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Editor's Postscript

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EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT

We would like to direct attention to Heusser's way of reading the first poem in *95 Poems* (CP 673):

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The first thing he does is to insist on adding the poem's number at the head, "I," as if it were the poem's title. "Contrary to common practice, which often substitutes the first line of the poem for inconvenient or missing titles, I have retained the original title 'I.' Changing it in any way alters the poem's appearance in a way that suppresses one of its principle iconic aspects" (270). He then adds: "Casual though the use of numbers for titles throughout the whole of Cummings' works may appear, the title of this, the first of the *95 Poems*, turns out to be decidedly functional"—i.e., it relates to and reinforces the "loneliness" motif. "Fragmentation and totalization, unity and multiplicity coexist side by side. 'I' carries within itself the seeds of both order and chaos, and lets the two kinds germinate simultaneously" (276).

But we must take exception to such a method of reading this poem—and of reading Cummings generally. To begin with, we disagree that Cummings uses numbers for titles. It must be understood that, with very few exceptions, the poet wanted his poems to have

no titles. Indeed, he designated one entire book in that way. While it is true that all of his poems are numbered, whether with Arabic or roman numerals, these numbers are almost interchangeable with page numbers, and in some of his books they are indeed at the bottom of the pages.

Although it is not accidental that "I/a" is numbered as "I", it is at the beginning of the book rather because it lays down the pattern in which Cummings tried, not always successfully, to arrange the sequence of poems in a book to proceed from darkness to light, cold to warm.

Finally, the real problem here is that *Complete Poems* puts less space between the numeral and the beginning of the poem than is the case with the original book publication in *95 Poems*: while the former has around 1/4", the latter has 1 1/2". There is thus five times more space in the latter, clearly separating the numeral from the poem.

Heusser's "decidedly functional," then, seems entirely arbitrary. Why shouldn't we see "2" as part of the meaning of the next poem, then, and so on? One point is unclear to me: why do Cummings' books use the roman "I" instead of the Arabic "1", even when the subsequent numbers are Arabic? In the typescript editions of *no thanks* and *Xaipe*, for example, it is the Arabic "1."