Plotting the Evolution of a
r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r

Michael Webster

In Memory of David Hendrickson (1954-2012)

This paper began when I decided to read Cummings' grasshopper poem ["r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" (CP 396)] on the letter level, plotting out the number of spaces in a line and reading individual letters down and backwards and even up, as one must do with some of Cummings' other non-readable-aloud poems. Later, after sending what I now think is the second manuscript version of the poem to Vakrilen Kilyovski and Gillian Huang-Tiller, the focus began to shift to an investigation of the various manuscript and typescript drafts and versions of the poem. Gillian's discovery of the 1935 typescript of the poem that Cummings sent to his printer S. A. Jacobs spurred me to locate and examine as many versions of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" as I could find.[1] I searched through the notes of one of my first visits to the Houghton Library and rediscovered a reference to yet another manuscript of the poem, which turned out to be the earliest draft we have found to date. Putting together letter and spacing research with manuscript research, I now offer a reading of the architecture and evolution of this extraordinary poem.

Cummings' visual form: "parody stanzas"

In his visual poems, Cummings creates semantic transformations by bending traditional verse forms and (re-)arranging and splicing words into fragmentary syllables and letters—thus requiring new levels of attention from his readers. For Cummings, "a style of constant emphasis" (Friedman, *Art* 124) creates poems with their own body and life, in which each letter and space potentially connects in multiple ways with every other letter and space. These radical visual poems, however, are also subtly traditional, for they are organized in lines and stanzas (even if those lines and stanzas consist only of one or two letters or a single punctuation mark). And, as Kilyovski (following Max Nänny) suggests in his article in this issue, the grasshopper poem can be seen as a sonnet with an extra fifteenth line, ";grasshopper," which forms its title. However, the grasshopper poem is not like most of Cummings' visual poems in that its fifteen lines spread out

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horizontally rather than forming a vertical column of shortened lines grouped in recognizable stanzas. Marjorie Perloff has termed these radically shortened lines and stanzas "parody stanzas" (99)—but they are not always parodic. Even in Cummings' radical visual poems, oral-based rhythmic and even metrical effects may occur before or after a one-or-two-letter line, interacting with non-traditional structures like line, letter, character, and space counts. Often, too, stanza-line counts and individual lines will be arranged in bilateral symmetrical patterns that sometimes emphasize the iconicity of letter shapes.[2] In some of Cummings' most radical visual poems, an oral, sound-based poetics disappears almost entirely. He wrote: "not all of my poems are to be read aloud—some . . . are to be seen & not heard" (*Letters* 267). Since the earliest manuscript of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" shows that Cummings at least briefly considered casting its words in parody stanza form, glancing at a later visual poem written in stanzas may help us grasp—if only by contrast—the iconic, semantic, and semiotic mysteries of the grasshopper poem.

The poem called "o // the round" (CP 606)—an elegy for the literary and music critic Paul Rosenfeld—begins as free verse and becomes progressively more difficult to read aloud:

o

the round
little man we
loved so isn't

no!w

a gay of a
brave and
a true of a

who have

r
olle
d i

nt

o
n
o

w(he)re

The poem's seventeen lines and nine stanzas are organized in a symmetrical 1-3-1-3-1-3-1-3-1 line pattern, with the middle ninth line ("who have") acting as a syntactic and visual pivot from complete words in mostly free verse to fragmented words and single letters. The dominant letter-shape in the poem is clearly the "o"—which is iconic of Rosenfeld's roundness (that rolled into nowhere) and of the loss and absence of a "who," an individual and whole personality. Symmetrical letter patterns are found in the two stanzas describing that personality: the second stanza begins and ends with the letter "t" while the fourth stanza rounds each corner with an "a." The almost-symmetry of line 12, "d i" (two letters each made of one upright and one rounded part), may be read as "die / i," or the death of the "i"—or the "olle / d i" (Rosenfeld's old i) that has now been transformed. (In one of his typescript drafts, Cummings considered writing "r / Old" for "r / olle / d".)[3]

This "i" was a whole, a rounded character made of many parts, a "who" "gay" and "brave" and "true"—hence the plural "have"—whose selves have disappeared. After this central "have," whole words begin to disintegrate into single letters which may be read downwards in a variety of combinations. Moreover, the two halves of the poem are connected by the lamenting o's or zeros: skipping down from line one to line four yields "o / no!" or "o / now!"—and reading the initial letters down from lines 13 to 17 transforms five letters into four paradoxical statements: "no now," "no no," "o no," and "o now." Similarly, the "o / no!w" of lines one and four transforms into the "nowhere" or "o where" or "o here" or "now here" or "o he [is] here" of the last three lines. In addition, we may see the "who" of the center line transformed into the "w(he)" of the last line—a "who" who is a "he" contained within a "where" that is also a "here." (The parentheses contain the "he" within an open "O.") These permutations, mostly hidden in the linear text, are brought forward by an active and recursive reading of the visual text.

Moreover, these variations offer us a number of the complex feelings that attend the death of any friend: shock, denial, bafflement about where life and personality have gone, and questions of why now?—and why one person's "now" has been turned into "no." The poem also offers us an answer to at least one of those questions: Rosenfeld is now a "he" (appropriately rounded within parentheses) who resides in the now and where and here of the poem, a place that is "n / o / w(he)re" or "now here." For Cummings, the poem lives on the paper: "the paperspace around

each poem is a where in which it heres or a surface on which it floats" (qtd. in Webster, "singing" 202).[4] Rosenfeld is reborn as a "he" in the "here" of the poem via a transformation created in a vocal-verbal-visual collaboration between poem and reader.

A poem like "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" in which stanza blocks have disappeared presents even more challenges for the reader and, it turns out, for anyone who would attempt to reproduce the precise spatial and typographic arrangement of letters and words that make up the poem. When Laura Riding and Robert Graves wrote in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* that Cummings' typographic manipulations were a way of insuring that his texts would remain fixed, a way of "protecting himself against future liberties which printers and editors may take with his work" (62), they underestimated the complexity of these spatial arrangements and the difficulty of reproducing them as Cummings intended. Once his texts were printed in book form, Cummings did not revise them in any way in subsequent editions. However, even he sometimes had difficulties maintaining their typographic (or type-writerly) integrity.

