Negatively Capable Dialectics: Keats, Vendler, Adorno, and the Theory of the Avant-Garde

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Frankfurt school aesthetics has never quite fallen off the literary-cultural map; yet as with other areas of what currently goes by the name theory, interest in this body of work has known its surges and dormancies. For reasons too complex really to develop here (but which certainly involve, after two decades of critique, some changing Left views on aesthetics in and since the Enlightenment), we've recently seen widespread renewal of attention to the Frankfurt *oeuvre* and especially to the work of Theodor Adorno. The attention shows every sign of increasing in scope and influence and thus invites more sustained reconsideration of a theoretical legacy and its animating literary/artistic, philosophical, and historical materials.[1] The attention also promises a return to foundational disputes

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1. The most cursory listing of important new Critical Theory studies would cite those by both veterans and relative newcomers to the field, including Susan Buck-Morss, Martin Jay, Fredric Jameson, Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Robert Hullot-Kentor, Miriam Hansen, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, Russell A. Berman, Richard Wolin, Lambert Zuidervaart, Anthony Cascardi, Tom Huhn, and Beatrice Hanssen. These studies have appeared together with much-needed translations and retranslations of key texts, such as Theodor Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie,* ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 7 of *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, under the title *Aesthetic Theory,* ed. Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, 1997); and *Noten zur Literatur,* 4 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1958–74), trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, under the title *Notes to Literature,* ed. Tiedemann, 2 vols. (New York, 1991–92).

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in and around Frankfurt aesthetics, including those debates most famously joined between Adorno and Walter Benjamin: debates over mechanical reproduction, aura, and aesthetic autonomy; formalism, hermeticism, and engaged, interventionist commitment; mimesis, expression, and construction. As these topics are revisited, fresh analyses of old controversies undoubtedly will find their way into literary-historical treatments of different periods, movements, and problems, providing, one hopes, illumination without narrow prescription, shedding light when applying (albeit somewhat allegorically) Frankfurt theory to various questions.[2]

Tracing the trajectory in the opposite direction—not retrospectively applying Frankfurt aesthetics to previous literary periods, but demonstrating how prior literary histories shape and help clarify recurrent problems in modernism and Frankfurt Critical Theory themselves—would stand to be a rarer phenomenon, if only because earlier studies seem to have covered that ground. And whatever might be added to the composite picture, it's probably safe to say that some of the least likely sources for further historical inquiry into the modernist, Marxian, and German materials at issue would reside in second-generation British romanticism and its Victorian aftermath. It would seem still more improbable that key information would emerge from the work of nineteenth-century British literature's perhaps most decidedly formalist poet, John Keats. And if all that's true, then *the* most unlikely way to understand Frankfurt Marxism should be via a critic renowned in our own time for sympathy to monumental Keatsian form and antipathy to politically inflected literary analysis, a critic generally deemed, in fact, the champion of aesthetic formalism *tout court:* Helen Vendler. It may already be evident that this essay will undertake precisely that effort of understanding; it may not be clear

2. For a trenchant essay on allegorical application/assimilation of Frankfurt theory to inapposite literary cases, see Marcus Bullock, "Benjamin, Baudelaire, Rossetti, and the Discovery of Error," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (June 1992): 201–25. I use *allegorical* here not in the usual Benjaminian or deconstructive sense of oppositional corrective to an illusory symbolic unity, but more loosely to designate interpretive applications made between parallel objects of study where the contextual, artistic, and theoretical materials themselves may not ultimately justify any necessary structural and/or historical connection.

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that the endeavor proceeds absent any notion of antithetical, oppositional reading of Vendler, absent even a claim to dialecticize her interpretations. I want instead to argue that in an unexpectedly straightforward way, Keatsian formalism—and Vendler's formalist defense of it—are crucial for grasping Frankfurt analyses (Adorno's above all) of what Marx and then modern Marxism try to do with nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, aesthetics, and the dialectical tradition. If the argument unsettles some contemporary Left tenets about the relative priorities of form and history (or of form and politics, culture, or society), it nonetheless may contribute to our understanding of the aesthetic's place in Frankfurt attempts to articulate possibilities for critical thought, agency, and praxis in modernity. I'll initially bring these questions together by sketching a very compressed history of Keats-interpretation and by presenting some of the necessarily contrastive structures within and across the works and periods under investigation.

Amidst all the polemics over the existence of aesthetic, romantic and postromantic, modernist and postmodernist ideologies, and over how such ideologies have or haven't shaped what we call the modern, one can yet offer certain claims with relative assurance. For instance, that when it comes to the second-generation romantic Percy Shelley and the question of the political, there's always been (and still is) something of a consensus. Not about the relationship of the poetics to the politics, but about why Shelley is an appropriate figure around whom to stage such a debate, as opposed to the second-generation poet so often paired with him: Keats. That basic opposition has held through countless poetic and theoretical revolutions, so that the terms for discussion were entirely understood when, at a 1991 MLA gathering to mark Shelley's bicentenary, the poet Michael Palmer offered a meditation on what he called "the necessity of Shelley" for contemporary poetry and critical thought. Invoking Benjamin throughout the essay, Palmer emphasized Shelley's special importance to progressive and Left traditions in poetry and criticism that were then taking stock—along with progressives and the Left in general—of a vastly altered, post-1989 global reality.[3] Shelley's poetics of "active cognition, exploration and interrogation, critique and renewal" was thus also to be considered in relation to Octavio Paz's notion of the "'other voice of poetry'" and to a host of exploratory countertraditions: objectivist, Black

3. Palmer framed the talk with two recent events, the collapse of "really-existing socialism" and the Gulf War; see Michael Palmer, "Some Notes on Shelley, Poetics, and the Present," *Sulfur,* no. 33 (1993): 273–81 and *Keats-Shelley Journal* 42 (1993): 37–47; the talk will also be included in Palmer's collection of essays (forthcoming). I survey the history of critical debate about the relationship of Shelley's poetics and politics and offer an argument for the formal-historical affinity between Shelley's work and Adornian critical aesthetics in Robert Kaufman, "Legislators of the Post-Everything World: Shelley's *Defence* of Adorno," *English Literary History* 63 (Fall 1996): 707–33.

Mountain, San Francisco renaissance, New York school, and later poetic experimentalisms. These were all set over against a more conventional culture of poetry, criticism, and theory.[4]

Palmer himself never explicitly mentioned Keats or the Keatsian, but a certain cultural history does assimilate the poet and term to a strain of formalism that, *pace* Palmer's Shelley, seems to abjure even the possibility of materially linking poetic to sociopolitical experiment.[5] This explicitly political differentiation between the two poets splits off from a more familiar line of literary analysis, where the names Keats and Shelley are pronounced in tandem, as if constituting a genetic unity. The familiar line could be said to begin with Shelley's *Adonais* and to reach to today's *Keats-Shelley Journal;* it enters literary history proper with Arthur Hallam's enormously influential 1831 essay "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson."[6] By modern poetry Hallam means Keats and Shelley whom, he hints, can practically be considered KeatsShelley, a single entity. Together they're made to stand for an advanced poetry of *sensation* as opposed to the Wordsworthian poetry of discursive *reflection* that Hallam eschews.

Hallam's essay essentially credits the two poets with launching what Victorians and then modernists would later view as a protosymbolist aesthetic, along with the penchant for what T. S. Eliot would call—nodding toward Keats's and Shelley's virtually singular attempts within nineteenth-century poetry to achieve it—"direct sensuous apprehension of thought."[7] From figures like Ruskin to Pater, Arnold, and Yeats, Hallam's analysis is read, quoted, cited, followed, and adapted. I'll have more to say about how later nineteenth-century poetry imbibes and rewrites Hallam's Keats and Shelley—perhaps most importantly in the Victorian development of dramatic and lyric monologue—but for the moment it'll suffice to note Yeats's meditation on the Keats-Shelley conjunction as the fount of nineteenth-century *poésie pure* in contrast, Yeats says (summarizing Hallam), to "impure artists . . . like Wordsworth."[8] And while poetry today (whatever its interest in Keats and Shelley) hasn't seemed particu-

4. Palmer, "Some Notes on Shelley, Poetics, and the Present," *Sulfur,* pp. 280–81; see Palmer, "Some Notes on Shelley, Poetics, and the Present," *Keats-Shelley Journal,* pp. 46–47.

5. Just how materially Shelley himself makes that link is subject to never-ending dispute; see Kaufman, "Legislators of the Post-Everything World."

6. See Arthur Henry Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," *The Writings of Arthur Hallam,* ed. T. H. Vail Motter (New York, 1943), pp. 182–98.

7. T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *Selected Essays* (New York, 1950), p. 246; quoted in Carol T. Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics* (Chicago, 1984), p. 53, to which my discussion is indebted. See also Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," pp. 186–87, 191–92, 194–95.

8. Yeats, *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1974), p. 332; quoted in Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics,* p. 78. On Yeats's rethinking of Hallam and *poesie pure,* see Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics,* pp. 73–82.

larly aware of Hallam, there has been notable literary-historical and theoretical attention to his essay—including speculation about the ways that Hallam's approach to Keats, Shelley, and Tennyson projects on a literary basis some of the earliest available coordinates for what Negt and Kluge will theorize, in supplement to Habermas, as a counter–public sphere.[9]

Insofar as the Keats-Shelley Question has been seen on the *Left* as a pivotal chapter in the aesthetics-and-politics story, it's the Left itself that's been split over whether the twins should be politically separated. On one hand is a current represented by a historically minded (sometimes poststructurally informed) criticism, which from various methodological perspectives contends that a historicized Keats is a political Keats (though fraternal rather than identical to the poet whom Paul Foot calls Red Shelley). Locating Keats in Dissenting and post-Jacobin circles and frequently highlighting the Cockney school membership he shared with other Left-identified figures like Shelley and Leigh Hunt, these scholars have reasserted the (progressive) political significations that inhere in the symbolic universe of Keats's poetry. They trace the ways a number of the poet's recurrent figures (the urn, Greece, materiality, a new psychic principle of historicity) conjure up contemporaneous icons of the struggle against reaction in Holy Alliance Europe and at home in England.[10]

Also in this vein were the efforts of a markedly earlier criticism such as that of Sidney Finkelstein, who had read the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" together with the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in which Marx had projected a vision of unalienated labor where a "true," socialized realm of creation could thrive "according to the laws of beauty." It

9. See, for example, James Chandler, "Hallam, Tennyson, and the Poetry of Sensation: Aestheticist Allegories of a Counter-Public Sphere," *Studies in Romanticism* 33 (Winter 1994): 527–37. For an instance where Hallam *does* briefly surface in contemporary poetry and poetics, see Norma Cole, "Ten Minutes to Talk about Experimental Writing," *Quarter after Eight* 5 (1998): 18–26.

