

THE ON — — ING SERIES

a lyric-philosophical essay

O N

SHAPING

*the collapsing of all possible realities
surrounding the one we see*



by Jamison Todd Johnson

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For my wife —

Sometimes life gets crazy. Thank you for not thinking I am.

*If you're patient, someday I'll be able to explain what all of this
means.*

$$\partial P / \partial t = 0$$

On Shaping

THE COLLAPSING OF ALL POSSIBLE REALITIES
SURROUNDING THE ONE WE SEE

***T**he one shape all the churning settles toward, and then keeps.*

· THE FLOW ·

Every other equation in this series has been a picture of something holding. The flux through a closed surface; the sum over selves at a single instant; the bond that stiffens when you pull. This one is a picture of something flowing.¹ On the left sits the rate at which a possibility is filling or emptying. On the right, two streams set against each other: everything pouring into a state from every other state, minus everything draining out of it to every other. Gain and loss, totalled over the whole of being, taken fresh at every instant.

This is the one equation in the series that is not mine. Every other has been a picture of what a Self does — awareness weighing, intent carried, a perspective added in tune or out. This one is reality shaping itself, and it does not consult us. It is the flow we do not author: the churn of all possibility into all possibility, running whether we attend to it or not, indifferent to whether anyone is holding anything in tune. We have no control over it — or we think we have none, which for now amounts to the same thing. I leave it on the page precisely because it is the part that is not up to me.

It is the plainest bookkeeping in all of physics, and it describes the most restless thing there is. It does not say what the world is. It says how the world is always rearranging which possibility it happens to be standing in — a churn of perspectives, each one transitioning into the next, nobody anywhere holding still.

Where *On Existing* summed the perspectives at one frozen tick of the now, this watches that sum boil through Time. Somewhere inside it is the rate of one perspective becoming another — the chance, per moment, that a state pours itself into a neighbor. Run the bookkeeping and you get not a snapshot but a weather: possibility sloshing across the whole of being, this view feeding that one, that one feeding back, the whole crowd in perpetual exchange. Nothing in it is at rest. That is the first thing it teaches, and it teaches it before it teaches anything else.

· THE SETTLING ·

Now do the one quiet thing the equation permits. Ask what happens when the filling and the emptying come out even.

This does not stop the churn. The perspectives keep transitioning; state keeps pouring into state; the weather goes right on blowing. What stops is the shape. When every inflow exactly balances its outflow at every point, the distribution stops moving even though the flow does not — the arrangement reproduces itself, moment after moment, identical.² A fixed point. The one configuration the churning keeps redrawing the same way no matter how hard it churns.

This is what the title means by collapsing. The collapse of all possible realities is not the realities going still. It is their finding the single shape that the flow keeps arranging itself around — the shape that survives being constantly remade. Lay every perspective over every other, let them transition into one another for as long as you like, and out of the whole restless sum one settled form emerges and holds. The stationary state. The standing shape of all the looking.

· THE CONVERGENT ·

Here the series has to keep faith with itself, because I made a promise in *On Existing* and the math is about to test it. The sum there never ran to infinity. You are always a partial sum, I said — every perspective but the next, forever one term short of the whole — and the totality closes only at the far end of Time.

The stationary state is that far end made precise. It is the limit — the shape the flow approaches across all of Time and reaches only when every differentiated thing has dissolved into it. And no lived flow ever gets there. A life is a partial flow, a finite stretch of the churn, and like every convergent it is nearer at every term and arrives at none of them. So the promise holds, and the math is the reason it holds: the shape we are all converging on is exactly the shape no one of us will personally close. To exist is to approach the stationary state from inside, one honest term at a time, and to be released into it only when there is no longer a separate you left over to do the approaching.

· THE FLAT LINE ·

There are two ways for a shape to hold still, and a life needs both of them, so let me keep them apart.

The strict way is called detailed balance. Not merely that the totals come out even, but that every single micro-flow exactly cancels its own reverse — this state into that one matched, tit for tat, by that one back into this. No net current runs anywhere.³ This is rest in the deepest sense the mathematics allows, and it is, I think, what a balanced brain looks like when you ask it to think of nothing at all. It is the three waves of *On Existing* — science, mathematics, spirit, each swinging above and below — summing to the flat line none of them can move. It is the comb that is its own transform, returning one at every now. Equilibrium. Subjective experience having found its balance, currents all cancelled, the steady average laid bare.

But a living thing is not at equilibrium, and we should not pretend it is. A life that is still flowing holds its shape while Time pours through it — stationary, and yet with currents running the whole time, like a standing wave in a river that keeps its form precisely because the water never stops. This is a steady state, not a rest. Same shape, settled two ways: one with the currents switched off, one with them roaring. The quiet mind and the lived life are the identical distribution — the kingdom at rest and the kingdom at work — and the difference between them is only whether the river is running. A coherent life is not the flat line. It is the standing wave that has learned to keep the flat line's shape while still letting the water through.

