his initial and relievingly-emphatic tirade against the term objective provides inklings that an extremely objective poetry could be equally disappointing. For example, poets who lack in emotion since they may be too objective or intellectual, do not make it to Ruskin's first grade of poets. And at the moment that poets such as Eliot and Pound turn perhaps too objective, too distant, or too difficult when they arrange their impersonal fragments into various intellectualized poetic tensions, modernist poetry begins to participate in the complication (over and above the necessary complexity) of sign-nature relations -- and then it may seem to lapse into a "lower" rank of poetry. Some examples include the hallucinatory passages of *The Waste Land* in which desert, forest, and unlikely bird "sounds" seem to jumble into an extremely isolated male mind-scape; a mind-scape which rather poorly interferes with ecological sensibilities or natural perception. It is just as unlikely to hear a nightingale call "jug jug" in a desert with pine trees as it is to envisage the cruel, crawling foam of the ocean's waves -- the latter is one of Ruskin's examples of interference or projection, as has been indicated. Neither a clarity of a non-subjective view of (say) the maple leaf, nor a clarity of the pure absence of natural connectivity occur in these jumbled images. Perhaps the worst examples occur when Pound assembles "angry" fragments of nature imagery to lash out at either economists (Canto XIV) or Taoists (Canto LIV) (see Chapters One and Six).

In short, an objective fallacy as found in mainstream modernist discourse can be as interfering and complicating with a view to nature -- if not more so -- than Ruskin's pathetic fallacy. The continuities and discontinuities of Ruskin's pathetic fallacy, the mainstream modernist objective fallacy, and Coupe's formulation of the semiotic fallacy potentially offer fertile ground for future research, especially against the backdrop of the continuities and discontinuities between Romanticism, modernism, and post-modernism.

Besides its concomitant natural interference, its tendency to take sharp turns between logical absence and objective substance, and its inclination to remain trapped within the rational relational mind, the objective fallacy also goes along with a

tendency of mainstream modernist poems suddenly to “die”, thus coming to a paradoxical if momentary relief or “life”. Examples indicated in the thesis include the conclusion of Eliot’s “Prufrock” in which a sudden awakening to outside context means the abrupt end of the poem, and Pound’s “Canto”-comments on his *Cantos* (see Chapter Six). A notable exception to these occurrences -- an exception brought into clear view from the perspective of Cummings’ poetic ecology -- involves the conclusion of the most salient modernist poem, *The Waste Land*.

A Cummings reader can do no other but brightly perceive the play of an orientalist and dynamic third, as well as an intimation of the ecological transcendence of a now-here-nowhere moment at least in the very last line of *The Waste Land*, with its thrice repeated “shantih”, its omission of a full stop, and (hence) the slightly and tellingly emphasized entry of text into blank space. I have pointed out that such a reading can be confirmed on the basis of various aspects of *The Waste Land* itself (Chapter Six), and one could have added that the very title of the poem, with its accent on issues of the land, already indicates that ecology is an imperative element of this poem, although contra-ecology serves to accentuate this even further.

Such a reading of this poem is more likely to the Cummings reader, made fully aware of the various potentials and subtleties of an orientalist ecological dimension within modernism at large. And such a reading would move away from the current fashionable post-structuralist pressures upon criticism, theory, and interpretation at one or two key levels. Instead of perhaps imposing a reading that stresses signs as no more than empty shells of signifiers that merely return upon themselves (without any meaningful connection to outside context and nature), such a reading dares to take another direction, and to follow the artist into regions that fall, strictly speaking, outside the comfortable or uncomfortable zones of semiosis for the sake of semiosis.

Indeed, such a reading away from the semiotic fallacy for a moment, and into an active ecological awareness, would fit the development of modernist discourse even in terms of its own history, for Eliot and Pound also arrived at an “alive” and ecological third voice in their poetries -- there to find, so to speak, a seemingly smaller poet that has explored the third route with considerable “aliveness” for a longer and more consistent period of time: Cummings. In oriental and Taoist mode, and in reconciliatory and more earthy mode, Pound and Eliot seem to have striven for their third voice with more alienation and equal intensity than Cummings.

I do not want to diminish the aesthetic excitement that the salient modernist poems have given and still give, namely a dizzying sense of de-context, or the feeling (in paraphrase of Umberto Eco (1990:7)) that such dazzling persistence in pointlessness or non-meaning is experienced as hugely significant. In fact, I hope to have indulged in precisely such reading on occasion in the thesis. However: currently we would be unwilling to return to a similar sustenance of those levels of positivism and objective reification (with its corollary absence of organicism). The later Eliot asserted a similar position. Further research on World War I modernism in contrast to World War II modernism seems to be called for, with a view also to these positivist and ecological developments, as well as the current status of post-structuralism on the basis of an ecological imperative.