10. See, for example, Paul Foot, *Red Shelley* (London, 1980); Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford, 1997), as well as the essays edited by Roe in *Keats and History* (Cambridge, 1995); Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1998); Theresa M. Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory* (Cambridge, 1997); Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif., 1997); Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and Their Circle* (Cambridge, 1998); Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago, 1998); John Kandl, "Private Lyrics in the Public Sphere: Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* and the Construction of a Public 'John Keats,'" *Keats-Shelley Journal* 44 (1995): 84–101; David Bromwich, "Keats and the Aesthetic Ideal," in *The Persistence of Poetry: Bicentennial Essays on Keats,* ed. Robert M. Ryan and Ronald A. Sharp (Amherst, Mass., 1998), pp. 183–88 and "Keats's Radicalism," *Studies in Romanticism* 25 (Summer 1986): 197–210; and Tilottama Rajan, "Keats, Poetry, and 'The Absence of the Work,'" *Modern Philology* 95 (Feb. 1998): 334–51. Chandler, Rajan, and Bromwich particularly stress not only the participation of Keats's poetic materials and achieved poems in concrete sociopolitical contexts; they emphasize too how Keats makes poetic form work philosophically and psychically as a means for registering (and in that sense, allowing engagement with) the historical itself.

may be worth recalling that Finkelstein's case for Keats's proto-Marxism (and for Marx's Keatsianism) was published as part of the once incendiary *Weapons of Criticism,* which emerged from the MLA's first Marxist Forum (held in 1972). Indeed, along with an essay by a critic much younger than Finkelstein—a younger critic named Fredric Jameson—Finkelstein's Keats-Marx meditation helped kick off *Weapons of Criticism.*[11]

On the other hand is a whole line of Left criticism that finds Keats guilty, in his impulse toward the formal, of desiring to fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget the sociopolitical; he is found guilty too of seducing later poetic constituencies into chasing the formalist siren. The claim at bar (coterminous with what is today known as the "critique of aesthetic ideology") is that any historicist defense of Keats falls short precisely when confronted with the history of—to put it generously—Keats's special amenability to formalization. The argument is that whatever signs of the political may have been evident within the poems and their discursive fields during the late romantic period, the reception history establishes that Keats's distinctive stylistic embodiments of his self-consciously aesthetic stance allowed the poetry immediately and subsequently to be aesthet*icized* with singular ease.[12]

The testimony of numerous anti-aestheticist literary critics and historians could be cited here, but a larger Left cultural narrative might be acknowledged by observing that precisely this Keats-critique was rehearsed by the late Derek Jarman in his ambitious attempt to create a dialogueless film "setting" for the canonical recording (conducted by the

11. See Sidney Finkelstein, "Beauty and Truth" and Fredric Jameson, "Criticism in History," in *Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in America and the Literary Tradition,* ed. Norman Rudich (Palo Alto, Calif., 1976), pp. 51–73, 31–50. Jameson's "Criticism in History" has been republished in his *Ideologies of Theory,* 2 vols. (Minneapolis, 1988), 1:119–36. See too Finkelstein's earlier, intriguing decision to align the indubitably romantic-symbolist Keats with a critical-realist aesthetics in Finkelstein, "Realism and the Crisis in the Arts Today," *Art and Society* (New York, 1947), pp. 104–26.

12. The Marxian- and deconstructionist-derived (often Frankfurt- and Adorno-citing) critique of aesthetic ideology runs something like this: At a foundational moment for modern-bourgeois, desocialized, representationalist ideologies of aesthetics, ethics, and politics, Kant's third *Critique* and the art contemporaneous with it establish an essentialist or transcendental theory of cultural value, a theory based in literary or aesthetic experience and form. This theory's other, from romanticism through the twentieth century, will be the material, the social, and the historical, all of which are erased by or made subservient to artistic-philosophical form. Thus emergent aesthetic formalism ideologically deforms material, sociohistorical reality, turning it first into art and then into art theory.

For an argument that a crucial strain of Marxian criticism (starting with Marx and Engels, and most fully elaborated by Adorno) carefully distinguishes between *aesthetic* and aesthet*icization*—and for an examination of the critique of aesthetic ideology's founding but highly problematic brief for application of Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology* to the realm of literature, art, and philosophical aesthetics—see Kaufman, "Red Kant, or The Persistence of the Third *Critique* in Adorno and Jameson," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): 682–724.

composer himself) of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem.* Britten's requiem, it will be remembered, features a libretto composed largely of settings of Wilfred Owen's World War I poetry; Jarman's remarkable film sought to make explicit the homosocial nature of both the poems and the requiem while seeking also to recapture their presumed intent to sing not of but against arms and the man. In one of the film's epiphanic moments Jarman makes the actor playing Wilfred Owen gaze longingly at a gorgeously bound volume of Keats, which Owen then deliberately puts aside (as the real Owen was commonly said to have rejected the influence of his long-cherished Keats in favor of Shelleyan engagement with an ostensibly larger world of pain and suffering). Having displaced Keats, Jarman's politicized *War Requiem* moves inexorably toward its finale; and of course the last Owen poem that Britten had set into the piece was "Strange Meeting," whose title Owen had taken directly from Shelley's *Revolt of Islam.*[13]

An ingenious solution to the whole Keats Question emerges in Marjorie Levinson's *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (1988). This eye-opening, influential study effects something like *The Marriage of E. P. Thompson and T. W. Adorno;* Levinson invites her readers to witness the prismatic self-making of the English almost-middle-class (or, better still, the literary bootstrapping of the petite bourgeoisie up toward full-class status). Recovering the significance of what Keats's contemporary reviewers had seen as the poet's "vulgarity," Levinson directs attention to the importance, particularly for a Marxian or Marxian-inflected criticism, of Keats's "badness." In an object lesson on class and canon, she demonstrates that Keatsian badness is to be understood as a paradigmatic fetishization of socially charged markers of value (here, the *arriviste*'s urgent, reproductionist display of the signifiers of a literary culture in relation to which he, Keats, stands as outsider). Citing Adorno's "Valéry Proust Museum" (from *Prisms*) and observing that Adorno's analysis of museum culture deeply informs her discussion, Levinson shows how Keats all but stage whispers his intent to embark on culture-acquisitive museum field trips, and how the poems in turn project a kind of "museum space." For Levinson, Keats's great accomplishment is to have fashioned a second-order alienation whose "discourse [of] self-possession is a

13. Derek Jarman, *War Requiem,* Anglo International Films/BBC/Liberty Films, 1988; see too Jarman's companion book *War Requiem* (London, 1989); and see Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem,* London Records, 414 383–2, 1963. Jarman's painting, design, and film careers have almost from the beginning put aesthetics together with gay and Left commitment; for a compact and provocative reflection on this braiding, see Jarman's Blakean *hommage* to Eisenstein, "Imagining October," 1984. For a very brief but interesting attempt to understand Jarman's and Stan Brakhage's cinema as belonging to different moments in modern art's experimental efforts to measure the socioeconomic—with implicit reliance on these filmmakers' histories of engagement—see Jameson, "Culture and Finance Capital," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Autumn 1997): 262–64.

function of its profound structural *dis*possession," whose "disturbing self-reflexiveness . . . brings out the difference between the subject and its internalized models, not their identity," so that "to 'overhear' Keats's poetry is to hear nothing *but* intonation, to feel nothing but style and its meaningfulness." Keats's art thus makes self-conscious (class-climbing) wish fulfillment salutarily palpable to consciousness and available—through dialecticizing literary engagement—for Freudo-Marxian interpretation.[14]

Levinson notes in passing that her book's lack of attention to Keats's odes was not originally conceived as a political or critical decision; rather, she'd written about those poems she'd found difficult to teach: Keats's romances. Nonetheless, she states, her position *is* political and critical, as the setting aside of the monumental odes constitutes a corrective to their "massive foregrounding . . . in this century" and can be understood as an anticanonical gesture toward "a differently conceived generic field." Moreover, she remarks—amidst a quick outlining of the field of Keats criticism—that "the question of the odes must also be the question of Helen Vendler." Among a host of observations about Vendler's *The Odes of John Keats* (1983), Levinson writes that Vendler's study, though "virtuoso," is merely "academic" or "professional" and "politically disturbing" in its "formalism"; therefore the special virtue of Vendler's book is that it gives us "something to read against" (*KLA*, pp. 32, 33, 30, 33).[15]

I'll return to Levinson's acute analysis of Keats's insights into the reification internal to nineteenth-century poetry and modern art more generally; but for now I want to advance some rather different reasons that Vendler's *Odes of John Keats* might be indispensable to the Marxian or Marxian-derived criticism generated in significant part from Adorno and the Frankfurt school. The central place here of *form* and *formalism* will readily become evident, though not as the usual Marxian historicization of form, nor even a bolder working-through of form to reach or emerge into "history as such." To be sure, the latter conceptions matter to

14. Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (London, 1988), pp. 28, 36; hereafter abbreviated *KLA;* see also pp. 12–15, 23–24, 26–28, 31, 36, and 43–44 n. 34, and p. 40 n. 13, where she cites Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," *Prisms,* trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (1967; Cambridge, Mass., 1981), pp. 173–86; see Adorno, *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1955). Levinson subsequently redirected her attention to Adorno, making valuable suggestions about his renewed importance to nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetics and theory; see her "Romantic Poetry: The State of the Art," *Modern Language Quarterly* 54 (June 1993): 183–214, esp. 211–13, excerpted in *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism,* ed. Mary A. Favret and Nicola J. Watson (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), pp. 269–81.

15. Clearly expressed differences between the two critics seem not to have ended with Levinson's Keats volume; see the critique of Levinson's important contribution to Wordsworth studies, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge, 1986), in Vendler, "'Tintern Abbey': Two Assaults," *Wordsworth in Context,* ed. Pauline Fletcher and John Murphy (Lewisburg, Penn., 1992), pp. 173–90.