A first draft of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r"

Inventing these texts was another matter entirely: in manuscript and typescript form, they are anything but fixed. What is probably the first draft of the grasshopper poem is handwritten on a single page in pencil, and thus is difficult to read and reproduce. Given this difficulty, in this paper I will refer to a transcription of the manuscript I have made (fig. 2).[5] Cummings starts the draft by describing the grasshopper's gathering "intoaThe [space] leaps." This ungrammatical formulation remains the same in almost all versions of the leap: one can gather into *a* leap or into *the* leap, but one cannot gather into *a* (as a verb or plural noun) "leaps" or into *the* (as a verb) "leaps." And since there is only one grasshopper here, it cannot gather into the (plural noun) "leaps," either. In one of the earliest interpretations of the poem, Sam Hynes noted that the capitalized "The" simply refers to the unknown animal leaping about: "The thing, the The," *leaps* (item 9). Precision creates very quick movement here: what begins as a leap suddenly becomes The capital T leap, while just as suddenly the definite article transforms into a being, a subject, and the word "leaps" moves from noun to verb, ending in "The [thing] leaps."

In the third version of the leap passage on this sheet, Cummings indicates the movement from definite article to subject by putting a space be-

tween the "T" and "he" ["T he" or "The he"]. With the fifth version of the leap, he begins to approach the look of the published poem, separating and capitalizing the "S" in the word "leaps," and thus dramatizing the shift from noun ("a leap" or "the leap") to verb (The [thing] leaps"). In addition, he arranges the letters of "leaps" as a descending stairway, capitalizing the "A" and inserting among the letters a colon, question mark, exclamation point, and a semicolon. These iconic devices show the suddenness of the leap, as well as conveying the viewers' astonishment and puzzlement—so much so that they render superfluous the word "incredibly" that Cummings had tried out at the beginning of the draft.

First pencil draft sheet, leap 1:
who upnowgath eringintoaT he   leaps incredibly arriving.
First pencil draft sheet, leap 5:

upnowgath
      ppegorhrass
          eringint)oaT he
:l
 eA?
   !p;▪   S   ar

Figure 1: First pencil drafts, grasshopper's leaps 1 and 5

The first draft page represents a working through of various ideas rather than a complete poem. Cummings mostly uses the left hand side of the sheet to try out at least twenty different scrambled spellings of the word "grasshopper," among them two of the three found in the final version of the poem. The three variations he eventually chose all have respellings or iconic features that emphasize the grasshopper itself. The final version of the poem avoids outside references, ultimately not using for example, "hassgropper" or "ppoherrgass." The right side of the sheet contains drafts that mainly figure out how to incorporate the scrambled grasshoppers into the otherwise somewhat linear syntax of the poem. Most notable surprises among these drafts are the notions that the grasshopper was ",A(sleep" be-fore his leap, and after the leap that he lands "wro ngwayr ound." With ",A

"r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" (first?) draft in pencil [Houghton Library, 1892.7 (121) folder 18, sheet 316]

who   [alternate first line:]
      upnowgath eringintoaThe   leaps   who
incredibly arriving.   upnowgath eringintoaT he
      nowupgath eringhim selfwitha
Who nowupgathering himselfinto a The   leaps

who gath(now)ering him(up)self in(

The up(now)gath(grass)eringhim(hop)self into(per)a
                                                          popherssagr
in who   cred   who
ibly elsewhere ar   p   upnowgath eringintoaThe   leaps
rives   grasshopper
                         popherssagr   hassgropper
                         popger   incred else ibly
grass   ppoherrgass   where arriving
  hop   pperohragass
  per   pophessagr
r a r g s s   who
| |
                                                                  (pperohgass)ering
ohpepsas   ppegorhrass   upnowgath(ppoherrgass)ering
                 ppegrorhass   in (pperohgass)
r   --
    r '
poprhessagr   ppregorhass   rpophessagr,A(sleep   rophessagpr
porhepsagrs   ppegorhass   who   rpophessagr
                     ppegohrass   a)s w(e look
                                            upnowgath
                                                           ppegorhrass
t tt tt t t t tt   eringint)oaT he
grasshopper   ppahorgess
hsospapregr   :l
                                          eA?
                                             !p;▪   S   ar
             Ri   :   Ri
grre   v   \l—ap?!;s   v
             ing   ing
                e ls ewh erea ndwro ngwayr ound   h
                        :l   he
                           eA?p!;.s   lse
                                           wher
grreapspho   e wron
                                           gway ro
                                           rIv
                 rIv   inGv
                 InG dis (hrespaprogr)   Ery   wrongwayroundfully
                 vi[illeg.]
                 t   rIv?   !InG
                 ly   grreapspho)
                                                &to
                                           rea(be)rran(com)ging(e)ly
                                           ,grasshopper;

Figure 2: Transcription of first pencil draft of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r"

(sleep," Cummings created an icon of the grasshopper at rest, hind legs jutting out. He certainly seems to have been toying with the semantic, homophonic, and iconic possibilities of juxtaposing ",A(sleep," with "aT he / :l / eA? / !p;▪ S," but finally decided to concentrate on the grasshopper leaping rather than sleeping. In the new version of "leaps," the capital

"A" could convey iconically both the up and down motion of the leap and the inverted V of the grasshopper's hind legs.

At the bottom right of the first draft, right after the fifth version of the leap, Cummings tries out a vertical version of the grasshopper's arrival, ultimately rejecting the descriptive formulations "e / lse / wher / e" and " v / Ery wrongwayroundfully":

<pre>
                                              ar
            Ri
            v
            ing
            h̶
            h̶e̶
            lse
            wher
            e wron
            gway ro
            rIv
            inGv
            Ery   w̶r̶o̶n̶g̶w̶a̶y̶r̶o̶u̶n̶d̶f̶u̶l̶l̶y̶

            rIv?   !InG
                  grreapspho)
                       &̶to
            rea(be)rran(com)ging(e)ly
            ,grasshopper;
</pre>

Notice that even this vertical draft is not divided into "parody stanzas"— and that the vertical format gives way to a more horizontal arrival of the "grreapspho)," centered under the large space between "rIv?" and "!InG"— prefiguring the more complicated and careful centering of the arrival in later drafts and in the final version This draft in the lower right quarter of the page arrives at much of the poem's final form, settling on two of the three deviant spellings of "grasshopper," adding "a)s w(e look," forming the shape of the "leap," and at the bottom of the page, triumphantly producing almost exactly the poem's final two lines: rea(be)rran(com)ging(e) ly / ,grasshopper;"—the only change being that the "ng" in "ging" is shifted to the other side of the "(e)" in the final version.