The fact is that from a purely ecological perspective, Cummings seems central to the poetries of Eliot and Pound. This could be postulated on several bases as indicated in the development of the argument in this thesis. Perhaps the best formulation needs to start with Eliot's and Pound's "second" voice: the voice of a deep-seated ecological ambivalence, dilemma, or double-ness as expounded in the thesis body. This is the voice that stretches the s-o variable into maximum uncertainty, absence, and objectification. On the one hand it entails a remarkable and aesthetic awareness of an absence of ecological soundness, and on the other it entails a further entrenchment of contra-ecology; it is, indeed, an uncanny voice (also from the ecological perspective). Eliot's second voice gave indications that it would develop into his third voice all along, and to my mind the DA sequence and conclusion of *The Waste Land* mark the turning point at which one began to flower into the other, although his conversion evidently has been vital to the full flowering. And Pound's third voice, when it more or less sporadically flowers into poetry throughout his career (of which highlights remain *Cathay* and the "Pisan Cantos" as has been demonstrated), is a voice of particular agility and "aliveness". My brief reading of Canto LXXXIII (Chapter Six) provides an example of this.

Cummings' third voice (as has also been demonstrated) may be viewed as slightly more "alive" overall than that of Eliot in the *Four Quartets*. Cummings' sense of transcendence is equally cyclical and integrating as that of Eliot's later poetry, but it is at least a fraction less formal and ceremonial. The third voice as

expressed through the hummingbird poem is more *showing* and readerly than it is within Eliot's *Quartets*.

And in terms of an orientalist approach to poetry, Cummings' unique American variants on Taoism seem to me to equal Pound's best oriental (mis)understandings. When it comes to the third voice Cummings possibly at least equals, and potentially may be slightly more satisfactory than Eliot or Pound. In the case of a comparison of Pound's and Cummings' third voices or ecologies, one has to mention, for example, that Cummings appears to be more consistent and flexible. Furthermore, Cummings possibly excelled in two areas that the *Cantos* did not: minimalism of expression, and a more enhanced sense of creating delicate and powerful interlevel contexts by means of the poetic sign.

It should also be quite clear that Cummings' more straightforward, complex, and simpler ecological poetry finds itself outside the inner realms of ambivalent major modernist poetry. Cummings accepts, employs, and revitalizes various supposed clichés from the outset (the word "love", the sonnet form). This is just one further indication that in terms of the objective fallacy, the pathetic fallacy and the semiotic fallacy, Cummings does not belong completely within the vacuous, deracinated, or double centre of major modernist poetry. Instead, Cummings continued to drill into the zone of between-ness until the heat was precisely such that opposites fused into one. Here, one must say, Cummings' poetry connects profoundly with Eliot's reconciliatory voice and Pound's orientalist voice.

The thesis therefore cannot, nor does it wish to, propose a re-*canonization* of these poets in terms of modernism itself. That is, Eliot and Pound could be said to deserve their major status, and Cummings' major minor status probably also contains some truth as Chapter Five explained. There would be little use for current critics to revert to the major minor issue in an attempt to reshuffle the various modernist exponents studied here. One cannot see that Cummings wished for major status, to mention one crucial factor again. Rather, the dualistic categories of major versus minor should be used in current criticism as an entry point into the deeper dualisms that underpin modernist poetic discourse, for example in terms of what I have proposed as the s-o variable (with its various and complex implications).

For this reason the thesis opts for the term “re-configuration”. It does not imply a late “movement” or “reshuffling” in terms of modernist exponents, but it certainly implies a critical shift among current critics. Taking the lead of the third voice and the various ecological dynamics that are ubiquitous in modernist poetic discourse, the thesis calls upon critics to commit the semiotic fallacy less, and to explore modernist ecology -- of which Cummings is one of the main exponents.

As the thesis hopes to have demonstrated, Cummings offers not only an art of considerable aesthetic attractiveness and substance, but also an ecological field of discovery that is indeed rich, varied, and profoundly refreshing. Cummings criticism has often centred on his status with a mixture of negative and positive responses to his popularity, his modernist majorness or minorness, and his supposed lack or otherwise of an intellectualized vision. Cummings created, sustained, and developed a unique poetic language of his own from standard modern English as well as modernist devices that were prevalent in his time, to which he added ingenious potentials of artistic expression. His language can be understood, although a description of it continues to be elusive: it remains open-ended also to his many current readers. His silently singing poetic and ecological voice can, moreover, be approximately followed, as demonstrated in this thesis. And he has managed, through all these criticisms and developments, to create a substantial poetic ecology that allows us to experience nature as an active place in the most original manner. A deep love of nature underlies and surfaces in his poetry. This lasting commitment has meant much over the past century of modern existence, and it guarantees the continued theoretical, critical, and more general engagement with his poetry.

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