Adorno. But he figures as one of Marxian aesthetics' special cases precisely for his insistence on sustaining and constantly returning to (rather than simply working through) the formal moment. The insistence bespeaks his conviction that the luminous opacity, the seeming inexhaustibility, of aesthetic experiment provides the means through which art may enable dynamic thought and kindle, among other things, possibilities for critical agency.[16]

This Adornian purchase on aesthetic experience and its relationship to the formal will bear far more than a casual connection to Keats. Yet shared affinities or parallel enactments of form might not themselves justify more than an intriguingly allegorical linkage between Adorno and Keats, much less between Adornian aesthetics and Vendler's account of Keats's odes. Standing alone, the demonstration of profound commitments to the formal could remain merely thematic, a thematization of form. What does establish a genuine literary-historical nexus between Keatsian and Adornian formalism is something of decidedly greater specificity than mere dedication to form; and it's here that Vendler's book proves invaluable, as it lets us see how the specific character of Keats's odic experiments simultaneously helps shape and elucidate Adorno's theorization of the foundations for a Left critical aesthetics.

Tellingly, the odes (and Vendler's treatment of them) are likewise crucial to a different understanding of the Keats-Shelley schism: to an analysis that alters nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of the relationships between two entwined poetics and that, still more unexpectedly, casts new light forward onto the genealogy and evaluation of the Adorno-Benjamin (and Adorno-Brecht) disputes over modern art. In ways that have escaped literary-critical and literary-historical attention, Adorno hints that Keats's and Shelley's poetics uncannily sketch the prehistory of central debates for subsequent projections of a progressive art and theory. Surprisingly (and perhaps more significantly than usually cited figures in German and French poetry like Hölderlin and Baudelaire), Keats and Shelley formally prepare the conflicted groundwork, and help produce the structural oppositions, for those later controversies around aesthetic form and aesthetics-and-politics that preoccupy the Frankfurt school as well as the artists and critics in dialogue with it.

In what remains, while focussing on Keats, I'll assume (without bothering to rehearse) the standard view that Shelley's poetry is more overtly political and, for all its formal achievement, less formal—weaker in structure; less sensuous, palpable, objectified, concrete, massive—than Keats's.

16. The point is made across Adorno's career, never more so than in the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*. For commentary on the role Adorno accords a classically formalist aesthetic phenomenology, see, for example, Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), esp. chap. 1, "Subjective Aesthetic Experience and Its Historical Trajectory."

Moreover, Keats-interpretation to a great extent will be seen as revolving around readings of the odes that formally or at least stylistically are not much in dispute. There's general agreement after all about their *monumentality* or *massiveness:* their impressively wrought consolidation of various sense-images by one another; the weightiness and repose in the lines' pivotal stationing, and the experiential arc described by each poem; and Keats's experimental rummaging through the history of the sonnet form in order to pilfer and reassemble, for the basic odic stanza, a loose-limbed but solidly structured unit (composed of a Shakespearean quatrain fused with a Petrarchan sestet).[17] I'll emphasize, though, that all this monumentality coexists with its other, negative capability.

My primary intent will be diacritically to engage Keats's work and exemplary issues in its critical history, along with their afterlives in nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry. I hope thereby to get at the ways that an identifiably Keatsian constellation of formalism, monumentality, and negative capability—hardly the favored concepts and rubric of today's critics of aesthetic ideology—may actually be perceived, in its charged interactions with a Shelleyan-identified poetic of negationalist voice, movement, and dissemination, to underwrite fundamental traditions in two centuries of Left poetics, as well as foundational aspects of the Marxian critical aesthetics most frequently identified with Adorno.

Vendler's abiding subject in her *Odes of John Keats* is what she calls Keats's "poetic 'thinking,'" the attempt in and through poetry to *construct* and develop[18] (as "Ode to Psyche" puts it and as nineteenth-century poets through Mallarmé revivify and modify Keats's phrase) "the wreath'd trellis of a working brain."[19] (If this already seems to pale beside a Shelleyan attempt to create the language for a revolutionary reordering of consciousness, it's worth bearing in mind that Palmer's defense of Shelley similarly focuses on poetry as a mode of thought.) Vendler contends that for Keats, poetic thinking goes far beyond chestnuts in Keats criticism about synaesthesia and/or "thinking in images." Rather, poetic thinking will ultimately mean the *construction* of an *architectonics* of sensation in lan-

17. For an efficient charting of these stylistic techniques in the odes, see Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 495–500; the discussion compresses and refines the analysis in Bate's earlier *Stylistic Development of Keats* (New York, 1945). See also Jack Stillinger's introduction to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Keats's Odes,* ed. Stillinger (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), pp. 1–16, and Stillinger, introduction, *John Keats: Complete Poems,* ed. Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. xiii–xxviii.

18. Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 8; hereafter abbreviated *OJK*.

19. Keats, "Ode to Psyche," *The Poems of John Keats,* ed. Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), l. 60, p. 366. On Mallarmé's rewriting of the "wreath'd trellis" and for an overview of his relationship to Keats, see Robert Greer Cohen, "Keats and Mallarmé," *Comparative Literature Studies* 7 (June 1970): 195–203.

guage, which in turn will be coordinated with an extremely complex structural polyphony, practically symphonic in its generation of simultaneous, multiple, often contradictory effects. Meanwhile this intricate yet monumentalizing constructionism is said to dissolve a previously foregrounded sense of expressive selfhood. The sequence of the six odes—"Indolence," "Psyche," "Nightingale," "Grecian Urn," "Melancholy," and "Autumn"—is seen as a series of investigations that culminate in the full-constructionist aesthetic just described; each ode "deconstructs its predecessor(s) and consolidates it (or them)" (*OJK*, p. 6). (That Keats's experiments should have privileged the ode comes as no surprise, given that it was conventionally understood, as commentators like Stuart Curran have noted, to be within lyric poetry the "dramatic, self-reflexive, and dialectical form" *par excellence*.)[20]

Significantly, Vendler launches this interpretation of Keats under the sign of Paul Valéry; she devotes much of her introduction's theoretical energy to discussion and distillation of what is in many ways a Valéryan view of process and construction in poetry. Levinson had also brought Valéry into court in the matter of Keats, by way of Adorno; and this grouping of Keats, Valéry, and Adorno will consistently reassert itself in the crux before us. In what may sound like straightforward if belated New Criticism, Vendler—liberally quoting Valéry (including his dictum about the need to "'imagine the still fluid state of a work . . . for a work dies by being completed'")—considers how Keats's constructionist enterprise depends on experiments in vocal range and diction, prosodic invention, emotional tonality, languages of philosophical thought and empirical sensation, and formal genre and overarching structure (*OJK*, p. 1).[21] It turns out, however, that practically the whole ensemble of Vendler's constructionist terms—as well as a remarkably homologous critical plot—obtains in Adorno.

The key terms are frequently mediated for Adorno, as for Vendler, by Valéry; and Adorno's treatment of Valéry's critical apotheosis of nineteenth-century *poésie pure* resonates with obvious import for reconsiderations of Keats and critical theory. Throughout Adorno's writings, Valéry is constantly invoked, cited, and parsed; already in the earliest disputes with Benjamin, Adorno is appealing to what he labels the profound sense of materialism, historicity, and above all, critical thought which he finds that Valéry's approach to form—and to construction in poetry—makes available. Lest doubts remain about the depth of Adorno's commitment to the critical value of Valéryan "aestheticism," one wants to footnote the series of correspondences (demanding study in

20. Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford, 1986), p. 66.

21. See also Vendler, "Keats and the Use of Poetry," *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), p. 118.

their own right) that Adorno establishes between Valéry, Paul Celan, and the controversial broodings about poetry after Auschwitz.[22]

When Adorno uses Valéry as a figure to mediate the ways that formal dynamics may enable critical thought, the artist ultimately at issue is of course not Keats but Schoenberg (though usually with rich suggestions about the nineteenth-century music and poetry. standing behind and informing Schoenberg). In basically the same narrative that Vendler tells about Keats's departure from self-expressive subjectivity, Adorno recurrently lauds Schoenberg's anti-essentialist constructivism, which Adorno puts into dynamic relation with expressivism (or expressionism), but with clear primacy attached to construction. I've tried at length elsewhere to complement these literary and musical matrices with a coordinate aesthetic-theoretical history,[23] which can here be put in conclusory form. From the vantage point of his own modernism, Adorno finds a critical, anti-essentialist constructivism inherent in the Kantian aesthetic and post-Kantian poetics. Rather than a Hegelian-Lukácsian (or, at times, a Brechtian-Benjaminian) labor-theory-of-value *productionism,* Adorno basically adapts—and puts at the heart of his Marxism—Kant's much less determinate notion of human *construction,* which will yield a strikingly different version of human agency. (Adorno characterizes "really-existing socialism"'s theory and practice of productionism as Marxism's own grim version of "instrumental rationality," where what is unduly valued is the material product worked into existence [expressed] by its revolutionary, super-subject maker, the proletariat.)

To return from the history of aesthetic-critical theory to art's enact-

22. See Adorno, letter to Walter Benjamin, 18 Mar. 1936, in Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel, 1928–1940,* ed. Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), pp. 169–70; trans. Nicholas Walker, under the title *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940,* ed. Lonitz (Cambridge, Mass, 1999), pp. 128–29. This letter also appears in Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin," in Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics,* trans. Harry Zohn et al., ed. Ronald Taylor (London, 1977), pp. 121–22. See also Adorno, "Der Artist als Statthalter," *Noten zur Literatur,* 1:187–92 and "Valérys Abweichungen," *Noten zur Literatur,* 2:50–51, 55–56, 73, 78–79, 82–83; "The Artist as Deputy" and "Valéry's Deviations," *Notes to Literature,* 1:105–7, 143, 146–47, 158, 162–63, 165. See also Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory.*

Adorno's 1949 comment that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" ("nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch") comes from the coda to his "Cultural Criticism and Society" (an essay republished as the opening piece in *Prisms,* p. 34). Significantly, "Valéry's Deviations," first published in 1960, was dedicated to Celan, the artist most identified with poetry after Auschwitz. Adorno only underscores the Valéry-Celan connection in 1967 when he writes, "long before Auschwitz, Valéry saw that inhumanity had a great future before it" ("Valéry sah längst vor Auschwitz, die Inhumanität habe eine grosse Zukunft") (Adorno, "Offener Brief an Rolf Hochhuth," *Noten zur Literatur,* 4:146; "An Open Letter to Rolf Hochhuth," *Notes to Literature* 2:245).