A second pencil draft of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r"

The crucial section when the hopper arrives is completed only in a second draft sheet in pencil, when something very close to the poem's final
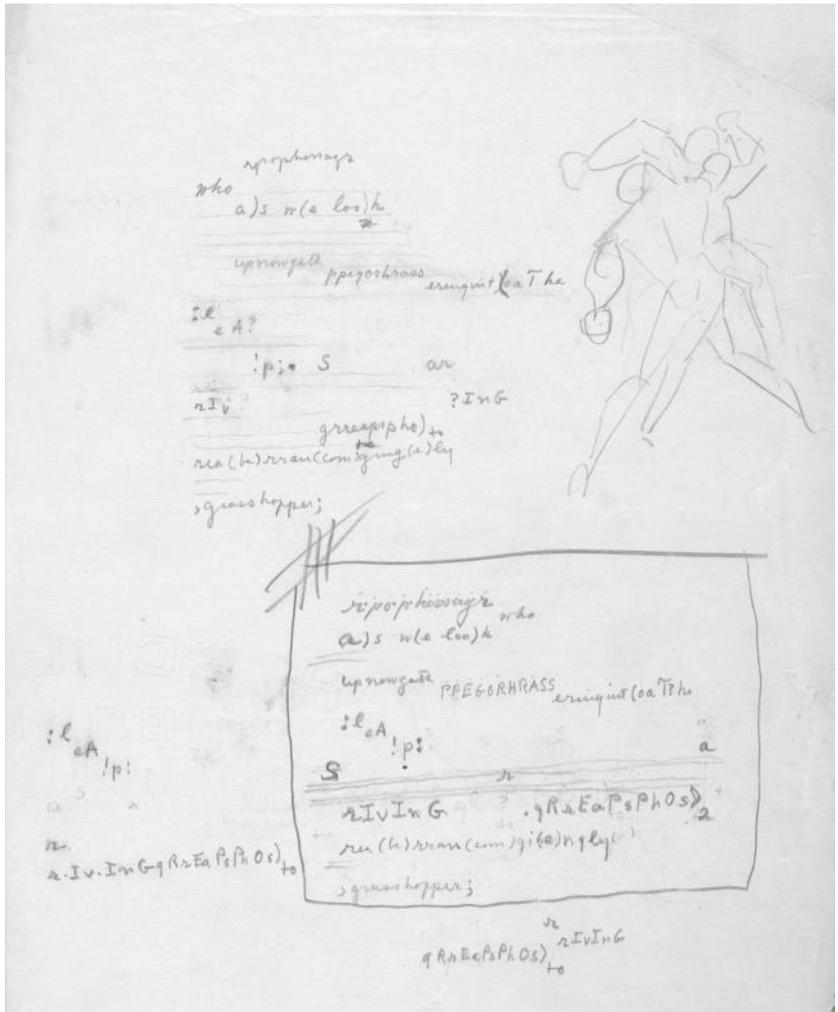
Figure 3: Second pencil draft sheet of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r"

shape emerges in the lower draft on this page (the one inside the box): fifteen lines with a stepped line-movement down and across for the first 9 lines, then two lines with only two and one letters respectively ["S a" and "r"], and then the line when the grasshopper arrives, the only line in which the words alternate capital and lower case letters, followed by a lonely "to" (or "2") on the right edge and then the two final lines.[6] (See figure 3.) In the upper draft, all the scrambled grasshoppers are in lower case. In the lower draft, however, the three scrambled words achieve their final forms.

Here we see before our eyes Cummings' intuitive shaping of the poem's iconic linguistics. Something—perhaps a desire to present three different aspects of an active animal perceived but not yet labelled—made him insert hyphens in the first hopper ["r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r"], capitalize all the letters of the second ["PPEGORHRASS"], and alternate lower case and capital letters in the third ["gRrEaPsPhOs)"]. Since "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" is aligned at the left margin instead of being moved to the right as in the final version, perhaps Cummings was still thinking of making a "parody stanza" visual poem, despite moving the "S" of "leaps" and the "a" of "arriving" to opposite ends of a single line. Indeed, the faint double horizontal lines on this draft clearly indicate line-spaces, which do not appear in the final version.

Pushing against stanzaic form, however, is the movement of the word "who" to the right to its canonical position near the middle of the second line. To further convey the uncertainty of "who" the gathering / leaping animal may be, Cummings adds a question mark to the space between "T" and "he"—calling the hopper "a T? he". In the final version, both space and question mark are dropped, while the ungrammatical lower-case "a" and capitalized "T" are moved from the end of line six to the beginning of the leap at line seven. Clearly, the alternation of lower-case with capital letters is meant to indicate movement, and perhaps the drawing of boxers to the right of the upper draft indicates the furious motion Cummings imagines. In December 1918, Cummings sent a draft of "SNO" (CP 113) to Scofield Thayer, commenting on creating movement through word and letter spacing: "note especially effect of splitting "stroppings" (17), of running 3 words on line 14 intensely-together in l 19 note the fight of a and A from 26 to 34."[7] Perhaps a similar "fight" occurs in "aThe):l / eA / !p:"?

But what sort of "fight" can possibly occur between lower and upper case letters? Why do these slight changes in lower or upper case, in punctuation, and in placement on the page matter at all? One answer is that they should not matter: this is the answer of the brilliant and sometimes extremely wrong-headed critic R. P. Blackmur, who wrote that when reading Cummings' poems, his "typographical peculiarities" should be "forgotten" just as "diacritical marks in the dictionary are forgotten once the sound of the word has been learned." In keeping with his belief that the poem "only takes wing on the page [but] persists in the ear" ("Notes" 110), Blackmur's comment assumes that Cummings' visual devices are intended only to reinforce sound qualities. Such is not the case. As we have seen, Cummings

explicitly stated that not all of his poems were meant to be read aloud: "some . . . are to be seen & not heard" (*Letters* 267). Almost every poem Cummings wrote, including his sonnets, features some non-readable-aloud iconicity. The movements that many of these iconic devices create are both visual and visceral, intellectual and immediate—the reader's eye moves and the mind feels and thinks. The "fight" or movement among letters, Cummings suggests, should be seen or experienced by the reader just as a passionate fan participates in a boxing match. In the same volume in which "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" appears, Cummings dramatizes two boxing matches via letter movements in the poems "i(meet)t(touch)" (CP 385) and "ondumonde' " (CP 430).[8] For Cummings, aesthetic experience should involve the whole body while mingling the feelings of "exaltation" and "humility"—a feeling that he compares in a 1938 essay to "falling seventy feet in the Cyclone rollercoaster at Coney Island" ("What About It?" 307). Even more dramatically, in a manuscript from 1918 he compares this feeling to "the contact of a naked fist with the lower jaw" ("Drafts of an essay," folder 5, sheet 41).