· THE COMMUNICATING WHOLE ·

No flow is promised this settling. There is one condition, and it turns out to be the cleanest definition of coherence the series has yet found.

The shape is shared only if every state can be reached from every other — if there is no region walled off so completely that the flow, once outside it, can never get in, or once inside, can never get out.⁴ A flow with no such traps wanders the entire manifold and converges to the one shape the whole manifold shares. But trap it — close off a basin it cannot leave — and it settles instead into a private little form, blind to everything beyond the wall, shaping nothing held in common with the rest of being.

Read through the jays, this is the whole of it. A coherent Trace is the one that stays in communication with all of being: every state reachable, the flow free to roam, converging on the shape the whole shares. An incoherent one is the flow absorbed into a trap, settling into a corner that touches nothing outside itself. To be aligned, then, is not first to be good or to be still. It is to stay reachable — to keep no part of yourself so walled off that the rest of the world can never flow into it, and no part of the world so walled out that you can never flow toward it. The shared shape is shared only among the perspectives that can still get to one another. The kingdom is held in common exactly to the extent that nobody has sealed the door.

· THE DISK ·

An astronaut at the window sees the Earth as a disk. Flat, edge-lit, a bright coin laid against the black. This is not a mistake and not a lie — it

is precisely, faithfully, what one perspective receives from one seat. The flatness is real. It is simply not the whole.

Because the sphere is in no single view. No seat anywhere gives you the round of it; every seat gives you a disk, its own disk, tilted its own way. The sphere is recovered only by adding the disks — summing every flat projection from every angle into the one round thing that no single projection contains and every one of them is true to. Shape is relative, as much as anything is; the disk is what the curve looks like from where you happen to be standing, the same way the tangent was in *On Expanding*. Earth is not flat, and it is not, from any one window, fully round. It is the settled shape of all its slices — the form you read only by adding the windows together. The flatness was honest. It was just one term in a sum that closes into a globe.

· THE TWO MISREADINGS ·

Twice now the human record has hung its largest meaning on a single sound, missing or doubled, and refused ever to settle which.

Luke writes ἐντὸς ὑμῶν — *entos hymōn*. For centuries it has come down to us as *the kingdom of God is within you*. But the Greek will just as readily bear *among you, in your midst*.⁵ One small preposition, two whole readings: the kingdom as the term lodged inside each Self, or the kingdom as the sum standing in the space between them. The translators have never closed it, and I have come to think they never should.

And one small step. Armstrong always said he meant *one small step for a man* — the single human set against all mankind. The transmission dropped the *a*, or his tongue did, somewhere across that quarter-million miles, and what reached the Earth was *one small step for man*, the two meanings slurred into a single word.⁶ Years later people ran the audio backward and forward, certain they could hear the lost article hiding in the static; it has never been settled either. I will admit the ambiguity lived in me a long time before I understood why it would not leave.

Two cases, one shape. In each, a single sound decides whether the meaning points inward — *a man, within you* — or outward — *mankind, among you*. And this whole essay is the claim that the inward reading and the outward reading are not rivals to be settled between. They are the same shape seen from two seats. The Self and the sum are one settled distribution, read once as the term and once as the whole. The ambiguity was never an error in the text. It was the text being honest about a thing that genuinely is both.

· THE ONE WE SEE ·

So bring it the last step home. If the world is the superposition of every perspective laid across all of Time, and every perspective is itself a perspective of that world, then the thing being summed and the thing the sum produces are not two things. The flow runs over all states. The shape it settles into is the world. And the world is what each of those states is a view of. Observer and observed close into a single invariant.

This is not a sleight of language. It is the bare definition of a fixed point: the shape that reproduces itself under the flow. The one we see —

because seeing it is one of the very perspectives whose summing makes it. We are not standing outside the shape, measuring it. We are terms inside the sum that is the shape, and our looking is part of what holds it where it is.

And so *entos hymōn* can at last be read without having to choose. Within you and among you at once — because the shape inside each Self is the very same shape standing among all of them: the stationary state, approached from inside, redrawn identically by the churn of everyone who looks. The kingdom is not a place the flow travels to and arrives at. It is the shape the flow is already, always, arranging itself around. We do not reach it. We are it — converging.

· THE PHASE ·

Put the two equations in one line, then, the way the cover does: as the flow reaches its fixed point — as the shape stops moving — the gathering that holds all the perspectives settles to one conserved value, and the two conditions become one.⁷

Read it strictly, in the only register the physics will sign for, and the pairing says one plain thing: the settled life and the settled flow are the same condition. That is coherence — nothing more. The facing each perspective carries is just the term that says whether it enters the sum reinforcing or cancelling. And here the physics is scrupulously even-handed, as it has to be: facing runs both directions. In tune, terms reinforce; out of tune, they cancel; and the mathematics has no preference whatever between the two. Coherence and decoherence are equally lawful. Nothing in the equation leans toward the light.