23. See Kaufman, "Red Kant" and "What Is Construction, What's the Aesthetic, What Was Adorno Doing?" in *Aesthetic Subjects,* ed. David McWhirter and Pamela Matthews (forthcoming). These essays elaborate Adorno's "dialectic of expression and construction."

ment of construction: When Adorno approaches Schoenberg, he regularly focuses on the composer's militant constructivism. Schoenberg's "implicit Kantian question [is] radical, without any ontological pseudo-radicalism"; the attendant "productive criticism" of "every subjective ingredient . . . interlocks with constructivism." As with Vendler's discussion of Keats, the analysis explicitly fuses construction, monumentality, and extreme polyphony.[24] Achieved construction finds its correlate in an investigative though nondominative subjectivity, a subjectivity represented by a cherished image of expression *within* construction that Adorno initially borrows from Kierkegaard; Adorno was subsequently delighted to find that years earlier, Valéry seemed already to have lifted the image from the Danish philosopher. In slightly different locutions, Adorno calls this super-aural figure the "speculative ear," "philosophic ear," or "intellectual ear." One of the key instances where Adorno elaborates the figure occurs in a commemorative essay simply titled "Arnold Schoenberg, 1874–1951." Written in 1952, the essay was first published in 1953 but received international attention after its inclusion in *Prisms* (where it happens immediately to precede the "Valéry Proust Museum" essay that, Levinson observes, deeply informs her Keats-interpretation). This well-known elegy for Schoenberg, which memorializes the composer's relentless commitment to construction and the intellectual ear, carries an epigraph that apparently reveals one of Adorno's touchstones for his thinking about the dear, inner expressive ear of construction. The epigraph to "Arnold Schoenberg" reads (as you may by now have guessed),

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
> Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
> Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.
>
> *Keats*[25]

My point is not really to claim that Helen Vendler is now or ever has been a card-carrying member of the Adornist International. Still, one is tempted to wonder if it's only an accident that in her conclusion to *The*

24. Adorno, "Sacred Fragment: Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*," *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1992), p. 229; see also p. 244. See Adorno, "Sakrales Fragment: Über Schönbergs *Moses und Aron*," *Quasi una fantasia*, pt. 2 of *Musikalische Schriften*, ed. Tiedemann and Klaus Schultz, vols. 16–18 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, 16:457 ("Ihre Kantische Frage wäre radikal ohne ontolgischen Scheinradikalismus" and hence "Produktive Kritik daran vershränkt sich mit dem Konstruktivismus"); see also 16:458.

25. Quoted in Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg: 1874–1951," *Prisms*, p. 148; "Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951)," *Prismen*, p. 180. Adorno is also constellating, of course, "ditties of no tone" with (a)tonality, serialist construction, and what he often refers to as "the need silently to (re)compose with the inner ear." References to the "intellectual" ("spirituelles Ohr"), "'philosophic'" ("'philosophisches Ohr'"), or "speculative" ("spekulatives Ohr") ear

Odes of John Keats she explicitly assimilates the poet's mature aesthetic to an analysis of the dialectics of imagination and labor made by Marx and discussed, she notes, by the Austrian Marxist aesthetician Ernst Fischer (see *OJK,* p. 325 n. 1).[26] It would also be of more than passing interest to consider Vendler's 1988 collection, *The Music of What Happens,* published five years after her Keats book (which by the way had never mentioned Adorno). *The Music of What Happens*—among whose talismans Keats still figures prominently—commences with something of a literary-critical hymn to Adorno.[27] On another occasion, I'd want to put more pressure on Vendler's notions of how Keatsian form should effectively be delimited in nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry, and I'd want to introduce that pressure via Adorno's measured but real critique of Valéry. Surprisingly, Adorno finally locates a conservatism, not in Valéry's formalism, but in Valéry's failure to be formal enough. That is, Adorno identifies in Valéry an often hypostatic notion of form, a refusal of the unfettered exploration that uncovers experiment in and as form (and that then links form to the Benjaminian concepts of *force field* [*Kraftfeld*] and *constellation*). Such refusal springs from and further enforces Valéry's occasional rejections of experiment per se (and hence his rejection of form-development: form's inner need to follow its materials, and vice versa). The disavowal amounts—strangely enough, given Valéry's implacable defense of aesthetic autonomy—to the denial of self-determination and development rights for form.[28]

At present, however, I want to project a surmise generated in relation to Vendler's book, which may further clarify how key modernist and

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and its relation to construction are found in Adorno, "Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951)," p. 193, "Arnold Schoenberg: 1874–1951," p. 157; "Valérys Abweichungen," *Noten zur Literatur,* 2:54; "Valéry's Deviations," *Notes to Literature,* 1:145; and "Schöne Stellen," *Gesammelte Schriften,* 18:718. For a virtuosic reading of how "Ode on a Grecian Urn" affiliates internal, expressivist silence with form-construction—and a reading, not coincidentally, of the sort of Keats-Mallarmé affinities remarked above—see Marshall Brown, "Unheard Melodies: The Force of Form," *PMLA* 107 (May 1992): 465–81.

26. Vendler quotes at length Fischer's most important work of literary-aesthetic theory, *The Necessity of Art,* trans. Anna Bostock (1957; London, 1963), p. 17.

27. See Vendler, *The Music of What Happens,* pp. 1, 5. See also Vendler's paeans to Adorno in her "Feminism and Literature," review of *Feminism/Postmodernism,* by Linda J. Nicholson, *New York Review of Books,* 31 May 1990, pp. 19, 20.

28. Hence Valéry's concept of form "remains a weak one," liable to lead toward "a stale formalism," a "conformism" that has less to do with even a provisional "unfolding of truth" than with a merely "pleasant chiming of bells" (Adorno, "Valérys Abweichungen," 2:83, 84, 85; "Valéry's Deviations," 1:166, 167; see also Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* pp. 140–63, 174–75; *Ästhetische Theorie,* pp. 211–44, 260–62). Generously, Adorno remarks that Valéry is on some level aware of this shortcoming. Valéry's consciousness of the problem is shown, Adorno adds, by Valéry's preference for mimetic *behavior* over straightforward copying or transcription; Valéry adheres to the idea that at the heart of aesthetic experience is an imitation or imaging of a process of creation (rather than an imitation of some entirely known object or objectlike formal law).

Frankfurt problems of art and theory are hatched in nineteenth-century literature. Since the appearance of Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* and kindred studies, a number of critics have been dividing in two what had once simply looked like modernism's Left-experimental wing.[29] A similar division of that twentieth-century, Left-experimental wing's accounts of nineteenth-century poetics—and of accounts written by nineteenth-century poets themselves—may yield valuable results. Bürger and others have shown why it makes sense to differentiate between, on one hand (and these will be usages derived from Bürger) *avant-gardist* attempts to enact a collapse of art into life—a certain artistic radicalism's effort (often through the championing of mechanical-technological reproduction) to destroy art's institutional, "distanced" status in hopes of marshalling art's energies for the quotidian and political; and on the other hand *modernist* attempts to preserve aesthetic autonomy and a rigorous separation of art from life, on the view that art's power is fundamentally negational. Reductively, this has often meant Benjamin the avant-gardist (whether he's talking about twentieth-century art or Baudelaire) versus Adorno the modernist (whether he's talking about Beckett or Goethe). Taking care not to assimilate or collapse different historical situations, it bears asking whether Keats and Shelley are proleptically introducing what Bürger identifies as the modern Left debate over a critical aesthetic. From its inception—wherever one locates that origin—the debate concerns the degree to which a certain poetics or art can be deemed more likely than its rivals to stimulate critical reflection, agency, and commitment.

Vendler once cannily remarked that she'd never understood how anybody could like the poetry of *both* Keats and Shelley.[30] The quip slyly registers, beyond Vendler's own formal preferences, a productive tension within the joint reception history of Keats and Shelley. More significantly, it captures something palpably at issue between the two poets themselves, a charged crossing that seems weirdly to contain the DNA of those subsequent histories that Bürger and others recount. There have been various interpretations of the discussion about style and form that Keats initiates when, near the end of his life, he memorably urges Shelley to stop being

29. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, 1984). See also, for example, Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994); Martin Jay, "Hierarchy and the Humanities: The Radical Implications of a Conservative Idea" and "Mass Culture and Aesthetic Redemption: The Debate between Max Horkheimer and Siegfried Kracauer," *Fin-De-Siècle Socialism* (New York, 1988), esp. pp. 37–40, 49–51, 82–96; and Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, 1998).

30. The observation's archness increases with knowledge of context: Vendler made the comment from the podium, upon being publically presented with the Keats-Shelley Association's annual award for distinguished scholarship (at the Keats-Shelley Association's MLA banquet dinner, 29 Dec. 1994, San Diego, Calif.; the present author was in attendance).

so magnanimous and learn instead to "'load every rift' with ore."[31] What hasn't been raised is the meaning of this debate for much later disputes between again competing and equally sophisticated versions of artistic form, disputes to which I'll return later in this essay. But the problem's earlier configuration can be usefully schematized now. In second-generation British romanticism and its Victorian aftermath, Keats's insistence on concretization, fullness, and formal rigor begins to look like a philosophical-political obligation, as if such militantly formal duty within Left, post-Jacobin art were his self-imposed task. To Keats, Shelleyan magnanimity will look like a bad—because rhetorical, overtly vocalized, external—negationalism, like a misplacement of the negationalism that should spring immanently, without pleading or advertisement, from within poetic form. Meanwhile to Shelley (with his own staunch defense of poetic form), the Keatsian interest in building up the object may start to look less like a protocritical constructivism and more like the effective denial of those voices and energies necessary to politically engaged art.

Talk of the energies of a prophetic Shelleyan negationalism apparently returns us to our initial schism: political Shelley (whose descendants include—on their own testimony—Brecht and W.E.B. Du Bois) and formalist Keats (whose descendants seem primarily to include . . . well, aesthetic formalists). But the very word *negational* brings forward that celebrated term Keats bequeathed to modern art and culture, *negative capability.* For critics of Aesthetic Ideology, Keats's definition of negative capability (as the ability to remain in an extended and speculative "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" with a concomitant suspension of "any irritable reaching after fact & reason")[32] cannot but exemplify the whole bourgeois enterprise of replacing politics with aesthetics, thereby deflecting into the latter the intensities that would otherwise be channelled into the former, causing dislocated and potentially rebellious populations to become imbued with false consciousness and thus forget their bonds to the sociopolitical.

Yet there's been a certain ambivalence in critique-of-aesthetic-ideology attitudes toward negative capability. For if the critique would seem to begin by charting connections between negative capability and the propagation of false consciousness, it has also averred that Keatsian commitment to objectified form becomes a refusal of the potentially radical, nonidentical nature of negative capability. Here the contention is that negative capability, along with Keats's concomitant notions of the "cam-

31. Keats delivers the injunction in a letter to Shelley (about one of Shelley's manifestly political texts, *The Cenci*), 16 August 1820, six months before Keats's death, *The Letters of John Keats,* ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 2:322–23. Keats quotes Spenser's "with rich metall loaded every rift" (*The Fairie Queene,* 2.7.28.5).