Cummings makes many tiny changers in punctuation, capitalization, and spacing as he feels his way towards the precise form that will create the maximum effect. A Cummings visual poem moves like Al Brown, the boxer depicted in "ondumonde' ": "caref / ully;pois / ed . . . strol(pre)ling(cise) dy(ly)na(/ mite)" (CP 430). Brown may be a "mite" (he was a bantamweight), but he knocks out his opponent with his precise "Isdensekil- / ling" power, just as Cummings' poems use minuscule means to create an Is precise and powerful enough to make significant contact with the reader's self. Some of the changes Cummings made in composing the grasshopper poem were indeed very small, and almost purely visual. For example, from the first draft sheet to the second, the phrase "a)s w(e look" changes in only one way: a parenthesis is added after the second "o" in "look": "a)s w(e loo)k". In the top draft of the second sheet, what appears to be an asterisk beneath the added parenthesis confirms the experience of many Cummings readers: he does not add parentheses lightly. And while the three parentheses in this phrase, which remain the same in the published poem, seem intuitively right, they resist explanation both visually and grammatically. Why three parentheses in such anomalous places? Why not, for example, put the parentheses around the double o's in "look" and thus create an icon of one pair of eyes looking, as Cummings does in "the(oo)is" (CP 740)? Sam Hynes maintains that the parentheses in "w(e loo)k" represent a "double

take" (item 9), but that view conflates the reader with the speaker of the poem, as well as failing to account for the parenthesis in "a)s". But perhaps the two parentheses splitting "as" and "we" indicate the hurried, partial, unfocused attention of the "we," while isolating the "e" (Estlin?) in the center space (7) of the line. Etienne Terblanche provides one answer to explain the third added parenthesis in "loo)k." He sees this parenthesis as an icon of the lens of an eye, indicating "an image which passes through a (reciprocal) biological lens from the world out there to the world in here" (*Poetry* 53). In biological and ecological terms, subject and object, observer and observed, are not really separate, but part of one dynamic (changing moment by moment) system. On the linguistic level, Cummings repurposes tiny sections of written language (three parentheses) to create a visual language that mimes tiny sections (a momentary perception, the lens of an eye, a jumping grasshopper) of this one system of life.

Upper draft	Lower draft

```:l```
``` eA?```
```   !p;■   S```
	``` :l```
	``` eA```
	``` !p:```
	``` S .```

Figure 4: Changes to the leap in "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" (CP 396), draft sheet two.

Among the changes on sheet two from the upper draft to the lower draft is the transformation of ":l/eA?/!p; // S" into ":l/eA/!p: // S". The reader will notice that the question mark has been deleted, the semicolon after the "p" has changed to a colon, and the black mark after the semicolon has disappeared, while the capital S has moved to the next line, one space to the left of the left margin. In addition, the black mark has become more of a bold period or dot beneath the "p," the only one of the changes that does not appear in the final version. Cummings also added a period before ".gRrEaPsPhOs)," clearly indicating that the grasshopper has landed on the ".g," the ground or grass. Perhaps also this period moves the stasis of the black spot from the leap to the arrival, just as the question mark was moved to the area of perceptual uncertainty ["aT? he"] before the leap.

But the most puzzling change on this page is the one that substitutes a colon at the end of "leap" for a semicolon. Perhaps the capital A gives us

clue, indicating as it does the up and down arc of the leap. If the capital A moves the eye up then down, the second colon at the end invites the reader to move the eye back up the ladder of words. Reading back up the leap (":p! / Ae / l:") is not such a strange idea for this poem, for, as we shall see, the first line may be read from the right to left or left to right. (Note also Vakrilen Kilyovski's article in this issue of *Spring*, in which he shows how the last line may be read as the title of the poem.) In addition, the added colon indicates a brief pause before the grasshopper's jerky movement to the left, making even more surprising the transition from noun to the verb formed by capital S. (Moving the S outside of the left margin further distances verb from noun.) However, even though the word "leap" is apparently a noun, deviant capitalization, spacing, and punctuation marks all make it jump like a verb. In contrast, the word ",grasshopper;" at the end is clearly a no-longer-leaping noun, yet the comma before and the semicolon after the word indicate movement.

Cummings' typescript "analysis of poem"

Typing out the poem formalizes the spatial relations of the letters by giving each letter its own same-sized space. Thus with a typed version we can more easily see how the small changes made in manuscript function not only locally in their immediate area, but also how they add up cumulatively to create a complicated formal construct. What we see in Cummings' "analysis" of the poem, now at the University of Virginia, is the formal culmination many small intuitive changes. As Gillian Huang-Tiller notes in this issue of *Spring*, Cummings' "analysis" is "little known to scholars," and was most likely sent to S. A. Jacobs to aid him in setting up the poem into type (111). In addition, it is the only typed manuscript of the poem that we have that predates the typeset version published in *No Thanks*. Reading this document, we discover that the poem has a left and right margin, that the two letters that make up line 10, "S" and "a," lie outside of each of those margins, and that "(r" (line 11) is placed exactly between those margins at the center of the poem. To put it another way, the distance from the left to right margin is 39 spaces, and the "r" occupies the twentieth space at the center of line. Since the poem has 15 lines, we can say that it is plotted on a grid (or field) 39 spaces wide and 15 spaces deep. That Cummings sometimes thought of the letters and lines of the typewritten space as a grid is evident when we examine a manuscript of "ondumonde' " (CP 430), which was written at approximately the same time as the grasshopper poem. Apparently wishing to visualize the spacing of the poem in the absence

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:

        (r
rIvInG   .gRrEaPsPhOs
                                        to
rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
,grasshopper;

analysis of poem
##################

lines 1,2,3 form a (reverse)Fall the end of which equals the **left** margin

    "   4,5,6   " " (regular)Fall

    "   7,8,9   " "   "   "

LINE 10 consists of two outside-the-frame unitsXXXX(S and a)

line 11 consists of two {centred-in-the-poem unitsXXXXXXX ..... (r
                        {   " between margins   XXXX
line 12 consists of two groups
    "   13   "
                        —a Poise   rIvInG from left margin
                        —a Fall   .gRrEaPsPhOs)
                                                to to right margin
lines 14,15   straight(at left margin)

                    summary
                    $$$$$$$$$$$

        the XXXX elements are   lines 1,2,3 = establishing of 2 Margins
                                                            right&left

                                 lines 4,XX/   repeat the Left Margin

                                 lines 12 & 13 repeat Both Margins

                                 lines 14,15   repeat the Left Margin

                                 LINE 11 establishes the midway-point
                                                between both margins

Figure 5: Typescript "analysis of poem" sent to S. A. Jacobs, circa 1935.

of a typewriter, Cummings drew his own graph paper, carefully noting at the top of the page that one box in the grid equals "one space."[9] Though in this manuscript the poem is aligned on the left margin, the published version of "ondumonde' " creates two large V-shapes pointing to the left margin in which each line is stepped forward or backward by one space from the previous or following line. The exceptions to this rule are two lines that begin 18 spaces from the left margin on a central axis of the poem:

```
           ondumonde"

       (first than caref
       ully;pois
        edN-o wt he
      n
    ,whysprig
              sli

      nkil
        -Y-
          strol(pre)ling(cise)dy(ly)na(
           mite)

            :yearnswoons,

             &Isdensekil-
              ling-whipAlert-floatScor
               ruptingly)

                      ça-y-est
                      droppe5
                     qu'est-ce que tu veux
                   Dwrith
                   il est trop fort le nègre
                  esn7othingish8s
                 c'est fini
                pRaW,lT;O:
                allons
               9
              &
             .

                      musically-who?

         pivoting)
           SmileS

            "ahlbrhoon
```

Cummings' "analysis" of the grasshopper poem shows how it is struc-
tured in a similar way, not so much this time by stepping the beginnings of
lines one space to the left or right, but rather by making the "steps" the
length of phrases, words, or a few letters. So Cummings notes that the
grasshopper poem begins on the right margin, "falls" three lines to the left,
then in a near-mirror image "falls" three lines to the right, then doubles

back to "fall" (or leap) in steeper fashion three lines to the right again. This zig-zag movement across the page becomes most pronounced in lines 10 and 11 where the eye must take in single letters at the right, left, and center of the poem's "field." Cummings carefully notes (twice!) that line 11 ["(r"] is "centred-in-the-poem" or "centred between margins"—exactly when and where the grasshopper begins his arrival after the leap. We can see this centering clearly when we type out the poem in Courier New, which mimics the mono-width spacing of the typewriter:

```
                    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;
```

Gillian Huang-Tiller writes that line 11 is "a kind of pivot" (112), which prompts both of us to see the centered "(r" as a visual indication that the grasshopper has at least briefly flipped over, or (as the first draft says) has become turned "wro ngwayr ound" before righting himself in the last line. This "pivot" is akin to the pivot that occurs in the space between the lines "(musically who?" and "pivoting)" in "ondumonde' " (CP 430). When the boxer Al Brown has finished his amazing and startling movements and knocked out his opponent, he pivots and smiles, something that Cummings captures iconically with two opposite-facing parentheses on separate lines:

```
              (musically-who?