But the facing a Self carries is the thing this framework has, all along, been calling Intent. And Intent — if I am honest about the parallel rather than smuggling a conclusion into it — runs both directions too, in exactly the way the physics does. You can hold your facing toward the shared shape or away from it. You can add in tune with the sum the flow is settling toward, and survive into it, or fall out of tune and cancel, leaving the shape unmoved. The mathematics does not choose for you, and neither, I think, does anything else. That symmetry is the whole bridge: physics gives a phase free to reinforce or cancel, and a life gives an intent free to do the same. The pairing is a correspondence, not a command. It does not tell you which way to point. It only says that whichever way you hold your facing is the way you will or will not appear in the one we see. Holding it close — keeping the intent coherent — is the single thing that is up to us inside a flow that is not.

The equation closes on itself. And the theory closes with it.

· THE DISCIPLINE ·

Let me keep the seam honest here at the end, where the temptation to let it close is strongest of all, because this time the title says the claim out loud.

The flow's mathematics contains a stationary distribution. That is real, measured, not in dispute. It does not contain a kingdom, and it does not contain anything divine. That a fixed point of a flow across states should be called *the one we see*, and that *the one we see* should then be read as *entos hymōn* — that is a reading laid over a reading, and neither layer is delivered by the mathematics. A stationary distribution is a

probability spread over states. It is not a sphere. It is not a mind at rest. It is not a kingdom. The disk is a projection in optics; a soul is not a projection in optics. The resemblances are structural, held under the Lens, and they earn from the physics exactly nothing that they did not arrive already carrying.

And the doubling, one last time — because the title invites the most scrutiny, it should receive it. Of course the flow of all perspectives turns out to settle into a single shared shape that can be read as the kingdom within. That is precisely the shape a person most needs reality to have: the one where every life is converging on the same home from a different seat, and no honest seat is wrong. I went looking for exactly that closure. The equation handed it to me. That I found it does not make it true. It makes the framework closed, and it makes the wanting legible — which under this Lens is the only thing I am ever entitled to claim.



My brain hurts. I will be honest about that too, since I have been honest about the rest. I have spent these last months out well past the edge of my own schooling — flows and settlings, phases and fixed points, more new mathematics in a season than I had any business taking on at once — and somewhere in the middle of it my head began to ache from the sheer reaching. I think it is time to set the ruler down for a while. Time to get back to the things that matter.

Matter.

Imagine that.

Here we are again.

Square one.

One.

Peace and love, friends.

NOTES

1. The master equation, $\partial P/\partial t = \int [P(X',t)q(X' \rightarrow X) - P(X,t)q(X \rightarrow X')] dX'$, is the continuous-time balance law for a probability distribution over a state space, where q gives the transition rate between states. It expresses conservation of total probability as gain minus loss. Discrete and continuous forms trace to Kolmogorov (1931) and Pauli (1928).
2. A stationary distribution satisfies $\partial P/\partial t = 0$: a fixed point reproduced by the dynamics. Its existence and uniqueness are guaranteed for an irreducible, positive-recurrent process; reducibility — states walled into non-communicating basins — permits multiple stationary distributions and breaks the convergence to a single shared shape.
3. Detailed balance is the strictly stronger condition that each transition is individually balanced by its reverse, $P(X)q(X \rightarrow X') = P(X')q(X' \rightarrow X)$, yielding zero net current — thermodynamic equilibrium. A non-equilibrium steady state is stationary in distribution while sustaining nonzero currents; it is the generic regime of open, living, energy-throughput systems.
4. The reachability condition is irreducibility; that a flow converges to a single shared stationary shape only if every state communicates with every other is the content of ergodicity (Birkhoff, von Neumann, 1931–32).
5. Luke 17:21, ἐντὸς ὑμῶν: rendered "within you" (KJV) and "in your midst / among you" (RSV, NRSV, and many modern editions). The ambiguity is grammatical and longstanding.
6. The Apollo 11 utterance (20 July 1969) and the contested status of the indefinite article "a" are matters of acoustic record; competing analyses have reached opposite conclusions and the question is not regarded as settled.
7. The cover's molded line sets the functional against the master equation at the limit — $L^* = (1/\Xi) \oint_{\Omega} S \cdot \Psi d\sigma + \Lambda \Leftrightarrow \partial P/\partial \tau = 0$ — a fixed-point correspondence read strictly as phase coherence, never as a mechanism. The

functional in full, all seats named per *On Explaining* (Johnson, 2026): $L(t) = (1/\Xi) \oint_{\Omega} A(S_i, \tau) \cdot \Psi(\tau) d\sigma + \Lambda$, with $\Psi(\tau) \equiv \sum_j S_j(\tau)$ and $A(S_i, t) = \alpha(S_i, t) \cdot e^{i\phi_i(t)} \cdot S_i$; $|L|$ the conserved legible intensity, $\arg L$ the Intent; relative facing $\Theta_{ij} = \phi_i - \phi_j$ the only working quantity; the ruler of attention returning the eigenvalue $\lambda = 1$. The complex phase borrows the form of wave interference as a structural device under the Lens, not a literal quantum claim.