32. Keats, letter to George and Tom Keats, 21, 27 (?) Dec. 1817, *The Letters of John Keats,* 1:193.

elion poet" and identityless "poetical character," are abandoned by Keats himself (and by later Keatsian formalists).[33] That is, everything Keats writes after the letter about negative capability is seen to betray, withdraw, or end-stop that earlier theory and practice. Negative capability ends so that Keats's writing may, in a diagnosis meant to be at once descriptive and pejorative, "progress." The writing of the highly wrought, objectified odes is said to exchange an earlier, fluid notion of nonidentity for what will become the paradigm of "the ideal moral evolution of the poet," an evolution that will represent the victorious conflation of the odes' monumentalizing formalism and a bourgeois identitarianism. The project of writing the great odes and becoming a great poet terminates the anti-career of the camelion poet, pulling down the curtain on a liberatory, presumably anti-aesthetic negative capability. The overall conclusion—often underwritten with Frankfurt citations—is that the massive, sculpted, built-up odes constitute simply a more palpable, objectified version of the Wordsworthian "egotistical sublime" that Keatsian negative capability had allegedly forsworn.[34]

However, the burden of my previous discussion of Adornian con-

33. Keats writes of the "poetical Character," the identityless or "camelion Poet" who "has no self," over against the poetics of the "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" in his letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 Oct. 1818, *The Letters of John Keats*, 1:386, 387.

34. For the powerful (if compressed) version of the schema summarized and quoted above, see David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 154, 156–57; see too Levinson's brief, laudatory discussion of Lloyd, in *KLA*, p. 38 n. 8.

Pursuing his argument that a fluid, nonidentitarian negative capability is superseded by a more properly bourgeois aestheticism, Lloyd cites Keats's imaging of the series of life-experience chambers in "the large Mansion of Many Apartments." The passage in Keats's *Letters* that Lloyd marks out reads:

> The first [chamber] we step into is what we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think—We remain there a long while and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle—we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man. [Keats, letter to J. H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818, *The Letters of John Keats*, 1:280–81]

Lloyd comments that, as the poet passes through the various chambers in the process of artistic maturation, the relationship between the chambers reveals itself to be "sequential, progressive, and, specifically, genetic." The substitution of the earlier, fluid notion of nonidentity yields to "'Romantic self-fathering,'" where one makes oneself into "the cultivated individual," a theoretical shift Lloyd finds almost immediately consecrated in the monumental odes (Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature*, pp. 156, 157).

Even before responding to this interpretation of monumental construction, a rebuttal to Lloyd might be fashioned around the chronology that ostensibly moves, in progressive sequence, from abandonment of negative capability to adoption of grand odic poetic. The

structivism was to suggest that the massive formal construction that is the ode (or the larger construction made by the sequence of Keats's odes) exists in relation to what Adorno all but calls the *negatively capable* "speculative," "'philosophic,'" "intellectual" ear. In short, constructivism exists in dialectical tension with negative capability. For Adorno as for Keats, an exploratory but nondominative subjectivity—willing to suspend itself in defamiliarization or doubt—and an achieved construction are mutually constitutive (though they still do not guarantee any specific ethical or political subjectivity). Finally, the point of building up the object (or for that matter, of experimenting with ways to build up the corpus of poetry) is not to make sensuous or palpable a newer, more musical version of an egotistical sublime or canon of great works; quite the contrary. The monumental construction exists to be energized, put into motion—even to be disassembled or dissolved—by the negatively capable subjects who exist in relation to it.

As Vendler more than any other recent critic has emphasized, Keats's odes, and their constructionist influence on later poetics and criticism, concern in large part the subject's confrontation with or experience of art. As the mysterious object of contemplation (a birdsong, an urn, an intellectual principle, a season) is virtuosically evoked, so the perceiver/subject is left weakened, bewildered, dissolute ("to thy high requiem become a sod"; "Do I wake or sleep?"; "Cold Pastoral!"). Yet this dissolution is simultaneously an opening, a charting of the movement of imagination through engagement with dynamic form. System and structure are meticulously worked up and represented and then in fact made fragile and provisionally negated when it turns out that the dissolution of the perceiver/subject is a sign of its being alive, as opposed to the monumental but dead urn, the haunting but inhuman and hence unimaginative birdsong. This would be the perspective from which one might well ratify and press into service Walter Jackson Bate's parsing of Keats's oft-repeated comment about the need for intensity in art. For Keats, art achieves beauty whenever it makes truth—reality—swell into (provisionally) apprehendable form, allowing for dynamic awareness of reality-as-process.[35]

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letter about the mansion of many apartments, which does succeed the letter about negative capability, is nonetheless *followed by* the letter usually deemed the companion to Keats's negative-capability discussion, namely, the letter about the nonidentitarian "poetical Character"/"camelion poet."

For a suggestive reading of Keats's apartments metaphor together with his use—in the wake of the Manchester Massacre—of a radical-democratic vocabulary and expressions of solidarity with the nascent labor and parliamentary-reform movements, see Bromwich, "Keats's Radicalism," pp. 207–10. See also more recent treatments in Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* and Chandler, *England in 1819*.

35. Keats's comments about intensity come from the negative-capability letter; see n. 32. For Bate's paraphrasings of Keatsian intensity and negative capability, see Bate, *John Keats*, esp. 243–44.

Negative capability is the concept and practice that underwrites dynamic awareness, not least when it exists in relation to apparently monumental form.[36]

Vendler's explicit treatment of subjective negative capability in relation to the odes' objective monumentality is brief, but she and other critics do remark the paradoxical fragility and ephemerality that adhere to these highly concretized, built-up poems.[37] One way into this paradoxical connection is found in a point critics have glancingly noticed but rarely pursued, the haunting presence of *Hamlet* throughout Keats's odic sequence.[38] The poetics of that haunting can be specified and developed. And with a nod toward the whole tradition of regarding *Hamlet* as proclamation of the modern,[39] it would be hard to overstate the importance—

36. If space permitted, these questions (of dynamic awareness and the mutual constitution of negative capability and monumental construction) would lead me to do much more than merely gesture toward the profound—and profoundly Kantian—affinities between negative capability and Adorno's negative dialectic, as well as toward affiliated thoughts in poetry and criticism about how to understand negative capability in relation to ethics, politics, and the idea of disinterest. For a survey and discussion of feminist approaches to negative capability, see Susan Wolfson, "Keats and Gender Criticism," in *The Persistence of Poetry,* pp. 88–108 and "Keats and the Manhood of the Poet," *European Romantic Review* 6 (Summer 1995): 1–37. For a skeptical, neopragmatist, essentially Kantian treatment of negative capability as aesthetic rather than ethical category of disinterest (in contrast to Bate's view of negative capability as a divestiture of selfish egoism), see Steven Knapp, *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), esp. chap. 2. Knapp contends persuasively that negative capability is synonymous with Kant's purposiveness-without-purpose formulation of aesthetic—as opposed to ethical or conceptual—experience. The temporary negation/suspension of the ethico-conceptual that springs, in Kant and Keats, from aesthetic experience's quasiconceptual character, likewise characterizes Adorno's resistant-to-conceptual-synthesis negative dialectic. This resolves into the notion of a negative romanticism whose trajectory extends to the Frankfurt school, modernism, and beyond. The Kantian, romantic, and Adornian-modernist aesthetic undertake temporarily to negate conceptual/instrumental thought, enabling present construction of new concepts and the new social dispensations that may spring from them. For sustained discussion of aesthetic quasi conceptuality and conceptual constructivism, see Kaufman, "Red Kant." On Shelley's version of purposiveness-without-purpose (which matches Keats's Shakespeare-identified negative capability by projecting a Miltonic *bold neglect of direct moral purpose*), see Kaufman, "Legislators of the Post-Everything World," pp. 716, 721–22, 724.

37. For Vendler's references to negative capability, see *OJK,* pp. 130, 284. Vendler's book offers much lengthier analysis of a phenomenon that Keats highlights within his negative-capability thesis: art's investigation and dramatization of differences between propositional and aesthetic modes of thought.

38. Vendler notes *Hamlet*'s presence across the odes; see *OJK,* pp. 33, 85, 93, 100, 105, 174, 306 n.8. For parallel trackings of *Hamlet,* see Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* (Oxford, 1986), and James O'Rourke, *Keats's Odes and Contemporary Criticism* (Gainsville, Fla., 1998) (the latter briefly considers Adorno in its treatment of Keats and his recent critics—including Vendler and Levinson).

39. See, for example, Philip Fisher, "Thinking about Killing: *Hamlet* and the Path among the Passions," *Raritan* 11 (Summer 1991): 43–77; see too the texts mentioned in Kaufman, "The Sublime as Super-Genre of the Modern, or *Hamlet* in Revolution: Caleb Williams and His Problems," *Studies in Romanticism* 36 (Winter 1997): 541–74.

for a young, second-generation romantic poet committed to denunciation of Holy Alliance reaction but committed equally to a ghostly aesthetic of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts"—of a phantasmatic figure from the old order upon whose veracity depend present affairs of state. Keats is impelled to steal and run with the ghost's triple *adieu* of mandated memory; he'll suffuse the solid odes with Hamletian dew, liquification, melting. A look at Shakespeare gives a fuller picture of Keats's *Hamlet*-borrowings and helps us understand their meanings in the odes.

Leaving the young Hamlet (to whom he has just related the story of Claudius's incestuous, murderous actions), the ghost issues the simple directive that turns out to be astonishingly difficult for the prince (let alone the romantics and moderns) to interpret: "If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not." The ghost then famously utters that triple adieu: "Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me," which Hamlet almost immediately makes his own, less one: "Now to my word:/It is 'Adieu, adieu! remember me.'"[40]

In the last stanza of "Ode on Indolence," Keats refuses the summonses of Ambition, Love, and especially, his "demon Poesy." The poem has already evoked, with references to a "deep-disguised plot" and to a wish that these figures would "melt, and leave my sense/Unhaunted,"[41] both the plots of Elsinore and Hamlet's three-adieus-reduced-to-two desire that his "*too too* solid flesh would melt,/Thaw, and resolve itself into *a dew!*"[42] The poem then implies a triple adieu: "So, ye three ghosts, adieu!"[43] Meanwhile, "Ode to Psyche" images intellectual-emotional suspension by joining Cupid and Psyche, whose "lips touched not, but had not bade adieu."[44] "Ode to a Nightingale"'s meditations on the attractions of death or deathlike reverie again channel Hamletian dissolution ("That I might . . . / . . . Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget/ . . . The weariness, the fever, and the fret"; "I have been half in love with easeful Death/

40. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark,* in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2d ed. (New York, 1997), 1.5.81, 91, 111, p. 1198.