         pivoting)
          SmileS
```

Like the added left-facing parenthesis that implies a lens in "loo)k," the right-facing parenthesis in the "(r" was a late addition to the grasshopper

poem. Perhaps both parentheses imply a turning movement, one a movement of the eyes, the other the turning of the grasshopper as he lands.

From "typewriter language" to "linotype-ese"

In the first printed version of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" in *No Thanks*, we can see that Jacobs has carefully centered the "(r" between the" S" and "a." But if we compare the 1935 printed version with the typewritten "analysis," we can see the difficulties that Jacobs had in maintaining the precise spatial relations that Cummings had worked out on the typewriter. Because the variable-width spacing of printers' fonts necessarily cannot reproduce the shape of a poem constructed with the mono-width spacing of the typewriter, Jacobs could not reproduce the exact spatial alignments of the "analysis." So even though the two characters "(r" in line 11 are at the center of the poem, they are no longer directly above the "(e" in line fourteen. The rectangle of the typewriter version has become more like a square in the printed version, so that the "(r," which was directly beneath the "SS" of "PPEGORHRASS" in the typewritten version is now in the typeset version approximately under the "RH." Jacobs' typeset version of the poem could only be an approximation of the typewritten version.

Figure 6: Jacobs' setting of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" in *No Thanks* (1935)

Cummings commented on the difficulty of translating mono-width typewriter language into variable spacing linotype language in his famous letter to his aunt Jane:

> am fighting—forwarded and backed by a corps of loyal assistants—to retranslate 71 poems out of typewriter language into linotype-ese. This is not so easy as one might think;consider,if you dare,that whenever a typewriter "key" is "struck" the "carriage" moves a given amount and the "line" advances recklessly or individualistically. Then consider that the linotype(being a gadget)inflicts a preestablished whole—the type "line"—on every smallest part;so that the words,letters,punctuation marks &(most important of all)spaces-between-these various elements, awake to find themselves rearranged automatically "for the benefit of the community" as politicians say. (*Letters* 140-141)

The line "advances recklessly or individualistically" because it advances one space at a time: each space and each letter occupies its own individual spatial world. A linotype machine, however, "inflicts a preestablished whole" on the line "so that the words,letters,punctuation marks &(most important of all)spaces-between-these various elements,awake to find themselves rearranged automatically." Note that Cummings pays particular attention to the spaces between the type elements—the grid of mono-space widths on the typewriter become kerned and squished and stretched by the linotype machine to accommodate and create an easily readable line. But Cummings does not want his lines to be easily readable; he doesn't want them "justified" in a neat, standardized block of prose text—he wants each poem-text to form its own individual shape according to the dictates of each poem's individual structure.

Certainly the grid created by mono-width spacing of the typewriter makes it easier to read down as we did with "o // the round" (CP 606). Lacking even parody stanzas, the grasshopper poem may be read in a variety of ways: forward, backward, down, up, and diagonally. Though the "analysis" stresses readings across the page from right to left and back again, a few up and down readings are possible. For example, reading down on the middle, twentieth space gives us the letters, "S | r | e," while reading up yields an equally puzzling "e | r | S." Since Cummings emphasizes throughout the letter "r"—which begins and ends the first line and also ends the poem—it is likely that "R" or "r" can also be read as "are"—a verb that captures the grasshopper's plural movements and being. (Of
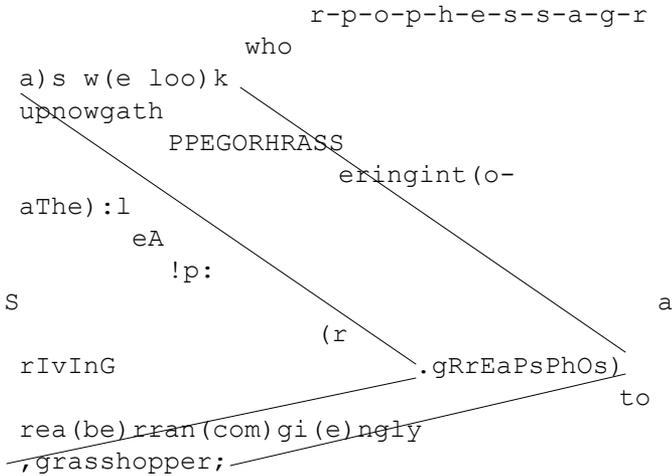
course the grasshopper is in the present, unlike the plural selves of Paul Rosenfeld who "have" rolled into nowhere.) So perhaps the multiple transformations of the "S" (the grasshopper) *are* the "e"—becoming, or E. E. Cummings, creator of the poem. Another possible downward letter-reading occurs at the right margin in space 39, where we discover that despite its multiplicity, the hopper "r | o" or "are [a] whole."

Returning to Cummings' "analysis" we notice that the poem begins on space 39 at this right margin. The hyphens and the letter "r" at either end of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" invite us to spell out the letters of the poem "backwards" ("r-g-a" etc.) when reading the first line. Starting this way allows us to see that the first "word" is (reading backwards) "r-g-a-s-s" and the second is "e-h-p-o-p-r"—or, unscrambled, "grass" and "hopper." Reading left to right we notice that the line as a whole displays a marked degree of symmetry. So the sequence has an "r" at each end and an "e" at the center, with the word "p-o-p" in the scrambled "hopper" after the left "r" and the word "s-a-g" in the "grass" on the far right. Also, "h-e"—or perhaps "he [missing apostrophe] s"—is in the middle. So the "pop" is in the "hopper" and the "sag" is in the "grass," while "he" is mister in-between. As Aaron Moe remarks, the "word 'p-o-p' foreshadows the sheer explosion" of the grasshopper's later leap (20). And Etienne Terblanche wrote in an e-mail to me that the "s-a-g" may refer to the grass bending when the hopper lands. In a more formal academic paper, Etienne also remarks that the "p-o-p" foreshadows "the surprising strength of the leap and the surprise of the sounds that accompany it" ("unanimal" 241). From the very beginning of the poem, the reader's eye must travel back and forth to construct sense from the fragmented letters. Yet this unreadable-aloud poem also stresses sound values, both in constructing new sense-units from letters and phonemes and in the onomatopoetic suggestion of the "various whirring and clicking sounds of the leap" (Terblanche, "unanimal" 241).

Looking at the letter "e" (reading horizontally from left to right), we notice that it tends to fall in the center space of space and character groups, as in line one: "r-p-o-p-h- |e| -s-s-a-g-r," line three: "a)s w(|e| loo)k," and line seven: "aTh |e|):l". In addition, the "e" in "eringint(o-" falls in space 21, just after the middle space, and the single "e" in parentheses in "rea(be) rran(com)gi(e)ngly" is exactly in the middle twentieth space. Certainly these multiple centered e's indicate that the poet "e e" is the central creator of this field of letters—and/or he is looking so closely that he is at the center of the action. As we saw with "(r" in line 11, centering is an important

organizing principle in a poem not aligned on the left margin.

The leap itself projects into the empty center of the poem, and may be visualized in several ways. For example, if we divide each 39-space line into three equal sections of 13 spaces each, then the 13-space letter groups assume added importance. The three horizontal letter groups of thirteen characters and spaces may be seen as forming a v-shaped line from top left to far right and back to bottom left, moving from "a)s w(e loo)k" to ".gRrEaPsPhOs)" to ",grasshopper;" at the end of the poem:

```
                        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;
```

The top of this V follows the diagonal descent of the letter group that describes the grasshopper's leap ["aThe):l / eA / !p:"] which jumps through three lines and 12 spaces. The thirteenth space of the leap then makes a sharp v-shaped turn to the left, ending just outside the left margin: "S." The reader's zig-zag eye movements peak during and just after the grasshopper's leap in this empty middle section of the poem, when our eyes jump back and forth, left and right across the page. The reader "loo)k[s]" along with "w(e" at the unpredictable but carefully plotted placement of the words.

As we have seen, the three scrambled grasshopper words and vertical letter-reading cause a great deal of eye-movement as well. If the first scrambled grasshopper represents movement ("pop" and "sag"), the second, capitalized one represents a more static if scrambled symmetry—or perhaps the "gathering" of tension before the leap (see Kidder 109)—with the "R" in the center and the two double consonants from the words "grass" and "hopper"—"PP" and SS"—at each end. On may begin reading the third

scrambled grasshopper, ".gRrEaPsPhOs)," with a period, and the read for-ward in lower case, which produces "grashs." Next (with a slight back-and-forth hOP), one might read backwards in (mostly) upper case, and—stopping before reaching the full stop—produce "hOPPER." This stop marks the beginning of the end of the animal's movements, before its final rearrangement into a properly spelled left-to-right bug resting in the bent grass of a comma and semicolon: ",grasshopper;".   Another approach to reading this section was taken by Max Nänny, who very cleverly tamed these eye and grasshopper movements into a pattern poem depicting a static grasshopper (fig. 7):
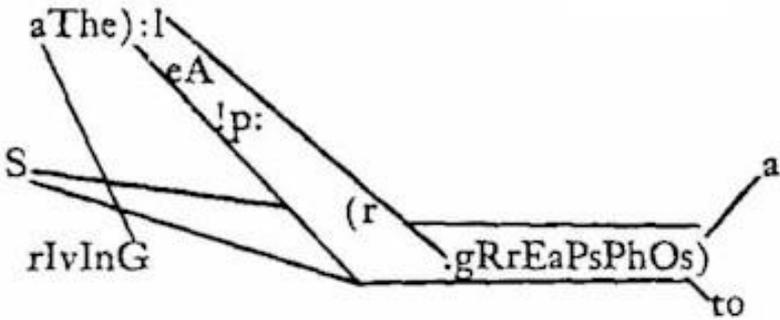

Figure 7: From Max Nänny, "Iconic Dimensions in Poetry" (1985)

To create this partial pattern poem, it appears that Nänny simply drew lines over the standard printed version of the poem in the 1972 *Complete Poems*. In the later printed versions (1954, 1972, 1994), the "(r" is positioned under the "OR" in "PPEGORHRASS" and above the "gi" in "rea(be)rran(com)gi (e)ngly". Despite small differences, the spacing in these standard typeset printed versions is much closer to Jacobs' 1935 typeset version in *No Thanks* than it is to the typewritten Cummings "analysis" or to the "typescript" version that Firmage produced in 1978.

However, in all these printed versions, the "(r" is approximately cen-tered between the out-of-bounds "S" and "a" on the line above. Yet in in-structions sent to the printer of *Poems 1923-1954* (dated "July 4 '53"), Cummings clearly indicates that the "(r" should be positioned beneath the "RH" in "PPEGORHRASS" and above the "m)" in "rea(be)rran(com)gi(e) ngly."[10] This positioning centers the "(r" not between the "S" and "a" of the line above, but precisely eight spaces to the right of the "G" in rIvInG and eight spaces to the left of the period that begins ".gRrEaPsPhOs)" (fig. 8).

DIAGRAM