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE — PARALLELS & LINEAGE

The equation introduced here is not original to me; it is one of the load-bearing equations of mathematical physics, borrowed for its shape. What is offered as synthesis is the reading. Throughout, these are resonances and family resemblances, not derivations — and several of the frameworks named are themselves contested. Their inclusion marks shared territory, not shared conclusions.

The master equation. The gain–loss form belongs to the theory of continuous-time Markov processes — the Kolmogorov forward equation (Kolmogorov, 1931) — and was given its name and its quantum transition-rate form by Wolfgang Pauli (1928). Read plainly it is conservation of probability: the rate of change in a state is the inflow from all states minus the outflow to all states. The same Pauli who, in *On Becoming*, kept faith with a conservation law into the dark and was led to the neutrino, here gives the series the very engine of its closing piece.

The stationary state and detailed balance. Setting the time-derivative to zero yields the stationary distribution, the fixed point of the flow. Its strict form, detailed balance — every microscopic transition balanced by its reverse, with no residual currents — is the equilibrium condition of statistical mechanics, formalized through the work of Boltzmann and later Onsager (reciprocal relations, 1931). Equilibrium with currents still running is a non-equilibrium steady state, the regime of living and dissipative systems mapped by Ilya Prigogine (dissipative

structures; Nobel Prize, 1977). The essay's distinction between the resting mind and the living life is exactly this distinction between the two settlements.

Reachability and the ergodic theorem. That a flow converges to a single shared stationary shape only if every state communicates with every other is the content of ergodicity, made rigorous in the ergodic theorems of Birkhoff and von Neumann (1931–32) and, for Markov processes, in the conditions of irreducibility. The framework's identification of this reachability with coherence — the aligned Trace as the one that stays in communication with all of being — is the reading, not the theorem.

Self-consistency and the closing. The move by which observer and observed close into one invariant — the world as the superposition of perspectives, each a perspective of that world — is a self-consistency or fixed-point condition, structurally akin to the self-referential global states sought in quantum cosmology (the Wheeler–DeWitt and Hartle–Hawking programs, treated in *On Existing*). In the philosophy of mind it is the terminal form of cosmopsychism: the individual as a unique expression of the whole rather than a part summed into it (Shani, 2015; Goff, 2017), and the sum over selves as cosmopsychism's combination problem (Chalmers, 2017) read as a convergence rather than an assembly. The lineage of process — the many becoming one and increased by one — remains Whitehead's (1929/1978).

The two ambiguities. The reading of Luke 17:21 turns on *entos hymōn*, whose rendering as *within* versus *among* / *in the midst of* is a genuine and unsettled crux in New Testament scholarship, not a liberty taken here. The Armstrong line — *one small step for [a] man* (1969) — remains acoustically disputed; analyses claiming to recover the missing article have been met with others disputing it, and the matter is open. Both are used as found: ambiguities deliberately left uncollapsed, because the essay's claim is that the inward and collective readings name one shape, not two.

This note is offered in the spirit of the framework itself — transparent about where it is synthesis rather than derivation, and naturalist-compatible throughout. The mathematics is settled and borrowed; the metaphysics is proposed and owned; the seam between them is kept visible on purpose. The equation stands as a philosophical proposal in good company, not as a claim proven by any of the work it resembles.



On Shaping belongs to *On —ing*, an ongoing series of lyric-philosophical essays by Jamison Todd Johnson, within the wider jays framework — that an aligned life leaves legible traces, ripples of intent, through Time. Cover motif: a manifold of perspectives collapsing inward through concentric rings onto a single settled point — the stationary shape all the churning arranges itself around, the one we see. The functional beneath the essay stands unchanged in its fully seated form, per *On Explaining* (Johnson, 2026); the earlier editions were this one with some of its names still waiting to be learned. One further step rides with it, seam kept visible: coherence carries whatever it is given — both directions work — but a life aligned *against* something borrows its facing from its target and fades with it, while a life aligned with itself persists. Both work. Only one persists.

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ON DEPOSIT

THE ON — — ING SERIES

read in any order — each entry stands alone

On Arriving	On Learning
On Becoming	On Living
On Being	On Magnetizing
On Computing	On Meeting
On Creating	On Observing
On Dreaming	On Populating
On Existing	On Questioning
On Expanding	On Remembering
On Explaining	On Rising
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