41. Keats, "Ode on Indolence," *The Poems of John Keats,* ll. 30, 13, 19–20, pp. 376, 375, 376.

42. Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* 1.2.129–30, p. 1193; emphases added. Modern *Hamlet* texts, including *The Riverside Shakespeare*'s, usually read "too too sallied [that is, sullied] flesh"; see *Hamlet,* in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* pp. 1145n, 1187n. But Keats's edition of Shakespeare's plays, which he purchased in 1817 (and immediately began filling with marginalia, underlinings, and other markings), contained the First Folio reading "too too solid"—which Keats indeed underlined. See Keats's *Hamlet* text in the Shakespeare he worked from, *The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare,* ed. Charles Wittingham, 7 vols. (London, 1814), 7:12. (These volumes, with Keats's marginalia, are located in the Keats Collection of Harvard University's Houghton Library.) That Keats was reading and underlining "too too *solid*" when he read Hamlet's soliloquy is of some interest in considering how he works the tension between monumental construction and negative capability.

43. Keats, "Ode on Indolence," l. 51, p. 376.

44. Keats, "Ode to Psyche," *The Poems of John Keats,* l. 17, p. 365.

. . . Now more than ever seems it rich to die"). These meditations culminate, in "Nightingale"'s final stanza, in another triple adieu:

> Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
> Adieu! adieu! . . .
> Do I wake or sleep?[45]

"Ode on Melancholy"'s last stanza states that as for Melancholy,

> She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
> And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding adieu.[46]

The *adieu* is absent from the final ode, "To Autumn," an absence readily explained. As influential accounts of the poem have noted, nothing is told in "To Autumn," yet everything is present. As Vendler puts it, we arrive with the other odes already in mind and internalized (see *OJK,* pp. 85, 233, and 269–70); and as Stuart Curran observes of a related disappearance, the absence of the *I* in "To Autumn" indicates not an abjuration of the previous odic dialectic (between speaker and object of contemplation) but its highest and subtlest realization. Despite—because of—such absence, the whole poem seems like one long, poised, and suspended adieu.[47]

Keats's adieu is not only thematic; rhyming, otherwise varying, and above all treating it as song, Keats fashions it into the very poetic of the odes. Thus evanescence and leave-taking (whose figuration in the poems is hardly exhausted by *adieu*) are integrated into concretized, monumental form. As the above-quoted lines about beauty and death from "Ode on Melancholy" make clear, the mutual constitution of the poem's fully

45. Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," *The Poems of John Keats,* ll. 19–23, 52–55, 73–80, pp. 370, 371, 372.

46. Keats, "Ode on Melancholy," *The Poems of John Keats,* ll. 21–23, p. 375.

47. See Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism,* pp. 83–84. See also, among other important interpretations of "To Autumn" since the 1970s, Geoffrey Hartman, "Poem and Ideology: A Study of Keats's 'To Autumn,'" *The Fate of Reading* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 124–46; Jerome J. McGann, "Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism," *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 15–65; and Paul H. Fry, "Nil Reconsidered: Criticism, Actuality, and 'To Autumn,'" *A Defense of Poetry: Reflections on the Occasion of Writing* (Stanford, Calif., 1995), pp. 108–32. On Hartman's interesting positionings of Adorno in "Poem and Ideology," see Kaufman, "Red Kant"; for Hartman's later, fuller engagement with Adorno, see his *The Fateful Question of Culture* (New York, 1997). Fry's *A Defense of Poetry* features, for its part, one of contemporary Anglo-American criticism's most important treatments of Adorno, "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft," *Noten zur Literatur,* 1:73–104; "On Lyric Poetry and Society," *Notes to Literature,* 1:37–54.

objectified form and its dissolute, ghostly subjects (subject matter; speaking-writing subject; reading subject) is also the mutual constitution of the beautiful and the sublime. Beauty is experienced in ways that overwhelm or exceed the subject's grasp, which is notably not in control of some object that yields its harmonious nature to the subject. Rather, as in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the presumably beautiful object of art—the urn—undoes our capacity to think representationally or logically. Virtually uniting Kant's mathematical sublime of continually increasing numerical sequence with his dynamic sublime of person-threatening spectacle, this ash-bearing vessel will "tease us out of thought/As doth eternity."[48] Bewildered—rendered seemingly unconscious by experiences fundamentally other to it, by an only dimly visible past and an ever-extending future that will include the subject's own death—the poet/subject is, precisely in proportion to this condition of ash-nothingness or negation, somehow able to construct or experience the most acute and synesthetically thick, palpable verse. This is an art destined to be canonized and anthologized for its demonstrations of how, in poetry, one sense can be fashioned to support and consolidate the others:

> I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
> Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
> But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
> Wherewith the seasonable month endows
> The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
> White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
> Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
> And mid-May's eldest child,
> The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
> The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.[49]

As he writes these 1819 odes of ghostly adieu and fortified structure, Keats has available to him important cultural reappropriations of *Hamlet,* prominent among them Godwin's *Caleb Williams* as well as Coleridge's and Hazlitt's lecture-meditations. Not having German, what Keats doesn't know is Goethe's *Hamlet*-infused *Wilhelm Meister* (though just three years after Keats's death, English-language audiences would have the Goethe in Carlyle's translation). Determining who gets what from whom and how is often an inexact science, and that's certainly the case with the nineteenth-century traffic-in-*Hamlet* that Keats joins. To take, for a moment, a highly influential and relevant instance: It would stand to reason that Marx's and Engels's play with *Hamlet* throughout their writing comes straight from Goethe (maybe mediated by Friedrich Schlegel). But interestingly enough, the real *Hamlet*-action for Marx and Engels may very

48. Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," *The Poems of John Keats,* ll. 44–45, p. 373.
49. Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," ll. 41–50, pp. 370–71.

well spring, judging by the textual chronology of when and where *Hamlet* powerfully enters their discourse, from their fascination—initially, Engels's special fascination—with Carlyle's immersion in *Germanistik,* an immersion that led Carlyle to undertake the Goethe translation Keats almost got to read.[50]

If Marx's and Engels's *Hamlet*-focus is representative of nineteenth-century literary culture, what bears emphasis for us is how, as various discourses envision their projects through time-out-of-joint lenses, Keats's odes become known as a founding articulation of this *Hamlet*-phenomenon within poetic form. Lacking Carlyle's *Wilhelm Meister,* Keats takes his own reading of *Hamlet* (along with early nineteenth-century fascination with the tragedy) and transforms it into a new dispensation or problem-set for lyric. It would be an understatement to say that later nineteenth-century poetry, dissatisfied with romantic conceptions of the creative imagination's synthesizing and subjective agency, undertakes its experiments with lyric and dramatic monologue in awareness of Keats as both a source of the "subjectivism" problem and as projector of a potential solution. That potential solution involves the apparent objectivity of the odes and—to cite again from the whole history of the poems' reception—their intensely dramatic character. Lyric and dramatic monologue will take the point a good deal further, seeking to preserve lyric as subjective utterance while conferring upon it object status, so that it might escape J. S. Mill's definitional boundaries and be both overheard and heard—lyric again imagined not only as intimate, high subjectivist poetic but as popular and socially grounded, too.

Yet it's not just that Keats's odes are consistently acknowledged as an anticipatory salvo for this Victorian and modern anxiety about objective grounds for art. It's also that the odes are obsessed with *Hamlet*—which is after all a drama, an exemplarily social, objective form that at least classically involves the mimesis of action. But *Hamlet* is *the* drama about action's impossibility, subjectivity unbound, the excess of thought-feeling as obstacle to decision and deed; negative capability unleashed in or as modern history. Little surprise then that later poets, in addition to repeatedly remarking how Keats's odes push toward the grounded objectivity they too seek, likewise conjure *Hamlet*'s spectrality time and again in their own experiments: Tennyson's description of *Maud* as his "little *Hamlet*"; Arnold's summoning of *Hamlet* when describing "Empedocles on Etna"; the rewriting of *Hamlet* (if not Keats's odes themselves) in Mallarmé's *Igitur.* Finally—exactly a century after Keats wrote the odes—a defender of Keatsian odic objectivity named T. S. Eliot, by no means wishing to abandon the tradition of dramatic monologue, nonetheless launches in "Hamlet and His Problems" a critical attack on sublimely

50. See, for example, Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester, and the Working Class* (New York, 1974).

dissociated subjectivity.[51] His critical theory aside, Eliot's artistic, space-clearing strategy may be to declare that dramatic-monologue form itself is not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be. Or shall no longer be.

When one reads "Hamlet and His Problems" together with Eliot's writings on Keats, Shelley, and other romantic and Victorian poets, it becomes clear that Eliot wants to separate the much-appreciated objectivity of Keats's odes from their Hamletian components. In Eliot's eyes, nineteenth-century poetry too often mistakes the cause (or at least, artistic carrier) of dissociated sensibility—*Hamlet*—for its cure. You cannot cure *Hamlet* with more *Hamlet,* Eliot believes, not even with a *Hamlet* that's been married to fully objectified form. For Eliot, objective form and *Hamlet* cancel one another out, are incapable of being placed in interesting tension. Unlike Keats's odes, the doctrine of the objective correlative announced in "Hamlet and His Problems" does not seek *Hamlet*'s objectification; the objective correlative attempts to remove *Hamlet* and its progeny from poetic form, art and culture, social history. Despite his best efforts, Eliot's *Hamlet*-denunciation hardly closed the books on Keatsian experiments in Hamletian form, as poets all the way to Amiri Baraka and Barbara Guest have demonstrated, as perhaps Eliot's own poetry demonstrated. But that's really another story.[52]

I want to conclude by stepping back from poetry's later nineteenth- and twentieth-century *Hamlet*-experiments in order to reconsider a foundational opposition they're inside of. If the constitutive tension in Keats's odes—between monumentality and negative capability—belongs to a Keats-Shelley anticipation of the subsequent (avant-gardist versus modernist) division in Left art and criticism, then some revised literary accounting is required. We have to do with a literary history that jostles any remaining sense that the merits of the avant-gardist versus modernist, "committed versus distanced" controversy (in either nineteenth- or twentieth-century incarnations) lend themselves usefully to political judgment. Rather than simply foreshadowing the split, the prehistory stands as the most complicated form of the problem, a *combinatoire* where positions that will later be differentiated are instructively—maddeningly—twined. The importance of the earlier moment stems, no doubt,

51. See Eliot, "*Hamlet,*" *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot,* ed. Frank Kermode (New York, 1975), pp. 45–49. This essay originally appeared as "Hamlet and His Problems," review of *The Problem of "Hamlet,"* by J. M. Robertson, *Athenaeum* 26 (Sept. 1919): 940–41. Eliot's essay is still generally known by—and frequently reprinted under—its original title; see, for example, *Critical Theory Since Plato,* ed. Hazard Adams (Fort Worth, Tex., 1992), pp. 764–66.