```
                                    r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
                              who
        a)s w(e loo)k
     upnowgath
              PPEGORHRASS
                          eringint(o-

     aThe:)
          eA
            !p:
   s
                        (r
     rIvInG                        .gRrEaPsPhOs)
                                               to
     rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
   ,grasshopper;
```

EXPLANATION

Of all my poems, this one is probably the most difficult to set.
To set it correctly, it must be considered as an oblong unit of 15
vertical lines (numbered 1-15 in leadpencil on my diagram) with two
opposite margins, one on the extreme left & one on the extreme right
(indicated in redpencil on my diagram).
The whole poem is contained between these margins, except for two
letters; namely "s" (line 10) & "a" (same line). "s" is just-outside the
left margin & "a" is just-outside the right margin of line 10.

PROCEDURE

1st--set lines 3-1, namely
                        r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
                  who
        a)s w(e loo)k
2nd--set lines 4-6, namely
     upnowgath
              PPEGORHRASS
                        eringint(o-
3rd--set lines 7-9, namely
     aThe):l
          eA
            :p:
4th--set line 10, namely
     s
5th--set line 11, namely
                  (r
6th--set lines 12-13, namely
     rIvInG   .gRrEaPsPhOs)
                                       to
7th--set line 14, namely
     rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
8th--set line 15, namely
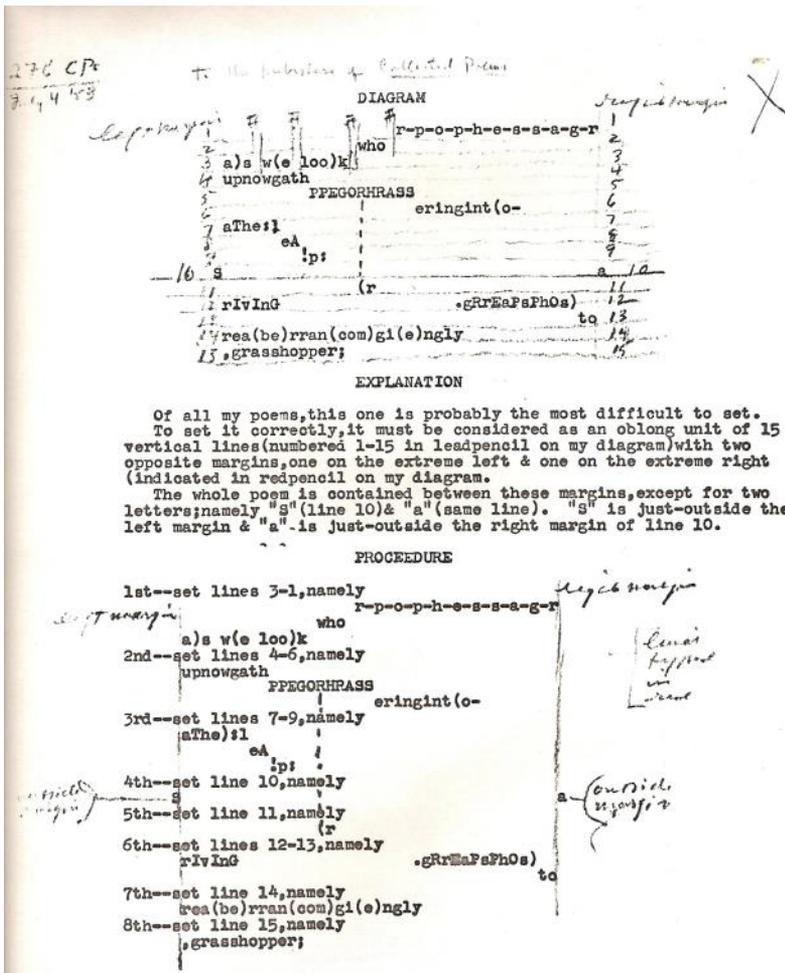   ,grasshopper;
```

**Figure 8:** Cummings' instructions to his printer (July 4, 1953)

The "(r" is now centered on the line after rather than the line before. Even though he directs the printer to set the "S" "just-outside the left margin" and the "a" "just-outside the right margin," Cummings seems to have forgotten that his typescript "analysis" called for the letter "r" to occupy the central twentieth space of the typewritten poem. Moreover, though Cummings writes that the poem "must be considered an oblong unit," he seems unaware that a typeset "unit" will tend towards a square shape rather than an oblong one. Yet, perhaps because of the tendency for typeset lines to be more compact, in *Poems 1923-1954* the "(r" ends up below the "OR"—and approximately centered between the "S" and "a" of the line above (fig. 9).

```
                              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;
```

Figure 9: "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" as printed in *Poems 1923-1954*

```
                              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;
```

Figure 10: "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" as printed in *10 Poemas* (1960)

In yet another set of instructions, this time typed directly onto a proof sheet and sent back to his Brazilian translator Augusto de Campos, Cummings advises placing the "(r" beneath the "OR"—moving the "(r" one space to the left of the instructions he gave in 1953. (This proof sheet is reproduced in Vakrilen Kilyovski's article on page 101 in this issue of *Spring*.) Since the "(r" is under the "OR" in the printed version found in *Poems 1923-1954*, Cummings probably based his advice to de Campos on that version (fig. 9). When the de Campos book appeared, the Brazilian typesetter managed the difficult feat of placing the "(r" under the "OR" and directly above the "(e)"! This feat was achieved by setting a much "squarer" poem than we see in *Poems 1923-1954*. Unlike his 1953 instructions, Cummings' advice on the de Campos proof sheet says nothing about setting the poem as "an oblong unit," and thus the Brazilian typesetter felt free to create a square version of the poem (fig. 10). Neither of these two later instruction sheets refers to the 1935 "analysis" instructions to Jacobs. Although they remained friends, sending the occasional note to one another, for some reason Cummings and Jacobs stopped working together sometime around 1950. So when Cummings needed to instruct printers, he lacked his 1935 "analysis," as well as Jacobs' expertise in translating "out of typewriter language into linotype-ese." Since any typeset version of the poem can only be an approximation of the typewritten "analysis" version, the preferred version of the poem should be the "typescript" version in Firmage's 1978 edition of *No Thanks*, or one carefully composed in Courier New font that reproduces as faithfully as possible the 1935 typewritten "analysis" that Cummings sent to Jacobs.

Conclusion

We have seen that charting the manuscript, typescript, and printed evolution of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" can help us to read, or plot, the twists and turns of Cummings' grasshopper. When first encountering the poem, we may simply "pass through" the three rearranged grasshopper names while deciphering the more legible words. A first perception may be one of confusing hopping letters that are not resolved into any sort of linguistic clarity until the last word: ",grasshopper;". But "a)s w(e loo)k" more closely, we begin a series of intense recursive readings, aided by Cummings' clues to the poem's structure. These visual, linguistic, and mathematical calculations and playings of/with the poem inevitably result in an intense engagement with a living and moving poem. As Cummings wrote to Norman Friedman: "Like a particular humanbeing,& unlike mostpeople,a particular

poem IS <u>im</u>measurably <u>alive</u>" "Letter" 147).[11] This poem is so alive that two letters, "S" and "a," fall outside the grid. Clearly, the grasshopper cannot be contained in the "field" of the poem, whether seen as a fractured sonnet or as a "free" form. Similarly, Paul Rosenfeld's "now" in the poem "o // the round" cannot be contained or cancelled into "no" by death alone, since his "he" is "(he)re" in the nowhere or "now here" of the poem. Cummings' multiple linguistic and visual permutations reflect the multiple selves of grasshopper and "round / little man," both of whom are called "who." Reading down, Rosenfeld's selves or "who" exist in both present and past: they have [an] "old i" and yet still "are" ["who have // r [are] / olle / d i"], while the grasshopper's selves or "who" exist exclusively in the present: reading down on the right margin, they "r | o"—or "are [a] whole," despite multiple permutations and movements. These selves are activated by the reader, who by multiplying quirky pathways of visual and verbal meaning makes the poem as sign and thing come alive. In this way, letters, grasshopper, poet, and reader move together. As William Carlos Williams wrote: "Cummings is not a playboy, he means what he dances: *da capo al fin*" (*Image* 237).

The meanings of the grasshopper's word-dance were discovered by an intuitive process of trial and error, beginning with penciled drafts and taking a carefully plotted form when typed on a typewriter. This highly personal and idiosyncratic form is formal but not formulaic. Cummings wrote:

> There are two types of human beings children & prisoners. Prisoners are inhabited by formulae. Children inhabit forms. A formula is something to get out of oneself, to rid oneself of—an arbitrary emphasis deliberately neglecting the invisible and significant entirety. A form is something to wander in, to loose oneself in―a new largeness, dimensionally differing from the socalled real world. (qtd. in Kennedy 319)[12]

While formulas imprison the self in the partial, so-called "real" world, forms let loose or loosen "the invisible and significant entirety" of a child-like self, which exists in a multi-dimensional "actual" world, a place where selves are born. So the grasshopper is loosed in Cummings' form; it "selves"—the form *is* the grasshopper.

So what are we to make of these enormously small changes that add up to a complex verbal-visual whole? The equally-spaced typewriter origins of the poem tell us that every letter and punctuation mark has equal weight and merits equal attention, which is another reason for reproducing Cum-

mings' poems in "typescript" editions or in Courier New, which gives each mark an equal space. Paying attention to all the marks is the only way to read a Cummings visual poem. Though some overall meanings of the poem are evident after a few readings, one's interpretation and enjoyment are strengthened and deepened by paying attention to tiny details in a careful sustained way. For example, Max Nänny's overall view of the poem is that it "enacts the change of an observer's initially blurred perception and cognition of an elusive moving object towards more and more clarity" ("Iconic Features" 231). This view is supported by his brilliant observation about how the letters of the three scrambled grasshopper words shift as one reads from the top of the poem to the final correct spelling at the bottom: "Whereas in the first spelling of the letters of the words 'hopper' and 'grass' are all on the wrong side, they gradually move to their appropriate positions till the correct spelling is completed" ("Iconic Features" 231). Nänny's insight does not, however, preclude other views. Following an earlier article by Nänny, in this issue of *Spring* Vakrilen Kilyovski has taken the opposite (but not incompatible, I think) view that one can read the poem from the bottom up, taking the last line as the title. This opening up of interpretive possibilities from the precise placement of words, letters, and punctuation marks allows Cummings' small worlds to "do" and "be" and become a very complex miming of various life processes.

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Notes

1. For more on Jacobs and his curious status as Cummings' personal printer, see Walker Rumble's article on him in this issue of *Spring*.
2. See Webster, "Sinister Dexterity" and "Numerical Prosody" for discussions of Cummings' bilateral symmetrical patterns.
3. Cummings papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1892.5 (402), sheet 9.
4. Cummings papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1892.7 (219) folder 8.
5. Houghton Library, Harvard University, call number bMS Am 1892.7 (121) folder 18, sheet 316.
6. Houghton Library, Harvard University bMS Am 1892.5 (475); sheet 1, recto.

7. Dial/Scofield Thayer papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 34 Series IV, Box 30, folder 787.

8. For a discussion of "i(meet)t(touch)" see Webster, "Poemgroups" (13-14). An extended discussion of the genesis and visual patterning of "ondumonde' " may be found in Webster, "floating particles" (53-62).

9. Both poems were probably written at about the same time, since they were published together with two others in a group of four poems in *Contact*, 1 (Feb.1932). The "ondumonde' " manuscript is at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, call number bMS Am 1892.5 (434).

10. These 1953 instructions to the printer are at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, call number bMS Am 1892.13 (488), folder 3.

11. Cummings' letter to Friedman may also be found at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1892.1 (55) folder 1.

12. Houghton Library, Harvard University, bMS Am 1892.8 (41)

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