52. See, for example, the exquisite (purposefully off-center, almost erased or negated) weaving of Keatsian and symbolist strains into a historical matrix for modern African-American culture in Amiri Baraka, "Miles Davis (1926–1991): When Miles Split!" *Eulogies* (New York, 1996), pp. 143–46. For further thoughts about late twentieth-century explorations of Keatsian-Hamletian form, see Kaufman, "A Future for Modernism: Barbara Guest's Recent Poetry," *American Poetry Review* 29 (July/Aug. 2000): 11–16.

from both accident and profoundly historical development. The prehistory of Bürger's subject, in other words, involves Western literary culture's first clear case of a postrevolutionary yet still consciously Left (in our modern, post-1789 use of that term) aesthetically experimental poetic school.

In this prehistory—barely antecedent to literary-market developments that thereafter will be used to support two opposed poetics' competing contentions for a "progressive political effectivity" based on those poetics' divergent formal and substantive characteristics—we appear to have, with two Left poets undoubtedly writing from shared assumptions of aesthetic autonomy, a situation where both the future modernist *and* the future avant-gardist, mechanical-reproductionist, anti-aesthetic-autonomy claims are *already formally operative and politically signifying.* Multiple factors and contexts produce this situation, which is simultaneously scored by contingency and historicity. First, these second-generation British romantic poets are postrevolutionary on various levels. Not only do they write (as do their contemporaries, the older first-generation poets) in the aftermath of the all-informing French Revolution. More important—and in contradistinction to Wordsworthian-Coleridgean plots of living through the bliss of revolutionary dawn and retrospectively writing the disillusion of its fading—Keats and Shelley begin their careers as opportunities for social regeneration seem checked on all fronts. But they are determined still to explore aesthetic activity as a means of asserting rather than eschewing progressive or revolutionary sympathies. Furthermore, these English poets are postrevolutionary by dint of their country's 1640–1660 experience and "advanced" political-economic development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; this developmental theme is called forth by both Left and Right in Britain (and France) during and after the French Revolution, then repeated throughout nineteenth-century literature (not least in Marx and Engels).

All these elements combine to make the second generation something of an origin point for later phenomena of Left literary-political belatedness (even of Left melancholy), as opposed to Wordsworthian-Coleridgean models of capitulation and/or turnabout. It should be noted too that the specific configurations drawn by the formal character of Keats's and Shelley's verse, together with the poetry's contemporary and posthumous reception, distinguish the two poets from their vastly more celebrated second-generation colleague Byron. The distinction carries tremendous significance for modernist and avant-garde history. While sharing much politically with them, and while becoming the first if not greatest Western contender for the crown of rebel-poet, Byron is never adopted as a *formal, poésie pure* avant-gardist. His work consequently is not central, in terms of aesthetic form, to the later nineteenth and twentieth-century poets and critics who invent the radical formal traditions that reach to modern constructivism and beyond. Rightly or wrongly, in his

time and after, Byron's worldliness is seen to characterize his verse as well as his person. It is true that Shelley's work, like Byron's, becomes pirated and adopted by radical plebeian culture.[53] On the other hand, when Byron's poetry is lauded in experimental aesthetic circles, it is not because he's perceived—like Keats and Shelley—as a relentlessly formal, antidiscursive poet of sensation. Hallam's praise song for Keats and Shelley, and his silence on Byron, echo throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

And perhaps most accidental are the repercussions of Keats and Shelley having enjoyed in their lifetime nothing like Byron's popularity. Oddly enough, this means that the debate between Keats and Shelley takes place in what can appear like laboratory conditions of form-testing. Neither poet can even pretend to rely on market or popular evidence to support his claims for the critical effectivity of his specific poetic. This is the first and possibly last such moment in canonical Left poetics and aesthetics. That would help explain why the Keats-Shelley controversy resounds not just as allied or parallel case but as generative principle in scattered quotations and citations within the modern-art debates of Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno, and others.[54] Keats and Shelley present the early, "pure" case (as in the *poésie pure* with which Byron was never compellingly identified) of allegedly sheer formal confrontation: no informing context or survey data with which to evaluate the claims, simply the projection of formal choices said to effect progressive criticality. It would be worth considering whether later nineteenth- and especially twentieth-century radical arguments for particular aesthetic forms and styles—arguments that generally point to materio-historical circumstances as the basis for their *raisons d'etre*—effectively recapitulate, in the trappings of material history, this earlier formalist encounter where recourse to external evidence ostensibly could not come into play.

To recall, then, the form that our schism takes in the twentieth century: A highly wrought, esoteric, and difficult constructionist art will be associated (by Adorno, Horkheimer, and others) with the preservation of a zone of critical negativity; among the chief exhibits here will be Schoenberg, Beckett, and Celan. The opposing camp (Brecht, Benjamin, Kracauer) will champion something of an art-into-life, technological-reproductionist position that proclaims itself exoteric or populist (Du-

53. See the history recounted and works cited in Neil Fraistat, "Illegitimate Shelley: Radical Piracy and the Textual Edition as Cultural Performance," *PMLA* 109 (May 1994): 409–23.

54. For a typical instance of how Shelley hovers around the generally French and German literary histories invoked in these debates—in a manner paralleling Adorno's linkages between Keats and an otherwise French-German tradition of constructivism—see the way Adorno (following Brecht and Benjamin) connects Shelley to a poetic of symbolist dissemination and expression in Adorno, "Parataxis: Zur Späten Lyrik Hölderlins," *Noten zur Literatur*, 3:174; "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," *Notes to Literature*, 2:122.

champ's placement of the urinal in the gallery; surrealism; aspects of William Carlos Williams's and the objectivists' "poetic machine"; above all, the mechanical reproducibility of cinema).

Now in the early nineteenth-century version (or prehistory) of this split, a Keatsian celebration of the actual—the refusal of magnanimous, auratically voiced negativity—initially looks like what will become the twentieth century's art-into-life position. The palpability, the concretized sensuousness, and objectification of Keats's poetry comprehend the rendering of life's fullness into a fully realized art. Thick as life itself, this art exists to enrich, energize, and thereby transform social life. Curb your magnanimity; be more of an artist, rein in your voice, and load every rift with ore. Do this, Keats advises Shelley, and the art will do its work in—by becoming part of—the world.

Because Keats so clearly intends his work to participate in what we call aesthetic autonomy, it has been hard to see that from Shelley's more openly engaged perspective, Keats's recommendation of disciplined, solid *objectification* over magnanimous, liberatory voice appears as a first step toward what twentieth-century artists and critics will lament or praise as anti-aesthetic *loss of aura, reification,* and *mechanical reproduction* (all of which are theorized as processes that, under really-existing capitalism, tend to reduce human beings to *object* status). So over against the Keatsian position stands Shelleyan disseminative negativity: implacable and explicit in its resistance to the palpably given, challenging and dissolving even the objective reality of Mont Blanc, commanding in *Prometheus Unbound*'s deconstructively or dialectically political voice that "Hope creat[e]/From its own wreck the thing it contemplates."[55]

Yet it also obtains that in Keats what had looked from one perspective like a palpable, art-into-life, proto-Benjaminian avant-gardism will appear from another vantage as an aesthetic distancing implicit in highly wrought and constructed artifice. Monumental Keatsian objectification emphasizes, as Levinson rightly observes, the consciously homeopathic self-reification-with-a-difference that Adornian modernist constructivism will commend (to help enact the negative presencing of a now-spectral aura). On this view, Keats's reification of the work, his ostensible setting of the art object on the slippery slope toward loss of autonomous aura through extreme objectification, actually anticipates Adorno's formulation of an aesthetic homeopathy that underwrites the ability to gesture anew toward aura. "Art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance; unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity."[56]

By the same token, Shelley's intentionally negationalist (and therefore apparently distanced-from-life, proto-Adornian modernist) poetry

55. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound,* in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose,* ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York, 1977), ll. 573–74, p. 210.

56. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* p. 226; *Ästhetische Theorie,* p. 335 ("Einzig durch ihre gesellschaftliche Resistenzkraft erhält Kunst sich am Leben; verdinglicht sie sich nicht, so wird

attempts, even at its most ornate, to speak not just esoterically but also in the more immediately interventionist tones of vatic or millenarian populism (a point not lost on Brecht, who thought it wise to steal from Shelley whenever possible).[57] To a remarkable degree, then, the two opposed positions inhere within each other, and they do so in ways whose meanings exceed those usually culled from readings of Victorian and early twentieth-century distinctions between subjective and objective poetry.[58] The positions' joint constitution is thrown into unexpectedly starker relief in the nineteenth-century British prehistory than in either Baudelaire or Hölderlin individually (the more frequent roots-of-modernism-and-the-avant-garde figures of study for Benjamin, Adorno, and their cohort), and still more than in fraught twentieth-century art itself.[59]

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sie Ware"). For comparison/alignment of Keatsian and Adornian objectification, see Bromwich, "Keats and the Aesthetic Ideal," pp. 186–88.

Levinson's own sense of the potentially critical and proto-Marxian register that self-consciously literary style's self-reification-with-a-difference may carry is perhaps conveyed in the subtitle of *Keats's Life of Allegory,* namely, *The Origins of a Style.* It so happens that the same subtitle belongs to Fredric Jameson's first book, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (New Haven, Conn., 1961). (See particularly Jameson's foreword where he limns—with explicit reference to Barthes and Adorno—a concept of style that will inform his entire career.) Levinson pointedly states that her methodology stems essentially from Sartre's dialectical "progressive-regressive" method (*KLA,* p. 43 n. 34); here she summarizes and cites Sartre's *Search for a Method,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York, 1963) while also quoting Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981) and citing Luckács's *The Ontology of Social Being,* ed. David Fernbach, 3 vols. (London, 1978–80). In addition, Levinson initially quotes and cites Jameson's *Sartre* when introducing the problem of relating Keats's stylistic techniques to notions of "'parodic reproduction of the social restrictions that marked Keats as *wanting*'" (*KLA,* p. 6).

57. For a preliminary sketch of Brecht's translations of, essays on, and rewritings (into his own poetry) of Shelley—and for the immediate influence of Brecht's Shelleyanism on Benjamin and, through Benjamin, Adorno—see Kaufman, "Intervention and Commitment Forever! Shelley in 1819, Shelley in Brecht, Shelley in Adorno, Shelley in Benjamin," *Romantic Circles Praxis* (Winter 2001): http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/

58. Given his great, retrospective importance to early twentieth-century attempts to develop firmer grounds for English-language lyric, Robert Browning's distinctions between the objective (Shakespearean) and subjective (Miltonic) poet would seem particularly relevant here. Not coincidentally, Browning makes the distinction in his 1851 "Essay on Shelley" (first published as the introductory essay to Edward Moxon's 1852 *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*); see Robert Browning, "Essay on Shelley," *The Poems,* ed. John Pettigrew and Thomas J. Collins, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth, 1981), 1:1001–13. For all its praise of Shelley, the essay is generally read as Browning's attempt to step away from his former model in favor of the more objective poetry that Browning hopes to create.

59. Hölderlin may be the most fascinating figure in nineteenth-century poetry to read comparatively with Keats and Shelley. Some two decades older, his revolutionary sympathies are as ardent as theirs (as are his hopes that poetry can have sociopolitical effect). Moreover, his poetic experimentalism embodies (as so much Hölderlin commentary has noted, though sometimes in a different vocabulary) both the disseminative-expressivist and constructionist elements at issue between Keats and Shelley. In the context of German history, however, Hölderlin could not quite articulate the tension between those two elements

The formal chiasmus that emerges in this long-historical view of the avant-gardist/modernist split suggests that the material circumstances of twentieth century sociopolitical context, so often invoked to explain the creation of modernist and avant-gardist artistic forms (and to explain a famously vexed, still continuing debate about those forms and political commitment), may not be so determinative after all. Once it becomes clear that a Left, second-generation British romanticism already had formally set forth and activated the constitutive elements of what would become the twentieth century's modernist and avant-gardist positions, then neither a doctrinal-methodological reliance on material conditions, nor any single artistic style, mode, form, or practice that will develop from the earlier form-cluster, can claim special political-critical effectivity or explanatory power. Rather it begins to appear that across two centuries the formal DNA of both poetics—on one hand, the Keatsian dissolution of selfhood and concomitant building up of form, which in turn serves an intellectual sensorium ultimately capable of dissolving the object-world; on the other hand, the Shelleyan prophetic and disseminative negationalism that pays tribute to reality by beginning in opposition to it—together comprehend the perhaps more modest projection of a negative romanticism of aesthetically derived critical thought. In other words, we have a poetics whose protopolitical vocation all along was not to capture the correct style, structure, or line but to help tease readers out of instrumental, and into critical, thought—by means of aesthetic experience.

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as part of a modern postrevolutionary dilemma since German revolution, let alone its aftermath, simply had not occurred. The historical ground thus would appear to play no small part in the absence, in Hölderlin, of expression-versus-construction as a political concern about correlating specific, nonnäive experiments in poetic form with critical/political agency (not to mention the absence of a twinned, Keats-Shelley type debate between Hölderlin and some allied but distinct figure in German poetics). Nor do overlapping Goethe-Schiller disagreements over poetic form really map onto the expression-construction problematic, or at least not onto that problematic's interactions with specific progressive or Left critical-political agendas. The point is that fully articulated disputes about the roles of these two poetics or aesthetics vis-à-vis their inculcation of protocritical, protopolitical agency does not really happen in German art until the twentieth century (and in the French tradition, not until Baudelaire).

Alternately, one might say that the belated publication and reception of most of Hölderlin's work—in the twentieth century's first few decades—curiously meant that sociopolitical circumstances had in a sense been able to catch up to his poetry, so that Hölderlin's explorations of expression-construction could now participate in the burgeoning (and more properly modern) avant-gardist versus modernist controversy about certain versions of artistic form and critical-political agency.

In that light, it's instructive to review the interpretations of one of the Hölderlin critics best known to Anglo-American audiences, Paul de Man. In a representative essay, "Patterns of Temporality in Hölderlin's 'Wie wenn am Feiertage . . . ,'" de Man remarks the ways in which Hölderlin projects and then unsettles notions of both organic form and subjective expressivity; de Man observes too the complication or self-deconstruction of the poet's desire that the poems expressively enact his radical political stance. Tellingly, de Man virtually

This amounts, certainly, to a historically expanded elaboration of Adorno's modernist defense of a surviving, provisional aesthetic autonomy in the age of anti-aesthetic mechanical reproduction; a constructionist *via negativa* to the critical reflection once articulated in relation to aesthetic aura, raised now to the second or third power in the modern experience of aura's loss. But it likewise recapitulates and works out Adorno's later view that Benjamin's writings themselves, even those proclaiming mechanical reproduction's supervention of aesthetic aura, finally yield such a critical aesthetics, that they foster a thought-expanding literary experience rather than the more immediate, anti-auratic, political-material effect Benjamin at times contended for and that contemporary art and theory often advocate in his name.

It amounts, moreover, to a sharp reversal of recent scenarios in which Frankfurt theory has been used to underwrite anti-aesthetic critique of the literary, critique that has particularly indicted romantic literature and its modernist descendants. For it seems that Keats and Shelley actually were adumbrating, in their dispute, the blurred prospectus of a notion that lately has been seen with renewed clarity as a mainspring of Frankfurt thought: Aesthetic experience's contribution to the possibilities for critical agency does not depend on specifically privileged formal or stylistic approaches; nor on particular, socially radical thematic and substantive choices; nor on explicit gestures toward material circumstance. Starting from opposite ends, Keats and Shelley (and then their avant-

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ends the essay by approvingly quoting Adorno's comments (from "Parataxis") about the importance in Hölderlin "'of the relationship that the content, including the intellectual content, maintains with the form.'" On this score, de Man briefly notes Adorno's interest in Hölderlin's nonorganic, paratactic constructions, including Hölderlin's almost magical passing without transition among distinct tonal levels (Paul de Man, "Patterns of Temporality in Hölderlin's 'Wie wenn am Feiertage . . . ,'" *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, ed. E. S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, and Andrzej Warminski [Baltimore, 1993], pp. 71–73).

But, unlike de Man, Adorno does not stop at the issue of deconstructive interference between the expression of intellectual, philosophical, or political content and poetic form. While assuming this fundamental aporia, Adorno's "Parataxis" goes on to see *construction*, in its interaction with expression, as central to Hölderlin and modernist critical aesthetics (that is, the very tradition that Bürger will rehearse in its differentiation from anti-aesthetic avant-gardism). See, for example, Adorno's statement that "Hölderlin was already concerned with the extremely modern problem of achieving articulated construction while renouncing pregiven schemata" ("hatte Hölderlin es bereits mit der höchst modernen Schwierigkeit artikulierter Konstruktion unter Verzicht auf vorgegebene Schemata zu tun") (Adorno, "Parataxis," *Notes to Literature*, 2:138; *Noten zur Literatur*, 3:195).

For de Man's pairings of Hölderlin and Keats (which do not, however, explicitly take up construction), see de Man, "Temporality in Hölderlin's 'Wie wenn am Feiertage . . . ,'" p. 51 and, more extensively, "Keats and Hölderlin," *Critical Writings, 1953–1978*, ed. Lindsay Waters (Minneapolis, 1989). De Man's *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism, Critical Writings*, and *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York, 1984) feature additional treatments of Hölderlin.

gardist and modernist successors) contend against each other—at times in what contextually may be anti-aesthetic languages—for the value of their respective modes. But their diversely expressed desideratum of criticality, when successfully realized (artistically and in terms of the Frankfurt theory whose contested invocation has been our subject), ends up being classically *aesthetic*. That is, their own apparently anti-aesthetic protestations to the contrary, the works in question become critical or protocritical by producing the experience that the tradition stretching from Kant to the Frankfurt school and beyond knows and values as aesthetic: quasi-conceptual experience whose wealth of thought-feeling cannot be reduced to any determinate concept and from which, therefore, may be constructed new concepts and social arrangements.[60]

On each side of the avant-gardist/modernist coin (and in both nineteenth- and twentieth-century instantiations) an underlying negative romanticism yields its payoff, which has little to do with politically compromised, escapist romantic syntheses or symbolic reconciliations, whether in art or between art and the sociopolitical. It concerns instead art's and philosophical aesthetics' participation in the exercise and development of critical thought, in the growth of those imaginative efforts animating a critical poetics and aesthetics that in turn may—in accord with the hopes and legacies of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century figures under consideration in this essay—offer their own contributions to extra-aesthetic thought and praxis. The crossed formal modes at play *ab ovo* between Keats and Shelley would then seem to have generated crucial modern fragments among those torn halves that do not add up to a whole, but that tease us toward the critical.[61]

60. The inability of avant-gardist anti-aestheticism itself to supersede or destroy the role of auratic aesthetic autonomy has, of course, been pointed out time and again by artists who are generally if hastily classified as avant-garde. For one recent instance, see the well-known experimental French poet Jacques Roubaud's "Du geste avant-gardiste," "D'un exemple," and "Quoi!" in Roubaud, *Poésie, Etcetera: Ménage* (Paris, 1995), pp. 169–75; trans. Cole, under the titles "On the Avant-gardist Gesture," "An Example," and "What!" *Crosscut Universe: Writing on Writing from France*, ed. Cole (Providence, R.I., 2000), pp. 134–37.

61. The teasing allusion is again, of course, to "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/As doth eternity" (Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," ll. 44–45, p. 373). The torn halves that do not reunite as one allude to Adorno's recurrent invocation of the torn halves of a freedom that do not add up to a whole. For reflection on Adorno's frequent use of this metaphor, see Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 163, 187 n.5. For two important expressions of Adorno's idea (both cited by Jay), see Adorno, letter to Benjamin, 18 Mar. 1936, in Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel, 1928–1940*, p. 171; *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, p. 130: "die auseinandergerissenen Hälften der ganzen Freiheit, die doch aus ihnen nicht sich zusammenaddieren läßt" ("the torn halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up"). See also Adorno, "Zur gesellschaftlichen Lage der Musik," pt. 5 of *Musikalische Schriften*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 18:734; trans. Wes Blomster, under the title "On the Social Situation of Music," *Telos* 35 (Spring 1978): 132: "Hälften eines Ganzen, das freilich durch deren Addition niemals rekonstruierbar wäre" ("halves of a totality which to be sure could never be reconstructed through the addition of the two halves").